

# Standing up for School Leaders – now and into the future

Speech by INTO General Secretary, John Boyle

Principals' and Deputy Principals' Conference 2019

**\*\*Check against delivery \*\***

I was a primary school principal teacher for nearly twenty years. I have an intimate understanding of the role. School leaders are the cement that holds a school together.

Our school leaders have been put under extreme pressure following a sustained period of austerity and the suite of new initiatives they've had to face in the last decade.

I'm delighted to have this opportunity to share my vision for school leadership over the next five years with you.

My vision is influenced by the 15 years of guidance and support I received from my principal and deputy principal and from my experiences as a teacher and HSCL coordinator in a DEIS band 1 school.

It is shaped by the 19 years I spent working as a principal teacher in a large urban Junior school.

There are some tough choices to be made North and South in the year ahead starting with Budget 2020 on 8 October in this jurisdiction.

The Irish Government can choose to invest in our future, restoring critical supports for school leaders, including assistant principal posts in large schools and providing a minimum of one leadership and management day per week for our teaching principals in small schools.

They can choose to finally honour a now twelve-year-old pay award to primary principals and deputy principals, who are drastically underpaid when compared to their peers at second level.

They can choose to empower schools with the leaders they deserve, ensuring we deliver a world class education well into the future.

Building leadership capacity in schools should never be limited to mentoring and training principals and deputies. An intelligent and committed team who are on the same page is invaluable.

However, with the axing of more than 5,000 posts of responsibility in schools, the government has made life a great deal more difficult for school leaders to build the necessary support systems in which schools thrive.

Being able to appoint assistant principals can make all the difference in our schools. 2017 saw the first, and to date the only structured restoration of these posts of responsibility, since the moratorium on promotions was introduced in March 2009.

Almost a decade later our school leaders need these valuable supports to meet the ever-growing challenges of their roles.

At our Congress earlier in the year, we unanimously called for a comprehensive review of the terms and conditions of employment of school leaders.

Teaching principals in particular outlined how they have seen their own roles expand exponentially in recent years, with an increased workload, ever more paperwork and additional child protection and data protection accountability measures.

All this extra work and they still teach a class every day.

If our teaching principals are to be afforded the proper opportunity to truly 'lead' their schools, they must be granted, at an absolute minimum, one leadership and management day per week.

It's imperative that adequate training and development is available to school leaders, and formal training, though important, isn't the only approach.

We gather today under the theme of managing workload – how apt. Events such as this conference enable school leaders to learn from one another and provide access to a network of like-minded professionals dealing with similar challenges.

I thank our PDC and team of officials for all the work they have done to organise the event.

We need a school leadership programme which will help principals to develop strategies and find tools they can use to help with leading and managing change in their schools.

The activities undertaken by school leaders need to be focussed on the issues that are 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.

However, we know that many principals go much further, they manage IT, manage accounts and finances, recruitment, policy formation and school maintenance issues and they deal with external bodies. The list is too long to go into detail here today.

Adequate staffing and funding will make all the difference. Every school should have access to a school secretary and caretaker, paid appropriately by government.

The capitation grant in the South and the funding in the North must increase so that our school leaders spend less time fundraising for basic necessities in their schools and more time leading their schools.

In December 2007 independent adjudicators recommended to government that primary principals and deputy principals' allowances be increased with the joint leaders of schools with 5 teachers or less rising two steps on the allowances ladder thereby increasing their allowances by approximately €3000 in the case of the principal from €9,800 to €12882 and €2750 per deputy from €3769 to €6520.

12 years ago, colleagues.

The government reneged on the payment of that award at the beginning of the recession. In fact, during the intervening period the majority of school leaders had to contend with a series of pay cuts, the last of which will not be reversed until 1 October 2020.

Throughout that period of austerity school leaders worked heroically, supporting everyone else in their school communities with no appreciation from government.

The second Public Service Benchmarking Body also recommended that every other primary principal and deputy principal in schools with more than 5 teachers be moved one step up the ladder of allowances resulting in increases of around €2000 per principal and €1500 per deputy in these larger schools.

Primary principals and deputies ought to have a common scale of allowances with our post-primary equivalents and primary schools should have the same schedule of promotional posts as applies in secondary schools.

But for the moment our priority regarding leadership salaries in the South has to be the securing of the 2007 award and the restoration of assistant principalships to previous levels.

I'm very hopeful that a review mechanism of PSSA will be triggered very soon and that this review will allow us to re-open discussions on the outstanding award for school leaders. When the review is complete, I'm determined to see a recommendation that payment of the award be on the agenda for the next public service pay talks expected in Spring/Summer of 2020.

