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Deputy Principals: A Hidden Asset in Schools?

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List of Abbreviations used in Report

AP1	Assistant Principal 1
AP2	Assistant Principal 11
ASD	Autistic spectrum disorder
C-19	Covid 19
COB	Code of behaviour
CPD	Continuing professional development
CSL	Centre for School Leadership
DCG	Design and Communications Graphics
DE	Department of Education
DES	Department of Education and Skills (previously Science)
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DDLDP	Deputy designated liaison person
DLP	Designated liaison person
DP	Deputy Principal
EAL	English as an additional language
ETB	Education and Training Board
EWO	Education Welfare Officer
GAA	Gaelic Athletic Association
GDPR	General data protection regulation
HR	Human resources
ICT	Information and communications technology
IT	Information technology
IPPN	Irish Primary Principals Network

ISMT	In school management team
JCPA	Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement
JMB	Joint Managerial Board
LAOS	Looking at Our School
LC	Leaving Certificate
LCA	Leaving Certificate Applied
LDS	Leadership Development for Schools
LGBTQ	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer or questioning
NAPD	National Association of Principals and Deputies
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
NQT	Newly qualified teacher
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OLCS	On- Line Claims System
PD	Professional development
PDST	Professional Development Service for Teachers
PME	Professional Master of Education
PTM	Parent-Teacher meeting
S & S	Supervision and substitution
SEN	Special educational needs
SENO	Special educational needs organiser
SESE	Social Environmental and Scientific Education
SET	Special Education Teachers
SLAR	Subject Learning and Assessment Review
SMT	Senior Management Team
SSE	School self-evaluation
TUSLA	(Child and Family Agency)
TY	Transition Year
UCD	University College Dublin
UG	University of Galway
UL	University of Limerick
VS Ware	(school administrative software system)

Executive Summary



The research team set out to explore how the position of deputy principal is perceived and enacted in Irish primary and post-primary schools. A review of the literature, national and international, and the views of 120 deputy principals (49 primary; 71 post-primary), through online questionnaire responses and 10 (5 primary; 5 post-primary) one-hour interviews, shape this report.

The literature review highlights a lack of clarity about the role of deputy principal, with practitioners engaging in a multiplicity of tasks. The extent and range of these often depend on the practices and preferences of the principal. Recent years have seen movement worldwide where deputy principals increasingly share in management and leadership as well as administration within the school. We note, however, that within the discourse of ‘distributed leadership’, the deputy principal position is rarely discussed. Participants identify significant job satisfaction in addition to role tensions and frustrations.

This research - albeit with a small number of participants - confirms much of the international findings. Based on the voices of participants, we suggest that the ‘multiplicity of tasks’ can be broken down into five distinct, while at times overlapping, categories:

1. Logistical maintenance: ensuring that the school operates smoothly, that students, teachers, support staff and all the associated back-up services are in place on a daily basis is seen as central and time-consuming.

2. Monitoring and maintaining behavioural standards and pastoral support: these supports to students are regarded as a core activity and can also be time-consuming. Seeing children and young people flourish is a major source of job satisfaction.
3. Building and nurturing good relationships with all stakeholders: this is viewed as important so that a dynamic, positive culture can be shaped and flourish. The principal-deputy principal relationship is regarded as especially vital.
4. Teamwork: working as part of a team that clarifies, shares and implements a vision for the school community in which the deputy works can be a source of great satisfaction; when such teamwork is underdeveloped deputies can find it frustrating.
5. Supporter of curriculum innovation and development: this is recognised as an important aspect of a deputy's leadership role. However, the urgency of more immediate demands and the unpredictable and reactive nature of the job often results in this being relegated in the list of priorities.

The key points for consideration from this scoping study are presented below.

Logistical maintenance

- The evidence suggests that, in addition to being very dedicated to fulfilling their roles, many deputy principals struggle with a multiplicity of tasks, with numerous tensions and even contradictions and, particularly, with a strong sense of not having sufficient time to do the job satisfactorily.
- Rather than describe these tasks as specifically administrative, management or leadership activities, the evidence points to individuals seeing their work as an overlapping continuum rather than distinct types of activity.
- The evidence suggests vagueness and lack of clarity about the deputy's role in some schools. It appears that duties and responsibilities tend to be less defined in small primary schools and much more delineated in large post-primary ones that have two or three deputies.
- While major differences are evident between life in primary and post-primary schools, the commonalities associated with a deputy's role are significant. At primary level, most deputy principals find that juggling full-time teaching responsibilities with leadership tasks can be very challenging.
- The 'loose' job descriptions and definitions identified in the literature can also be seen as giving the deputy principal position valuable flexibility. This flexibility can enable

creative responses to the real needs of a school and its students; each school's context, culture and personnel are unique and so require specific responses.

Working with students

- Addressing student wellbeing, including behavioural issues, mental health concerns, safeguarding and providing supports for children with additional needs, take up a significant portion of the deputy principal's day. It exerts an emotional and professional toll on them as they advocate for resources, while being sensitive to the complex lives of young people at home and in the community.
- Deputies also frequently take the lead in organising school-wide events such as sports day, Christmas events, and working with student councils and committees and more.
- In the arena of safety and child protection, deputy principals play a key role, particularly as Deputy Designated Liaison Persons (DDLPS). They are also involved in drafting, reviewing, and updating school policies, for example on health and safety, curriculum, behaviour etc.

Special Education provision

- The inclusion of children with additional needs to mainstream schools has been a feature of schools since the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act (2004). An associated development has been the appointment of Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs). The evidence points to some deputy principals also acting as SENCOs. Both roles require significant leadership skills to liaise with parents/ guardians, teachers and other professionals. They are also very time consuming. Respondents are fully aware of the deficits within special education provision as a whole and with the associated challenges that arise as they support the children, parents/guardians and teachers involved. This research prompts the question whether this practice of a deputy principal also acting as SENCO is sustainable within the current policy of increasing enrolment of children with Additional Educational Needs (AEN) in mainstream schools.
- Identifying children with SEN through observation and input from other professionals takes time. Throughout this report there are many references to the relentless toll of duties and the lack of time required to address these matters as teachers would wish. SENCOs/DPs are seen by colleagues as having the knowledge and capability to arrange assessments and therapies. This adds to the tension and complexity of their roles.

The point of intersection of communications networks

- Schools are sites of intense communication. Messages are continually being sent and received between staff, between students, between parents/guardians, and between individual members of these groups, with each other as well as with external stakeholders. Informants indicate a sharp awareness that deputy principals are at a critical intersection within the school's formal and informal communications traffic; they also indicate knowledge of the consequences of 'poor communication' in schools.
- It is apparent that there are many factors at play in shaping the cultures in schools. One important contribution deputy principals and other leaders can make is in initiating and furthering conversations with colleagues, particularly though not exclusively, professional conversations. The deputy principal has a key role in shaping school cultures.
- Data from the questionnaires and interviews point to a strong preference for more participative communication, planning and implementation of policies, moving away from a traditional, top-down model of decision-making.

Working with the principal and leadership team

- The literature on the position of deputy principal is relatively limited, though, internationally, there has been an increased visibility in the past decade. As in Ireland, many other countries have been moving from a strong hierarchical and authoritarian tradition where the deputy's role was very dependent on how much a principal delegated tasks and responsibilities. These tasks were mainly administrative, usually aimed at maintaining order and the smooth operation of the organisation; often there was limited power for the deputy to engage in leadership tasks.
- More recent thinking and discourse on schooling has favoured a shift to more shared models of leadership, away from responsibilities being concentrated in the principal, including the idea that all teachers play a leadership role. Within the past decade, policy documents in Ireland from both the Department of Education and the Teaching Council reflect this movement. While the term 'distributed leadership' has been widely used about school leadership, it is important to know that some critics see that term as underdefined and, at times, ambiguous. We note surprisingly little explicit discussion about deputy principals in the 'distributed leadership' literature.
- Deputy principals are seen as essential in supporting the school principal, playing a pivotal role in the day-to-day management of the school. They are increasingly viewed

in schools as distinct leaders, responsible for areas like curriculum development, student welfare, and staff management.

- The international literature poses the question as to whether the role of the deputy principal is to be viewed as a stepping stone to principalship or as a distinct, legitimate leadership position. Our data is inconclusive on this question, but it is very clear that many respondents have a strong commitment and loyalty to the school community they serve as deputies.

Support and wellbeing

- Many express high levels of satisfaction in their role. That is not to imply that the participants were uncritical, far from it. As Jennifer Nias (1989) noted, teachers are capable of being very satisfied and very dissatisfied with their working lives at the same time.
- Beyond external factors, several deputies recognised the challenges the position places on them as people. Maintaining work/life balance, improving how to manage time, managing relationships and dealing with conflict are among the skills required to be effective.
- The importance of ongoing professional development for deputy principals is another key theme. Some respondents were critical of their professional development opportunities. Others welcome the professional networks provided by various partners. Deputy principals need more formal professional development in leadership, as some aspire to become principals but lack structured preparation for the transition.
- Support comes at different levels within the system. At the school level deputies talked about the good relationships with the principal, middle management, teachers, guidance counsellors, chaplains, SNAs, other staff, students, parents/guardians and the wider community.
- At a personal level, all mentioned family and friends as being supportive.
- At system level, there is support from bodies such as IPPN, NAPD, Oide, Education Centres, Unions, networks etc.
- At policy level, some were critical of aspects of professional support in relation to job clarity, multiple tasks, relationships, stresses and tensions etc. They also commented, especially at primary level, about the lack of administrative support.

Leading Curriculum

- The deputy principal acts as an intermediary between curriculum, principal, parents, students, teachers and community through connecting, translating and at times brokering.
- The deputy principal is involved in curriculum making through their work on, for example, interpreting curriculum policy, timetabling, teacher allocation to areas of the curriculum, student allocation, leading professional development at school level, managing assessment and feedback for students, communicating with parents/guardians and advocating for students who need additional supports.
- Deputy principals work in schools supporting curriculum by creating space for teachers to meet, providing material support and having the difficult professional conversations to facilitate opportunities for change. Leading curricular change can be challenging when the culture of the school is not open to innovation.
- While tasks are talked about as being administrative in nature, the local knowledge of the school community context means that deputy principals often make crucial decisions that have an impact on teaching and learning in the school.

Significance of this research

We believe the time is right to look further at the position of deputy principals in schools, as practitioners share their unique perspectives. The research aims to illuminate the strengths, satisfactions and challenges of the position with a view to establishing pointers to a more nuanced appreciation of the possibilities of deputy principalship to enhance students' learning and the sustainability of schools. This research seeks to address the void in this area of leadership research and to help inform policy and practice on the role of the deputy principal in schools.

1. Introduction



1.1 Background

Reflective conversations about our work teaching and researching in Maynooth University's Education Department led to a growing realisation that the position of deputy principal in Irish primary and post-primary schools is under-explored. Through our interactions with teachers, aspiring and practising school leaders, we noted an unevenness in how the position is understood and enacted.

A review of national and international literature confirmed this perception, highlighting that the role is often misunderstood, under-appreciated and largely under-researched. Recent discourse on school leadership has emphasised the value of greater collaboration, including 'distributed leadership' (e.g. DE, 2022b, 2022c; Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018a). However, we sensed that this presents challenges to the cultural traditions in many schools. We were particularly struck by comments in the *Chief Inspector's Report 2016-2020* (DE, 2022a) when he observed that "the extent of the burden of the principal's role" continues to be a matter of grave concern "despite the investing in restoring middle leadership posts and the increased

powers to delegate roles and responsibilities across middle leaders”. As the Chief Inspector states: “it is incumbent on the system as a whole to ensure that what has been provided to date is working effectively”. We see deputy principalship as central to that discussion. These insights led us to this research question: “How is the position of deputy principal perceived and enacted in Irish primary and post-primary schools?”

Subsidiary questions include:

- Based on current practice and policy, what are the main duties undertaken by deputy principals?
- How is the position of deputy principal changing in the light of the current emphasis on distributed leadership?
- What do deputy principals themselves see as the strengths, satisfactions and challenges of the position?
- What pointers can be offered to clarify the identity of the deputy principal’s unique position?

To explore these questions, we designed a modest scoping study to capture the perspectives of currently practising deputy principals, using a case study methodology (Yin, 2018) within an interpretivist paradigm (Burke and Dempsey, 2022). It is exploratory in design as it sought to explore the hidden potential within the role of deputy principal. Ethical approval for the research was given by Maynooth University Faculty of Social Science Research Ethics Committee (ID: 2483900).

1.2 Historical Context of the Deputy Principal Role

For the past quarter century, the Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998) has been the key policy document shaping practice in schools. The Act makes more than 20 references to ‘the Principal’, a few of them to ‘the Principal and teachers’. There are clear statements about a principal’s position, duties and responsibilities. There is no mention in this legislation of deputy principals¹. In *Improving School Leadership* (LDS/OECD, 2007, p.21) three phases in the evolution of principalship in Ireland, as described by Sugrue (2003), are listed as:

¹ A striking contrast in the 1998 Education Act is that, in the section establishing the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), the deputy-chairperson (of which there are two) is mentioned seven times!

- a) predominantly administrative (prior to 1971);
- b) predominantly managerial (1971 – 1989);
- c) growing emphasis on leadership in addition to administration and management (1990 onwards).

Preparatory work for that LDS/OECD report gives some insight into thinking at that time. The leadership function of the principal is described as “seeing the bigger picture”, “having a vision for the school” and “being involved in strategic issues”. The report notes that “these concur with the view of leadership espoused by Ruth (2006, p.16) “The role of the leaders is to step back, understand what is going on, understand the wider context and think about where things are going in the longer run” (quoted in LDS/OECD, 2007). They go on to say that “At post-primary level, the role of the deputy principal has been significantly enhanced and formalised in Circular 4/98 (DES, 1998)”, which delineates the role of the deputy principal as follows:

- The Deputy Principal acts as the Principal in the absence of the Principal and assists the Principal in the fulfilment of the Principal’s role.
- The Deputy Principal occupies a position of vital importance in the administration and development of the school.
- The Deputy Principal shall undertake responsibility under the direction of the Principal for the internal organisation, administration and discipline of the school.
- The Deputy Principal shall assist the Principal through the carrying out of the specific professional duties for which responsibility is delegated.

That 2007 report then quotes Circular P07/03 (DES, 2003, p.1) and a rationale for the development of school management structures for deputy principals and other posts holders at primary level as:

- Match(ing) the responsibilities of the posts more closely to the central tasks of the school, and clearly specify(ing) responsibilities for the various posts
- Focus(ing) on the provision of opportunities for teachers to assume responsibility in the school for instructional leadership, curriculum development, the management of staff, and the academic and pastoral work of the school
- Establish(ing) selection procedures for Deputy Principals, Assistant Principals and Special Duties Teachers, with the aim of ensuring that the most suitable people are appointed.

The report next quotes from Section D of the 2003 Circular:

- The Deputy-Principal is required to assist the Principal teacher in the day-to-day organisation and supervision of the school. In addition, his/her teaching duties the Chairperson (of the Board of Management) should assign the Deputy-Principal specific duties. Before assigning such duties to the Deputy-Principal the Chairperson should discuss the matter with the Principal teacher (DES, 2003, p.25).

Observing that “almost three-quarters of principal teachers at primary level are ‘teaching principals’ i.e. they combine the dual roles of class teacher and principal”, the report then states that, following representations, “provision is now made for release time for teaching principals for the purpose of undertaking ‘administrative, leadership and management functions’ within the school”. In addition to these points, this landmark publication includes reference to professional development, local autonomy, support services, technological change, increasing accountability and legislative compliance, financial allowances, curriculum development, system gaps and weaknesses, the complexity of school governance, recruitment and retention of school leaders limited research – all of which are relevant to deputy principals.

Many of the points from the 2007 LDS/DES/OECD report feature in the documents relating to ‘quality framework for schools’ in more recent years under the title *Looking at Our School* (DES, 2016a, 2016b; DE 2022b, 2022c). As pointed out later, there are notable differences in the explicit references to deputy principals between the 2016 versions and their 2022 successors. In the latter, the implications suggest a more collaborative approach by the principal and the deputy(s) working together in leading a school.

While the Principal is ultimately responsible to the Board of Management/ Education Training Board (ETB), as appropriate, for the management and leadership of the school, the Deputy Principal occupies a position of vital importance within the senior leadership team in a school. Shared leadership requires openness and willingness on the part of Principals and Deputy Principals to share and to distribute leadership and management responsibilities amongst them in a manner that encourages and supports partnership. The Deputy Principal(s) cooperate/s with the Principal in the fulfilment of his/her role and acts or deputise/s as the Principal in the Principal’s absence.

DE Circular Letter 0003/2018: p.6

However, anecdotally, a wide range of practices by deputy principals is evident, from genuine shared leadership to minimal involvement. While oversimplifications are best avoided, practices at primary level appear less developed than at second level. During the Covid-19 crisis, much public attention was on the weight of responsibilities carried by principals (Dempsey and Burke, 2021). Limited explicit reference to the role of the deputy principal was a notable feature of the discourse.

Developments in understandings of the deputy principal position in schools over the past three decades or so has been accompanied by more focused support. The formation in the late nineties of both the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD) and the Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN) have become reliable sources of support and advice for school leaders. Moreover, these organisations gather, reflect and articulate the professional experiences and collective knowledge of principals and deputies to other stakeholders including the Department of Education.

The establishment of the Leadership Development for Schools (LDS) programme in 2002 by the Department of Education was further recognition of leaders' need for support. Initially, the LDS was aimed particularly at principals. The LDS team also made important contributions to *The Country Background Report* (LDS, 2007) which informed the *OECD's Improving School Leadership* (OECD, 2008). During those years, 2002-2010, courses, particularly for newly appointed principals and deputy principals such as 'Misneach', 'Tánaiste', 'Forbairt', Spreagadh, 'Cumasú' and 'Cothú' were developed.

Meanwhile, universities have been offering post-graduate diplomas as well as strands within Master of Education programmes for many years. For example, in a significant partnership development between LDS and Maynooth University, *Tóraíocht*, a post-graduate diploma in educational leadership (PGDEL) was developed. Since 2007 more than 4,500 teachers have successfully completed school leadership programmes in Maynooth.

In 2010, the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) took responsibility for the LDS programme. This was followed in 2015 by the setting up of the *Centre for School Leadership* (CSL, 2018), a partnership between the Department of Education, IPPN and NAPD. In 2023, CSL was subsumed into Oide, an integrated service to support the professional learning needs of all primary and post-primary school leaders and teachers.

Co-operation between the CSL, IPPN, NAPD and universities led to the setting up of the Post-Graduate Diploma in School Leadership (PDSL)². An important initiative by the CSL was developing coaching supports for school leaders and leadership teams.

1.3 The role of the deputy principal at Primary and Post-Primary level

Our focus was on the commonality of experience within the role of deputy at primary and post-primary level. One critical difference in the sectors is in the situation of the teaching deputy in the majority of primary schools. There are approximately 3,095 primary schools in Ireland. In 2023, 41.5% (1,294) of all schools were small with four or less teachers. However, only 13.3% (72,157) of pupils nationwide were enrolled in small schools (DE, 2023). While the number of small schools has been declining in recent years, they remain common, particularly in rural areas. Small schools are relatively rare in the greater Dublin area, but they comprise the majority of primary schools in many parts of the west of Ireland³. The number of administrative deputy principals is dependent on the number of children enrolled. The Department of Education grants administrative deputy principal posts to primary schools with larger enrolments, generally starting from around 350–400 pupils, therefore many deputy principals still have extensive teaching duties. Circular 0011/2024 provides the most recent guidance on staffing arrangements, including the allocation of administrative deputy principal roles (see also Appendix E).

It is important to say that many teaching deputies work as part of the leadership team of the school with a principal who is also teaching fulltime. Circular 0011/2024 (DE, 2024) confirms the retention of one leadership and management day a week for every teaching principal. This scheme has proven to be successful in supporting teaching principals with an increased workload, while ensuring consistent access to a teacher for their class (INTO, 2024). This, however, is dependent of having a supply of substitute teachers available to the schools.

² The programme is a collaboration between the Schools of Education at UG, UCD and UL - it is supported by Graduate and Professional Studies at UL and is taught by key academic team leaders and researchers. The programme is jointly awarded by the University of Limerick, University of Galway and University College Dublin (from UL website).

³ Statistical Bulletin, August 2024: Overview of Education 2003/04–2023/24 Department of Education

It is clear from the responses to our survey and in interviews that deputy principals experience feelings of guilt from not being able to concentrate fully on their work in the classroom nor on their work as school leaders. Teachers in primary schools see their relationships with children as in *'loco parentis'* and are committed to the values of care and nurturance. The more these values are denied, the greater the 'depressive guilt' of the teachers (Hargraves and Tucker 1991, p. 496). The 1,000 school leaders who responded to a national survey by the IPPN on the sustainability of their role, gave an average rating of 3.96 out of 10 for the sustainability of their role. For teaching principals this fell to 3.53 out of 10 (IPPN, 2022). It would be interesting to explore the ratings given by deputy principals in such a survey. While taking the challenges into account it is important to recognise the commonality of experience, at a personal and professional level in the lived reality of the deputy at primary and at post-primary level, as evident throughout this report.

From the outset the authors of this report have recognised that, in all schools, relationships between principals and deputy-principals are critically important. In practice, such relationships greatly shape the daily lives of deputies. Moreover, much of what is relevant for deputies also has strong resonances with school principalship. However, as noted later in this report, the literature on principals is much more extensive than that on deputy principals. If readers feel that principals – or for that matter assistant principals - are somewhat 'neglected' in this research, it is because the intention is to highlight specifically the work of deputy principalship within the complex spectrum of leadership in schools.

Our research aimed to hear the voices of deputies in conversation at interview and through their written responses to the questionnaire. Many welcomed the time to think through their roles at interview and were grateful for the opportunity to share their challenges and opportunities. As interviewers, we reflected on the urgent need to mandate time for such opportunities in our schools, to initiate conversations through which "beginnings are crafted, ends are negotiated, and means are assessed, all in complex continuous cycles" (Quantz *et al.*, 2016, p. 383).

1.4 Structure of this research report

A brief executive summary is presented at the outset.

Chapter one present the context for the research, how it arose as well as official views on the role of deputies in both primary and post-primary schools. An outline of how the research was conducted follows.

Chapter two provides a review of the pertinent literature used to inform the research.

Chapter three describes the methodology used, the methods for data collection and analysis.

Chapter four presents a synopsis of the data collected in the online questionnaires from the 120 participants.

Chapter five illustrates, through the voices of ten practicing deputy principals, some dimensions of the role.

Chapter six using a thematic analysis, provides a selection of issues that, in our opinion, deserve further discussion. Finally, this report concludes by attempting to offer some pointers as to how the asset in schools that are deputy principals, might be realised more widely and more effectively.

2. Literature Review



2.1 Statement of the problem

A major thrust of policy development within the last decade has been an emphasis on distributed leadership in schools. This can be defined as “a deliberate process of sharing leadership behaviour so that team members, other than the head or manager, take an active lead” (Lindon and Lindon, 2012, p.119). Harris (2013) sees distributed leadership as involving “mobilising leadership expertise at all levels in the school to generate more opportunities for change and to build the capacity for improvement”.

The *Looking at Our School* documents from the DES (2016a; 2016b) presented fresh ways of looking at school administration, management, and leadership. Circular Letter 0003/2018 (DE, 2018) and Circular Letter 0044/2019 (DE, 2019) significantly advanced the post of responsibility structure with the establishment and facilitation of leadership teams in schools, with appropriately defined and shared responsibilities. The updated version of *Looking at Our School* reinforces the notion of shared leadership in schools (DE 2022c; 2022d) as does the *Chief Inspector’s Report 2016-2020* (DE, 2022a).

Re-imagined understandings of leadership roles are now very evident in policy documents from Trust Bodies, in job descriptions and in the context of leadership and development programmes offered by Universities, Oide (formerly PDST), and Trust Bodies. Furthermore, a feature of recent developments has been new partnerships between relevant agencies, for example, Oide, ATECI and IPPN’s collaboration.

The *Chief Inspector's Report 2016-2020* suggests among its key findings regarding school leadership that:

- Clear communication practices and strong cultures of collaboration lie at the heart of effective schools, but they need further development in a minority of schools.
- Self-reflection and self-evaluation practices have evolved; systematic approaches are not yet fully established or embedded in many schools and settings across all sectors.
- Effective leaders and managers communicate well and demonstrate a strong commitment to improving the quality of provision for learners. (DE, 2022a, p. 242)

These system strengths offer a useful framework for interrogating the position of deputies across a range of schools with particular attention to sustainability.

The urgency of our research is further underlined when that same report (*ibid.* p.231) notes that “the extent of the burden of the principal’s role” continues to be a matter of grave concern “despite the investing in restoring middle leadership posts and the increased powers to delegate roles and responsibilities across middle leaders”. As the Chief Inspector remarks “it is incumbent on the system as a whole to ensure that what has been provided to date is working effectively” (DE, 2022a). We see deputy principalship as central to that discussion.

2.2 The role of deputy principal – Literature review

A striking feature of the international literature is the variation and inconsistency in nomenclature; in some jurisdictions the preferred term is ‘deputy-principal’ while elsewhere it can be ‘vice-principal’ or ‘assistant principal’. In addition, while ‘principal’ and ‘deputy principal’ are common, ‘head’ and ‘headteacher’, ‘deputy head’ and ‘deputy headteacher’ are also used, with varying patterns of capitalisation. In Ireland, from the late 1990s, usage changed from ‘vice-principal’, often with a hyphen, to ‘deputy principal’, frequently unhyphenated, while ‘assistant principal’ has become the preferred description of the positions previously known as ‘A posts’ and ‘B posts’ (DES, 1998).

Secondly, a persistent thread in the research findings across the world is the multiplicity and range of tasks associated with deputy principals combined with a vagueness or lack of precision or definition of the role (Harvey, 1994a; Grant, 2014; Leaf and Odhiambo, 2017; Sibanda, 2018; Pollock, Wang and Hauseman, 2017; Berry and Townsend, 2019). However, within that

generality, there are some recurring activities. For example, one recent Irish study (Flaherty and Mannix McNamara, 2024, p. 11) recorded staff perceptions of deputy principals in post-primary schools as working with the principal in administrative duties and the day-to-day running of the school, with management roles regarding discipline and behavioural issues, supervision and substitution and timetabling mentioned as common practices.

Thirdly, until relatively recently, many research articles on deputy principals began by asserting that the role is ‘under-researched’ (Harris, Muijs and Crawford, 2003; Cranston, Tromans and Reugebrink, 2004; Grant, 2013; O’Donovan, 2015; Harris and De Flaminis, 2016; Leaf and Odhiambo, 2017; Kumalo and Van der Vyer, 2020). In contrast, surveying research on ‘school principals’ tends to confirm this assertion, with hundreds of research reports, books and articles on that topic. However, as Tahir, Musah and Hassan (2023, p.5) report, since 2011 there has been ‘a tremendous growth’ in the number of published articles on deputy principals.

Finally, to muddy the waters further, ‘school principals’ in the literature frequently seems to refer to a sole individual within a school, occasionally explicitly including ‘deputy principals’ and sometimes appears to imply inclusion of both roles. Furthermore, the increasingly popular terms ‘school leadership’ and ‘distributed leadership’ shift the emphasis more towards broader teacher leadership as well as greater collegiality and collaboration among all staff in a school (Harris and Muijs, 2005; Helterbran, 2010; O’Donovan, 2015; Abrahamsen, 2018; Hargreaves and O’Connor, 2018a; , DE, 2022b; DE 2022c).

2.3 Conceptualising the role of deputy principal

Historically and internationally, under-conceptualising of the deputy’s role leads to vagueness and, at times, conflicting perspectives. While the literature consistently suggests that the deputy’s role is all-encompassing, it also suggests that, in reality, it tends to be imprecise and ambiguous, without structure, and dependant on local understandings (Harris, Muijs and Crawford, 2003; Cranston, Tromans and Reugebrink, 2004; Grant, 2013; O’Donovan, 2015; Harris and De Flaminis, 2016; Goksoy,2016; Leaf and Odhiambo, 2017; Abrahamsen, 2018; Berry and Townsend, 2019). In an Australian study, Leaf and Odhiambo (2017) found that deputies “performed a huge range of tasks”, “frequently performing as instructional leaders”

and contributed to the school, “through distributing leadership, team building and goal setting”. These researchers also noted that professional learning of deputies was “largely dependent on principal mentoring and self-initiated but was often *ad hoc*”. They suggest a need to frame “the deputies’ role as emergent educational leaders rather than administrators” and for professional development that is “coherent, integrated, consequential and systematic”. Similar emphases can be found in Barnett *et al.*, (2012), Liang and Shaw (2016), Hamm (2017), Barnett *et al.*, (2012), Khumalo and Van der Vyver (2020).

Recent changes in Norway saw a traditional administrative deputy head role re-organised into a new one with expanded leadership responsibility for staff and for instructional leadership. Abrahamsen (2018) found that the shift to more learning focused leaders has led to tensions for deputy principals between autonomy and control. In Ontario, Canada, a study by Pollock, Wang and Hauseman (2017) found that vice-principals in elementary and secondary schools spent their time mainly in five areas: administration and human resources; instructional leadership; relationship management; school management; and community and professional learning. Student discipline and internal school management were two significant predictors to the average amount of time vice-principals spent working each week. Only 10.3% of respondents thought they were spending enough time on instructional leadership.

That Canadian study revealed that vice-principals’ work-related challenges are manifested in six areas: community environment, political environment, principal leadership, staff management, students’/parents’ influence, and teacher influence. Students’ mental health issues lead to vice-principals, particularly in secondary schools, feeling emotionally drained. The authors conclude that with 66% of participants in their study having fewer than five years of experience in their roles as vice-principals, there is a great need for formal supports for both aspiring and practising vice-principals (Pollock *et al.*, 2017).

In South Africa, Sibanda (2018) found that while deputies might appreciate the idea of distributed leadership, some “showed a lack of trust in teachers’ ability to take leadership and believed that if teachers are given that power, they may abuse it”. Sibanda suggests that formal leaders in schools need to “build trust relationships in which teachers feel entrusted to make good decisions for the school”. In another South African study, Kumalo and Van der Vyer (2020) sought the views of 157 secondary school principals and concluded that deputies need “positional awareness or role-awareness, technical, socialisation and self-awareness skills in

order to perform their duties effectively”. The authors recommend “... a preparation programme, mentoring and ongoing professional development to develop these skills for deputy principals in order to empower them to contribute to the attainment of quality education”.

While research indicators point to a need for nurturing professional collaboration between principal and deputy principal(s), the immediacy of school life often means that meetings between principals and deputies are not prioritised. In their UK study, Garrett and McGeachie (1999) concluded that “a lack of quality time” inhibited meaningful practice of the role and that additional time given to deputies “is not necessarily spent in meetings with the head” who perhaps takes their classes and is “often lost in cases of emergency or staffing crisis” (*ibid*, p.75).

Students’ mental health issues lead to vice-principals, particularly in secondary schools, feeling emotionally drained

Pollock, Wang and Hauseman, 2017, Ontario, Canada

2.4 Role of Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator

Policy trends in the 21st century towards inclusion have promoted greater participation of children with special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream schools. This development has, in turn, led to the emergence of a position of Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator (SENCO) in Irish schools. The role is “complex, substantial, and primarily operational with no formal identity” and “shrouded in ambiguity and lacking in clarity” (Fitzgerald and Radford 2020). At the primary level, the SENCO is sometimes also the deputy principal. Thus, studies that illuminate the SENCO role can also shed light on the deputy principal position, not least in the understandings of operational, management and leadership dimensions, as well as the practice of distributed leadership. Colum and Mac Ruairc (2023) found “a feeling of despondency among SENCOs in primary schools”. They state, with echoes of Grant’s (2014) conclusions about deputy principals, that “the status of the SENCO within the school context

is determined through how the SENCO is included and acknowledged in leadership and management positions, and the leadership practices of the SENCO are attributable to the manner in which the role of the SENCO is challenged or confirmed” (Colum and Mac Ruairc, 2023).

In their study of SENCOs in Irish secondary schools, Fitzgerald and Radford (2020) recognise the centrality of school context and culture. The SENCO is more likely to flourish when schools develop systematic approaches to collaboration. They maintain that “Systems facilitating collective and individual reflection, planning, action and evaluation in relation to teaching and learning for all learners may support schools to identify the need for change” (*ibid*, p.1002). Fitzgerald and Radford assert that “In learning organisations (Senge,1990) where such cultures (and practices) exist, it may engender reflective and adaptable responses to meeting diverse needs and data-informed approaches to leadership” (Fitzgerald and Radford, 2020, p. 1002).

2.5 Tensions and uncertainty

Historically,

The deputy principalship originates from the designation of a senior teacher to accept responsibility for an overflow of lesser administrative tasks in order to reduce the workload of the principal. The specific responsibilities of the deputy principal were decided by the principal (Harvey, 1994a).

Harvey notes that in the British tradition a paternalistic concept of headship had passed from nineteenth century public grammar schools to primary schools. As the deputy’s role was dependent almost totally on what the principal wanted, it varied from school to school and could involve any aspect of administration.

Greenfield (1985) reviewing the development of the role in the United States summed it up as stating the principal “dictated duties, responsibilities and experiences of the deputy-principal”. Harvey refers to lists of tasks identified by Kourra which typically are “an *ad hoc* set of tasks which are not grounded in a clear conceptualization of the purpose of the role in a school which is a place for learning” (Harvey, 1994a). Within the range of tasks associated with the deputy principal, administrative tasks, often “janitorial in character” (Leader and Boldt, 1994)

dominated; there was little involvement with leading teaching and learning. Based on a study by Barr and Himmler (1985), Harvey mentions three directions in which deputy principals' efforts were directed:

- monitoring the school environment to ensure the organisational regularity and values of the school prevailed;
- supporting situations that are interpreted as reinforcing the organisational regularity and/or promoting organisational values;
- remedying situations interpreted as upsetting organisational routines (Harvey, 1994a).

It is not our intention here to revisit the slow historical evolution of the various understandings and conceptualisations of the deputy principal role as these are readily available in a number of other studies (e.g. Greenfield, 1985; Ribbins, 1997; Grant 2013). However, apparently casual throwaway phrases can sometimes shine valuable light on educational realities. Grant (2013) cites Good (2008) as stating that deputy principals in Texas used to fill their days with 'Books, Behinds and Buses', going on to make the point that, not too different from the early literature, the deputy's duties were mainly associated with "student discipline and attendance". Significantly, the deputy has "little influence on the overall leadership of schools" (Grant, 2013, p.22). Furthermore, deputy principal job descriptions were vague, and deputies were often given tasks which they were not trained to do. The literature from this time consistently showed how the principal dictated duties, responsibilities and experiences of the deputy-principal (Greenfield,1985).

During the 1990s, in many countries, changes relating to the roles and responsibilities of deputy principals evolved with two strong trends particularly evident. Firstly, practitioners themselves pushed for a change in the balance from tasks directed at maintaining the school's smooth operation to leading more developmental activities such as curriculum development, teacher professional development and school policies (Harvey, 1994a; Leaf and Odhiambo, 2017; Chi-Kin Lee,, Kwan and Walker, 2015; Bufalino, 2019; Brivina, Mastora and Psoni, 2020). Secondly, traditional views of schools as very hierarchical were softening to explore more shared models of leadership (Hargreaves, 1994a; Harris and Spillane, 2008; Groon, 2010; Gunter, 2016).

Following the National Education Convention held in Dublin in 1993, the report stated:

While the role of the principal is relatively well-defined, that of the vice-principal is rather vague. Indeed, some division of opinion is apparent on how this position fits into the overall management system in schools. One view is that the principal and vice-

principal form the senior management team in the school, while another is that the vice-principal is a member of the middle-management team” (Coolahan (editor), 1994, p. 45).

