



Irish National Teachers' Organisation  
*Cumann Múinteoirí Éireann*

# Teacher Workload:

**INTO Research Report**

Final Report: December 2022

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## INTO Research Report

Final Report: December 2022

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*A nation's greatness depends upon the education of its people*



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# Acknowledgements

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# Abbreviations

BIGTU	British and Irish Group of Teacher Unions
BOM	Board of Management
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CEC	Central Executive Committee
COGG	An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CPH	Croke Park Hours
CPSMA	Catholic Primary School Management Association
CSO	Central Statistics Office
CVs	Curriculum Vitae
DE	Department of Education
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DPs	Deputy Principals
EAL	English as an Additional Language
EDC	Education Committee
Ed Pysch	Educational Psychologist
EPSEN	Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs
EPV	Extra Personal Vacation
EQC	Equality Committee
ETB	Education and Training Board
FSSU	Financial Support Services Unit
HR	Human Resources
HSCL	Home School Community Liaison
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IEP	Individual Educational Plan
INTO	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
ISM	In-School Management
IT	Information Technology
IPLP	Individual Profile and Learning Programme
IPPN	Irish Primary Principals' Network
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
OLCS	Online Claims System
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OT	Occupational Therapist
PDC	Principals' and Deputy Principals' Committee
PDST	Professional Development Support Service for Teachers
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PE	Physical Education
PLC	Primary Language Curriculum
POD	Primary Online Database
PPP	Pupil Personal Plan
PR	Public Relations
P/T	Parent/Teacher
S&L	Speech and Language
SET	Special Education Teacher
SEAI	Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SLT	Speech and Language Therapist
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
SSE	School Self-Evaluation
STEAM	Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Maths
TALIS	Teaching and Learning International Survey
WSE	Whole School Evaluation



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# Foreword

Workload is currently a major concern for the teaching profession. While not a new concern, the demands placed on teachers, whether they are principals, class teachers or special education teachers, create additional pressures leading to stress and burnout. Motions on workload have featured on the agenda of the INTO Annual Congress in recent years and teacher workload has been a theme at INTO conferences.

Addressing teacher workload is a matter of priority for the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) as it is closely aligned to teachers' job satisfaction, impacting on staff morale, the quality of teaching and learning and the wellbeing of our professional educators. The extent to which teachers feel their workload is manageable is a significant factor associated with their job satisfaction (Lynch, et al., 2016; Sims, 2017) and this, in turn, is one of the key factors associated with teacher retention (Bamford & Worth, 2017). The INTO is committed to ensuring that any initiative that increases the workload of principals and teachers or causes a deterioration in their conditions of service will not be supported.

This report reflects work undertaken by the INTO following the adoption of a resolution on workload at Annual Congress 2018 that called for additional research, outlined in part one, in addition to a resolution adopted at Annual Congress 2021 that called for an independent audit of principals' work, outlined in part two. Research carried out for both parts of this report illustrate how the demands being placed on teachers and principals continue to increase their workload.

Reducing teacher workload is a considerable challenge that is influenced by the expectations and actions of policymakers, school and system leaders, parents/guardians and teachers. The INTO continues to lobby to decelerate the pace of change and initiatives in primary schools and to provide additional supports for principals and teachers. Accurate and detailed data on the nature and impact of teacher workload in Ireland are crucial for developing effective policy and practice. This report contributes to our knowledge of teacher workload and offers possible policy and practical solutions that are worthy of further exploration, with a view to creating a healthier and more sustainable working environment for all teachers.

The INTO would like to thank the working group on teacher workload who steered the project leading to this report, with the assistance of the Education and Research team in Head Office, under the direction and guidance of Dr Deirbhile Nic Craith, Director of Education and Research (until December 2021) and Máirín Ní Chéileachair, Director of Education, Research and Learning. The INTO would also like to thank Anne English, retired primary principal teacher and former member of the INTO Education Committee, who was commissioned to prepare part two of this report in collaboration with David O'Sullivan, Assistant General Secretary.



John Boyle  
INTO General Secretary  
December 2022



# Introduction

Teaching has long been recognised as complex work, involving an extensive range of responsibilities and activities (Connell, 1985). In Ireland, as in many western countries, the role of the school principal has undergone significant changes over the last couple of decades, with the work of contemporary school leaders intensifying in terms of its complexity and volume (Wang, Pollock & Huseman, 2015; Spillane, 2015). Workload is not just a matter of quantity, however, but also intensity. Intensity of work, long hours and consequent work–life balance issues have been a feature of discussions of contemporary working life, and it is evident from the responses to the research outlined in this report that such work intensification has heightened the demands upon all teachers rendering teaching and school leadership increasingly complex and problematic.

The INTO's report on *Workload, Stress and Resilience of Primary Teachers*, published in 2015, reported on a survey carried out by the INTO and analysed by Professor Mark Morgan (INTO, 2015). The report provided a brief literature review on the topic of teacher stress, including causes of stress and burnout, and the role of resilience. Workload giving rise to stress among teachers include international factors such as large-scale comparative studies such as PISA, national factors such as drives to increase standards and accountability, and local factors such as school culture and climate, administrative support and autonomy, and classroom experiences. Burnout arises from the accumulation of workload-related stressful experiences where there is no opportunity to bounce back (Day et al., 2007). Teacher resilience in coping with stressful experiences varies between individuals and contexts and is related to motivation, beliefs and satisfaction.

The survey carried out as part of the preparation for the report sought to identify sources of workload and stress for primary teachers in Ireland. The survey also sought teachers' opinions regarding the increase in stress and workload in the previous five years. Interestingly, given the continuing focus on workload, about 90% of teachers took the view that teaching had become more stressful, demanding, challenging and hectic in the previous five years. However, for most teachers these features did not detract from their job satisfaction or their view that teaching was worthwhile, though principal teachers were more likely to state that their role was less rewarding. Principal teachers were more likely than class teachers to state that their role had become more stressful. Learning support and resource teachers were also more likely than class teachers to state that their role had become more stressful. Teachers in multi-grade classes were more likely than teachers in single-grade classes to state that teaching had become more stressful and demanding in the previous five years.

Among the issues identified as creating additional workload were new initiatives, additional administration, large class sizes, a demanding curriculum, and lack of professional development. The need for documentation related to policies and practices and the demands for school improvement plans created additional administrative workload for teachers. The demands on schools to solve problems that were of concern to society also made teaching more challenging. Another major factor was the requirement of teachers to cater for individual differences and the increasing number of children with behavioural difficulties. Schools were also engaging with an increasing number of agencies. It was noted in the report that most of the factors identified as more challenging were not inherently related to the practice of good teaching. Teachers were of the view that demands for additional documentation were not relevant to their real work and did not contribute significantly to pupils' learning but rather took from the time and energy available for teaching.

Solutions offered by teachers in the survey were a reduction in curriculum overload, dedicated time for planning at school level and a lesser requirement to document certain school activities. Better support for children with special educational needs, greater administrative support and the resources necessary for the efficient running of a school were suggested as key local solutions

to address the increasing workload. Teachers also suggested that a focus on teacher wellbeing was essential to ensure that teaching remained rewarding. A sense that a teacher's job had become more bureaucratic, that teachers had less control over their work, and that demands for accountability diminished professional trust, has a knock-on effect on teacher morale, and in turn has an effect on stress levels. Recommendations included in the report regarding school leadership, curriculum, school support, special educational needs and the teaching career, continue to be pursued by the INTO.

A major factor that has exacerbated stress is the greater demand to solve problems that emanate from societal change and concern. At INTO's Consultative Conference on Education in 2019, based on the theme of *Curriculum Review*, this demand on schools was identified by teachers, and this is a legacy issue as any concern about children in society results in a call for schools to take action to educate children about the issue. Not only are schools ill-equipped and inadequately resourced to deal with emerging issues, but the introduction of strategies and programmes to serve as a solution to societal problems magnifies the longstanding issue of curriculum overload and has led to an overwhelming volume of projects, sometimes referred to as 'initiative fatigue.'

The increased workload associated with administration implies that a teacher's job is becoming more bureaucratic. As a consequence of recent changes, teachers perceived themselves to be less in control with a feeling that their professional judgement and expertise are overlooked. The demand for increased documentation is viewed as evidence of greater accountability on behalf of teachers leading to a diminution of professional trust, in turn, contributing to the increased level of stress felt by teachers.

The area of special education has been identified as a challenge within the Irish primary school context. Insufficient support to meet the needs of pupils with special education needs and the increasing diversity in Irish classrooms mean that planning for differentiation is stressful for teachers, who often feel overburdened with unnecessary paperwork arising from record-keeping associated with teaching children with special educational needs.

Teachers have previously remarked on the lack of time for collaboration with colleagues and planning (INTO, 2015). The lack of time for collaboration with colleagues is also an issue of grave concern for school leaders, which is compounded by insufficient in-school middle management roles, creating a barrier to effective leadership.

Work overload and teacher wellbeing have gained more prominence recently at inter-union discussions both in Ireland and internationally. At their first in-person meeting since Covid-19, the presidents and general secretaries of ten education unions within the British and Irish Group of Teacher Unions (BIGTU) called on policymakers within their own jurisdictions to prioritise the tackling of teacher workload and the promotion of practitioner wellbeing within schools, colleges and universities. Teachers spend an excessive time on non-teaching tasks including paperwork, tracking, audits and form-filling; tasks that have little effect on the quality of teaching and learning yet have a negative impact on the quality of teachers' working life. BIGTU called on departments of education on these islands to redouble their efforts to reduce teacher stress by reducing the amount of paperwork required, with a view to having a positive impact on pupil learning, teacher and pupil wellbeing, and on the overall pupil experience.

Part one of this report describes the findings of surveys about teacher workload carried out in 2021 and makes recommendations to address teacher workload. Part two contains the independent audit of principals' time demanded by INTO Congress in 2021. It should be noted that this research was carried out at a time when substitute cover was available for all absences due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

# Part One: Teacher workload research project

## Section 1: Overview of workload project

### 1.1 Introduction

The Teacher Workload Research Project arose in the context of the adoption of a resolution at INTO Annual Congress in 2018. The resolution called for an independent study into how teacher workload has increased over the past decade and the impact it has had and is having on the health and working conditions of members and for the findings to be used to inform and support the organisation's actions to protect all members against the increasing demands being placed on them by the Department of Education, the Teaching Council and other such bodies. The resolution also called for a timetable for curricular change and for an agreement regarding a deceleration of curriculum change. Following representations from the INTO, a deceleration of curricular change occurred in Autumn 2018 with the deferral of the introduction of a revised mathematics curriculum for a few years. The Primary Education Forum, described in this section, was established to facilitate agreement regarding curriculum change and other initiatives. The full resolution adopted at Congress 2018 is outlined in *Appendix A*.

### 1.2 Working group

The Central Executive Committee (CEC) set up a working group to oversee the research project. The working group comprised of representatives from all national committees in addition to the INTO president and vice president. Professor Mark Morgan, who worked with the INTO on the 2015 report, was invited to participate on the working group, but was unable to accept the invitation. The working group members included Joe McKeown, INTO President 2021/22, Mary Magner, INTO President 2020/21, Carmel Brown, CEC, Eleanor O'Dwyer, EQC, Bríd Finnegan, PDC and Paul Moroney, EDC.

The independent dimension of the project was ensured through the appointment of Milo Walsh, retired primary teacher, assisted by Mairéad Holden and Lourda Roseingrave, to facilitate the workshops, that were part of the project, and by inviting Anne English, retired principal teacher, to assist with the finalisation of the survey.

### 1.3 Project outline

Given that the 2015 INTO report on teacher workload identified the sources of workload, the working group decided that the focus of the research project would be on the identification of solutions to address the issue of teacher workload in addition to identifying new sources of workload since 2015. The working group decided to conduct the project in phases.

- ⌘ **Phase one** of the research involved a series of workshops, organised to include members representing different groups of teachers, such as principal teachers, deputy principal teachers, class teachers and special education teachers. Discussions at these workshops sought to identify workload issues that had emerged since 2015 and to explore potential solutions.
- ⌘ **Phase two** involved the preparation and dissemination of a questionnaire based on the themes that emerged in the initial phase, and the suggested solutions to addressing increased workload that arose in the workshops. The purpose of the questionnaire was to identify the level of members' support for the suggested solutions and to ascertain to what extent the suggested solutions would not find favour with members.

- ⌘ **Phase three** involved examining the findings of the questionnaire through a focus group discussion with members and preparing a set of recommendations to address workload.
- ⌘ **Phase four** of the research project finalised the conclusions and recommendations arising from the research project to address teacher and principal workload.

## 1.4 Workshops

Eight workshops took place during 2019, hosted by members of the INTO Education Committee and the INTO Principals' and Deputy Principals' Committee. These events were held in District 1 (Antrim, North Down), District 6 (Galway, Roscommon), District 7 (Longford, Westmeath, Offaly, Kildare, Meath), District 8 (Wicklow, parts of South Dublin), District 11 (Tipperary, Clare, Waterford), District 12 (South Cork), with two meetings in District 15 (North County Dublin).

Each of these workshops invited groups of teachers or principals, identified by the Education Committee or the Principals' and Deputies' Committee to participate, with a view to gaining an insight into the various factors that affect INTO members in their roles in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The various workshops targeted the following groups of members: Special School Principals, Deputy Principals, Teaching Principals, Administrative Principals, Mainstream Class Teachers and Special Education Teachers.

The questions raised at the workshops were as follows:

- ⌘ In what respects has teaching become more demanding or stressful since 2015?
- ⌘ What factors have made teaching more demanding/stressful?
- ⌘ How has the climate of teaching changed, with references to various policy changes?
- ⌘ What kinds of policy changes have impacted on the climate of teaching?
- ⌘ How can stress/workload be addressed in ways that enhance job satisfaction?
- ⌘ What kind of initiatives would be likely to increase job satisfaction and make teaching less stressful?
- ⌘ What opportunities are required for teachers to plan and how can the system respond?

The majority of INTO members at workshops expressed the view that teaching had become more stressful in the previous three years, that their conditions of employment had changed considerably, and that their workload had increased significantly. Among the factors identified as contributing to teachers' excessive workload were the proliferation of paperwork and greater need for documentation, confirming the findings of the 2015 report.

## 1.5 Presentation to biennial Principals' and Deputy Principals' Conference 2019

Issues raised during the workshop sessions with principals and deputy principals were presented at the Principals' and Deputy Principals' Conference in September 2019 which centred on the theme of *Managing Workload*. The conference explored the ever-expanding role of principals and the workload which had increased significantly in recent years. A background paper was circulated to delegates in advance of the conference outlining the main theme and reporting on issues raised in previous consultations with members based on the topic of workload and principals' experiences of managing their workload.

In his opening address to delegates, the INTO General Secretary, John Boyle, spoke of the need to ensure that activities undertaken by school leaders were focused on the issues that were core to the role of a school leader (school development, leading teaching and learning, personal and peer development, leading improvement, innovation, and change, managing the school and engaging with the school community), but he acknowledged that principals very often go beyond these duties and the plethora of additional responsibilities increase their workload to a level that is proving to be unsustainable.

Representatives of the INTO's Principals' and Deputy Principals' Committee acted as facilitators in discussion groups, and based on the findings of previous research and interaction with members, the three key questions for discussion were:

1. What are the **workload issues** right now for you as a school leader? Are they the same as the findings summarised in the presentation in the plenary session?
2. What has worked to **alleviate the pressure** on you, **in your school**?
3. What **supports** are required **at system level** to relieve the pressure on school leaders and tackle difficulties?

Twenty-first century school leaders are expected to face enthusiastically the challenging task of preparing children for the future, and the strong message emerging from discussions among principals and deputy principals was that there were three essential elements to enable this to be realised: adequate time, appropriate pace, and increased support. The discussion groups acknowledged that the pace of change in primary schools had accelerated in recent years. The 2017/18 school year saw the implementation of revised child protection and data protection regulations and the introduction of a new system of allocating special education resources. These developments added new responsibilities to the already demanding role of school leaders and were initiated without sufficient professional development.

## 1.6 Survey of possible solutions to teacher workload

Phase two of the research project involved the preparation of a survey to explore further with members the ideas that had emerged during the workshops and at the biennial conference for principals and deputy principals in September 2019. These ideas, combined with findings of the 2015 INTO report on workload stress, and the deliberations of the working group, informed the survey.

Two versions of the survey were prepared to capture effectively the views and experiences of both principal teachers and class/special education teachers regarding possible solutions to workload. The survey sought to identify key priorities for reducing teacher workload while also contributing further insights into teachers' and school leaders' working conditions and garnering additional evidence on what drives increasing teacher workload. The surveys were designed for the Republic of Ireland. Separate surveys will need to be designed to reflect the particular education context of schools and teachers in Northern Ireland.

The issuing of the surveys to teachers was delayed due to school closures as a result of Covid-19. A pilot survey was conducted with members of the INTO national Education Committee (comprising school leaders and class teachers) in Spring 2021 and their feedback was considered by the working group in the planning and preparation of the final iteration. The surveys were sent out in October 2021. The findings of the two surveys are outlined in the next sections.

## **Section 2: INTO survey on workload – principal teachers**

### 2.1 Introduction

A copy of the *INTO Survey on Workload – Principal Teachers* was sent electronically to all primary and special schools in the Republic of Ireland. A total of 3,241 surveys were issued, and 1,178 were returned, a response rate of 36%.

The responses are considered under four headings:

1. School leadership and administration
2. Teaching and learning
3. Special education
4. Communications

## Profile of respondents

There was a good balance between respondents in administrative principal roles (53%) and respondents who were teaching principals (47%).

Respondents had a range of teaching experience with the majority (90%) indicating that they had been teaching for more than 11 years. Over one third of those surveyed had assumed the role of principal in the last five years with a further 24% holding a principal position in their school for between six and ten years. Only 11% were in the role of principal teacher for 21 years or more. The majority of participants (91%) worked in full stream/vertical schools. Smaller percentages of respondents taught in senior schools (6%) or junior schools (3%) and 6% were special school principals.

Regarding socio-economic disadvantage, 8% were principals in DEIS Urban Band One schools, in areas of high levels of socio-economic disadvantage, 4% were in Urban DEIS Band Two schools in areas of moderate disadvantage, and 8% were in rural DEIS schools. Among the sample, 5% of respondents were based in Irish medium gaelscoileanna with a smaller number of respondents working in a Gaeltacht school (2%).

For an additional breakdown of the profile of principal respondents, see *Appendix B*.

## 2.2 School leadership and administration

In an observational study, Horng et al. (2009) found that principals spent much of their day on administration and organization management tasks whereas they had little time to concentrate on teaching and learning which is at the core of their role.

Previous research carried out by the INTO (2015) indicated that principal teachers often lack the time to lead teaching and learning because of the demands of administration, including data collection and reporting requirements. Principal teachers were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with some specific solutions to alleviate the proliferating administrative demands.

Principal teachers were asked to what extent they agreed that the INTO should aim for the equivalent of two days per week for teaching principals to engage in leadership and administration. It is not surprising that 87% of respondents agreed with this suggestion (69% to a great extent and 18% to some extent) while only 4% disagreed. In their comments, principal teachers noted the benefits of having additional days for leadership and administration, to assist in managing paperwork and other duties.

Additional days where teaching principals were released from their teaching responsibilities were negotiated by the INTO over the last few years particularly as a measure to assist principals address the challenges associated with Covid-19. All teaching principals now have one day per week for school leadership and management. One principal described the additional days as “a gamechanger.” Another principal remarked that “the role of teaching principal has only become more manageable due to the one day per week administrative leave.” This view was echoed by other school leaders who welcomed the development but emphasised the need to ensure that this was not a temporary measure with one school leader stating that “I honestly do not know how I could do my job if I were to go back to only having two days a month in the office.” Similarly, another school leader noted that “this principal administration day is vital to staying on top of administration duties...[I] could not imagine how administrative duties could be carried out without it.”

Many respondents also referenced the support they receive from their school’s deputy principal in leading and managing teaching and learning. Principal teachers were asked to what extent they agreed with the suggestion that deputy principal teachers should also be released from teaching duties, to assist with school leadership and administration. A total of 93%

of respondents agreed with this suggestion (72% to a great extent) while only 1% disagreed. Administrative deputy principals are currently appointed in large mainstream schools with 24 class teachers or in special schools with 15 teachers. A majority of respondents agreed that administrative deputy principals should be appointed in all special schools.

The role of a teaching principal is acknowledged as being particularly challenging (INTO, 2015). Respondents were asked to what extent they supported the suggestion that all schools with ten or more staff (including non-teaching staff) should have an administrative principal. With 93% of respondents agreeing, there was overwhelming support for this suggestion. The majority of respondents (91%) also agreed with the suggestion that all mainstream schools with special classes should have an administrative principal. See Table 1.

Currently (*Circular 0025/2022* for school year 2022/23), an administrative principal is appointed when a school has eight class teachers (174 pupils) or is operating two or more special classes. In the case of DEIS Urban Band One schools, it is seven class teachers (114 pupils) and six class teachers (141 pupils) for DEIS Urban Band Two schools.

**Table 1: Administrative time in schools - extent of agreement with proposals**

Proposal	To a great extent (%)	To some extent (%)	Hard to say (%)	Not at all (%)
Two day administrative and leadership days for all teaching principals each week	69	18	9	4
Administrative deputy principal (DP) for all special schools with 8 or more class teachers	68	18	11	2
DPs release time pro rate with size of school	72	21	6	1
All mainstream schools with special classes should have admin principal	74	17	<8	<1
All schools with more than 10 staff, including non-teaching staff, should have admin principal	75	18	6	1

### School administration

School administration and the demands of paperwork cause significant workload issues for principal teachers. Principal teachers were invited to indicate to what extent they agreed with three suggested solutions. See Table 2.

**Table 2: School administrative support**

Proposal	To a great extent (%)	To some extent (%)	Hard to say (%)	Not at all (%)
All schools should have school administrators/secretaries qualified in school administration and paid by the Department of Education pro rata depending on school size	93	5	2	<1
All schools should have access to a HR advisory service	76	17	6	1
Supply panels for all schools would reduce principals' workload in relation to securing substitutes	80	15	4	1

An overwhelming majority of respondents (98%) agreed with the suggestion that every school should have access to an administrator/secretary who would be qualified in school administration and paid by the Department of Education pro rata depending on school size. In an open-ended question centred on the theme of administration, one eighth of principals referenced their school secretary to whom they “offload” a certain amount of work and one principal commented that the school secretary must be “seen as a recognised asset and not just someone to mind the photocopier and answer the phone...and must be remunerated accordingly.” Over one quarter of respondents (28%) in the open-ended questions referred to their school secretary as a source of support in dealing with administrative work. It is clear that school secretaries, where available, are an invaluable asset to the school and play a key role in the effective operation of the school.

Principals were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed that schools should have access to a HR advisory service. A large majority (93%) of respondents agreed with this suggestion. A large majority (94%) also agreed with the suggestion that supply panels for all schools would reduce principals’ workload in relation to securing substitutes. Principals spend a lot of time securing substitute teachers.

**Boards of management**

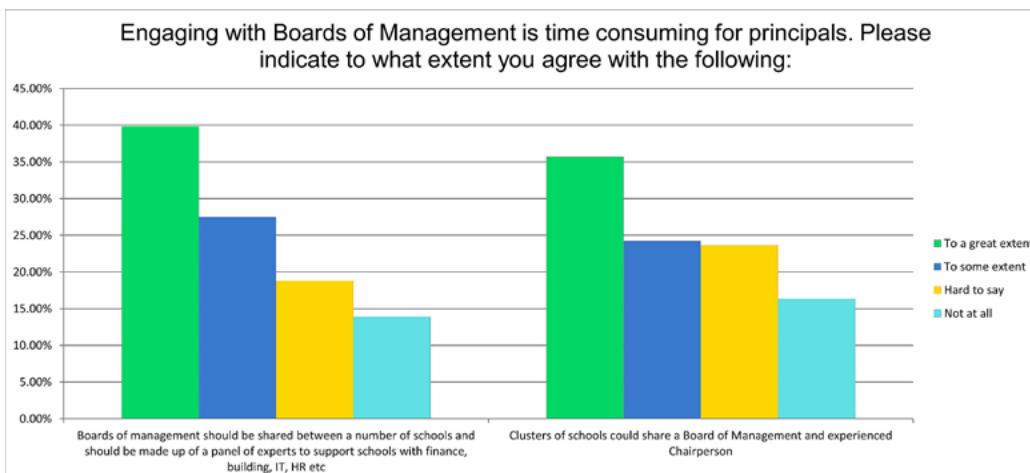
Systems must support sustainable leadership (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003).

Darmody and Smyth (2016) note that leadership challenges are particularly acute for teaching principals and that voluntary boards of management (BOM) often rely heavily on the school principal’s expertise, work and guidance.

Principals were asked to what extent they agreed that boards of management should be shared between several schools and should be made up of a panel of experts to support schools with finance, building, IT and HR because the work of boards of management often falls to the principal teacher. While two thirds of respondents (67%) agreed with the suggestion that boards of management should be shared among schools, 14% disagreed and 19% were of the view that it was hard to say.

Regarding the suggestion that clusters of schools could share boards of management and a chairperson experienced in school management, only 60% agreed, while 16% disagreed and 24% of respondents were of the view that it was hard to say. See Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Engaging with boards of management**



## School policies

The need for policies at school level, often arising from national policies, have been identified as a major demand on the work experiences of teachers. Demands for higher standards and increased levels of accountability, requiring schools to have ever-increasing higher standards of teaching, learning and achievement are also recognised as sources of additional workload and stress. Internationally, frequent national policy changes are also among the challenges with which teachers are confronted (Day & Gu, 2014), and at a macro level, the extent to which policy changes and demands causes stress and anxiety in teachers' lives has long been the focus of study. While neoliberal approaches to education policy seek to devolve responsibility, the corresponding forms of 'remote control' which are then established suggest that such moves are contrary to trust in, and respect for, teaching professionals.

Principals were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with four suggested solutions to the workload associated with policies at school level. The results are captured in Table 3. As is evident from the responses, 98% of principals agreed (to 'a great' or 'some' extent) that all Department of Education circulars should be accompanied by templates to reduce the workload associated with policies. There was also support for the suggestion that policies should be devised centrally and adapted locally to suit the individual school context, with 98% of principals agreeing. This approach would help to decrease the time spent on preparation of policies but would ensure that schools could retain autonomy and flexibility to make amendments as necessary. As well as the time involved in formulating policies, principals highlighted the need for adequate time to introduce change, with an overwhelming 99% of respondents agreeing that appropriate notice should be given to afford schools sufficient opportunity to introduce and implement a new policy. Regarding curriculum policy, 89% of respondents agreed that a review of such policies could be delegated to teachers.

**Table 3: School policies**

Proposal	To a great extent (%)	To some extent (%)	Hard to say (%)	Not at all (%)
All Department of Education circulars should be accompanied by templates	90	8	>1	<1
Principals should delegate the review of curriculum related policies to teachers	40	49	8	3
All policies should be devised centrally and adapted locally	79	19	<2	<1
Appropriate notice should be given to allow for time to put new policies in place	96	3	<1	<1

Principal teachers, in the qualitative responses, expressed their frustration at the proliferation of policies and the paperwork associated with them. Respondents commented frequently on the seemingly excessive impost of unceasing change and new policies. Some of the suggestions made by respondents to alleviate the burden associated with policy development and monitoring included delegating to other staff members, assigning policies to staff members who hold a post of responsibility as well as convening regular staff meetings where teachers have an opportunity to engage in discussion and contribute to school plans.

As demonstrated in Table 3, four out of ten principals agreed, to a great extent, that curriculum-related policies should be delegated to teachers, whilst almost half of respondents indicated that they agreed with this solution to some extent. Exploring this possibility further, it was apparent that although delegating certain policies and tasks to teachers was a viable

option, principals had some reservations about how this could be facilitated. Some respondents mentioned the potential to delegate to teachers with posts of responsibility while others mentioned collaboration with other principal teachers or availing of sustained professional development support from PDST.

