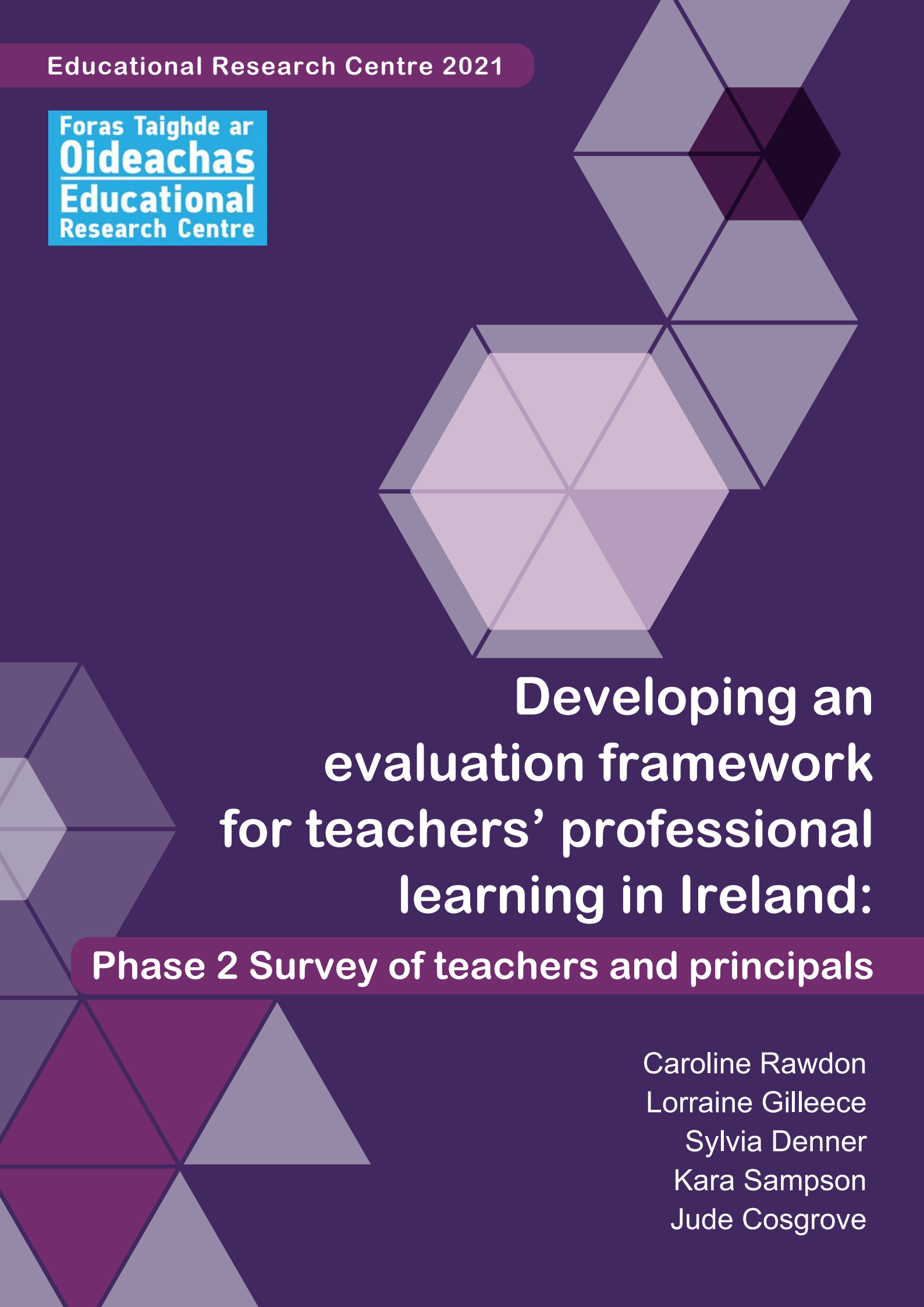


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# Developing an evaluation framework for teachers' professional learning in Ireland:

## Phase 2 Survey of teachers and principals

Caroline Rawdon  
Lorraine Gilleece  
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# Preface

This report represents the output of the second strand of this project which has the overall goal of developing a framework for the evaluation of Teachers' Professional Learning (TPL). The project consists of detailed desk-based research, including a literature review (Rawdon, Sampson, Gilleece, & Cosgrove, 2020); a survey of teachers and principals in primary, post-primary, and special schools; research with TPL providers; consultation with children and young people; and an in-depth case-study component. The administration of the survey outlined in the current report coincided with school closures arising from COVID-19, likely a major contributor to the lower-than-anticipated response rates.