Since that time, a more nuanced and complex view of deputy principalship - and school leadership generally - is evident in Irish research studies (e.g. Grant, 2014; O’Donovan, 2014) and in policy (CSL, nd; DE, 2016; 2022).

“While the role of the principal is relatively well-defined, that of the vice-principal is rather vague”.

Report on National Education Convention, 1994

As indicated in the introduction, the setting up of the Leadership for Development in Schools (LDS) programme in 2002 was a significant milestone with a dedicated team of experienced leaders developing and presenting programmes for newly appointed principals and deputies. These have been further developed and expanded by PDST, CSL and now Oide.

In 2016, the Teaching Council published *Cosán, A Framework for Teachers Learning*. Among the core beliefs it listed as arising from “significant developments in thinking in relation to learning, assessment and leadership” was that all teachers are leaders, quite a move away from traditional views on school leadership (Teaching Council, 2016b, p.5). *Looking at Our School* (DE, 2016), another milestone publication, set out in some detail how leadership in schools might be exercised with heavy emphasis on distributed leadership and staff collaboration. However, deputy principals appeared incidental rather than central to the shift in thinking.

In the 2020-21 school year, as one of the responses to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Department of Education granted deputy principals in primary schools some release days from teaching duties “ranging from 5 days to 16 days depending on the school size, to support administrative principals” (DE, 2022a, p.31). Implicit in this provision was a recognition that tensions exist when one is appointed as deputy principal but is also expected to function as a full-time teacher. The slightly revised version of *Looking at Our School* that appeared in 2022 indicates a conscious effort to mention deputy principals at almost every opportunity.

2.6 School leadership team

Exploring the position of deputy principals inevitably leads to some interrogation of the position of principal and leadership generally. School leadership has been identified as second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning (Leithwood *et al.*, 2006). In addition, shared models of leadership are increasingly regarded as contributing to school success (Spillane, 2005; Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018a). These emphases have led to increased expectations of greater active and meaningful participation of deputy principals in leadership including goal setting, redesigning the organisation, developing people and managing the instructional programme - teaching and learning (Celikten, 2001; Leithwood *et al.*, 2006). However, teacher expectations of more traditional enactments of the deputy's role can lead to resistance to an involvement in instructional leadership in particular, as Jeffers (2006b) recounted when reflecting on his own experience as a deputy principal.

According to Gronn (2010), the model of 'heroic leader' has not been sufficiently responsive to the complexity of modern educational leadership. The role of the principal continues to expand under a whole new architecture, but with no similar expansion or development for the role of the deputy. The legacy of a strong hierarchical, authoritarian leadership tradition casts a long shadow over many studies. Key questions for schools include: Who leads this school? Is there one person at the top, or is it a more level playing field with a shared model of leadership?

Day *et al.*, (2011) concluding their national three-year research project in England identified eight dimensions of successful school leadership, all centred on student learning, wellbeing and achievement. They maintain that successful leaders:

- define their values and vision to raise expectations, set direction and build trust;
- reshape the conditions for teaching and learning;
- restructure parts of the organization and redesign leadership roles and responsibilities;
- enrich the curriculum;
- enhance teacher quality;
- enhance the quality of teaching and learning;
- build collaboration internally;
- build strong relationships outside the school community.

These researchers add “Although the sequence, timing, order and combination of these strategies vary from school to school, the visions and values are strikingly similar” (Day *et al.*, 2011 p. 229).

Linked to the foregoing might be added the importance of context and culture. As Barth (2001) put it, a key task of a leader is to read the culture of a school. Stoll (1998) noted that culture involves the complex interaction of a school’s history, context and the people in it, while McBeath (2012) contends that a key leadership role is to foster a culture in which learning is the day-to-day norm, built into the fabric of school life. This point is developed further by Day *et al.*, (2020) who contends that principals have a key role to play in setting direction and creating and sustaining positive school cultures. Stoll and Temperley (2009) maintain that a fundamental challenge for school leadership to enhance twenty-first century learning is to be flexible, adaptable and creative.

While by no means exhaustive, these descriptions give a flavour of some dominant themes in the school leadership literature and outline a framework for further exploration.

One of the few Irish studies on deputy principalship, concluded that in primary schools the pervading culture determines how much meaningful opportunity is distributed beyond the principal (Grant, 2013). This echoes a theme that recurs in much of the international literature: a vagueness and limited clarity about the role.

Grant (2013)

In O’Donovan’s (2015) study of distributed leadership across three Irish post-primary schools, she noted that “while there is widespread support for a distributed model of leadership, the concept does not explicitly form part of the discourse in the case-study schools. This poses challenges for school leaders and policymakers to put mechanisms in place to re-culture schools, to develop teacher-leadership capacity and to reflect on the future direction of leadership in Irish post-primary schools”.

A major shift, in discourse if not necessarily in practice, took place in 2016 when the Department of Education’s Inspectorate published *Looking at Our School* (DE, 2016a, 2016b). These innovative policy documents presented a fresh dynamic view of schooling with a strong

emphasis on leadership for teaching and learning. The idea of collaborative leadership pervades the documents. However, the vagueness and limited clarity about the deputy principal mentioned earlier was also evident. This is probably best illustrated by comparing the 2016 version of *Looking at Our School* with the slightly amended 2022 revision (DE, 2022a, 2022b). In the 2016 editions, the term ‘deputy principal’ is used 23 times for post-primary schools and three for primary schools; six years later, there are 62 mentions in the version for post-primary schools and 61 in the one for primary and special schools.

Challenges associated with shifting the cultures in schools to more distributed models of leadership are implied in the Chief Inspector’s Report 2016-2020 (DE, 2022), as is some inspectorial frustration. It notes that, since 2014, a School Leadership Working Group (SLWG) has been working towards developing “optimal leadership practices in schools”. The report then states:

Much of the focus of the engagement between school leadership organisations and the SLWG has been on the extent of the burden on the principal’s role, despite the investment in middle leadership and the increased powers to delegate roles and responsibilities across middle leaders. In that regard, it is incumbent on the system as a whole to ensure that what has been provided to date is working effectively. This is particularly so, given the Department’s considerable investment in supporting school leadership.

Chief Inspector’s Report 2016-2020, (DE, 2022, p.221).

This greater visibility for deputy principals in LAOS 2022 reflects an international trend of awareness as reflected in a tripling of publications on the role in the second decade of this century when compared with the first decade. In the context of encouraging collaborative models of schooling, the LAOS emphasis is not a ‘top-down only’ model nor is the Teaching Council’s (2016) *Code of Professional Conduct* which also envisions extensive teacher collaboration. Each school is unique, particularly in how leadership is exercised. O’Donovan (2014, p.266) notes schools are often at different stages of development and “there are variations between schools in the extent and nature of leadership distribution”.

Grant’s (2013) study, including interviews with twelve deputy-principals in Irish primary schools, revealed “the complex relationship which exists between both roles (principal and deputy principal) and the extent to which the pervading school culture determines how much

meaningful leadership opportunity is distributed beyond the principal”. His informants described their role as “being in the main unfulfilled and underutilised” (Grant, 2013, p.143). Most felt well prepared for the role of deputy but “underprepared to assume a principalship” (*ibid*, p.144). Grant proposed a need for some role reconceptualisation with “a change in organisational culture that will bring more ownership, a larger role and more autonomy to its incumbents”. However, he notes that not all respondents would embrace wholeheartedly a redefined role encompassing greater co-leadership, commitment, time and accountability for the deputy” (*ibid*, p.144).

With the cultures within schools emerging as such a critical variable in the literature of deputy principalship and school leadership generally, Schien’s (2004) description is worth recalling:

Culture is the deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organisation that operate unconsciously, and that define in a basic ‘taken for granted’ fashion an organisation’s view of itself and its environment (*ibid*, p.26)

Furthermore, he sees the culture of a group (such as a school staff) as:

A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems (*ibid*, p.17).

Shorthand descriptions of school culture also abound in the literature, for example, ‘the way we do things around here’ (Deal and Kennedy,1983, p. 4), ‘the social glue that hold people together’ (Schien, 2004, p. 11) ‘patterns of behaviour that distinguish us from them’ (Gruenert and Whitaker, 2015, p. 6), and ‘a set of behaviours that seem strange to new employees’, (Gruenert and Whitaker, 2015, p. 6), ‘habits and habitats’ (Robinson, 2017, p. 154). Culture is also shaped by external factors such as societal expectations and policy emphases from government. In the latter regard, certain leadership practices will be encouraged and others underplayed. In her 2014 analysis of 21 WSE reports, O’Donovan observed that: "There is no evidence in the reports to indicate if the principal and deputy principal engage with students on their learning, with teachers on their teaching methodologies or if they monitor teaching and learning in classrooms” (O’Donovan, 2014, p. 206).

“..... the pervading school culture determines how much meaningful leadership opportunity is distributed beyond the principal”

Grant (2013)

Moynihan and O’Donovan’s (2022) study of emerging collaborative cultures in voluntary secondary schools identifies the historical legacy of “power and authority ... located in the principal with the teacher being denied agency” where “The teacher operated a closed-door system and an isolationist teaching” (*ibid*, p.614)

2.7 Individualism

Distributed leadership implies a culture in which school leaders and staff work together collaboratively. Nearly half a century ago, Lortie (1975, p.56 *sqq.*) identified several key characteristics of teaching, including ‘individualism’. Uncertainty about effectiveness, he maintained, led teachers to rely of their own personal indicators of success. This in turn led them to goals in tune with their own capacities and interests. A direct consequence of this is a strong inclination to maintain autonomy and resist anything that might threaten that autonomy. On top of that, many schools, Lortie found, socialised teachers into a ‘sink or swim’ culture (*ibid*, p.55), isolated from colleagues and collegiality. While recent policies such as *Looking at Our School* (DE, 2022c) seek to move schools towards greater collaboration, the culture of individualism that Lortie identified can be deeply embedded in traditions, beliefs and practices.

Around the same time as Lortie was putting forward his insights into cultures of teaching, Stenhouse (1975) in the UK advanced the distinction between teachers who are ‘extended’ professionals rather than ‘restricted ’ones. This concept is also reflected in notions of being a ‘critically reflective practitioner’ (Brookfield, 2017; Ghaye, 2011). In both approaches, trusting in the benefits of collaborating with colleagues is central as is the rejection of a competitive individualism. Not surprisingly, when teachers are appointed to positions of deputy principals, some of that culture of individualism can be present to a greater or lesser extent as the inclination to “want to do everything alone” (Hargreaves and O’Connor, 2018a, p. 24) can run

deep. Newly appointed deputy principals can also struggle with a tension between their understanding of role as part of a hierarchy and a desire to be ‘collegial’. Sergiovanni maintained that collegiality is reciprocal because it involves both support and cooperation—give and take between professionals. “What makes two people colleagues is common membership in a community, commitment to a common cause, shared professional values, and a shared professional heritage. Without this common base, there can be no meaningful collegiality” (Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 91). Nurturing this combination of support and cooperation is not easy. Hargreaves (1994) first warned of the danger of ‘contrived collegiality’ and continues to beat that drum (Hargreaves and O’Connor, 2018b).

Newly appointed deputy principals can also struggle with a tension between their understanding of role as part of a hierarchy and a desire to be ‘collegial’.

More recently, McNamara (2021, p.23) identified a tension between a traditional understanding of the Irish primary school deputy principal as “the person in charge when the principal is absent” and distributed leadership. She concludes that a key issue to be addressed is “assigning more accountability to deputy principals sharing responsibility ‘with’ rather than ‘instead’ of the principal”.

In the UK context, Muijs and Harris (2003) noted that, despite increased emphasis on partnership between principals with deputy principals and assistant principals, a maintenance rather than a developmental model persisted. Their research suggested that deputy principals wished to increase their leadership roles including more involvement in planning, policy making, staff and curriculum development and external relationships. In terms of reading and shaping positive school cultures, West-Burnham’s (2011, p.159) assertion that “the theory and practice of community is a more appropriate paradigm for learning and wellbeing than traditional organisational structures and processes” is also relevant. As a useful marker of traditional school leadership practices and perspectives in Ireland, Leader and Boldt’s 1994 study is instructive. One of the few research studies conducted at that time, the focus tends to be on ‘the principal’ with limited reference to ‘the deputy’. However, that research can

illuminate aspects of school leadership that are very relevant to the deputy principal role. For example, they remark:

Consistent with research findings elsewhere, the workload of principals in Irish voluntary secondary school is characterised by its variety, demands and unpredictability. The researchers were nonetheless struck by the pace and content of this workload; this usually involves evening and weekend activity. Furthermore, it was surprising how much of principals' time is spent on low-value activities such as maintenance and janitorial tasks, fund-raising, and responding to problems and incidents as they occur. There was a marked discrepancy between the activities principals think should consume most of their time and the activities reported and observed to actually consume most of their time (Leader and Boldt, 1994, p.6).

While some school leaders might maintain that little about their role has fundamentally changed in the subsequent three decades, that can be countered by policy developments that highlight shared responsibilities (DE, 2022a). Murphy's (2019) overview of research on school leadership between 2008 and 2018 also suggests development in policy in relation to their role. Furthermore, as noted earlier, in *Cosán*, the declaration is made "that all teachers are leaders" (Teaching Council, 2016b, p.5), a significant shift in thinking.

However, discussion about 'shared responsibilities' needs to be tempered by posing questions such as whose interests are served. How does the change empower students? While the rhetoric may be about increased professional autonomy, does the movement represent greater accountability, notably to the Department of Education? (Lynch, Gummel and Devine, 2012). Furthermore, as will be seen later, in any exploration of deputy principalship, issues of power also deserve consideration (Sarason, 1996; Lumby, 2013).

"... the theory and practice of community is a more appropriate paradigm for learning and well-being than traditional organisational structures and processes".

West-Burnham (2011)

2.8 Distributed leadership

Since the turn of the century, the concept of ‘distributed leadership’ in schools has been a strong strand in educational research and literature (e.g. Harris and Spillane, 2008; Leithwood, Mascall and Strauss, 2009; Humphreys, 2010; Harris, 2013; Diamond and Spillane, 2016; Mifsud, 2023). However, the term is contested and debated and sometimes misused as “an umbrella term to encompass any mode of shared, collaborative, or extended leadership practice” (Harris, 2013). Surprisingly, expectations that deputy principals might feature centrally in the distributed leadership discourse are not realised. The deputy principal role tends to be implied, hidden and presumed rather than addressed explicitly.

A distributed model of school leadership presents an opportunity for a paradigm shift from a hierarchical, ‘top-down’ approach with a single leader to a more collaborative, horizontal one where deputy principals and other staff members exercise leadership (Bush, 2011; Hargreaves and O’Connor, 2018a; Murphy and Brennan, 2022). Such a cultural change has the potential to ease the burden on over-worked principals, to enable colleagues to develop talents that can enrich the whole school community and for school to respond to a changing society (Day *et al.*, 2000). The theory is that teachers flourish when given real leadership, that “Within every school there is a sleeping giant of teacher leadership, which can be a strong catalyst for making change” (Katzenmeyer and Moller, 1996, p.2). This perspective also seeks to overcome what Helderbran (2010) calls the ‘I am just a teacher’ syndrome.

However, despite the term’s popularity, Tian, Risku and Collins (2016) concluded that a commonly agreed definition of distributed leadership is hard to find. To counter the “relatively large body of normative work promoting distributed leadership”, Lumby offers a critique, noting the absence of considerations of power in the distributed leadership discourse. She argues that “The (distributed leadership) theory's confusions, contradictions and utopian depictions are argued to be a profoundly political phenomenon, replete with the uses and abuses of power” (Lumby, 2013, p.592) and concludes that the effect of distributed leadership is to maintain the power status quo.

(In much of the literature on distributed leadership) the deputy principal role tends to be implied, hidden and presumed rather than addressed explicitly.

In his report for the years 2016 to 2020, former Chief Inspector at the Irish Department of Education Inspectorate, Harold Hislop includes a definition from Linden and Linden (2012, p.119) stating that “Distributed leadership may be defined as ‘a deliberate process of sharing leadership behaviour so that team members, other than the head or manager, take an active lead’”. This is followed by an extract from Harris (2014): “It involves ‘mobilising leadership expertise at all levels in the school to generate more opportunities for change and to build the capacity for improvement’” (DE, 2022a, p.226). The Chief Inspector adds that “To support the advancement of distributed leadership in schools, Circular 0003/2018 and Circular 0044/2019 provided for a post of responsibility structure involving the establishment and facilitation of leadership teams in schools, with appropriately defined and shared responsibilities”. The commentary notably then refers to ‘distributed leadership and teamwork’ being ‘very good or good’ in a majority of schools, adding “Notwithstanding these positive findings, there is scope to build capacity in the area of distributed leadership and in the role of the in-school management team in leading teaching and learning”.

Sugrue (2009, p.368), like Harris (2008) questions whether the new forms of leadership currently fashionable - including distributed leadership - will be any more effective than what has been the norm. Sugrue does see the focus on interactions within the distributed leadership discourse as a strength as it draws attention to how leadership practices are enacted and embedded in routines. It therefore offers the possibility “to be empowering by releasing the leadership potential of all actors on the school scene, and this can be a major ‘plus’ for leadership capacity and density within a school community” (Sugrue, p.368). Hickey, Flaherty and Mannix McNamara (2024, 2022) noted that hierarchical structures within schools are not conducive to shared models of leadership. Barry, Walsh, O Gallchóir and Mannix-McNamara (2023) state that in the DEIS schools in their study, collaborative cultures and positive interactions resulting from schools implementing their DEIS Plans appear to promote a culture

of ‘structural togetherness’. These findings resonate with Jeffers and Lillis (2021) identification of the centrality on positive relationships in how schools respond to educational inequality.

These attentions to the micropolitics of school life bring one back to Ball’s observation that “In no other institution are notions of hierarchy and equality, democracy and coercion forced to co-exist in the same close proximity” (Ball, 1987, p.15) and Sarason’s point that “Any educational reform that does not explicitly and courageously own up to issues surrounding changing patterns of power relationships is likely to fail” (Sarason, 1996, p.31). More recently, Quinn (2022) highlights that economics also needs to be considered in discussion of distributed leadership as he found a “cleavage between a rhetoric of workplace democracy and a reality of management work carried out voluntarily and unpaid, including activities which arguably are not leadership at all”.

These points about hierarchy, democracy, relationships, and power are all highly relevant to the position of any deputy principal in any school. Furthermore, the persistent understating – and at times almost total absence - of the role of deputy principals in commentary and discussion of distributed leadership at both primary and post-primary levels is noteworthy.

2.9 Teamwork

In the light of mixed findings regarding distributed leadership earlier, as well as Lortie’s conclusions about teacher individualism, ‘teamwork’ may be a more appropriate and less contentious term not only when interrogating the position of deputy principal but of leadership across the whole school. Katzenbach and Smith (1993, p. 45) characterise a team as “a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable”. Katzenbach and Smith contend that teams operate at one of five levels: a working group; a pseudo team; a potential team; a real team; and a high-performance team. Team effectiveness depends on clear goals and purpose for the team, clear roles and responsibilities, a supportive context including resources and the sharing of values, vision and mindset (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993, p. 50 sq.). While their research did not specifically look at schools, this model can be very relevant when examining the leadership teams in schools.

Aguilar puts the case for teamwork as follows:

We can't do it alone. No individual alone can transform our schools into places where all children get what they need every day. Many of us are acutely aware of how much work needs to be done and of how far we are from the ideal of education. Teams have great potential for solving hard problems in challenging contexts. They bring together more skill, knowledge, and experience to work than any single individual can (Aguilar, 2016, p.7).

2.10 Autonomy and accountability

Despite recent policy emphases on distributed leadership and school self-evaluation (SSE) (DES, 2012), there have been ambiguous positions in relation to these concepts. For example, a fresh focus on middle-leadership was grossly undermined by cutbacks associated with the economic recession after 2008 (McNamara and O'Hara, 2012); these have since been restored. Thus, at that time, increased expectations were dashed by the limited capacity of schools to engage, resource and deliver on such expectations. Secondly, while appearing to empower schools to be more autonomous with regard to shaping their own destinies, a strong underlying counter current towards greater accountability and 'new managerialism' (Lynch, Devine and Grummel, 2012) has been identified by various scholars (Sugrue, 2009; Skerritt, O'Hara, Brown, McNamara and O'Brien 2021; Barry, Walsh, Ó Gallchóir and Mannix-McNamara 2022; Fleming, 2024).

Autonomy is an important concept to consider in relation to leadership with some research pointing to a "correlation between leadership autonomy, strategic decision-making and student performance" (Wermke *et al.*, 2023). Wermke and colleagues talk about autonomy being a "complex phenomenon" about decision-making and control within unique contexts (*ibid*, p. 348). Their work focuses on principal autonomy but has some key messages for deputy principals, such as that autonomy in education needs to be seen as acting in a least four domains – educational, social, developmental and administrative. They also talk about how leadership needs to adapt to the local setting. This unique ecology of individual schools is a recurring theme within the literature.

2.11 Looking at Our School (LAOS) in practice

One illustration of how the shared leadership aspired to in *Looking at Our School* (DE, 2022b, 2022c) works in practice is evident in the joint reflection by Rafferty, Hayes, O'Connor and

Sheehan (2021). Four leaders in a large post-primary school explain how they have an effective senior management team “mainly because there is clarity about our roles, informed by great discussion and collaboration” (*ibid*, p.184). The deputy principal notes that “When I became a DP, the clarity on our roles allowed a focus that could have been lost in the firefighting of daily school life but presented opportunities to grow and to adjust our roles as needed” (*ibid*, p.185). An Assistant Principal (AP1) states: “The culture is key, cultivating the conditions by design or intent to nurture leadership at all levels. There is no blueprint for this journey. It is unique for each school, but it starts with a vision of where you would like to go” (*ibid*, p.189).

“The culture is key, cultivating the conditions by design or intent to nurture leadership at all levels. There is no blueprint for this journey. It is unique for each school, but it starts with a vision of where you would like to go”.

Rafferty, Hayes, O'Connor and Sheehan (2021, p.189)

In contrast to Rafferty *et al.*, – and in some ways complementary - is Snow and colleagues (2021, p.17) highlighting of “an emergence of toxic leadership experiences” with “negative consequences for the teaching professionals who took part in the study”. These included decreased job satisfaction, professional agency and staff morale; reduced performance; increased attrition; increased negative behaviours including incivility and more.

At primary level, Lynskey and O'Connor (2023) – a principal and deputy principal - offer a clear picture of how the thinking that informs *Looking at Our School* (DE, 2022b) can translate into co-leadership. They write: “For us, co-leadership means leading our school together. This is achieved by sharing key responsibilities including decision making, planning, ownership of our school vision, problem solving, coaching and development and inclusion of our school community” (Lynskey and O'Connor, 2023, p.5). Later they note, critically, “We are collaborators, thinking partners and peer mentors. Our model is about collaboration, not delegation” (*ibid*, p.5).

However, there can be a disconnect between notions of distributed leadership among middle leaders and principals as Lárusdóttir and O'Connor identified in both Irish and Icelandic

schools. A key issue, as they remark, arises when distributed leadership is seen “strictly at the gift of the principal rather than a reciprocal relationship” (Lárusdóttir and O’Connor, 2017, p.423).

2.12 Transitional or Terminal

Some research on deputy principals seeks to explore the extent to which those in role see the position as a ‘stepping stone’ to principalship. Half of the deputy principals in a New Zealand study by Shore and Waltshaw (2019) “perceive their job as a legitimate terminal career” with many expressing “immense satisfaction in the role”. Furthermore, these deputies enjoyed the “high level of challenge without the demands of ultimate leadership responsibility” and saw “interpersonal relationships, particularly those with the senior leadership team as the most significant dimension in the role”. An earlier study in Australia, (Cranson *et al.*, 2004) found that about 40% of deputy principals indicated an intention to seek promotion to principalship with “lifestyle decisions” identified as “the overwhelming deterrent” to seeking promotion. The researchers noted that the “level of satisfaction with their role related to how well the notion of team among school administration team members was developed and the alignment in their roles between what deputy principals saw as their ‘real’ role with their ‘ideal’ role. The closer the ‘real’ and ‘ideal’ roles were aligned, the higher the level of satisfaction. Deputy principals identified strong interpersonal/people skills, inspiring and visioning change, delegation and empowerment and being a good manager as key skills for their role”. A study in Scotland (Fowde and Lowden, 2015) also noted the intersection of personal and professional circumstances can deter deputy principals for applying for principalship.

Grant noted some gender differences in response to questions of what he calls ‘vertical progression’. “The female respondents were generally more reluctant to seek career progression finding the idea of greater responsibility and organisational mobility a less attractive prospect” (Grant, 2013, p. 167). Guihen (2019) suggests that there is a need for research which explores the ways in which gender intersects with identity strands such as ethnicity and sexuality to influence individual deputies’ career trajectories.

In a 2022 survey of members, IPPN record a decline in the number of people applying for principalship in Irish primary schools. Respondents reported an apparent reluctance of those already working in a particular school to apply for principalship in the same school. When the position of principal was last advertised, 36% of schools did not receive any applications and in 68% of cases, the deputy principal did not apply. In smaller schools, recruitment of teaching principals attracted even fewer applicants, where 51% of schools received no internal applications and in 67% of cases the deputy principal did not apply. The IPPN makes the sobering observation:

It seems clear from this data that internal aspiring leaders and deputy principals look at the role of principal and consider it impossible to take on while also preserving a work-life balance. (IPPN, 2022, p.42).

In primary schools with vacancies for principalship – both administrative and teaching – two thirds of deputy principals in those schools did not apply for the position. Furthermore, 31% of the 2021 appointees to the role of primary principal who engaged with Misneach had previously been deputy principals (*ibid*, P. 45). The equivalent figure at post-primary level was 77% of appointees. These data do suggest that, at primary level at least, many deputy principals don't have much faith in deputyship as particularly beneficial preparation for principalship.

2.13 Preparation for Principalship

According to Kwan (2009, p.192) “most new principals are drawn from the ranks of VPs in many school systems in the world”. However, whether deputy principalship is a useful preparation for principalship appears to be inconclusive. Coulson (quoted in Ribbins, 1997, p.296) maintained that vice-principalship was inadequate preparation for principalship because VPs did not have sufficient opportunities to make the type of decisions required of principals. In his Irish study of primary school deputy principals, Grant arrives at a similar conclusion, stating that the gap in knowledge and experience between deputyship and principalship is so great “that energy should flow into the formation of formal, planned and structured preparation for deputyship into principalship” (Grant, 2013, p. ii).

The UK study by Ribbins (1997) also quotes Todd and Dennison who contend that the job of “deputy headteacher has not been clearly defined, and in part this has arisen from a similar lack of role definition for headteachers, who have tended to exercise the powers of a paternalistic

autocrat. As a result, headteachers have viewed their deputies as an extension of themselves, and in doing so have deprived them of an authentic role ... many (complain) they were frequently reduced to carrying out a few minor technical or clerical duties which did not encourage, or even allow, the use of initiative and expertise. In addition, the ‘man in the middle’ position – between the headteacher and his staff – was a major source of difficulty and dissatisfaction (Todd and Dennison, 1980, p 304, quoted in Ribbins 1997, p. 297).

Garret (1999) found that, in addition to limited formal preparation, a combination of factors limited UK primary deputy principals in gaining appropriate experience. These included familiar themes of “the lack of a robust definition of the role of the primary deputy”, the arbitrary control the headteacher had over the role and the limited time availability. Furthermore, most deputies thought of their role in mainly operational terms; very few were able to develop a more strategic perspective. Since that work was published, significant more formal opportunities for professional development have been introduced in the UK.

Berry and Townsend (2019), also writing about the UK, propose, in an illustrative case study, how the lead-in period between the appointment to a position of deputy principal and the formal assumption of the role can be productively used. In her study of over 300 vice-principals in Hong Kong, Kwan (2009) identified seven dimensions to their responsibilities: External communication and connection.; Quality assurance and accountability; Teaching, learning and curriculum.; Staff management; Resource management; Leader and teacher growth and development: and Strategic direction and policy environment. She found that those with higher academic qualifications believed that they “had been better prepared to become principals” (Kwan, 2009, p.199). She also found that “experience in strategic direction and policy environment was the only job responsibility considered by VPs as a training ground for the principalship” (*ibid*, p.202). The researcher remarks that respondents may underestimate the value of “their extensive experience gained in staff management”.

2.14 Summary

Research from a range of countries including Ireland, United Kingdom, Australia, United States, New Zealand, Norway, Iceland, Canada and South Africa presents a picture of deputy principals having broad and ambiguous responsibilities with significant variations depending

on local contexts. Arising from a strong hierarchical and authoritarian tradition in schooling worldwide, the role of deputy principal has long been understood as greatly shaped by the extent to which a principal delegates tasks. In many cases such tasks were primarily administrative, usually aimed at maintaining order and the smooth operation of the organisation; often there was limited power for the deputy to engage in leadership tasks. In the Irish context, the position of deputy principal at post-primary level tends to be less vaguely defined than at primary level. At primary level, limited time to complete tasks as well as tensions between responsibilities for both teaching and leading can lead to frustration.

Recent thinking and discourse on schooling has favoured a shift to more shared models of leadership, away from responsibilities being concentrated in the principal, including the idea that all teachers play a leadership role (Teaching Council, 2016b; DE, 2002b, 2002c). This reflects international trends where deputies have often increased expectations beyond organisational maintenance to include goal setting, organisational design, and leading teaching and learning. However, expectations that the rhetoric of collaboration might highlight fresh understandings of how deputy principals specifically might effectively contribute to school development have yet to find serious expression in policy documents.

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The literature also identifies that at primary level in Ireland there can be a significant intersection between the deputy principal role and that of Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO), noting that both roles share operational complexity and lack of clear identity.

The review emphasises the centrality of school cultures in shaping leadership roles. Traditions of individualism as well as tensions between autonomy and accountability are also recognised as important in understanding the evolving position of deputy principal. Evidence related to deputyship being perceived as useful preparation for principalship is mixed, particularly at primary level. Overall, the literature review suggests an urgent need to re-evaluate the roles of

deputy principals if these critically important actors are to be more closely aligned with visions of inclusive, collaborative and improving school communities.

3. Methodology



3.1 Introduction

This research project adopted an exploratory case study methodology (Yin, 2018) within an interpretivist paradigm (Kinvunja and Kuyini, 2017; Burke and Dempsey, 2022). It is exploratory in design as it sought to explore the hidden potential within the role of deputy principal. The exploratory design fits with a scoping study where we put forward further areas for discussion and research based on the findings from the study. It is interpretivist in that we contend that the reality of one's situation is constructed by individuals and that there are as many realities as there are individuals (Scotland, 2012), therefore, knowledge is culturally derived and historically situated (Creswell and Poth, 2016). Each participant in this study reflects their own unique context and each of these contexts in turn comes with their own cultural, historical and environmental complexities and nuances.

Within the case study we employed a mixed methods design where questionnaires were sent to a wide population of deputy principals through networks, social media and school emails. 120 responses were received (= 49 primary and n= 71 post-primary). The findings from this stage of the research are presented in chapter 4. This analysis was used to generate questions for semi-structured interviews with n= 5 primary and n=5 post primary deputy principals. These data were coded using Braun and Clarke's six step process (2022) and the findings are presented in chapter 5.

3.2 Exploratory Case Study

An exploratory case study is used to investigate a new or previously unexplored phenomenon or issue (Yin, 2028). While the role of the deputy principal is not new it is under researched in the literature and policy changes have led to a need for a new way of describing the role. Exploratory case studies are typically qualitative in nature and use a variety of methods to collect data. The steps involved in the research are presented in figure 3.1 below. The initial phase of research involved a literature review, followed by a policy scoping to provide a historical context and finally consulting with experts in the field.

Initial consultations with representatives from groups such as CSL, PDST, IPPN and NAPD, various Trust Bodies and Trade Unions confirmed to us that many critical issues regarding the sustainability of schools gravitate around the role of deputy principal. These include the widespread phenomenon of overworked principals, early retirements and the relatively low progression rate from deputy principal to principal.

Through this process a short questionnaire was developed. Data from the questionnaire informed the development of the interview protocol.

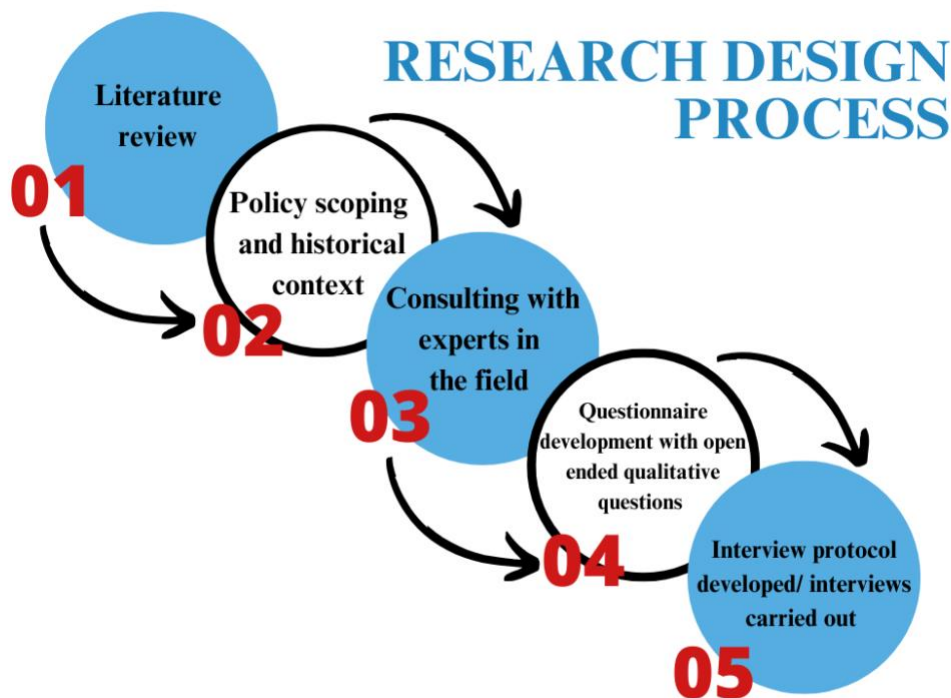


Figure 3.1: Research design process

The focus of the study was to gather as much information as possible about the role of the deputy principal and to identify new and emerging themes or patterns. The goal of an exploratory case study is to provide a foundation for further research about the phenomenon being studied. By exploring the topic in-depth, we can identify new areas of research and generate new questions to guide future research. One of the strengths of an exploratory case study is its ability to provide a rich and detailed understanding of a phenomenon (Laksmiwati *et al.*, 2023). By using a variety of data collection methods, we gathered a broad range of data and perspectives to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the role of the deputy principal.

3.2.1 Sample

The questionnaires were sent to a wide population of deputy principals through networks, social media and school emails (see Appendix A). 120 responses were received (n= 49 primary and n= 71 post-primary). Respondents were not asked for details of their schools, though, in question 5 where they were invited to provide any other relevant details that they might think useful to add, the responses gave a flavour of the unique and complex settings where they worked.

To illustrate this variety of settings and the way deputy principals represent their schools, we include some of the responses below.

Primary schools

- Large growing and changing school with the needs of inclusion placing big pressures in terms of implementing changes and creating an inclusive school culture that is taking lots of energy to successfully implement.
- DEIS Band 1 - Big urban Junior school with 2 early start units and a language class, 5-6 classes at each level ranging from Junior- 2nd class.
- X Community National School is a multi-denominational co-educational primary school established in 2018, which accepts students of all faiths and of none... have 5 members of teaching staff, 3 Special Needs Assistants and a current enrolment of 86 pupils. Our school core values are centered around the promotion of wellbeing, the development of 21st century skills, building respectful and responsible relationships and active engagement in both local and global communities.