Whilst 'delegation' emerged as a common theme, there was a level of hesitancy among some respondents who felt that unless individuals held a post of responsibility, they would not feel comfortable assigning additional duties to them for which they would not receive remuneration. This tension is experienced by principals as they seek to meet the demands placed upon them whilst also supporting their staff members. One respondent described this a "a constant struggle" and one which was exacerbated because of the Covid-19 pandemic when additional responsibilities were placed on principals. The full restoration of posts of responsibility was noted as one key action that would allow schools to operate more efficiently as principals would then be able to allocate tasks/duties to post-holders. Some principals fostered teacher collaboration by providing instructional leadership and sharing leadership with teachers, with the view that higher levels of teacher collaboration may lead to improved student achievement. Team-based planning and policy development was also suggested as it was felt that the sharing of knowledge and expertise with colleagues would be beneficial and teachers with a keen interest in a particular curricular area could offer valuable insight. As well as this collaboration between teachers, the development of cross-site learning and collaboration between school leaders were identified as a source of support for principals. The role of the principal can sometimes be an isolating one, and this approach allows leaders to reflect on their learning needs, refine their approach and strive towards stronger outcomes for students.

### **Strategies to address leadership and administration**

Principals were invited to give examples of any strategies they have used or any ideas they may have to reduce their workload associated with school administration. A total of 914 respondents offered comments.

More than one in ten (13%) respondents indicated they did not see any way of reducing their administrative workload as school principals given their recent experience of a relentless and never-ending growth in expectations and demands being placed upon them. The opinion of many principals was that the best that could be done in current circumstances was to find ways of managing the workload. Many respondents could not give any examples that they have actually been able to implement but did give ideas and suggestions that they would like to see implemented. These suggestions would require changes in how schools are currently managed as well as additional funding.

#### ***Delegation/distributed leadership***

More than a quarter (28%) of respondents identified delegation of tasks and fostering a culture of distributed leadership as an example of how they managed their workload. The delegation of duties and tasks was considered constructive as staff were working cooperatively and sharing the burden, but delegation could also be viewed through the prism of professional development opportunities for teachers who may otherwise not be afforded a chance to showcase their skills or utilise their expertise in a particular area. Principals recognised the potential to support teachers in exercising or developing leadership skills through involvement in a field of interest, however, the continuing lack of posts of responsibility in schools was identified as a significant barrier to this strategy. Principals felt guilty about asking colleagues who were already very busy to take on additional tasks and responsibilities. Principals also felt unable to ask colleagues to take on additional work for which they would receive no additional remuneration. Poor staff morale and the increased pressure and challenges throughout the pandemic period also made it more difficult for principals to delegate and share responsibilities with colleagues:

Delegation was an option but now class teachers have an enormous workload as well. Teachers are already working 20 minutes extra every morning due to staggered arrivals and carrying out extra yard supervision due to bubbles. Hard to ask more of them.

Delegation of some tasks to ISM, however, their posts are already full, so this is on an essential basis only, e.g. health and safety and remote learning issues.

We have tried to delegate to postholders, but with the reduced number of postholders and the increasing workload, this is not working.

### ***Greater administrative support***

One in seven (14%) respondents referred to the importance of good administrative support. In many cases, principals referred to their excellent school secretaries and how they could not do the job of principal without their support. Unfortunately, many also commented that the level of secretarial/administrative support was totally insufficient. All schools now require a fulltime secretary to deal with the ever-growing administrative burden. Teaching principals, in particular, cannot continue to fulfil their duties without fulltime secretarial/administrative support in their schools. Respondents noted also that school secretaries and caretakers should be employed by the Department of Education and paid a fair and proper wage, and that appropriate and relevant training should be provided to enable them to do their job fully for the benefit of the school:

School secretaries can help greatly but there needs to be a recognised training course and appropriate remuneration.

Employ a good secretary! There really should be greater recognition of their role in the school.

Having a competent secretary is crucial. Therefore, I think it is very important that all secretaries be employed by the DE.

### ***Use of technology and online tools***

One in seven (13%) respondents referred to the importance of using digital technology and online tools to manage and in some cases reduce their administrative workload. Data management packages such as *Aladdin* and file sharing and communication platforms such as *Google Drive* and *Seesaw* are seen as having reduced this workload as so much data is managed automatically by the programmes and are accessible to other members of staff who need to retrieve or update data on an ongoing basis. These tools also facilitate prompt communication within the school and between school and home. The use of online payment tools to collect money from families as well as online banking were also highlighted as very welcome developments for managing the school's finances. Principals believe that *Aladdin* or a similar package should be funded by the Department of Education for all schools or alternatively that the Department should develop their own suite of tools to be provided to schools:

Maximize the use of technology. *Aladdin Connect* and e-payments have greatly improved the flow through our own office.

*Aladdin Connect* has saved loads of time and paper re communication with both colleagues and parents.

The use of the *Aladdin* administration system and online payments has reduced administration greatly.

*Aladdin* - excellent all-encompassing online platform that facilitates communication at many levels within the school community, money collection, school organisation, administration, record-keeping etc.

### ***Prioritisation***

Over one in ten (11%) respondents referred to prioritisation of tasks and demands. It is not possible to do everything so tasks need to be prioritised in order of importance. Many respondents referred to leaving to one side anything that was not absolutely essential or was not going to enhance teaching and learning in their school. The cessation of all non-essential and extra-curricular activities by schools during the pandemic caused many principals to reflect on their practices and they have realised that they as individuals and the school as a whole need to be more judicious in the tasks and activities they choose to implement, though the problem of managing workloads was exacerbated for some principals in the Covid-19 context with constant uncertainty and changing of guidelines and advice.

Some practical approaches that some principals found effective included filtering emails to omit any promotional or 'irrelevant' content which could be discarded, removing annual reporting (such as charities regulator/SEAI), co-ordinating 'A Monday Memo' which was circulated to all staff to set out all key events/deadlines/projects to be completed over the course of the week, as well as enforcing a strict "cut off time" and "sticking to it." Numerous respondents articulated the difficulty of managing their time with specific examples, for instance one principal shared their aim to "not send emails to staff after 6pm" and "trying to avoid work at weekends" but stated that "this is not realistic at present" and "although I work no less than a 50-hour week I'm not getting a fraction of it done."

### ***Networking/professional supports***

A small percentage (7%) of respondents referred to the importance of networking and developing relationships with other principals. This was seen as an important way of sharing and benefiting from the knowledge and experience of others. The INTO, IPPN, CPSMA and other groups were also identified as a valuable source of advice and support. The value of clusters was noted by many principals who stated that sharing of templates with local principal network clusters may be effective in addressing some administrative pressures.

Working with other schools to share knowledge and expertise.

A cohort of reasonably local principals support each other in all things administrative. We give each other opportunities to grow from one another's work.

Calling on other local principals who have experience of different challenges to use their learned knowledge.

### ***Centralisation/outsourcing of school administration***

A small number (5%) of respondents asserted that responsibility for matters not directly related to teaching and learning such as HR, procurement, buildings and maintenance, and legal issues, should be taken away from school principals and either outsourced to experts in these areas or given over to some central national or regional authority. A similar view was expressed that the Department of Education should have a much greater role in determining and providing templates for school policies. Much greater use should be made of standardised templates provided by the Department so that each school was not left to 'reinvent the wheel.' One idea that emerged was that it might be advantageous to have one suitably qualified person with an in-depth knowledge of the primary education system employed to deal with administrative duties of a number of schools in a local area or cluster.

Capital projects, summer works schemes should be fully overseen by designated project supervisors. The level of administration to satisfy procurement, etc. is exceptionally demanding.

Centralisation of cleaning...bus escorts with DE looking after all these additional things that are so time consuming.

Centralising all IT issues - a proper Departmental-based IT support system. Not this business of tendering and engaging expensive private companies to provide support. Principals should not have to work as procurement officers.

Schools need professional managers for managing the building, insurance, maintenance, contracts for maintenance as well as for staff roles, servicing equipment, sorting gas/oil/heat, plumbing issues, ordering specialist equipment as principals often MUST deal with these things to ensure the doors open for staff and pupils before ever getting round to leading learning and teaching in the school. I am not doing the job I am meant to be doing and I feel guilty all the time about it.

## 2.3 Teaching and learning

### **Curriculum**

In previous INTO research on curriculum and in the INTO report on workload and stress (2015), teachers referred a lot to curriculum overload as a significant source of their workload. Principal teachers were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed with a few suggested solutions to address workload associated with curriculum. Just under half (49%) of the respondents agreed, though only 10% agreed to a great extent, that the recently launched guidance on preparation for teaching and learning, would reduce the amount of paperwork associated with planning, while 10% disagreed and a large minority of 41% were of the view that it was hard to say. It is possible that many principals were not very familiar with the guidance document. Guidance on preparation for teaching designed by the Department of Education, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and the Professional Development Services for Teachers were launched in April 2021.

There were also differing opinions regarding the issue of whether teachers should have to record their plans for differentiation. Over half the respondents (58%) agreed and over one in five (22%) disagreed. A fifth (20%) were of the view that it was hard to say. The central role played by technology in schools drew attention during Covid-19. Almost all principals (97%) agreed that IT technical support should be provided regionally or centrally.

### **Initiatives**

In an open-ended question, principals were invited to comment on why they thought schools participated in the wide range of initiatives available to primary schools. Engagement with certain initiatives and their potential for community involvement can be considered critical investments in children and families that have ripples of dividends in the future. The passion and dedication of teachers and school leaders to invest in that which has long-term positive impacts for pupils and families is manifest in schools' involvement in initiatives.

A total of 1,003 of the 1,178 principals who completed the online survey provided additional comments regarding engagement with school-based initiatives.

### **Benefits to pupils**

Just under three quarters (72%) of respondents stated that they undertook various initiatives due to the many positive effects they have for pupils and for the school as a whole. The benefit of involvement in such initiatives to pupils in their school was the dominant factor influencing their decision to engage with these programmes. "Principals and teachers are in the profession for one

reason ... the children. That is their focus for such initiatives.” There was an acknowledgement that these activities are important to offer children “various platforms on which to shine” and therefore allow children who may not be confident in certain curriculum subjects to enhance their self-esteem through other areas. Initiatives such as Green Schools, Active Flag and Yellow Flag encourage children to work together, develop leadership skills, take ownership of projects, and also offers a sense of achievement and fulfilment upon completion. Respondents commented that engagement with initiatives:

- ⌘ Provides a more holistic education.
- ⌘ Allows opportunities for children to develop many additional skills and capacities outside of the academic focus of the curriculum.
- ⌘ Caters for diversity of interests and abilities and opportunities to develop real world practical skills.
- ⌘ Contributes to school ethos.
- ⌘ Enhances morale, cooperation, and school spirit.
- ⌘ Are enjoyable for children and teachers and help to foster links with the wider community.

Schools engage in these initiatives to enrich the learning experiences of the pupils and to help them connect with issues affecting society. One principal commented:

I think every school wants their school to be the best it can be and their children to have all the opportunities that others do. They also see the long-term benefits for the children and for society as a whole when children develop an interest at a young age for schemes that benefit them and their community.

#### ***Publicity and competition with other schools***

More than two fifths (44%) of respondents commented that these initiatives are undertaken to generate positive publicity for their school particularly for smaller rural schools who are competing with other schools in the area to attract families. Respondents commented that it was important to be seen as a progressive school that engaged with various initiatives and provided similar opportunities to competing schools, to be seen as a ‘good school’, and to enhance the school’s reputation and profile among prospective parents. If one school achieves a particular flag or distinction, neighbouring principals felt they must achieve the same or something better to avoid being left behind or viewed negatively compared to their peers. Many respondents referred to a sense of ‘one-upmanship’, ‘keeping up with the Joneses’, and being in competition for pupils:

Often it is because of keeping up with the Joneses’ but I would rather it was a focus for us to teach the curriculum in a structured, active and child-friendly approach.

We bring it on ourselves because we are all competing for children. If you are not seen to do these things, fewer children will come to your school. And then before you know it, you have lost a teacher.

Too much emphasis on PR and a sense of other schools are doing it and we should be seen to do it also.

We only pick initiatives that we really value in our school. You don’t always need a flag to put something in place.

### ***Expectations of parents and other groups***

One fifth (21%) of respondents commented that one factor motivating them to engage with various initiatives was pressure from parents and other agencies as well as feeling compelled to emulate achievements of other schools in the locality with whom they are competing for enrolment. Respondents referred to pressure being placed on schools by parental demands as well as wider societal expectations that schools can solve all social problems by taking on various programmes and initiatives provided by special interest groups. Other stakeholders such as the Inspectorate were also seen as creating an expectation that schools should be engaging with these initiatives. Respondents commented that participation in these programmes had become an expectation rather than an optional extra. If a school did not have a display of various flags outside, there was a perception that there was something wrong with the school:

There can be pressure from parents/local community on the school to participate when other local schools are involved. These initiatives can even influence parents when choosing which school to enrol their child! Personally, I feel there are far too many initiatives being pushed on primary schools ... we are expected to cure all ills!

Pressure to be seen doing them by parents, BOM and enhance profile of school.

### ***Teachers' personal interests, professional development, opportunities for career progressions***

A small number of respondents (6%) said that many teachers agreed to lead and/or facilitate these initiatives due to their personal interest in the topic or initiative. As well as this, teachers may see leading such initiatives as a good opportunity to develop their skills and facilitate professional development and subsequent career progression. Engaging with initiatives provides "a chance for teachers to develop leadership skills." Respondents also commented that "staff have particular interests and talents in areas which they enjoy sharing with pupils in schools" or that "teachers are trying to improve their CVs."

In spite of their recognised potential to contribute to positive outcomes for pupils, the impact of school involvement in initiatives on principals' workload was a key issue voiced by survey respondents. Principals mentioned that participation in these initiatives increased their workload, particularly in the early stages. Additional time was needed to communicate with stakeholders and to engage students, teachers, parents, staff and the rest of the school community in the various programmes occurring at the school level. Developing successful initiatives extended the workday for principals by resulting in an increase in the number of administrative tasks such as paperwork and emails on a regular basis. Managing partnerships with external agencies and local groups and building community connections was time-consuming, arduous work. According to one principal:

Decisions to partake should be made on the basis that it benefits the children and their learning and development. It should never be done as a result of pressure and initiatives should be capped in any given year depending on the human resources available to direct them. Schools should always be free to take a stance and stand back and say no to such initiatives.

This sentiment was echoed by another principal who explained that in their school they "only engage in two [initiatives per year] because of overload" and these are chosen in line with curriculum objectives.

Despite the impact on their workloads, school principals recognise that these programmes have a benefit for pupils and the school community and feel that the beneficial nature of such programmes outweighs any negative affect they may have on their workload.

### Planning and collaborative time

Current understandings of teacher professionalism, special education teaching, and curriculum planning, require teachers to collaborate and work as members of a team (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018). One of the greatest challenges in Ireland's system is finding the time for collaborative work. In Ireland, as in many countries, co-operation and collaboration between teachers takes the form of exchanging and co-ordinating ideas and information, team teaching, staff meetings and at times, professional development.

Principal teachers were asked to indicate how much cumulative time on a monthly basis they thought staff require for collaborative work, including staff meetings, planning, and CPD. They were also asked how they thought this collaborative time should be provided.

A total of 941 principals offered suggestions as to how collaborative time could be provided. A range of suggestions were offered. Some respondents suggested longer working hours, stating that teachers should be paid for such additional time. Others stated that Croke Park hours should be used. Many principals suggested dedicated time either weekly, fortnightly or monthly. In order to facilitate the release of teachers to engage in collaborate work, some respondents suggested the employment of substitute teachers, supply panel teachers or part-time teachers. Other respondents suggested the employment of specialist teachers, for subjects such as music or PE, so that class teachers could be freed up for periods during the school day. Some respondents referred to such practices in other jurisdictions, such as Scotland, England and Australia.

Principal teachers were also asked to what extent they agreed with the introduction of a 35 hour week for teachers and principals to include all teachers' duties and responsibilities, such as staff meetings, professional development, meetings with parents, individual and collaborative planning, with additional pay. There were mixed views regarding this suggestion. Only 37% agreed to a great extent while 25% agreed to some extent, less than two thirds. One fifth (20%) did not agree at all, while 17% were of the view that it was hard to say.

Principals were invited in an open-ended question to indicate how much time they thought staff require for collaborative work, such as staff meetings, planning for teaching and learning and professional development on a monthly basis. The question was interpreted in a variety of ways with some respondents referring to individual planning and preparation in addition to collaborative activities. While a very broad range of responses was gathered, more than 65% of responses were within the range of four to 10 hours with the average response being eight hours. See Table 4 for the most common responses.

**Table 4: Monthly time required for collaborative activities**

No. of hours	No. of responses
4	186
5	160
10	121
8	115
6	97
2	75
20	45
3	44
12	31
2.5	14
1	13
30	12
4.5	12

Within the qualitative data collected in this survey, principals provided examples of current practice whereby teaching staff worked together and shared expertise. This approach was frequently observed where schools had some classes at the same grade level where teachers worked together in planning. This partnership with colleagues was useful in reducing the time needed to complete paperwork associated with planning. It also provided teachers with an opportunity to engage in professional dialogue and reflection, sharing their own classroom experiences and reviewing their teaching alongside their peers. Finding time to facilitate such peer collaboration can be a challenge for principals.

Staff meetings were identified as another effective means of enabling collaboration but with ever-increasing demands and initiatives, some principals reported difficulty in choosing topics and issues that should be prioritised, and this was particularly challenging in a Covid-19 context. The large volume of policies and plans to be discussed, drafted and reviewed can often result in less meaningful debate and some respondents to the survey noted that to allow more time for greater engagement with themes, they adopted a distributed model of leadership. As remarked by one respondent “teachers are schools’ best asset” and sharing workload by assigning small groups of teachers to specific curriculum areas or policies was considered a useful strategy.

The issue of time for collaborative work requires further exploration and consideration.

### **Professional development**

Professional learning and development are a core part of the teacher education continuum. INTO research over the years has shown that teachers would welcome opportunities to engage in professional development. Professional development to support system change, e.g. revised curriculum, is usually provided during school time, through school closures, the provision of substitute cover, or through the sustained support model, however, teachers engage in professional development most often in their own time. Principal teachers were asked to what extent they agreed that all schools should have a bank of substitute days that they can draw on to release teachers to participate in professional development and learning. A large majority (97%) of respondents agreed.

### **Strategies to address teaching and learning**

Respondents were invited to give examples of any strategies they have used or any ideas they had to reduce the workload associated with leading teaching and learning. A total of 853 principals gave responses. Themes emerging from the responses to this open-ended question were similar to those identified in other areas of the questionnaire.

#### ***Delegation***

Over one fifth (22%) of respondents to this question identified delegation of duties to colleagues as one strategy that has been effective in reducing workload associated with teaching and learning. Some principals noted that they rely on the goodwill of staff to enable them to meet the demands they face in their role.

Common points emerging in responses included:

- ⌘ An acknowledgment of the value of empowering other teachers to lead in areas of identified strengths or interests.
- ⌘ An emphasis on the reinstatement of posts of responsibility to incentivise teachers to carry out additional roles such as leading a particular curriculum area or coordinating a school initiative.
- ⌘ Whilst distributed leadership and the involvement of other teachers in leadership activities were considered by many respondents as a strategy to reduce their workload, there was a level of reluctance among some principals who felt that it was unfair to expect colleagues who were not post-holders to engage in additional work without remuneration.

- ⌘ Many principals were of the view that they were unable to invest sufficient time in teaching and learning as they were overstretched with the increasing demand for paperwork and the burden of administration. Teaching principals emphasised that too much time and energy were expended on paperwork taking away from teachers' capacity to provide high quality learning experiences for their pupils. (Some principals referred to the pressures associated with the school's Covid-19 response plan and how this had intensified their workload in recent times).

### **Templates**

About one in ten (11%) respondents identified templates for planning as a useful tool that would help to reduce the workload of teachers and school leaders. Some principals reiterated their frustration at the inconsistencies regarding expectations for planning and paperwork between individual schools and also between individual members of the Inspectorate. The creation of templates was seen as one way to alleviate the burden of documentation and the time associated with preparation for teaching and learning.

Some respondents reported examples of good practice in their schools with regard to the development and design of templates for *cuntais mhíosúla* that are user friendly and guarantee uniformity and a consistent whole-school approach. A thematic approach to planning was also identified as a successful strategy to minimise paperwork and ensure efficient use of time.

Some other issues raised included:

- ⌘ Keeping a diary to record daily notes that may be different from a monthly/fortnightly plan (this is in keeping with the recently published *Guidance on Preparation for Teaching and Learning* which states that teachers' planning should be "practical and purposeful.")
- ⌘ Facilitating regular staff meetings to discuss planning documents.
- ⌘ Careful filing and retention of resources and notes that are built up over the years.
- ⌘ Using templates that are transferrable from year to year and can be edited/alterd as appropriate.
- ⌘ The use of a centralised digital folder for plans and *cuntais*.

### **Networking**

One in ten (10%) respondents suggested that opportunities for school staff to network and collaborate with other schools would be of great benefit in planning for teaching and learning and could serve to reduce workload. The professional sharing and working collaboratively with other schools of a similar profile are considered worthwhile and principals glean practical advice from other school leaders who can share examples of best practice. In some cases, forging relationships with other local schools/principals can also allow for community-based project work and sharing of the workload associated with certain initiatives. The possibility of organising cluster groups or communities of practice in local areas, coordinated by PDST was also raised.

### **Continuous professional development (CPD)**

Where teachers have engaged in CPD in a particular area, respondents suggested that they should facilitate the sharing of knowledge through whole-staff meetings, e.g. Croke Park hours. One respondent commented that CPD sharing was always included on the agenda for staff meetings. The use of *TeachMeets* as a means of sharing expertise was also recommended. *TeachMeets* enable knowledge and ideas to be shared in an engaging and creative way. The INTO has used *TeachMeets* to great effect at recent conferences to enable teachers to share ideas and experiences. Some respondents spoke about their experience of coordinating whole-school CPD with PDST and NEPS and feedback from those who engaged with such training was extremely positive. A number of principals reported using their administrative days to attend CPD events and underlined the importance of ensuring that school leaders have sufficient release time to attend such events.

### **Prioritisation**

Some principals stated that they prioritise what they and their in-school management team identify as being the most pressing need(s) for the school at a given time. Respondents acknowledged that this means that all areas may not be covered nor some initiatives but expressed the view that “it is impossible to fulfil either the role of principal or the role of teacher to the best of (their) ability so something must give to preserve sanity and mental health.”

A number of principals stated that they limit the number of initiatives within their school setting. One respondent explained that their school celebrates four ‘special weeks’ in the school calendar – Book Week, Science, Maths and Engineering (STEAM) Week, Wellbeing Week and Active Schools Week.

### **Other areas**

Other areas which were mentioned by smaller numbers of respondents included:

#### **Class size**

- Some respondents stated that reducing class size was the best way of alleviating teacher workload. It is not possible to meet the increasing expectations and demands being placed upon schools in supersized classes.
- Smaller class sizes would enable teachers to better facilitate differentiation and inclusion of all pupils.

#### **Dedicated time for planning, collaboration and administrative tasks**

- It was widely reported by respondents that principals were spending large amounts of time outside of the regular school day carrying out schoolwork and meeting administration demands.
- Many principals reported working at weekends and during school holidays.

#### **External support**

- A number of respondents suggested the use of external personnel with expertise in a particular field to support teachers, in areas such as PE, music, performing arts, etc.

## **2.4 Special education**

Responding to and addressing special educational needs was the greatest source of workload for both principal and class teachers as identified in the INTO’s report on workload and stress (2015). According to the INTO report of 2015, challenges related to the requirement to cater for individual differences and the increase in the number of children presenting with behaviour difficulties. Furthermore, there were difficulties relating to the number of agencies with which schools had to deal. International research also recognises the particular challenge special education creates for teachers (OECD [TALIS], 2009; 2018).

Principal teachers were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed with a range of suggested solutions to addressing workload associated with special educational needs. See Table 5.

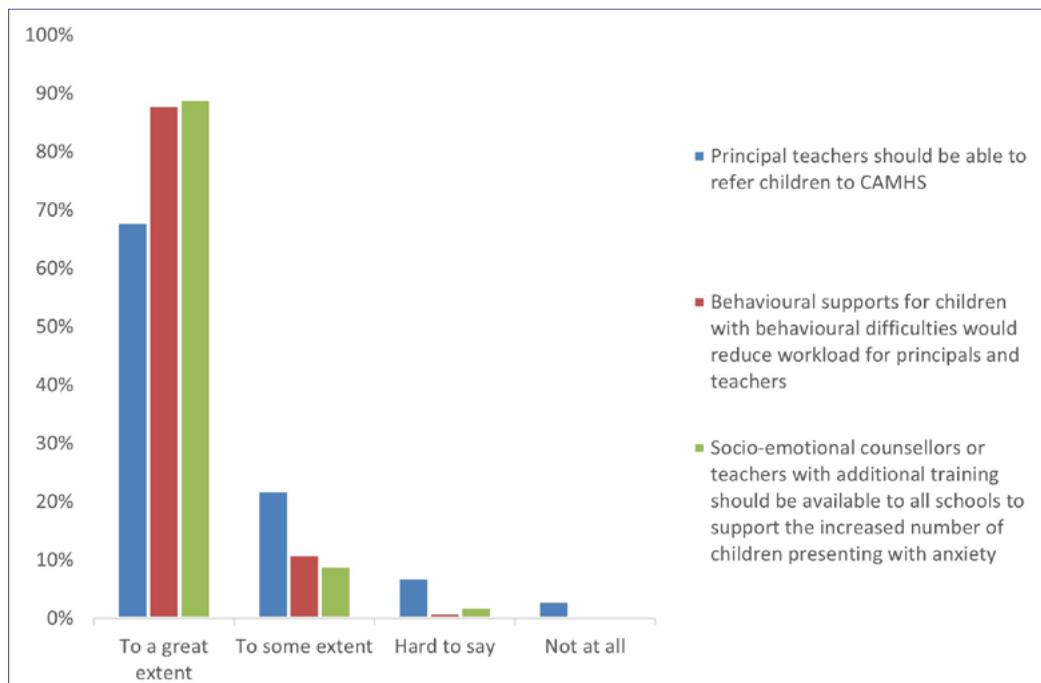
Practically all respondents agreed that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) should simplify and reduce the amount of paperwork required to access support, to appeal and to seek a review of provision. A large majority (97%) also agreed that all schools should have a post of responsibility for the coordination of special education. Furthermore, 96% of respondents agreed that teachers with responsibility for coordination of special education in schools should be allocated time for this purpose as part of a school’s general allocation of SET. There was less agreement regarding the suggestion that school clusters for the sharing of SET should be organised regionally or centrally rather than at individual school level. This suggestion was supported by 79% of respondents, while 6% did not agree at all and 15% were of the view that it was hard to say.

**Table 5: Supporting special educational needs - extent of agreement**

Proposal	To a great extent (%)	To some extent (%)	Hard to say (%)	Not at all (%)
The NCSE should simplify and reduce the amount of paperwork required to access support, appeal and review of provision	96	4	<1	<1
Teachers with responsibility for coordination of special education needs in schools should be allocated timetabled time for this purpose as part of a school's general allocation of SET	88	8	3	1
School clusters for the sharing of SET should be organised regionally/centrally rather than at individual school level	51	28	15	6
All schools should have a post of responsibility for special education coordination	90	8	2	<1

The provision of sufficient support for special educational needs can assist in reducing workload for principals and class teachers. Principal teachers were asked to what extent they agreed with a few suggested solutions. A large majority (90%) agreed, (68% agreed to a great extent), with the suggestion that principal teachers should be able to refer children to CAMHS, while 7% were of the view that it was hard to say and 3% disagreed. Almost all respondents (99%) agreed that behavioural supports for children with behavioural difficulties would reduce workload for principals and teachers, while 98% of respondents agreed that socio-emotional counsellors or teachers with additional training should be available to all schools to support the increased number of children presenting with anxiety. See Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Support for special educational needs**



The theme of special education featured in many respondents' qualitative comments. For example, one respondent stated:

Special Ed is massively challenging – it is ever growing and expanding and becoming more and more difficult. Children with severe needs are being sent into mainstream schooling without appropriate supports. We are being told to spread the resources we have, which is a 'loaves and fishes' approach, without Jesus being present. If you want schools to be so diverse, you must support appropriately.