I give you my word INTO will do everything in its power to ensure that this long-awaited award is paid.

The issues confronting school leaders in the North mirror those being experienced by colleagues in this jurisdiction.

There are however some significant differences which the Northern Committee and the officials in the Northern Office are working hard to address.

The absence of the devolved Assembly and consequently the absence of political oversight is a particular challenge. Our INTO officials and activists have no Minister to lobby, no Committee to petition.

All decisions rest with the civil service and the last policy directive imposed upon them, making it impossible for policies to be adjusted to changing circumstances.

An example is the renewed INTO push, in concert with communities and schools, aided by PPP, to finally end the 11plus. Despite this campaign gaining momentum, it requires Ministerial and political support to bring about change.

INTO is campaigning for adequate school funding North and South. I know only too well that more than 60% of schools in Northern Ireland are now running in deficit. Once again, we see principals having to make impossible decisions on a daily basis – who gets special needs support? IT equipment or toilet rolls?

School leaders are being forced to focus on fundraising and activities that were never part of their core job.

School leaders deserve better than this.

The Northern Committee and our Officials are to the forefront of challenging this unacceptable status quo. They have led a campaign, which the education authorities in the North and Department of Education have agreed to, to ensure the role of school leaders will be a PRIORITY AREA when the deal is finally concluded between the teachers' unions and government.

This deal remains to be concluded and will encompass not only the beginning of pay restoration but will bring significant and immediate change to workload across the profession. In the medium term it will see the terms and conditions of teachers reshaped to reflect the expectations and demands of life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We are not there yet and much will depend on how the broader political picture resolves itself in the north, but we are determined to prevail.

INTO talks a lot about school leadership. Why? Because school leaders are the foundation of a well-run school.

You motivate and inspire your colleagues.

You direct all of the actions undertaken in your schools.

You are the key members of staff that possess the combination of personality and leadership skills that make others want to follow your direction.

But you can't do everything, and you can't do it alone.

In my view the complex challenges of modern school leadership demand that our school leaders work in teams, that you receive ample mentoring, that you are surrounded by co-leaders that can help you with capacity building and adult development as well as leading teaching and learning.

This internal capacity building is key if we are to enhance student achievement and build schools that are well equipped to meet the complex challenges of tomorrow.

Building strategic school leadership is important because education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a new frontier, and 21st century learners are a new breed. Many of the students going through schools since 2015 are from a whole new generation: Generation Alpha.

These children born since 2010 have grown up in a different world from older generations. They have never lived in a world without smartphones, drones, tablet computing, apps, and

3D television. They are extremely comfortable with technology, having grown up using it: many of them were given smartphones or tablets to play with before they could even walk.

This unprecedented access to technology means our students have more information available to them than we could have dreamed of, even a couple of decades ago. They can teach themselves almost anything they want to know using the resources available to them.

They are also unaware of the borders that used to strictly contain our experience of the world.

Small children can communicate with people all around the world at the touch of a button. They increasingly have friends in numerous countries and grow up expecting that international travel will be a common part of their life.

As educators, we are tasked with helping these capable, intelligent children prepare for challenges we can't fully foresee. That requires a whole new kind of leadership schools haven't required in the past.

21st Century school leaders must enthusiastically face the challenging task of preparing young minds for the future, and you must think strategically about the goals and systems that will support this task.

But in order to do that you need the **time**; you need the **space** and you need the **support** that's sadly lacking at the moment.

Building leadership capacity in schools should never be limited to training principals and deputies: an intelligent and committed team who are on the same page is invaluable to a school.

But we cannot expect our members to take on the challenge of participating in leadership teams without being fairly paid for doing so.

It can be overwhelming to know where to begin developing a leadership team but at least if the DES provided Assistant Principals we could start. Often formal school leadership training is assumed to be the answer, in the form of professional development days, one-off school leadership programmes, and school leadership conferences. While a school leadership conference like the one we're having here in Tullamore or some well-thought out school leadership courses can be incredibly useful, they can only be truly effective in the context of an ongoing commitment to change.

A school leadership programme should help you establish strategies and tools that you can use over time to drive change, not simply inspire you in a way that ends along with the event.

Whether you're leaders of a new school or an established school, committing to establishing solid leadership in an ongoing manner can make you a thought leader school, with others wondering how you did it.