- We are a DEIS band 1 school located in a large urban town. We have nearly 330 pupils with a significant level of social need and diversity. We have a high level of pupils requiring additional support. We have 16 class teachers, 1 HSCL teacher and 10 SEN teachers. I have taught in the school since 1993.
- My school is a large, co-ed, suburban school with 680 pupils. We have 50+ staff including ancillary staff. I am an admin deputy principal.
- DEIS urban band 1, 30% homeless, area with high crime and a recent school amalgamation with new building project
- I am an administrative deputy principal, externally appointed three years ago. I know from my associate work with the PDST Leadership Team that this is a rare enough occurrence. We have a pupil population of around 650 and will be opening three classes for children with ASD this September.
- I am an administrative deputy principal of a Catholic, urban, DEIS band 1 school. The school (split campus) is comprised of 2 schools, boys and girls which amalgamated 5 years ago. We grew organically from a Junior school (up to 2nd class) to a full stream school over 4 years. We are part of a Common Application and Enrolment Policy with 3 other local schools. Currently we have 536 pupils, 25 Mainstream Class teachers, 19 SETs, 10 SNAs, 2 secretaries and 2 caretakers. Under the recommendations of the Guerin report, we were granted 6 extra teachers and Admin deputy for 5 years by the Department for Social Inclusion. (Our school has been impacted by gangland feuds and violence over the last number of years). I was the Principal of the Boys' School prior to the amalgamation.

Post-primary

- DEIS urban 900 students 50 years old large traveller cohort
- Fee charging school
- Co Ed school, 270 pupils
- Voluntary secondary school, mixed student population, town, and country demographic, 1000+ 3DPs
- Large urban school of over 1100 students.
- DEIS band 1, Community School in a large town with a student population of just under 1000.

- It is a Community school with 1600 pupils from varying socio-economic backgrounds. The academic profile would go from your 625 points to the 100 pts. We would have LCA and a very strong SEN dept.
- All girls voluntary secondary school, 300+ students, only 0.75 of a deputy but workload of 2, diverse students of mixed backgrounds, city centre school but students come from city & county.
- ETB, non-DEIS, urban, recently opened two ASD classes, young staff, co-educational for the last six years.

Semi-structured interviews with n=5 Primary and n=5 post primary deputy principals. Table 3.1 below provides the pseudonyms allocated and some demographic details.

Table 3.1 Interview participants pseudonyms and demographic details

NAME	GENDER	SCHOOL TYPE	SCHOOL SIZE	EXPERIENCE AS DP
Abby	Female	PP	c.900	10
Sarah	Female	PP	c.600	3
Gavin	Male	PP	c.500	6
Cillian	Male	PP	c.1100	3
Michael	Male	PP	c.1100	6
Síle	Female	P	c.375	Teaching DP - 16
Oliver	Male	P	c.800	Admin DP - 2
Aaron	Male	P	c.650	Admin DP - 3
Ruth	Female	P	c.500	Teaching DP -5
Geraldine	Female	P	c.500	Acting Teaching DP - 4

3.3 Positionality

This research is carried out within the paradigm of interpretivism as we contend that the reality of one's situation is constructed by individuals and that there are as many realities as there are individuals (Scotland, 2012), therefore, knowledge is culturally derived and historically

situated (Creswell and Poth, 2016). This position was important for us as we believe that the deputy principal’s role is very context dependent and, therefore, we needed to allow the data collected to tell the story of the experience of the individuals within their social context. Each individual brings their own cultural and historical reality to the role. The school then impacts on this personal, cultural and historical experience through the cultural, structural and material realities of the school.

Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) provide a useful list of characteristics of research within this paradigm. In Table 3.2 we attempt to provide justification for our methodological choices within this understanding of the paradigm.

Table 3.2 Characteristics of research under the interpretivist paradigm

Characteristics	
The admission that the social world cannot be understood from the standpoint of an individual	Scoped the field using a questionnaire to search for patterns or themes
The belief that realities are multiple and socially constructed	Carried out individual interviews
The acceptance that there is inevitable interaction between the researcher and their research participants	The leadership experience of two of the team were crucial in providing insights into the analysis of the data
The acceptance that context is vital for knowledge and knowing.	Each individual talked about their own experiences and relationships with people in their schools
The belief that knowledge is created by the findings, can be value laden and the values need to be made explicit	We used the direct quotes of our participants to describe the key themes
The need to understand the individual rather than universal laws	Building on data from individuals we make some tentative recommendations
The belief that causes and effects are mutually interdependent	This is evident in the data
The belief that contextual factors need to be taken into consideration in any systematic pursuit of understanding	A policy and literature scoping helped to map the context of the work of the deputy principal in Ireland

While findings within this paradigm are not generalisable, there are important insights to be gained within an exploratory case study that will provide a basis for research informed policy development.

3.4 Data collection

3.4.1 Survey

Following an initial literature and policy review a short questionnaire was developed and sent to participants via Microsoft Forms. See appendix B.

Based on your experience as a deputy principal (and, if relevant, your experience in former and/or subsequent positions) what, for you, are (were) the main features, strengths, satisfactions and challenges in the roles?

1. The features of their role
2. The strengths: personal and professional
3. The satisfactions that accrue
4. The challenges that they manage
5. Any other relevant details that they might think useful to add

3.4.2 In-Depth Interview

Following analysis of the questionnaire data, an interview protocol was developed. A list of participants who volunteered to be interviewed via the questionnaire was generated and divided into primary and post-primary. From this selection (n= 37), a list was generated to ensure that a variety of school types was included. Information sheets and consent forms were then e-mailed to 10 randomly selected respondents. When consent forms were returned, the respondents were sent the list of questions (see Appendix C and D for interview protocol). When there was no reply, we moved to the next name on the list.

Interviews, each lasting approximately 60 minutes, were carried out on Microsoft Teams and audio recorded with the permission of participants. Transcripts were cleaned and all identifiers were removed. In some interviews the respondents described incidents that might have led to the school being identified. These data were removed from the transcripts ahead of sharing them with respondents. The transcripts were sent to respondents for checking and again approval to use the data was received. No changes to transcripts were asked for.

3.5 Data analysis

Data were analysed using Braun and Clarke’s (2022) six step thematic analysis. The process is outlined below.

Table 3.3 Data analysis steps

Braun and Clarke’s (2022) six step thematic analysis

Steps	Process
Become familiar with the data	Immersion of data through all three researchers reading and making brief notes about ideas and insights.
Generate initial codes	Identify segments of interests from the data and code these together using MaxQDA.
Search for themes	Compile codes to generate initial themes through an active process of review using both inductive and deductive analysis.
Review themes	Develop viable initial themes and revise the meaning of others which may not match the initial codes to already identified themes.
Define themes	Refining and further defining themes identified and linking our thinking back to the literature.
Write-up	Weaving together insight with data to produce a coherent story about how the dataset addresses the research questions and developing this report.

3.6 Ethical considerations

Issues of consent were considered. A detailed information sheet was developed and shared with all participants. Signed consent forms were obtained ahead of interviews which were carried out on Microsoft Teams. GDPR and data storage issues were all addressed in line with Maynooth University policy. Ethical approval for the research was given by Maynooth University Faculty of Social Research Ethics Committee. ID: 2483900.

4. Questionnaire data



4.1 Introduction

Our research focuses on the role and practices of deputy principals in primary and post-primary schools. 120 responses were received to the questionnaire sent to deputies across a wide spectrum of contexts: in both school sectors, urban/rural, DEIS/non-DEIS, Voluntary and Community schools, ETB schools and from the Educate Together sector. 49 of the responses were from the primary sector, where most deputies are responsible also for class teaching or for SEN teaching. A copy of the survey is available in Appendix B.

Questions were formulated to gather initial data as to how deputies describe:

- Their role;
- The strengths: personal and professional;
- The satisfactions that accrue;
- The challenges that they manage;
- Any other relevant details that they might think useful to add.

4.2 Data from questionnaires

4.2.1 *The role of deputy principal*

A striking feature in the responses from deputies in both sectors, is the magnitude and variety of tasks that are undertaken. A primary deputy writes a list that is replicated with minor variances in other responses:

Main Features : behaviour coordinator, deputy designated liaison person, SNA coordinator, timetabling of subs, active flag, timetabling of common zones -P.E. hall, sensory garden etc., delivering assemblies, ISM rota, report cards, sports day

timetabling, online claim system administrator, senior management meetings weekly, ISM meetings monthly, relevant child protection training for staff, trauma informed training (4P).

Another writes:

Assist with Principal with day to day running of the school; ASD Class teacher; ASD Co-coordinator of 4 special classes; ASD Committee Coordinator; Yard Timetables; SSE Coordinator; Numeracy Coordinator; Child Protection; Students' Council Coordinator; Health & Safety Officer; Critical Incident Committee; Covid Leader; BOM Nominee; Hurling Coordinator (46P).

This deputy at primary level with responsibility for class teaching responds:

Co- leading every aspect of school's life! SENCO and everything this involves - full time job in itself! Sacramental coordinator. DDPL. Responsibility for all SSE and SIP. CPD. Deputise in Principal's absence. Run assemblies. Responsibility for everything to do with standardised tests, ordering, collating data, reporting to board etc. Organising Book Fair. Organising library. Organising morning duty rota. Organising personalised Christmas cards. Organising Halloween cake sale. Organising pupil profiles. Co- organising of Christmas Fair and working all weekend first week in December every year. Organise Credit Union quiz, prep kids at lunch time, attend etc. Attendance at all school functions. SESE core content packs. Running Droichead (3 NQTs this year). Running the discipline committee. Running a working group. Signing off on half the school's end of year reports. Attendance at Infants meeting and welcome days. Attendance at open days. Working in July and coming back a week earlier than other school staff to work on school priorities. Half an hour a day morning yard supervision. Covering absences by teachers. Meetings before school with principal. Meetings after school with ISM team. And a full-time teacher!!!!!! (80P).

Post-primary deputies also face an unending list of tasks:

Day to day running & communication with all stakeholders. Timetabling, staffing allocations & contracts, DDLP, co-ordination of post holders, overseeing policy, SSE, Additional Educational Needs and team teaching, school improvement, student voice, overseeing extra-curricular activities, teacher CPD, student and new staff induction, liaising with the Parents' Association, building community networks and social media.

Recording Secretary to the Board of Management. Teaching Learning to Learn (1st Yr.). Organise S&S, entered claims on OLCS, October and September returns, implement the code of behaviour, write and review policies, support Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) and student teachers, interview prospective teachers, promote CPD, work with post holder in overseeing SSE, Wellbeing and Junior Cycle reform, devise subject options, state and house exam analysis. As time goes on the main feature is to distribute this work which you initially take on (17PP).

Another list reads:

Mental health/pastoral support of children, problem solving, interactions/meetings with stakeholders and outside agencies, supporting staff in their roles, S&S, OLCS, attendance management, evening meetings, PR, policy development, SSE, Wellbeing, Guidance, general admin, timetabling, celebrations, building management (43PP).

4.2.2 The strengths: personal and professional

Responses to Strengths within the role included the following from deputies in the post-primary sector:

The role develops your leadership credentials as you are challenged every day to provide leadership in a fair and balanced way in all aspect of the job we do. It allows autonomy within SMT when three deputies are in place. Each deputy is designated certain roles to fulfil as part of their post. With multiple deputies in place, it allows for collaboration between them, very good pool of expertise when advice is needed on how to handle situations that arise during the course of this job. There is lots of learning opportunities from DP networks, presenting ideas and policies to staff, sharing ideas and receiving feedback from them in a formal and informal manner (18PP).

Another responded:

The main strengths for me include working with a fantastic leadership team with full support. We are also very lucky to have an incredible staff, and it is a pleasure to work with them. I have a lot of autonomy in my role especially in the areas of leading learning that I may be working on. I collaborate with a number of groups of teachers within the school, often working with them as a community of practice and I see this as one of my strengths. It is also important to be innovative and resourceful in the role in order to

be able to maximise your time and to be able to ensure that we are staying relevant and abreast of change (21PP).

Another positive note was struck by this deputy:

Leadership, autonomy, collaboration, learning, innovation, self-development, endurance, celebration, resourcefulness and great job satisfaction!!! (91PP).

This following response shows how critical it is to have good professional relationships within the ISM team:

I have really enjoyed my role and in particular the opportunity to interact with students on a different level. The Deputy can sometimes act as intermediary in a discipline issue before it reaches the principal, you create an extra presence around the school at breaks and lunches. We have a very good management team that work v well together and I think this is a KEY to a successful management team, we have moved from 1 deputy to 3 since I started. I have always had great autonomy but equally would never do something without involving/consulting the principal. I think personality is also v important, ability to adapt, ability to deal with awkward situations/people and in a time when there is a policy for everything having the ability to think on ones' feet (13PP).

Another deputy recognised the need to develop oneself within the role:

Over time I developed my leadership skills. I particularly focused on a coaching method of leadership and am working towards a more distributed form of leadership in the school. Restorative practice skills have been a strength that I tap into regularly (54PP).

A primary deputy recognises the positive effects on practice of taking on the role:

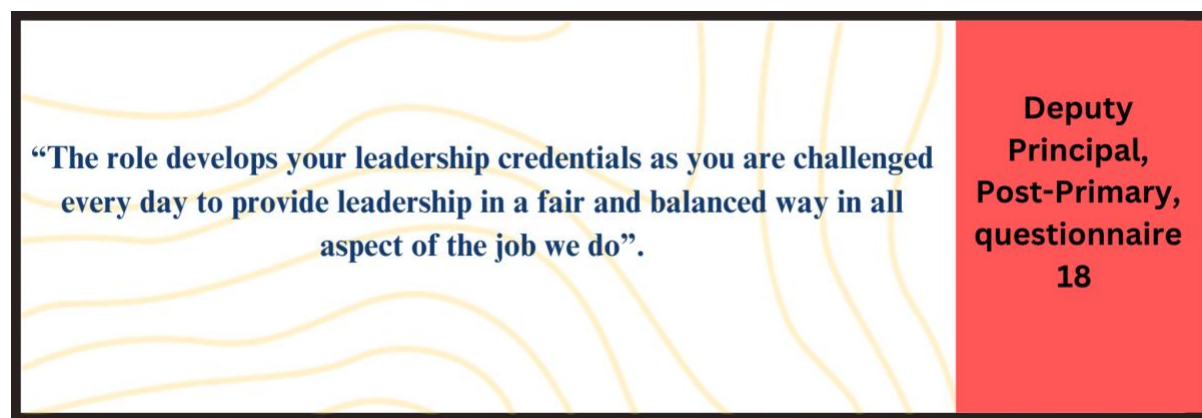
This role has invigorated and reenergised my practice. It is my wish to lead and develop teaching and learning within my school and in order to do this I feel it necessary to constantly reflect, to engage in CPD, to connect with and participate in discussions surrounding development and reform in education. I enjoy leading projects, delegating to and motivating colleagues, pupils and parents. The autonomy associated with this role is motivating in itself and I am afforded opportunities daily to learn from a wonderful leader, my principal, as well as to work with other school leaders within my patron body and fellow deputy principals through CPD and shared project (8P).

This following response echoes the themes of autonomy, leadership and good relationships:

Relationship with the principal, being at the heart of decision-making, leading colleagues, believing more in myself and my abilities, freedom and confidence to innovate, suggest, talk through ideas etc. (75P).

It becomes obvious through reading the responses, that deputy principals enjoy and find fulfilment in leading others. This responder is upbeat on the opportunities within the role:

The particular strength is the opportunities to lead; I enjoy leading by doing. It is satisfying to collaborate with colleagues on particular issues and effect positive change. I also enjoy the autonomy; I decide what needs to be done on a particular day; the principal trusts and empowers me to work away on issues as I see fit (102P).



4.2.3 *Satisfactions in the role*

Many deputy principals wrote clearly about how much job satisfaction they derive from the role:

I love the role usually. Relationships are key to being successful in this role, I like trying to be creative and find unusual or innovative solutions (66PP).

This response, also from a deputy in the post-primary sector, looks to the development of students and of teachers:

Looking after our students and the satisfaction of seeing them develop and grow into a young person. Providing them with all the support and opportunities to help them reach their potential. Watching young teachers grow in their position and become excellent

teachers by building on their confidence and again providing them with the CPD and other opportunities to grow (25PP).

Another response recognises the importance of trust within the deputy/staff relationship:

The main satisfactions are setting goals and targets for improvement for your school and others and achieving them. Seeing policy become practice and initiatives being led by stakeholders. Seeing people put their hand up voluntarily and putting themselves in leadership positions. Having trust between you and staff. Seeing policy and values enacted. Love doing something different that no other school has taught of or not following a local or national trend because it does not fit your context and knowing it's the right decision (107PP).

Deputies in the primary sector wrote about their satisfactions within the role:

Seeing others grow into leaders, seeing aspects of the school improve under a new management team, having the position in the school to make things happen, gaining trust of colleagues (56P).

Building professional relationships and developing leadership capacity among my colleagues is particularly satisfying (57P1).



A note of caution is added from this respondent:

All of above I find quite challenging - personal empowerment a real issue which has affected my self- esteem (72PP).

Not all deputies derive all-round satisfaction:

Good to be able to advise and mentor other colleagues, job satisfaction is limited as it's crazy busy, most days without lunch. As Middle Leaders don't function as leaders it's leaving a strain on DP. We have two (deputies) but no distinction in jobs, too much overlap. Schools are now all chiefs and no Indians... everyone has ideas but no one on the ground implementing or having oversight on day –to-day picture (112PP).

The theme of relationship-building and being part of a team is echoed in many responses:

My professional relationships with staff have strengthened, I have grown in confidence and have learned to delegate roles as I see fit (70P).

Relationships - I enjoy the social element of the job, working with staff, students and offering my support. I also enjoy the admin part of the role. Before I was a teacher I worked in the IT world, a job I look back on fondly, and I have a chance to utilise my technical skills more in my present role as an admin DP. I enjoy collaborating with staff, the L&M team and the principal. Working as a team is very satisfying where we can put our heads together to create the best outcome. I also enjoy the busy nature of the job (73P).

These insights have some resonances with the findings of Kwan (2011) when she identified 'leader and teacher growth and development', and 'teaching, learning, and curriculum' as contributing to job satisfaction and career aspiration.

4.2.4 Challenges encountered in the role

All respondents wrote in detail about the challenges associated with their position. A deputy in the post-primary sector writes about the recent challenges, some associated with the post-Covid environment, i.e. changes in relationships, GDPR legislation and the rising tide of responsibilities faced:

...the box-ticking paperwork rather than focusing on teaching & learning, the increasing lack of support/understanding from parents & challenges to disciplinary sanctions, dealing with aggressive/highly anxious students, just really finding the time to do everything - there is so much - I am always first in and last out of the building!, GDPR challenges, my role is hugely complex always juggling a dozen urgent things at once, In terms of relationships I am busy being a buffer between others - staff v staff,

parents v staff, students v staff, staff v management, mediating in squabbles, I have little or no time for CPD, you need enormous energy and patience for this role (66PP).

Another states:

The complexity of humans (staff) and the resistance to change and the sheer inability to understand how collaboration is good for all and makes life and work far easier and pleasurable for all the stakeholders. My motivation has always been about giving choice and making life better for all those we are entrusted to educate and thus this is from where I derive my satisfaction (119PP).

This deputy agrees that post-Covid, expectations are higher and reiterates the difficulty of dealing with colleagues to ensure clarity with communications:

Communication is a huge challenge to make sure everyone is hearing the message. Complexity of people including teachers, in a job that is very time consuming and time sensitive, is always a balancing act to get this right. Relationship- to develop the last point further I always take my break and lunch with staff, in the staffroom we are all the same, there has to be a time to speak with staff in an informal manner and they see you as one of them when in the staffroom. Energy - it can be an all-consuming job, so, to get the balance right re. work and rest is hugely important as it is a marathon rather than a sprint, Wellbeing has been brought in as part of the new JC but the well-being of teachers and SMT can be overlooked by all the stakeholders. Definitely since our full return post Covid students, parents, are more demanding and the focus in the media seems to be that school is there to provide assistance in response to all issue that arises, parents need to take a greater role of leadership in the children's lives, be parents rather than friends of their children (59PP).

Others echo these views:

The main challenge in the role is the constant state of change. There seems to be a never-ending stream of new tasks - wellbeing, Junior Cycle reform, SLARS, C19, Special Classrooms, LGBTQ, international students. In my 6 years as Deputy the job has become a lot more complex and the issues people are bringing are more complex. There are constantly new policies. There never seems to be anything taken away. This allied to the heightened expectations from society and parents in particular is extremely

difficult. Getting staff to engage with extra-curricular activities is becoming harder (2PP).

JCT was and is a challenge for us, time factor always there, but like our students, our staff are resilient (45PP).

My biggest challenge is that as deputy, I spend a lot of time trying to engage my principal with my vision for the school, particularly where our school development priorities are not aligned. She is always willing to listen and we have a very good relationship as colleagues. However, her values are traditional and conservative, and she draws on her instinct when making decisions. I am the opposite, and I find it a challenge to reconcile the time and energy it takes to advocate for changes that are so well supported by local or wider research (28PP).

The big challenges within the primary sector relate in the main to the dual role of deputy and class teacher. The following are examples of the responses received. The themes of Time, Relationships, Dual responsibilities and Wellbeing are evident in the data.

Lack of time to adequately meet my administration responsibilities due to full teaching role. Constant feelings of guilt that I am not meeting all my deadlines. Frustration at communication difficulties with staff members due to lack of admin. Time. Being pulled away from my teaching role due to lack of admin time. Poor work/life balance. Unfinished conversations with management team and colleagues due to time pressures (55P).

Change – Certain members of staff find new management different and try to resist it in whatever way they feel appropriate. This is hard to plan for and manage and also challenging too. Time management - Challenging to make time for all the facets in the role, particularly with increasing needs for children with Special Educational needs and not enough staff. Keeping to the timetable also proves a challenge when unexpected challenges occur. Relationships - peers struggle with new role, teachers (113P).

Energy - in a 2-stream school, DPs needs to be administrative. There is too much to do. A principal is appointed for 8 classes, an admin DP needs to be appointed for 16 classes. Principal also has far too much to do. I am constantly pulled from teaching duties to perform in a DP role (78P).

Large school... I have full teaching duties even though school has over 400 pupils... deputy principal is supposed to have a shared leadership role, however there is no time given by the Department not even a release day... It's actually a joke and so short sighted... bringing in more posts at lower grades but this doesn't help unless you have enough senior management people available to attend to all the wide ranging issues that happen daily... it's a very busy school which requires two people to be available to the school community... it's not good enough to say that this work can be done after school ... it is when the school is open and operating that the work is done... If you need to speak to staff, deal with issues etc. then this happens during the school day... if you had a shop that had more than 400 customers and over 30 staff in the premises all day then I'm sure there would be a manager and a floor manager - why can't the same apply to schools full of children and staff... give us the resources we genuinely need (46P).

With an ever- increasing workload and teaching in the classroom, it makes it difficult to find the time to fulfil all the duties that one sets out to fulfil. It requires planning to set aside some time in the morning before class begins to meet with my Principal and have a check in on events which are happening for the week. Since Covid we try to be mindful of the need to look after our own wellbeing which can often be brushed to the bottom of the pile as the demands of school life tend to take over. There is such an emphasis now on paperwork which puts great demands on one's working day. While professional development is the key to learning about new initiatives and policies, finding the time to devote to these can be difficult (99P).

“I have full teaching duties even though school has over 400 pupils... deputy principal is supposed to have a shared leadership role however there is no time given by the Department not even a release day... It’s actually a joke and so short sighted...”

**Deputy
Principal,
Primary,
questionnaire
46**

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter provides a flavour of the responses to the questionnaire. We analysed these data thematically with a view to formulating a set of questions to ask participants at interview. The following themes were developed in the form of an interview protocol for phase two of the research. Questions 3 and 4 were adapted for primary [Questions in italics] / post primary respondents.

1. A striking feature of the responses to the questionnaire is the numerous **tasks** associated with the deputy principal position. In your opinion, what are the three most important ones?
2. For you, what is the most **satisfying** thing about your work as a deputy principal?
3. What is **your role** within the senior management team in the school where you work?
[3 Primary. *Some responses to the questionnaire express concern about the lack of support for children with additional educational needs. How do you see this situation?*]
4. What is the relationship between your responsibilities as a **subject teacher** and as a deputy-principal?
[4 Primary. *A number of responses indicate that the arrangements whereby a school is allocated an administrative deputy principal are unsatisfactory. What is your opinion about this?*]
5. Clearly, many respondents point to the centrality of good working **relationships, particularly between the principal and the deputy principal in a school**. In your opinion, how is this relationship best nurtured?
6. What, in your opinion, is the most **challenging** part of being a deputy principal?
7. Where have you personally received meaningful **support** in your position, e.g. partner, family, Principal, colleagues, students, parents, Trust bodies, professional learning

community, external agency (Inspectorate, PDST, NCSE, CSL, NAPD, Education Centre) etc.?

8. How has your position affected your **relationships** with colleagues?
9. How did the Covid-19 pandemic impact on your position?
10. Can you describe the interactions you have with **students**, and with their **parents**?
11. If you could **change one thing** about your professional life as a deputy principal, what would it be?
12. Is applying for a position as **a school principal** something you might consider?

5. Interview data



5.1 Introduction

In this chapter we present the findings from the interviews organised around the questions asked. As each of the ten interviews lasted approximately one hour, the data generated is extensive. While what follows is, almost inevitably, a selection, we believe that the voices of deputy principals presented here are among the most important parts of this report.

5.2 Most important tasks

Responses to the questionnaires reveal that deputy principals, in both primary and second-level schools, are very busy people, engaged in numerous tasks. As evident in the previous chapter, long lists were often supplied to give a flavour of the breadth of activities, though the priorities can vary from school to school. In the interviews, the opening question invited participants to name what they see as their three most important tasks.

Ruth, deputy principal in a primary school who is also a mainstream class teacher and has responsibility for Information Technology across the school, states: *“The first one is the day-to-day supporting of the principal in running the school and also working with them towards your shared vision and strategic planning for the school. And the second task is that you have the willingness and the capacity to act up and deputise when the principal isn’t there. ... Your principal has to be able to trust you, that you can do the job. Thirdly, I think that the deputy principal plays a key role in supporting staff and students every day and those relationships and the communications part, that is a huge part of the role. You don’t anticipate, going into this role, how big a part that will be, but it is very important”*.

Gavin, deputy principal in a second-level school with approximately 500 students, sees 'logistics' as a main priority. "... *first and foremost, the most important task I have is to make sure that all of the students are looked after, logistics.*" He elaborates on what he means: "*it is making sure that all the students are supervised – looking after supervision and substitution, teacher absences and so on - that there is someone with them*". *Managing IT throughout the school is also central to his work.* Gavin's third priority is "*ethos and relationships. for me and the Principal, it's very much about the relationships we have with students, relationships we have with staff. We see our roles very much as overseeing that the relationships between staff, between staff and management and between staff and students and parents are maintained is vital*".

That theme of relationships tops Sarah's list: "*I suppose it depends on your context as well, and I can only talk about my own being a single deputy in quite a large-scale school - we are at 600. ... I think first and foremost, it has to be about nurturing relationships in every space. I think as a DP you are that link, very much between the principal and the APs, the principal and the staff and even parents come to you, and the admin team*". She points out that: "*...there are going to be ebbs and flows, ups and downs in all those relationships depending on what pressure comes to bear; different teams of people at different times, it can be different. Whether it's the class teacher, whether it's a student in a class, whether it's an upset parent, whoever it is. So, yes, that would be number one and a lot of my day would be around that*".

Sarah's second priority echoes Gavin's response: "*Number two was scheduler or planner*". She adds that when she talks about her job with friends who work in industry, "*they're actually saying, my God, how much of your job is taken up by this? In their (work) places they have people dedicated in this space as a scheduler and a planner. I actually can't believe the amount of my time that I spend on it, and it actually has to be done sometimes away from my office because I don't get to it when I'm actually here. It is about keeping all the plates spinning. It's about the sport, the calendar, the curriculum, meeting with students, committees, meeting the teacher committees and making sure people can leave to do their CPD, making sure there's cover, making sure you have SNAs; HR comes into that, but you're scheduling and you're planning on a huge level, and it has layers upon layers upon layers. .. that logistics piece for me was a surprise, I just didn't realise it. You do the S and S, but it's just so much more than that. And, in the school, if you're not getting that piece right, the school isn't functioning*".

Sarah puts 'leading teams' as her third priority. She remarks that *"One of the things I found hard when I stepped into the deputy principal role was (the realisation) that you can't do everything yourself. (Before) I loved being at the centre of the teams that were going on in the school, I would have been involved in the Teaching and Learning Committee, the amber flag, the student voice and so on. The difference between being a leader of those committees and (being a deputy) is making sure they're happening and allowing people the time and meeting with them to get updates and not actually being involved in the day-to-day running - as you can't. But that is the piece I still have to be very much aware of, knowing what teams are running and knowing what they need to keep running and keep building that scaffolding."*

"It is about keeping all the plates spinning. It's about the sport, the calendar, the curriculum, meeting with students, committees, meeting the teacher committees and making sure people can leave to do their CPD, making sure there's cover, making sure you have SNAs; HR comes into that, but you're scheduling and you're planning on a huge level, and it has layers upon layers upon layers."

**Sarah, Deputy
Principal,
Post-Primary,
interview**

Geraldine has worked in the same junior primary school for 22 years and has been four years as deputy principal. She regards her most important task as, *"to keep the children safe, and all the staff safe at school"*. She expands on the latter point: *"I think the role of the deputy is crucial in the school, particularly for staff because there can be a little bit of a gap between staff and the principal. I think staff know that you know what they're talking about because you have been in the class, you're working with the children. It's very real, so they know that they can relate to you, and you can relate to them. ... anybody can talk the talk, but you certainly have to walk the walk as a deputy, This is true for the principal as well, otherwise you just lack credibility."* Geraldine sees continuity of staff as very important. *"You see, our school only has junior and senior infants, so we have a very quick turnover of students. We have new children and parents every year. There are some families who move away. We had a lot of changes in staff also. So, it is important to have the principal and deputy there long term"*. Building trust is also important for Geraldine. She comments, *"I know the families. That's very important for trust. Parents get to know you and they trust you and they trust your words, they trust your intent. They know you are coming from a good place. The school has a great tradition in the*

area and many parents came to the school as children. It is good to have a sense of community in an urban setting”.

Cillian, one of three deputies in a large post-primary school, responds succinctly: *“IT management, discipline and links with middle management”*. His IT responsibilities resonate with the comments made by Ruth and Gavin, though on an even bigger scale. Responsibility for student behaviour is shared among the three deputies, each overseeing two year-groups. Cillian was appointed to the position during Covid-19 as a second deputy and the school has since grown further. Relationships with AP1s and AP2s are very important to him, *“middle management come to me (saying), help with this, try solve that. Do you know what to do here?”*

For Síle, a primary school deputy principal, coordination of SEN is her key priority. *“I coordinate SEN in the school; we have eight SEN teachers, four EAL teachers and we have 10 SNAs”*. She adds that *“another (part of the) role that's very close to my heart would be managing SPHE in the school and looking at the wellbeing framework and trying to find ways of introducing that. And we're hoping to introduce restorative practice*. She links this with leading school development and forming a school development plan. Síle adds, *“I am the key holder and I monitor the alarms and stuff like that because I happen to live locally. Fire drills, I do the testing schedules.”*

Abby observes that priorities for a deputy principal can shift depending on the time of year. As an example, she says, *“if you're starting about setting up the school year, proper planning of your curriculum and a good working timetable that gives enough balance as you can possibly manage for the students.”* By balance, she means *“so that you don't have all of your maths classes last class of the day or something like that. You're making sure they've all got the right amount of hours and that I suppose you're looking at the structures properly and making sure that everybody's going to be comfortable that their department, their subjects have been given due consideration.”* The second feature of the role that Abby mentions is that *“... on a day-to-day basis, you're going to make sure that everybody's safe, sound and in place ... and being cared for.”* Again, ‘relationships’ are a priority for Abby. She explains, *“When I started as deputy - this is my 10th year at it - I was the only one; we were at 750. ... so, I was ... the discipline liaison with ... the year heads. Now that we're heading close to the thousand, we have three deputies and we work with two year-heads each”*. Abby remarks that the year-head for first year has been out sick for three weeks and the students *“really need minding”* so, she

is filling in. She enjoys being involved with the year heads and getting to know the students; getting to know “*what's going on for them*” is also a chance “*for them to know that you are a real person, that you're a teacher as well.*”

Oliver, an administrative deputy principal in a primary school with a staff of almost 60 teachers is in his second year in this role. He prefaces his three priorities by stating that “*it's only as you go through the job, you realise there's more expected of you. There's more than was traditionally associated with the role*”. The first aspect of the position in his case is “*the administrative side of things. I have responsibility for looking after staff leave or staff absences first thing in the morning. That's almost like an avalanche waiting every morning when you come in.... So that takes up a considerable amount of time and preparation. I try to make sure we have substitute teachers. Or will I have to split classes? And then you've got the paperwork. You know you've got sick leave. You've all of that type of thing to have on file. The admin side of stuff takes up your morning and it's that kind of work that needs to be done immediately*”. Oliver’s second priority is “*the pastoral side of things in terms of meeting the children, reassuring the children, meeting the staff, being an ear for the staff or even being an avenue to the principal for the staff. They would knock on my door before they'd knock on the principal's door. So, it's just being a listening ear and a friendly voice for both the pupils and the staff*”. Oliver continues: “*Thirdly, ... would be the curricular side of things, trying to assist the most effective teaching and learning. It's something that I feel passionate about, particularly the area of literacy. It's great to be in a position to be able to lead change in that area and in other areas but sometimes I feel that the other two aspects of the job push that down to the bottom so it becomes the third priority on the list, whereas you might prefer it to be the first*”.

“It's only as you go through the job, you realise there's more expected of you. There's more than was traditionally associated with the role”

**Oliver,
Deputy
Principal,
Primary,
interview**

From his position as one of three deputy principals in a large post-primary school, Michael's response echoes much of what is stated by other deputies. For him, the primary task is *"supporting the principal in creating and maintaining a positive learning environment"*. Secondly, *"developing and nurturing and maintaining professional relationships across the whole school community"*. Included in this *"the promotion of professional learning"*. Michael also has a strong belief that a deputy principal *"and indeed other leaders in the school"*, have a big responsibility for *"modelling the behaviours and the vision that I personally would have for the school"*. Michael sums up his position as deputy principal as *"a supportive person to all members of the school community"*.

Primary school deputy principal, Aaron, reflects on being appointed to the position in the early days of the Covid pandemic. *"... it was a huge learning journey for me personally, trying to understand what the role was and leading special educational needs. I know that's quite common for a lot of deputies"*. Secondly, *"another aspect of the role would be to deputise for the principal, which in my case happened quite a lot, which was unforeseen. It certainly was a learning journey because I was quite new to school leadership"*. Aaron continues: *"The big thing that strikes me about this question, is that there's very little definition anywhere about the role of a deputy. And I know that Looking at Our School in its most recent iteration, goes some way towards identifying and clarifying the role of deputy, which is very welcome, but it's still very unclear. From talking to other deputies in the system, it really depends on the relationship between the deputy and the principal and taking time and space to clarify what actually is the role, what is the expectation and so on and so forth"*. Aaron states that being sensitive to colleagues is an important aspect of the deputy's role. This is *"because you are a member of the senior leadership team in the school, but you're not the principal; sometimes I find that colleagues would be perhaps a little bit more forthcoming by discussing things that maybe they want to get a steer on before going and talking to the principal. I've certainly found that to be the case. That's a human aspect of the role. There's definitely an emotional intelligence aspect to the position"*.