### **Strategies to address special education**

Principals were invited in an open-ended question to give examples of any strategies they have used or any ideas they had in relation to reducing their workload associated with special education. A total of 826 respondents offered comments.

#### ***SEN post of responsibility***

Over a third (38%) of respondents identified the creation of a post of responsibility with the specific duty of leading/coordinating special educational needs (SEN) within the schools as one of the most effective strategies in managing workload associated with special education. Many principals revealed that they 'rely heavily' on the SEN coordinator in their school, given the huge level of paperwork associated with the role.

The importance of ensuring that the individual in this role is competent and diligent was highlighted. Principals must have trust in their SEN coordinator. Many respondents commented that the teacher who held responsibility for SEN was passionate in this area and would therefore be enthusiastic about engaging in CPD in this field.

However, in contrast to this view, another principal expressed a reluctance to promote the development of expertise in SEN among a small cohort of staff as they felt that this approach could 'centralise' knowledge and prevent the sharing of expertise. It could also lead to lack of staff rotation and potential stagnation. For this reason, this principal chose not to assign SEN-related duties as part of a post of responsibility. Rather, special education teachers (SETs) were rotated regularly, and the entire SET team was responsible for the implementation of policy and completion of paperwork. The principal was centrally involved in SET so, the principal's workload had increased rather than reduced. However, the respondent in question believes that this approach lends weight to the importance of the SET role meeting the needs of the most vulnerable students. By affording many teachers the opportunity to take on SET, their teaching is informed when they return to mainstream teaching. Principals want to be involved and linked in with the progress of most vulnerable learners:

Special education takes up the majority of my time, despite this being a mainstream school. The majority of my meetings with teachers, parents, SETs and outside agencies revolve around meeting the needs of a small minority of pupils in my school, some of whom have very significant needs. Given the level of need some of these pupils present with there is a need for regular and continuing collaboration and input from all involved. Over the past few years, the school has also come under considerable pressure from representative organisations who, under the banner of 'rights' have attempted to influence teacher allocation, class splits, SET allocation and SNA allocation. Attempts by myself or the BOM to seek advice on how to manage such conflicts have met with little success...

### ***Administrative time***

About one in eight (13%) respondents called for increased admin time for teachers working in special education. The need for dedicated time within a teacher's timetable for administration and liaising with other professionals was highlighted as this is a vital part of the role. Building a rapport with parents was crucial for teachers to ensure that there was a level of trust so that decisions were made in the best interest of the child. Forging these relationships and communicating with parents is time consuming as teachers cannot rush such conversations but rather must approach these discussions sensitively.

### ***Funding and therapy supports***

One in five respondents expressed frustration at the inadequate support available to address the needs of pupils with special educational needs. The level of paperwork required in applying for resources (from NEPS and NCSE) was cited as a major obstacle to accessing timely support and consequently exacerbating the stress felt by principals and their teaching staff.

Principals and teachers are not qualified to provide supports, such as therapeutic supports, that are required for certain children with particular needs. Respondents called for more external professionals aligned with schools to provide support as needed. Principals called for the provision of additional resources that are responsive to the changing needs of schools. Some respondents stated that the proposed frontloading model was inadequate and would not work in developing schools.

### ***Other comments***

Other areas mentioned by smaller numbers of respondents included the following:

- ⌘ Revision of the criteria for granting SEN support for schools (ending the gender bias).
- ⌘ Dedicated administrative position in every school with two or more special classes.
- ⌘ Limiting targets set in pupils' support plans, e.g. setting three targets.
- ⌘ Collaboration with staff and SET to ensure balance of tasks/distribution.
- ⌘ While rotating staff, always have continuity with one member of the team who has been in the position for three years.
- ⌘ Frequent SEN team meetings.
- ⌘ Standardisation of planning templates and sharing of notes/pupil plans between teachers from one school year to the next.
- ⌘ Provision of additional teachers.

One respondent commented that "this is an area where the associated workload is not appreciated." Principals and teachers are committed to supporting children with special educational needs, but the workload associated with the organisation and management of special educational needs often remains invisible.

## **2.5 Communication**

Principal teachers receive communications from an increasingly wide range of state agencies, creating additional demands on their time. Principal teachers were asked to what extent they agreed with the suggestion that the timing of school initiatives, e.g. revised curriculum implementation, and key annual/multi-annual tasks, e.g. NCSE related tasks, should be coordinated at national level by the Department of Education in consultation with the INTO. A total of 98% of respondents agreed. There was less agreement about the suggestion that all notifications regarding school business should be through the OLCS, with just over two thirds agreeing (69%) and 15% not agreeing at all. The remaining 16% were of the view that it was hard to say.

## Communication with parents

There are increased expectations around communications between parents and teachers today. In particular, the need for communication was highlighted during school closures arising from Covid-19. In an open question, principal teachers were asked how expectations for increased communications between teachers and parents could be met without increasing principals' and teachers' workload. Almost 900 respondents offered comments.

Many respondents were of the view that such expectations could not be met without increasing workload. Some respondents stated that expectations should be lessened as the primary focus of schools was teaching and learning. However, in general, respondents recognised the importance of communication with parents overall, evident in the comments below:

I really believe that communicating with parents is very much part of our job. It is especially so now as parents rarely even see teachers anymore. Communication methods should be clearly outlined for parents - email, *Dojo*, phone, face-to-face appointments, through the secretary, etc. As written messages can often be incorrectly interpreted, I recommend a phone call as a direct route to resolving an issue or clarifying a situation.

Being visible on school grounds (pre/post Covid) solves much anxiety among parents. Anxiety fuels many expectations.

Communication takes time. Teachers are time-poor already. No amount of tech/strategies can get around this. A person can be in only one place and do one thing well at a time. Time spent on other duties is time away from prep for teaching and learning and also time away from the ACTUAL TEACHING! We need less things that take us from core duties - if communication with parents is to increase - something else has to give. Workloads are unmanageable already.

Communication with parents is essential to our work and while can be time consuming, it is more often than not time well spent and beneficial to the child.

Respondents acknowledged two main dimensions of communication with parents. The first dimension was communication from the school to parents. According to respondents, this form of communication was supported through the use of technology and digital means of communication, such as apps, email, *Aladdin*, *Seesaw*, social media, regular newsletters and the school website. The second dimension of communications related to communications between teachers and parents regarding individual children, requiring time for such communications to take place.

## Strategies to address communication

Respondents offered the following solutions in the open-ended questions.

### *Use of digital technologies and online communication platforms*

Almost one in five (19%) respondents saw increased use of digital technologies and online communication platforms, e.g. *Aladdin*, *Seesaw*, *Google Classroom*, etc. as a means of managing the workload involved in parent-school communication. Many respondents commented that funding to schools should be increased to cover the costs of purchasing these services or alternatively that the Department of Education should design and put in place their own communications platform which would be provided to schools free of charge, ensuring consistency between different schools. Having relevant and up-to-date information available to parents on the school website and providing updates as needed by text messaging or other communication platforms were seen as helping to cut down on non-essential phone calls and parents dropping into the school:

We need a centralised communications system for use by all schools, for example *Aladdin Connect*, which should be paid for by the DE, not out of school funds. *Aladdin Connect* would make our lives a lot easier for communications and indeed administrative work including payments, P/T meetings scheduling, alas with our level of funding our school cannot afford it.

Good systems, such as *Aladdin* or *Databiz*, really do cut down on the time needed to communicate with parents. Parent expectations re communication times, etc. should be managed, regarding availability of staff.

We introduced email contact between parents and teachers during lockdown. It's working really well, and there haven't been any problems to date. We have guidelines in place as to when teachers should reply to emails, inform principal of issues, etc.

### ***Establish clear policy and procedures for communication at school level***

One in six (16%) respondents referred to the importance of implementing clear policy and procedures and establishing expectations regarding communication between school and parents. One of the drawbacks of the increased use of technology and digital platforms is that schools and teachers are contactable at any time of the day or night and many respondents reported that some parents expect an immediate response to communications sent to teachers/principals regardless of the time or day.

Setting out clear procedures for managing communications including expected response times was seen as an important measure in managing expectations. There were suggestions that schools' policies should clarify for parents when and how to contact schools so that expectations around communication are clear. However, there were also calls for national guidelines around communication with parents so that expectations could be clear for both parents and schools, and to ensure that practice was similar across the system. One principal recommended, "setting ground rules with parents" and "creating a communication policy which outlines clearly for parents how communication will occur and when." It was important to have systems or protocols in place as one principal said, "we do not see this as a major issue. Systems in place already work well."

Email has changed the game. You are now completely accessible and contactable 24/7. Before a parent would have had to come to the school, having made an appointment. Now the minute something flashes through their mind they can send an email.

Protocols should be provided to parents in terms of communication with teachers/principals. We have done so, and it has helped, but some parents expect increased availability from schools.

Simplified and streamlined expectations around communication should be drawn up on a national level and communicated locally.

### ***Designated time for communications***

One in ten (10%) respondents expressed a view that designated time should be allowed for principals and/or teachers to engage in communications with parents. Various mechanisms were put forward to achieve this including release time from the classroom facilitated by substitute teachers, additional paid time outside of the school day, additional parent/teacher meetings during the year but not all face-to-face, qualified administrative staff, HSCL teachers in all schools, and meeting parents by appointment.

On the other hand, some respondents acknowledged the importance of incidental contact, such as morning or afternoon times when children were arriving or leaving school. It was acknowledged by many respondents that communication with parents takes place after school hours as this is when teachers are available, however, respondents also expressed the view that this practice was not sustainable given the increasing demands and expectations in this regard. Many respondents mentioned that there should be a cut off at 4pm or 4.30pm. A small percentage (5%) of respondents believe that teachers and teaching principals require release time from the classroom on a monthly or weekly basis to allow them to meet and communicate with parents including facilitating the annual parent-teacher meeting within the school day:

More paid or release time given to teachers in the day. Teaching a full class requires full focus on teaching and learning when children are present in school. They cannot be left unattended or without teaching for the teacher to communicate with their parents each day.

Increase the standard hours required for teachers to be in school to include time to provide this but allowance will also be necessary for the extra-curricular time, e.g. school matches, school walks, concerts, religious ceremonies, etc.

#### ***Enhanced communications role for Department of Education***

A small percentage (7%) of respondents believed that the Department of Education should take on a greater role in communicating with parents and relieve some of the burden from schools. Some respondents referred to unclear messages from national level/Department of Education having to be interpreted for or explained to parents by principal teachers creating additional pressure for principals. Respondents pointed to the central communications role taken on by the Department during the Covid-19 pandemic, whereby standard information and communication materials were provided by the Department to schools for distribution to parents. This could be further extended by the Department communicating directly with parents using the contact details available on POD.

Many respondents also related their dissatisfaction with the standard of communication between the Department and schools, particularly the timing and lateness of important announcements with schools and school leaders often being the last to hear. The poor timing of communication placed additional pressure on principals as parents were contacting the school for information and clarification on a lengthy circular which the school had either not yet received or had received only minutes previously:

Clear communications from the DE on what they want to be shared. Often it is left to the schools to share information or deduce what is to be shared. Or what has been received is not reflective of the parent body in most primary schools, for example the content of the documents received from the DE suggests a high level of education and grasp of English.

Clear direction from DE and having this information easily accessible rather than listed somewhere on a very poor DE website would help.

#### ***Greater administrative supports for schools***

A small percentage (6%) of respondents believed that greater administrative supports were necessary to address the greater demands of communicating with parents. Suggestions included enhanced secretarial support including a full-time secretary for all schools, HSCL for all schools and the restoration of posts of responsibility.

## 2.6 Concluding comments

To conclude the survey, principals were invited to state what duties or functions they were carrying out that they thought were unnecessary. A total of 867 respondents offered comments, relating to school buildings, paperwork and policy-making, school finances, and recruiting and sourcing substitute teachers. Many principals expressed their dissatisfaction at the duties and responsibilities that are undertaken by them in their roles as school leaders. School principals are often tasked with making decisions on issues that are beyond their area of expertise and that are not part of their core responsibilities.

One quarter of respondents identified construction-related work as a duty beyond the remit of their role that significantly impacted on their workload. Although principals do not have the necessary experience or qualifications in this area, decisions regarding school buildings rest with them causing a great deal of stress. Navigating the complexities of school building projects was considered an unnecessary burden on principals and many respondents believed that school boards of management should include fulltime experts in the area affording school leaders more time to lead teaching and learning. Tasks associated with building maintenance were considered time consuming and many respondents argued that such duties should be centralised and overseen by the Department of Education.

About one in eight (13%) respondents expressed the view that the time and effort associated with policy development caused undue pressure on school leaders. There was a view among principals that policy documents should be devised centrally by the Department of Education to ensure consistency but that individual schools could adapt such policies, as appropriate, to suit their particular contexts. It was suggested that such policy reviews should involve collaboration from all staff members, though designated time would be required for this purpose.

Managing school finances was also identified as a factor that increased the workload of principals. For those schools that did not have full-time secretarial support, the time and effort associated with financial issues were a significant cause of additional work. There was a belief among many respondents that school finances could be centrally managed by the Department of Education.

About one in eight (12%) respondents reported difficulty finding teachers to engage in substitute work within their schools to cover teacher absences. The system for sourcing substitute teachers was considered impractical in many areas and some principals felt that this process should be centralised as they spend a considerable amount of time contacting teachers whose name appears on a register but when approached were not in a position to work as a substitute (sometimes due to the fact that they had secured a teaching role elsewhere). There was an acknowledgement that the availability of substitutes has been impacted severely by the Covid-19 pandemic and as a result principals were struggling to find sufficient substitute cover to meet demands.

Other areas mentioned by smaller numbers of respondents include the following:

- ⌘ Performing secretarial tasks such as answering phone calls, phoning parents, responding to emails and ordering supplies when the school secretary was unavailable.
- ⌘ Registering with the Charities Regulator - respondents stated that schools were an essential service, not a charity.
- ⌘ Registering with the SEAI - preparing statistics on energy usage should not be part of the job of principal.
- ⌘ Principals were often expected to complete a huge amount of paperwork and some respondents highlighted the amount of repetition associated with certain forms. There was a view that such information could be gathered and stored centrally by the Department to avoid using valuable time recording the same details on different forms.
- ⌘ Many respondents reported managing non-teaching staff and bus escorts as a contributing factor to increased workload. Some principals reiterated their view that the Department of Education should include all staff in their calculations/assessments of schools for salary purposes.

- ⌘ Lengthy tendering and quotation processes.
- ⌘ Coordinating fundraisers internally and externally.

School principals carry out many duties and functions necessary for the smooth operation of schools. However, it is clear that many of the duties and responsibilities essential for the operation of schools are not core functions of school leaders, whose primary responsibility is children's education. In the absence of a school infrastructure to enable schools to function as centres of education, teaching and learning, duties and responsibilities fall on principal teachers, who are committed to their role, often at the expense of their own wellbeing. Solutions to their workload will involve professionalised administrative support, increased dedicated leadership time for teaching principals, restoration of posts of responsibility, centralised support from the Department of Education regarding buildings and maintenance, centrally-produced templates for policies, proper funding of schools, and dedicated time for collaborative activities. These issues are further explored in Section 4.

### **Section 3: INTO survey on workload – teachers**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The CEC decided to issue the survey on workload to a sample of its membership. In total 4,000 members were selected randomly from the INTO membership database, representing 10% of its overall membership at the time. Some of the members selected were principal teachers, who had also received the survey for principals to their school. The survey was issued electronically to selected members' email addresses. Given the high level of interest in the topic of teacher workload, some teachers who had received the survey, circulated the link to colleagues. As a result, 4,262 responses were received. While the survey can no longer be considered a random sample, the findings are very useful for exploring teachers' perspectives regarding solutions to their workload.

The findings are discussed under the following five headings:

1. Curriculum
2. Planning and collaboration
3. Special education
4. Communications, funding and support
5. Documentation and paperwork

#### **Profile of respondents**

Teacher respondents had a range of teaching experience. A third (33%) had more than 20 years' experience, over half of the respondents (56%) had between six and 20 years' experience, and 11% had five years teaching experience or less. Respondents included class teachers (52%), SEN teachers (32%) and teaching principals (5%). A small number were home school community liaison (HSCL) teachers, early start teachers, special class teachers, supply panel teachers, administrative principals, English as an additional language (EAL) teachers, visiting teachers, seconded teachers or substitute teachers. Respondents taught in cities (17%), suburban schools (20%), towns (30%) or in rural schools (32%). The majority taught in full stream schools (87%). Almost 5% of respondents taught in special schools and 22% taught in DEIS schools (schools in areas of socio-economic disadvantage) – DEIS Urban Band 1 (12%); DEIS Urban Band 2 (5%); DEIS rural (5%). Over 7% of respondents taught through the medium of Irish, 1.5% in a Gaeltacht school and 5.6% in a gaelscoil.

For an additional breakdown of the profile of teacher respondents, see *Appendix B*.

### 3.2 Curriculum

Since the introduction of the *Primary School Curriculum (1999)*, teachers have complained of curriculum overload. While there was a general appreciation of the philosophy and approaches advocated in the curriculum, there was a definite perception that it contained too much content, (INTO, 2015; 2016). In this survey, teachers were asked to what extent they agreed that there is too much content in the *Primary School Curriculum (1999)*. A large majority of respondents (97%) agreed that there was too much content in the current curriculum, however, only 47% of respondents agreed to a great extent.

Teachers were also asked to what extent they agreed with three curriculum-related suggestions regarding workload. Only 30% agreed that the new guidance on preparation for teaching and learning would reduce the amount of paperwork associated with planning. Almost one fifth (19%) disagreed. Just over half the respondents (51%) were of the view that it was hard to say. These responses may reflect the fact that the guidance had only been launched in April 2021 and many teachers may not have been fully aware of them.

Teachers were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed that the new *Primary Language Curriculum* would help to reduce workload associated with planning and teaching language. A small majority of respondents disagreed (63%) and only 15% of respondents agreed. Over a fifth (22%) were of the view that it was hard to say. At the time of the survey, the professional development sustained support to support the *Primary Language Curriculum* was in the early stages of implementation, having been interrupted due to Covid-19.

Regarding teacher planning for differentiation, over two thirds of respondents (69%) agreed that teachers should not have to record their plans for differentiation. Almost one fifth (19%) disagreed while 12% were of the view that it was hard to say. See Table 6.

**Table 6: Addressing curriculum overload – extent of agreement**

Proposal	To a great extent (%)	To some extent (%)	Hard to say (%)	Not at all (%)
The new guidance on preparation for teaching and learning will reduce the amount of paperwork associated with planning	10	20	51	19
The new <i>Primary Language Curriculum</i> will help to reduce workload associated with planning and teaching language	1	14	22	63
Teachers should not have to record their plans for differentiation	24	45	12	19

#### **Initiatives**

Many schools decide to participate in educational initiatives, such as the Green Flag, Active Flag, Gaelbhrtach, Coirm, Cumann na mBunscol and others, that create work for teachers. In an open question, teachers were asked why they thought schools engaged with initiatives, when such initiatives were optional. A total of 3,596 respondents offered comments.

Just over half of the respondents (56%) who offered comments referred to the benefit for children. They expressed the view that participating in initiatives had many positive effects for pupils and for schools as a whole by providing a more holistic education, allowing opportunities for children to develop many additional skills and capacities outside of the narrow focus of the curriculum. Other reasons cited were opportunities to develop real world practical skills, catering for a diversity of interests and abilities, contributing to school ethos, enhancing morale, cooperation and school spirit. Participating in initiatives was also enjoyable for children:

To provide students with as rounded an education as possible. These initiatives are very good and give children the chance to explore the world around them, but they are very time consuming in an already overloaded curriculum.

Schools basically want the best opportunities for the children in their school. They are also great links with the community. There is also a sense of achievement and accomplishment and reward for pupils and teachers.

It gives children an opportunity to work in teams, to get involved in meaningful activities outside of class curriculum, it's something to work towards and it gives children a chance to take responsibility...It can also bring out talents in children that weren't obvious previously and children who aren't academic sometimes shine.

Over a third of respondents (37%) mentioned that schools undertook initiatives to generate positive publicity for the school which is especially important where schools were competing with other schools in the area to attract families. The role of social media was mentioned by many respondents. Initiatives such as Green Schools, Active Schools and other initiatives were seen as a good source of content for schools' social media accounts. Respondents also mentioned that it was important to be seen as a progressive school that engages with various initiatives and provides similar opportunities to competing schools:

Pressure to keep up with other schools and provide best opportunities to maintain or increase enrolments ... parents look for all the extras.

Trying to keep up with what every other school are doing and make the school attractive to parents. It makes the school look good.

Schools that don't involve themselves in such initiatives tend to be categorised by parents as "bad schools" or as having "lazy teachers".

Some respondents (16%) referred to pressure being placed on schools by parental demands as well as wider societal expectations that schools can solve all social problems by taking on various programmes and initiatives provided by special interest groups. Other stakeholders such as the Inspectorate were also seen as creating an expectation that schools should be engaging with these initiatives. According to teachers, participation in these programmes has become an expectation rather than an optional extra. If a school does not have a display of various flags outside, there is a perception that there is something wrong with the school:

Inspectorate asked me what initiatives we were engaged with during a WSE. They were looking for evidence that we did extracurricular stuff. There was a strong indication that to say that we did none would mean that we would be looked on unfavourably.

A fear of not doing enough or pressure from parents when they see other schools doing all these nice initiatives.

Schools feel pressurised into participating in such schemes. Schools want to participate for the benefit of the children. However, the workload can be enormous. There is a perception amongst parents that if a school is participating in an outside scheme that it is "a good school".

Pressure from school management was also mentioned by about 5% of respondents. Some teachers felt being "pressured" into undertaking initiatives by principals and other postholders in their schools. Others stated that principals and other postholders agreed to undertake an initiative without consulting with the wider staff before then delegating much of the work involved to other colleagues.

A small number of respondents (3%) mentioned that some teachers may agree to lead and/or facilitate these initiatives in the interests of their own career progression. Non-permanent teachers may seek to make a good impression in the hope of securing permanent employment in the school. Similarly, other teachers with ambitions to take on leadership positions or other career advancement may take on such initiatives to 'build' their CVs:

Pressure from school principal ... to promote the school in a positive light.

Someone in management thinks it's a good idea and other less senior teachers are reluctant to refuse to engage with activity for fear of being seen as not being supportive.

I think it is frequently teachers on short-term contracts who feel obliged to put this sort of thing on their CV who undertake this work.

While participation in initiatives is optional for schools, it is clear that there are many pressures leading to schools and/or individual teachers participating in such initiatives. While respondents acknowledged that there were benefits to participating there was also extra work involved.

### 3.3 Planning and collaborative time

Current understandings of teacher professionalism, special education and curriculum require teachers to collaborate and work as members of a team (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018).

One of the greatest challenges in our current system is finding time for collaborative work. Teachers were asked in open-ended questions how much cumulative time they thought staff require on a monthly basis for collaborative work including staff meetings, planning and professional development. They were also invited to make suggestions as to how this collaborative time could be provided.

In terms of the amount of time each month that teachers suggested was required, responses ranged from three quarters of an hour to over 100 hours. The average response was seven hours. It is difficult to interpret the findings as it is clear from the responses themselves as well as from the significant variation in responses that this question was interpreted in a variety of ways. Some respondents included individual planning and preparation time rather than collaborative work as indicated by the question. Nevertheless, respondents acknowledged the need for some time to engage in collaborative work planning, staff meetings and professional development. Some respondents were of the view that current collaborative time, such as staff meetings and Croke Park hours could be used more efficiently. Many respondents stated that too much time was being spent on non-teaching work and that it was not always productive. Other respondents referred to different amounts of time being required at different times of the year and commented that it also depended on school context and teaching position.

Regarding how collaborative time could be provided, most respondents gave a combination of some or all of the following options in their answers.

#### ***Scheduled release time within existing school day***

Just under half (46%) of respondents indicated that time for collaboration should be provided during the existing school day whereby teachers would be released from their teaching duties for a scheduled period on either a weekly or monthly basis. Many respondents referred to similar measures in other jurisdictions including Scotland, England and Australia:

- ⌘ A number of different mechanisms were put forward including building the extra teachers required into a school's SEN allocation, expanding the teacher supply panels to cover this requirement, setting up a special panel of teachers dedicated solely to this need similar to

the release days for teaching principals. There were also suggestions that specialist teachers should be employed to teach certain subjects, e.g. PE, art, music, thereby releasing the class teacher for an hour each week.

- ⌘ If this time is to be used for teacher collaboration, it would require the release of multiple teachers within the school simultaneously.
- ⌘ Some respondents referred to current informal arrangements in their schools whereby teachers were released from their classrooms to engage in collaboration and administrative tasks; infant teachers took more senior classes for an afternoon each week, SEN teachers took classes while engaged in in-class support, and administrative principals and deputy principals took classes on a planned basis.

#### ***Croke Park hours or similar***

About one sixth (15%) of respondents identified Croke Park hours (CPH) or some similar arrangement as the means of providing time for collaboration. Some respondents stated that current arrangements regarding CPH are sufficient to meet the need for collaboration within their school while many respondents stated that if greater flexibility was allowed in how CPH can be used then this could provide the time required.

#### ***Reduced school hours for pupils***

Just under one sixth (14%) of respondents referred to reducing pupils' contact hours while maintaining teachers' current working hours and using this time where pupils are not in attendance to facilitate collaborative work at a whole-school level. A number of mechanisms were suggested to achieve this.

- ⌘ Children could go home an hour earlier one day each week/month while teachers remain in school.
- ⌘ Children could have a half day once a month, e.g. the last Friday of each month, while teachers remain in school.
- ⌘ One full day school closure allowed once each term.
- ⌘ Many respondents are seeking greater flexibility than is currently allowed for taking half-days including the practice of taking a half-day to facilitate a 'half-in half-out' staff meeting which was common prior to the introduction of CPH and is still the practice in some schools.

#### ***Collaboration outside of teaching day***

- ⌘ A small percentage (5%) of respondents stated that the time to facilitate collaboration and other activities must be found outside of the school day and cannot and should not be taken from class contact time.
- ⌘ Extend teachers' working hours and increase salary.
- ⌘ A small percentage (4%) of respondents stated that as teachers are already doing this work and much more outside of the formal school day that this should be recognised by officially extending teachers' working hours accompanied by a commensurate increase in salary.

Teachers were also asked to indicate to what extent they agreed that a 35 hour week, with additional pay, should be introduced for teachers and principals, to include all teachers' duties and responsibilities such as staff meetings, professional development, meeting with parents, individual and collaborative planning. There was no overall consensus among respondents. Just over a quarter (26%) agreed to a great extent, 25% agreed to some extent, 17% were of the view it was hard to say, while almost a third (33%) disagreed.

### 3.4 Special education

According to the workshops held at the early stage of the workload project, responding to and addressing special educational needs was the greatest source of workload for both principals and class teachers. One teacher stated that they were “drowning in special needs without any help” and “feel overwhelmed all of the time”. Teachers were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed with a number of possible solutions.

Almost all respondents (97%) agreed that all schools should have a post of responsibility for coordination of special educational needs with allocated timetabled time for this purpose. A large majority of respondents (95%) agreed that language support teachers for children with English as an additional language (EAL) and additional support when large numbers of refugees/migrant children are enrolled in school should be available in all schools, in addition to teachers allocated under the *General Allocation Model* for special educational needs.

