

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

### 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. High numbers stepping down from the role.
- 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 (PRD) per week needs to be delivered to Teaching Principals in schools without Special Classes in the following school sizes 0-44 pupils = 1 PRD, 45-74 pupils = 2 PRD, 75-132 = 3 PRD, 133- 160 = 4 PRD, 160+ = 5 PRD.
- Deputy Principals of schools with special classes need to be assigned administrative days pro rata.

#### **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 on a permanent footing, to cover rising costs of utilities, insurance, and other operational expenses, reducing the need for schools to engage in extensive fundraising. Align primary capitation in parity with second level pupils. Ensure that smaller schools are not disadvantaged by *per capita* allocations.
- Reassess the Ancillary Grant urgently 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 (NDA Report, 2023)
- 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 within this timeframe. Allocations do not match the level of need presenting in our schools.
- The 2011 austerity measures reduced SEN resources by 15%, and these cuts have not been fully reversed.
- Chronic Teacher supply crisis in Primary Education – SEN pupils most adversely affected.

### **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. Current, accurate data can easily be gathered from schools via their POD (Pupil Online Database) or Annual Census returns.

### **Challenges in Accessing Support:**

- Schools struggle to get additional SET or SNA support through difficult and often unsuccessful appeals processes (approx. 8% success rate).
- The removal of "Complex Needs" as a criterion leaves many younger students without vital support, and disables our ability to provide crucial early intervention in schools.

### **Overwhelmed Services:**

- National Educational Psychological Services (NEPS) are under-resourced (National ratio 1:5000 pupils)
- Temporary measures like the Scheme for the Commissioning of Psychological Assessments (SCPA) are insufficient.
- Over 20,000 children are awaiting AON (Assessment of Need) in Ireland at present.

### **Recommendations:**

- A huge increase in funding is essential. 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 from the NCSE
- Reinstate "Complex Needs" as a criterion and support early intervention
- Utilise existing data systems like the Primary Online Database (POD) to gather SEN Data directly from schools for accurate needs assessment and resources allocation
- 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
- Address the chronic Teacher Supply Shortage plaguing our system, with an action plan

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