The Centre for School Leadership offers personal leadership coaching to principals, but this help must be extended to deputies and assistant principals. Leadership coaching in schools can assist principals and other leaders in reaching their full potential.

Taking control of your career and the future of your school now, will reap the rewards. The removal of incentives for continuing professional development was a very short-sighted austerity cut. If this decision is not revisited soon, I believe that it will impact very negatively on the future of school leadership.

As I see it, our job as a union is to work with all stakeholders in education to ensure that our schools have leadership teams who are positive, energetic and skilful enough to be able to motivate their colleagues to make their school the best centre of learning it can be.

During my tenure as General Secretary I will be determined to make leadership positions in our schools more attractive.

First of all, we must ensure that we have the most capable people in these key leadership positions. Not only our principals and deputy principals but also our assistant principals and indeed everyone else in our schools all of whom have a role to play when it comes to leadership.

Adherence to the new criteria for appointing principals, deputy principals and assistant principals will assist greatly with the development of school cultures, where shared leadership is to the fore.

Secondly, we must ensure that school principals, deputy principals and assistant principals spend their time on activities that would typically be undertaken by someone in a leadership position. By making that happen I believe that more of our members would aspire to school leadership and that we would retain our leaders for longer.

Thirdly, school leaders who have spent all of their energy giving maximum effort to school communities must be provided with opportunities to take time away from leadership or to step down with dignity without negative impact on their pensions.

And fourthly we must make school leadership positions attractive not only with adequate and fair remuneration but with the whole package - the hours, the job-satisfaction the collegiality and the professional development.

The activities undertaken by our school leaders need to be focussed on issues that are core to the role of a school leader- school development, leading teaching and learning, developing self and others, leading improvement, innovation and change, managing the school and engaging with the school community not on troubleshooting technology issues, programming and managing school maintenance, dealing with external bodies or undertaking mundane administrative tasks.

While I have no issue with principals being the manager of the school site, they must have the staff and financial support to guarantee that manual, transactional or specialist

maintenance tasks can be more appropriately carried out by others. Therefore, the provision of appropriate caretaking staff, the training and resourcing of board of management members and the delivery of adequate capitation, technology and maintenance grants are crucial.

So once again I call for every school to have access to a school secretary and caretaker and for primary school funding in the South to be increased by 20% each year for the next 5 years and for school funding in the North to be restored to pre-recession levels as a matter of urgency.

In my view the best enablers to principals and deputy principals managing their workload is the availability of time for administration, of capable administrative staff and middle leadership team members.

At our last conference two years ago, we focussed on strengthening the work relationship between principals and deputy principals. While this is key, principals and deputies with strong work relationships still won't be able to lead their schools properly without the support of a well-structured team of fellow professionals and appropriate administrative staff.

Such supports would enable school leaders to delegate and manage workload more effectively. The ten-year-old moratorium on promotions in schools has impacted very negatively on schools in the South while the deep budgetary cuts have also hit school leadership in the North very hard.

Primary schools in the south are short over 4,000 assistant principalships. While INTO has stemmed the tide in the last two years with the retention of 500 AP2 posts in the system, we must re-double our efforts to restore an appropriate middle management structure in all of our schools.

It stands to reason that if a school with six teachers and 150 pupils has half of its teaching staff promoted into leadership positions a school with 600 pupils and 24 teachers should have half of its staff promoted too.

Currently a six-teacher school has 3 teachers promoted while a 24-teacher school only has only 6 teachers promoted, where previously they had 12.

I believe that the budgetary decision in October 2017 to give €4.6 m to post-primary schools towards the restoration of middle leadership and only half of that to primary schools was misguided and hugely insulting to our sector. Budget 2020 must significantly restore Assistant Principals posts of responsibility in schools with administrative principals.

We are grateful that leadership posts have been restored in schools with teaching principals, but the Department of Education and Skills appears to have no comprehension of the administrative burden being carried by teaching principals.



While its noteworthy that INTO pre-budget campaigning since 2015 has resulted in the restoration of AP2 posts in all small schools and three increases in the number of administrative release days **the target of one leadership and management day per week remains far off for principals of schools with less than 6 teachers.**

We have costed proposals for one weekly administrative release day for every teaching principal and for another phase of restoration of assistant principal posts at €5.2 million from budget 2020. I urge you all to demand this from your local TDs in the week ahead. And I urge you all to form new clusters so that your release days will be covered by the same fully qualified teacher all year long. I also implore those of you who will be involved in the six pilot areas for substitute supply panels to give your all to this initiative. We need this initiative to be expanded nationwide from next September.