A large majority (87%) also agreed that schools’ learning support/special education teams should include a teacher with additional knowledge/professional development and training to support the socio-emotional needs of pupils in the school, as a first step before children are referred to community services. A small minority (4%) disagreed while 9% were of the view that it was hard to say. Respondents (89%) also supported the suggestion that organised support clusters for special education teachers (SET) would assist in collaboration among SEN teachers and that timetabled time should be set aside for such collaboration both within and between schools. Only 3% disagreed and 8% were of the view that it was hard to say. Table 7 indicates respondents’ level of agreement with suggested solutions.

**Table 7: Addressing workload related to special education – extent of agreement with suggested solutions**

Proposal	To a great extent (%)	To some extent (%)	Hard to say (%)	Not at all (%)
Language support teachers for children with EAL and additional teaching support when large numbers of refugees/migrant children are enrolled in school should be available in all schools in addition to teachers allocated under the <i>General Allocation Model</i> for special needs	85	10	3	2
All schools should have a post of responsibility for coordination of special educational needs with allocated timetabled time for this purpose	90	7	2	>1
Schools’ learning support/special education teams should include a teacher with additional knowledge/professional development and training to support the socio-emotional needs of pupils in the school, as a first step before children are referred to community services	66	21	9	4
Organised support clusters for SETs would assist in collaboration among SEN teachers and timetabled time should be set aside for such collaboration both within and between schools	66	23	8	3

Teachers were asked to what extent they agreed with a number of suggestions regarding the provision of sufficient supports for special educational needs to assist in reducing the workload of principals and teachers.

Almost all respondents agreed to a great extent (86%) that all schools should have substitutable release time to engage with external specialist supports such as NEPS, NCSE, visiting teachers. A large majority (86%) also agreed that the paperwork required for NCSE applications for support, appeals and review processes should be reduced and simplified. In addition, 89% agreed that teachers with responsibility for SEN in a school should have release time to complete paperwork, with 71% agreeing to a great extent, 5% disagreeing and 6% of the view that it was hard to say. Nine out of ten (90%) respondents agreed, 64% of whom agreed to a great extent, that professional development and training for principals and teachers, in a timely manner, in behaviour management would reduce workload associated with managing challenging behaviours, though 7% were of the view that it was hard to say. Almost all respondents (97%) agreed, of which 84% agreed to a great extent, that enhanced supports for children with behavioural and learning difficulties would reduce workload for principals and teachers and 97% of respondents also agreed that socio-emotional counsellors should be available to all schools to support the increased number of children presenting with anxiety. See Table 8.

**Table 8: Supporting pupils with SEN – extent of agreement with suggestions**

Proposal	To a great extent (%)	To some extent (%)	Hard to say (%)	Not at all (%)
All schools should have substitutional release time to engage with external specialist supports (i.e., NEPS, NCSE, Visiting Teachers)	86	12	1	1
Professional development and training for principals and teachers in a timely manner in behaviour management would reduce workload associated with managing challenging behaviours	64	27	7	2
Enhanced supports for children with behavioural and learning difficulties would reduce workload for principals and teachers	84	13	2	1
Socio-emotional counsellors should be available to all schools to support the increased number of children presenting with anxiety	84	13	2	1
Teachers with responsibility for SEN in a school should have release time to complete paperwork	71	18	6	5
The paperwork required for NCSE applications for support, appeals and review processes should be reduced and simplified	85	11	3	<1

### 3.5 Communication, funding and support

#### *Communicating with parents*

According to teachers, increasing demands from parents are contributing to their workload. Teachers were asked to what extent they agreed with some suggested solutions.

Just under two thirds of respondents (65%) agreed, though only 26% agreed to a great extent that explaining to parents at the beginning of the school year what to expect in relation to their children's learning would reduce demands during the school year for additional information. Almost one quarter (24%) were of the view that it was hard to say, and 11% disagreed. While over half of the respondents (55%) agreed that it is reasonable to expect teachers to meet with parents outside of school hours, only 6% of respondents agreed to a great extent. Just over one in ten (11%) respondents were of the view that it was hard to say, and a third (34%) did not agree at all.

A large majority (94%) agreed that teachers should be given release time with substitute cover to meet with parents of children with SEN to facilitate review and support IEP planning. The majority of respondents (79%) agreed, though only 52% agreed to a great extent, that parents should be made aware of the complaints' procedure at the beginning of every school year, 6% disagreed and 14% were of the view that it was hard to say. Regarding the option for teachers to use technology to communicate with parents, a large majority (91%) agreed teachers should have this option - 58% agreed to a great extent. Only 2% disagreed while 7% were of the view that it was hard to say. See Table 9.

**Table 9: Communicating with parents – extent of agreement with suggestions**

Proposal	To a great extent (%)	To some extent (%)	Hard to say (%)	Not at all (%)
Explaining to parents at the beginning of the school year what to expect in relation to their children's learning would reduce demands during the school year for additional information	27	39	24	10
It is reasonable to expect teachers to meet with parents outside of school hours	6	49	11	34
Teachers should be given release time with sub cover to meet with parents of children with SEN to facilitate review/support IEP planning	74	20	3	3
Parents should be made aware of the complaints procedure at the beginning of every school year	52	28	14	6
Teachers should have the option to use technology to communicate with parents	58	33	7	2

### **Funding**

Teachers and principals have complained over the years about the lack of funding in primary education which puts increased pressure on them in running the school or teaching the curriculum. Teachers were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed with three statements regarding funding of schools. Two thirds of respondents (67%) disagreed that teachers should be expected to engage in fundraising for the school. Almost one in five (19%) agreed to some extent, but only 3% agreed to a great extent. Two thirds of respondents (66%) agreed that collecting money from children for school activities should not be the responsibility of the class teacher, though 18% disagreed with 16% of the view that it was hard to say. Almost all respondents (98%) agreed that the Department of Education should provide all schools with *Aladdin* or other Department-sanctioned platform or the funds to purchase a platform. Many of the comments in the qualitative section of the surveys highlighted the benefits of using a platform such as *Aladdin* and were of view that schools should not have to purchase platforms from their own funds. See Table 10.

**Table 10: Funding – extent of agreement**

Proposal	To a great extent (%)	To some extent (%)	Hard to say (%)	Not at all (%)
Teachers should be expected to engage in fundraising for the school	3	19	11	67
Collecting money from children for school activities should not be the responsibility of the class teacher	38	28	16	18
The DE should provide all schools with <i>Aladdin</i> or other Department-sanctioned platform or the funds to purchase it	92	6	2	<1

### Teacher support

Teachers and principals have a lot of responsibility to ensure that pupils' needs are met in schools. Teachers were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed with a number of suggestions to support them in their roles as teachers.

Since the introduction of *Droichead*, the national induction support for newly qualified teachers (NQTs), professional support teams have been established in schools where NQTs have been employed. These teams provide support and mentoring for NQTs in their school and schools receive a certain amount of release time to engage in induction support. Teachers were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed that too much was expected from the professional support teams in supporting NQTs. Fewer than two thirds of respondents (60%) agreed – only 27% to a great extent. One in ten disagreed while 30% were of the view that it was hard to say.

Teaching infant classes is particularly challenging given large class sizes and the nature of play-based pedagogy. Some infant classes may have special needs assistants (SNAs), but this is not the case in all classrooms. Teachers were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed that every infant class should have a classroom/inclusion assistant. A large majority (95%) of respondents agreed - 85% to a great extent.

The DEIS programme (2005) proposed the introduction of a sabbatical scheme for teachers and principals in DEIS schools to assist with recruitment and retention. The proposal was never developed because of the recession that had a major impact on Ireland since 2008. Teachers were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed that all teachers should be entitled to a paid sabbatical term after ten years in the teaching profession. There was a mixed response. Fewer than three quarters of respondents (72%) agreed, 12% disagreed and 16% were of the view that it was hard to say.

The Professional Development Support Service for Teachers (PDST) provide professional development opportunities for teachers in schools through the in-school sustained support model. Teachers were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed that the PDST in-school sustained support requires time and substitute cover to release teachers to participate. The vast majority of respondents (96%) agreed, though 3% were of the view that it was hard to say. See Table 11.

**Table 11: Teacher support – extent of agreement**

Proposal	To a great extent (%)	To some extent (%)	Hard to say (%)	Not at all (%)
Too much is expected from the professional support teams in terms of supporting NQTs	27	32	31	10
Every infant class should have a classroom/inclusion assistant	86	10	3	1
All teachers should be entitled to a paid sabbatical term after 10 years in the teaching profession	57	15	16	12
PDST in-school sustained support requires time and substitute cover to release teachers to participate	84	13	3	<1

### 3.6 Documentation and paperwork

The survey invited teachers through open-ended questions to provide additional information that could be useful in addressing the issue of teacher workload. Specifically, teachers were asked what paperwork they were currently doing that they thought was unnecessary.

### Planning for teaching and learning

Over half of the respondents (52%) to this question identified planning for teaching and learning as a source of unnecessary paperwork.

- ⌘ The level of detail expected in teachers' short-term planning was viewed as excessive and unnecessary, particularly for more experienced teachers who have a high level of knowledge and experience of both the curriculum and various teaching methodologies.
- ⌘ Respondents expressed frustration that in addition to outlining what they will teach, they must also include significant detail about how they will teach, what resources and methodologies will be used, and how the learning will be assessed.
- ⌘ Many respondents expressed the view that the various forms of planning (long-term, short term and *cuntas míosúil* [monthly report]) are highly repetitious with largely the same information being included in all three forms of planning and then being copied and pasted from one document to another for the sake of fulfilling unhelpful planning requirements.
- ⌘ Similarly, many respondents questioned the need to include details regarding differentiation for individual pupils in short-term planning as such specifics were already contained in relevant student support files.
- ⌘ The *cuntas míosúil* attracted a high level of negative commentary. Many respondents said that they saw little to no value in completing this as a separate document in addition to a fortnightly plan. It is clear from the responses that in some schools a combined fortnightly plan and *cuntas míosúil* were accepted by the principal and/or the inspector, but this was not the case in all schools.
- ⌘ According to some respondents, there is a high degree of performativity associated with teachers' practices related to planning for teaching and learning. Teachers do not see an intrinsic value or benefit to much of their planning practices but continue to plan in this way to meet external requirements and criteria imposed by the Inspectorate and/or school management.
- ⌘ A few respondents stated that after having expended great time and energy producing a formal plan that meets the expected requirements, they then go on to produce a second usable plan for their own use while the formal plan sits unused in a folder. Throughout the responses there was a high level of dissatisfaction with the *Primary Language Curriculum* (PLC). It is considered that the PLC has added significant complexity to the planning process without any discernible positive impact on teaching and learning.
- ⌘ A very small number of respondents referred to the recently published *Guidance on Preparation for Teaching and Learning*. Some of these responses mentioned that the guidance in this document had helped to refine their approach to planning while some also referred to the advice in this document being ignored or overruled by school management.

The following are representative of teachers' comments on this issue:

The new language curriculum demands too much planning and written notes which is overwhelming.

Monthly plans should absolutely be enough along with a general overview for the year. The curriculum states what must be done and having to dissect it into fortnightly chunks is unnecessarily tedious.

Obviously, you have to do a certain amount of paperwork to keep track of what you plan to do and what you have covered ... but it's the detail that is now required when doing schemes/fortnightly/yearly for class teachers and SETs is just ridiculous.

Several suggestions were put forward by respondents to address some of these issues.

- Short-term planning should be completed on a monthly rather than a fortnightly basis with the monthly plan serving also as the cuntas míosúil.
- School plans for the respective curricular areas should be used as long-term plans rather than having to create a unique plan each year for each class.
- Long-term plans should be no more than a broad list of topics to be covered. There should be no requirement to include additional details such as curriculum objectives, which are in the curriculum books already, or details of differentiation or assessments.
- Currently NQTs are required to plan on a weekly basis before changing to a fortnightly plan. Perhaps a similar distinction could be made for more experienced teachers, e.g. after five years of teaching, short-term planning to be done monthly.
- Remove need for constant repetition and duplication of plans, e.g. if differentiation approaches are included in student support files, they should not need to be included again in long-term and short-term planning.

### **Special educational needs (SEN)**

Just under one in six (15%) respondents to this question identified paperwork related to special educational needs as unnecessary.

- ⌘ While the importance of record keeping and documenting progress of SEN pupils was acknowledged by many respondents, the sheer volume of records and paperwork associated with SEN teaching was viewed by many respondents as taking away from their capacity to meet the needs of their pupils.
- ⌘ Similar to the concerns expressed about planning for teaching and learning, respondents reported that there was a huge amount of repetition and overlap between various documents – IEP, PPP, IPLP and student support files.
- ⌘ Respondents were not clear on why all these documents were needed but continued to complete same as this was required at school level. Many respondents also reported that much time was spent reviewing and revising these documents at the end of an instructional period. While in theory, reviews may seem beneficial, when there were large numbers of pupils being supported by one teacher, the associated workload was unsustainable.
- ⌘ Applications to NCSE and other agencies for SNA support or assistive technology were frequently cited as very onerous and a huge source of workload for teachers involved.
- ⌘ Frustration was again expressed about having to submit the same information multiple times or that information previously submitted was disregarded and needed to be resubmitted.
- ⌘ There was a perception among respondents that such processes were intentionally designed to be difficult to discourage applications for supports:

The copious amount of paperwork in SEN is taking a lot of energy and time. I can see the value in having a record of work completed and work to be completed... but I find that I spend so much time creating short term plans, school support plans and personal pupil plans and this time could be much better spent on researching activities, strategies and creating resources that would have an immediate benefit for the pupils ... I spend most of my evenings typing notes that do not directly benefit the child.

Questionnaires and application forms for pupils applying for SEN services, applications for assistive technology, SNA review docs, school transfer profiles ... Understandably all of these documents listed are necessary, but the volume of information needed in all make them time consuming and cumbersome. All of these documents have to be filled in after school time.

There is a huge amount of paperwork required for NCSE review and pointless really as most appeals are turned down.

### **Other areas**

Other areas which were mentioned by smaller numbers of respondents included:

- ⌘ Assessment – respondents questioned the expectation of inspectors and in some cases school management to create and maintain detailed assessment folders with samples of children’s work when the children’s work was already recorded and accessible to the teacher in their copybooks and other work samples in the classroom. The practice of keeping a specific folder was not seen as beneficial.
- ⌘ Drafting and review of school policies – a number of respondents expressed a view that all school policies should be provided as a generic template to schools from the Department of Education which schools could adapt as required for their own circumstances rather than each school having to ‘reinvent the wheel.’
- ⌘ School self evaluation (SSE) – While the value of SSE as a process was acknowledged, the formal paperwork and administrative requirements of the process were described as excessive by some respondents.

### **Strategies to address paperwork and documentation**

In an open-ended question, teachers were invited to give information regarding any successful strategies they have used or any ideas they may have to reduce workload associated with paperwork and documentation. A total of 1,931 teachers offered suggestions. Themes that emerged in the responses are similar to those identified in other parts of the questionnaire.

#### ***Collaboration with colleagues***

The most common strategy to reduce workload put forward by respondents (37%) was collaboration with colleagues. This included working with colleagues to complete long and short-term planning collaboratively, engaging in team teaching, sharing and pooling teaching resources, and teachers with a special interest or skillset in a particular area, e.g. art, music, teaching this area to another teacher’s class and vice versa. It was acknowledged that these approaches worked well in larger schools where there were multiple streams of each class, but such opportunities were more limited, if at all possible, in smaller schools.

Many respondents who mentioned sharing and collaboration with colleagues referenced the role of various digital tools and online platforms such as *Google Drive*, *Dropbox*, and *OneDrive*, in facilitating increased collaboration and sharing of teaching plans and resources between colleagues. Saving of plans and resources to accessible locations such as these was also identified as being very useful when changing class level or moving from SET to mainstream and vice versa as it meant that teachers were not starting with a ‘blank slate’ but had existing plans and resources available as a useful starting point and guide.

While the benefits of collaboration were widely acknowledged by respondents, the greatest challenge to collaboration was finding time, with most collaboration taking place outside of school hours. Respondents are seeking dedicated non-contact time where teachers have an opportunity to collaborate with colleagues and work together on joint planning. Several suggestions were put forward in this regard: use of supply panel teachers to facilitate release time; specialist teachers for certain subjects (music, PE) to allow release time for class teachers, schools to close for half days more regularly to allow for whole staff collaboration:

Collaboration with the teachers in your band is crucial, if teachers work together to plan and assess, it’s very helpful ... It also gives teachers a good starting point when they get a new class ... Collaboration and teamwork is not encouraged enough in staff rooms.

Working in a large school has allowed for a huge amount of collaboration from a planning perspective which has greatly reduced workload and allowed for more focus on planning for teaching and learning in the classroom. This should be the norm in all large schools where class teachers at the same level come together to spread the workload.

There should be allocated time to for class teachers and SETs to meet and collaborate and paperwork should be distributed more evenly with time allocated to compile it, particularly in SET.

### **Planning**

Similar to other responses in the survey, many respondents expressed a desire for greater clarity and consistency on expectations placed on teachers regarding planning for teaching and learning. There is a widespread view among respondents that current expectations placed on teachers for planning are needlessly onerous and create unnecessary workload which does not enhance teaching and learning.

It was suggested by some respondents that standardised curriculum plans should be provided for each class level by the Department of Education and/or teacher education support services. These plans should specify specific content and curriculum objectives to be covered at each class level thus providing a greater focus for teacher planning and ensuring greater consistency for pupil learning across all schools, e.g. all fourth classes in all schools would cover the same history topics. This would largely remove elements of choice that currently exist in many curriculum areas and would be similar to the current maths curriculum where there are specific content objectives for each class level rather than the 'menu curriculum' across two class levels in most subject areas. This greater consistency would facilitate more opportunities for collaboration between teachers in different schools and for sharing of resources.

I think we need to simplify the planning so that it doesn't overwhelm young mainstream teachers who seem burdened with massive planning and assessment folders. Perhaps collaboration is the key to reducing the workload. A tired teacher is simply no use in a classroom, and I see many young colleagues who spend inordinate amounts of their leisure time doing schoolwork. Teachers should be required to prepare simple fortnightly plans and no more.

We are trained professionals who waste countless hours preparing notes for no other reason than to have on file in case an inspector asks for them ... In most cases the requirement for this paperwork is placed on us by administrators who have little or no experience of working in a busy classroom.

My mantra is 'You either want me to teach or write about it,' if all I do is write about it I've no energy left to deliver the curriculum ... Notes do not make a good teacher!

### **Other areas**

Other areas that were mentioned by smaller numbers of respondents included the following:

#### **Cross-curricular integration**

- Greater use of cross-curricular integration and thematic planning for teaching and learning.
- Greater flexibility allowed in curriculum time allocations to facilitate more thematic approaches to teaching and learning.

**Increased funding and teaching resources**

- Increased funding for schools to purchase resources for teaching and learning so that teachers are not required to spend their own time and money purchasing and/or creating teaching resources.
- Department of Education together with PDST and other support agencies should develop and make available for free to schools a bank of high-quality curriculum linked resources so that individual teachers are not spending their own money on services such as *Twinkl*.

**Curriculum overload**

- Reduce number of discrete subject areas and reduce content within subjects.
- Remove religious education and sacramental preparation from schools.

The time of the PDST would be better served providing lesson content for each learning outcome so that each teacher is not starting from scratch when they plan.

The curriculum is overloaded and teachers are constantly under pressure trying to achieve what seems like the unachievable. I think it would be brilliant if we could have a designated PE teacher in the school. I think class teachers should be focusing on English, Irish, maths and SPHE. I think art and music should be taught weekly and I think SESE should be taught through project work.

The Inspectorate and PDST should be amalgamated into one service. I understand that there needs to be accountability and a system for overseeing what's going on in schools, but this system should be a collaboration of professionals on an equal footing. Teachers are becoming stressed about what notes this inspector wants or what methodologies another inspector expects.

### 3.7 Concluding comments

To conclude the survey, teachers were invited to add any additional comments they had regarding the issue of teacher workload. There were 1,962 contributions on similar themes raised in other aspects of the survey.

**Paperwork associated with planning**

Almost two fifth of respondents (39%) who offered further comments identified planning for teaching and learning and other forms of paperwork associated with assessment and accountability as being excessive and a significant source of workload for teachers. Common issues identified included the excessive and unnecessary level of detail required in teachers' planning and assessment taking up teachers' time and energy, leading to burnout and the loss of experienced teachers through early retirement. According to respondents, demands for paperwork demonstrated a lack of trust in teachers as professionals and took away from teachers' capacity to provide high quality learning experiences for their pupils. Many respondents stated that while they enjoy teaching, they do not enjoy the growing burden of administration associated with teaching.

Respondents expressed frustration about the inconsistencies regarding expectations for planning and paperwork between individual schools and between individual members of the Inspectorate. Many respondents expressed the view that the various forms of planning (long-term, short term and *cuntas míosúil*) were highly repetitious with largely the same information being included in all three forms and then being 'copied and pasted' from one document to another in order to meet unhelpful external requirements and criteria imposed by the Inspectorate and/or school management. Teachers did not see an intrinsic value or benefit to much of their current planning and reporting practices, and many respondents did not seem to be aware of the recently

published document, *Guidance on Preparation for Teaching and Learning*. Respondents that were aware of the guidance commented that the guidance had helped to refine their approach to planning while some also referred to the advice in this document being ignored and/or overruled by school management. There were many references to the *Primary Language Curriculum*, as having added significant complexity to the planning process without any discernible positive impact on teaching and learning.

There was also a perception that Ireland is repeating the mistakes previously made by other education systems, e.g. United Kingdom, by placing an undue emphasis on planning, paperwork and external accountability at the expense of providing a child-centred, teacher-led education system. This focus on paperwork, according to respondents, will lead to poorer learning outcomes for children and significant difficulties with attracting people to the profession and retaining highly-skilled, effective teachers:

The time spent working on planning documentation often takes away effort and time that could be put into preparing more meaningful and engaging resources for enjoyable learning experiences for children.

After 39 years, the planning paperwork and constant record keeping are two of the main reasons why I will be retiring at the end of the current school year. I got into this wonderful profession to teach but the teaching itself and the time given to it seems to have been lost in the mountain of bureaucracy we now have to deal with.

The teaching taking place in the classrooms around the country is far more important than any scrap of paper. I feel it is far more important to prepare my lessons effectively than have my paperwork in correct order. Often the paperwork that I have to complete does little to prepare me for the day/week/term ahead.

We know how to teach, let us do it...Our workload means that we don't have the time, energy or enthusiasm to think of great lessons and topics because we're permanently worn-out doing paperwork that doesn't bring us any joy. Please, please, please bring back the joy of teaching again.

Teachers are overburdened, stressed and overwhelmed by unhelpful/useless paperwork. It is being produced to satisfy inspectors and principals and has little or no benefit for the most important group in education - the children.

### **Special educational needs (SEN)**

More than one in ten respondents (13%) offered comments regarding the workload associated with SEN provision in schools. Similar to the concerns expressed about planning for teaching and learning, respondents reported that there was much repetition and overlap between various documents – IEP, PPP, IPLP and student support files that teachers are expected to complete. Respondents highlighted the inadequate provision of resources (both human resources and physical and teaching resources) provided to schools to meet the needs of children with many of the view that SEN teachers were stretched too thinly and were carrying an excessive caseload. The lack of community services and the difficulties families faced accessing relevant qualified health professionals (SLT, OT, Ed Psych., etc.), placed a demand on teachers to 'fill in the gaps' and to carry out roles and duties for which they were not qualified yet many strive to do so as they want what is best for the children in their care. Application processes to NCSE and other agencies for SNA support or assistive technology, were frequently cited as very onerous and a huge source of workload for teachers involved:

For me, the major issue is that teachers are no longer able to simply be teachers and are now expected to supply the deficit in funding and staffing across multiple agencies and supports. And because we care about our students, we keep doing it, at no small cost to our own health and wellbeing.

I am not an OT or an SLT and should not be expected to teach OT or S&L when I am not trained to do so. I am more than happy to change my teaching to facilitate and to accommodate and to practise what is appropriate...but my experience is in pedagogy and academics, and I feel like my role is being diluted down because the children can't get access to the services they need.

The provision of proper supports from outside agencies is essential for teachers dealing with pupils with SEN. Government policy is integration, however teachers need to be provided with proper supports to facilitate this. Proper SNA and SET support. OT, Psychological and S&L supports should be available in school. So much of my time and energy as SET is devoted to chasing support/advice from outside agencies and completing the mountain of paperwork involved. Proper allocation of these services to schools without the burden of paperwork would help.

### **Increased parental and societal expectations**

A small number of respondents commented that schools and teachers were seen as providing a solution to all the ills of society. Many lobby groups and state organisations provided programmes and initiatives and flags of various colours which schools were expected to engage with or to implement. While respondents were of the view that there was nothing inherently wrong with these programmes and that many were very positive but too much was expected of schools to cover all these add-ons in addition to an already overloaded curriculum.

Respondents also commented that parents were seeking more regular and more detailed reporting on their children's progress. In addition, especially since the increased use of electronic communications during pandemic-related school closures, parents were more frequently communicating directly with teachers, often outside of school hours and seeking a prompt response.

### **Curriculum overload**

Respondents reported that aside from the various optional extras and initiatives which have become expected from schools recently, the Primary School Curriculum was already overloaded. Some respondents reported that schools and teachers were trying to do too much, constantly rushing from one area to the next and suggested that it might be better to refocus the curriculum whereby less content was covered but what was done in schools was done to a higher standard. Concern was also expressed about the current draft primary curriculum framework proposals for new subject areas such as modern foreign languages and coding, with respondents stating that if new content was added, other areas would have to be removed.

Similarly, concerns were expressed based on teachers' experience to date of the *Primary Language Curriculum*. Teachers reported largely negative experiences of implementing the new curriculum and stated that planning had become more complicated and time consuming than before. There was a fear that the same may happen across all subject areas with a revised curriculum.

### **Right to disconnect for teachers**

Some respondents highlighted the increased use of digital communications coming not only from parents but also from within schools as many schools were using *WhatsApp* groups and *Aladdin Connect* to communicate between members of staff and for management to communicate with staff. Respondents reported that such communications outside of school hours had increased significantly in recent times and commented that it was impossible to disconnect from work in these circumstances. Unlike many other jobs, teachers are not provided with a work phone or other IT devices by their employer and are using their personal mobile phones and devices for school-related communications. Therefore, simply turning off their phone or work device to 'disconnect' from work as others may do, is not an option available to most teachers.

### **Class size**

Some respondents suggested that reducing class sizes was the best way of alleviating teacher workload. Respondents stated that it was not possible to meet the increasing expectations and demands being placed upon schools in supersized classes of up to 30+ pupils. Smaller class sizes would enable teachers to facilitate differentiation better and inclusion of all students, relieving some of the difficulties associated with supporting pupils with special educational needs:

Smaller class sizes are key to reducing the workload. When you are dealing with 30 pupils, their individual needs, 30 parents, and planning for their learning and correcting all their work it cannot but be a huge workload.

### **Dedicated time for planning, collaboration and administrative tasks**

It was widely reported by respondents that teachers were spending large amounts of time outside of the regular school day carrying out schoolwork: planning for teaching and learning, recording assessments, meeting with colleagues, parents and other professionals, and creating classroom displays. Many respondents reported that this work, which is essential for high-quality teaching and learning and the effective running of schools, is neither acknowledged nor valued by the Department of Education, some parents or by wider society. Respondents suggested that dedicated time should be available to teachers for planning, collaboration and administrative tasks, either by adding additional non-contact time to the school day, or by allocating a set amount of non-contact time within the existing school day on a fortnightly or monthly basis, using supply panel teachers to cover teachers' classes. Respondents who had taught abroad referred to similar arrangements in other countries, e.g. Scotland. It was also suggested that teachers' salaries should be increased in recognition of the significant additional work completed by teachers outside of the formal school day.