From these data the complexity of the role is evident, however commonalities such as building relationships and trust are being mentioned in addition to the administrative load that the deputy principal takes on.

5.3 Satisfactions

Aaron is an administrative deputy in a large primary school that includes many classes for children with special education needs. He reflected on his role as a non-teaching deputy with special emphasis on his work with these children: *“When you see progress, and progress for me is that needs are identified and you can put something in place that helps to either alleviate, to address or to improve those needs. In the media there's an awful lot of reporting of the justifiable anger in the system towards external services and waiting lists and so on. When you feel that you've helped a pupil and therefore a family along the road towards getting to a better place it's very, very satisfying. This is wider than SEN”*. Aaron sees his role as an instructional leader. While he does not have his own class, he realises that he can influence teaching and learning. In relation to the revised primary curriculum Aaron can, *“sit and facilitate conversations with colleagues about what this curriculum is, what the challenges might be, and how we work on those challenges. So that's really satisfying when you feel that you're helping colleagues in terms of refining their own practice”*.

Oliver, also a primary administrative deputy, talks about his personal satisfaction in the relationship he has built with the principal. *“Well, I take pride in being a deputy to the principal. I hope I have helped to share the load somewhat. I hope I have been able to be trusted with sharing the burdens and sharing the responsibilities. It's not merely stepping in when the principal is away. I feel when she's here we are sharing the one job to a different extent. It's just very satisfying”*. Oliver and the principal share a common vision for their school, and this is the basis for their partnership: *“Helping to manage such a big organisation and that the relationship is very effective and it's working brilliantly. So, I take great pride in that that we're both working together to a common goal and that my contribution is valued and really seen for what it is. It's valued by the principal and by the rest of the staff. It's early days, but I do feel that. It's a great feeling”*.

Síle is also a primary deputy with responsibility for: *“...liaising with pre-schools and also helping with the transition to secondary school phase of the children who have special educational needs”*. Síle finds this work particularly satisfying. She is also a facilitator for other deputies in a support group in the local education centre. She sums up the positives of her role: *“So, having a role in the school and being one of the outward faces of the school as*

well, because I'm on the management team. I'm the one who lives locally and I'm very rooted in the community as well”.

“You have a key position between home and school and parents and the parish. You actually are in a privileged position in terms of the amount of people that you meet through the school community and the relationships that you build and that you develop”.

**Ruth, Deputy
Principal,
Primary,
interview**

Geraldine is a primary deputy who is also focused on the sense of community in schools. Her main satisfaction is in: *“The sense of community. I like the whole collaborative approach that we have in our school. We involve the children in decision making, especially around behaviour. I really love the fact that we approach everything like a team. I consult people. I'd consult teachers, I consult the secretary, the SNAs. We really have a good team approach in our school, and I love that”.*

Ruth is a mainstream primary class teacher as well as being the deputy principal. She is also focused on community in the school and in the parish. Her main satisfaction is in: *“... those interpersonal relationships. You have a key position between home and school and parents and the parish. You actually are in a privileged position in terms of the amount of people that you meet through the school community and the relationships that you build and that you develop. You have these conversations with parents and they go away feeling better about something. So, for me, it's all about the personal part. I really find that very satisfying. I am in the school a very long time and I'm really most passionate about it, as passionate now as I was when I started”.* Ruth is grounded in her role as teacher. She enjoys the sense of achievement when a new initiative is embraced by colleagues and when it is proven to be successful: *“I think when you start an initiative or you put a lot of work into getting something up and running, and if that takes off and you see you've got buy- in from the staff, and then you see the children benefiting from something like that and I find that really rewarding. When you see the children are really benefiting from something, that's what it's all about”.*

These thoughts are echoed by Gavin, a deputy in a post-primary school. Like Ruth he is most satisfied when he can make a direct intervention for the good of a student. *“I would say the most satisfying is when you get to see the work that you are doing is directly affecting students”.*

Gavin goes on to give an example of how he intervened to help a student who had no money for schoolbooks or indeed for lunch in school. He then described one of the *'real tangible things that are going to directly affect students'* as *"broadening the curriculum to include practical subjects has given students extra options"*. He added that *"doing stuff like that can be really satisfying"*.

Cillian responded to the question by stating that: *"...one of the main reasons why I took the job was I love helping others. That's one of the reasons why a lot of us get into teaching, we love helping others along. Now, when you get those smaller projects over the line, it's very satisfying. Like, I'm in charge of Parent Teacher meetings and we had our first one (of the year) yesterday, the first time to have it on my roster. And there are so many little bits to a parent teacher meeting"*. Cillian acknowledges also that *"the positive feedback from staff, things like that, give you job satisfaction"*.

Michael responded to the question without hesitation: *"Most satisfying for me is supporting others, serving others particularly as we are striving for a more inclusive school. We do see small successes as we move along and it's incremental but that whole area of supporting people that's what's most satisfying for me"*. The interviewer was interested in whether Michael was equally committed to supporting teachers as well as students. He replied: *"... for me it is about support for all. I hope I wouldn't have at any time favoured one over the other. But I would be student centred as opposed to maybe teacher centred because I feel that our primary purpose is to develop the student. Now, of course, as I said earlier, developing professional learning for teachers is very important. But I see our primary role as developing the potential of everybody, but primarily the students. Teachers are really there to promote the learning of the students"*.

Sarah is a deputy in a large school with a diverse student cohort. She responded to the question of what gives her most satisfaction by reflecting on the emotional wear and tear that is intrinsic to her work. *"What I find personally most satisfying, and it can also be what rips the heart out of you at times ... is when you are able to work with the most vulnerable students and see a plan, a wraparound plan, put in place for them and you bring them with you. You are talking about bringing the parents, their teachers, the year heads and you can see sometimes, it's only small progress but for me, that is the most satisfying thing. When I see somebody that might not stay in school and suddenly, they do a leaving cert, or a case of a child who didn't ever*

want to do a junior cert and they got junior results today”. While thinking about how she can support students, Sarah is also aware of her role as school leader. She comments: *“I love the school development element of it as well. I get very excited about what's going to make life better for my colleagues, the whole community including students and I think it's a privilege to be able to be involved in that”*.

As with Sarah and Gavin, Abby focused her reply on how she is in a position to support a student with many challenges. Her main satisfaction is in finding the right time and the right way to intervene: *“Having that moment where you can find something takes a child out of a difficult situation. And did you find a way? Often, it's just the simplest thing. It's just talking to them, showing them around, showing them where the options are. That's it for me”*.

5.4 Challenges

5.4.1 Challenges at Primary level

Primary school deputy principal, Aaron, started in the role in September 2020, during the Covid-19 pandemic. He was new to this school and the biggest challenges for him were what he calls ‘ambiguity’ as well as working out the priorities in the school. *“I was trying to identify what the needs of the learners were and what were my own needs in terms of professional development. There was no road map. It was just a case of trying to decide, day by day, what needed to be done. Over time I felt that I gained an awareness of what aspects of the role needed to be addressed day-to-day and week-to-week and month-to-month. Now moving on to a new role, I am trying to put together a document for my successor in this school. I wish somebody had done that for me”*.

“There was no road map. It was just a case of trying to decide, day by day, what needed to be done”.

**Aaron,
Deputy
Principal,
Primary,
interview**

Ruth, also working in a primary school, echoes Aaron's concerns about role clarity. *"I think the role of deputy principal is very blurred. An understanding of the role is not consistent in schools. What the deputy is doing in one school and what a deputy does in another school can be totally different. There can be different expectations"*. One consequence, she says, is that *"a deputy could end up becoming all things to all people and just be absolutely exhausted"*. The effort to balance the workload can be very challenging. Ruth fears there is *"an expectation that you will always say yes and take everything on"*. *"To be quite honest,"* she continues, *"it's exhausting"* referring to her dual role of deputy principal and a teacher of sixth class. Particularly frustrating can be tasks that *"should take five minutes but turn into twenty"*, for example, if a colleague is absent or if she is asked to attend a meeting or a dozen other things. *"All this eats into my teaching time"*, she says, adding, *"My class is good and they understand and they work well with me on these occasions. But I feel sometimes for them, that I can be removed from the class. But my principal is very aware of that too. She does her maximum to make sure that doesn't happen often"*.

For Oliver, an administrative deputy principal in a large primary school, the unpredictability of any day as well as *"the admin side of things"* are big challenges. *"You might have an excellent day planned, going to visit this class and going to have a small meeting with that group of SETs about an initiative, but that all could go by the wayside when something happens and something falls on your door like absences that need to be covered or classes or a parent coming in who wants to talk about something"*. There is frustration in relation to additional educational needs. Oliver explains, *"We have a fantastic team of SNAs here. But sometimes I feel after a day that my job was the admin officer for a team of SNAs. That should only be a part of my job. My predecessor would have said the same. She felt that her job was the manager of SNAs"*. He suggests that specific support and resources from the Department of Education should be proportionate to the number of SNAs in a school.

A close association between the deputy principal position and children with additional educational needs is also evident in Geraldine's situation. Asked about the challenging part of the role, she mentions a *"priority pupil in one of the special classes"*. Geraldine explains that it is a *"very difficult situation to manage"*, particularly when the relationship between school and home had broken down. *"We've rebuilt it now,"* she continues, citing the amount of time it can take, the number of supports and the learning involved. In the face of such challenges, Geraldine talks about the importance of hope, noting that, *"it's very important as the leader"*

that you don't have catastrophic or fatalistic thinking. There's always hope for a situation to get better, or ... to become more manageable”.

Síle, deputy-principal in a primary school, says, in relation to being interviewed, that *“I promised myself I wouldn't be negative. But it's very hard not to be negative”*. She states that, in a school with 380 pupils with *“a lot of children from other countries a lot of children with needs”* she feels undervalued as a deputy principal. Síle elaborates: *“I'm remunerated well, but I feel at the end of the day, I am a teacher who is expected to teach all day, every day, and yet I've a very busy administrative role. I feel I have all these talents, all this expertise I've gained over the years and it's almost like I'm not given the chance to put it into practice”*. Her frustration is palpable, *“It's almost like I'm all things to all people, but I don't have time to listen. So, I feel like I can never be fully present with the children I'm teaching. They're compromised in the school of this size because inevitably there are issues that have to be sorted out. I'm never fully present to my colleagues because when I'm trying to arrange things and do things for them, I'm trying to do it after school. When I'm trying to do it, they're not available and I'm never fully present to the principal because obviously I have to prioritise the children I teach”*.

Síle recalls being *“absolutely delighted during Covid times that we got 10 admin days a year”* remarking that for a school of that size it was *“Very, very little”*. She continues, *“I feel if I could sum up my job in two words, it would be unfinished conversations”*, then posing the question *“and what can unfinished conversations achieve?”* As she sees it, *“Because you're always on the hoof; you always have to be somewhere else, and you're always trying to catch that thread about that conversation.... of that initiative, I feel it impacts on my ability to mentor the younger teachers because I can never be fully present to them”*. She expresses the view that *“not having some level of administrative support for deputy principals - certainly in big schools - is counterproductive”*.

While emphasising the challenges arising from not having time *“to communicate in meaningful ways with colleagues ... and support them”*, Síle believes that keeping lines of communication open within the school is crucially important. She says, that, at a formal level, there has been some success in the school where she works with regular, focused meetings that facilitate people collaborating. She mentions meetings after school on Mondays, in-school management meetings, gatherings of AP2 post-holders and ‘Croke Park hours’ meetings. In responding to

challenges, the school adopts a team approach. *“We try to involve the whole staff in a lot of team conversations”*, Síle continues, explaining about band planning (1st and 2nd class teachers planning together; also 3rd and 4th and then 5th and 6th). As a recent meeting all staff *“brainstormed our wish list for managing the organisation and for leading learning. We do a dotmocracy where we will decide on three things in each domain that we will try and put a dent in this year. If you looked at everything that's on the lists, you'd run out of the building because you'd never get it all done”*. With those processes, Síle believes *“people feel they have a voice. We decide what the most important things are and then you get a lot more buy-in”*.

From these responses it is apparent that the role of deputy principals in primary schools is very challenging. They are presented with the almost impossible task of being a full-time teacher and also administering, leading and managing the school.

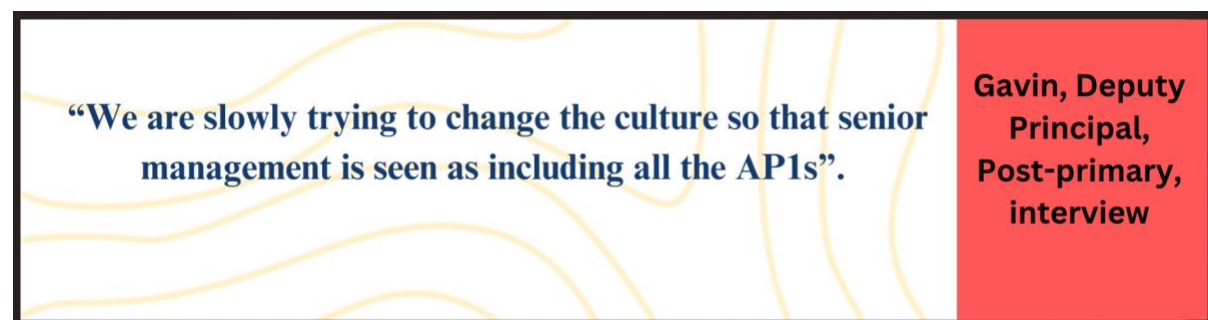
5.4.2 Challenges in Post-Primary schools

Frustration, limited time and multiple demands were also evident, to some extent, among the interviewees working as deputy-principals in second-level schools.

Cillian describes the challenging part of the role as *“the pulling and the dragging, needing to be in three places at once, and the on-the-spot thinking and the question ‘how can I best solve this problem right now?’ and all this mixed with your long-term projects and short-term projects running in the background”*. Cillian explains that on the day of the interview *“during the first two classes, there was a lot of firefighting; a few behaviour things arose.... You just get days like that sometimes and it can throw you off a little bit”*, echoing the unpredictability highlighted by Oliver at primary. Cillian recalls that as a teacher he was brilliant at keeping things in his head but since becoming a deputy principal he has become aware of a need to write things down, *“I need to do this and this for tomorrow. And I'd be able to work through that list. OK, I've got that done, what's next?”*

Gavin, initially mentions that *“It's a great school and there are lots and lots of positives”* before stating: *“One of the challenges myself and the principal face in our school is the senior management”*. Gavin explains that while all the AP1s are year-heads, some regard ‘management’ in a more traditional way of consisting only of the principal and the deputy principal. *“We are slowly trying to change the culture so that senior management is seen as including all the AP1s”*. As Gavin sees it, this cultural change includes AP1s seeing their

responsibilities less as a series of specific tasks and more of a sense of ‘ownership’ of leadership within the school. He suggests that, if an API holder was to have a review meeting with the principal structured around the LAOS document, he is not convinced these year-heads would be familiar with LAOS. Gavin would like to see year-heads assessing themselves more critically, “*asking really hard questions of themselves*”. He then refines these comments slightly, stating that “*we are very lucky. Year-heads work hard. They're very good. But there is still that little bit of a disconnect*” (with belonging to senior management). He points out that some staff members “*are really AI*” and when, sometimes, “*teachers come in from outside, they are often amazed*”. Gavin also detects a tiredness among teachers with “*the constant churn and change and stuff*”.



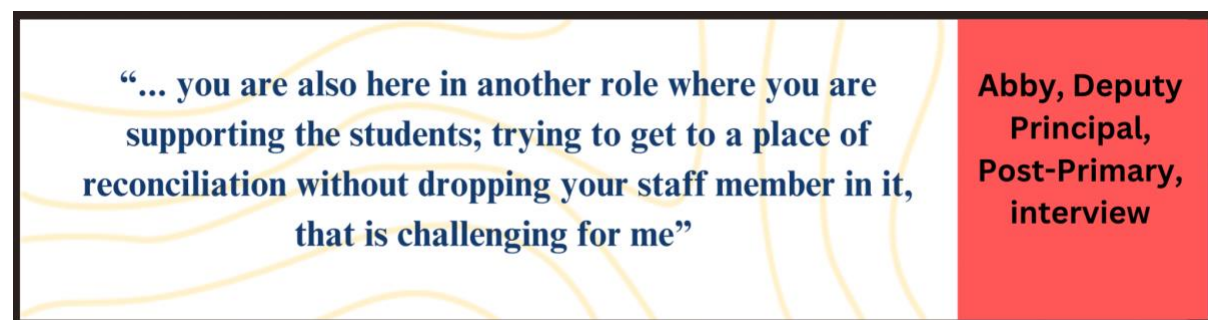
Struggling to get on top of the wide variety of responsibilities associated with deputy principalship continues to be challenging for Sarah. Among the many examples she references is the constant stress of maintaining a familiarity with “*circular letters and all the changes*” while feeling there is very little time to do this because of the immediate demands every day. “*You’re just supposed to know and if you make a mistake, well, you’re in deep trouble. I have found that really tough*”, adding that the training for the position is inadequate. Two days are not sufficient, she says, pointing to the time needed to get on top of programmes like OLCS and VS Ware as well as all the circular letters. In Sarah’s case as a newly appointed deputy principal, there have been “*massive learning curves. I’d be confident in my abilities with the teaching and learning, the parents, the students, the teachers, the conflict resolution, it’s the other piece, the facilities. I didn’t know I was supposed to know about cleaning contracts ...SNA contracts and HR. That’s all been very big*”. Sarah explains that, as well as SNAs “*we have one special class and we support a lot of students with autism. If an SNA doesn’t turn up, I have to have somebody in to support the students and the special class*”. Trying to ensure that there are two or three people on stand-by who have been interviewed and are “*trusted and have child protection and are garda vetted and all of that. Huge!*”

As a deputy principal for the past six years in a large school with a newly appointed principal from 'outside', Michael faces many challenges. He engages frankly and at times bluntly about his situation. He sums up the challenges as "*No shared vision, no plan, no road map, poor communication.*" The senior management team includes nine AP1s, three deputies and a principal. According to Michael, this team used to have weekly meetings, "*but it was more about firefighting*". Without a clear vision, perhaps inadvertently, there can be competition rather than cooperation among post-holders. Michael believes that this team should be "*trashing out a vision for the school*". Michael contends that "*We should have a clear agenda, we should have clear meetings and different roles for different functions. We should have, at least once a fortnight, a meeting about the vision and the plan and where we're going and how we should get there and all of that. Now, I've written down here as well 'time'. That's a challenge*".

He also remarks that "*the school culture is a really strong force.*" As he sees it, the culture should be supporting the school community. But "*different people have different impressions of what support for them should be. There lies the challenge. But for me it is about support for all teachers are really there to promote the learning of the students*". Michael cites as an example, attitudes to staff meetings, "*You know, the person who wanted to be out the door first was the person that was leading the meeting. We have this culture that if we can get away in 15 minutes, let's get away in 15 minutes. That attitude is very challenging if you are student centred. You're kind of on your own*". As in Gavin's case, Michael recognises that bringing about a cultural shift can take a long time. He also states that, in relation to the principal, "*we have to give that person time*" adding that the transition between principals in the school where he works was "*Unfortunately, for me anyway, it was a difficult time*".

In addition to the macro-challenge of the absence of an agreed vision for the school, daily tasks in a big school also bring their challenges. Michael's responsibilities encompass inclusive education – the school recently opened an ASD class – anti-bullying, parent-teacher meetings, school reports, student support, the behaviour of two year-groups, school attendance, school avoidance, staff professional learning. It's a long list. Michael also introduced and developed a school app, a sophisticated tool that facilitates communication between staff, students and parents. He is also leading a review of the code of behaviour "*though it's probably more a code of expectations*".

Asked about the challenging parts of the deputy-principal position, Abby is also frank, direct and reflective: *“I have been told that I'm very blunt”*, she says explaining that *“my face won't let me lie; if somebody says something, I will say what I think”*. She recognises the very real tensions between supporting the adults and the staff in the school but if *“an adult (is) getting something wrong and ...you are also here in another role where you are supporting the students; trying to get to a place of reconciliation without dropping your staff member in it, that is challenging for me. When adults don't do what they're supposed to do or do things wrong they cause problems for other people. I won't defend the indefensible, but I will look to the context and that's also challenging”*. Abby reckons that, as in many other schools, *“we spend 90% of our time on 10% of the kids, 90% on 10% of the parents and 90% on 10% of the staff”*. The demands of this can get very acute when a ‘difficult’ parent comes in *“and you're trying to manage that and you're trying to show the way through to the light at the end of the tunnel”*. Abby adds *“four or five teachers might be involved with that one child, and maybe two of them have actually let you down. Challenging!”*.



5.5 Primary School Deputies and Children with Additional Education Needs

While many questions were appropriate to deputy principals working at both primary and second-level, data from the questionnaires had highlighted how, in primary schools, the deputy principal often has particular responsibilities for coordination of provision for children who have additional needs. Therefore, a specific question was put to the primary school deputies about this.

Oliver is an administrative deputy in a school that caters for children with Autism, Moderate General Learning Disability/Multiple Disabilities, Severe and Profound Learning Disability, as well as for children in mainstream classes. He reflects on the need for Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) and on the ‘struggle’ that is involved in getting the children the provision that they need. *“We've got over 40 SNAs at the moment. It's just the complexity of the needs of*

the children and their special requirements. It's so difficult to provide for them in terms of SNA support. We find we're constantly on to the SENO. It's becoming a daily part of your job, putting forward these needs and asking for extra help. ...the SNA provision first of all is something that we feel we really have to fight for when it should be an absolute necessity when the child is coming to school". Children need to be assessed so that they can benefit from education provision in the school. Oliver points to the difficulty of having their list of referrals overseen by NEPS. Sometimes the list is so long that *"you end up advising parents to go down the private road, which is just not acceptable or it's not feasible for some families in the first instance. You really feel that you're failing the children when you can't just automatically offer that from a government agency or from government funded money"*. Oliver acknowledges that with over 40 SNAs in the school it is imperative that extra resources should be provided to schools, taking into account, *"the number employed in the school"*. Síle would like to see a lot more money coming into schools to buy resources for children with special educational needs. Her response captures the situation of a school that tries to cater for the SEN children but who are also trying to provide education to children from Ukraine who have moved into the area. She too uses the word 'battle' to describe efforts. *"Everything's a battle. Trying to get a sensory room. ... and then, in the process of doing that, all the Ukrainians began to arrive. So, the closet that was supposed to be the sensory room is now a classroom. Our staff room has been changed into a classroom, and we have two teachers teaching in the hall. And our hall is now the staff room"*.

Ruth also used the term, 'battle' to describe her school's efforts to offer the supports some children need. *"We have SET allocation reviews and it's such a battle to try and get any more extra allocation of hours. It's a hard fight. I worry for these children as they go forward because this is where they get the intense nurturing and minding. You'd hope you'd be able to set them up for secondary school"*. Ruth acknowledges that the school, *"can't provide the supports that we should be providing to children. That's very frustrating"*. Some of the difficulty is in finding staff for general classes. This means that, *"SEN teams have been just decimated"* because SEN teachers are taken from their work to teach in mainstream classes.

Aaron commented on all the bureaucracy involved in getting resources for children with SEN. He wondered how deputies are to know how to navigate the services e.g. Children's Disability Network, HSE, Tusla. *"It is important to determine how to best meet the needs of the child. The biggest frustration is that there's a lot of bureaucracy"*. He adds, *"I think it's a double-*

edged sword’. The services aren't effective enough, but there's also ambiguity about what is the correct pathway for that child. When asked about meetings between school personnel and other agencies, Aaron said that he wished schools were seen, “*as partners in the system*”. He went on to reflect: “*It doesn't seem to be dialogic in nature, it just seems that the support is top down. It seems that the support is being done to schools as opposed to being done with schools. And that's the best way I can describe it. The whole system needs reform, which is obviously a longer-term project*”.

Geraldine is a deputy principal who is a SET and is also the SENCO in her school. She described her school's very good reputation in the community. She understands how inclusion can positively influence teachers' professional development. She engages positively with the NCSE and with the SENO for her area and with any other agency that can advise or complement the services they offer. Her response to this question is worth quoting in full: “*We are very supportive of parents in a respectful, compassionate way. We support parents with referrals. We now have two classes for children with autism. This has been good for our own professional development. The SENO was a great help. There was a lot to learn about the enrolment requirements for the classes for children with autism. We got help also from an advisor with the NCSE. We use the NCSE portal. We have visits from a teacher for children with hearing impairment and the NEPS psychologist was a really great help. He has been here for quite a long time. We work also with the (named) centre for autism. We have good relationships with all these professionals. We also liaise with the Disability Network in the area. There is an easy relationship, and it depends on your approach. Our school has built up a reputation and I find then that other professionals would do anything for you. They realise that we work in an honest and transparent way. It is all in service of the children and their families*”.

One is reminded, through these responses, of the multitude of external service providers that deputy principals are required to liaise with and the complex landscape that exists for seeking support for children with additional needs.

“Everything's a battle. Trying to get a sensory room. ... and then, in the process of doing that, all the Ukrainians began to arrive. So, the closet that was supposed to be the sensory room is now a classroom. Our staff room has been changed into a classroom, and we have two teachers teaching in the hall. And our hall is now the staff room”.

**Síle, Deputy
Principal,
Post-primary,
interview**

5.6 Deputy principals at second-level and subject teaching

Typically, at second-level, a newly appointed deputy principal pivots from a highly structured timetable to a less structured and responsive role. How do they adjust to the new situation?

In the first few years after her appointment, Abby didn't teach on a regular basis. At that time she was the only deputy whereas now there are three. As she puts it, she had been *“tipping in and out of teaching some of the groups, physics or maths then I went into a team-teaching role with a leaving cert higher-level maths group. Girls in particular were dropping out (of the class). I went in to look at how could we create a growth mindset with these particular girls”*. Then Abby's team-teaching colleague left the school and she became their lone teacher. Then *“we went into lockdown”*. As Abby sees it, *“Definitely with a class that you're having on a daily, weekly basis, over periods of time, you actually forget you're the deputy principal until somebody comes knocking on the door to interrupt your teaching and it can be frustrating. But when you're in the room with the kids, no, you're not the deputy principal. You are their teacher. You're there for them”*. It is clear that Abby still sees herself as a teacher of Maths. *“It's so important”*, she says with feeling. But the demands of the deputy principal role mean that she is uncertain about taking regular timetabled classes in the future. *“That doesn't mean I won't change my mind next year”*. Reflecting on that particular class group she recalls the *“pure enjoyment”* and *“there were times when that was my favourite hour of the day”*. Tellingly, Abby states: *“I suppose I'm probably ... I'm a teacher to the bone. Education is what we're about and the way I view the role that I have now is how to make sure that is delivered in the best way possible across all the subjects in the school with all of the kids that are enrolled with us. And that's a contribution... in itself”*.

Gavin describes himself as “... a walking deputy. I don't teach at all, in that I'm not in the classroom. (Teaching) English is my background. If an English teacher is out, I go in and I teach their class”. Asked if he misses teaching regularly, Gavin replies,

“There was an English teacher out for a week. It was glorious, going to the classroom and she was doing a couple of things I like as well... a poem I liked. King Lear with another group, which I love doing and it was just glorious. It was beautiful, but when I went home at the weekend with thirty King Lear essays, it was like I'd forgotten what this was actually like! If you could take the correcting away, I'll go back in the morning”
(Gavin, PP, interview).

Sarah highlights some features of being a subject teacher, for example “*your subject knowledge, your relationship with your departments, your methodologies, your differentiation. You're doing that very much as an active piece and the relationships you're building are very much with the classes that you have*”. Sarah continues: “*Then as DP, you're doing that, but much more from a helicopter perspective*”. As a teacher she valued subject department meetings and so “*I still go to a lot of department meetings purely because I want to see what's happening and not just my own department*”. She enjoys learning about active teaching methodologies in other subjects. Sarah believes that “*the skills and what is needed in the classroom is something that I very much bring with me as DP because you still have to have that personal touch*”. She admits, “*I missed the kids. I missed the classroom. I actually went back in one hour a week this year to LCAs. It happened, not planned*”. She believes “*it's really good for the kids to see you (teaching). Secondly, it's really good for your colleagues to see you because they know that you're actually experiencing what's going on in there*”. Sarah aims to teach at least one substitution class each week. She returns to talking about the LCA students she teaches for their work experience module ... “*if I'm not there and then they're falling behind with their key assignment, I'm worried ... It's not ideal some days, but Oh my God, am I enjoying it*”.

Michael says he doesn't miss classroom teaching, in his case Construction Studies, DCG (Design and Communications Graphics), and related subjects. He says, “*when I made the decision to apply for the role of deputy, I knew I (would be) leaving the classroom behind. So, you can't be hankering to go back. OK, maybe there are some days that you might say 'wouldn't it be lovely to be going down the corridor, going into your classroom, closing the door'*”.

Michael quotes a deputy in another school who describes her role as “*solving other people's problems, whereas when she was in the classroom, she was trying to solve her own*”.

Initially, when Cillian was appointed deputy principal

“I broached the idea of some classroom teaching with the principal.... asked, do you think I'd be able to keep on my sixth years, maybe bring my fifth years to sixth year and just see how I get on? The other deputy was there and he turned around and said ‘I had the exact same thought with my fifth year and sixth year Maths. I decided to keep them on ... I've actually given up about halfway through the year. It was in their best interests that they had a teacher that could give them their full time’. He found he was the few minutes late (to class) each time, not getting enough time to do proper corrections, not able to give the students the attention that they deserved, because the role of the deputy took over so much; things arise and you need to be free. It could be a health and safety issue, it could be a critical incident ... and you cannot leave that scene or that scenario to try and get down to the class. Then I need to try and get somebody to cover the class. It's so complex. I talked and I listened to her (principal's) advice and I said, ‘hard as it is to take, but I won't keep on a class’. So, I didn't. More recently, we had a teacher going on paternity leave and I took his classes on and that was nice to get back in with the group as well too, for a little while” (Cillian, PP, interview).

Cillian adds, “*there's elements to the (DP) job where sometimes you think to yourself: it would be good to just go back teaching for a year... almost... just take a break*”. He is also keen to point to “*opportunities you get as a deputy that you don't have as a subject teacher*”. Earlier on the day of the interview, Cillian had attended a coffee morning for about 40 parents of first year students (about 30% turnout). “*We are happy with that. They're busy people too. They've jobs and so on. It's great to be able to link in with them and chat with them, as we also did at the parent teacher meetings last night. I don't have a schedule myself (at a PT meeting) so I'm free to mingle, have the quick chat, opportunities you don't get as a subject teacher*”.

It is significant that being a teacher is always part of the deputy principal's identity, with many enjoying the opportunity to go back to that role on occasion.

5.7 Relationships between the deputy and the principal

Among interviewees, there is agreement that the principal-deputy principal relationship is a central feature of both roles. These relationships will have ups and downs so a key question arises: how is the relationship nurtured?

Ruth, in her fifth year as a primary school deputy principal, views the relationship between the principal and herself as *“a good working relationship. I think we're on the same page with a lot of things. We have a shared vision and goal for the school. But like any other relationship, it is built on trust, on communication, on transparency, on being real with each other, having that psychological safe space to challenge each other, to ask each other questions and to be able to engage in what are sometimes difficult conversations ... and then being able to move on after them. And checking in and being able to read the temperature with each other. Recognising that the principal may be under serious pressure on a day. Then I need to ask, ‘Are you OK? Do you want a hand?’ But I think just keeping that relationship open, being trustworthy and a good communicator are key for all of us”*. Informal meetings, regular checks as well as a weekly formal meeting help nurture the relationship. Ruth explains: *“I pop in every morning. Just a quick ‘Hi. How are things?’ Everything is different every day in school. So, if there was anything in particular, then we would meet. We stay after school on a Friday. During the week we take notes, build a document, and talk things through on Fridays. We have informal conversations as we walk from the staff room to the classroom. But there is no time to process these until eight o'clock that night. That's when I get all my thoughts together. On Fridays, we have our proper meeting when everyone's gone and we do our chatting”*.

In addition to formal and informal professional conversations, respect, trust and a shared vision, there is the importance of ‘a united front’. Second-level deputy principal, Abby, with ten years’ experience in the role, recalls that in one of their very first meetings, the current principal and herself agreed that *“whatever we disagreed about, whatever we didn't like, the public face would always be agreement”*. Abby adds that behind closed doors *“we could fight it out, and we do... we have been known to have a good old ding-dong fight”*. Warming to her theme, Abby emphasises the importance of space for professional conversations, *“having that space where you can say ‘no, I disagree. You're wrong about that. We should go another way, do another thing’. I have friends who are deputies ... who just don't have that opportunity. If you*

are working with somebody who just expects you to toggle off into the distance and do the cover for the day and just deal with the things that they don't want to know about and not bother you, that can be very difficult. And I do know it does exist”.

Síle, working in a primary school with almost 400 students, says that the principal, herself and an assistant principal “*work closely together and bounce things off each other, which is great. And we do have a very good relationship, which is a real gift. I know a lot of people aren't in the same position*”. According to Oliver, in the primary school where he is based “*we are sharing the one job*”. Talking about ‘ethos’, Gavin, deputy in a 500+ second-level school, says, “*For me and the principal it's very much about the relationships we have with the students, relationships we have with the staff. We see our roles very much as overseeing that*”. For Oliver, the relationship is nurtured by good, open and frequent communication, often informal: “*From day one, I was conscious of having an open-door policy with the principal. We have our offices side by side. I would actually leave my door open a lot and she does the same. So, it's almost a matter of popping in and out to one another rather than making specific times for an appointment, which is really helpful and effective. We also communicate with WhatsApp. ... it's a quick and effective way to deliver a message. Our campus is quite large and it's really important that we're able to get hold of one another*”.

As with Abby, Oliver recognises that not all principal-deputy relationships run smoothly. “*I've been at the Oide Tánaiste programme and heard from some other new deputies about how their relationships with their principals are difficult. I feel so lucky that I'm in a position where communication and cooperation are taken for granted. I really do appreciate it. And it's only when you hear from other people that you realise that this is special, and it deserves to be nurtured*”. Gavin talks about the importance of trust between principal and deputy, and also about patience, “*For the deputy principal, the key thing is that the principal trusts you. You do things and are given the responsibility to do them, and you're trusted ... I find that empowering. It comes back to trust and that has to be built up over time; you have to do things well. It's not something that's easily earned, it does take time.*”

For Sarah, appointed as a deputy just before the Covid-19 pandemic, these points about agreement/disagreement, professional conversations, trust and patience were in sharp focus. “*I went into the role and then we were dealing with Covid... it was ... a baptism of fire. We just*

had to dig in. We both had a huge respect for what the other was trying to do. So, we started from there. We knew we both had a very strong vision for what we felt the community, the school could be and we wanted to work very hard to get there. Even though we don't always agree - we don't - we don't do cheerleading squads for each other. We have very robust discussions about different things because we are quite different about how we'd approach things. But it works. And that friendship has deepened over the three years. It's good professional dialogue and we do a lot of listening to each other. We have had to learn to trust each other... Covid was another level... in some ways it makes you stronger. Times were so uncertain. They talk at all these in-services about ... you and the principal having to communicate, but when you don't know each other it's very, very hard. So, we actually had to spend time getting to know each other and there were decisions made about, 'OK, we're going to make this work, we're going to trust each other and get over ourselves'. And I think that's what good professionals do. They forge those bonds because they make decisions around what needs to happen. I think when you watch each other work and you begin to trust the vision, see that the actions are matching up with the words, it helps”.

