

Primary School Principals Call for Urgent Nationwide Funding and Special Educational Needs Help

Overview of Primary and Special Schools in Ireland

- **Total Number of Schools:**
 - Primary Schools: 3,095
 - Special Schools: 140
- **Total Number of Pupils:**
 - Primary School Pupils: 546,787
- **Asylum-Seeking Pupils:**
 - Enrolled in Primary Schools in the Past Two Years: 11,248
- **Percentage of Teaching Principals: 60%**
 - **Approximate Number:** 1,850

Request 1: Increase of Admin Time for Teaching Principals

- **Burnout and Job Fatigue:** Due to the dual responsibilities of teaching and administration, many Teaching Principals experience significant job stress and fatigue. The lack of adequate support staff exacerbates these issues, leading to high levels of burnout.
- The above figures coupled with the dire conditions teaching principals are forced to work under highlight the current landscape of primary and special education in Ireland, focusing on the critical role and challenges of Teaching Principals. Addressing these challenges is essential for maintaining a high standard of education and ensuring the well-being of both educators and pupils.
- At a bare minimum the following amount of Principal Release Days (hereafter PRD) per week needs to be delivered to Teaching Principals in schools without Special Classes in the following school sizes 0-39 pupils = 1 PRD, 40-79 pupils = 2 PRD, 80-119 = 3 PRD, 120-159 = 4 PRD, 160+ = 5 PRD.

Request 2: Urgent Increase for Primary School Funding

- Align primary education funding (currently at 13% in Ireland) with the OECD average, increasing expenditure per student to at least 27% of per capita GDP. Establish a consistent funding schedule to aid in school budget planning.
- Provide additional financial support to cover rising costs of utilities, insurance, and other operational expenses, reducing the need for schools to engage in extensive fundraising.
- Reassess the Ancillary Grant to ensure it adequately covers the wages of secretarial staff as well as cleaning and caretaking costs, maintaining hygiene and employment standards in schools.
- Allocate additional resources and support for schools integrating refugee and asylum-seeking children, ensuring they receive the necessary academic and social support.

Request 3: Urgent Call to address Chronic Under Resourcing of Special Education Needs (SEN) Supports and Provisions.

Increasing Demand:

- The number of children with special needs in primary schools increased by 56% between 2017 and 2021.
- Families face significant challenges in finding appropriate placements.

Inadequate Resource Allocation:

- Special Needs Assistant (SNA) and Special Education Teacher (SET) allocations have been frozen or cut.
- The 2011 austerity measures reduced SEN resources by 15%, and these cuts have not been fully reversed.

Flawed Allocation Model:

- The 2024 allocation model uses outdated data from 2016, ignoring current needs.
- The model relies on enrolment numbers, literacy/numeracy scores, and educational disadvantage metrics, but lacks individual profiling.

Challenges in Accessing Support:

- Schools struggle to get additional SET or SNA support through difficult and often unsuccessful appeals processes.
- The removal of "Complex Needs" as a criterion leaves many younger students without support.

Overwhelmed Services:

- National Educational Psychological Services (NEPS) are under-resourced.
- Temporary measures like the Scheme for the Commissioning of Psychological Assessments (SCPA) are insufficient.

Recommendations:

- Increase funding and reverse austerity cuts.
- Update allocation models to reflect current needs with individual profiling.
- Enhance professional support for testing and diagnoses.
- Simplify and improve the appeals process for additional resources.
- Reinstate "Complex Needs" as a criterion and support early intervention.
- Utilise existing data systems like the Primary Online Database (POD) for accurate needs assessment.
- Develop a strategic plan to improve SEN provisions over the next three years. Immediate action is needed to ensure that all students with special educational needs receive the necessary support for their academic and social development.

Contact: Ms. Angela Dunne, Principal of Loughmore National School, Tipperary
Contact Number: (087) 7833264
(On behalf of a group of extremely concerned primary principals nationally)