The various strands of the research project will ultimately lead to the publication of a research-based framework for the evaluation of TPL. The resultant framework, designed to have broad applicability, will be applied initially to TPL in the area of student wellbeing, given the increased focus on student wellbeing across educational levels and settings. The term TPL was selected for use in the current project in order to acknowledge the full range of learning activities undertaken by teachers. It was agreed by the Steering Committee to better reflect the various dimensions of teachers' learning than a narrower term such as Continuing Professional Development (CPD).



# Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks to members of the Steering Committee (listed in the front matter of this report), appointed to oversee the development of a framework for the evaluation of TPL. We appreciate the considerable help of members of the Steering Committee in reviewing initial drafts of the survey questionnaires and reviewing the current report.

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# Membership of the Steering Committee

Martin McLoughlin	Chairperson, PO, Teacher Education, ITE & Professional Development, DoE
Brian Geraghty	Secretary, EO, Teacher Education, ITE & Professional Development, DoE
Jude Cosgrove	CEO, Educational Research Centre (ERC)
Brendan Doody	Assistant Chief Inspector, DoE Inspectorate
Mary Dunne	Inspector, Primary, Teacher Education, ITE & Professional Development, DoE
Margaret Dunning	Primary Divisional Inspector, DoE Inspectorate
Gráinne Egan	APO, Social Inclusion Unit, DoE
Noreen Fitzpatrick	Manager, National Innovation Unit, SOLAS
Lorraine Gilleece	Research Fellow, Educational Research Centre (ERC)
Gabrielle Greene	Regional Director, National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)
Madeline Hickey	Specialist Lead in Policy and Practice, National Council for Special Education (NCSE)
Carmel Kearns	Head of Teachers' Learning and Research, Teaching Council
Pádraig Kirk	Director, Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT)
Seamus Knox	Senior Inspector, Post-primary, Teacher Education, ITE & Professional Development, DoE (until retirement in October 2020)
Julie Lynch	Inspector, Post-primary, Teacher Education, ITE & Professional Development, DoE
Judith Lyons	APO, Teacher Education, ITE & Professional Development, DoE (Chairperson until December 2020)
Éadaoin McGovern	Secretary, Education Support Centres Ireland (ESCI)
Meabh McGuinness	Education Project Manager, Health Service Executive (HSE)
Eamonn Moran	PO, Post-primary, Curriculum and Assessment Policy Unit (CAP), DoE
Jim Mulkerrins	PO, Teacher Education, ITE & Professional Development, DoE (until retirement in December 2019)
Mary Nihill	National Director, Centre for School Leadership (CSL)
Éadaoin O'Brien	Psychologist, National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)
Mary O'Callaghan	National Coordinator, The National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT)
Evelyn O'Connor	PO, Primary, Curriculum and Assessment Policy Unit (CAP), DoE
Ciara O'Donnell	National Director, Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST)
Caroline Rawdon	Research Associate, Educational Research Centre (ERC)
Joan Russell	Education Research Officer, Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) (joined in July 2020)

# Glossary of Acronyms/Abbreviations

<b>ADHD</b>	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
<b>AP</b>	Assistant Principal
<b>ASD</b>	Autism/Autistic Spectrum Disorder
<b>CAP</b>	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Unit
<b>CDI</b>	Contract of Indefinite Duration
<b>CPD</b>	Continuing Professional Development
<b>CSL</b>	Centre for School Leadership
<b>DoE</b>	Department of Education (formerly DES – Department of Education and Skills)
<b>DEIS</b>	Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools
<b>DLF</b>	Digital Learning Framework
<b>DP</b>	Deputy Principal
<b>EAL</b>	English as an Additional Language
<b>EPV</b>	Extra Personal Vacation
<b>ERC</b>	Educational Research Centre
<b>ESCI</b>	Education Support Centres Ireland
<b>ETB</b>	Education and Training Board
<b>ETBI</b>	Education and Training Boards Ireland
<b>FESS</b>	Further Education Support Service
<b>FET</b>	Further Education and Training
<b>GUI</b>	Growing Up in Ireland
<b>HSE</b>	Health Service Executive
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communications Technology
<b>ICCS</b>	International Civic and Citizenship Education Study
<b>ITE</b>	Initial Teacher Education
<b>JCT</b>	Junior Cycle for Teachers
<b>MOOCs</b>	Massive Open Online Courses
<b>NAMER</b>	National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading
<b>NCCA</b>	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
<b>NCSE</b>	National Council for Special Education
<b>NEPS</b>	National Educational Psychological Service
<b>NIPT</b>	National Induction Programme for Teachers
<b>NPC</b>	National Parents Council
<b>NQT</b>	Newly Qualified Teacher
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>ODD</b>	Oppositional Defiant Disorder
<b>PDST</b>	Professional Development Service for Teachers
<b>PE</b>	Physical Education
<b>PISA</b>	Programme for International Student Assessment
<b>PLCs</b>	Professional Learning Communities
<b>PPS</b>	Probability Proportional to Size (sampling)