Building on that difficult start, Sarah now emphasises the power of space for regular communication and conversation: *“We make sure that we check in (with each other) in the morning, we have regular meetings, informal and formal. I'm only beginning to see (the value) of time away – we were at NAPD last week - the time driving up and down in the car, talking and thinking things through as people as well as professionals”.*

For Geraldine the relationship *“is really based on trust and honesty”*. She is frank about how the principal might regard her: *“I'm like a dog with a bone. She would joke and say that I'm very persistent and that if I really believe strongly in something, I will pursue it. She would say that we complement each other... administration, as in the paperwork, wouldn't be her strongest point”.*

Cillian, one of three deputies in the school, also identifies time away from school as helpful in strengthening professional relationships among the senior management team. *“We go to conferences - we all go and the APIs step up.... Those moments are golden because there is no distraction. The (named Trust Body) conference that we go to is a great opportunity. It's an overnight stay. We have the in-school management conference coming up and that's another overnight. There's a meal and there's a chance to socialise, the four of us together, but also*

with others, like deputies from other schools... What we tend to actually talk about is the vision for the school. 'Do you know what would be great if we could do this, if we could do that' kind of thing. 'I'd love to be able to do something down that area of the school' and 'let's try and spruce it up a little bit'. We generally tend not to talk about the day-to-day bits. I suppose that's the idea of a conference, isn't it? Because you go to get fresh ideas and a fresh plan..... And then (at these conferences) there are other principals and deputies, and when they jump in on the conversation, you get to hear their take and about their school, and then you realise that you're not alone in all of this and that, actually, we are doing a good job" .

By way of contrast, Gavin, a sole deputy at second-level, emphasises that when the relationship with the principal is strong, much communication is informal and spontaneous. He states: *"I'm very lucky in that my principal is great. ... She's a good people person. She is someone who shares.... brings me into confidence about things that are happening... We would not meet officially any day, like never have timetabled official meetings. But, say, Monday morning, she might say "Can you meet me at half nine?" She often comes up to my office to meet. At least half our meetings take place in my office. ...We'll meet and we'll talk.... We will talk about the weekend. We'll talk about the match or we'll talk about stuff like that".* This, Gavin points out, helps open the door to the more serious professional conversations. Among recent examples he cites a discussion about altering the subjects on offer in the Junior Cycle curriculum, and the moving from classes of 40 minutes to one hour. *"She's very good for having those big conversations. They tend to happen in school. The odd time she'll say to me, "Do you want to go down to (named location) for lunch?"*

Oliver, a deputy at primary level, also values the informality and spontaneity that can develop when the principal - deputy relationship is working well. He talks about *"being trusted with sharing the burdens and sharing the responsibilities. It's not merely stepping in when the principal is away. It's very satisfying helping to manage such a big organisation and that the relationship is very effective and it's working brilliantly. I take great pride in that we're both working together to a common goal and my contribution is valued ...by the principal herself and by the rest of the staff. It's early days, but it's a great feeling".* Oliver cites the principal's affirmation as being *"very forthcoming with praise"*, for instance, after what *"might have been a tricky meeting with a parent"*. He also feels the sense of co-leadership by being consulted on emerging issues. Often, it is *"to get a knock on the door and she would say, 'Can you come in? I want to run something by you'"*.

‘Trust’ and ‘respect’ are two terms consistently threaded through the interviews, particularly in relation to relationship building.

Michael sees a clear link between trust, respect and vision and talks about difficulties that can arise when they are absent from the relationship. *“It’s all about trust,”* he says, recalling that in his six years as deputy principal, *“unfortunately, that wasn’t always there. There was no impetus, no vision of where we need to go, no asking of how we are going to get there. Respect, too of course. You need to have that, and then a certain amount of autonomy. Yeah, trust, respect and autonomy. In fairness, I did find there was a certain amount of autonomy, but we were just missing that final link or two.”* Importantly, rather than focus solely on principal-deputy relationships, Michael broadens the conversation to highlight the importance of the deputy *“nurturing and maintaining professional relationships across the whole school community.”* He sees this as a high priority and links it with the idea of *“modelling the behaviours and vision that I personally have for the school”*. Ideally, according to Michael, principal and deputies *“would have a shared vision, know where the school is going for the next three or five years. And every now and again, must say honestly ‘we’re veering off here, we need to go back to the shared vision, a plan with clearly defined roles’”*.

Michael values informal conversations with other members of the senior management team as *“they give greater insight. You find out if they’re in a similar vein of thought. That definitely enhances those relationships”*. But, he maintains, regular, structured formal meetings are also vital. His frustration here is obvious: *“We have a weekly senior leadership meeting and since I took up the role, we’ve never had an agenda. It’s all ad hoc”*. While weekly meetings between principal and deputies are scheduled, they don’t always take place at the agreed time. *“And then all of a sudden, we could be called upon at any time, say Wednesday at 11:30. The message goes out half-an-hour in advance”*.

It is clear from the interviews with Cillian and Michael, both operating in large schools with three deputy principals, that the relationship between principal and deputy-principals cannot be viewed in isolation from that among the deputies themselves and, as Michael, emphasises strongly, *“across the whole school community”*. Linked to that are not only the need for regular, structured meetings of the senior management team, but also well-defined job descriptions for

deputy principals. Cillian shared a list of the three deputies’ duties and responsibilities. A modified version can be seen in the table below.

Table 5.1 Role and Responsibilities for three deputy principals in one school (modified)

Named Deputy Principal	Named Deputy Principal	Named Deputy Principal
Teaching and Learning	Teaching and Learning	Teaching and Learning
Care Team	Care Team	Care Team
Links with AP1s	Links with AP1s	Links with AP1s
Links with AP2s	Links with AP2s	Links with AP2s
VS Ware, calendar	Student Behaviour, Years 2	Student Behaviour, Years
VS Ware, class lists	+5	3+6
Supervision and Substitution	Staff handbook	Inclusion, SEN, Guidance
Room allocations	Staff induction	Assistive technology
Student Behaviour, Years 1	Staff meeting planning	TY, LCA developments
+4	PME student-teachers	Teacher mentoring
Incoming students	IT management	Staff professional
Attendance, suspensions,	Digital Learning Team	development
expulsions	PT meetings	Assessments
Health and Safety	Privacy Officer	Co-curricular activities
Co-curricular activities	Co-curricular activities	(Musical)
(Cultural)	(Sport)	Graduation and award events

While reflecting the varied responsibilities associated with deputy principals, three important caveats need to be added: firstly, individual schools will vary as to what is designated as the role and responsibilities of principals and other post-holders (AP1s and AP2s) as well as non-post holders; secondly, some of the responsibilities mentioned will be shared on teams with colleagues; thirdly, as Cillian says, teamwork and open conversations among the deputies are vital. He points out how the school where he works grew quite rapidly and the three deputies were appointed at different times: *“I would look up to (named deputy) who is in the job twice as long as I am. I can ask ‘have you come across this before? What did you do in this scenario? Can I get your take on this? And (other named deputy), he's coming from a guidance counsellor background. So, when there are issues around care team things, guidance things, I might go to him... Other things, he'd come to me. So, we all have our strengths and our challenges”*.

Navigating the relationships between duties in a large school requires trust, open conversations and an awareness of possible tensions, according to Michael: *“Maybe there are some aspects (of the role) that I’m doing well or somebody else would serve it better, or maybe I should take on an aspect of somebody else’s work because it ties in more closely with what I’m doing. There is a tension: somebody else might be getting the credit for something I did. It’s not that I am personally looking for credits, though it feels like that sometimes. Somebody else may feel that you’re walking on their toes. You need trust.”*

Michael’s views on a shared vision translate into an emphasis on policy and school culture. As he sees his situation, *“the culture was ‘no change’”*. This strained relationships. He describes a tension between his striving for a more student-centred culture and meeting resistance from those who preferred *“teacher-centred and the status quo”*. He says, *“Even before I became a deputy principal, in my role as an API, I would have been promoting a lot of things and people would say ‘why are you doing that?’ Even still, people ask why are you bringing in a policy for CBA? why are you bringing in a policy for assessment? why are you bringing in a general policy for junior cycle? Historically, there was never much of an emphasis on policy, and for me policy is clarity, and it is communication”*.

Aaron regards the nurturing of the relationship between a deputy principal and a principal as *“about trying to look at a mutual vision. So, a school leadership vision first and foremost, and then that has to feed into a wider, facilitative conversation with the rest of our colleagues to see whether we all share this collective vision. That can’t happen in a very busy and rushed environment. It’s the oxygen mask analogy. If the plane is going down you’re not looking for a vision, you’re looking for an oxygen mask. You’re looking to try and fix the priorities at the time. I believe vision is important, but it can’t be rushed. It has to be more than just in a nice little wooden frame at the front door where it is displayed”*.

5.8 Being supported as a deputy principal⁴

The question about the supports they avail of was posed to all interviewees. Here we report the responses relating to the emotional support received by deputies from colleagues and from family. Support from family, from trusted colleagues in school and from a group of other deputy principals who come together to find solutions to problems of practice are seen as critically important.

Primary school deputy Síle commented on the support she receives from her long-time colleagues *“I do get support from my colleagues. I mean, I genuinely do. I'm very fortunate. I know I'm well regarded by my colleagues because they know me. They are people who've worked with me for many, many years. They know me to be a doer”*. Another primary deputy, Geraldine, speaks about the support she receives from her husband, *“I think I'm very lucky that my husband is very supportive. He is a very honest, genuine guy and he really values education”*. Cillian, a post-primary deputy, commented on the support he receives from the school chaplain and other colleagues including a group of year-heads within the school. Gavin, also from the post-primary sector, remarked, *“We have a brilliant guidance counsellor and a great caretaker. They'd be the first two things I'd start with in a new school. The teachers in this school are good and having positive professional support from them is nourishing”*.

Post-primary deputy, Michael, spoke about the support he has experienced from a group of Special Needs Assistants within the school. He acknowledges that their depth of knowledge would not be the same as that of his teaching colleagues, but comments, *“They are people whom I can go out to at any time and they know they can come to me”*. Implied here is the person -to-person human connection that is essential for the emotional wellbeing of the school leader. Later in the interview he acknowledges that for him, *“a handful of people is sufficient because they're the people you can trust, people you can speak to and know it ain't gonna go any further. I never want to burden them”*. Sarah, a post-primary deputy, speaks about her

⁴ The Leadership Development for Schools (LDS) programme was a formalised support programme for school leaders, particularly principals. It was initiated in 2002 and delivered under the auspices of the Teacher Education Section of the DES. Before it was initiated, the DES had financially supported a range of initiatives aimed at supporting principals specifically, predominantly via their professional associations (NAPD and IPPN). The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) took responsibility for the LDS programme in 2010. The Centre for School Leadership (CSL) was established in 2014. In 2024, PDST, along with the CSL, was subsumed into Oide.

support from colleagues but in addition she alludes to the intentionality of building solid teams of teachers and students within her school, *“My colleagues, they count. We have a very good API support team in the school. We have a good admin team. We're building those teams. We really were at Ground Zero for quite a while. We are now in year three and I'd love you to talk to me at year 5 and year 10. We also get great support from our student committees as we are building our student voice”*.

Many deputies spoke about the value of support groups convened to help with particular challenges such as in administrative areas or personnel challenges. Gavin was a member of a group of five deputies formed after a PD event with the JMB. Now that group has dwindled to two. He commented, *“I was talking to one of them today, asking about their posts (of responsibility). ... You can have conversations with them and they can be supportive. They understand what it's like to have five teachers out”*. Ruth speaks about being part of a support network in the primary sector, *“I'm part of the deputy principal support network group and I love that. We just chat and talk about our work. There's always lots of support. We can just send a message and ask for input on any challenging issue. There's a lovely sense of collegiality about that. You help one another because you understand where everyone is coming from”*.

Formal supports for deputies come from a range of agencies and Trust Bodies e.g. Oide, and the JMB; teacher unions are active in promoting good practice including through their journals and conferences. The IPPN and NAPD have both championed the cause of the deputy in the primary and post-primary sectors. Initial training for deputies (Tánaiste/Oide) gives essential information on the duties associated with the role (see Appendix I). This input for beginning deputies can be situated on a continuum of professional development. Aaron, who facilitated primary deputies on the Tánaiste course, commented that *“... in terms of my own preparation for a leadership role, while I didn't explicitly set out to be a school leader, but, by working as an advisor with the PDST I was afforded the luxury of having an awful lot of facilitation training. That's a continuum. I don't think you're ever fully qualified as a facilitator. It definitely enabled me to do a lot; we have 41 teachers and almost 20 SNAs. It's all about talking to people and interacting with people and listening. I felt that the facilitation training was really beneficial, especially in a challenging scenario”*.

Geraldine outlines the scale of her school's involvement with external agencies. Her ability to deal with others in a professional way highlights the need for further development of skills in adult-to-adult relationships, *"I am the SENCO in the school and an SE teacher. The SENO was a great help. There was a lot to learn about the enrolment requirements for the classes for children with autism. We got help also from an advisor with the NCSE. We use their portal. We have visits from a teacher for children with hearing impairment and the NEP's psychologist was a really great help. He has been here for quite a long time. We work also with the (named) centre for autism. We also liaise with the Disability Network in the area. We have good relationships with all these professionals; it depends on your approach"*.

5.9 Relationships with colleagues

Responses to this question showed how participants managed themselves in relation to their colleagues. Gavin relies on his people skills to forge professional and personal links. He spoke of the loneliness that is part of the leadership experience, when there is no department to support decision-making. He also commented on the isolation of Covid and how this helped him grow into the new role. There was quite a degree of self-awareness in his response, *"If you asked me what are my better qualities, I would say I was quite good with people and having good relationships with people, that side of things"*. In fact, he knew that these particular skills were important factors in his promotion as teacher in another school to deputy in his present school, *"In having conversations afterwards, I would say one of the reasons I got the job was my people skills"*. Cillian, another post-primary deputy, recognised the need for emotional intelligence when responding to colleagues, *"... there are those phone calls that you get. You just have to have a chat with them. Your soft skills come in to play. Being empathetic with them. I've taken these calls myself and it is about how you manage them, these difficult conversations"*. Cillian was aware that these teacher-colleagues (on the phone) faced challenges when dealing with all the personalities within their class-groups every day. He was determined to support them but realised that there were times when difficult conversations were necessary. He remarked that, as a school leader, *"you are constantly making those kind of professional judgments"*.

Sarah quickly realised that on appointment, colleagues, *"stopped seeing me as Sarah; to them I was the deputy principal and I was going to hear exactly how they felt. ... So that takes a lot of hard work, and it takes a lot of going to people and meeting them where they're at and*

sometimes saying, look, I know how you're feeling. I empathise!". Michael spoke about the difficulties he faced, and still faces in a school which he believes privileges the *status quo*. "...*In the area of school life, I would say that relationships were strained. Because, as I have said, the culture was 'no change', even though people would say that we need to do this and we need to improve, we need to do that. But when it came down to actually bringing it forwards, they weren't there for that. The culture was 'we're just going to roll along'*". He is facing an ethical dilemma, believing what is important and critical to the lives of the students but unable to garner support from his colleagues, "*I just scribbled down here 'strained; being student-centred; striving for excellence versus teacher-centred and the status quo'. Even before I became a deputy principal, in my role as an API, I would have been promoting a lot of things and people would say 'why are you doing that?' Even still, people ask why are you bringing in a policy for CBA? why are you bringing in a policy for assessment? why are you bringing in a general policy for junior cycle? Historically, there was never much of an emphasis on policy, and for me policy is, clarity and its communication"*".

Geraldine, a primary deputy, recognised the need for basic practical support for the staff. She was just three months into her position when her principal took sick leave. This meant that Geraldine stepped up to principalship. She took this opportunity to show her interest in and her respect for colleagues. She emphasised care and active listening, "*I think people on the staff knew that I was always an advocate for the staff. One of the first things I did was I created a form to gather information on the basic needs of the staff. For example:*

- *Do you have a key?*
- *Do you have a fob?*
- *Do you have a parking space?*
- *Are the blinds in your classroom functioning?*

These are basic things that the staff needed to be sorted. Staff need to be cared for in basic ways. And also what helped was that I made myself available to staff as an active listener, and then if they said something I would actually follow through with whatever action was needed. So, I think that really helped to gain trust".

Abby, working in a busy post-primary school reflected on her relationship with colleagues, "*I suppose everybody knew my work ethic, the commitment I had to the kids and all the rest of it; so they knew that they were going to get that, just in a different way. But there were those who*

did struggle". She is very conscious of her role as a support to colleagues. This support results in teachers being able to get on with their teaching without having to deal with behaviour issues. She commented, "... you're not hearing classes being disrupted because they know there is the support, and they know that they can text message me and I will come down to the class and be at the door; any one of us in the management team will be there and there is huge support".

Aaron was appointed as an outside candidate to the role of primary school deputy. There was an initial struggle as he dealt with the disappointment of other candidates from within the school. He reflected on how he and others felt on appointment; some still feel aggrieved, "... Not everybody received me well from day one. They didn't and I'm sure there probably are colleagues who maybe are a particular issue for me. But by and large it wasn't all. It took time. I didn't go and address people explicitly and directly about the fact that they may have gone for the position, even though there are quite a number that did. But over time, you hear through the grapevine about other people who were interested in the role and maybe (feel) aggrieved not to have been successful. But I just prioritised having both personal conversations, and also professional conversations because I wanted to demonstrate that I'm a human and I'm a colleague, you know, and I value getting to know people. But I also wanted to demonstrate professional competence with relationships as well as on issues that arose".

Aaron considered how colleagues would greet his appointment as an outsider to the school. He realised that there were others on staff who may have been candidates. His school culture is such that any discomfort was put aside to ensure that learning and teaching continued in a positive environment. "I felt responsible for disappointing other people. You don't know who may have had expectations of the role. But I have to say from the morning it was announced on the last day before the summer holidays every other candidate from the staff came to me to congratulate me and I felt it was genuine. And as time has gone on, I know for a fact that their congratulations were genuine, despite their disappointments. It was quickly put away with and everybody just got on with their job. It was great to know that people were so professional and supportive as well".

Síle, a deputy in a rural primary school, spoke about working with friends and neighbours. Some of her colleagues are past pupils of the school, as she is herself. She was happy to welcome a new principal who was not from within the school. Síle recognises the difficulties

of making tough decisions when she is ‘*a friend and neighbour*’. The challenge of leadership lies with the accountability and responsibility that must be faced “*I was in the school for a long time before being deputy principal, and I just had a good relationship with my colleagues. But it is hard, all of a sudden, to be the person who has to say well, there's a deadline for this and where are you, where are your notes or whatever?*”.

Ruth is a primary deputy who commented on the lack of training for the role. This led her to question herself, ‘*Am I supposed to change? Am I supposed to be different? Do I still keep my friends?*’ She goes on to say, “*... the biggest thing I learned and would pass on to others in terms of interactions with colleagues is to just stay true to who you are yourself and keep your values front and centre. You don't have to change as a person. Yes, your role has changed. Yes, they might be a little bit more guarded around you at times in terms of conversations they will have, but you can still have very meaningful relationships with staff if you just stay true to yourself*”.

A thread running through these data is the need to be professional in all interactions with colleagues. This helps to maintain relationships.

5.10 Covid and its impact

The outbreak of Covid-19 in Ireland in 2020 presented schools, including deputy principals, with situations never experienced previously. Creative responses were needed for school leadership. The interviewees reflect some of what was happening. Síle’s frustration with trying to balance full-time teaching with the additional responsibilities of deputy principal is very clear. “*I feel undervalued*”, she says. When the school was given 10 administrative days during Covid-19, she was initially delighted. “*I took a week at the start of the year for all the start-up initiatives and then (another week) for all the closing-up initiatives at the end of the year*”. As she reflects on that initiative, she now believes strongly in the need for more administrative support in schools. Síle also states “*I found Covid was the most stressful time of my whole career. And I'm not alone in saying that... It was very, very busy ... I'd be in the office upstairs in the house at home, there were days I was in there 10 hours. Not only was I trying to support colleagues online, but I was also trying to prep work and do online stuff for the children that I was teaching*”. She talks about the sense of “*being at home and being in a leadership position*”.

and not being the best for it". She says that in the school where she works "we do use certain online learning platforms still", quickly adding "I hope it never comes again".

In Oliver's workplace, Covid-19 *"changed our focus somewhat, from the curricular to the pastoral area in terms of pupil wellbeing"*. As part of their self-evaluation just before Covid, the school, fortuitously, had focused on student wellbeing. This, Oliver believes, sensitised the staff to the fear and unsettled state the students had during virtual teaching and when they returned to school. *"We recognised that the children needed so much more from us as educators than the curriculum. So, a lot of our time was spent on devising programmes and working out initiatives within the staff and the school to help support the pupils and to develop resilience"*. Oliver says that *"There is still a need for us to nurture that sense of wellbeing on a daily, almost hourly basis to reassure the pupils. I don't think we would have been able to achieve anything else if we hadn't first looked after or addressed their wellbeing needs"*, he says. According to Oliver, *"that whole emotional processing of what had just happened and why we had been away for so long, ... being back into the big school environment again, it must clearly have been very daunting for a lot of the pupils"*.

Aaron took up the deputy principal, primary, position during the Covid-19 pandemic. What he remembers most is the *"ambiguity of trying to identify the matters of priority trying to identify what the needs of the learners were and what were my own needs in terms of professional development. There was no road map"*. During Covid, getting to know and work with the principal, also newly appointed, was difficult. *"We were both finding our feet and finding our way. It actually was a really beneficial experience"*.

Like many primary school deputy-principals, Ruth is very aware of the complex and varied needs of children with additional educational needs. *"These children suffered so much during Covid and they are now suffering because we don't have the supports there for them. We have SET allocation reviews and it's such a battle to try and get any more extra allocation of hours. It's a hard fight. I worry for these children as they go forward because this is where they get the intense nurturing and minding. You'd hope you'd be able to set them up for secondary school"*. Ruth believes that if, for example, a deputy principal could be freed up during the first week of every month, they could *"get through so much work. As it is, you're doing work from 8 to 11 at night. I'm working every single night trying to do policies because there is no time at all allocated to this ... One day a month for administration would change my world"*.

In the school where she works, Geraldine had the role of Covid lead during the pandemic. She sums up that period as ‘*relentless*’. The health and safety aspects were time-consuming and demanding. Enquiries were constant. Geraldine points to how some things “*died a death*” during Covid. For example, beforehand, there was a thriving parents’ group. Now, trying to re-establish it is challenging.

In the large second-level school where Sarah works, a major event in the middle of the Covid pandemic was the departure of the principal who had been in position for fifteen years and the arrival of a new principal who have previously worked, as principal, in another school. On top of that, two serving deputy principals also retired and Sarah was appointed as a deputy. “*We hit a huge learning curve*”, she says, “*it was just a baptism of fire. ... we were dealing with Covid.... we just had to dig in*”. Sarah says that the principal and herself respected each other, particularly their visions for the school. Building these relationships can be challenging at the best of times and listening, talking, agreeing and disagreeing during Covid was difficult. “*It was very, very difficult. It really was. ... Covid was another level. But when I think back, in some ways it makes you stronger*”.

Sarah reckons that “*I possibly came into the position at one of the most challenging times ever. ... I just thought it was normal to work the level of hours that you were doing because I didn't know any different. I remember trying to open the school after Christmas in my first year. It was where everybody went down with Covid. I went down with it myself. I remember sitting on the bed trying to organise S&S for literally 20 people. We didn't know if we could open the school the next day - how was I going to have people in classrooms and how are we going to open?*” Then the principal got so sick with Covid that he was out for four weeks and Sarah stepped up as acting principal. During that time “*not only did we have the HR crisis.... We had storm Adam, so I had to close the school. We had a data breach at the time, I had to manage that – I never had to manage that before. I had emergency works. I'll never forget it.. And so, anything since then just hasn't been that bad*”. Sarah also remembers how, during Covid-19, some colleagues felt overwhelmed by the changed situation of different timetables, trying to teach remotely, students’ altered relationship with school and more. They looked to the deputy principal for support and sometimes they gave voice to anger and frustration. “*I did find (listening) to that difficult*”, she adds. Now Sarah reflects, “*But the more I look back, the more I can see. And you just got on with it. You just did it*”.

In addition to her role as a deputy principal, Abby was also teaching a Leaving Certificate Maths class when the pandemic struck. *“When they announced the first version of the calculated grades, they cut us off completely (from the students). They wouldn't allow us to have any further contact or communication. It was very sudden ... you develop these relationships.... you know more about them than just their maths abilities ... they rely on you for an extra two minutes at the end of the day just because they want to... suddenly it was just cut off. That was hard”*. On top of that, Abby, was also trying to write up a Masters’ thesis. Her days were consumed by teaching and the new demands being made on a deputy principal and, in the evenings, *“I was writing kind of between 8:00 o'clock and 4:00 o'clock in the morning, helping then till about eight, half-eight, up (again) through meetings, classes - in for a little snooze- and then go back again”*. These cycles became ‘normal’, but Abby is pleased that she did submit her thesis.

Michael recalls how, prior to the Covid outbreak, the then PDST had set up Lionra, a support network for deputy principals. He found this network and the support from deputies working in other schools *“excellent”*. But then, *“once Covid came, it went online, and it stayed online. But it was still supportive, a place where you could speak, and people listened”*.

Within the school where he works, Michael says that the pandemic had a *“massive impact”*. He led, along with one of the AP1s, the school’s efforts to move teaching and learning online. He remembers how, initially following lockdown, there was a lot of scrambling to familiarise teachers with Microsoft Teams, change the timetable so that some classes were ‘live’ remotely and then to engage students with assignments and so on. *“That was demanding”*. Michael remembers being *“available to teachers, students and parents, every day, sometimes up till eight o'clock at night. That was to ensure that they were able to get online and benefit to the best they could”*. He adds that *“the teaching body was excellent”*. Michael says that the principal came, occasionally, to planning meetings during the Covid times, was approving of what they were doing, saying *“you're doing a great job, keep it up”*. Michael estimates that his standing with colleagues rose during the period as *“they are probably saying that only for Michael and this other person we would have been at home watching daytime TV”*.

Gavin also recalls how *“For me the hardest part was when we went into the online stuff”*. As the lead person for IT, in addition to setting up and monitoring the system, there were multiple requests from teachers and students about basic things like how to log on, to issues with e-

mails and lots more. *“So, from that side of things, that was very draining”*. He adds that, although he was working from home, *“I think I was busier during Covid. Definitely. First time around, it was really stressful”*. Gavin began making videos to show teachers how online teaching could work. *“Lots ... are really good and really savvy, but there is still a proportion of staff that were slow to master the online”*. Gavin also found the return to school stressful, trying to strike a balance between *“making sure that teachers felt fully supported and safe”* and ensuring that the students returning felt that *“school was the best place for them”* and to do that safely. Gavin also feels that during the days of Covid, schools could have been given more support from the Department of Education.

Like Sarah, Cillian was also appointed to the deputy principal role in the early days of the pandemic. *“We were all wearing masks, lots of separateness, not much togetherness. ... There was no real staff room. I had young kids at home, one with asthma and so on. So, I wasn't really mingling too much with staff”*. Looking back, Cillian thinks that those somewhat isolated early Covid days, may have *“prepared me for the bit of - I don't want to say loneliness because it's not lonely in any way - but sometimes you do feel like you are kind of on your own, because these jobs are up to you and you have no department as such”*. He became very conscious how ‘on your own’ a deputy principal can be when tackling certain tasks. He also built a small, strong network of colleagues who are friends. Cillian feels it is important that these people, at least, continue to see him for who he is, not just a deputy principal. Having small children in common helped build those relationships.

5.11 Relationships with students and parents

Oliver, a primary administrative deputy, had a clear vision of how he might communicate with the children and with their parents: *“When I started last September, it was something I wanted to do. I wanted to get around to every class in the school - 28 mainstream and 11 ‘special needs’ classes. It was quite a long journey to get around, but I felt it was great to just get my face out there and say, ‘This is my new job, and you might recognise me from being a teacher. What do you think my job entails? What is a deputy and what do you think I'll be doing now when I'm in my office?’ I wanted to put myself out there also as somebody they could approach not just when they're being sent to the office for whatever discipline breaches might have taken place. A lot of them felt that's what my job was, to deal with discipline. I just wanted to say*

that the office is open to everybody, for good news, and to say this is what my role is. And I'm here to help you develop. And I'm here to help the principal in her role as well”.

Moving on to parents, “... I would make a point of being out on the yard in the mornings and try to be there as well at home times just so that they can approach you. That's less official than making an appointment. They might just want to have a word or even to just say hello and catch up on how their child is doing to be there at as many of the school public events as possible e.g. a charity match or if we're having a fun run or a drama event... they can see that you're approachable. I am happy with the number of calls I get from parents... they feel they can come to me instead of going directly to the principal. They know I will feed back in good faith if there's an issue that needs sharing with the principal. I think little measures like that can go a long way to making yourself available to the parent body”.

Aaron, also a primary administrative deputy, recognised the positives of nurturing relationships with the parents of the children and has been pro-active in this: *“My main interactions with parents were conversations around special education and around behaviour. Quite often they wouldn't be the most positive of conversations because unfortunately, the way the code of behaviour operates is you generally communicate more about misdemeanours than anything else. There wouldn't be an awful lot of time to communicate about good behaviour. This would be done by the class teacher. So, I found that a lot of my interactions with parents were either talking about a child who's struggling academically or about a sanction being put in place. It can be challenging. Coming into the role I saw that I could be regarded as the bad cop. I made a huge effort to try and to go out... I open the gates -the caretaker did that previously. I wanted to say good morning to people and to engage with them. . It's just a good thing to do. I think that there is a payback as well; if you do have to have a challenging conversation with them you're not starting from zero. You have rapport. They know that you're coming from a good place”.*

Aaron believes that an administrative deputy principal is somewhat shielded from parents. *“When you're not teaching, you don't have as many reasons to communicate, unless it's something very serious, whether it be behaviour or special needs or something like that... Going in the yard in the mornings, being around, being visible, going to school plays or different things... they're really important opportunities to get to know parents a little better. The LAOS document highlights the need to lead school development. There is also a*

PR element to the role. Deputies need to know the school community and the parents. In my own school context, we do not have DEIS status although we are not far away from that. We do not have a home/school/liaison teacher. Maybe the deputy is best placed to take opportunities to link with parents and to get to know the school community”.

Síle is a teaching deputy and reminisced about the challenges of dealing with a multinational parent community during the past year: “... *my interactions with parents can be difficult. It can be hard to be PC all the time. But you have to use the softly, softly approach. You can interact with different parents differently depending on their own personality as well. Last year was hugely challenging because the local hotel has 450 Ukrainians and we've about 60 Ukrainians in school now.... We have a lot of children from other countries anyway. We find the parents good, the community have been very welcoming. Because children are children, parents donate old uniforms, et cetera”.*

Another primary deputy, Geraldine, reported on how she re-convened the Parent’s Group in her DEIS school: “*We're trying to re-establish the parents’ group. It died a death during Covid. I went around to each parent/teacher meeting at the start of the year and I spoke about the parents’ group. I said that I had joined as a member of the group in my own children’s school. I demystified it for them. Now we have 14 recruits. I think it was having that relational approach, talking about it rather than just sending out a leaflet. I think it's very important to have the human touch”.*

Gavin is a deputy in a post-primary school and uses his IT skills to ease the students’ transition from primary school. He recognises the value of modelling good practice for less experienced teachers: “*I'm very lucky in my school, in that we don't have a lot of discipline issues.... I'm able to have a very positive relationship with parents and students. I do a lot of stuff with subject choice, so I'm often the first person they really engage with when they're coming into first year. I do a lot of the presenting such as subject options or using Chromebooks. If a parent has a problem with Chromebook, it's me they come to. So, I'm often the first person who helps to fix a problem. ... I would definitely say that the deputy principal should be really involved with the new students. Because from the get-go, they see you as a doer, a fixer.... You can build very positive relations from that”.* Gavin has always engaged in extra-curricular (co-curricular) activities and believes that this it is important for deputies to lead the way in this aspect of school life. “*I'm involved in GAA in school. I believe that deputy principals – and I*

understand it can be harder for principals - should be involved in an extracurricular activity. Not all deputy principals might appreciate me saying that. This year, I'm only looking after two football teams. Last year, I looked after four because we had no one else. It's not specific to GAA, it's actually any extracurricular activity. If I became principal in the morning, I would not give up my involvement". Gavin is particularly concerned that it is becoming harder to get teacher involved in extra-activities, to volunteer their time. "I think if teachers see the deputy there in a tracksuit, going to matches.... they are more likely to volunteer".

Cillian in a post-primary school, is also aware of the need to be approachable: *"... the students who did TY are the last few in the school... whom I actually taught. Many students don't realise what you used to teach. I try and pop down to first year graphics classes and have a little walk around and I tell the kids that 'this used to be my room' and little things like that. And then, the parents. Actually, I think if anything taking on the role (of DP) has strengthened my relationship with parents... You do have those difficult conversations and there have been a few irate ones... They are not always majorly positive conversations that you're having. You are trying to solve problems when they call you; they're not calling you to tell you how well their (son or daughter) is getting on".*

Abby speaks positively about the efforts made in the school to nurture relationships with students and their parents: *"... we take an approach that we are a very pastoral school, a very supportive school. So even while we might be having a meeting with a parent about a child and we might be having to go through a suspension, simultaneously we're letting them know where all the supports are, what we think the problems are and we're looking at ways that we can help them correct the behaviour. Nobody likes to hear 'No', you can't do a particular thing they request; you suddenly become the person that they don't want to talk to anymore because you said 'no'. For example, they want to do a teacher selection in an area where there's five teachers across the year group and they've been placed with the one they don't want...you just can't, because if you open that door, it has to be open for everyone". Abby remarks "I have discovered that a lot of people don't like hearing the word 'no'.*

She goes on to speak about her care for all the students and especially for those who are less advantaged: *"Like last Thursday night, we had our first-year welcome night and there were two girls there who were getting a presentation. Both had got 625 points. Fabulous kids, no doubt about it". Abby juxtaposes this with her memory of the day the results came out and her*

concern for one student. *“I'm looking to him. Did he get 5 passes? Did he get his LCA? Has he got something he can go on to? Because let's be fair, there are kids here that have advantages ... and there are others who just don't, and somebody has to be looking out for them and that'll be me”.*

Sarah, a deputy in a post-primary school, is keenly aware of interacting with both groups and individual students and parents: *“...there's the macro and the micro... you're dealing with the parents as a whole at the parent's council, the parents' evenings, the open evenings, the parents' nights. And you're dealing with students at assemblies. You're dealing with students in corridors, you're dealing with them over the intercom. They hear you every day. So, there's that macro piece and then you have the micro piece where you're dealing with individuals, you're dealing with families, and you're dealing with conflicts, you're dealing with emotion. And every time I say to the principal or the year head, whoever's in with me, just remember we're dealing with very frightened people. We're dealing with very vulnerable people and let's start from there and let's work with them. And you can have such positive interactions You can change the relationship, you can change it, and you can bring them with you ... they become part of the team”.* Michael spoke about the positive relationships he has with parents in a post-primary school: *“... the relationship with students and parents is very respectful. There are very rare occasions when it's not ... 99.99% of parents are supportive of me in my role. I got that a lot when we developed a school app. They would contact me with questions or queries... The only time I find it difficult with parents is if I'm delivering a message from somebody else; when you're not part of coming to the conclusion but have to deliver the rough news of a suspension or something like that. It doesn't happen very often because most of the time I'm involved in coming to the conclusion. The only times I came to loggerheads with a parent (were) delivering that message without having the full background, maybe five times during six years”.*

Ruth, in a primary school, says, *“A lot of the time I'm talking to parents and children about negative issues. Sometimes a child might be sent to me because of an issue and we have to contact the parents. These can be difficult conversations. You have to respect parents. You have to listen. You have to understand that if you're coming to them with something that's negative about their child, you ask yourself, ‘How would I feel if I was getting this call? ‘You just have to use that empathy and just be emotionally intelligent and socially intelligent when you're dealing with them. And if you do that with the best intentions, things will work out.*

Parents will realise that you all want the same good outcome for the children. But there are times when conversations are not so easy. We have to move with the times and we have to adapt our communication style if we want the right outcome. You have to be open to listening and to hearing what they're saying. You have to do that. You have to work together. But being a DP is great way to get to know the different children in school and to build relationships with them. I love when the children come and they open up to me. We've brought in restorative practice this year and that's been very beneficial, really good. They are much better at articulating their thoughts. And once they feel listened to, they'll go with you too. They know you have their backs and that you want the best for them”.