There was a large response from teachers to the survey on workload. It is evident that teachers are experiencing a significant sense of work overload leading to stress and in some cases, burnout. They are also frustrated and at times angry with the ever-increasing expectations being placed on schools regarding curriculum, administration and paperwork and the lack of resources and supports available to support children with additional needs. Some respondents commented that teachers were subject to frequent negative commentary and disparaging remarks which have undermined and devalued the important role of teachers in society. This commentary was particularly apparent during the pandemic-related school closures.

In addition to identifying their sources of workload, respondents made suggestions regarding possible solutions to the challenges that they identified. These suggestions include greater facilitation of teacher collaboration including dedicated non-contact time where teachers have an opportunity to collaborate with colleagues, reducing class size, increased funding and availability of curriculum-linked teaching resources, reducing the number of discrete subject areas in the

curriculum and reducing content within subjects, removing religious education and sacramental preparation from schools, and revising expectations regarding teacher planning, to include monthly rather than fortnightly plans and greater use of cross-curricular integration and thematic planning.

The findings and suggestions arising from the teachers' survey are considered further in Section 4.

## **Section 4: Conclusions and recommendations**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The INTO workload project outlined in part one and the audit of principals' time outlined in part two of this report provide clear parents' association evidence that the work of teachers and principals has continued to become more demanding as each year progresses. For principal teachers in particular, workload is becoming unsustainable. The project has also provided an insight into possible solutions to address teacher workload. The suggested solutions that emerged in the workload project were further discussed in a final focus group to assess their feasibility and to make further suggestions regarding implementation. This section of the report considers various dimensions of teachers' and principals' work, builds on the findings of the workload surveys, and makes recommendations to support teachers and principals in their work and to address teacher workload. Addressing teacher workload will also require a fundamental review of school governance and school infrastructural supports. Without such a review, increasing expectations being placed on schools will continue to contribute to teachers' workload and particularly to the workload of principal teachers.

If schools are to function effectively in providing high-quality education and learning experiences for all pupils, the Government will need to invest in the provision of system supports and infrastructure to enable principal teachers to be leaders of teaching and learning in their schools, to facilitate teachers' collaborative work and professional development and to support pupils with additional needs to enable them to engage with education.

Section 4 of this report offers conclusions and makes broad general recommendations to address teacher workload, under the headings of school governance, school leadership, administration and management, teaching and learning, special education and communication.

### **4.2 School governance**

How the primary school system currently operates is causing workload issues for principals and teachers. The *Chief Inspector's Report 2016-2020* stated that the voluntary nature of school governance arrangements was not sustainable (DE, 2022, p.235). The report also acknowledged that those in leadership and management positions in schools need to place a more substantial focus on the leadership of teaching and learning. As shown in this workload project, principals are aware that they don't spend sufficient time on leadership of teaching and learning because of the workload associated with all their other responsibilities. Given the pressure teachers face regarding participation in initiatives, it is of note that the Chief Inspector's report recommends that there is a need to support schools more systematically in their provision of extra-curricular activities in light of the potential of these activities to support pupils' social and emotional development (p. 12). Supporting schools systematically is essential to enable teachers and principals to provide high-quality education for their pupils while ensuring that their workload remains doable and their career rewarding.

### **School leadership**

Principal teachers are responsible for leading teaching and learning and for general school organisation and administration. The INTO surveys on workload and the audit of principals' time have demonstrated that these responsibilities are very broad and time-consuming. Schools lack a supportive infrastructure to enable principals to carry out their responsibilities.

In general, principal teachers support the delegation of tasks and functions to other members of staff. They are aware, however, that other members of staff do not have release time, therefore, principal teachers are conscious that that they do not wish to overburden their colleagues, particularly when teachers do not receive additional remuneration unless they hold promoted posts. Nevertheless, principal teachers were aware of the potential for teachers to develop areas of interest and to take on leadership roles. The INTO should continue its focus on demanding the restoration of all posts of responsibility at primary level and the reinstatement of release time for deputy principals.

There was strong support for two administrative leadership and management days each week for all teaching principals. Principals who participated in the final focus group discussion expressed the view that the position of teaching principal becomes untenable in schools with more than four class teachers. Most four-teacher schools also have special education teachers and SNAs, thereby increasing the leadership and management responsibilities of principal teachers. There was strong support for the appointment of administrative principals in all schools with more than ten staff members (93%) and in all schools with special classes (91%).

There was also strong support for release time for deputy principals (93%), pro-rata depending on size of school. Respondents also support the appointment of administrative deputies in special schools with eight or more teachers.

The INTO should continue to negotiate additional release time for teaching principals and to seek some release time for deputy principals.

### **School administration**

Principal teachers have a wide range of responsibilities. Their role as leaders of teaching and learning tends to receive less attention than principals desire on account of administrative duties and responding to a myriad of other demands takes precedence. Principals carry out many functions that are not essential to teaching and learning, but that are necessary for the smooth operation of schools. Such functions include project management of building works and summer maintenance work, which do not need to be managed by principal teachers. School caretakers, where they exist, often have responsibility for daily school maintenance issues, but the management of school building works, renovations and extensions should be the responsibility of the DE. The DE could consider devolving such responsibilities to local or regional bodies.

Most schools employ school secretaries, though in many small schools, secretaries are appointed on a part-time basis. It is not necessary, at present, to hold qualifications in school administration to be appointed as a school secretary, and schools' experiences vary. Principals were very appreciative of their school secretaries, and many held the view that some of their duties could be delegated to school secretaries.

There was overwhelming support (98%) for the appointment of school secretaries/administrators qualified in school administration, on a pro-rata basis, depending on size of school, and that secretaries/administrators should be paid directly by the DE.

Duties that could be delegated to school secretaries, as suggested by principal teachers, include management and operation of *Aladdin* (or its equivalent), school accounts (book-keeping), completion of forms for educational agencies such as NCSE, administration of enrolment, liaison with FSSU and organisation of visitors. Having a well-qualified school secretary or school administrator would also assist principal teachers in managing the numerous communications with schools. Principal teachers should retain overall responsibility. Having appropriately qualified and adequately remunerated school secretaries should enable principal teachers to have confidence in delegating many administrative functions.

The INTO should initiate discussions with the Department of Education, management bodies and with Fórsa to discuss the potential to develop the role of school secretary, to consider possible job specifications, and to design a professional preparation course for school secretaries. The desirability of making a qualification in school administration a prerequisite for future appointments as school secretaries should also be discussed, while current school secretaries should be offered an opportunity to avail of the new qualification.

There was a lot of support among principals for having access to a HR advisory service (93%). However, principal teachers prefer to retain responsibility for recruitment of staff. The INTO should raise the issue of providing HR support for schools with the primary management bodies. Principals also agreed (95%) that the provision of supply panels in all schools would reduce the work associated with accessing substitute teachers. The INTO should continue to pursue a policy of seeking the establishment of supply panels for all schools.

### **Boards of management (BOMs)**

Principal teachers acknowledge the limitations of the current boards of management (BOMs) structure. Many principals are reluctant to make demands on voluntary members of boards. Survey respondents expressed mixed views that schools could share boards of management or share experienced chairpersons. Discussion during the final focus group led to the suggestion that the position of chairperson of BOMs should be semi-professionalised. Suitable people, such as retired principal teachers, could take on the role of chairing a few BOMs for an appropriate fee. Retired principal teachers could be interested in such a role and would have the advantage of experiential knowledge of the operation of schools. In the absence of any major restructuring of primary school governance, the INTO should initiate discussions with the DE and management authorities with a view to exploring options for semi-professionalising the role of chairperson of BOMs.

### **School policies**

There was a lot of support among respondents for the provision of templates by the Department of Education for policies and that school could adapt policies locally. Schools would continue to have autonomy and flexibility in how they used and interpreted templates to respond to the needs of their own context.

## **4.3 Teaching and learning**

The *Primary School Curriculum (1999)* is very comprehensive, and while teachers are supportive of the curriculum, they have constantly criticised curriculum overload. The new *Primary Curriculum Framework* must address curriculum overload. Society continues to increase expectations of what schools should do. Teachers also recognise the benefits of participating in initiatives that support the curriculum, however, they often feel under pressure to engage in initiatives or programmes. School communities should receive a clear message from the Department that participation in initiatives is at the discretion of individual schools and participation should be decided according to the capacity of schools to engage.

Principals struggle to pay sufficient attention to their responsibilities to lead teaching and learning due to the nature of school administration tasks. Preparing and planning for teaching also create additional pressures for teachers in an era of accountability focused on paperwork and bureaucracy. While teachers' work was never confined to the formal school day, it is clear from the surveys and from the audit of principals' time that the working time for the majority of teachers and practically all principal teachers beyond the formal school day and the formal school year has increased significantly and that the nature of teachers' work has become more time-consuming:

Teachers/Principals hours should be defined more. A teachers job only looks like 9-3 which we all know is much more than that. If teachers are to do everything they are supposed to do – planning, meetings – this needs to be defined and included ... Planning/meetings are they inside or outside of pupil contact hours? There are not enough of Croke Park hours and Croke Park has run its course- we are now doing much more than we ever did - teachers resent Croke Park hours.

The school day is defined in Rule 53 of the *Rules for National Schools* as 5 hours 40 minutes each day, from the time the school opens for the reception of pupils to its closing on their dismissal. Teachers are obliged under Rule 126 to prepare for their teaching and to prepare weekly and yearly plans and monthly reports and this preparation is in addition to the 5 hours 40 minutes. Therefore, the formal school day has never defined teachers' working day. Teachers' preparation time has never been quantified and varies according to time of year and teacher experience and has generally entailed individual preparation. However, the nature of primary teachers' work has changed substantially since the *Rules for National Schools* were devised. Understandings of teacher professionalism today place a strong focus on teacher collaboration (Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018) and on building relationships with stakeholders (Bottery, 1996). Therefore, in addition to their individual planning, teachers need opportunities to collaborate and work with their colleagues. Teachers need time for professional activities beyond pupil-contact time. Collaboration will be even more important in the context of a learning outcomes curriculum, where schools as communities determine how learning outcomes are interpreted and achieved in their own school contexts (Hargreaves in INTO, 2018). Many respondents commented that Croke Park hours are generally used for collaborative activities in schools, though experiences of Croke Park hours differ across schools.

### **Collaborative activities**

Many respondents offered suggestions as to how collaborative and professional time could be provided. A range of suggestions was offered. Some respondents suggested longer working hours, with respondents stating that such additional time should carry extra remuneration. Others stated that Croke Park hours should be used. Many principals suggested dedicated time either weekly, fortnightly or monthly. In order to facilitate the release of teachers to engage in collaborate work, some respondents suggested the employment of substitute teachers or 'floating subs', supply panel teachers or part-time teachers. Other respondents suggested the employment of specialist teachers, for subjects such as music or PE, so that class teachers could be freed up for periods during the school day. Some respondents referred to such practices in other jurisdictions, such as Scotland, England and Australia.

While additional pay does not solve the issue of workload, teachers are clear that the time teachers spend on teaching-related activities such as planning and preparation, staff meetings, communicating with parents, contacting agencies, assessing children's work and participating in initiatives needs to be recognised and accommodated. If such activities are deemed to be part of teachers' work, they must become an integral part of teachers' working time, and the right infrastructural supports put in place to ensure that the role of teachers, and in particular, the role of principal teachers remains doable. At present, the expectations placed on teachers and, particularly on principal teachers to take on additional duties and responsibilities are not sustainable.

A large majority of principals support the provision of a bank of substitute days to schools to enable teachers to participate in professional development and collaborative activities during school time. The supply panels could be extended to include cover for teachers released to engage in collaborative work with colleagues or to engage with parents. Alternatively, part-time teachers could be employed to cover teacher release time. Part-time teachers could teach aspects

of the curriculum delegated to them by the class teachers. Part-time teaching hours could also be combined across schools to create full-time posts. While the idea that specialist teachers could be employed to teach aspects of the curriculum, such as music or PE, was suggested by respondents to the survey, the final focus group expressed reservations, and were of the view that primary teachers, in general, found great satisfaction in teaching PE, music and art. Rather than appointing specialist teachers, part-time teachers, or shared fulltime teachers could be appointed to teach various aspects of the curriculum according to the needs of individual schools. There isn't a consensus, at present, on the merits of introducing specialist teachers in Irish primary schools and moving away from the current generalist model of primary teaching.

Many respondents suggested allocating time regularly, by closing schools, to enable teachers to engage in collaborative activities and whole school professional development, to meet with parents, to liaise with other professionals – suggestions included half an hour a day after normal school day, a half day once a week/fortnight/month where pupils went home early, or one full day each month or each term. The precise structure of additional professional time would need further consideration. The need for collaborative time for teachers should be included in future discussions regarding schools' substitute needs. The INTO should also enter into negotiations with the DE and with management authorities to agree an amount of time each term for collaborative activities such as whole school planning, professional development and meeting with parents.

### **Planning for teaching and learning**

Planning for teaching and learning was the most frequently mentioned source of teacher workload. The level of detail expected in teachers' planning was viewed as excessive and unnecessary, and involved a lot of repetition with the same information being included in the various forms of planning (long-term, short term and *cuntas míosúil*), leading to a lot of cutting and pasting for the sake of fulfilling unhelpful planning requirements. Many respondents seem to be unfamiliar with the new *Guidance on Preparation for Teaching and Learning*, launched in April 2021. The emphasis in the new guidance is on preparation that is relevant and useful to the teacher and not on preparation to meet external requirements. This message has not yet been communicated sufficiently to teachers. The INTO should demand that the DE provide time and resources for teacher professional development regarding the *Guidance on Preparation for Teaching and Learning*.

Differentiation is important in planning for teaching and learning, though it can be time consuming if all plans for differentiation have to be recorded. Over half of the principals agreed that teachers should not have to record their plans for differentiation, almost a quarter disagreed while another almost quarter thought it was hard to say. Many teachers, however, are of the view that plans for differentiation are usually included in student support plans. Additional guidance for teachers regarding differentiation is required and should be an integral part of all curriculum-related professional development. The DE should provide additional guidance and professional development for teachers on the topic of differentiation.

### **Class size**

The INTO has long pursued the reduction of class size in primary schools. Ireland has yet to reach the average class size at primary level in Europe, though progress has been made. Many respondents referred to large classes as contributing to their workload particularly in relation to supporting children with special educational needs and in implementing play-based and active learning. There is no optimum class size, as circumstances vary between schools and between classes. The campaign to further reduce class size should continue. Consideration should be given to maximum class size as follows: single grade - max 26 pupils; multi-grade - max 20; and infant classes - max 16.

#### 4.4 Special education

Responding to and meeting the needs of children with special educational needs creates additional workload for both principals and teachers. Many respondents complained about the paperwork associated with planning and preparation of IEPs, PPPs, IELPs, and about paperwork associated with applying for additional support and resources. Large class sizes were also considered a challenge particularly when there were many demands for differentiation and individual planning. The INTO should enter into discussions with the NCSE regarding their procedures for applying for resources, appealing allocations, and seeking reviews with a view to reducing the workload associated with such procedures and processes. The INTO should also liaise with the NCSE regarding guidelines for individual planning in the context of the review of the EPSEN Act (2004).

Children with special educational needs require a range of supports that are not currently available in schools. Respondents were of the view that having the right support for pupils in schools, particularly in relation to therapeutic and behavioural supports would reduce the pressure for teachers. Teachers often feel they are asked to fill gaps when such supports are not available for children. The INTO should continue to support the current demonstration project in relation to providing therapy supports to schools and should enter into negotiations with the DE regarding the provision of behavioural and therapeutic supports for children in all schools. The INTO should also explore possibilities of enabling experienced teachers to become qualified therapists (speech and language, occupational, behavioural) with a view to providing therapeutic supports to children in primary and special schools.

There was a lot of support among respondents for the appointment of socio-emotional counsellors in schools. The INTO should demand that the DE appoint socio-emotional counsellors in primary schools, on a shared basis depending on size of school to support children's socio-emotional, mental health and wellbeing needs. The INTO should explore with the DE the possibility of facilitating experienced teachers to become qualified socio-emotional counsellors operating in primary and special schools.

To assist principals to lead teaching and learning for children with special educational needs, the INTO should demand additional posts of responsibility, pro rata depending on size of school, to coordinate the provision of special education at school level.

#### 4.5 Communications

Parents are the primary educators of their children according to the Irish Constitution. Communications between home and school are an integral part of school life. Teachers have traditionally held parent-teacher meetings once a year in Autumn or Spring and send home report cards at the end of each school year. Teachers and parents work together for the benefit of children's education. While teachers appreciate the role of parents and the need for communication, many respondents expressed the view that in an era of mass communications and social media, demands on teachers for additional contact with parents created more workload for teachers. Respondents supported the provision of guidance around school policies for communications with parents to ensure expectations remained realistic and manageable.

#### 4.6 Concluding comments

The national school system has evolved since its establishment in 1831. In the early days, schools were controlled by single managers, usually clergy, and principal teachers, with the support of assistant teachers depending on size of school, were responsible for the day-to-day teaching and learning and running of the school. School communities are more complex today. Boards of management were established in 1975, parent associations emerged since the 1980s, and

legislation in the area of education underpinned primary education with the introduction of the School Attendance Act (1926), Education Act (1998), Educational Welfare Act (2000), Teaching Council Act (2001), Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (2004), Children First Act (2015), and their subsequent amendments. The *Rules for National Schools (1965)*, though some have been rescinded, and Department of Education circulars continue to determine the life and work of schools. Incremental small changes to primary education over the years have increased the demands being made on teachers, and while each individual change may not increase workload significantly on their own, cumulatively all changes have a significant impact on teacher workload. Stress and burnout are significant challenges today, evident in the *INTO Report on Stress and Resilience (2015)* and in resolutions adopted at annual congress over recent years. How the primary education system is administered currently is impacting on teacher workload. Functions carried out by principals and teachers are considered necessary for the smooth operation of primary schools, according to principal teachers, however, how this work is done needs to be reviewed.

According to the audit of principals' time, outlined in part two of this report, the median number of hours spent by principals on school-related work outside the teaching day over a particular four-week period while schools were open was 16 hours and 30 minutes for administrative principals and 12 hours and 15 minutes for teaching principals. Only one in five reported spending an average of 6 hours 30 minutes on school-related work in addition to the normal teaching day, while eighteen principals had at least one week out of four where they engaged with school-related work for more than 20 hours after the formal school day. School administration took up most of the additional time. The audit did not take account of school contextual factors that impacted on time spent on school-related work in order to protect the identity of the participants.

Respondents to the INTO survey on teacher workload indicated strong support for measures to reduce workload. These measures include additional time for teaching principals and deputy principals to engage in leadership and management, the restoration of posts of responsibility, an enhanced role for school secretaries, a less bureaucratic system for applying for or appealing resource allocations for children with special educational needs, provision of holistic support for children with special educational needs such as therapy services, behaviour supports and socio-emotional counselling, smaller class sizes, less paperwork regarding teacher planning and fewer curriculum-related demands. Implementing these measures will assist in alleviating teacher workload, however, without a comprehensive review of how the primary education system operates, the source of teacher workload will not be addressed. Therefore, it is timely to review the primary education system.

The INTO recommends that a Primary Education Review Group be established by the Department of Education, involving the INTO, school management bodies and other stakeholders, in addition to the Department with the purpose of carrying out a review of how the primary education system could be supported to ensure children continue to receive high-quality primary education in Ireland. A review of the structure and organisation of primary education will need to consider the role of various education agencies and their relationships with schools (NCCA, NCSE, COGG, Teaching Council), update *Circular 16/1973* regarding the functions and responsibilities of principal teachers, amend the *Rules for National Schools* to reflect how schools operate today, revisit the concept of regional structures to support schools, examine in-school supports required to enable teachers and principals to lead teaching and learning.

In essence, the Primary Education Review Group should consider the following issues:

- The role and function of voluntary boards of management – what can reasonably be expected.
- Regional structures to support schools where external support is required – school buildings, minor works, technology, human resource advisory support.
- Time for leadership and management functions, including release time for teaching principals and for deputy principals, at what stage should administrative principals be

appointed in both mainstream and special schools, at what point should administrative deputy principals be appointed in mainstream and special schools. How principals are appointed and supported after appointment.

- The role of school secretaries – development of role, qualifications in school administration, functions and responsibilities.
- Supporting children with special educational needs – allocation and deployment of resources, holistic supports such as therapies, behavioural supports, counselling, school buildings and equipment, record keeping and documentation, coordination.
- Professional (non-pupil contact) time for teachers - planning and preparation for teaching, engaging with other professionals, communicating with parents, releasing teachers during school hours, structured time monthly/termly/annually, review of Croke Park hours.

The teaching profession in Ireland is well regarded and respected (The Teaching Council, 2009). Teachers' job satisfaction remains high despite increasing workload. In addressing teacher workload, the challenge for the INTO is to ensure that teaching remains an attractive, enjoyable and rewarding career and that Ireland retains its reputation as a high-quality education system with a highly regarded, respected and well-rewarded teaching profession.



# Part Two: Audit of principal teachers' time

## An independent report on time, outside normal school hours, spent by primary school principals on school-related work

### Section 1: Overview

#### 1.1 Introduction

The functions of the principal teacher in schools in the Republic of Ireland are set out in legislation:

In accordance with Section 22 of the Education Act, 1998, and Section 23 of the Education (Amendment) Act 2012, the Principal provides leadership to teachers, other staff and to the pupils and the wider school community. The Principal has overall responsibility, under the direction of the board of management/ETB, as appropriate, for the day-to-day management of the school. The Principal has responsibility for the internal organisation of the school, including the assignment of roles and responsibilities to members of the teaching and non-teaching staff. The Principal submits to the board of management/ETB, as appropriate, all such statements and reports affecting the conduct of the school as the board of management/ETB, requires. (Department of Education, 2018, pp. 6-7)

In 2021, on foot of a Congress resolution on the role of the school leader, the INTO commissioned an independently audited survey on the time spent by principal teachers, outside normal school hours, on school-related work. The findings of this audit are presented in this report, together with relevant background information and details regarding the approach and methodology used.

#### 1.2 Terms of reference

The terms of reference of this report are drawn from part b (1) of the resolution adopted at INTO Congress 2021 which called on the Central Executive Committee (CEC) of the INTO to carry out the following:

Congress

a. finds

1. that the role of the principal as set out in the Education Act and *Circular 16/1973* bears little semblance to the day-to-day realities which principal teachers find themselves in on a day-to-day basis;
2. that the workload and expectations placed on principal teachers has become excessive; and

b. demands

1. the CEC appoint independent auditors to conduct an audit of time worked by principal teachers during evenings, weekends and school closures;
2. that the CEC negotiate with the Department of Education (DE) to seek the awarding of five EPV days to every principal teacher as recompense for work carried out during school holiday periods or additional payment for any and all work carried out by school leaders during school holiday periods;

3. that the PDC and fora be central in the consultation in any review;
  4. that the CEC engage with the DE with a view to the issuance of a new circular detailing the duties and responsibilities of principal teachers; and
  5. the CEC place their proposition on the structure and detail of such a circular before Congress 2022 if agreement has not been reached with the DE at that stage.
- c. further demands that:
1. the DE provide proper administrative supports for school leaders, including secretarial support, release time of at least one day per week for teaching principals, support for building projects, the full restoration of posts of responsibility and the appointment of administrative deputy principals in all special schools and in all other schools on the same basis as in post-primary schools;
  2. all staff be counted for the purpose of calculating principals' and deputy principals' allowances; and
  - d. a proper and dignified mechanism for stepping down from the role of principal be developed and implemented by the Department of Education.

The terms of reference which were provided to this researcher had interpreted 'audit of time' as a thorough review and assessment of time worked by principals outside normal school hours; 'audit of time' as a survey of principals over five weeks; and 'independent auditor' as a researcher independent of the INTO whose remit it would be to conduct the survey and associated review and compile a report. The terms 'audit' and 'independent auditor' as used in this report are to be interpreted accordingly.

The central focus of this report is to:

- Determine the quantity of time, outside normal school hours, typically spent by principal teachers on school-related work.
- Highlight the nature of work (activities) carried out during this time.
- Establish when this work typically takes place.
- Identify patterns that may emerge relating to the nature and/or timing of such work.

In simple terms, it is about measuring the time outside normal school hours that principal teachers spend on school-related work, examining this time under various headings and communicating the findings to the INTO. The intention is that the primary data gathered, analysed and presented in a structured way will support the INTO in its considerations around the workload of principals. It is not within the remit of this report to analyse this data against the backdrop of current literature or to make recommendations to the INTO based on the findings: accordingly, such analysis and recommendations will not be a feature of this report.

## 1.3 Background to the research

### 1.3.1 Introduction

The resolution from the INTO Congress 2021 on the Role of the Principal demanded that the union's CEC appoint independent auditors to conduct an audit of time worked by principal teachers during evenings, weekend and school closures.

The terms of reference for the independent audit of time, as decided by the CEC, are contained in *Appendix C*. These are summarised below where they are supplemented with explanatory notes as appropriate.

### 1.3.2 Timeframe

The CEC decided to base the audit on a survey covering a period of five individual weeks from October to November 2021:

- ⌘ Week commencing Monday, 18 October.
- ⌘ Week commencing Monday, 25 October (coinciding with the Hallowe'en midterm break).
- ⌘ Week commencing Monday, 8 November.
- ⌘ Week commencing Monday, 15 November.
- ⌘ Week commencing Monday, 22 November.

The INTO considered a number of factors when deciding on the duration and timing of the survey period. Bearing in mind the tedium associated with logging blocks of time outside normal school hours and taking cognisance of the existing demands on principals' time, it was decided to restrict the survey to five weeks. Concern was expressed that extending the survey over a longer period would be excessively onerous on principals and would ultimately lead to a reduced participation rate or high drop-out in the course of the survey period. The period October to November was chosen for two main reasons: (i) it spans four weeks when schools are officially open and a standard school closure of one week, thus facilitating capture of data relating to such times and (ii) while acknowledging the 'ebb and flow' that characterises the school year in terms of tasks and activities that place demands on principals' time, it would nonetheless provide a valuable snapshot of a particular point in time.

The week immediately after the midterm break was not included in the survey: apart from that gap, the survey was carried out over consecutive weeks. The INTO determined that a break of a week in the course of the survey would lessen the likelihood of survey fatigue and associated dropout.

### 1.3.3 Recording time

For ease of tracking and analysing the time spent outside normal school hours on activities relating to the role of principal, the INTO decided that this time would be recorded in blocks of 15 minutes, i.e. 15 minutes, 30 minutes, 45 minutes, 1 hour, 1 hour 15 minutes, etc.

For the purpose of logging this time, three defined periods were chosen: evenings, weekends and school closures. These periods were defined as follows:

- a **Evenings:** This refers to time after the end of the normal school day. For the purposes of this survey, it also includes time prior to the commencement of the normal school day. In other words, it relates to time before and after the normal school day. (See point b re Friday.)
- b **Weekends:** This relates to the end of the school week, i.e. Friday (after normal school hours), all day Saturday, all day Sunday.
- c **School closures:** This relates to days, other than Saturday and Sunday, when the school is not in session. As the principals surveyed did not report any incidental school closures during the course of this survey, this period relates purely to the Halloween midterm break here.

Principals were free to record time spent on various activities (see section 1.3.4) in whatever method they themselves found most convenient, e.g. in an INTO diary; using an app such as *Clockify*, *Time-Up* or *Toggl Track*; or using a spreadsheet. However, each principal would ultimately enter the data that they collected into a standardised *Microsoft Excel* template and forward same to the independent auditor.