<b>SEN</b>	Special Educational Needs
<b>SIP</b>	School Improvement Plan
<b>SNA</b>	Special Needs Assistant
<b>SOLAS</b>	State Agency for the FET Sector
<b>SPHE</b>	Social, Personal, and Health Education
<b>SSE</b>	School Self-Evaluation
<b>TALIS</b>	Teaching and Learning International Survey
<b>TES</b>	Teacher Education (ITE and Professional Development) Section
<b>TPL</b>	Teachers' Professional Learning
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization
<b>WPSF</b>	Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice



# Executive Summary

## Introduction and aims

The current report is the second in a series of publications emanating from a research project which aims to develop a framework for the evaluation of Teachers' Professional Learning (TPL) in Ireland. Arising from an increased focus on student wellbeing across educational settings and levels in recent years, and a commitment made in the *Action Plan for Education 2018* (DES, 2018a), TPL related to student wellbeing represents the first content area to which the draft framework will be applied once it has been developed. This report describes the findings from a survey of principals and teachers regarding their views on, and experiences of, TPL as well as their recent uptake of TPL related to student wellbeing. The survey was carried out in Spring 2020.

The specific aim of this phase of the research project was to survey a nationally representative sample of principals and teachers in Ireland representing those working in primary, post-primary, and special schools. The survey gathered data on participants' views and experiences of TPL; their participation in TPL activities since September 2018; their understanding of pupil/student wellbeing<sup>1</sup>; their views on student wellbeing in their school; and their perceived needs in relation to TPL for student wellbeing. The survey was designed to address some of the knowledge gaps which remained at a national level following an extensive review of the international literature (Rawdon, Sampson, Gilleece, & Cosgrove, 2020). Specifically related to student wellbeing, the survey was designed to provide both an insight into principals' and teachers' understanding of student wellbeing and to assess their TPL needs in this area<sup>2</sup>.

A representative sample of 280 schools was selected and invited to participate in the survey. Of these, 53 primary schools, 41 post-primary schools, and 11 special schools returned principal questionnaires with adequate data for analysis. Teacher surveys with adequate data were returned from 354 primary teachers (representing 61 schools), 547 post-primary teachers (from 54 schools), and 72 special school teachers (from 14 schools). It is likely that the lower than anticipated response rate was a consequence of schools closures associated with COVID-19; schools closed in Ireland from March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020, shortly after the survey went live. While both the school and teacher datasets are weighted for analysis, results from principals or teachers cannot be generalised to the population since the extent to which responses may be biased on factors relating to TPL and wellbeing is not possible to determine empirically.

## Key findings

This section presents key findings from each section of the survey.

### A profile of principals and teachers

- Primary school principals were much more likely than their post-primary or special school counterparts to report working as a teaching principal. Almost two-thirds of primary principals (compared to 2% of post-primary and 13% of special school principals) indicated that they were teaching principals.

1 In the survey, the term 'student' was used to refer to learners at post-primary level while 'pupil' was used at primary level and for learners attending special schools. In this report, the term 'student' replaces 'pupil/student' throughout.

2 Recent years have seen an increasingly strong focus on student wellbeing at school. It is likely that this may not have been emphasised to the same degree in Initial Teacher Education (ITE), particularly for those teachers who completed ITE several years ago. Therefore, it is possible that teacher needs for TPL related to student wellbeing are greater than for other subjects which were more strongly emphasised in ITE. Also amongst teachers engaging in TPL for student wellbeing, there may be more variation in baseline knowledge.