5.12 If you could change one thing?

Towards the end of the interviews, we asked “*if you could change one thing about your professional life as a deputy, what would it be*”?

Primary deputies, working as class teachers or SE teachers, commented on the workload they undertake. Geraldine admitted that, “*There is so much to the role that I doubt that one person can do it fully*”. Ruth offers a possible solution, allowing deputies some administrative days. “*During Covid*”, she says, “*there were administrative days given to Deputy Principals. Those days are needed more now. Maybe one day a month. Maybe that's a lot to ask. But you'd have to find a substitute teacher to take your class. For example, during the first week of every month a deputy could go into a room and get through so much work. As it is you're doing work from eight to 11 at night. I'm working every single night trying to do policies because there is no time at all allocated to this. All ISM meetings are out of school hours. Everything you do has to be brought home now. I prefer sometimes to bring things home because I've got a clear head. I'm in my own space. There are no children around me. One day a month for administration would change my world*”.

Síle agrees that more time allocated in school would allow her to give support to SETs and to work on SPHE: “*I would be more effective if I had more (administrative) time in school. Time to work on SPHE or meet with professionals about the SEN kids. Or meet with parents* People say to me, ‘*Síle, how do you manage to do everything*’? And I say ‘*the secret is you have to do everything and that's what it feels like to me*’. And ‘*half doing things*’ doesn't come naturally to me. But you kind of learn then about the importance of wellbeing. The Department

of Education talks about wellbeing in schools I think we're getting the wellbeing of the children. We're conversant now in resilience and mindfulness. These are concepts that the children are very familiar with. But there's not a whole lot of wellbeing for the teachers realistically and certainly not for management”.

Oliver and Aaron are primary administrative deputies. Both agree that ‘double-jobbing’ is impossible to manage: “*To be honest*”, said Oliver, “*I can't fathom how a person could do the role effectively without being an admin deputy principal. During the Tánaiste two-day event when I said I was an admin principal, I got a lot of reaction like ‘Oh my God, you're so lucky!’ I cannot imagine trying to teach all day, which to me is a full-time job and then to take on extra duties as the deputy before and after school. I know small schools might be slightly easier, but I think in any school you're ‘double jobbing’ and I cannot imagine how a teacher would plan or make sure that they have their own time when they are effectively doing two really important jobs. It just beggars belief how it can be done. How can we do either job to the best of our ability?*”

Aaron questioned the role of the deputy as SEN co-ordinator. His wish is that “*from a system level it would be to put some more structure on the role and I know that LAOS 2022 has started to do this, but there needs to be more development. Many deputies are SEN co-ordinators. So, does that stay part of the deputy principal’s role or do we make that a post in its own right? There needs to be clarity*”.

Preparation for positions as principals and deputies also concerns Aaron. “*The Tánaiste and Misneach programmes are akin to servicing the aircraft mid-flight. They are in place when the candidate has already been appointed. Maybe that’s too late. I’m struck by the refinements in LAOS 2022. It is good that other school leaders are mentioned, besides the principal. There’s agency, accountability, and responsibility that are part of the integrity of the role of a deputy*”. Aaron went on to offer a critique of the attitude of some deputies within the system: “*Perhaps we need to address those deputies who maybe sought the role and got the role because they felt it was the next step in their career as opposed to wanting to lead. I think there’s a body of work to be done there. I would have seen that in my own advisory role (with PDST). There are many deputies who are super professionals, highly motivated, really want to make a key difference. But there are the few....*”

Abby, a post-primary deputy would like to see *“the next generation of teachers coming through with the same enthusiasm for education and the same work ethic, as I think our generation had,”*. She reminisced about having, *“trained football teams, netball teams, Irish dancers... I've done fashion shows, talent shows, cooking competitions the lot ... volunteerism is dead for me now”*. Sile had noted a generational shift: *“I look back and I know there were many, many times where school came first (ahead of family). And that was the way a lot of people of my era were. I'm not sure if the younger teachers have that view. I think they're probably right”*.

Sarah is concerned with the amount of time she allocates to her deputy principalship role at post-primary level: *“... it's that leakage into your home life and it is your time management. There is a lot of talk around the amount of hours we do. But I find myself feeling guilty if I don't do X amount of hours because the job is supposed to be so hard. Good principals, good deputy principals are doing them”*. Cillian would like practical support with IT and with accounting procedures in post-primary schools. His school has saved money by managing these in-house but acknowledges that not every school has an accounting teacher as principal. He remarks: *“I just think it (managing money) is a massive burden”*. He would also like to have, *“a smaller support network. What got me thinking about this was the guidance counsellors ... have supervision as it's called, a chance for them to debrief, link up, talk about things that are going on... Some sort of a support network”*.

Gavin admitted that his welcome change might, *“sound bad; I'd go to less meetings”*. Michael was pragmatic. He saw that, *“Developing a school plan is something we need, and we never had”*. He would also like to develop his own coaching skills.

5.13 Applying for principalship

The responses to Question 12 showed the commitment of the interviewees to their individual schools, some reticence about taking on the work of the principal, and, in some cases, fear about the time that might be taken away from family life.

Geraldine has assessed her situation. There will likely be an amalgamation of local schools, and she recognises that this will mean lots of work in *‘gelling together’* and *‘teasing out policies’*. She is adamant that she would not like to be the principal of a large school and neither would she want to leave the school to be a principal elsewhere. Aaron at time of interview was

a deputy principal. He has given thoughts to his career trajectory: *“I had two thoughts on this in terms of mapping out my career: I felt that I wanted to be a principal, but I struggled since being offered the role. In the last three years I developed an immense connection to the school that I’m in as deputy. I felt a strong attachment... I look forward to it (being a principal), but I can see how a deputy would feel very connected to where they are and maybe find it challenging to look for promotion external to their own school”*. Aaron went through a period of wanting and not wanting the role of principal. He finally realised that his primary commitment is ‘to children who live in direct provision’. This was the subject of his recent doctoral studies. His new school *“has many children who live in direct provision. It would be almost false of me not to take up the position. It might sound too serious to say that I felt a moral imperative to apply for the principalship”*.

Ruth also has a dilemma, loving the idea of being a principal but recognising her limitations: *“I don’t have the confidence to do it, to be honest, but I do feel I would love it. I just don’t know if I’d be able for it. I feel quite comfortable in my role now... But it’s just probably the fear of the unknown”*. Ruth acknowledges that being a principal, *“is a great role’ ... ‘a really satisfying role”*. Síle responded to the question by commenting positively on the allowance paid to deputy principals in larger schools. The allowance for principals in smaller schools is a deterring factor. She is also conscious that, as a deputy, she does not have to take, *“some of the harder decisions ... and I don’t have to be responsible for recruiting”*.

Oliver reflected that he never had ambitions for any leadership role within a school. ... Now in the role of deputy he can see clearly how much is involved in the role of the principal. He would put the demands of his family before any promotion. He said *“I think the experience of the last year has definitely made me question whether it (principalship) would be a sustainable job in the long term, given the demands that are increasing all the time. So, it’s probably not the answer people expect to hear, but I think you have to be realistic with yourself and be kind to yourself and say, ‘You know, it could make a huge impact on your life, which might not be for the good’”*.

Cillian had completed ten years as a deputy. If he were to be appointed now as a principal, he could face twenty years in that position.... He has confidence in his ability. However, he sees tensions and even contradictions within school leadership positions. Cillian argues that teachers are first and foremost teachers. *“We’re trained teachers, that’s what we do best”*. He points to

teachers 'doing well' at interview and then being asked to take responsibility for matters such as finance or schoolwide IT, areas where they may have little expertise.... Much is demanded of them by the community but also by the Department of Education.

Gavin has seven years' experience as a deputy, "*in a really good school*". He admitted that: "*you do get to the point where you have to start considering the next step. I really like the job of deputy principal because it's very task orientated; a lot of what you do is very tangible and directly touches students and teachers, it directly affects their day-to-day life in the school. ... I haven't applied anywhere, but if my principal was ten years younger, I would, yes, I would consider applying for a principal's position (elsewhere)*".

Abby has completed ten years as a deputy. She loves her job in that particular school. Like Gavin she fears that being a principal would entail stepping away from the kids and from yourself. She describes her work as deputy as being: "*...in there with them and you're doing whatever it is you're doing, the discipline or the teaching ... the principal layer takes away from that*". Abby says she could take on the role in her own school without any stress. Finally, she says that she does not want to move away from her school to be a principal elsewhere. She feels she is needed in her school.

Sarah is reluctant to apply for the position of principal in any school: "*No, I'm very committed to where I am and it's where I am in my own career. And to be honest, the more I see, I feel I have a lot more to do. I like the interaction that I have as the front face of the relationships piece, the students, and the committees*". She has observed the work of the principal and can see that: "*It's a very different job, I think, ... No, at the moment, it's not something I will be looking at moving up to. No, I don't have my eye on it. No.*"

6. Discussion and Conclusions



6.1 Introduction

In this section we will discuss themes that were developed from the quantitative and qualitative data. The order does not indicate any hierarchy. Rather, we hope to paint a picture of the complex role of the deputy principal. In doing so we invariably comment on and reflect on other roles within the school community. Where possible we link back to our literature review to situate this research within the broader research context.

As set out in Department of Education circulars, the deputy principal occupies a position of vital importance within the senior leadership team in a school and when the principal is absent, the deputy deputises. While there are commonalities in the roles enacted at primary and at post-primary levels, an important difference is that the vast majority of primary school deputy principals carry significant responsibilities for class teaching as well as for school administration, management and leadership.

While deputy principals in both sectors engage in extensive and varied activities, the evidence from this scoping study is that such tasks can be grouped under five broad headings. These categories can, at times, overlap. Moreover, many respondents express frustration at not having sufficient time to complete all that is expected of them.

1. Logistical maintenance: ensuring that the school operates smoothly, that students, teachers, support staff and all the associated back-up services are in place on a daily place is seen as central and time-consuming. A wide range of examples were provided by informants and ranged from record keeping and data maintenance to timetabling.

The umbrella term ‘timetabling’ can refer to their construction and implementation including teacher allocations; room organisation; supervision and substitution arrangements; rosters and rotas to cover for teacher absences (planned and unplanned); substitution for SNAs; liaison with substitute teachers; planning and co-ordination of ‘mock’, end-of-term and State examinations; parent/guardian – teacher meeting schedules; award events, graduations and more. Obviously, the smooth operation of a school depends on a lot more than the deputy principal, including the principal, other deputies, assistant principals, teachers support staff and, critically, the students. However, a deputy principal is frequently regarded as a key co-ordinator of this logistical maintenance.

2. Monitoring and maintaining behavioural standards and pastoral support: these supports to students are regarded as a core activity and can also be time-consuming. Seeing children and young people flourish is a major source of job satisfaction. Examples of activities include Code of Behaviour implementation; dealing with behaviour/issues; supporting year-heads in managing discipline; cyberbullying intervention; detention management, student and staff safety, nurturing a caring and trusting environment, and, especially for those at primary level, leading the school’s responses to children with additional needs and their families. The evidence also points to an important role in student support and care. This can include leading responses to the pastoral needs of students; working closely with year-heads; care team participation; mental health promotion; supporting guidance and wellbeing and restorative practice. As with logistical maintenance, this aspect of the role is also a shared one and depending on the size of the school can vary greatly in its enactment.
3. Building and nurturing good relationships with all stakeholders: this is viewed as important so that a dynamic, positive culture can be shaped and flourish. Mentoring colleagues in various ways, leading the Droichead process for newly qualified teachers, facilitating professional development activities and resolving conflicts are some examples. Developing relationships with outside support agencies and community interests are also noted with EWOs, Tusla, NEPS, CAMHS, social work services, other health professionals and employers mentioned. At primary level, those who also work as SENCOs highlight this dimension of the work. Sustaining the principal-deputy principal relationship is regarded as especially vital. As the deputy principal operates

at a critical intersection within the school's formal and informal communications traffic, communication skills are very important. The evidence points to high levels of self-awareness, emotional intelligence and a capacity for critical self-reflection as vital if deputy principals are to grow and develop in their interactions, particularly with colleagues, students and their parents. These are very valuable areas that can be addressed through reflective practice and through focused professional development.

4. Teamwork: working as part of a team that clarifies, shares and implements a vision for the school community in which the deputy works can be a source of great satisfaction; when such teamwork is underdeveloped deputies can find it frustrating. Teams relating to In-school management teams, school development planning, teaching and learning, student voice, anti-bullying, DEIS, additional educational needs and school self-evaluation are among the examples given. A striking realisation during the research was the almost invisibility of 'deputy principal' in the discourse on 'shared leadership'. Further examination leads us to suggest that 'teamwork' may be a more suitable term that 'distributed leadership' in the context of the reality of schools.
5. Supporter of curriculum innovation and development: this is recognised as an important aspect of a deputy's leadership role. Initiatives to promote literacy and numeracy, junior cycle reform and moving to classes of one hour were among the examples cited. However, the urgency of more immediate demands and the unpredictable and reactive nature of the job often results in this being relegated in the list of priorities.

All the above-mentioned realities point towards the importance of in-school conversations about the distribution of duties and responsibilities, particularly between principal, deputy principal(s) and assistant principals. This evidence underlines the reality that the position of deputy principal involves a combination of administrative, management and leadership activities and that sometimes the boundaries between these distinctions can be 'fuzzy'; in reality, administration, management and leadership can be seen as an overlapping and interacting continuum rather than three distinct types of activity. Individual contexts demand individual responses. In general, the deputy's role appears to be less defined in smaller schools; the clearest role definition is evident where there is more than one deputy (see also Máirtín, 2007).

The position carries many triggers of stresses and tensions. These can arise from a loosely defined job description, the difficulties in deciding on priorities and sometimes, from the inadequate provision of resources to schools, from the inevitable position of being at the intersection of the many push and pull factors that operate in a school and from the challenges of maintaining a work-life balance.

Given the undoubted satisfaction that many deputy principals derive from the busy-ness and ‘troubleshooting’ or ‘fixer’ dimensions of the role - ‘being at the centre of things’ - a high level of self-awareness and emotional intelligence is essential.

6.1.1 Tasks and time

Deputy principals can, at times, feel overwhelmed by the sheer volume of demands on their time and expertise.

.... we have so many tasks ... I find it difficult to conclude at the end of the week that I have my list completed ... School is a busy place and extreme organisation is required to ensure that tasks are completed (50PP).

However, not all experience the many demands in the same way.

...you are centrally involved in all aspects of school life. This makes for a very busy yet enjoyable job (43P).

Every day I get the chance to make sure that people have a better day because of the things I say and do. It is very much a problem-solving role which makes every day exciting... (30 PP).

Schools *are* busy places where, every day, unpredictable events occur. These often demand immediate responses; it might be an accident in the yard, an unplanned visitor, a distraught student or something else. With most staff members engaged in classroom teaching, principals and deputy principals can have a flexibility and agility to react quickly to such situations. While ‘completing tasks’ is clearly important, the frequency with which informants wished to temper this with comments about being people-centred, listening and building and sustaining relationships is notable. The value of informal, often unprompted, encounters with colleagues are often cited.

You have to be very flexible, patient and always remember to actively listen no matter how busy you are (50PP).

Most accept that unpredictability, urgency and relationship building are central to the position even if their juxtaposition create tensions such as how to complete very concrete tasks such as ensuring, at very short notice, that a group of students has a teacher in their classrooms, while at the same time maintaining and nurturing professional relationships with all involved.

For teaching deputies in primary schools, the push and pull can be especially frustrating. Ruth talks about the impact on this on her “... *a deputy could end up becoming all things to all people and just be absolutely exhausted....to be quite honest, it is exhausting ... with tasks that should take five minutes but turn into twenty ... All this eats into my teaching time*”. This is even more stressful when you have these tasks on top of a teaching role.

School size can be a significant variable in how priorities are worked out. In larger schools, responsibility for Information Technology may be a large part of a deputy’s duties as can the co-ordination through regular, formal meetings of the work of assistant principals (AP1 and AP2 positions). Specific school contexts demand specific responses. In general, the deputy’s role appears to be less defined in smaller schools; the clearest role definition is evident where there is more than one deputy.

The evidence also draws attention to some underdeveloped thinking in the discourse on ‘distributed leadership’. If leadership for a school is to be shared, surely a strong, co-operative, professional relationship between principal and deputy(s) is a vital building block. This will be discussed in more detail later. A comment that captures how the multiplicity of tasks and the limited time have an impact of deputies is:

“Because you’re always on the hoof. You always have to be somewhere else, and you’re always trying to catch that thread about that conversation” (Síle, interview).

**“ if I could sum up my job in two words, they would be
'unfinished conversations'”**

**Síle, Deputy
Principal,
Primary,
interview**

It seems worth recalling that Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018a) conclude their study of teacher collaboration with a focus on three questions:

- What should we stop doing?
- What should we continue doing?
- What should we start doing?

These three questions offer a possible framework for re-imagining deputy-principalship. The answers are likely to be school specific as contexts vary so much (Jeffers and Lillis, 2021). However, the evidence here suggests that regular professional conversations – sometimes in formal meetings - particularly between principals and deputies, can create space and structure for discussion and decision-making. Similarly, regular, formal meetings between principals, deputies and assistant principals can not only bring greater clarity and efficiency to the school's operation but can nurture cultures of inclusive leadership and collaborative professionalism.

6.1.2 Satisfactions

Deputies were asked about the satisfactions they experienced through their work. This was an attempt to make visible the hidden assets in schools; the commitment to education, the resilience and magnanimity of deputy principals. The extent to which the deputies who took part in this research view the centrality of student learning to all their work in school is strongly evident. Like Robinson (2011) they recognise that the core business of teaching and learning should be the focus for their influence, their learning, and their relationships with teachers in order to more positively influence student learning.

The essence of our teaching role is to see children learn which gives great satisfaction. Collaboration and having a good working relationship with one's colleagues is a great way to learn. Finding out what has worked well for others can only benefit other staff members. Satisfaction comes with a child being happy and content in your class and in turn working to their full potential (99P).

The ability to work on a one-to-one basis with students to do interventions re. behaviour was very beneficial and rewarding (119PP).

Abby in her interview articulated this as “... *that moment where you can find something that takes a child out of a difficult situation*”. This echoed by Sarah who refers to the emotional toll it can take on you as deputy principal “*What I find personally most satisfying - and it can also be what rips the heart out of you at times - is when you are able to work with the most vulnerable students and see a plan, a wraparound plan, put in place for them and you bring them with you*”. These and other comments reflect “teachers’ sense of personal mission, their ability to invest their personal satisfaction in the growth of students” (Tuohy, 1999, p149). Caring about their students, especially about the students who find the system challenging, is a marked feature of the responses.

Caring for the child means caring for the family of the child:

“When you feel that you've helped a pupil and therefore a family along the road towards getting to a better place it's very, very satisfying” (Aaron, interview).

When deputy principals see student learning at the heart of their work, their ability to relate to and support colleagues is enhanced. In that context, the advocacy in LAOS (2022d) for building a strong culture of mutual trust, respect, responsibility and shared accountability within the school makes a lot of sense. The findings suggest that being part of a team is a further source of satisfaction with the support of colleagues leading to work that is less isolating and with more positive outcomes.

I enjoy collaborating with staff, the L&M team and the principal. Working as a team is very satisfying where we can put our heads together to create the best outcome (70P).

Being part of a team that is allowed to reimagine what the school could be and how to begin the journey. Seeing others grow and develop. Celebrating the gifts of the team (86P).

How deputy principals articulate their satisfactions can also indicate the extent to which they have moved on from being class or subject teachers to viewing the development of the school as a priority.

Seeing others grow into leaders, seeing aspects of the school improve under a new management team; having the position in the school to make things happen, gaining trust of colleagues (46P).

The responses to the question about ‘satisfactions’ appears to have energised many respondents. This prompts a question about the time and space in schools – if any – when leaders can reflect on the values that inspire their actions and share them with colleagues. Conversations about what has been most effective and satisfying can open up possibilities for deeper analysis of what we are about in our schools, what our community cares about and what is possible to achieve. Deputies are well placed to lead these conversations, and in so doing enrich the culture of the school, as they have, in general, a holistic view of the school and have the welfare of their colleagues and students at the heart of their endeavours. Such reflections and conversations about what motivates and energises those in leadership positions, might also contribute to more colleagues appreciating the possibilities within the role, and – without denying the challenges which the evidence indicates can be substantial (Chagger and Bisschoff, 2015) – applying for principal and deputy principal positions.

Furthermore, allowing deputies to assume responsibilities, to act creatively within the school’s context and allowing them to promote and nurture leadership with their colleagues can add to the satisfactions experienced in the role. As previous researchers have concluded: “if vice-principals find their jobs more satisfying, their interest not only in becoming a principal, but also in becoming better in their present role, may well be boosted” (Kwan and Walker, 2010, p.16).

6.1.3 Stresses, Tensions and Balance

A consistent thread in the evidence from deputy principals is that there can be substantial stresses and tensions associated with the position. Sometimes this arises from a loosely defined job description, sometimes from the multiplicity of tasks and challenges faced and the difficulties in deciding on priorities and sometimes from the inevitable position of being at the intersection of the many push and pull factors that operate in a school. Striking an appropriate balance amidst the various tensions can be challenging. Individual inadequacies can also contribute. At primary level in particular, limited time to complete tasks combined with responsibilities for classroom teaching and for leadership can be stressful. To the question about challenges, one primary deputy wrote:

Time, everyone wanting a piece of you every day - it adds up and takes away from your time to carry out duties. Relationships between teachers and SNAs and between SNAs themselves sometimes needing restoration. Workload and never feeling on top of everything, feeling like I just can't know enough about circulars and policies at any one time to get through the workload. Not being involved enough with the children as too busy in management (82P).

These sentiments are echoed throughout the responses:

... never feel on top of teaching job or deputy job (8P).

... the learning of the children either suffers or your leadership suffers. It's impossible to do both jobs effectively in my view (13P).

Tensions can also arise from other factors and can manifest themselves in varied ways:

Striking the balance between school leader, colleague and friend also poses challenges on occasion (4P).

Stress caused by concerns about pupil's home lives, poverty, homelessness, domestic violence etc. (120P).

.... it can be difficult to find the balance between the 'managing the organisation' side of my role and "leading learning" part of my role due to time constraints, staff shortage etc. (76P).

.... being always available to all, expectation that you will be able to solve some unsolvable problems (95P).

Sarah describes the stress she feels as follows,

"...massive learning curves. I'd be confident in my abilities with the teaching and learning, the parents, the students, the teachers, the conflict resolution, it's the other piece, the facilities. I didn't know I was supposed to know about cleaning contracts ... SNA contracts and HR. That's all been very big ... If an SNA doesn't turn up, I have to have somebody in to support the students and the special class ...trusted and have child protection and are garda vetted and all of that. Huge!" (Sarah, PP, interview).

“I didn't know I was supposed to know about cleaning contracts ,... SNA contracts and HR”.

**Sarah, Deputy
Principal,
Post-Primary,
interview**

Ruth links this stress to the undefined role description where you become all things to all people, an impossible position for anyone in leadership.

“I think the role of deputy principal is very blurred. An understanding of the role is not consistent in schools. What the deputy is doing in one school and what a deputy does in another school can be totally different. There can be different expectations... a deputy could end up becoming all things to all people and just be absolutely exhausted” (Ruth, primary, interview).

Data from questionnaires echoed these sentiments.

“The major challenge is dragging yourself out of the day-to-day elements and making time for the more strategic and longer-term elements of the job” (44PP).

“...Finding the correct support at a professional level for legal issues, financial issues, policy issues, employment issues, discipline issues, ethos issues, education issues, and so on and on and on” (83P).

Sometimes the stress is brought about by a cluster of factors, often having an impact on each other:

“Responsibilities too broad, time to communicate face to face with staff, time to get tasks done, DP responsibilities cropping up during teaching time, doubting my abilities, imposter syndrome, unease/tension on securing position over longer serving staff member” (73P).

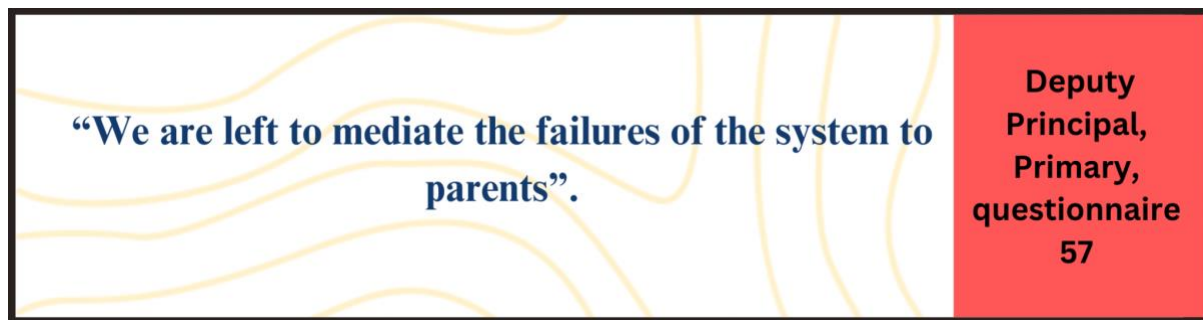
“The schedule can be very intense and often unpredictable, so time management and work life balance are two of the greatest challenges I face on a day-by-day basis” (31P).

A number added that during the Covid-19 pandemic some of the tensions were heightened with a feeling of “You never feel you can draw a line under anything!” (76P).

The inadequate provision of resources to schools is a major source of tension and irritation. As one primary deputy put it:

“We are left to mediate the failures of the system to parents” (57P).

This sums up failures in the availability of speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and psychologists, and seems to be most keenly felt when dealing with parents/guardians of children with additional educational needs. This can have a negative impact of the school’s relationships with parents.



This phenomenon of tensions resonates with much of the international literature related to deputy principals, e.g. Ribbins (1997); Cranson *et al.*, (2004); Kwan (2009); Pollock, Wang and Hauseman (2017); Abrahamsen (2018); Shore and Waltshaw (2019); Tahir, Musah and Hassan (2023); also see Tahir *et al.*, 2019). It also features in other work related to Ireland including; Grant (2014) and IPPN (2022). McNamara (2021) identified a tension between the new emphasis on distributed leadership and a traditional understanding of the Irish primary school deputy principal as “the person in charge when the principal is absent”. She concluded that a key issue to be addressed is “assigning more accountability to deputy principals sharing responsibility ‘with’ rather than ‘instead’ of the principal”. This conceptual tension between seeing the role as mainly administrative and individualist (Lortie, 1975) and following the logic of shared and dynamic leadership (Hargreaves and O’Connor, 2018a) - including co-leadership of the school - continues to be played out every day in schools.

While ‘relationships’ simmer away as central features of a deputy’s role, if the relationship with the principal is not healthy then this can present a major challenge for the whole school.

Among the findings are two distinct features relevant to this. Firstly, if principals and deputy principals share a vision of what the school is about and how to achieve its goals, then many other matters can be resolved. Secondly, this critical relationship between principals and their deputies needs to be nurtured by regular professional conversations and it is imperative - despite the undoubted immediacy and busyness of days in school - that time be found to enable such conversations.

While there are tensions and contradictions associated with all schools, these can be even more pronounced in schools serving ‘disadvantaged’ communities (Jeffers and Lillis, 2021; Fleming 2000; 2024; Bourke, 2023). As evident in some of the questionnaire responses, the fissure of educational inequality is a clear reality for deputy principals working in DEIS contexts.

The idea of a more tightly defined role for deputy principals has some attraction. However, loose role definitions can give schools a flexibility so that a deputy principal’s position can be shaped to address the specific context (see Hallinger, 2018) of an individual school, to complement the skills and competencies of the incumbent principal and, increasingly in larger schools, fellow deputies, and to play to the deputy’s strengths and gifts. When, in September 2024, aspects of the research were shared with a range of educational leaders at a seminar in Maynooth University, a message of “don’t over-define the role” was loud and clear.

The evidence suggests that, as tensions and at times even contradictions are essential features of the role, developing capacity to live and work with such tensions, stresses and frustrations is important learning for every deputy principal.

6.1.4 The deputy principal as Special Needs Coordinator in Primary Schools⁵

Deputies in primary schools were asked, in the questionnaire and at interview, to give their views on the provision of supports to children with special educational needs. Many deputies act as SENCOs within their schools, sometimes a hidden aspect of their role. Acting as SENCO and principal implies a recognition of the inherent leadership skills required to liaise with parents, teachers and other professionals. SENCOs would ideally have some professional development in this area to equip them with the personal attributes needed in order to build consensus around the provision of special education in the school. They are fully aware of the

⁵ Special Educational Needs (SEN): Under Section 1 of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004 (Government of Ireland 2004) “special educational needs” means, in relation to a person, “a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health, or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition”

deficits within the special education system as a whole and with the challenges of managing these as they support the children, parents and teachers involved.

“SENCO and everything this involves - full time job in itself!” (80P).

The role of the SENCO in primary schools has been described as having five broad areas of responsibilities that frame the role:

1. identifying children with additional needs and administrating assessments,
2. fostering in-school collaboration and supporting others,
3. determining and monitoring resource allocation,
4. providing staff development and
5. liaising with external agencies (Colum and MacRuairc, 2023).

The five points are useful as a way of reflecting on the responses that have been given by participants in this research. It must be emphasised that their work as SENCOs is in addition to their other work as school leaders and class teachers. One deputy manages a team of 19 SE teachers and 10 SNAs (P7). Inclusive schools are very much part of the education landscape. It may be worth considering the extent of inclusion, the varied nature of the inclusion and indeed what is meant by inclusion and how it affects a school. This is exemplified in the following response:

“So the closet that was supposed to be the sensory room is now a classroom. Our staff room has been changed into a classroom, and we have two teachers teaching in the hall. And our hall is now the staff room” (Síle, P, interview).

Identifying children with SEN through observation and input from other professionals takes time. Throughout this report there are many references to the relentless toll of duties and the lack of time required to address them as teachers would wish. SENCOs/DPs are seen by colleagues as having the knowledge and capability to arrange assessments and therapies. This echoes with earlier comments on being all things to everyone, which in reality is just not possible. The reality is that they experience:

“over 2 years waiting for public assessment speech & language, O.T., schools unable to refer into public services such as CAMHS, clinical psychologist in HSE” (P20).

Fostering collaboration and supporting colleagues is the ideal to which all aspire. This cannot be easy when, as a teaching deputy, you are also accountable for the class or cohort of children

to which you are assigned. Trusting relationships with colleagues are developed through meaningful conversations and time for these conversations is limited.

Sometimes the SENCO is trying very hard to be one step ahead of the changes to policies, alternative programmes, medical and psychological difficulties presented, professional and other help that can be arranged. Aaron wondered: *“if deputies are informed as to how to navigate the services e.g. Children’s Disability Network, HSE, Tusla. It is important to determine how to best meet the needs of the child. The biggest frustration is that there’s a lot of bureaucracy in trying to arrive at the best outcome”*.

Providing staff development is a leadership function where a SENCO draws on the experience and knowledge of colleagues to consider how they can meet the needs of particular children. It is imperative that deputies have the support of principals so that they can convene and manage worthwhile meetings. The outcomes of meetings should have the principal’s support. Liebermann advocates that good professional development, ‘must be collaborative, involving a sharing of knowledge among educators and a focus on teachers’ communities of practice rather than on individual teachers’ (Liebermann, 1995).

SENCOs are fully aware of the need to collaborate with professionals from outside agencies. These meetings occur during the times when they are also,

“Deputising for Principal, organising cover for staff, Timetabling of SNAs and SETs, SEN Resources, Enrolment of pupils in ASD classes, Organising CPD for teachers and SNAs, Liaising with outside professionals e.g. NEPS, Applications for Assistive Tech and Irish Exemptions, Supervision of Special Ed planning and recording” (93P).

Consideration might be given to making the post of SENCO part of the leadership team within the school, depending on the number of special education teachers and SNAs employed.

6.1.5 Leading curriculum

The deputy principal acts as an intermediary between curriculum, principal, parents, students, teachers and community through connecting, translating and at times brokering. In schools we talk about curriculum making to mean ‘a highly dynamic and transactional process of interpretation, mediation, negotiation and translation’ within the complex everyday work of leading a school (Priestley *et al.*, 2021, p.273). The deputy principal is involved in curriculum

making through their work on for example, interpreting curriculum policy (Dempsey *et al.*, 2021), timetabling, teacher allocation to areas of the curriculum, student allocation, leading professional development at school level, managing assessment and feedback for students, communicating with parents/ guardians and advocating for students who need additional supports. They often act an intermediary between the principal and the teachers. Sarah's comment illustrates this intermediary role well:

“I think first and foremost, it has to be about nurturing relationships in every space. I think as a DP you are that link, very much between the principal and the APs, the principal and the staff and even parents come to you, and the admin team” (Sarah, PP, Interview).

Also, middle leaders have been described as being pivotal to the successful running of a school (Flemming, 2019) and as impacting directly and indirectly teacher practice and curriculum (Lipscombe *et al.*, 2023). In many of the responses the Deputy Principals mentioned developing the timetable, organising professional development, providing cover for classes, sitting on interview panels and more. While these may appear to be administrative duties each of them has a curriculum focus. For example, when they talk about finding a good fit between a particular teacher and the needs of a class, they are focusing on who can best teach the individuals and the curriculum.

While tasks are talked about as being administrative in nature, the local knowledge of the school community means that as deputy principal you are often making crucial decisions that impact on teaching and learning in the school. Sarah talks about *“It's about the sport, the calendar, the curriculum, meeting with students, committees, meeting the teacher committees and making sure people can leave to do their CPD, making sure there's cover, making sure you have SNAs; HR comes into that, but you're scheduling and you're planning on a huge level, and it has layers upon layers upon layers. ...”*. However, without these layers upon layers it is difficult to imagine how teaching and learning could happen in schools. This is echoed by Abby as she observes that priorities can shift in a day, at the time of the year and so on. This flexibility is core to the leadership skills of the deputies we talked to. As Abby puts it:

“if you're starting about setting up the school year, proper planning of your curriculum and a good working timetable that gives enough balance as you can possibly manage for the students (is vital)” (Abby, PP, interview).

By balance, she means

“so that you don't have all of your maths classes last class of the day ... I suppose you're looking at the structures properly and making sure that everybody's going to be comfortable that their department, their subjects have been given due consideration.”

(Abby, PP, interview).

She went on to talk about matching teachers to class groups that might need more pastoral care and so on. Many deputies talked about having conversations with first years around subject choices, around settling in and being organised for class. These are all ways deputies make sure that individuals have access to the education they need.

Cillian talked about how there were times when difficult conversations were necessary. He remarked that, as a school leader, *“you are constantly making those kind of professional judgments”*. For example, when Michael describes how difficult it is to bring about change and to develop a culture where teachers were more open to changes proposed by the Junior Cycle Reform. He comments that

“...In the area of school life, I would say that relationships were strained. Because, as I have said, the culture was ‘no change’, even though people would say that we need to do this and we need to improve, we need to do that. But when it came down to actually bringing it forwards, they weren't there for that. The culture was ‘we're just going to roll along” (Michael, PP, interview).

