Management Staff for Early Childhood and School Education

Management

Early Childhood

Pre-school services are generally owner-managed or managed by a Childcare Manager (private/community). A pre-school’s management is typically responsible for:

- The direction and supervision of the work of all staff in the service;
- Recruitment, induction, training, development and performance management of staff;
- Overall safety and well-being of the children in their care;
- Setting policies and procedures for the service and ensuring their implementation;
- Ensuring compliance with the Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations 2006 and all other relevant legislation;
- Management of the finances of the service and reporting of same to the committee/board of management/investors (private/community).

School Education

The main administrative post in a school in Ireland is that of principal. The principal is assisted by a deputy principal, or deputy principals, depending on the size of the school. The management authority is the school board of management which is generally comprised of patron's nominees, principal teacher representatives, parent representatives and two co-opted members of the community.

The principal usually acts as non-voting secretary to the board of management of a post-primary school. The duties of a school principal are specified in Part V of the Education Act, 1998 [1]. Under the direction of the board of management of the school concerned, the principal is responsible for the day-to-day management of the school, determining its educational aims, formulating strategies to achieve them in collaboration with the rest of the staff and developing its curricular policies.

The principal is expected to play a leading part in the preparation of the school plan. The principal has the right to assign duties to teachers to foster learning, to evaluate students and report students' progress to parents. The principal encourages the involvement of parents in the life of the school community. The principal must also promote the professional development of teachers. Depending on the size of the school, and particularly at primary level, the principal may be required to fulfil some teaching as well as administrative responsibilities.
Requirements for Appointment

Early Childhood

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) has published a list of all qualifications that meet the regulatory requirements for working in the Early Years sector in Ireland. The list also sets out the appropriate level of DCYA approval.

All qualifications are placed on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). QQI has responsibility to develop, promote and maintain the Irish NFQ. QQI also facilitates the recognition of foreign qualifications.

Prior to the introduction of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme in 2010, there was no minimum qualification requirement for staff working in the Early Years sector. Since 2013, a National Early Years Quality Agenda initiative comprised a range of measures including the introduction of a regulatory requirement that all staff working with children in pre-school services should hold a qualification in Early Childhood Care and Education at a minimum of Level 5 on the National Qualifications Framework (NFQ) or equivalent. Further, the contract for the ECCE programme would require that all Pre-school Leaders in ECCE services would be required to hold a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at a minimum of Level 6 on the NFQ, or equivalent. Additionally, a higher rate of capitation funding was available to Early Years settings where the Preschool Leader had achieved a major award in early childhood care and education at a minimum of level 7 on the NFQ or equivalent, and other assistant staff had achieved the minimum level 5 award. The role of childcare manager equates generally most closely to the profile of Advanced or Expert Practitioner as described in the Model Framework. The occupational profiles presented in the Model Framework were reviewed by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland and the Awarding Bodies to match them with appropriate awards levels in the NFQ.

School Education

The minimum qualifications required for appointment as principal, are the qualifications required to be recognised as a teacher, at the school level in question, and a minimum of five years satisfactory teaching experience. However, many applicants will, in practice, have also attained certified courses such as specialist Post Graduate Diplomas in Education, Management/Administration, or Doctoral or Masters Degrees in Education. A qualification in school leadership is not essential for appointment. Selection is based on merit, bearing in mind experience, qualifications, and achievements. The process is a formal one – an application form together with curriculum vitae is submitted, following public advertisement. Interviews are conducted by a selection committee and may include personal presentations by the applicants. Referees’ reports are sought in relation to previous professional experience and personal suitability for a leadership position. The selection committee reports to the board of management, or the ETB committee, which makes the appointment. Although they are not regularly evaluated, newly recruited principals serve a one-year probationary period, following which they secure tenured position. Provision for appeal regarding alleged inadequacies in due process or bias is available to disappointed applicants.

