



Irish National Teachers' Organisation
Cumann Múinteoirí Éireann

Results of INTO Survey - Special Schools

January 2014

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Introduction

Questionnaires were issued to principals of special schools in January 2014 with a view to exploring the main issues of concern for principal teachers in leading and managing special schools. The findings of the survey will be used by the INTO to seek better supports for principals in special schools. Out of a total 124 questionnaires issued, 70 (57%) were returned for analysis. The respondents represented a broad spectrum of special schools.

Funding

Funding is an issue in special schools. Only eight principals (11%) were satisfied with the current capitation grant – 30 principals (43%) considered it inadequate, and 32 principals (46%) considered it very inadequate.

Professional Development

Many teachers in special schools hold additional qualifications in special education, ranging from a post-graduate certificate in special education to a doctorate in special education. See table 1 below.

Table 1: Additional qualifications held

Qualification held	No. of Schools	Total No. of Teachers
Post-graduate certificate in Special Education	31	91
Post-graduate Diploma in Special Education	54	189
Masters in Special Education	34	78
Doctorate in Special Education	3	3

Extended School Year

More than half (55%) the special schools that responded to the survey provide an extended school year programme in July. Of those that do provide an extended school year programme, one school provided one week, fourteen schools (38%) provided two weeks, two schools provided three weeks, and 20 schools (54%) provided a four week extended programme. Principals considered the additional remuneration for the extended school year programme to be inadequate (25%) or very inadequate (65%).

In relation to extended school year programmes for all children with SEN, 44% of principals disagreed that such programmes should be provided to all pupils with SEN, while 38% agreed – 18% of principals were undecided.

Management Responsibilities

Principals in special schools have responsibility for leading and managing a large staff. The leadership teams in special schools and the principal' remuneration (allowance) is determined by the number of teachers on staff and not on the total number of staff. Two principals are managing over 100 staff when all staff are included.

Principals of special schools are leading and managing staffs as follows:

Table 2: Number on staff in special schools

Number on staff	Number of schools (principals)
<20 staff	12 principals
21-30 staff	14 principals
31-40 staff	12 principals
41-50 staff	12 principals
51- 60 staff	9 principals
>60 staff	11 principals

In addition to teachers, special schools employ special needs assistants (SNAs), bus escorts, secretaries and caretakers. Other personnel with whom the principal teacher must develop a relationship and to whom they must allocate time include nurses, clinical therapists, care staff and cleaners.

Teaching Staff as a percentage of whole staff

The teaching staff constitutes less than half of the total staff in most cases. In two schools, the teaching staff constituted less than 10 % of the whole staff. In 53 cases (76%), the teaching staff constituted between 11% and 30% of total staff. In 12 (17%) cases the teaching staff constituted between 31% and 50% of total staff. In only three schools did the teaching staff constitute more than half the total number of staff. See table 3.

Table 3: Teaching Staff as % of total staff

Teaching staff as % of total staff	Number of schools
<10%	2
11-20%	25
21-30%	28
31-40%	10
41-50%	2
51-60%	1
61-70%	1
71-90%	-
91-100%	1

In-school Leadership and Management Team

Principal teachers are supported by an in-school leadership team, which includes a deputy principal, assistant principal and special duties teachers, depending on size of school.

All except four special schools had a deputy principal teacher, the majority of whom were teaching fulltime. Three deputy principals were administrative.

Only 16 schools (23%) had an Assistant Principal post - one school had three such posts. Regarding special duties posts, 17 schools (24%) had no special duties post, though three of these schools had an Assistant principal post. Twenty-one schools (30%) had one special duties post, 11 schools (16%) had 2 special duties posts, 11 schools (16%) had 3 special duties posts, 5 schools (7%) had 4 special duties posts, and one school each had 5, 7 and 10 special duties posts. See table 4 below.

Table 4: Schools with Posts of Responsibility

Post	Number (%) of schools
One Assistant Principal Post	15 (21%)
Three Assistant Principal posts	1 (1%)
One Special Duties Post	21 (30%)
Two Special Duties Posts	11 (16%)
Three Special Duties Posts	11 (16%)
Four Special Duties Posts	5 (7%)
Five Special Duties posts	1 (1%)
Seven Special Duties Posts	1 (1%)
Ten Special Duties Posts	1 (1%)

A total of 43 schools (61%) lost posts of responsibility because of the moratorium on recruitment since 2008. Eighteen schools (26%) lost one post, 12 schools (17%) lost two posts, and 11 schools (16%) lost three or more posts.

Health-related Services

Special schools have a variety of experiences regarding the availability of health-related services such as speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, nursing care, psychologists, social workers, behaviour specialists and others. The availability of such services often depends on the patronage of the school. When asked what professionals, if any, should be employed by school boards of management and report to the principal teacher, nurses were the most frequently suggested professionals. In second place, schools noted the importance of HSCL teachers and recommended that such teachers be appointed in special schools. Some principals also suggested that occupational therapists (OT), speech

and language therapists (SLT) and behaviour specialists should be appointed directly by schools.

The vast majority of principals were of the view that their school should have access to a range of professional supports during school terms. In general, access to a multi-disciplinary team was seen as necessary, one that would include psychologists, physiotherapists, behaviour specialists, OTs, SLTs, social workers and play therapists. Non-health-related professional support was also mentioned in a number of cases, for example, access for the board of management to the services of a solicitor, accountant and engineer.

The issue of the relationship between the principal teacher and health-related professionals, in terms of reporting and work organisation was explored. Some principal teachers were of the view that therapists should be employed by school boards of management and report to the principal teacher, others would be satisfied if therapists and health-related professionals were employed by the DES rather than the HSE, so that they could focus exclusively on the needs of schools. The focus was on a collaborative and partnership model, with a recommendation that the professional provide regular reports to the principal. It was noted that while the nurses / SLTs / OTs should liaise and link with the school, they would still need support and supervision from their own profession in terms of their practice. It was also noted that, while a close collaborative relationship was desirable, it was not the role of the principal teacher to source, lead or organise the work of the relevant health professional. Principals also pointed out that depending on geographical location, the number of agencies that schools had to deal with could lead to a considerable workload.

The priority is to ensure that clinical and multi-disciplinary services are readily available to schools when required.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is evident from this short survey of special schools that principal teachers in such schools have a considerable workload without sufficient supports. Given the large numbers of staff for whom they are responsible for leading and managing, they have significant personnel responsibilities that is not reflected in their current remuneration. In order to provide better support to principals of special schools, the INTO recommends:

- Future negotiations on teacher pay should take into account that the remuneration of principals and deputy principals in special schools should reflect their levels of responsibility.
- All special schools should have an administrative officer qualified in school administration;
- All large special schools, with more than 25 members of staff, should have an Administrative deputy principal;
- In-school leadership and management posts should be restored in a manner that reflects the needs of schools;
- All special schools should have a HSCL teacher;
- Special schools with large enrolments of children with behavioural and emotional difficulties should be allocated an additional teacher to support behaviour;
- Consideration should be given to enabling boards of management to employ some health-related professionals directly, such as nurses, who are members of staff. In other cases multi-disciplinary teams should be available to all schools, to include all additional health-related services required by schools. Multi-disciplinary teams should be designated to schools, with professionals liaising and communicating with principal teachers regarding the needs of the school. Consideration could be given to organising multi-disciplinary support teams as part of the new Inclusion Support Service.
- Roles, responsibilities and boundaries should be clarified.