On the other hand, Aaron talks about a different culture in relation to the revised primary curriculum where he can

“sit and facilitate conversations with colleagues about what this curriculum is, what the challenges might be, and how we work on those challenges. So that's really satisfying when you feel that you're helping colleagues in terms of refining their own practice” (Aaron, P, interview).

This ability to lead change is also one of Oliver's top three tasks as a leader,

“Thirdly, ... would be the curricular side of things, trying to assist the most effective teaching and learning. It's something that I feel passionate about, particularly the area of literacy. It's great to be in a position to be able to lead change in that area and in other areas but sometimes I feel that the other two aspects of the job push that down to

the bottom so it becomes the third priority on the list, whereas you might prefer it to be the first” (Oliver, P, interview).

However, he sees administrative tasks and discipline as pushing the curriculum making to a lesser place in his priorities.

Thinking about curriculum as social practice; it is something that is done, made by practitioners and other actors working with each other, therefore, relationships are important in all aspects of how teaching and learning happens in schools. The deputy principal is in a unique position of working with principals, teachers, students, parents/guardians, others including those in systemic support structures. This provides them with a 360-degree view of the curriculum enactment experience. Practices which comprise curriculum according to Priestley and colleagues (2021) such as pedagogical approaches, organisation of teaching [and assessment] (e.g. timetabling), and the production of resources and infrastructure for supporting curriculum making in schools. Deputy principals work in schools supporting curriculum by creating space of teachers to meet, providing material support and having the difficult professional conversations to open up opportunities for change. As Sarah tells us when talking about teams working *“making sure they're happening and allowing people the time ... knowing what teams are running and knowing what they need to keep running and keep building that scaffolding”*.

School leadership has been identified as second only to classroom teaching as an influence on student learning (Leithwood *et al.*, 2006). This puts pressure on deputy principals to keep the curriculum including teaching and learning on the ‘agenda’ of the school community. Whether this is leading teams as mentioned by Sarah above or responding to parents’ concern around student academic engagement or leading initiatives around curriculum reform such as junior cycle or the soon to be implemented senior cycle redevelopment, curriculum is a core responsibility for the deputy principal.

6.1.6 Communication - professional conversations - relationships

As discussed earlier, ‘professional conversations’ is developing into a major theme in this report. The broader context here is communications generally in a school. The evidence supports the view that professional relationships, especially those between school principals and deputies, are centrally important in the efficient running of schools. Schools are sites of intense communications. Messages are continually being sent and received between staff,

between students, between parents, and between individual members of these groups, with each other as well as with external stakeholders. These messages range from practical information - the school concert will take place on May 15th - to the many subtle ways its mission and values are consciously and unconsciously sent and received.

All members of the school community have agency, that is, they can shape, influence, inspire, undermine and nurture the messages that others are sending to those within and without. Therefore, those entrusted with formal leadership roles carry particular responsibilities to be both aware of and sensitive to communications within the school. Informants indicate a sharp awareness that deputy principals are at a critical intersection within the school's formal and informal communications traffic; they also indicate knowledge of the consequences of 'poor communication' in schools.

Some frame their work in terms of 'managing relationships', even as one of the best parts of the job:

"Developing collaborative relationships with staff especially post holders and SMT is a highlight of the role" (30PP).

"A very positive feature (of my role is) to be able to build wonderful relationships with parents, students and staff" (119PP).

Another states:

"School is a busy place and extreme organisation is required to ensure that tasks are completed. The building of professional relationships is key in any school" (50PP).

While 'relationships' feature strongly in the fulfilling and satisfying aspects of a deputy principal's role, they also appear consistently in the challenges.

"Relationships between teachers and SNAs and between SNAs themselves sometimes need restoration" (82P).

".... navigating relationships with parents can be challenging" (4P).

“Relationships - peers struggle with (my) new role, teachers more senior also struggle with new role. Feel more isolated as certain teachers resent your position and due to lack of time your relationships with some may decline” (113P).

That point about limited time when linked with the centrality of relationships appears to create an important tension in the role of deputy principal: how to complete very concrete tasks such as ensuring, at very short notice, that a group of students has a teacher in their classrooms, while at the same time maintaining and nurturing professional relationships with all involved. It’s a theme that surfaces in different ways throughout the evidence.

The data also indicate that within the myriad of relationships that a deputy principal has to manage and navigate through, that with the principal is vitally important. The evidence points to a broad spectrum of experiences:

“I feel that the strong relationship I have with my principal is the most important element in my feelings of success in the role. I feel supported by her. I can be totally honest and open and through this honesty and openness we get things done efficiently” (82P).

“Communication is a major difficulty. Time is another one. I get no admin time. I’m teaching and it’s very difficult. Not valued by principal at all” (114P).

As this is a scoping study, it is difficult to gauge how widespread that latter viewpoint might be across the system, or Michael’s remark during his interview that, from his perspective there is *“No shared vision, no plan, no road map, poor communication”*.

What is clear is that principals and deputy principals in schools need to work at initiating, nurturing and maintaining professional relationships. Some of the evidence both from the data and from the literature is that professional conversations should be central to these relationships. To re-work Michael’s remark above, these conversations need to be about sharing a vision for the school, about planning how to realise that vision with detailed goals and stages, all conducted with open, honest and trusting communication.

What is very clear is that principals and deputy principals in schools need to work at initiating, nurturing and maintaining professional relationships. Some of the evidence both from the data and from the literature is that professional conversations should be central to these relationships.



This can be very challenging, particularly when there are real differences in educational values and/or strong clashes of personality. Practical steps need to be taken to encourage such conversations. Sometimes, the immediate aftermath of a successful school event can offer opportunities as can critical incidents. Preparation for and de-briefing after staff meetings can also present a fresh focus. ‘Can I have a word?’ need not always be an ominous introduction to every conversation; mutual affirmation and support can be powerful. Furthermore, the increased emphasis on teamwork and ‘distributed leadership’ presents more opportunities for professional conversations among the broader leadership team.

While the principal is the secretary to the Board of Management, some boards invite a deputy principal to attend meetings, often as a minutes’ secretary. This practice not only facilitates deputies’ insights into more ‘big picture’ issues affecting the school, it can also assist both principals and deputies deepen their shared understanding of the leadership challenges they face. The suggestion, that deputy principals be in attendance at BOM meetings, might also be a relevant consideration in responses at system, trust body and school levels to the conclusion of the former Chief Inspector when he said in relation to improving school governance that “there is scope to develop the work of a significant minority of boards” (DE, 2022a, p.232).

6.1.7 School culture

As mentioned in the review of relevant literature, reading, understanding and shaping the cultures of schools - those complex amalgams of a school’s history, context, people and their assumptions – is increasingly regarded as a key leadership skill. The evidence in this study points to deputy principals being aware of this.

“... you have a crucial role to play in influencing school culture and communication throughout the school” (20P).

“I take professional satisfaction that teachers are developing themselves as leaders as a result of changing school culture that visibly values input from its stakeholders” (21PP).

Some respondents talk about trying to change the culture *“We are slowly trying to change the culture so that senior management is seen as including all the APIs”* (Gavin, PP, interview). Others comment on the negative impact of inherited practices *“We have this culture that if we can get away (from meetings) in 15 minutes, let's get away in 15 minutes!”* (Michael, PP, interview)

The word ‘culture’ has many connotations and any leader planning to shape cultures and sub-cultures in a school needs to have some awareness of the shades of meaning that derive from anthropology - shared values, beliefs and customs that shape a group’s worldview (Geertz, 1973), from sociology - the beliefs, values, norms, and symbols that bind people together in a society (Durkheim, 1912), and from psychology – the collective programming of minds that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another (Hofstede *et al.*, 2001). These descriptions capture different aspects of culture, emphasising its role in shaping identity, behaviour, and social interaction. They can also be useful if one recognises that school culture is probably best thought as not in the singular but as including sub-cultures (Prosser, 1999; Fullan, 2007).

In those anthropological, sociological and psychological explorations of culture, ‘time’ and how it is organised is a significant theme. Much of the time spent in school is already formally structured (Jackson, 1968) but within that, there is also discretion. Individual school leaders, particularly principals and deputy principals, do have noteworthy freedom to choose how some of their time is spent (Darling-Hammond, 2001). As very evident through many comments in this study, time is regarded as particularly precious and a number of informants state that they don’t feel there is sufficient time to fulfil their responsibilities as deputy principals. While critical consideration of how time in school is organised generally is important, a further cultural dimension is how individual deputy principals organise their time - what is actually prioritised and what gets neglected. The practice of monitoring how they spend their days and interrogating the findings of these reflections - individually and with colleagues - can be a refreshing activity for school leaders.

According to LAOS (DE, 2022d, p.25) the first standard in the domain of leading learning and teaching is that “School leaders promote a culture of improvement, collaboration, innovation and creativity in learning, teaching, and assessment”. As a standard to aspire to and an indicator for self-evaluation, this may have many manifestations. Furthermore, as Hargreaves and O’Connor warn, collaboration can have its pluses and minuses:

Collaboration, community, and teamwork promise many benefits. These include greater efficiency, better results, moral consolation, enhanced motivation, commitment to change, worker retention, diversity of perspective, and tenacity in the face of obstacles or disappointments. A culture that works together also holds out the prospect of a longer-term impact that is not dependent on one or two talented individuals who may leave as quickly as they arrived. At the same time, collaboration can lead to groupthink, the evasion of personal responsibility, and the suppression of critical judgment. Teams can be used to implement the will of tyrants. Communities can become claustrophobic or controlling. Few people, anywhere, clamour for more meetings (Hargreaves and O’Connor, 2018a, p.12).

It is apparent that there are many factors at play in shaping the cultures in schools. One important contribution deputy principals and other leaders can make is in initiating and furthering conversations with colleagues, particularly though not exclusively, professional conversations. As one informant put it with identifying ‘challenges’ in their role as a deputy principal:

“Time – for professional AND personal conversations with colleagues. The personal conversations have as much value to enhancing a positive school culture as the professional ones do” (20P).

This comment resonates with Síle’s assertion in her interview that the two words that could sum up her job would be “*unfinished conversations*”.

Two further points are worth mentioning. Moynihan and O’Donovan (2022, p. 626) refer to an “historically isolationist culture” coupled with “the pervasive results-driven competitive culture” in voluntary secondary schools in Ireland. Their exploration of these and other obstacles to cultures of collaboration is instructive. As discussed in the literature review, Lortie’s (1975) observations about autonomy and isolation are also valuable insights relevant to the work of deputy principals. Nurturing school cultures characterised by professional conversations need formal structures as well as informal interactions. Awareness of these points can assist deputy principals to sharpen their focus on school cultures. The idea of ‘communities of practice’ is set out clearly by Lave and Wenger (1998) and in many subsequent

studies. One example of an Irish formal, structured set of conversations about learning and teaching can be found in Jeffers (2006b).

Secondly, while deputy principals are obviously key among the school leaders who might develop the standards set out in LAOS (DE 2022d), it would be foolish, even arrogant, to think that only those in formal positions can lead such conversations. Kennedy (2022) offers insights from a teaching and learning group in one large Dublin school. Her article illustrates how bottom-up leadership can develop professional learning communities (PLCs). The account also carries lessons for school leaders who might lean towards micro-management. The discussion of ‘professional conversations’ is developed further later in this chapter.

6.1.8 Shared leadership

As evident in the literature review, the benefits of sharing leadership in schools through collaboration and teamwork – increasingly spoken about as ‘distributed leadership’ – can enhance decision-making, ease the burden on principals and foster staff co-operation. Data from the questionnaires and interviews point to a strong preference for more participative communication, planning and implementation of policies, moving away from the historical legacy of a hierarchical, sometimes authoritarian, and top-down model of decision-making. Greater teacher leadership can also promote increased professional development, give valuable foundational experience for further positions and contribute to a more collaborate culture. There can also be a greater sense of “buy-in” to the school’s overall mission when one is sharing some of the decision-making. A further advantage is that if, for whatever reason, a principal is out of office, there are people familiar with the operation who can steer the school through transitional periods.

However, not only is such a cultural change challenging to enact but some of the issues associated with greater sharing of leadership deserve further exploration, particularly from the perspectives of deputy principals.

Listening to multiple voices can be time-consuming and, at times, present such a range of opinions that decision-making is delayed. The very process of consultation can, on occasion, increase a principal’s workload. Decisions regarding delicate, sensitive and difficult matters ultimately require some individual to be prepared to take responsibility and answer questions about such decisions. Conflict, even power struggles, can develop when colleagues are invited

to share in the leadership and then voice viewpoints that differ significantly from those of the principal. Conflict resolution in such situations can be tough. As Grant, (2014, p.114) found in his study, not all teachers – including deputy principals -wish to be more involved in decision-making.

Finally, in terms of difficulties with implementing distributed models of leadership in schools, the principal may prefer the single, powerful model of being the authority figure and resist requests and demands for more shared models.

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In terms of difficulties with implementing distributed models of leadership in schools, the principal may prefer the single, powerful model of being the authority figure and resist requests and demands for more shared models.

Deputy principals who find themselves in such cases with single-minded, authoritarian leaders face major challenges (Allen, 2003). Policy vagueness and lack of precision in role definition offers little support⁶. While the evidence in this current scoping study underlines the power and value of professional conversations between principals and deputies, some mechanism – preferably other than through the courts - needs to be found to address the situation of a principal reluctant to engage in sharing leadership. Difficult as this may be, the best interests of students should always be the primary consideration⁷ (UN,1989). What can be done is limited and many – notably deputy principals - can feel disempowered. In such cases, Boards of Management have a role to play, though as the Chief Inspector observed: “there is scope to develop the work of a significant minority of boards” (2022a, p. 232).

While recognising the validity of Sugrue’s assertion that distributed leadership has the possibility “to be empowering by releasing the leadership potential of all actors on the school scene”, (Sugrue, 2009, p.368), as mentioned in the literature review, hierarchical structures and collaborative cultures don’t always sit comfortably together (Hickey, Flaherty and Mannix McNamara, 2024; Barry, Walsh, O Gallchóir and Mannix-McNamara, 2023; Quinn, 2022; Lumby, 2013; Sarason, 1996; Ball, 1987). Policies, at national and local levels, need to address this, particularly as it plays out for deputy principals. The observations about teamwork, accountability and autonomy discussed in the literature review are also relevant to that web of issues. Untangling some of that might be a useful exploration for those attending courses in preparatory and ongoing programmes of professional development. Greater conceptual clarity around distributed leadership is desirable among leaders before one goes trying to implement it.

⁶ See Appendix E for a list of some relevant Department of Education circular letters.

⁷ In the *United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child* (UN, 1989) which Ireland ratified in 1992, article 3 states that in all actions concerning children taken by institutions such as schools “the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration”.

Finally, one of the most striking discoveries in our exploration of distributed leadership at national and school level was the near invisibility of the deputy principal. While the *Looking at Our School* documents (2016a, 2016b, 2022b, 2022c) signify a noticeable difference in awareness of the existence of deputies, it is not easy to see much advancement in role clarification. When visiting numerous school websites, one observes a persistent - though not total - absence of explicit reference to deputies. It would also be worth discovering how many boards of management encourage deputies to attend meetings, either as recording secretaries or as occasional observers. Whatever one's terminology preference is for distributed leadership, shared leadership or teamwork, the reality has to involve a lot more than rhetoric.

6.1.9 Support for Deputy Principals

In both questionnaires and interviews, many deputy principals in this study frame their work in terms of giving support to others in the school community – students, teachers, SNAs, other staff, parents and the principal. At primary level, the number of references to supporting children with additional educational needs, and their parents, is striking.

Given the stresses and tensions associated with the position, already discussed, support for deputy principals themselves is regarded as important, even vital for long-term sustainability in the role. The evidence points to such support operating at micro, meso and macro levels. Within the school where a deputy works, supportive colleagues are seen as especially valuable. Informants spoke less about whole staff support but more about individual 'critical friends', people they could converse with openly and confidentially and whom they knew 'had their back'. The examples given indicate that these supportive colleagues can come from across the staff e.g. assistant principals (Cillian, Sarah), guidance counsellors (Gavin), Special Needs Assistants (Michael), and chaplains (Cillian, Gavin). Sarah also mentioned students themselves as supports and Michael talked similarly about parents. Critically, at this micro level, is the support a deputy receives from the principal.

"I feel that the strong relationship I have with my principal is the most important element in my feelings of success in the role" (P82).

Oliver in interview talked about feeling supported

"I never feel that I'm not supported by the principal or the assistant principals, and I know that they feel supported by me. So, when you have the relationships right in school, it's amazing" (Oliver, P. interview).

Outside school, ‘family support’ is also referenced as valuable. This resonates with the findings in a 2022 IPPN health and wellbeing survey of primary school leaders where 77% reported that their partner was a source of support (Rahimi and Arnold, 2022, p.8).

While mandates or structures can encourage these supports, deputy principals themselves need to work at nurturing these supporting relationships at school and family levels.

At the meso level, beyond the individual school, structures are vital. As Ruth stated in interview *“I’m part of the deputy principal support network group and I love that. We just chat and talk about our work”*. Prior to the Covid outbreak, Michael found Lionra, a support network of deputy principals enabled by the then PDST (now Oide) “excellent”. Such structures appear to be effective at both supporting deputies in their present role and building on their collective experiences to strengthen their capacity for further school leadership.

Opportunities for deputy principals to converse with others doing the same job can be offered by Oide, the support service for teachers and school leaders funded by the Department of Education. Trust bodies and over-seeing agencies such as the JMB, NAPD and IPPN also offer structured occasions when deputies can meet and talk. Trade Unions have also track records of supportive structures. Local Education Centres are hospitable venues where deputies (and others) can meet and talk. The evidence in this report, particularly in relation to job clarity, multiple tasks, relationships, stresses and tensions, should inform all these agencies in their future planning for supporting deputy principals.

Deputies are keenly aware of how some specific supports at the macro level could enhance their work. Some are critical of what they see as major system weaknesses. For example, primary school deputies are notably vocal about the limited administrative support that is currently available. The experience of additional administrative days during the Covid crisis was eye-opening for some and prompted new possibilities. As Síle puts it *“not having some level of administrative support for deputy principals - certainly in big schools - is counter-productive”*.

If the current century has been characterised by change in our schools, one of the most visible is the greater inclusion of children with additional educational needs. Given the evidence of

the deep engagement many deputies have with such children and families, when they point to the lack of administrative support for this development, they should be heard. Oliver's suggestion that specific additional supports for school leaders proportionate to the number of SNAs in a school seems eminently sensible. Aaron's critique cuts deeply. His wish is that schools be seen more "*as partners in the system*", where relationships between the powers at the centre of the system – in the Department of Education – and school is more "*dialogic*", where schools feel listened to. If, as Aaron sees it, the feeling that the support that is available to schools is experienced as too "*top-down*", being done "*to*" schools as opposed to "*with*" schools, this is a serious systemic weakness.

The data throughout this study also point to the practicality of the suggestion from the NAPD (2021) that schools should employ administrative officers. Briefly, the NAPD argument is that to live up to the ideals set out in LAOS (DE, 2016b, 2022d) is extremely difficult. In particular, the responsibility to manage a school's human, physical and financial resources is "inordinately time-consuming" and "takes senior leaders' focus and attention away from their core obligation to lead teaching and learning" (NAPD, 2021, p.3). Hence, the proposal for a new position where the person would have responsibility for budget preparation, plan for the strategic needs of student wellbeing and subjects, plan strategically to use the school's physical and financial resources and provide strong overall support for the senior management team is constructive, imaginative and very relevant. These administrative tasks are closely associated with the educational aims of the school. Those appointed will need to become part of the school community, take part in relevant discussions and exercise leadership in their sphere.

Tellingly, when NAPD recently conducted a survey of members, good support for this novel idea of an administrative officer was evident

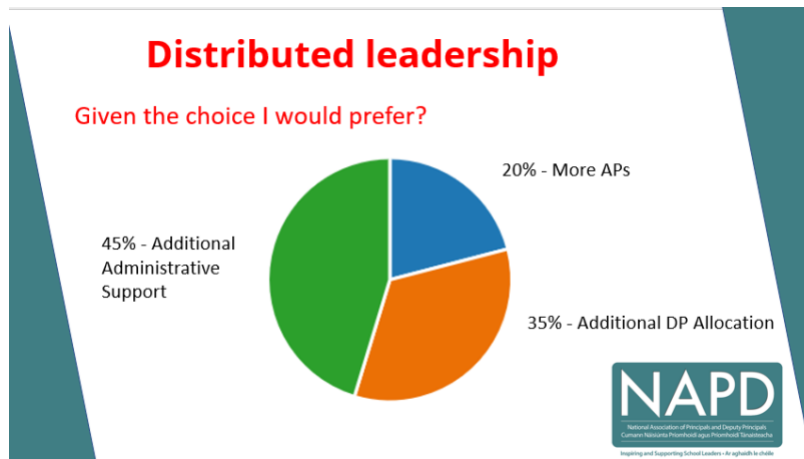


Figure 6.1: PowerPoint presentation, NAPD, 2024.

The IPPN has also suggested that the NAPD proposal for a School Administrative Officer could be adapted to meet “the different, but no less onerous administrative needs of primary schools” (IPPN, 2022a, p. 58). This call for more administrative and leadership supports is echoed by Carroll and colleagues (2024) where school leaders highlighted the considerable demands being placed on them across a multiplicity of roles including administrative, financial, human resources, industrial relations, and infrastructural needs.

Finally, 30 years ago, researchers put down a marker when they noted:

The absence of effective support structures to assist principals in their work, adequate levels of support staffing, and adequate finances were cited as the main impediments to principals to exercise a leadership role (Leader and Boldt, 1994, p.6).

An important policy question is: to what extent have these impediments been addressed and to what extent do provisions at the macro level facilitate deputy principals to implement their role effectively?

6.1.10 The identity of deputy principals

While there has been extensive research into teachers’ identities, much less has been written about the identity of deputy principals. Teachers, first of all, develop a personal identity. This is influenced by their own experiences of family, schooling, relationships as well as values and a growing sense of efficacy (Rodgers and Scott, 2008). Teachers’ professional identities build on these personal identities and are formed gradually through their work in classrooms, in schools and from messages, influences and the expectations articulated by the Department of

Education, in the media and from agencies such as teacher unions, trust bodies and others. Particularly powerful is the influence of their relationships with students, colleagues and parents. Day *et al.*, (2007, p.103) found that at the professional level what they call “the technical and emotional aspects” of teaching including classroom management, subject knowledge and students’ results are critically important to teacher identity formation. Curriculum developments also impact professional identity. Day *et al.*, (*ibid*, p. 103) suggest that “...professional life growth is not a linear one”; hard to predict life events, resilience, how tensions are managed, and a sense of efficacy all play their part. Furthermore, while initial teacher education can offer valuable foundations, on-going development is vital. As the Teaching Council states: “Central to *Cosán*, ... is a vision of teachers as professionals who are intrinsically motivated to take ownership of their professional development and steer the course of their own learning journeys” (Teaching Council, 2016b). Beauchamp and Thomas, (2009) contend that these two identities, personal and professional, continually influence each other.

Making the transition from teacher to deputy principal carries challenges. The focus is no longer mainly on an individual classroom or specific groups of students but on the whole school community. Administrative, management and leadership activities need to be learned quickly and put into action, sometimes in the glare of close attention. In addition to the deputy principal’s own sense of new responsibilities, others, notably the principal and colleagues will also have their expectations, frequently based on the culture of the school and the role adopted by the previous deputy principal.

One way of looking at the new challenges is through the lens of the five categories of action already identified in this report: logistical maintenance; monitoring and maintaining behavioural standards and pastoral support; building and nurturing good relationships with all stakeholders; teamwork; supporting curriculum innovation and development. The relative importance, time and energy a deputy attaches to these activities will shape their identity.

The relationship between one’s previous identity as a teacher, personal and professional, and the new overlaid identity of deputy is not always a comfortable one. The evidence in this study is that reverting to an emphasis of ‘being a teacher’ can be attractive, even comforting, perhaps highlighting the relative ‘aloneness’ associated with the deputy’s position.

In a previous work, on how schools respond to educational inequality (Jeffers and Lillis, 2021), we noted the importance of people telling stories to help them make sense of their realities.

The evidence from the current research is that storytelling – to colleagues and to those outside school – are important tools for deputies shaping their identities. Many mention their conversations with principals as well as participation in deputy support groups as critical factors in deepening their understanding of the role.

How a deputy principal negotiates and navigates their way into their new role, how they respond to the unexpected and how well they make the transition from their teacher identity, may be worth studying in greater depth. This may yield insights into the willingness and readiness of deputies to apply for principalship.

6.1.11 Leaders in waiting

Recent Irish policy documents put a strong emphasis on teacher leadership. Teacher leadership is promoted in the DE document LAOS 2022 and in the Cosán (Teaching Council) framework for teachers' professional learning (2016b). "All teachers play a leadership role within the school" (DE, 2022c) and ... "all teachers are leaders" (Teaching Council, 2016b). Circular 44/2019 places an onus on principals to:

"share and to distribute leadership and management responsibilities in a manner that encourages and supports partnership ...every teacher has a leadership role within the school community and in relation to pupil learning".

In practice this means that every teacher, strengthening the values of respect, care, integrity and trust (Teaching Council (2016a), does their best to engage their learners with the subject matter of their classes prioritising relationship building and a trusting, supportive classroom culture. Teacher leadership is in the service of student learning. Teachers are enthusiastic about upskilling in their areas, take the lead on new initiatives and take part in professionally nurturing conversations in vibrant communities of learning. Forster states that teacher leadership is a right and responsibility of all teaching professionals "All teachers must be educational leaders in order to optimise the teaching and learning experience for themselves and their students; and, as professionals, they are expected to do whatever it takes to make that happen" (Foster,1999, p.83).

Statements in policy documents are a step that needs to be followed by experience, upskilling as well as confidence and competence building. Our research did not explore the prior leadership experiences of deputies. However, in two cases, during interview, deputies acknowledged their lack of confidence and fear of the unknown in progressing to the role of

school principal *'I don't have the confidence to do it, to be honest, but I do feel I would love it. I just don't know if I'd be able for it'* (Ruth, Interview). *"I would never have had ambitions for any leadership role within a school"* (Oliver, Interview). In this case, Oliver was encouraged by the principal to lead a school initiative when he was a teacher. Finding that he had capacity to do this, and recognising the support he gained from colleagues, opened his mind to possibilities of being not 'just a teacher' (Helterbran, 2010, p.363), but becoming a teacher leader.

Typically, application for a position as a deputy principal position involves completing a detailed application form. Shortlisting is followed by interview, usually a single one. Frequently, application forms ask applicants to show leadership activities under the following headings. (This framework is also used for principal appointments).

- Leading learning and teaching
- Interpersonal relationships including developing leadership capacity
- Management and administration including managing the organisation
- Strategic management including leading school development
- Self-awareness and self-management skills.

Unless an applicant has experience in leading in these areas as a post holder or as a volunteer, it would be difficult to write and to speak with confidence about the challenges and successes of their work. Teachers, however, are dependent on the attitude and effectiveness of the school principal for access to these opportunities. If the school leader tries to embody the ethical values of respect, care, integrity, and trust (Teaching Council, 2016a) there is a likely chance that teachers will find encouragement and support for their efforts. Open conversations about school leadership could be one way of igniting enthusiasm. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2016, p.121) suggest that this discussion is a prerequisite to teachers thinking about their development as teacher leaders.

This leads again to our contention that conversations in school are a vital source of building a community where all teachers find joy and experience success. Glasser (2014, p.15) advises that "To get to the next level of greatness depends on the quality of the culture, which depends on the quality of the relationships, which depends on the quality of the conversations. Everything happens through conversations!"

A deputy at post-primary gave examples of how they began to share leadership

I started by encouraging individuals with interest and skill to take on areas to manage and I supported them with guidance and time, where possible. This year, I set up SSE teams, most of which are now led by teachers who've opted in. The number of teachers applying for AP position is increasing, compared to previous years, and I take professional satisfaction that teachers are developing themselves as leaders as a result of changing school culture that visibly values input from its stakeholders (28PP).

Individual teachers can practice leadership by modelling good practice in their classrooms and in the school generally. This might include attendance at professional development programmes⁸. There is anecdotal evidence that teachers learn by speaking to others who understand their situations and can offer recommendations for practice and emotional support. The importance of communicating their attendance to colleagues and conversations with them about the experience cannot be overstated. This waterfall approach could apply to any new learning.

Teachers may wish to practice leading a professional learning community in their schools through an action research methodology. This offers invaluable experience in data gathering, group reflection, and positive action for improvement as well as opportunities to lead. As stated earlier, the cultures within individual schools can vary greatly in this regard. It is necessary to comment here on the following response submitted in the questionnaire:

I would say the introduction of Croke Park hours was one of the single most negative effects on staff morale. Teachers at the time took the wage cuts better. It was as if there was no acknowledgement of the huge amount of extra work teachers do in an extra- curricular capacity and unfortunately Management teams were left to deal with this as staff felt "forced" to stay on for planning meetings etc (13PP).

Teacher volunteerism, within and outside the school, is a rich and proud tradition in Ireland. Being 'forced' to attend what are essential activities for learning and teaching can stifle the willingness and generosity of the profession. In retrospect, that policy decision (re. Croke Park hours) seems like a major 'own goal' by the Department of Education.

⁸ Appendix I offers some examples of professional development programmes for deputy principals

6.1.12 One change

From the perspectives of respondents to the questionnaires and in the interviews, some recurring themes and suggested changes emerge regarding their professional lives. Our synthesis and comments are tentative but may provide a possible platform for further investigation.

Administrative Time: Many deputies expressed the need for dedicated administrative time. Ruth and Síle both emphasised the value of having administrative days set aside for important tasks. Ruth suggested one day a month for administration, recalling that such days were provided during Covid-19 but are now more essential than ever. Primary schools in particular have, since then, enrolled a cohort of children with special educational needs, in some cases extending their school buildings, and they have offered places to children from displaced communities in areas of conflict around the world, some living in homeless accommodation in towns and cities. Therefore, there is widespread need for acceptance that deputies need dedicated time for administration. Ruth pleaded: *“One day a month for administration would change my world”*. Deputies like Síle recognised her responsibilities in SPHE, SEN and other curricular areas. She needs time for these and to support the growing number of special education teachers.

Balancing Double Roles: Deputies like Oliver and Aaron highlighted the difficulty of double-jobbing, where they must juggle teaching and administrative duties. Oliver, an administrative deputy in a primary school, emphasised that having separate roles for teaching and administration is crucial for effectiveness. Aaron added that there needs to be clearer role definitions, especially regarding SEN coordination. He advocated for more structure around the deputy principal role, *“How can we do either job to the best of our ability?”* A change here might address, *“those deputies who maybe sought the role and got the role because they felt it was the next step in their career as opposed to maybe wanting to lead. I think there's a body of work to be done there”*. He would like to see better preparation and training for deputies, focused on the specifics of the role prior to assuming the position. Currently formal training is provided by Oide subsequent to appointment to the role. Aaron commented, *“The Tánaiste and Misneach programmes are akin to servicing the aircraft mid-flight”*. He questioned the role of the deputy as SEN co-ordinator. His wish is that, *‘from a system level it would be to put some more structure on the role and I know that LAOS 2022 has started to do this, but there needs to be more of a development on that. Many deputies are SEN co-*

ordinators. So does that stay part of the deputy principle's role or do we make that a post in its own right?

The voices of deputies as they articulate the challenges they experience is in sharp contrast to the ideals of LAOS:

Leading learning and teaching relate to how the principal and other leaders plan for learning and teaching for all pupils in the school and review the effectiveness of how this is done.

Managing the organisation relates to the practical issues which are involved in running a school, such as establishing a safe and healthy learning environment.

Leading school development relates to the need to ensure that the school is continually developing and improving, through self-evaluation, through responding to change and through the building of relationships with the school community.

Finally, an important aspect of leadership and management is developing leadership capacity and ensuring that all members of the school can develop their leadership skills. School leaders do this by giving teachers responsibility for various aspects of school life and by promoting and facilitating the development of pupil participation, pupil leadership and parent participation (LAOS, 2022d, p.14).

Professional Wellbeing: Many deputies mentioned that the emphasis on wellbeing in schools should extend to the wellbeing of staff, including those in leadership roles. Síle pointed out that while schools focus on children's resilience and mindfulness, there is insufficient emphasis on teachers' wellbeing. Deputies often work long hours, and there can be a general feeling of guilt if they aren't constantly working. Ruth explained, *"As it is you're doing work from 8 to 11 at night. I'm working every single night trying to do policies because there is no time at all allocated to this"*. Sarah is concerned with the amount of time she allocates to her deputy principalship role at post-primary level: *"It's that leakage into your home life and it is your time management. There is a lot of talk around the amount of hours we do. But I find myself feeling guilty if I don't do X amount of hours because the job is supposed to be so hard. Good principals, good deputy principals are doing them"*. She would wish for better time management on her own part but acknowledges the pressure in the system due to the amount of administration all deputies are required to do.

Support Networks and Professional Development: Deputies like Cillian expressed a need for more practical support, especially with IT and financial management tasks. Additionally, he suggested the creation of a support network for deputies, similar to the supervision provided

for guidance counsellors, where they can meet regularly, debrief, and share experiences and strategies.

Work-Life Balance and Role Clarity: Many deputies, like Abby and Síle reflected on generational shifts and the evolving expectations of teachers and deputies. Abby lamented the fading spirit of volunteerism. She reminisced about having, *“trained football teams, netball teams, Irish dancers... I’ve done fashion shows, talent shows, cooking competitions the lot ... volunteerism is dead for me now”*. Síle had also noted a generational shift: *“I look back and I know there were many, many times where school came first (ahead of family). And that was the way a lot of people were of my era. I’m not so sure if the younger teachers would have that view. I think they’re probably right”*. Sarah and others expressed concerns about the encroachment of work into home life. Aaron, meanwhile, called for more clarity around the role and purpose of deputies, noting that some might view the position as just a career step rather than a genuine leadership opportunity.

School Culture: Gavin admitted that his welcome change *“might sound bad; I’d go to less meetings”* This remark could be interpreted in several ways and gives rise to questions about;

- The purpose of meetings
- Evaluation of meetings
- The advisability of mandated Croke Park hours
- The facilitation skills necessary for principals and others in order to lead productive meetings
- Our knowledge and familiarity as educators with the principles of working with adults.

In summary, the interviewees appreciate the complexity and demands of the role. As evident here, there is not one, simple ‘magic’ action that might transform the position. As has been emphasised throughout, local school contexts vary greatly. However, if deputies could change one thing, many would focus on reducing their workload by creating:

- more structured time for leadership and administrative responsibilities,
- clarification of their roles, *“Sometimes the Deputy Principal is simply not noticed. The role is often to make others look good, or to make something complex look easy”*. (9PP)
- provision of better training and support,
- promoting a healthier work-life balance.

6.2 Seminar with educationalists

Twenty-six people joined the researchers at a seminar on the research on 19th September 2024. Invitations had been sent to a selection of educationalists who had expressed interest in the work or whom the researchers had worked with previously or who represented organisations which had encouraged the study. Many participants had practical experience of school leadership (See Appendix J for a list of participants).

A digest of points from the research had been circulated in advance to assist participants to focus on particular issues⁹. The lively, fruitful discussions at the seminar indicated that not only is the research welcome but there is an appetite across a range of organisations for further research into the position of deputy principalship. While difficult to capture the fullness of the exchanges in the room, some key points from the seminar are presented here. Of significance is that while viewpoints reinforced much of what the research participants had stated, those taking part in the seminar also raised topics and issues not evident in the data, underscoring the limitations of the scoping study and the complexity of deputy principalship. To enable conversations, three discussion questions were suggested:

Discussion 1: Having read our materials, and in the light of your experience, can you discuss your understanding of the role of the deputy principal?

Discussion 2: What are the policy and practice implications of this scoping inquiry?