### 1.3.4 Activities to be recorded in the survey

It was intended that the survey would yield information both on the amount of time spent outside normal school hours on activities relating to the role of principal and the nature of activities on which this time is spent. In conjunction with the Principals' and Deputy Principals' Committee (PDC), the CEC devised a list of headings under which the time would be recorded:

- ⌘ Planning for leading teaching and learning (short term).
- ⌘ Discipline/behaviour/pastoral care/supervision before and after school.
- ⌘ Engaging with parents and addressing related issues.
- ⌘ Dealing with external bodies, e.g. Tusla, Inspectorate, NCSE, S.29 appeals.
- ⌘ Recruitment, interviewing, appointment and induction of staff.
- ⌘ Planning curriculum/school development/SSE (medium to long term).
- ⌘ School maintenance and technological issues, e.g. building projects, minor works, ICT, broadband.
- ⌘ Administration/day-to-day management, e.g. sourcing substitutes, school admissions.
- ⌘ Special educational needs.
- ⌘ Child protection/safeguarding.
- ⌘ Staff management, e.g. dealing with grievances, contact from staff.
- ⌘ Preparation for and attendance at meetings including board of management, parents' association.
- ⌘ Dealing with public health issues and health and safety matters.
- ⌘ Attending activities, e.g. religious ceremonies, sports and games, other events.
- ⌘ Thinking and/or reflection about school matters.
- ⌘ CPD events.
- ⌘ Other (Please specify).

While the INTO has members in two jurisdictions, the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, only members from the Republic of Ireland took part. Accordingly, the list of activities was not adapted to include appropriate equivalent headings for Northern Ireland.

### **1.3.5 Survey participants**

For purposes of statistical validity, it was decided that a broad representation of principals in a variety of locations, settings and types should be included as part of the audit.

### **1.3.6 Miscellaneous**

A webinar took place in October 2021 at which the terms of reference of the audit together with the expectations of those taking part of the survey were explained to those whose names had been put forward at that time.

## **Section 2: Approach and methodology**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The research design, approach and methodologies employed in order to achieve the aims of this independent audit are outlined in this section. The objectives of the audit are stated, research methodologies and instruments used are identified and justified, procedures followed with regard to sample selection are outlined, data analysis procedures are described and any associated limitations are discussed. Ethical considerations are also presented.

### **2.2 Research focus**

The primary focus of the research is as follows:

- ⌘ How much time do primary school principals spend outside normal school hours on school-related work?
- ⌘ When does this work outside normal school hours take place?
- ⌘ What is the nature of the work carried out during this time?

### 2.3 Research design

In order to address these research questions, a decision was made by the CEC of the INTO to carry out an audit with a sample drawn from all INTO districts. As the purpose of the survey was to gather numerical data under pre-determined headings rather than to probe opinions and experiences, a quantitative research methodology was employed. The following section details the survey that was carried out.

### 2.4 Participants and sampling strategy

It was envisaged that the sample would include three principals from each participating INTO district. The survey sample (n=33) is made up of 33 principal teachers. Participants were recruited directly from the 14 INTO districts in the Republic of Ireland by the INTO CEC in conjunction with PDC representatives. The two INTO districts in Northern Ireland did not take part in this survey.

A non-probability and purposive sample facilitated inclusion of a diverse range of contexts. In line with the terms of reference, the CEC representatives sought to include principals from a variety of school types, settings, sizes and under different patronages with various backgrounds and status'. Principals who expressed a willingness to take part in the survey were invited to attend a webinar, organised by INTO Head Office, at which information was shared about the nature and purpose of the audit. Following this, a consent form and background questionnaire (*Appendix D*), both of which had been prepared by INTO Head Office, were circulated to the 45 principals who were in attendance. Those documents were circulated from a dedicated email account by the independent auditor and from there on communication with participating principals regarding what the INTO termed the *Time Audit Survey* was through the independent auditor.

Of the 45 principals who attended the webinar, 38 completed and returned the consent form and background questionnaire. While it is not known why some principals decided not to take part in the survey at this point, it is interesting to note that two principals specifically cited pressures of work as the reason for declining to participate.

Of the 38 principals who agreed to take part, 33 ultimately engaged with the survey, i.e. they returned completed spreadsheets to the independent auditor in the course of the survey period. The following two tables, Table 12 and Table 13, give information about the role and length of experience of participants and the type of school in which they currently work.

**Table 12: Summary details re principals who participated in the survey**

Category	Description	No. of participants
Nature of role	Administrative principal	17
	Teaching principal	16
No. of years in role of principal	<5 years	10
	6-10 years	8
	11-20 years	10
	21-30 years	4
	31+ years	1

**Table 13: Summary details re type of schools from which participants were drawn**

Category	Description	No. of participants
Type of school	Mainstream	32
	Special	1
Disadvantaged status	DEIS Primary Rural	4
	DEIS Primary Urban	3
	Non-DEIS	26
Type of school by class level/age of pupil	Full stream - infants to sixth class inclusive	27
	Senior school - second class to sixth class inclusive	5
	Pupils up to age 18	1
Teaching language	Gaeltacht school - Irish medium	3
	Gaelscoil school - Irish medium	2
	Other schools - English medium	28
School location	Rural	16
	Town	8
	Suburban	3
	City	6
Size of school by number of pupils	<50	3
	50-100	8
	101-200	11
	201-300	8
	>300	3
Size of school by number of teachers	1-4	5
	5-8	8
	9-15	13
	16-25	7
School patronage	Catholic (on diocesan basis)	29
	Church of Ireland (on diocesan basis)	2
	Educate Together	1
	Other, e.g. individual patron	1

As is evident from Table 12 and Table 13, principals from a wide variety of school types and class levels were recruited to take part in the survey. While it does not follow from this that the findings of this survey are generalisable to the entire body of principals within the Republic of Ireland, the diverse sample is nonetheless beneficial in that it contains data drawn from a wide variety of contexts. It is interesting to compare the composition of the sample with statistics relating to the overall cohort of primary school principals in Ireland (Table 15 and Table 16). This shows a strong correlation overall between the composition of the survey sample and statistics across the entire body of primary schools in the Republic of Ireland.

**Table 14: Primary school statistics 2020/21 academic year**

Category	Number/%
Primary schools in the Republic of Ireland (all)	3241
Mainstream schools	3107
% of all schools that are special schools	4%
DEIS Urban	10%
DEIS Rural	10%
% Irish medium schools of all mainstream primary schools	8%
% All-Irish and in Gaeltacht	3%
% Catholic ethos	89%
% Church of Ireland	6%
% Other	6%

**Note:** Statistics as furnished by statistics@education.gov.ie in response to an email. See *Appendix E*.

**Table 15: Primary schools 2020/21 survey sample – statistical comparison**

Category	Republic of Ireland	Survey participants
Primary schools in the Republic of Ireland (all)	3241	33
Mainstream schools	3107	32
Per cent of all schools that are special schools	4%	3%
% DEIS Urban	10%	12%
% DEIS Rural	10%	9%
% Irish medium schools of all mainstream primary schools	8%	15%
% All-Irish and in Gaeltacht	3%	9%
% Catholic ethos	89%	88%
% Church of Ireland	6%	6%
% Other	6%	6%

## 2.5 Research instrument

A survey was carried out by means of an *Excel* spreadsheet template that was emailed to participants on a weekly basis throughout the survey period. This closely mirrored the spreadsheet that was generated by the INTO Head Office for this purpose. However, prior to circulation of the spreadsheets to participants, some minor adjustments were made by the independent auditor to minimise the risk of error and to render them more user friendly, e.g. formatting of cells with drop-down menus for logging of time and locking of cells that should remain constant; re-ordering of the list of activities to minimise confusion, e.g. relating to planning for teaching and learning (long-term and short-term), and the inclusion of helpful tips on completion of the spreadsheet. The survey template for Weeks 1 and 2 is shown in *Appendix F*.

Survey participants recorded the duration of times spent on various activities outside normal school hours under the headings listed in the survey, together with the timing of these activities, i.e. before/after school hours; weekends; or during a period of school closure. Activities not reflected in the headings provided could be included under the heading 'Other'. Participants logging activities under this heading were requested to specify the nature of such activities.

It was determined by the INTO that it was imperative that the survey, together with the associated report in draft form, would be completed by the end of January 2022 and ready for presentation to INTO Congress 2022. This meant that there was insufficient time for a pilot survey to be conducted. It was agreed by the INTO that the discussion and feedback generated by CEC and PDC committees during the drafting of the survey documents together with the INTO's extensive experience in surveying its members would serve to counteract potential negative effects associated with not conducting a pilot survey.

## 2.6 Data collection

Data was collected by means of a standardised *Excel* spreadsheet template. The first spreadsheet template covered two weeks, i.e. the week of midterm (school closure) and the week prior to that; all other spreadsheet templates related to one week only. Spreadsheets were circulated to participants by email at the outset of the relevant week, i.e. on a weekly basis, other than for the initial two weeks (which included a week's school closure). Guidance on the completion of each spreadsheet was included in the body of the spreadsheet and also in the accompanying emails; participants were also encouraged to contact the independent auditor directly regarding any queries/difficulties.

A number of steps was taken to limit the risk of participant fatigue or drop-out. The decision to subdivide the survey into weekly spreadsheets for each participant rather than one overall spreadsheet to be returned at the end of the survey was informed by the likelihood of a greater response rate associated with regular returns and frequent contact with the independent auditor. The auditor was available by email and telephone to respond to any participant queries relating to survey completion. Participants were advised that they were welcome to engage with the independent auditor through English or as Gaeilge. All completed spreadsheets were individually acknowledged by the independent auditor on a weekly basis, thus maintaining a direct line of communication right throughout the survey period. Reminders were emailed to participants to return the data at the end of each relevant period.

In the course of the survey period and again at its conclusion, participants were invited to share with the independent auditor any additional information relevant to the survey that the spreadsheet templates might not have adequately captured, e.g. school closures on days that were not marked as such on the standardised spreadsheet template. Following on from this, a number of principals shared insightful comments on the current workload of principals and these are drawn on in Section 3: Findings.

## 2.7 Data analysis procedures

The data from each spreadsheet submitted to the independent auditor was, on receipt, entered into a master spreadsheet in anonymised form. This anonymised data was, however, linked with participant characteristics, school size, administrative/teaching principal, etc., thus facilitating generation of statistics using a variety of parameters.

Of the 38 principals who submitted consent forms and background questionnaires, 33 subsequently participated in the survey. Of those 33 principals, 27 submitted spreadsheets for all five weeks and, for various reasons, e.g. illness/Covid-related leave or reasons uncited, six did not submit spreadsheets for all weeks. All calculations based on the data were adjusted to reflect partial completion of the survey, as detailed in Table 16. For example, only 'valid weeks' (i.e. weeks for which a completed survey was submitted by the survey participant) were included when calculating the mean and median for various subgroups.

It is interesting to note that the highest rate of non-return of spreadsheet related to the final week of the survey: five principals did not submit a completed spreadsheet for that week.

**Table 16: Return rate of surveys by participants**

Week of survey	No. of spreadsheets returned
1	33
2	33
3	30
4	30
5	28

The research question and sub questions informed the approach to data analysis:

- How much time do primary school principals spend outside normal school hours on school-related work?
- When does this work outside normal school hours take place?
- What is the nature of the work carried out during this time?

After much careful study of the data to ensure familiarization with same, *Excel* formulae were devised to help extract meaningful information to respond to the research question/sub questions. To ensure accuracy, repeated cross-checks, in both manual and electronic form, were performed on the data generated.

Filters were used to extract data relating to various groups and subgroups, e.g. administrative principals/teaching principals. To eliminate the risk of identification of individuals in the final report, a decision was made not to extract data relating to small cohorts, e.g. special schools (n=1).

The categories of activities on which the survey was based contained a considerable degree of detail. This level of detail ensured that the participants could categorise with relative ease the various activities on which they spent time; this in turn helped to enhance the consistency of approach by reducing the risk of participants logging similar activities under different headings. While this degree of detail was appropriate and helpful at data entry stage, some activity categories were summarised more succinctly by reference to their category number and a brief descriptor when presenting findings in chart form. (Long captions and descriptors in pie-charts, for example, can result in either very small font size or a cluttered presentation.)

**Table 17: Activity categories as used in the survey**

Activity number	Activities as described in survey at data entry stage
1	Planning for leading teaching and learning (short term)
2	Planning curriculum/school development/SSE (medium to long term)
3	Engaging with parents and addressing related issues
4	Dealing with external bodies, e.g. Tusla, Inspectorate, NCSE, S.29 appeals
5	Recruitment, interviewing, appointment and induction of staff
6	Discipline/behaviour/pastoral care/supervision before and after school
7	School maintenance and technological issues, e.g. building projects, minor works, ICT, broadband
8	Administration - day-to-day management, e.g. sourcing substitutes, school admissions
9	Special educational needs
10	Child protection/safeguarding
11	Staff management, e.g. dealing with grievances, contact from staff
12	Preparation for and attendance at meetings including board of management, parents' association
13	Dealing with public health issues and health and safety matters
14	Attending activities, e.g. religious ceremonies, sports and games, other events
15	Thinking and/or reflection about school matters
16	CPD events
17	Other (please specify)

The open-ended category *Other* was intended to capture activities that were not covered by the 16 other categories. Participants were requested to specify the nature of the activities that they included under this category heading. At the data analysis stage, activities that were listed under this category were reviewed by the auditor to see if they aligned closely with any of the other 16 categories and would more appropriately be recategorised therein. Activities such as banking, for example, were recategorized under *Activity 8*. Activities that did not readily lend themselves to recategorisation, together with activities the nature of which was unspecified, remained in the *Other* category.

## 2.8 Ethical considerations

All principals who expressed an initial willingness to engage in the survey were invited to attend a webinar organised by INTO Head Office on Thursday, 7 October 2021. In the course of this webinar, David O’Sullivan, Assistant General Secretary, INTO, explained the purpose of the survey and detailed the procedures involved in same. Anne English, the independent auditor, was introduced to those present and she outlined her approach to the survey overall and detailed the steps that would be taken to ensure confidentiality of participants’ personal information. Assurances were given that all personal data submitted would be destroyed following the submission of the final report to the INTO and that great care would be taken to ensure that participants would not be identifiable in the survey report.

Principals’ queries that emerged in the course of the webinar were responded to in the question and answer session. Following on from this, names and contact details of the principals willing to participate in the survey were shared with the independent auditor. From this point onwards, all data relating to the survey was sent to a password-protected, dedicated email address to which only the independent auditor had access.

A completed consent form was received from all survey participants prior to their participation in the survey (*Appendix D*).

Personal data relating to the survey was saved by the independent auditor in password-protected form. All data extracted from the spreadsheets was anonymised prior to its entry in a master spreadsheet for data analysis purposes.

## 2.9 Independent auditor – positionality

The INTO commissioned the *Time Audit Survey*, recruited potential participants from its membership base, appointed the independent auditor and organised an information webinar for those considering taking part. The independent auditor was the sole point of contact for survey participants thereafter. The independent auditor has a range of professional experience in the primary school system and elsewhere, including a number of years in the role of primary school principal, but has neither worked in a teaching/leadership role in schools nor served on a school’s board of management since 2019. The INTO were mindful of the experience and independent status of this person when appointing her to the role.

## 2.10 Limitations

### 2.10.1 Overview

All studies face limitations. Limitations refer to weaknesses within a research project which may influence the outcomes of the research. Key limitations of this research and considerations around same, together with efforts made to mitigate them, as appropriate, are outlined here.

### **2.10.2 Sample**

When recruiting participants, efforts were made by the INTO to recruit a sample that would complement the specific requirements of the research in question. Table 16 indicates a high correlation between the characteristics of primary schools from which the principals in the sample were drawn and characteristics of primary schools in general within the Republic of Ireland. This, together with the geographical spread of the participants, drawn from 14 INTO districts, adds a robustness to the survey. However, the sample size (n=33) and the non-random, purposive nature of the sampling must be borne in mind when interpreting the data. It should not be assumed that the findings are generalisable. It could be argued that random selection of a larger number of participants would be of benefit with regard to generating more generalisable results; however, it would be difficult to ensure that such a sample would include representatives from such a diversity of schools or would generate a sample that would correlate relatively closely with statistics for primary schools overall.

A number of principals who had originally expressed interest in taking part in the survey and subsequently declined, cited pressures of work and lack of time as the reason for opting out. Additionally, a small number of principals who did not submit completed spreadsheets for the latter weeks had logged relatively high amounts of time for the earlier weeks: it may be the case that they opted out at that stage for workload reasons. It is reasonable to expect that the participation of those principals in the survey would have been reflected in higher time averages/medians in the findings overall.

### **2.10.3 Reporting by participants**

Participants self-reported the time spent on various activities during the survey period by means of completing a standardised spreadsheet and sending the completed spreadsheet to the independent auditor. Records submitted by participants were not independently verified. However, as each individual's weekly spreadsheet was entered into a master spreadsheet, the auditor checked for any apparent data entry errors, e.g. time that appeared excessive within the context of a given day/week and checked and confirmed same directly with the relevant participant, as appropriate. In the interest both of minimising data entry errors and for ease of data entry on the part of the participants, blocks of time spent on various activities were entered by participants in cells that were pre-formatted with drop-down menus configured to 15-minute time periods. Other than the first survey spreadsheet which spanned a two-week period, spreadsheet templates were circulated to the participants on a weekly basis and completed spreadsheets were returned to the auditor the following week or very soon thereafter. Regular contact with participants to follow up on any outstanding spreadsheets ensured that records were compiled and submitted very close to the data period in question, thus minimising the risk of errors associated with deterioration of recall over time.

### **2.10.4 Timing and duration of survey**

Data collected related to five weeks during the first term of the 2021/22 school year. While acknowledging the 'ebb and flow' associated with the demands on principals' time at various stages in the school year, it was felt that this would provide a snapshot of a particular point in time.

The five weeks were made up of the week of midterm (school closure) and the week prior to it, and the second, third and fourth weeks after midterm. Excluding the week immediately after midterm was a decision taken by the INTO with a view to minimising survey fatigue and associated drop-out from the survey. However, a small number of participants indicated that this week would normally be a very busy week for them and expressed disappointment that it was not included in the survey.

When interpreting and considering the findings it is important to note also that were the survey replicated at what are perceived to be the peak times of the year in terms of demands on principals' time outside normal school hours, e.g. June (school reports, recruitment, summer works scheme, graduation, etc.) results would likely differ in terms of the amount of time spent and the nature of activities carried out during that time.

## **Section 3: Findings**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The focus in this section of the report is on presenting the data clearly and from a number of angles so that the INTO will have access to relevant information that will inform discussion and planning. It is important to reiterate that it is not within the remit of this report to make recommendations to the INTO based on the findings of this survey; accordingly, such recommendations will not be a feature of this report.

In line with the research focus, the findings of the report are presented under two broad headings:

- Amount of time spent by principals outside school hours on school-related work.
- Nature of activities carried out during that time.

A total of 17 categories of activities were used in the survey that was circulated to participants. While this has made it possible to gather rich data, it nonetheless presents challenges with regard to representing that data in graphs and charts. For example, some charts can appear cluttered and difficult to read when a large number of values are represented. In some cases, therefore, tabulating the data renders the data more readily accessible to the reader. As accessibility of data is a priority here, where it is deemed appropriate both tables and charts are used.

In the course of the survey, participants were welcome to get in touch with the independent auditor (by email or by telephone) and share any additional feedback relating to the survey that they deemed to be relevant, e.g. if the school was closed on some of the days that were not marked as school closures on the spreadsheet templates that were circulated; if there was some relevant information that they felt might not have been adequately captured in the spreadsheets; or if there was anything else relating to the survey that they wished to highlight. Some comments made by the participants are drawn on in the narrative in this section.

Note: As indicated previously, while there was a very high response rate from participants overall, not all participants returned the spreadsheet for each week: calculations are based on the relevant number of spreadsheets returned for each individual week of the survey - a number which varied slightly from week to week.

### **3.2 Time spent on school-related work outside normal school hours**

#### **3.2.1 Introduction**

In this part of the report, findings are presented relating to the amount of time overall, outside normal school hours, that survey participants logged as having spent on school-related work. Findings relating to the sample as a whole are presented, together with findings that specifically relate to administrative principals and teaching principals.

#### **3.2.2 All principals**

One of the most commonly used statistical measures is the mean (the 'arithmetic mean' to be precise, but more often simply termed the 'average') [Central Statistics Office, n.d.].

Average amounts of time spent by principals outside normal school hours on school-related work are presented under a number of headings.

During the five weeks of the survey, the average amount of time, outside normal school hours, spent by each principal on a weekly basis on school-related work was 13 hours 38 minutes. As the survey period spans both four weeks during which the school was officially open and one week of school closure, it is important to probe the available data more fully.

The average amount of time, outside school hours, spent by each principal on a weekly basis on school-related work, across the four weeks during which schools were officially open was 15 hours 15 minutes; the average for the week of school closure was 7 hours 40 minutes. It is unsurprising that the figure for the week of school closure is substantially less than the figure for the weeks during which the school was open. See Table 18.

It is of note that 94% of all principals who responded indicated that they spent some time on school-related work during the midterm break. The amount of time logged varied widely, ranging from 30 minutes to 28 hours and 30 minutes, with no identifiable pattern across characteristics of participants (role, length of experience, school context, etc.).

**Table 18: Average weekly hours outside normal school hours – all survey participants**

	During 5-week survey period	During 4 weeks when schools were open	During the week of school closure
Average no. hours spent	13 hours 38 minutes	15 hours 15 minutes	7 hours 40 minutes

Hours, outside normal school hours, reported as having been spent on school-related work, during weeks when the school was officially open, can be further subdivided as follows:

- Weekdays: time before or after the school day, Monday to Thursday inclusive, and time before the commencement of the school day on Friday.
- Weekends: time after the normal school day on Friday and time on Saturday and Sunday.

**Table 19: Average weekday/weekend hours (outside normal school hours) - during the four weeks when schools were officially open – all survey participants**

	Weekdays	Weekends
Average weekly no. of hours (outside normal school hours) during the 4 weeks when schools were officially open	11 hours 38 minutes	15 hours 15 minutes

### 3.2.3 Administrative principals/teaching principals

The survey sample was made up of 17 administrative principals and 16 teaching principals. Teaching principals are those who carry out the role of principal in addition to having full-time teaching duties within the school. Bearing in mind this difference between the duties of administrative principals and teaching principals, respectively, and noting also that administrative principals and teaching principals make up the two largest defined groups within the survey sample, it is appropriate to specifically examine the findings relating to those groups.

Teaching principals are ordinarily granted a number of release days each year (days on which substitute cover is available to them to release them from their teaching duties and direct attention to other duties) pro rata with the size of their school (Department of Education, 2020). During the Covid-19 pandemic this provision was provisionally adjusted to allow all teaching principals one release day each week in respect of the 2020/21 school year; this arrangement was subsequently extended to include the 2021/22 school year (Department of Education, 2021).

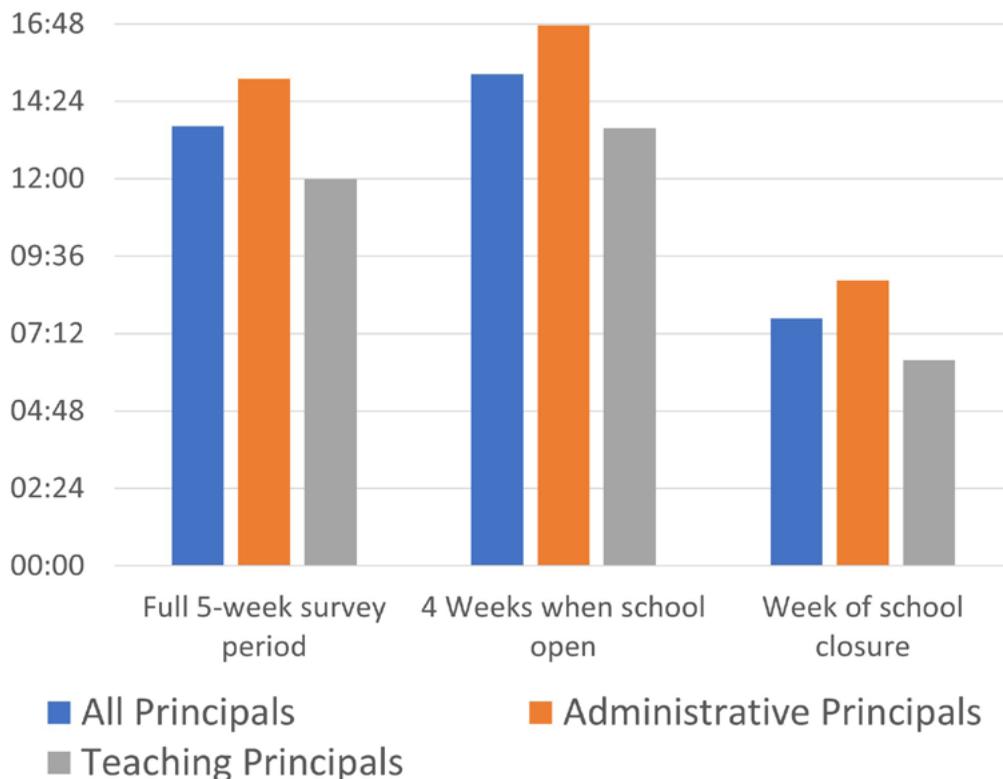
The following table shows the average amount of time spent by administrative principals and teaching principals, respectively, on school-related work during the four weeks when schools were officially open as compared with the week of official school closure (Halloween midterm break). It is significant that this survey was carried out during a time when the allocation of release hours to teaching principals was enhanced on a temporary basis. It is reasonable to speculate that the figures for time spent by teaching principals outside school hours on school-related work would have been higher were those release days not available to them or were fewer release days available.

**Table 20: Average weekly hours (outside normal school hours) – administrative principals/teaching principals**

Principal role	During the 4 weeks when schools were officially open	During the week of school closure
Administrative	16 hours 45 minutes	8 hours 51 minutes
Teaching	13 hours 34 minutes	6 hours 23 minutes

The following chart gives a broad overview of average times logged outside normal school hours by all principals/administrative principals/teaching principals.

**Figure 3: Average weekly hours – all/administrative/teaching principals**



While the mean (average) presented in Figure 3 under various headings gives us interesting information about the cohort of principals as a whole who participated in this survey, it does not give us the full picture in statistical terms. It is common for there to be outliers in any data set (<https://towardsdatascience.com>). Outliers may be explained as values that are much smaller or much larger than most of the other values in a set of data. These outliers can skew the average of

the data set. For example, the largest amount of time spent in an individual week outside normal school hours and on school-related work by a principal during the entire survey period was in excess of 39 hours; the smallest amount, which was during the week of school closure, was 0 hours. For this reason, when we wish to describe the central tendency of the group, the median is the most appropriate statistical measure. The Central Statistics Office (CSO) explains in simple terms how the median is found: "The median is found by ordering the group characteristics in ascending value and selecting the middle one." (Central Statistics Office, n.d., "Statistics Section", Means V Median Information Note).

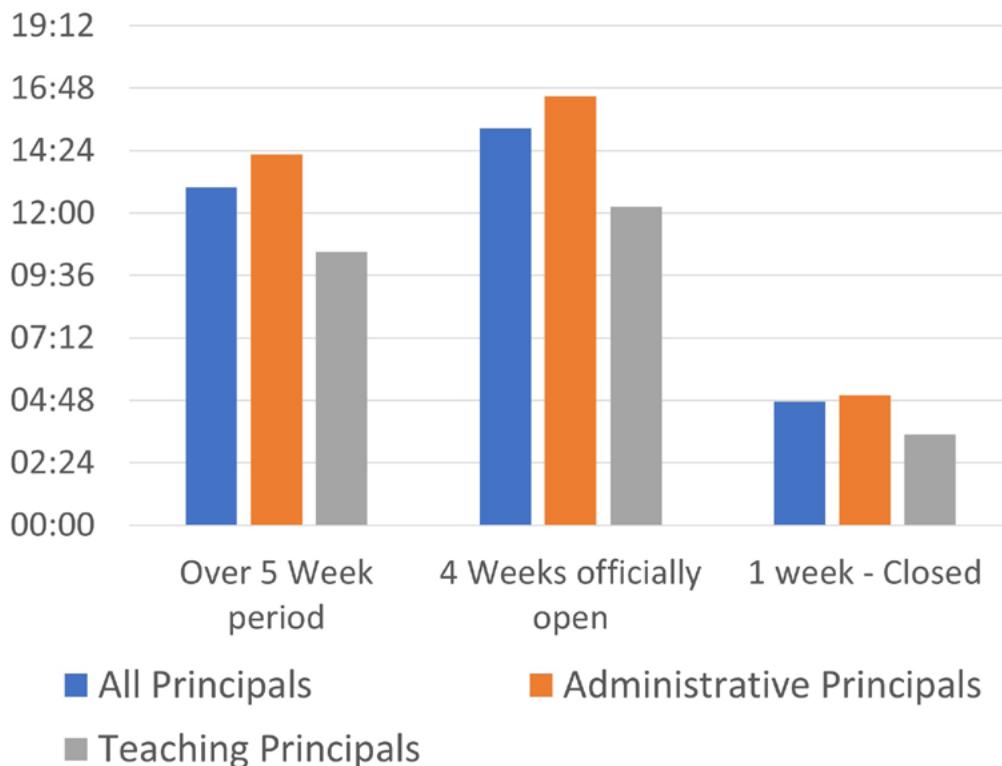
The CSO further advises that the median "is a better measure of the central tendency of the group as it is not skewed by exceptionally high or low characteristic values." With this in mind, median times are presented under a number of headings in the following table.