As we consider the challenges you will face into the future, we are working hard to put together services and structures to support and advocate for you.

There's no doubt that involvement in collegial networks that are sources of information and support is crucial for school leaders. Thankfully we have organisations like the Centre for School Leadership and the IPPN who support principals and deputy principals. INTO has 47,000 members. Nearly 7000 are principals or deputy principals. I am acutely aware that principals and deputy principals need greater support from their union.

With that in mind we have restructured the section in our office led by Deirdre O Connor to Conditions of Employment and **School Leadership** which will see us step up the services we offer to school leaders.

We have also increased the number of places on our principals' seminars and we have allocated more funding to our principals and deputy principals fora. And we will continue to develop stronger relationships with all agencies who support our school leaders.

The Primary Education Forum can play an important role.

INTO first demanded the establishment of a Forum to address teacher workload in November 2017. The Forum was established in the Autumn of 2018.

Since then INTO Representatives Michelle Keane Chairperson PDC, Joe Killeen Ex-President and Deirdre O Connor AGS have worked tirelessly with a view to convincing the department that our school leaders do not have the capacity to absorb and action large numbers of communications materials, changes related to initiatives and policy updates very often with tight turnaround times.

The Forum had limited success last year due in the main to the fact that the Child protection Changes and GDPR had been scheduled long before the Forum was initiated. However, we have achieved a lot with regards to the pacing and resourcing of curriculum change and the delayed implementation of the school's admissions act and we will achieve even more in the coming years.

Very significantly my own call for a Symposium on Strengthening and Supporting Small schools was heeded by Minister Mc Hugh. The work undertaken at the Symposium now forms part of the agenda for the Primary Education Forum.

In a nutshell we need clarity from the education departments North and South on how tasks they request align with the department's own objectives and how they add value to our schools. We need support structures from the Department and from school management bodies and most of all we need policy makers to take typical school rhythms into account when planning change. It will still not be possible for our school leaders to process multiple reforms and large-scale initiatives even if they have the required supports. Tasks that require time and attention must receive that - there are only so many hours in any day. An rud nach féidir, ní féidir é.

We met with the leadership team of the Department of Education and Skill's inspectorate before the Summer and will meet with them regularly moving forward. We had a full and frank exchange of views. School inspectors have a job to do to monitor the quality of the system and to report on progress. School leaders and INTO members have always wanted the best for their pupils. But they must be trusted as professionals who know what works best in their schools. All of us welcome support and advice from the inspectorate, so long as that advice is **useful, consistent** and that implementing recommendations will **improve** the learning experience for our pupils.

In the meantime, INTO's blueprint for coping with the workload of school leadership is this: **Accept** that we have to do some activities beyond standard hours but only some!

**Decide** each week how many hours you can afford to devote to your leadership role and stick rigidly to that.

**Make time** for strategic activities even if transactional or administrative tasks have to be parked for a while.

**Prioritise** engagement with staff and students, enabling professional learning and supporting wellbeing in your school. The most important people in any school are the people in the building.

**Set achievable work/life balance restrictions** that will give you the space to be at your best in the role. An té nach mbeireann ar an ngnó, beireann an gnó air/ uirthi.

**Avail** of the mentoring and networking supports provided by various agencies INTO, IPPN, CSL, PDST and Managerial Authorities, Education Centres, SESS, NIPT, DES.

**Collaborate** with colleagues through team morale building exercises and with other school leaders for example by sharing policy templates.

**Celebrate** your success. It's really important for the future of our profession that we demonstrate how stimulating and rewarding the role of school leader can be.

I accept that school leadership teams have a responsibility to adapt and meet the challenges which are to come.

However, the Departments of Education North and South must also accept that they have a responsibility to support school leaders, to value school leaders and to respect school leaders.

And we in INTO have a responsibility to fight tooth and nail to make that happen.

It's said you can't build a great building on a weak foundation and you certainly can't deliver great schools without great school leaders. Our pupils and teachers deserve better. Budget 2020 is an opportunity for government to show that it appreciates the work of our school leaders, who need vital supports to ensure that everyone in primary school thrives.

Colleagues help us fight for you. In less than two weeks this government will likely pass the last budget before a general election. We have a campaign in progress. We need you all to play your part. Enlist the support of your teaching colleagues. Talk to parents. Talk to local politicians. Demand that they invest for the best. Share our campaign resources. Together, in the great history of this union, we can and will secure a better future for our school leaders.

Chun tosaigh linn a chairde. Go raibh cead maith agaibh ulilig.