Discussion 3: What is the one big change needed so that the deputy principal is acknowledged as a more valued asset in our schools?

- While discussion in the literature about the job descriptions and role identities of deputy principals often highlight lack of clarity, vagueness and a certain looseness, this can also be seen as giving the position a flexibility and nimbleness so that, principal and deputy(s), working collaboratively can address the leadership needs arising from an individual school's specific context. The deputy can complement and strengthen talents

⁹ In addition to some points arising from the research the participants received draft versions of chapter 4 and 5 so they could 'hear' the participant's voices.

and competencies in the leadership team. The suggestions from the seminar not to 'over-define' the deputy principal role seem wise.

- While welcoming an increased emphasis and clarity on co-leadership roles based on a shared vision, there is lot more needed to support this move in schools. One participant noted “*Deputies should be afforded the support required to meet the needs of the school and be respected as senior leaders in the same vein as the principal leader*”.
- There is a need for a deeper understanding of power, how it is shared, and how to support decision-making becoming more collaborative. A question was posed as to how efficient it is to have every task in a school overseen by the principal. The deputy principal has a pivotal role working with middle leaders, including mentoring. Their role is about more than practicalities, it is about nurturing leadership within the senior management team.
- Supports for deputy principalship are often directed at teachers prior to appointment (for example, leadership courses) or in the early years after appointment. The needs of those more than five years in post are also worth considering for specific supports. Some Trust bodies are piloting such initiatives, however, there is need for more centralised focused support for all in leadership positions. This professional development needs to be complemented by more opportunities that facilitate dialogue across school types and between those working under different Trust bodies in order to share practices, avoid ‘groupthink’, and have historical assumptions challenged. Senior school leaders who have received a minimum of four individual coaching sessions through the current Oide Leadership Coaching Programme can avail of team coaching in their school. Four two-hour team coaching sessions can be availed of per school with a maximum of six participants from the school leadership team. Could this provision be expanded to include a wider leadership team?
- There was a discussion on the need for additional administrative support. There are tasks such as the administration of the free book scheme, the October returns, solar panels, buildings, getting three quotations for certain purchases and so on, that do not need to be completed by the principal or deputy principal, but do need a dedicated person with time to carry them out. Opinions suggest that while having great merit, this proposal needs to be developed to ensure that such appointees have both administrative competence and an ability to work well as part of the educational leadership team.

- In recognising the very different contexts in which deputy principals enact their roles, in particular, across primary and post-primary schools, small schools deserve special attention. At Primary level more than 90% of deputy principals have teaching responsibilities while more than 50% of Principals are teaching 80% of the time. See the section in the introduction on small schools.
- Additional allowances paid to those with posts of responsibilities received some attention. The focus was more on those working in small schools and as assistant principals rather than on the remuneration of principals and deputy principals. One commented that “people don’t apply for AP1 posts as they can make as much on a few grinds”. AP1 allowance is standard regardless of school size whereas the deputy principal is on a sliding scale depending on school size. There was some consensus that principals in small primary schools are insufficiently remunerated. Regular reviews of post of responsibility allowances seem an obvious dimension of the monitoring of the work of school leadership (See Appendix G for the financial allowances).
- As mentioned earlier there is a 29% movement from the position of deputy principal to principal at primary level compared to 73% at post-primary (IPPN, 2022, p. 35). This deserves urgent attention and further research. When the vast majority of primary school deputy principals indicate to IPPN that they would not apply for principalship, it is clearly an alarm signal for all stakeholders.
- Strong agreement with the scoping study’s emphasis on the centrality of relationship nurturing and building by deputy principals was tempered with a need for greater acknowledgement of how demanding this can be, emotionally, educationally and physically. More structured support for deputy principals in sustaining relationship building appears to be a definite professional development need.

The researchers were very grateful to all who gave their time to attend the seminar and for the fruitful conversations that happened during it and over lunch. It was clear that for many, these spaces for thinking and talking are valuable and should be more commonplace in the educational year.

6.3 Limitations of the research

As a scoping study an intention was to map an overview of the situation of deputy principals in Irish primary and post-primary school. Practising deputies were invited, initially, to respond to an online questionnaire. We cannot know how representative the 120 respondents were. Similarly, the ten who volunteered and were chosen for interviews are a relatively small fraction of the total number of deputies. Hence, this report is best read as a tentative document.

6.4 Further research possibilities

A larger study, similar in structure to this but with bigger numbers of deputy principals taking part, would be a logical development of this work. Smaller, more focused exploration on aspects of the position of deputy principals could also illuminate matters. For example, research is needed on how senior leadership teams work together within their own contexts.

As evident in the discussion points in this chapter, various research questions could be framed.

6.5 Conclusion

This small scoping study explores data from 120 deputy-principals (41 Primary, 79 Post-primary) and 10 subsequent one-hour interviews (5 Primary, 5 Post-primary). This report presents, predominantly **in their own words**, participants' views on how the position of deputy principal is perceived and enacted in Irish primary and post-primary schools.

While a deputy principal “occupies a position of vital importance within the senior leadership team in a school” (DES, 2018), the experience of working at primary (P) or post-primary (PP) levels, are quite **different**: more than 90% of primary deputies have full-time teaching duties whereas their post-primary counterparts generally don't. However, there are also **commonalities**: both groups identify long lists of tasks, often unanticipated but important in maintaining the smooth functioning of the school, as features of deputy principalship. It is also noteworthy that both groups report deriving satisfaction from similar aspects of the job: seeing children and young people develop and **flourish**; being part of a **team**; **making a difference**.

The practicalities of maintaining a smooth working day in school - what some refer to as '**logistics**' - is generally regarded as central to the deputy's position (e.g. including timetabling, arranging substitution for absent staff, other scheduling and planning, student and staff safety, nurturing a caring and trusting environment, monitoring and responding to student behaviour/discipline, etc.). As schools have become **more inclusive**, some deputies in primary

schools also take on the role of Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) which further increases responsibilities.

Extensive tasks and demands can exhilarate – the feeling of being close to the heart of things – but also frustrate, and many report feeling that there is never enough **time** to respond adequately to all the administrative, management and leadership responsibilities and expectations associated with the role.

Our data about the multiplicity and range of tasks resonate with research findings across the world. Furthermore, in this study and internationally, a **vagueness** or lack of precision or definition of the role is also strongly associated with deputy principalship (Tahir *et al.*, 2023). However, the vagueness and general lack of clarity about the deputy principal's role may not be such a bad thing. Loose role definitions can give schools **flexibility** so that a deputy principal's position can be shaped to both address the specific context of an individual school and to complement the skills and competencies of the incumbent principal and, increasingly in larger schools, fellow deputies.

From the data, most deputies indicate a nuanced awareness of how each school's **context** can shape their priorities and challenges. Responsiveness to the unexpected is a critical feature of the role and very dependent on 'local knowledge'. Becoming familiar with ongoing changes arising from directives in circular letters and mediating them within the school community presents further challenges. Some respondents reflect the growing international awareness that a central task for school leaders is to 'read' and shape the cultures within schools (Barth, 1990) with culture here referring to the complex interaction of a school's history, context and the people in it (Stoll, 1998).

Deputy principals are at a critical **intersection** within the school's formal and informal communications traffic. The role of deputy involves intense **collaboration** with staff, the leadership and management team, parents/guardians, students, other agencies such as Tusla and NEPS. Developing and maintaining professional **relationships**, while juggling a multitude of tasks can be challenging. A good working relationship with the principal, characterised by frank professional conversations with both parties working towards a shared vision for the school, is vital. Without that, it is unlikely that a school will flourish.

The term 'distributed leadership' features prominently in the international literature on school leadership as well as in recent Irish **policy** documents. The **near invisibility** of the deputy principal in the distributed leadership discourse is striking. While the *Looking at Our School*

documents (DES 2016a, 2016b; DE 2022b, 2022c) signify a noticeable difference in awareness of the existence of deputies, it is not easy to see much advancement in role clarification. While the evidence points to the deputy principal being a key asset in a school, it also suggests that this is sometimes under-appreciated and even hidden.

Many respondents and interviewees recognise the value of **teamwork** - “we can put our heads together to create the best outcome” - but also how this is not always easy to sustain. Effective teamwork can be nurtured by clear, open communication and conversations. Embedding such practices seems to necessitate dedicated time.

Managing multiple tasks and maintaining positive relationships almost inevitably leads to tensions, **stresses**, even contradictions, for deputy principals. One informant, talking about special educational needs provision, stated that “We are left to mediate the failures of the system to parents/guardians” while another remarked that if asked to sum up their job in two words it would be “unfinished conversations”.

Tensions can also arise in the communications arena. An ability to engage in professional educational conversations, including ‘**difficult**’, ‘challenging’ and ‘conflictual’ ones, is crucial. This facility extends across the diverse members of the school community including teachers, SNAs, administrative staff, students, parents/guardians and community interests.

Clear articulation of substantial challenges and frustrations associated with the work of a deputy principal does not necessarily contradict the undoubted satisfactions experienced by many. As Nias (1989) noted, teachers are capable of being very satisfied and very dissatisfied with their working lives at the same time.

At a **time of significant change** in Irish society and in schooling, including moving from a traditional, hierarchical, authoritarian model to a more inclusive, participative and collaborative one, deputy principals need to be aware of these trends and clear about their own values. They should also be supported and guided towards these new interpretations of their role.

Support for deputy principals in their role comes from many sources. In school, good relationships with the principal, middle management, teachers, guidance counsellors, chaplains, SNAs, other staff, students, parents/guardians and the wider community all help. At the personal level, all indicated appreciation of support from family and friends. In the wider context, support from bodies such as IPPN, NAPD, Oide, Education Centres, Teacher Unions and informal networks were mentioned. Regarding opportunities for ongoing **professional**

development, some are critical while others express appreciation of the professional networks provided by various partners. That some deputy principals need more formal professional development in leadership, as some aspire to become principals but lack structured preparation for the transition, is a notable theme in the literature (Kwan, 2009; Grant, 2014). The data here also point to many practitioners having strong commitments to the particular school and community in which they work. This, it appears, can act as a deterrent to applying for positions of principal in other schools.

At primary level, deputies recall the benefits that arose when, during the Covid-19 pandemic, they were given, depending on school size, between five and 16 days when they were released from teaching duties. Increase in such **administrative support** could not only lessen stress but also lead to increased effectiveness in the leadership exercised by deputy principals.

Thinking about the deputy's position has evolved slowly over the past thirty years as seen in the international and limited Irish literature. While still poorly understood, under-appreciated and under-researched, the role is no longer seen as exclusively administrative. While, in practice, the position of deputy principal involves a combination of administrative, management and leadership activities, sometimes the boundaries between these distinctions are unclear and might be best viewed as an overlapping and interacting **continuum** rather than three distinct types of activity.

Many job descriptions state that a crucial task of the deputy principal is to cooperate with the principal in the fulfilment of their role and deputise in their absence (DES,2018). Participants in this research point to significant satisfactions in the job. However, a combination of systemic structures, school specific difficulties and personal limitations can restrict, frustrate and challenge.

As this is a modest study, we are wary of generalisations, particularly because individual school contexts can vary so much. Overall, the data resonate with the international literature which proposes an urgent need to re-evaluate the roles of deputy principals if these critically important school leaders are to be more closely aligned with visions of inclusive, collaborative and improving school communities.



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Appendices

Appendix A – Poster inviting people to take part in the research (January 2023)

Deputy Principals, a hidden asset in schools?



RESEARCH PROJECT
Gerry Jeffers and Carmel Lillis

Context Recent discourse on school leadership has emphasised the value of 'distributed leadership'. Deputy principals are key players in re-imagined understandings of school administration, management and leadership. However, the literature on the position consistently contends that deputy principalship is 'under-researched'. Primarily - though not exclusively - through the eyes of deputy principals, our research seeks to construct an understanding of how the position is enacted in Irish primary and post-primary schools and how its potential might be more fully realised in post Covid-19 school environments.



If you are, or have ever been, a Deputy Principal in a primary or post-primary school we would welcome your participation in this research. E-mail us at dpresearch@mu.ie to take part.

Carmel and Gerry **January 2023**

Appendix B – Online Survey

We are conducting research into the position of deputy principals in Irish schools, primary and post-primary.

We invite you to participate in this research by responding to the following question:

Based on your experience as a deputy principal (and, if relevant, your experience in former and/or subsequent positions) what, for you, are (were) the main features, strengths, satisfactions and challenges in the roles?

- Bullet points are acceptable.
- In anything we write your name or the school where you work will not be mentioned.
- A more detailed account of our research proposal is available on request.
- Please e-mail your response to dpresearch@mu.ie

Thank You from Carmel Lillis and Gerry Jeffers

<p>Features (tasks, duties, responsibilities, e.g. timetable, behaviour policy, professional development schedule, data management, attendance at evening meetings, preparing reports for DES and management body etc.)</p>	
<p>Strengths (e.g. leadership, autonomy, collaboration, learning, innovation, self-development, endurance, celebration, resourcefulness)</p>	
<p>Satisfactions (e.g. student development, professional relationships, creativity, learning, achievement, personal empowerment, growth in self-esteem, values-based role)</p>	
<p>Challenges</p>	

(e.g. change, assessment, complexity, communication, time, energy, relationships, diversity, inclusion, self-evaluation, professional development)	
Sector (Primary or Post-Primary?)	
Duration of time in DP role	

Additional information about the school context in which you work (optional)

(You may wish to include reference to student population, locality, Trust Body, age of the school, DEIS/non-DEIS, fee-charging/non-fee-charging, urban/rural, other distinctive features).

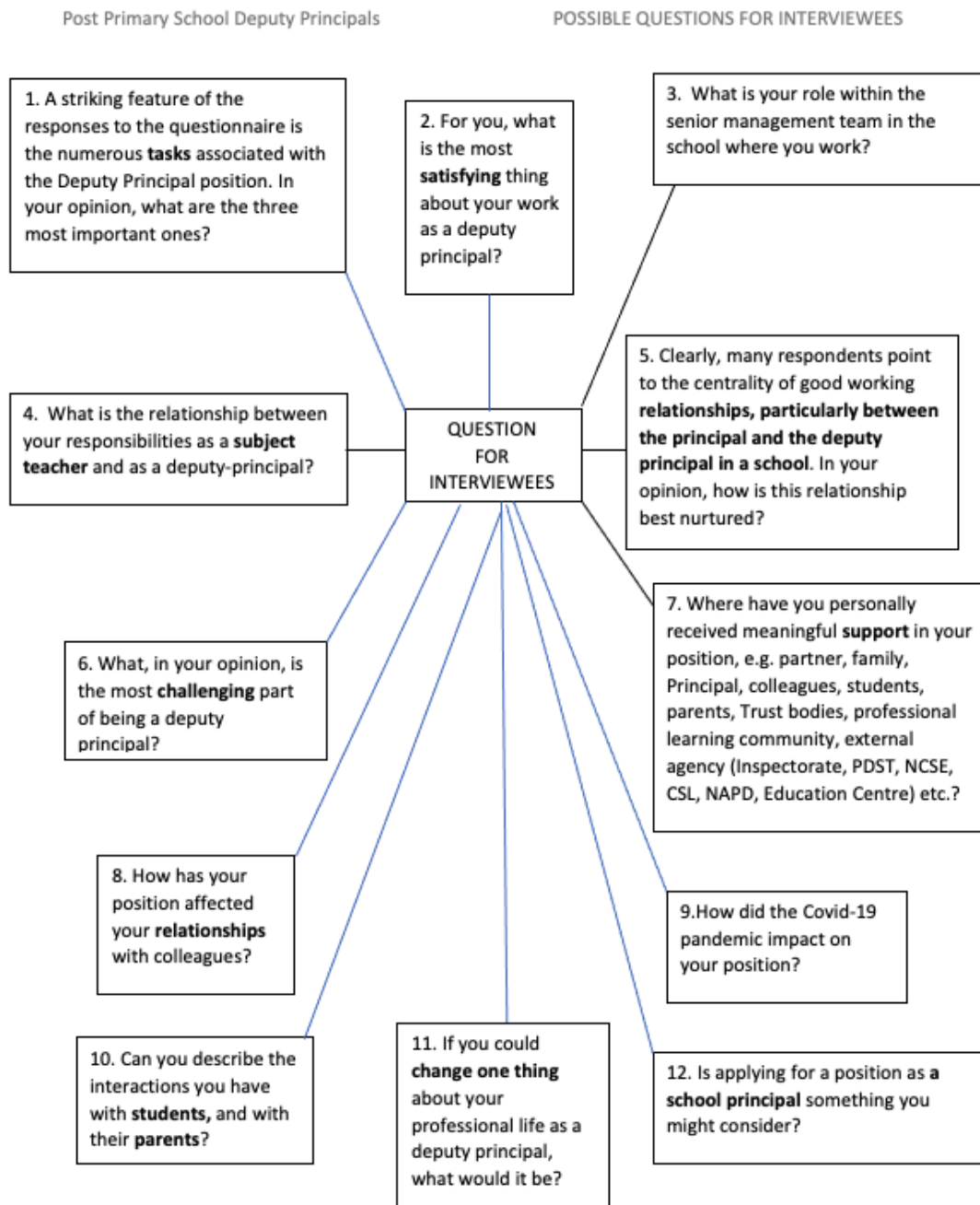
Would you be willing to be interviewed as part of the research? (Y/N)

This project has been approved by the Maynooth University Research Ethics Committee, ID : 2483900.

Appendix C – Interview protocol for Primary School deputy principals



Appendix D – Interview protocol for Post-Primary deputy principals



Appendix E – Selected Circular letters impacting on deputy principal role

<p>Circular 04/98</p>	<p>To the Authorities of Secondary Schools Revised in-school management structures in secondary schools. Further to Circular 3/98, the Minister for Education and Science hereby authorises the implementation of the revised in-school management structures and procedures in relation to posts of Principal and Deputy Principal in secondary schools in accordance with the detailed terms set out in this circular as negotiated between the ASTI, the JMB and the Department of Education and Science. It will be noted that in schools of 17 or more teachers, the appointment of Deputy Principals will be on the basis of open competition. This figure relates to the number as determined by reference to the calculation of wholetime teacher equivalents referred to in Circular 6/98. You are requested to ensure that copies of this circular are provided to the appropriate representatives of parents and teachers for transmission to individual parents and teachers.</p>
<p>Circular PPT06/02</p>	<p>To the Chief Executive Officer of each Vocational Education Committee. Revised Arrangements for Eligibility for Promotion Posts in Vocational Schools and Community Colleges to Include Certain Non-Permanent Teaching Service.</p>
<p>Circular PPT07/02</p>	<p>To The Board of Management of each Community and Comprehensive School. Revised arrangements for eligibility for promotion posts in community and comprehensive schools to include certain non-permanent teaching service.</p>
<p>Circular 0008/2011</p>	<p>To the Management Authorities, Principal Teachers and Teachers of Primary Schools</p> <p>Following discussions involving the Department, the INTO and School Management in relation to particular aspects of the Croke Park agreement, the attached document is now forwarded to schools for implementation. As is set out in the document, a central purpose of the additional time requirement is to provide for a range of essential</p>

	activities to take place without reducing class contact/tuition time. In keeping with this, schools are asked to ensure that they utilise this time so as to significantly eliminate the requirement for early closure or closure for half days or a day.
Circular 20/2012	States the post of Principal and Deputy Principal should be advertised on www.publicjobs.ie. All other teaching posts should be advertised on www.educationposts.ie. Any changes to the list of websites are a matter for the management bodies.
Circular 0049/2013	Public Service Stability Agreement 2013 – 2016 (Haddington Road Agreement) and the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2013 – Teachers.
Circular 0006/2014	The Managerial Authorities of Recognised Secondary, Community and Comprehensive Schools and the Chief Executives of Education and Training Boards Public Service Stability Agreement 2013 – 2016 (Haddington Road Agreement) Supervision and Substitution Scheme. As this Circular consolidates the changes to the Supervision and Substitution Scheme arising from the Haddington Road Agreement, the terms of Circular 49/2013 are hereby superseded. However, where any of the measures set out below were applied to a teacher under the terms of Circular 49/2013, these measures should not be applied to the teacher for a second time by virtue of this Circular.
Circular 0042/2014	Public Service Stability Agreement 2013 – 2016 (Haddington Road Agreement) - Teachers: Rostering of Supervision and Substitution.
Circular 0052/2014	Public Service Stability Agreement 2013 – 2016 (Haddington Road Agreement) Teachers Review of Usage of Croke Park Hours – Amendment to Circular 0008/2011.
Circular Letter 0025/2016	The Managerial Authorities of Recognised Secondary, Community, and Comprehensive Schools and the Chief Executives of Education and Training Boards Promotion and Appeal Procedures for

	<p>appointment to Assistant Principal, Special Duties Teacher and Programme Co-ordinator</p> <p>This Circular comprises two parts: Part A: Promotion procedure for appointment to Assistant Principal, Special Duties Teacher and Programme Co-ordinator Part B: Appeal procedure in respect of competitions for appointment to Assistant Principal, Special Duties Teacher and Programme Co-ordinator The revised promotion and appeals procedures contained in this Circular apply to all competitions advertised from 4 April 2016. This Circular supersedes Appendix 1 of Circular 42/2010 in respect of appointments to Assistant Principal and Special Duties Teacher. In respect of appointments to Programme Coordinator, this Circular supersedes sections 2.2 and 3 of Circular PPT17/02, sections 3 and 4 of Circular PPT18/02 and sections 3, 4 and 5 of Circular PPT19/02. This Circular also supersedes the existing appeal arrangements issued in March 2015.</p>
<p>Circular 0042/2016</p>	<p>To: The Managerial Authorities of Recognised Primary Schools Public Service Stability Agreement 2013 – 2018 (Lansdowne Road Agreement) Teachers Review of Usage of Croke Park Hours – Amendment to Circular 0008/2011.</p>
<p>Circular 0063/2017</p>	<p>LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS (influenced by LAOS 2016)</p> <p>High quality leadership is crucial in establishing a central purpose and vision for a school and the achievement of high quality educational outcomes for pupils. The primary purpose of school leadership and management is to create and sustain an environment that underpins high quality pupil care, learning and teaching. This circular sets out a leadership and management framework for posts in recognised primary schools. This circular supersedes all previous circulars, memoranda, rules and regulations in relation to posts of responsibility including Circulars 0039/2014 and 07/03 and is to be implemented by each employer with immediate effect.</p>

<p>Circular 0003/2018</p>	<p>LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS</p> <p>For post-primary schools, this circular reinstated posts of responsibility and detailed the leadership and management structures, focusing on both the Principal and Deputy Principal roles. It provided guidance on responsibilities, recruitment, and post-appointment duties.</p> <p>This circular, in the context of commencement of the restoration of posts, sets out a leadership and management framework for posts in recognised post-primary schools.</p> <p>Due to the COVID19 crisis, circular 0003/2018 is amended as outlined in Information Note TTC 0022/2021 on Interviews for Leadership and Management Positions in Recognised Post Primary schools for the school year 2021/2022. Preceded by: <u>0025/2016 0042/2010</u></p>
<p>Circular 0070/2018</p>	<p>Leadership and Management in Primary Schools</p> <p>This circular sets out a leadership and management framework for posts in recognized primary schools. This circular supersedes all previous circulars, memoranda, rules and regulations in relation to posts of responsibility including Circulars 0063/2017, 0039/2014 and 07/03 and is to be implemented by each employer with immediate effect.</p> <p>Preceded by: <u>0063/2017</u></p> <p>Followed by: <u>0044/2019</u></p>
<p>Circular 0044/2019</p>	<p>This circular outlines the framework for leadership and management in primary schools, covering the recruitment and appointment procedures for Principals, Deputy Principals, and Assistant Principals. It emphasizes the promotion of leadership within the school and sets clear guidelines for Deputy Principals at the primary level</p>
<p>Circular 0002/2023</p>	<p>The Managerial Authorities and Principal Teachers of Recognised Voluntary Secondary Schools: Staffing Arrangements in Voluntary Secondary Schools for the 2023/24 school year</p>

<p>Circular 0032/2023</p>	<p>Recently, changes were made to the Supervision and Substitution Scheme for Principals and Deputy Principals, starting from September 2022. This circular particularly affects Deputy Principals at both the primary and post-primary levels by outlining their options to opt into the scheme.</p>
<p>Circular 0011/2024</p>	<p>Staffing arrangements in Primary Schools for the 2024/25 school year. Enrolments required for Administrative Principal status and Administrative Deputy Principal status in Ordinary Schools, Gaelscoileanna and Gaeltacht National Schools for the 2024/25 school year</p>
<p>Circular 0028/2024</p>	<p>Appointment of Administrative Deputy Principals and Staffing Arrangements in Special Schools to take effect from the 2024/2025 school year</p>

Appendix F – Thresholds for administrative posts

Primary Schools

Enrolments required for Administrative Principal status and Administrative Deputy Principal status in Ordinary Schools, Gaelscoileanna and Gaeltacht National Schools for the 2023/24 school year

The enrolment thresholds for Administrative Principal status are listed in the table below:

School Type	Minimum Enrolment on 30th September 2022
Ordinary, Gaelscoileanna, Gaeltacht	169 pupils
Ordinary, Gaelscoileanna, Gaeltacht Schools operating two or more special classes*	No specified enrolment

* In schools with less than 169 pupils that are operating two or more special classes, an additional classroom post to facilitate Administrative Principal status is approved. This post will be subsumed into the school’s staffing if the school reaches the required enrolment for the appointment of an Administrative Principal in the future.

The enrolment thresholds for Administrative Deputy Principal status are listed in the table below:

School Type	Minimum Enrolment on 30th September 2022
Ordinary, Gaelscoileanna, Gaeltacht	573 pupils

OR

Mainstream schools operating five or more special classes for children with low incidence special needs**	No specified enrolment
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** In schools with less than 573 pupils and operating five or more special classes for children with low incidence special needs, an additional classroom post to facilitate Administrative Deputy Principal status is approved. This post will be subsumed into the school’s staffing if

the school reaches the required enrolment for the appointment of an Administrative Deputy Principal in the future.

Enrolments required for Administrative Principal status and Administrative Deputy Principal status in DEIS Urban Band 1 and 2 Primary Schools for the 2023/24 school year

The enrolment thresholds for Administrative Principal status are listed in the table below:

School Type	Minimum Enrolment on 30th September 2022
DEIS Band 1	113 pupils
DEIS Band 2*	136 pupils
DEIS School operating two or more special classes**	No specified enrolment

*An additional post to facilitate Administrative Principal status is approved in a DEIS Band 2 school with an enrolment of between 136 and 168. This post will be subsumed into the school's staffing if the school reaches the required enrolment for the appointment of an Administrative Principal in the future.

** An additional post to facilitate Administrative Principal status is approved. This post will be subsumed into the school's staffing if the school reaches the required enrolment for the appointment of an Administrative Principal in the future.

• The enrolment thresholds for Administrative Deputy Principal status are listed in the table below:

School Type	Minimum Enrolment on 30th September 2022
DEIS Band 1	500 pupils
DEIS Band 2*	573 pupils
DEIS School operating two or more special classes**	No specified enrolment

OR

DEIS Band 1 and 2 schools operating five or more special classes for children with low incidence special needs**	No specified enrolment
--	------------------------

** In a DEIS 1/DEIS 2 school with less than 500/573 pupils that is operating five or more special classes for children with low incidence special needs, an additional classroom post to facilitate Administrative Deputy Principal status is approved. This post will be subsumed into the school's staffing if the school reaches the required enrolment for the appointment of an Administrative Deputy Principal in the future.

Based on Circular Letter 0006/2023 - Staffing Arrangements in Primary Schools for the 2023/24 school year

Post-Primary Schools

Each recognised school is allocated one post in respect of a Principal. Deputy Principal posts are allocated to each recognised school as follows:

Pupil Enrolment (including PLC ¹¹)	Deputy Principal Allocation (WTE ^{10s})	
	Non DEIS ¹²	DEIS
1-150	0.25	0.25
151-300	0.5	0.5
301-400	0.75	0.75
401-599	1	1
600-699	1	2
700-899	2	2
900+	3	3

Based on Circular Letter 0002/2023 - Staffing Arrangements in Voluntary Secondary Schools for the 2023/24 school year; Circular Letter 0003/2023 - Staffing arrangements in Community and Comprehensive Schools for the 2023/24 school year; Circular Letter 0004/2023 - Staffing arrangements in Education and Training Boards for the 2023/24 school year.

¹⁰ Whole Time Equivalents

¹¹ Post Leaving Certificate courses

¹² Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools scheme.

Appendix G – Allowances for Deputy Principals (September 2024)

Primary

Additional allowance to a teacher's salary for Principals (1st level) range from €13,806 to €44,086 depending on enrolments.

Additional allowance to a teacher's salary for Deputy Principals (1st level) range from €6,932 to €28,518 depending on enrolments.

Post-Primary

Additional allowance to a teacher's salary for Principals (Post-Primary) range from € 10,503 to €47,910 depending on enrolments.

Additional allowance to a teacher's salary for Deputy Principals (Post-Primary) range from €7,356 to €30,704, depending on enrolments.

Based on Circular Letter 0007/2023 Revision of Teacher Salaries under Building Momentum - A New Public Service Agreement 2021-2023 ("The Agreement") Application of pay adjustments due on 1 March 2023.

Appendix H - Professional Development Courses for Deputy Principals

Universities offer accredited academic programmes in leadership and management. There is a range of supports, programmes and services in place from professional bodies, Management and Trust bodies, and trade unions that all serve in some way to meet the professional development needs of school principals, deputy principals and others with leadership responsibilities or aspirations. Education Support Centres host many of these courses (www.ateci.ie).

When appointed, deputies are encouraged to avail of the **Tánaiste** programme (Appendix I).

- **Forbairt** is a professional development programme for school Leadership Teams at post primary level, comprising of
 - an experienced School Principal
 - Deputy Principal
 - Two Teacher Leaders (open to all teaching staff)

Forbairt is designed to strengthen the collaborative approach to school improvement at a senior management level as well as developing leadership capacity at a Teacher Leader level in line with the distributed leadership approach to school development.

Deputies are also encouraged to join a *Líonra* network to contribute to and learn from colleagues.

Líonraí are affiliation networks for Deputy Principals which promote personal as well as group development. Sessions explore current leadership issues, facilitate professional learning and share good practice.

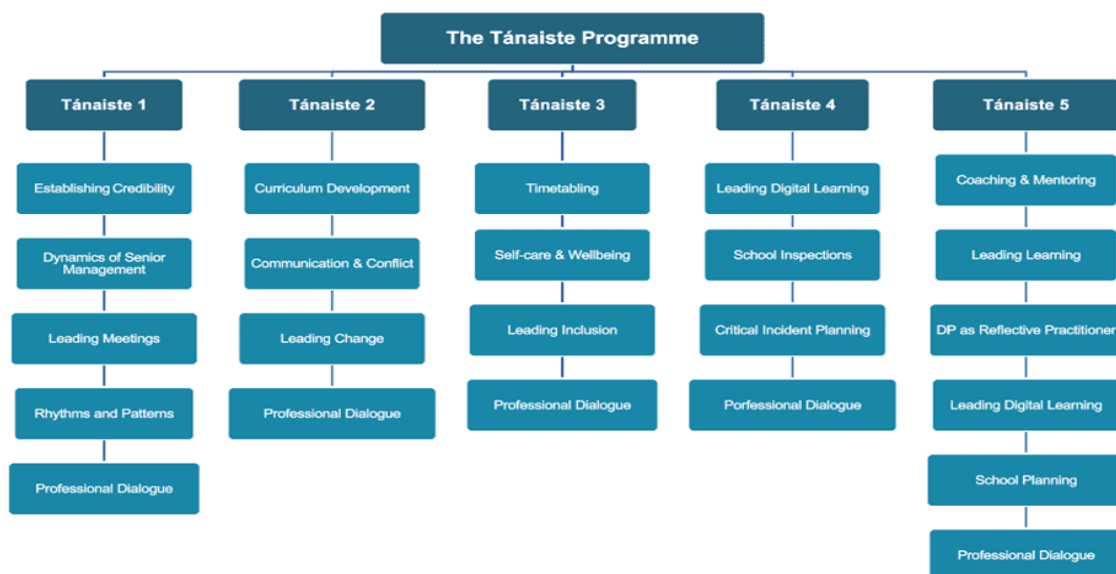
Appendix I– Tánaiste Programme

Tánaiste Primary and Post Primary (www.oide.ie)

Tánaiste is Oide’s leadership training programme for newly appointed Deputy Principals and Acting Deputy Principals. The aim of Tánaiste is to support the Deputy Principal over the course of their first year as senior school leaders. The programme commences in August and concludes in the September of the following year.

Over the course of the programme, participants attend five different events where they explore a broad range of topics related to their role and closely linked to the domains and standards of *Looking at our School 2022*. Oide’s Tánaiste Programme team is dedicated to growing participants’ knowledge and confidence as well as key leadership skills and depositions which will help sustain them in their new roles.

While Tánaiste is an established programme, its design allows for flexibility to respond to priority developments in national policy and cultural change. Modules are practical, informative and evidence based. Participating in Oide’s Tánaiste programme also provides opportunities for networking and collaboration with other Deputy Principals and Acting Deputy Principals.



Tánaiste Testimonials

“The Tanaiste programme is a great opportunity to get to know other new appointees. It builds connections and forges friendships with others. It is very important in countering any feeling of isolation that may come with a new appointment and it brings great comfort to know that you are not alone - that others are experiencing similar challenges and opportunities at the same time as yourself.”

“I was very impressed overall. I thought the presentations were excellent. Meeting other deputy principals informally for a chat at mealtimes was most helpful and I thank most sincerely the Tánaiste team for giving us this opportunity. It has given me great confidence in my job. The support is excellent.”

“Fantastic opportunity to meet fellow Deputy Principals and discuss strategies for improvement.”

“It was an excellent programme from start to finish. I am delighted to have had the opportunity to participate. I looked forward to the sessions and getting a chance to learn about the role and share issues in a constructive way with others on the same journey. The sharing in the group by email was a powerful back up too. Thank you all for all the effort and organisation that went into planning a great course.”

“The Tánaiste Programme has been invaluable to me. The mailing list, training days, excellence of the facilitators and opportunity to meet colleagues made the year enjoyable, enlightening and very worthwhile. A must for any new DP to attend.”



Appendix J – Participants in seminar September 2024

Gerry Berry	ERST
Caroline Clarke	Trinity College Dublin
Mary Daly	Dominican College, Taylor's Hill, Galway
Audrey Doyle	Dublin City University
Orla Finnegan	Carrick on Shannon Education Support Centre
Sarah Gibbons	NAPD
Rob Halford	CEIST
Diarmaid Hyland	Maynooth University
Siobhán Kavanagh	Kildare Education Support Centre
Claire Kilroy	Le Chéile Schools Trust
Steve Lane	Maynooth University
Michael Lynch	Cavan Monaghan ETB
Alice Lynch	Former school Principal
Deirdre Matthews	JMB
Dominik McEvoy	ETBI
Éadaoin McGovern	Navan Education Support Centre
Michael McKenzie	Mayo Education Support Centre
Ann Mulcahy	TUI
Jacinta Murphy	Maynooth post primary
Ceire Murphy	Maynooth post primary
Brian O'Doherty	IPPN
Ciarán O'Domhnaill	Deputy Principal Maynooth Post Primary
Anna Mai Rooney	Oide
Clare Ryan	Maynooth University
Maija Salokangas	Maynooth University
Jean Marie Ward	NAPD

Maynooth University Department of
<Insert Department name here>
National University of Ireland Maynooth,
Maynooth, Co. Kildare, Ireland.

Roinn na <Insert Department name here>
Ollscoil Mhá Nuad
Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad, Má Nuad,
Co. Chill Dara, Éire.