From the middle of the nineteenth century the churches in Ireland exercised a major role in the establishment of primary and post-primary schools, which became state-aided. The tradition arose where many religious congregations became responsible for the administration of schools. Thus, for many post-primary schools and for many of the larger, town-based primary schools, the head or principal teachers were members of the religious congregations, or in the case of seminary schools, priests of the diocese. Since the 1970s, with the decline in religious vocations and accelerating societal change, this pattern has changed, and there has been a predominant trend to appoint lay
people as principals of schools. Many of the religious authorities have established boards of trustees for their schools, with policies in line with their ethos and contemporary needs. The largest of these new trustee bodies are the Edmund Rice Schools Trust [7] (ERST) and Catholic Education: an Irish Schools Trust [8] (CEIST). Boards of management have the general responsibility for managing the schools with the principals and deputy principals dealing with the day-to-day administration and the implementation of national policy.

Historically, Ireland has had large numbers of small schools, particularly at primary level, serving scattered rural communities. Since the 1960s many small and older schools have closed and/or amalgamated with other schools in villages or towns. Where such an amalgamation takes place the principal of the amalgamated schools is appointed from within the principals of the existing schools. As privileged assistants, the former principals retain the level of a principal’s allowance appropriate to their former school for the remainder of their teaching career, unless they are appointed to a post of responsibility carrying a higher allowance. Principals of primary schools of less than eight teachers are required to teach a class or classes, as well as to administer the school.

**Conditions of Service**

**Early Childhood**

Pre-school services are autonomous in terms of staffing and each determines its own recruitment procedures. The Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations 2006 [9] do, however, require that services should have management, recruitment and training policies in place to ensure that a sufficient number of suitable and competent adults are available.

**School Education**

Since 1999, two representative associations – the Irish Primary Principals’ Network [10] (IPPN) and National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals [11] (NAPD) – have been formed with the aim of addressing principals' professional and personal needs, supporting principal teachers at local and county level networks and representing their views nationally. IPPN articulates the collective knowledge and professional experience of 6,600 Principals and Deputy Principals. NAPD represents its members on a wide range of educational, social and cultural organisations and contacts with educationalists across the globe. Both organisations work with the Department of Education and Skills [12], the National Parents' Councils (primary [13] and post-primary [14]), management bodies, unions, education agencies, academic institutions and children's charities towards the advancement of education.

They have conducted surveys, prepared policies and documents and lobbied in support of the needs of principals. An issue of debate is that while women greatly outnumber men in the teaching profession this is not at all reflected in the number of women who are principals. Among other concerns, principal associations seek further clarity on the extent of principals' responsibilities, more clarity on the relative roles of trustees, boards of management and principals; a more focused approach to the role of middle management personnel. They have also lobbied for more training for principals at the induction and in-career stages.

In the past, the principal's role was viewed as one predominantly focused on teaching matters with some administrative duties. In the new dispensation, more emphasis is placed on leadership, personnel management, communication skills and financial and legal accountability. There are new attempts to bring the main focus of the principal’s role back to leadership of teaching and learning. The Centre for School Leadership [15] (CSL) was established in 2016 in a partnership between NAPD, IPPN and the DES for an initial period of three years. The CSL’s responsibility extends across the
continuum of leadership development from pre-appointment training through to induction of newly appointed principals and continuous professional development throughout the leader's career. The Centre also advises the DES on policy in this area.

Supportive induction and CPD for principals is also a live issue of debate. The Department of Education and Skills has established a leadership and planning strand in the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) to assist beginning and experienced principals by providing programmes of professional development. The university education departments and some trustee bodies also offer courses in school leadership, which are well subscribed by teachers.

Further debates include the challenges faced by principals in many primary schools, associated with combining full-time teaching with attendance to administrative and leadership roles. Some principals in small post-primary schools also teach classes. The impetus for reform has seen principals across all schools raise concerns about the time and organisational pressures they face, particularly in the context of reduced resources. There is evidence of a decline in the number of applicants for the post of principal which is a cause of some concern. The remuneration of principals is framed on the basis of a teacher's salary, plus an allowance for the extra responsibilities involved in the exercise of the post.

While the principals' associations have been highlighting the multi-faceted roles of their members and their needs for greater training and other supports, the profile of the principal's role has won wider public recognition and regard nevertheless. Many of the principals in position and those aspiring to such posts (even if reduced in numbers) see the leadership role involved as professionally satisfying. A high degree of commitment is in evidence, with good interpersonal relationship qualities and a caring concern for the well-being of their school communities.

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