**Table 21: Median weekly hours (outside normal school hours) – all/administrative/teaching principals**

Time period	All principals	Administrative	Teaching
5 weeks of survey period	13 hours	14 hours 15 minutes	10 hours 30 minutes
4 weeks when schools were officially open	15 hours 15 minutes	16 hours 30 minutes	12 hours 15 minutes
1 week of school closure	4 hours 45 minutes	5 hours	3 hours 30 minutes

This data is presented in chart form in Figure 4.

**Figure 4: Median weekly hours – all/administrative/teaching principals**



### 3.2.4 Principals spending relatively high amounts of time (outside school hours) on school-related work

A significant number (n=11) of those who participated in the survey reported that they spent 75 hours or more in total during the five-week survey period, outside normal school hours, on school-related work. Average weekly hours reported by the individuals in this group ranged from 15 hours 15 minutes to 28 hours 24 minutes. This cohort makes up one third of the entire sample. In view of the large size of this cohort and taking into account the concerns around principal workload that led to this survey being conducted, the data for this group merits closer examination. Note: this cohort may have been greater in size had all participants completed the survey.

As is evident from the following table, this cohort is made up of eight administrative principals and three teaching principals. Of the eleven schools, four have DEIS (disadvantaged) status; seven do not. There is no fixed pattern to the length of experience, specifically in the role of principal, that these principals have.

**Table 22: Principals who each logged a weekly average of in excess of 15 hours across the five weeks of the survey**

	No. of principals
<b>Principal role</b>	
Administrative	8
Teaching	3
<b>No. of years' experience as principal</b>	
<5	2
6-10	4
11-20	3
21-30	1
31+	1
<b>School status</b>	
DEIS	4
Non-DEIS	7

Most of the eleven principals in this cohort logged relatively high amounts of time for the week of school closure; times logged ranged from 5 hours 30 minutes to 28 hours 30 minutes, with five principals logging 16 hours 45 minutes or more during that week.

Of the eleven principals, it is notable that five logged between 100 and 142 hours across the five weeks of the survey. This figure includes both administrative principals and teaching principals. (Bearing in mind the importance of participant anonymity, it is not appropriate to analyse the make-up of this group further.) This is a significant amount of time in addition to the regular school day, especially when one takes into account that the five weeks logged included a week of school closure during which there was a bank holiday (midterm break).

Since the sample was made up of 17 administrative principals and 16 teaching principals, it is of note that eight of the 11 principals in this groups are administrative principals - a disproportionately high figure. This may be due to larger numbers of staff and pupils in their schools and the associated workload. However, it is important to note that teaching principals have additional teaching duties in the course of the normal school day. While they have access to a number of release days to allow them to direct their attention to non-teaching duties, their primary focus during the school day is teaching.

While the cohort of principals who each logged a weekly average of in excess of 15 hours across the five weeks of the survey relates to one third of the entire group, many of the other principals logged particularly high times for individual weeks. We can see from the following table that 18 principals reported spending 20 hours or more in a week, outside school hours, on school-related work, at least once during the survey period.

**Table 23: No. of weeks during which 20 hours or more were logged**

Logging 20 or more hours a week	No. of principals
1 week	8
2 weeks	5
3 weeks	3
4 weeks	2

### **3.2.5 Principals who each logged a weekly average of less than 6 hours 30 minutes across the five weeks of the survey**

A small number of principals logged relatively smaller amounts of time outside normal school hours in the course of the survey. In the course of the five weeks, 21% of the participants (n= 7) logged, on average, less than 6 hours 30 minutes each week.

### **3.2.6 Feedback from survey participants**

Regular email contact was maintained with the survey participants throughout the survey period; this was supplemented with telephone communication as required. In the course of this communication, some principals shared further details regarding the time, outside normal school hours, that they spent on school-related work during the survey period and their perceptions of the challenges of their role. While this research is quantitative in nature, a brief perusal of some extracts from this feedback is nonetheless interesting and worthy of consideration.

One principal who had logged in excess of 16 hours in the week prior to midterm shared the following comment:

I did find that in doing the work I pushed a lot into the final few days before the break that would normally have evolved into the following week, but I was fully focused on shutting the door on it all Friday evening, which thankfully worked.

This might lead one to believe that such an amount of time was above and beyond norm for that principal. However, the principal in question logged in excess of 20 hours in the second week after midterm and 10 and 12 hours, respectively, in the two weeks thereafter. This, together with the following comment (from another principal), would suggest that principals may not always be aware of how much time they are spending, outside normal school hours, on school-related work. The following comment came from a principal who logged, on average, in excess of 15 hours for each of the four weeks during which the school was open, together with close to nine hours for the week of school closure:

I must say it was a frightening process when I saw how much of my life outside of school is being swallowed up by school and the level of expectation/demand which is put on principals.

While the survey sought to capture all time outside normal school hours, there may be 'unseen time' that went unrecorded but that merits consideration, as pointed out in the following comment:

One thing I was very conscious of is that with Covid protocols, many principals like myself did not go into staffrooms and so we worked through our lunchbreaks sitting at our desks.

I didn't factor this in, but I do believe that working through the breaks has become the norm for many of my peers and myself.

It is of note that the average weekly time logged by this principal, for the four weeks during which schools were officially open, was almost 19 hours.

A number of principals indicated their belief that their current workload is unreasonable and unsustainable and that it is having a negative impact on their health and wellbeing, as reflected in the following selection of comments (from various principals):

It is genuinely a bit nuts at the moment - I reckon a lot of us in the office jobs will burn out soon - I know I am struggling to keep up.

I can't begin to quantify the amount of disturbed sleep I have been experiencing, particularly in recent times. I believe that my job is borderline undoable and if it had been at this level when I started, I wouldn't be here today. I am looking down the barrel of retirement in less than three years and while I love much of the job, I am just hanging on at this stage.

... this is the most frustrated I have been for a long time with the system. I do have health issues...caused by the job, namely hypertension. This might be an interesting side issue to be investigated further.

... Covid notwithstanding the admin/leadership aspect has grown exponentially. I have been a principal since September 2005, so 16/17 years' experience. As bad as it has been when I was just short of gaining admin status, this is the worst I have ever seen it.

### 3.3 School-related work on which time (outside normal school hours) was spent by the survey participants

#### 3.3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this survey is to establish not just the amount of time that principals are spending outside normal school hours on school-related work but also to gather information about the nature of activities that are being carried out during that time. Findings relating to the activities on which this time is spent are presented in this section under a number of headings.

It is important at this point to reiterate that the times recorded for the various activities across a variety of contexts relate solely to time outside normal school hours. Collation of data on time spent on activities during normal school hours is not within the remit of this report and, accordingly, an average weekly time of, e.g. 53 minutes, for a given activity does not equate with the average total time spent on that activity in the course of a week.

#### 3.3.2 Weeks when schools were officially open – all principals

The following table ranks the various activities in order of the average weekly time, outside normal school hours, spent by all principals on same across the four weeks of the survey period during which schools were officially open. For example, *Activity 8: Administration - day-to-day management, e.g. sourcing substitutes, school admissions* is the activity on which most time was spent, on average, by each participant during those weeks and *Activity 14: Attending activities, etc.* is the activity on which least time was spent.

**Table 24: Ranking of activities by average weekly time spent on same, outside normal school hours, by survey participants in the four weeks of the survey period during which schools were officially open**

Ranking	Activity number	Activity description	Average number of hours and minutes
1	8	Administration - day-to-day management, e.g. sourcing substitutes, school admissions	2:44
2	1	Planning for leading teaching and learning (short term)	1:39
3	15	Thinking and/or reflection about school matters	1:35
4	7	School maintenance and technological issues, e.g. building projects, minor works, ICT, broadband	1:09
5	12	Preparation for and attendance at meetings including board of management, parents' association	1:08
6	6	Discipline/behaviour/pastoral care/supervision before and after school	1:04
7	13	Dealing with public health issues and health and safety matters	1:03
8	3	Engaging with parents and addressing related issues	0:53
9	5	Recruitment, interviewing, appointment and induction of staff	0:43
10	16	CPD events	0:43
11	11	Staff management, e.g. dealing with grievances, contact from staff	0:42
12	2	Planning curriculum/school development/SSE (medium to long term)	0:41
13	9	Special educational needs	0:33
14	4	Dealing with external bodies, e.g. Tusla, Inspectorate, NCSE, S.29 appeals	0:22
15	17	Other (please specify)	0:20
16	10	Child protection/safeguarding	0:15
17	14	Attending activities, e.g. religious ceremonies, sports and games, other events	0:13

It is worth bearing in mind that this survey was conducted during October/November 2021. It is likely that activities such as *Activity 5: Recruitment, etc.* and *Activity 14: Attending activities*, ranking ninth and seventeenth respectively, would feature more prominently were the survey to be conducted in the month of June, for example. Additionally, on foot of public health measures associated with the Covid-19 pandemic, social distancing, restrictions on large gatherings, etc., various school and community-based activities that would typically be associated with the school year were seriously curtailed at that time; those restrictions may also have had an impact on the ranking of *Activity 14*.

It is interesting to note that one administrative principal shared the following comment at the end of the survey period: "Covid is taking up all my time in school at the moment." Although *Activity 13: Dealing with public health issues and health and safety matters* is ranked seventh in Table 25, it is important to note that this relates purely to time spent on same outside school hours. It is also worthwhile to consider how urgent matters such as health and safety which require immediate attention in the course of the school day can mean that other important activities get shelved, temporarily, at least.

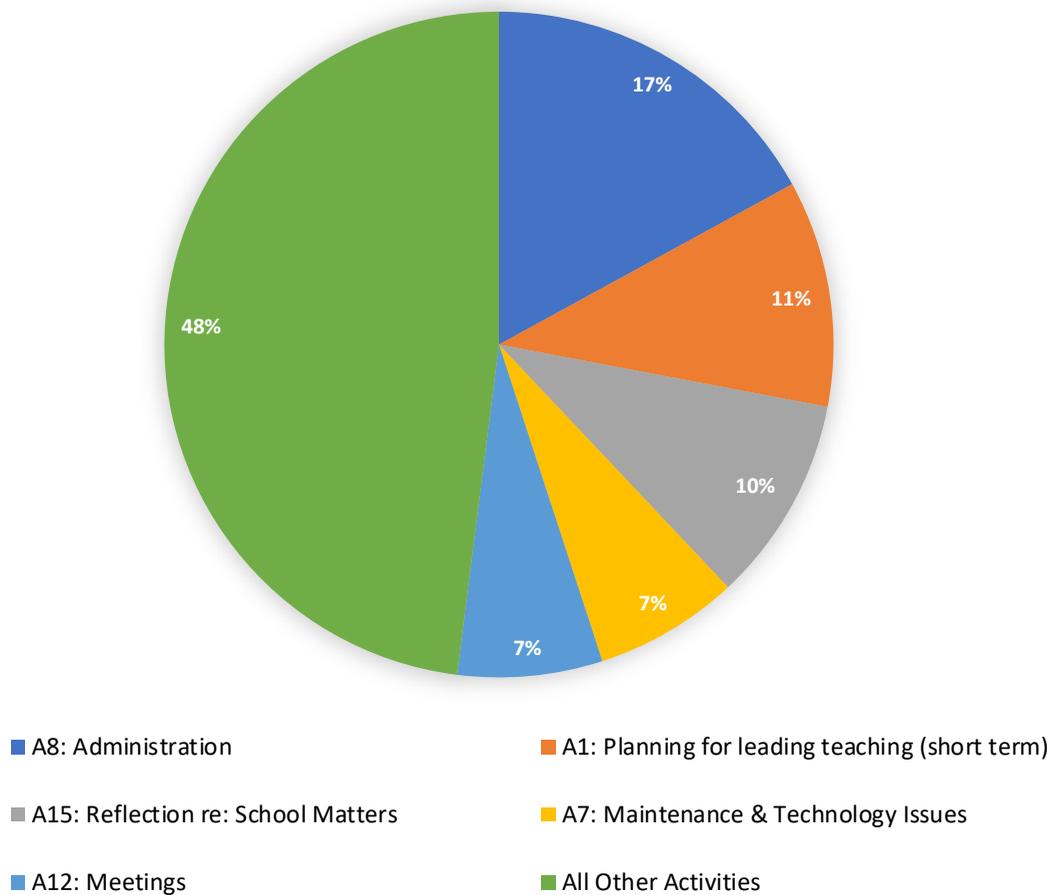
We see that *Activity 8: Administration* was ranked highest of all activities in terms of the average time spent on same during the weeks when the school was officially open. One could speculate on the reasons for this. Perhaps this is work that required long periods of undivided attention and cannot be addressed in the context of unplanned interruptions during the school day; perhaps it indicates a lack of appropriately qualified and capable administrative staff and related resources to carry out this work; or perhaps it relates to the urgent nature of some administrative work,

e.g. meeting deadlines for grant applications and various schemes, meaning it cannot be put off until time becomes available during normal school hours. There may be a variety of other reasons why some administrative tasks may be very difficult to address in the course of the school day, irrespective of whether or not the principal has teaching duties. It may be difficult to source substitute teachers or SNA substitutes during normal school hours as potential substitutes may not be contactable at that time. Additionally, the principal may be notified of the expected absence of a staff member after the school has closed for the day and, by definition, deferring sourcing a substitute until the following working day would result in staffing issues.

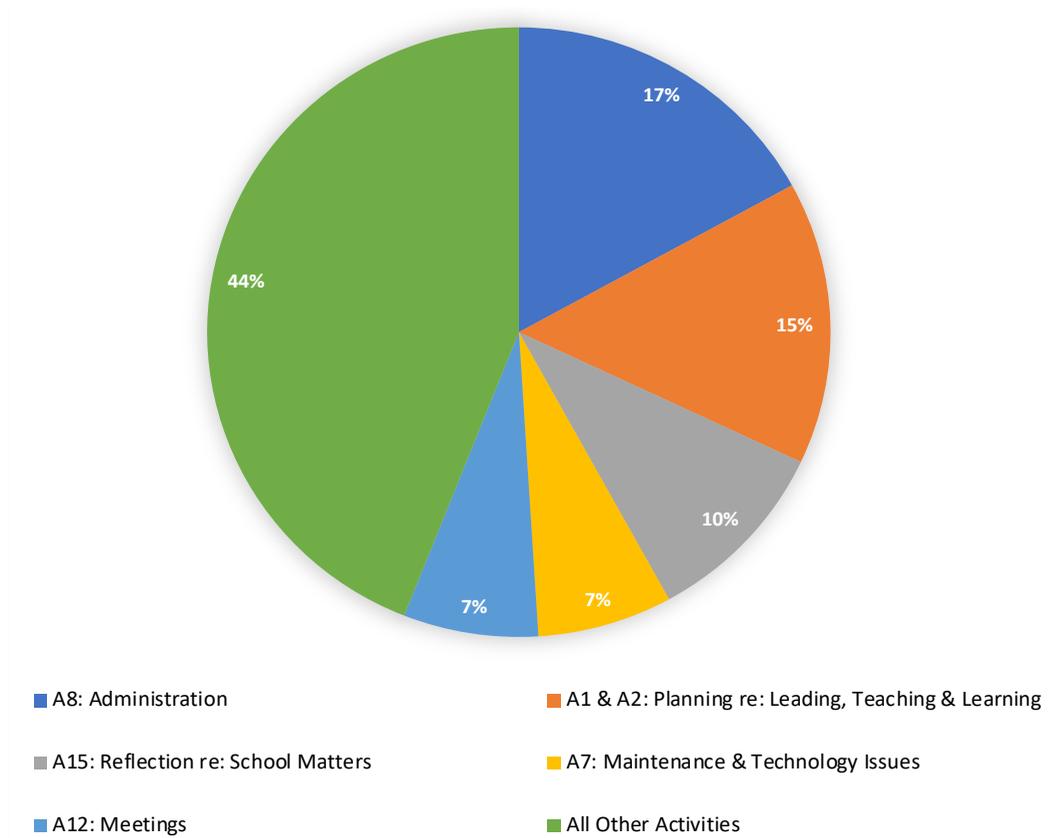
*Activity 1: Planning for leading teaching and learning (short term)* and *Activity 2: Planning curriculum/school development/SSE (medium to long term)* are ranked second and twelfth respectively. These activities could be seen as logically fitting together under an overall heading such as *Leading teaching and learning in the school*. However, the average weekly time spent on those two activities combined, outside school hours for the four weeks during which the school was open, is 2 hours 20 minutes. (Note: As highlighted in Section 2, all calculations are adjusted to reflect the valid weeks, i.e. the number of completed spreadsheets returned for the period in question.) Even when those activities are combined in this way, they are ranked second to *Activity 8: Administration*. This is illustrated in the two pie-charts that follow.

**Note:** In order for the pie-charts to be less cluttered, abbreviations were used for the various categories of activity. For full descriptions of each activity, see Table 18.

**Figure 5: Distribution of time spent on activities when schools officially open – all principals**



**Figure 6: Distribution of time spent on activities when schools officially open (Activities 1 and 2 combined here) – all principals**



### 3.3.3 Week of school closure – all principals

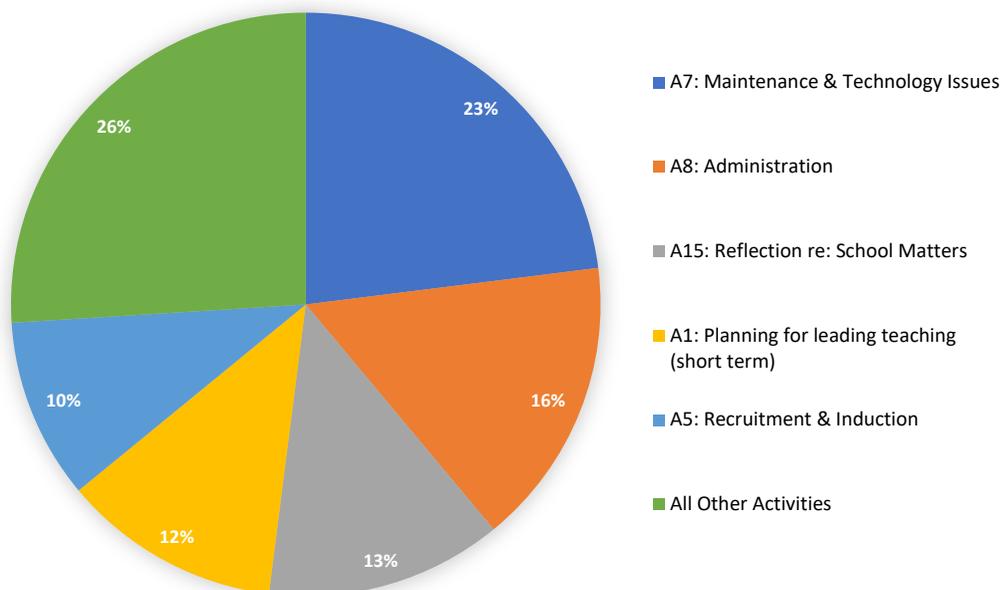
The following table ranks the various activities according to the average time each principal spent on same during the week of school closure, i.e. the midterm break. The ranking of a number of activities is lowered substantially relative to the four weeks during which schools were officially open, e.g. *Activity 6: Discipline/behaviour/pastoral care/supervision before and after school* and *Activity 3: Engaging with parents and addressing related issues*. Other activities move up considerably in the rankings, e.g. *Activity 7: Maintenance/technology*. Such changes may be explained by the absence of staff and pupils from the school site. *Activity 7: Maintenance/technology* is the activity on which most time, on average, was spent during this week. It would be interesting to ascertain the nature of maintenance and technology-related work that was carried out during this time and to establish if some of this could be carried out by other persons, e.g. a school caretaker/persons authorised by the BOM.

**Table 25: Ranking of activities by average weekly time spent on same by survey participants during the week of school closure**

Ranking	Activity number	Activity description	Average number of hours and minutes
1	7	School maintenance and technological issues, e.g. building projects, minor works, ICT, broadband	1:12
2	8	Administration - day-to-day management, e.g. sourcing substitutes, school admissions	0:51
3	15	Thinking and/or reflection about school matters	0:42
4	1	Planning for leading teaching and learning (short term)	0:37
5	5	Recruitment, interviewing, appointment and induction of staff	0:33
6	2	Planning curriculum/school development/SSE (medium to long term)	0:21
7	17	Other (please specify)	0:10
8	4	Dealing with external bodies, e.g. Tusla, Inspectorate, NCSE, S.29 appeals	0:09
9	16	CPD events	0:08
10	11	Staff management, e.g. dealing with grievances, contact from staff	0:07
11	9	Special educational needs	0:05
12	13	Dealing with public health issues and health and safety matters	0:05
13	12	Preparation for and attendance at meetings including board of management, parents' association	0:05
14	14	Attending activities, e.g. religious ceremonies, sports and games, other events	0:03
15	3	Engaging with parents and addressing related issues	0:03
16	10	Child protection/safeguarding	0:01
17	6	Discipline/behaviour/pastoral care/supervision before and after school	0:00

The following pie-chart gives an overview of the relative amounts of time that principals spent on activities during the midterm break. The time spent on each of the five highest ranking activities is compared with the cumulative total for all other activities.

**Figure 7: Distribution of time spent on activities during week of school closure – all principals**



### 3.3.4 Weekdays, weekends and school closures compared

The following table enables us to compare the relative ranking of activities, carried out by all principals in the survey sample, across weekdays (weeks during which schools were officially open), weekends (of weeks during which schools were officially open) and school closures. Again, this is based on average figures for each activity.

**Table 26: Ranking of activities by average time spent on same by survey participants - weekdays/weekends (in the four weeks when schools were officially open)/school closure**

Ranking	Activities on weekdays (weeks during which schools were officially open)	Activities during weekends (weeks during which schools were officially open)	Activities during school closure
1	8: Administration - day-to-day management, e.g. sourcing substitutes, school admissions	8: Administration - day-to-day management, e.g. sourcing substitutes, school admissions	7: School maintenance and technological issues, e.g. building projects, minor works, ICT, broadband
2	1: Planning for leading teaching and learning (short term)	15: Thinking and/or reflection about school matters	8: Administration - day-to-day management, e.g. sourcing substitutes, school admissions
3	12: Preparation for and attendance at meetings including board of management, parents' association	13: Dealing with public health issues and health and safety matters.	15: Thinking and/or reflection about school matters
4	6: Discipline/behaviour/pastoral care/supervision before and after school	1: Planning for leading teaching and learning (short term)	1: Planning for leading teaching and learning (short term)
5	15: Thinking and/or reflection about school matters	7: School maintenance and technological issues, e.g. building projects, minor works, ICT, broadband	5: Recruitment, interviewing, appointment and induction of staff
6	7: School maintenance and technological issues, e.g. building projects, minor works, ICT, broadband	2: Planning curriculum/school development/SSE (medium to long term)	2: Planning curriculum/school development/SSE (medium to long term)
7	3: Engaging with parents and addressing related issues	11: Staff management, e.g. dealing with grievances, contact from staff	17: Other (please specify)
8	16: CPD events	5: Recruitment, interviewing, appointment and induction of staff	4: Dealing with external bodies, e.g. Tusla, Inspectorate, NCSE, S.29 appeals
9	13: Dealing with public health issues and health and safety matters	3: Engaging with parents and addressing related issues	16: CPD events
10	5: Recruitment, interviewing, appointment and induction of staff	12: Preparation for and attendance at meetings including board of management, parents' association	11: Staff management, e.g. dealing with grievances, contact from staff
11	11: Staff management, e.g. dealing with grievances, contact from staff	16: CPD events	9: Special educational needs

Ranking	Activities on weekdays (weeks during which schools were officially open)	Activities during weekends (weeks during which schools were officially open)	Activities during school closure
12	2: Planning curriculum/school development/SSE (medium to long term)	9: Special educational needs	13: Dealing with public health issues and health and safety matters
13	9: Special educational needs	14: Attending activities, e.g. religious ceremonies, sports and games, other events	12: Preparation for and attendance at meetings including board of management, parents' association
14	4: Dealing with external bodies, e.g. Tusla, Inspectorate, NCSE, S.29 appeals	17: Other (please specify)	14: Attending activities, e.g. religious ceremonies, sports and games, other events
15	17: Other (please specify)	4: Dealing with external bodies, e.g. Tusla, Inspectorate, NCSE, S.29 appeals	3: Engaging with parents and addressing related issues
16	10: Child protection/safeguarding	6: Discipline/behaviour/pastoral care/supervision before and after school	10: Child protection/safeguarding
17	14: Attending activities, e.g. religious ceremonies, sports and games, other events	10: Child protection/safeguarding	6: Discipline/behaviour/pastoral care/supervision before and after school

We see that *Activity 8: Administration* is one of the two highest ranked activities under all three headings – weekdays, weekends and school closure. *Activity 7: Maintenance and technology-related matters* is highest ranked during the period of school closure. *Activity 1: Planning for leading teaching and learning (short term)* features prominently under all three headings, ranking second, fourth, and fourth respectively. *Activity 13: Dealing with public health issues and health and safety matters* is the third highest ranked activity during weekends; one could reasonably speculate that this relates to the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on schools.

### 3.3.5 Administrative principals/teaching principals

Drawing on the information presented in the following table, it is possible to compare the activities on which administrative principals (as a group) and teaching principals (as a group) spent the most/least time outside of school hours during the survey period as a whole.

**Table 27: Ranking of activities by average time spent on same by administrative principals/teaching principals - across all five weeks of the survey period**

Ranking	Administrative principal	Teaching principal
1	8: Administration - day-to-day management, e.g. sourcing substitutes, school admissions	1: Planning for leading teaching and learning (short term)
2	7: School maintenance and technological issues, e.g. building projects, minor works, ICT, broadband	8: Administration - day-to-day management, e.g. sourcing substitutes, school admissions
3	15: Thinking and/or reflection about school matters	15: Thinking and/or reflection about school matters
4	13: Dealing with public health issues and health and safety matters	12: Preparation for and attendance at meetings including board of management, parents' association
5	6: Discipline/behaviour/pastoral care/supervision before and after school	2: Planning curriculum/school development/SSE (medium to long term)

Ranking	Administrative principal	Teaching principal
6	12: Preparation for and attendance at meetings including board of management, parents' association	5: Recruitment, interviewing, appointment and induction of staff
7	11: Staff management, e.g. dealing with grievances, contact from staff	6: Discipline/behaviour/pastoral care/supervision before and after school
8	3: Engaging with parents and addressing related issues	7: School maintenance and technological issues, e.g. building projects, minor works, ICT, broadband
9	1: Planning for leading teaching and learning (short term)	3: Engaging with parents and addressing related issues
10	16: CPD events	13: Dealing with public health issues and health and safety matters
11	5: Recruitment, interviewing, appointment and induction of staff	9: Special educational needs
12	2: Planning curriculum/school development/SSE (medium to long term)	16: CPD events
13	4: Dealing with external bodies, e.g. Tusla, Inspectorate, NCSE, S.29 appeals	11: Staff management, e.g. dealing with grievances, contact from staff
14	17: Other (please specify)	4: Dealing with external bodies, e.g. Tusla, Inspectorate, NCSE, S.29 appeals
15	9: Special educational needs	14: Attending activities, e.g. religious ceremonies, sports and games, other events
16	10: Child protection/safeguarding	17: Other (please specify)
17	14: Attending activities, e.g. religious ceremonies, sports and games, other events	10: Child protection/safeguarding

Administration is one of the two activities on which most time was spent by both administrative principals and teaching principals during the five weeks of the survey.

Teaching principals spent a larger proportion of their time on matters related to curriculum and leading teaching and learning. *Activity 1: Leading teaching and learning* is the activity on which most time is reported as being spent by teaching principals; this activity is ranked ninth for administrative principals. *Activity 2: Planning curriculum/school development/SSE (medium to long term)* is also ranked much higher for teaching principals - it is ranked fifth for teaching principals and twelfth for administrative principals. This may be linked to the teaching workload of teaching principals.

*Activity 15: Thinking and/or reflection about school matters* is the third highest ranked activity overall for both groups, indicating that reflecting on issues related to the role consumes a relatively high proportion of the time logged by all.

*Activity 7: School maintenance and technological issues* ranked second overall for administrative principals whereas this activity is ranked eighth overall for teaching principals. Perhaps this reflects issues relating to the larger school size associated with the role of administrative principal.

### 3.3.6 Small schools

Small schools have been the subject of much discussion in the Republic of Ireland in recent years; their characteristics and needs have prompted much reflection and debate by stakeholders. A two-year action plan aimed at supporting small rural schools was launched by the Minister for Education in July 2022. In the press release for this action plan small schools are defined as follows:

Small schools are defined for statistical purposes as schools with four mainstream teachers or fewer. Schools meeting this definition constitute 44% of all primary schools – around 1,360 individual schools – and account for 14.2 per cent of all students (Department of Education, 2021b).

Of the 33 principals who participated in this survey, six were working in schools of 1-4 teachers, i.e. 15% of the entire sample. In light of the aforementioned focus on small schools, it is appropriate to present data relating specifically to survey participants from those schools.

**Table 28: Ranking of activities by average amount of time (outside normal school hours) spent on same across the five weeks of the survey: data from principals of 1-4 teacher schools compared with data re all schools**

Ranking	1-4 teacher schools	All schools
1	1: Planning for leading teaching and learning (short term)	8: Administration - day-to-day management, e.g. sourcing substitutes, school admissions
2	8: Administration - day-to-day management, e.g. sourcing substitutes, school admissions	1: Planning for leading teaching and learning (short term)
3	2: Planning curriculum/school development/SSE (medium to long term)	15: Thinking and/or reflection about school matters
4	12: Preparation for and attendance at meetings including board of management, parents' association	7: School maintenance and technological issues, e.g. building projects, minor works, ICT, broadband
5	15: Thinking and/or reflection about school matters	12: Preparation for and attendance at meetings including board of management, parents' association
6	5: Recruitment, interviewing, appointment and induction of staff	13: Dealing with public health issues and health and safety matters
7	7: School maintenance and technological issues, e.g. building projects, minor works, ICT, broadband	6: Discipline/behaviour/pastoral care/supervision before and after school
8	16: CPD events	3: Engaging with parents and addressing related issues
9	4: Dealing with external bodies, e.g. Tusla, Inspectorate, NCSE, S.29 appeals	5: Recruitment, interviewing, appointment and induction of staff
10	6: Discipline/behaviour/pastoral care/supervision before and after school	2: Planning curriculum/school development/SSE (medium to long term)
11	9: Special educational needs	16: CPD events
12	3: Engaging with parents and addressing related issues	11: Staff management, e.g. dealing with grievances, contact from staff
13	14: Attending activities, e.g. religious ceremonies, sports and games, other events	9: Special educational needs
14	13: Dealing with public health issues and health and safety matters	4: Dealing with external bodies, e.g. Tusla, Inspectorate, NCSE, S.29 appeals
15	11: Staff management, e.g. dealing with grievances, contact from staff	17: Other (please specify)
16	10: Child protection/safeguarding	10: Child protection/safeguarding
17	17: Other (please specify)	14: Attending activities, e.g. religious ceremonies, sports and games, other events

One could speculate on the reasons for the commonalities and differences across the various rankings of activities. For example, the higher ranking of *Activity 2: Planning curriculum/school development/SSE (medium to long term)* for principals of 1-4 teacher schools relative to the sample as a whole may reflect the direct teaching component of the role of principal in a small school. A higher ranking of *Activity 3: Engaging with parents and addressing related issues* for all participants in the sample relative to the ranking of this activity for principals of 1-4 teacher schools may reflect the larger numbers of parents in larger schools. Similarly, a higher number of health and safety-related issues that may perhaps warrant a principal's direct attention in larger schools may be the reason for the substantially higher ranking of *Activity 13* across all schools (ranked sixth) relative to 1-4 teacher schools (ranked fourteenth). However, such musings are speculative and do not yield definitive answers.

### 3.3.7 Irish medium schools

**Table 29: Ranking of activities by average time spent on same (outside normal school hours) by principals of schools in which Irish is the medium of instruction – across all five weeks of the survey period**

Ranking	Irish medium schools	All schools
1	8: Administration - day-to-day management, e.g. sourcing substitutes, school admissions	8: Administration - day-to-day management, e.g. sourcing substitutes, school admissions
2	13: Dealing with public health issues and health and safety matters	1: Planning for leading teaching and learning (short term)
3	7: School maintenance and technological issues, e.g. building projects, minor works, ICT, broadband	15: Thinking and/or reflection about school matters
4	5: Recruitment, interviewing, appointment and induction of staff	7: School maintenance and technological issues, e.g. building projects, minor works, ICT, broadband
5	12: Preparation for and attendance at meetings including board of management, parents' association	12: Preparation for and attendance at meetings including board of management, parents' association
6	11: Staff management, e.g. dealing with grievances, contact from staff	13: Dealing with public health issues and health and safety matters
7	6: Discipline/behaviour/pastoral care/supervision before and after school	6: Discipline/behaviour/pastoral care/supervision before and after school
8	1: Planning for leading teaching and learning (short term)	3: Engaging with parents and addressing related issues
9	15: Thinking and/or reflection about school matters	5: Recruitment, interviewing, appointment and induction of staff
10	9: Special educational needs	2: Planning curriculum/school development/SSE (medium to long term)
11	16: CPD events	16: CPD events
12	3: Engaging with parents and addressing related issues	11: Staff management, e.g. dealing with grievances, contact from staff
13	2: Planning curriculum/school development/SSE (medium to long term)	9: Special educational needs
14	14: Attending activities, e.g. religious ceremonies, sports and games, other events	4: Dealing with external bodies, e.g. Tusla, Inspectorate, NCSE, S.29 appeals
15	10: Child protection/safeguarding	17: Other (please specify)
16	17: Other (please specify)	10: Child protection/safeguarding
17	4: Dealing with external bodies, e.g. Tusla, Inspectorate, NCSE, S.29 appeals	14: Attending activities, e.g. religious ceremonies, sports and games, other events

It is interesting to note that *Activity 8: Administration* is the highest ranking again here. Some variations are noted, e.g. *Activity 13: Dealing with public health issues and health and safety matters* is ranked second for schools in which Irish is the medium of instruction, as opposed to sixth for all schools. However, bearing in mind the unpredictable nature of matters related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the small number of schools from which this group is drawn, this is not statistically significant.

### **3.3.8 Principals who each logged a weekly average of in excess of 15 hours across the five weeks of the survey**

As mentioned previously, a significant number (n=11) of those who participated in the survey reported that they spent relatively high numbers of hours during the five-week survey period, outside normal school hours, on school-related work. Average weekly hours reported by the individuals in this group ranged from 15 hours 15 minutes to 28 hours 24 minutes. This cohort makes up one third of the entire sample. In view of the large size of this cohort and taking into account the concerns around principal workload that led to this survey being conducted, the data for this group is probed more fully here. The two tables that follow present the data relating to (a) the four weeks during which schools were officially open and (b) the week of school closure (midterm).

**Table 30: Principals who each logged a weekly average of in excess of 15 hours across the five weeks of the survey – ranking of activities by average amount of time spent on same (outside normal school hours) across the four weeks during which schools were open**

Ranking	Activity	Average no. of hours and minutes per week
1	8: Administration - day-to-day management, e.g. sourcing substitutes, school admissions	3:20
2	15: Thinking and/or reflection about school matters	2:23
3	6: Discipline/behaviour/pastoral care/supervision before and after school	1:47
4	1: Planning for leading teaching and learning (short term)	1:37
5	7: School maintenance and technological issues, e.g. building projects, minor works, ICT, broadband	1:26
6	12: Preparation for and attendance at meetings including board of management, parents' association	1:24
7	16: CPD events	1:23
8	13: Dealing with public health issues and health and safety matters	1:21
9	3: Engaging with parents and addressing related issues	1:20
10	11: Staff management, e.g. dealing with grievances, contact from staff	0:55
11	2: Planning curriculum/school development/SSE (medium to long term)	0:51
12	5: Recruitment, interviewing, appointment and induction of staff	0:42
13	9: Special educational needs	0:38
14	4: Dealing with external bodies, e.g. Tusla, Inspectorate, NCSE, S.29 appeals	0:36
15	10: Child protection/safeguarding	0:29
16	17: Other (please specify)	0:26
17	14: Attending activities, e.g. religious ceremonies, sports and games, other events	0:21

**Table 31: Principals who each logged a weekly average of in excess of 15 hours across the five weeks of the survey - ranking of activities by average amount of time spent on same (outside normal school hours) during week of school closure**

Ranking	Activity	Average no. of hours and minutes per week
1	7: School maintenance and technological issues, e.g. building projects, minor works, ICT, broadband	2:39
2	15: Thinking and/or reflection about school matters	1:23
3	8: Administration - day-to-day management, e.g. sourcing substitutes, school admissions	1:21
4	1: Planning for leading teaching and learning (short term)	0:57
5	2: Planning curriculum/school development/SSE (medium to long term)	0:49
6	17: Other (please specify)	0:31
7	5: Recruitment, interviewing, appointment and induction of staff	0:30
8	13: Dealing with public health issues and health and safety matters	0:16
9	11: Staff management, e.g. dealing with grievances, contact from staff	0:16
10	4: Dealing with external bodies, e.g. Tusla, Inspectorate, NCSE, S.29 appeals	0:13
11	14: Attending activities, e.g. religious ceremonies, sports and games, other events	0:10
12	16: CPD events	0:08
13	3: Engaging with parents and addressing related issues	0:08
14	9: Special educational needs	0:08
15	10: Child protection/safeguarding	0:05
16	12: Preparation for and attendance at meetings including board of management, parents' association	0:04
17	6: Discipline/behaviour/pastoral care/supervision before and after school	0:02

### 3.5 Findings: summary and related comments

Analysing and presenting the available data to inform INTO discussion and planning around the time that principals spend, outside school hours, on school-related work are the focus of this report. It is beyond the remit of this report to make recommendations. Accordingly, key findings and observations are summarised in the following.

Reminder: all data below relates to time spent outside normal school hours on school-related work.

#### 3.5.1 Findings on amount of time: average and median

Averages relevant to the purpose of the survey are presented here:

**Table 32: All principals – averages**

Time period	Average weekly no. of hours and minutes
5 weeks of the survey	14:38
4 weeks of schools open	15:15
1 week of school closure	7:40
Weekdays during 4 weeks of schools open	11:58
Weekends during 4 weeks of schools open	3:17

**Table 33: Administrative principals - averages**

Time period	Average weekly no. of hours and minutes
4 weeks of schools open	16:45
1 week of school closure	8:51

**Table 34: Teaching principals - averages**

Time period	Average weekly no. of hours and minutes
4 weeks of schools open	13:34
1 week of school closure	6:23

Median figures relating to weekly hours for administrative principals and teaching principals are presented as follows:

**Table 35: Administrative principals - median**

Time period	Median weekly no. of hours and minutes
5 weeks of the survey	14:15
4 weeks of schools open	16:30
1 week of school closure	5:00

**Table 36: Teaching principals - median**

Time period	Median weekly no. of hours and minutes
5 weeks of the survey	10:30
4 weeks of schools open	12:15
1 week of school closure	3:30

***Principals who each logged a weekly average of in excess of 15 hours across the five weeks of the survey***

A significant number (n=11) of those who participated in the survey reported that they spent 75 hours or more in total during the five-week survey period, outside normal school hours, on school-related work. As this cohort made up one third of the entire sample, their data was analysed further. Both DEIS and non-DEIS schools were represented in this cohort and it reflected a cross-section of principals in terms of the length of experience. Administrative principals made up 73% of this group whereas they made up 52% of the survey sample.

***Principals who each logged a weekly average of less than 6 hours 30 minutes across the five weeks of the survey***

A small number of principals logged relatively smaller amounts of time outside normal school hours in the course of the survey. In the course of the five weeks, 21% of the participants (n= 7) logged, on average, less than 6 hours 30 minutes per week.

***Principals who logged >= 20 hours in any individual week***

In the course of the entire survey, 18 principals logged weeks in which they worked 20 hours or more. Many weekly entries were well in excess of 20 hours.

- ⌘ 8 principals logged 1 week of 20 hours or more.
- ⌘ 5 principals logged 2 weeks of 20 hours or more.

- ⌘ 3 principals logged 3 weeks of 20 hours or more.
- ⌘ 2 principals logged 4 weeks of 20 hours or more.

**Activities worked on outside normal school hours:**

Activities were ranked by the amount of time spent on each, on average. This data was analysed under a number of headings. For example:

**Table 37: Top five activities (all principals) across the four weeks during which schools were open**

Ranking	Activity description
1	8: Administration - day-to-day management, e.g. sourcing substitutes, school admissions
2	1: Planning for leading teaching and learning (short term)
3	15: Thinking and/or reflection about school matters
4	7: School maintenance and technological issues, e.g. building projects, minor works, ICT, broadband
5	12: Preparation for and attendance at meetings including board of management, parents' association

Analysis of the data showed some commonalities and differences between various groups. Of note was the high ranking of *Activity 8: Administration* in all groups and the relatively higher ranking of *Activity 1: Planning for leading teaching and learning (short term)* and *Activity 2: Planning curriculum/school development/SSE (medium to long term)* for teaching principals as compared to administrative principals. It was also noted that *Activity 7: School maintenance and technological issues e.g., building projects, minor works, ICT, broadband* had a higher ranking for administrative principals than for teaching principals.

### 3.5.1 Findings: related comments

A number of points need to be borne in mind when considering the findings.

- ⌘ The survey was conducted over five weeks in October/November 2021. While some key activities are likely to feature prominently for all principals across the entire year, others assume greater/lesser prominence at different points in the course of the year. Activities such as *Activity 5: Recruitment, interviewing, appointment and induction of staff*, for example, would likely have a much higher ranking in June or September. Additionally, while matters such as child safeguarding are an important part of the role of principal, the amount of discrete time spent on same is likely to vary significantly in response to events that are unpredictable.
- ⌘ Again, bearing in mind the 'ebb and flow' associated with the school year and associated demands on principals, it is likely that the quantities of time worked outside normal school hours would be greater in June when tasks associated with the end of the school year are carried out.
- ⌘ It is worth reiterating that quantities of time logged for various activities relate purely to time worked on these activities outside normal school hours. Information was neither sought nor provided on the quantities of time directed to those activities in the course of the normal school day. As such, it is not appropriate to draw inferences regarding the relative amounts of time that principals dedicate to the various activities overall in the course of any given week.
- ⌘ While the survey sample is representative of a cross-section of principals from various contexts, it does not take into account a variety of contextual factors which could impact on the amount of time that principals spend on school-related work outside normal school hours and the nature of activities that they address during that time, e.g. local circumstances such as the availability of appropriately-qualified support staff, locally-available funding for, e.g. maintenance and related projects, and other miscellaneous factors.



# Appendices

## **Appendix A - Congress resolution adopted at Congress 2018:**

### **Teacher workload**

Congress:

- a views with deep concern the ever-expanding list of initiatives emanating from the DES and others, and states that the expectation that teachers undertake the additional workload and resulting pressure is untenable;
- b notes:
  - 1. the ongoing curricular change in Language and Maths and other initiatives over the past few years;
  - 2. that these changes are being accelerated without adequate resources, inservice training and consultation which makes their implementation impossible;
- c demands that a timetable for curricular change and deceleration of curricular change be agreed:
- d further demands that the CEC:
  - 1. carries out an independent study into how teacher workload has increased over the past decade and the impact it has had and is having on the health and working conditions of members: and
  - 2. utilises the findings of the report to inform and support its actions to protect all members against the increasing demands being placed on them by the DES, the Teaching Council and other such bodies.

## Appendix B - Profiles of respondents to workload survey (Part One)

Table 38: Key background characteristics of the respondents (principals)

Principal role	Percentage %
Administrative	53
Teaching	47
<b>No. of years teaching</b>	
0-5	<1
6-10	5
11-20	35
21-30	29
31+	32
<b>No. of years as a principal</b>	
0-5	35
6-10	24
11-20	30
21-30	10
31+	1
<b>Type of school</b>	
Full stream (infant to sixth class)	91
Infants/junior school	3
Senior school	6
Special school	6
<b>Disadvantaged status</b>	
DEIS Primary Urban 1	8
DEIS Primary Urban 2	4
DEIS Rural	8
<b>Irish-medium school</b>	
Gaelscoil	5
Gaeltacht school	2

Table 39: Key background characteristics of the respondents (teachers)

<b>Current role</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Teaching principal	5
Class teacher	52
SEN teacher	32
Substitute teacher	2
HSCL teacher	<1
Early start teacher	<1
Other	8
<b>No. of years teaching</b>	
0-5	11
6-10	17
11-20	39
21-30	17
31+	16
<b>Type of school</b>	
Full stream (infant to sixth class)	87
Infants/junior school	6
Senior school	7
Special school	5
<b>Disadvantaged status</b>	
DEIS Primary Urban 1	12
DEIS Primary Urban 2	5
DEIS Rural	5
<b>Irish-medium school</b>	
Gaelscoil	2
Gaeltacht school	6

## **Appendix C - Terms of reference for the audit of principals' time as laid down by the INTO (Part Two)**

RE: Terms of reference for the independent audit of time worked by principal teachers during evenings, weekends and school closures - matters for consideration

### ***Background***

The resolution from Congress on the role of the principal demanded that the CEC appoint independent auditors to conduct an audit of time worked by principal teachers during evenings, weekends and school closures.

### ***Terms of reference for the independent audit of time***

#### 1. Timeframe

That the independent auditor conduct an audit over the following timeframe from October to November 2021 to include five separate and individual weeks/periods as follows:

- Week of 18 October 2021.
- Week of 25 October- Halloween midterm break.
- Week of 8 November 2021.
- Week of 15 November 2021.
- Week of 22 November 2021.

#### 2. Evenings, weekends and school closures

The following definitions of periods will apply:

- a **Evenings:** For the purposes of the audit, evenings to be comprehended in relation to activities undertaken by principals after the end of the normal school day. Given that principals undertake activities prior to the commencement of the school day, evenings should also comprehend this. For clarity, evenings to be comprehended for the audit as activities which are undertaken by principals before and after the normal school day.
- b **Weekends:** For the purposes of the audit, weekends to be comprehended in relation to activities undertaken by principals at the end of the school week, i.e. Friday, Saturday and Sunday.
- c **School closures:** For the purposes of the audit, school closures to be comprehended in relation to activities undertaken by principals when schools are not in session. This includes midterm break at Halloween, any incidental closure due to weather events, Covid-19, election, issues with the building, etc.

#### 3. Measurement of the time

For ease of tracking and analysing, the time for activities undertaken during evenings, weekends and school closures to be recorded in blocks of 15 minutes, ie. 15 minutes, 30 minutes, 45 minutes, 1 hour, 1 hour 15 minutes, etc.

#### 4. Activities for the time spent during the evenings, weekends and school closures

For the purposes of the audit, the following activities are to be recorded:

- Planning for leading teaching and learning (short term).
- Discipline/behaviour/pastoral care/supervision before and after school.
- Engaging with parents and addressing related issues.
- Dealing with external bodies, e.g. Tusla, Inspectorate, NCSE, S.29 appeals.
- Recruitment, interviewing, appointment and induction of staff.
- Planning curriculum/school development/SSE (medium to long term).
- School maintenance and technological issues, e.g. building projects, minor works, ICT, broadband.

- Administration - day-to-day management, e.g. sourcing substitutes, school admissions
- Special educational needs.
- Child protection/safeguarding.
- Staff Management, e.g. dealing with grievances, contact from staff.
- Preparation for and attendance at meetings including board of management, parents' association.
- Dealing with public health issues and health and safety matters.
- Attending activities, e.g. religious ceremonies, sports and games, other events.
- Thinking and/or reflection about school matters.
- CPD events.
- Other (please specify).

Some of the above will need to be adapted to meet the requirements of schools in Northern Ireland. Northern Office should be involved to identify the equivalent headings.

5. Recording of the time spent

The following are possible methods for recording time:

- INTO diary
- Apps, e.g. *Clockify, Time-Up, Toggl Track*
- *Microsoft Excel spreadsheet/Google sheet*

It will be open to each principal to utilize a suitable recording mechanism for himself/herself. Each participant to receive a pre-populated *Excel spreadsheet/Google sheet* to input time spent and to be forwarded to the independent auditor. Participants can input any data recorded in the diaries/apps, etc,

Figure 8: Example spreadsheet

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1		Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
2	<b>Activities</b>	25th Oct	26th Oct	27th Oct	28th Oct	29th Oct	30th Oct	31st Oct
3	Planning for leading teaching and learning (short term)							
4	Discipline/behaviour/pastoral care/Supervision before and after school							
5	Engaging with parents and addressing related issues							
6	Dealing with external bodies e.g. Tusla, Inspectorate, NCSE, S.29 Appeals							
7	Recruitment, interviewing, Appointment and Induction of Staff							
8	Planning curriculum/school development/SSE (medium to long term)							
9	School maintenance and technological issues e.g. building projects, minor works, ICT, broadband							
10	Administration- day to day management e.g. sourcing substitutes, school admissions							
11	Special Educational Needs							
12	Child protection/safeguarding							
13	Staff Management e.g. dealing with grievances, contact from staff							
14	Preparation for and attendance at meetings including Board of Management, Parents Association							
15	Dealing with public health issues and health and safety matters							
16	Attending activities e.g. religious ceremonies, sports and games, other events							
17	Thinking and/or Reflection about school matters							
18	CPD Events							
19	Other (Please Specify)							
20								
21	Notes-Insert blocks of 15 minutes							
22	Green=School closure							
23	Blue=Weekend							
24	Please do not forget to click save before you exit the spreadsheet							

6. Principals - schools and numbers

That a broad representation of principals in a variety of locations, settings and types be included as part of the audit.

a Location and settings

Republic of Ireland	Northern Ireland
Urban and rural	DEIS and non-DEIS
Large, medium and small	Mainstream and special
English and Irish medium	Patronages: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Catholic (on diocesan basis)</li> <li>• Church of Ireland</li> <li>• Educate Together</li> <li>• An Foras Pátrúnachta</li> <li>• Education and Training Boards (Community National Schools)</li> <li>• Special education</li> <li>• Other, e.g. individual patrons</li> </ul>

b School size definition

Small	Medium	Large
4 mainstream teachers or fewer “Small schools are defined for statistical purposes as schools with four mainstream teachers or fewer.”	5-12 mainstream teachers	13+ mainstream teachers

A School type - Republic of Ireland

	School type	No. of principals required
1	Catholic patronage large urban school – non-DEIS (Dublin)	2
2	Catholic patronage large urban school – non-DEIS (outside of Dublin)	2
3	Catholic patronage large urban junior school	1
4	Catholic patronage large urban senior school	1
5	Catholic patronage medium urban	2
6	Catholic patronage medium rural	2
7	Catholic patronage small rural – non-DEIS	2
8	DEIS I	2
9	DEIS II	2
10	Rural DEIS	2
11	Church of Ireland urban	2
12	Church of Ireland rural	2
13	Educate Together large urban (Dublin region)	2
14	Educate Together large urban (outside of Dublin region)	2
15	An Foras Patrúnachta - urban	1
16	An Foras Patrúnachta - rural	1
17	ETB urban school	1
18	ETB rural school	1
19	Island school	1
20	Special school (Dublin region)	2
21	Special school (outside of Dublin region)	2
22	Gaeltacht school	2
23	Other (Presbyterian, Inter-denominational, Muslim, Methodist, Jewish)	1
		38

**B School type - Northern Ireland**

	<b>School type</b>	<b>No. of principals required</b>
1	Primary Catholic maintained schools	2
2	Post-Primary Catholic maintained schools	2
3	Special school	1
4	Other	1

**7. Other matters**

That a webinar be scheduled in early October for the names put forward to outline the terms of reference/expectations for the audit. Contact details will be required for that purpose.

## Appendix D - Principal Audit of Time: Consent form and questionnaire

Principal Audit of Time  
 CONSENT FORM & QUESTIONNAIRE

Name:

Email:

Contact Number:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the audit of time worked by principals during evenings, weekends and school closures.

In order to participate in the audit, it is necessary for us to obtain your consent on the form below.

		Yes	No
1	I have been fully informed as to the nature of the audit.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	I understand my role in the audit.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	I understand that no names (individual or school) will be used in the report.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	I understand that the findings may be published in academic journals and presented at conferences.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	My participation in this audit is voluntary.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	I understand that I can withdraw from this audit at any time without adverse consequences.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	I understand that I will be furnishing information to the independent auditor.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name (please print):

Signature:

Date:

### ABOUT YOURSELF AND SCHOOL

1. What is your current role?     Admin principal     Teaching Principal

2. Where is your school?     Republic of Ireland     Northern Ireland

3. Location     City     Suburban     Town     Rural

4. Type of School

(a)     Mainstream school     Special school

(b)     Primary     Post-Primary (Northern Ireland)

(c)     Full Stream (Inf – 6th)     Infants/Junior     Senior

Pupils up to age 18

5. Disadvantaged Status

No     DEIS Primary Urban 1     DEIS Primary Urban 2     DEIS Primary     Rural

6. Are you teaching through the medium of Irish?

Yes, Gaeltacht     Yes, Gaelscoil     No

7. Size of School (Number of pupils)

8. Size of School (Number of teachers) (Include shared teachers if your school is the base)

1-4 teachers     5-8 teachers     9-15 teachers

16-25 teachers     26+ teachers

9. Number of years as Principal/Admin Principal

< 5 years       6-10 years       11-20 years       21-30 years       31 years +

10. School Patronage

Catholic (on diocesan basis)       Church of Ireland (on diocesan basis)   
Educate Together       An Foras Pátrúnachta   
Education and Training Boards (Community National Schools)   
NABMSE       Primary Catholic Maintained Schools (NI)   
Post-Primary Catholic Maintained Schools (NI)   
Other, e.g. individual patrons

Please return to: Anne English, Independent Auditor

Email address: XXXX (dedicated email address provided in original document)

### **Appendix E - Primary school statistics 2021/21 academic year**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Number</b>
Primary schools in the Republic of Ireland (all)	3241
Mainstream schools	3107
% of all schools that are special schools	4%
DEIS Urban	10%
DEIS Rural	10%
% Irish medium schools of all mainstream primary schools	8%
% All-Irish and in Gaeltacht	3%
% Catholic ethos	89%
% Church of Ireland	6%
% Other	6%

**Note:** As received by email from [statistics@education.gov.ie](mailto:statistics@education.gov.ie) on 6 January 2022.





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