- About two-fifths of primary principals who had teaching responsibilities reported working as a special education teacher. There was some evidence that teaching principals at primary level were more likely to have senior classes (Fourth class and above) compared to junior classes.
- A large majority of respondents was female. In primary and special schools, over 80% of teachers were female and more than three-quarters of principals were female. In post-primary schools, over 70% of teachers were female and about three-fifths of principals were female.
- Compared to post-primary (40%) and special school (44%) teachers, higher percentages of primary teachers (60%) were aged under 40. One-in-six primary teachers, one-in-nine post-primary teachers, and one-in-ten special school teachers was aged less than 30.
- Almost one-in-five primary principals and nearly one-in-three special school principals was aged less than 40. At post-primary level, 98% of principals were aged 40 or above and almost half were aged 50 or above.
- High levels of teaching experience were reported by school principals, particularly in post-primary schools where 77% of principals had over 20 years of teaching experience and just 7% had only one year's experience as a principal. At primary level, 67% of principals had over 20 years of teaching experience; one-quarter had one year's experience as a principal; and half had been appointed as principal within the last 5 years. In special schools, 55% of principals had over 20 years' experience as a teacher; one-third were in their first year as a principal; and half had been appointed as principal in the last 5 years.
- A larger percentage of teachers in primary schools (48%) reported having no additional qualifications relevant to their role compared to their counterparts in post-primary or special schools (25% and 23%, respectively). All post-primary principals reported having additional relevant qualifications. This compares to 35% of principals at primary level and 13% in special schools.
- Younger and less experienced teachers were more likely to have a fixed-term contract (whole-time or part-time) or to be a substitute teacher.
- High percentages of teachers and principals reported being 'very' satisfied with their job. However, at primary level, more than one-in-ten principals indicated that they were 'not at all' or 'not very' satisfied with their job and this was somewhat more likely in non-DEIS compared to DEIS schools<sup>3</sup>.
- High percentages of principals (primary 60%, post-primary 60%, special school 86%) reported that their job was 'very' stressful. Principals in primary DEIS schools were particularly likely to indicate high levels of stress, with 86% reporting that their role was 'very' stressful (compared to 52% in non-DEIS schools).
- Teachers were less likely than principals to indicate that their role was 'very' stressful although one-fifth of primary teachers, one-third of post-primary teachers, and two-fifths of special school teachers, categorised their job as 'very' stressful.
- A sizeable minority of primary (36%) and post-primary (21%) principals indicated that they felt 'not very' or 'not at all' supported in their role. Amongst special school principals, 60% reported feeling inadequately supported in their role.

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3 At primary level, 12 DEIS schools returned a completed principal questionnaire with adequate data for analysis. At post-primary level, 10 principal questionnaires were available for analysis from DEIS schools. Given the comparatively small number of DEIS schools, limited generalisations may be drawn. Where findings of interest emerge for DEIS schools, these may represent useful avenues for future research.

## A profile of schools and the school community

- Amongst schools with special classes<sup>4</sup>, the most common type of special class was an 'autism/autistic spectrum disorders' class. The variety of special classes at primary level was greater than at post-primary.
- Both at primary and post-primary levels, the most prevalent disability was the category specific learning disability. Based on principals' reports, an average of just under 5% of primary pupils had a specific learning disability and the average number of pupils per school with a specific learning disability was 7.5. The percentages of primary pupils in this category ranged from 0% to 22% across participating schools. At post-primary level, an average of 6.4% of students were identified as having a specific learning disability and the mean number of students per school with a specific learning disability was about 27.
- Additional learning needs associated with a general learning disability were most common in special schools. Over half of students on average in special schools were categorised as having additional learning needs associated with a general learning disability.
- At primary level, 16% of pupils on average were reported by principals to come from an immigrant background. In primary schools with the highest concentration of immigrant pupils, over two-thirds of pupils were reported to have an immigrant background. At post-primary level, about one-in-ten students on average was reported to have an immigrant background; in special schools, the average was closer to one-in-five.
- On average, low percentages of students were reported to identify as members of the Traveller or Roma communities (primary 2%; post-primary 1%; special school 7%); live in direct provision (primary <1%; post-primary <1%; special school 1%); or to be homeless or living in temporary accommodation (primary <1%; post-primary <1%; special school 3%).
- On items relating to student aggression and bullying; relationship difficulties among pupils; pupil disengagement; and low achievement, percentages of principals in special schools indicating that these issues represented a 'moderate' or 'serious' challenge were considerably higher than in primary and post-primary schools. A particular challenge at post-primary level was reported to be student absenteeism; 47% of principals reported that this was a 'moderate' or 'serious' challenge. Primary principals were less likely than their post-primary or special school colleagues to indicate that various issues posed 'moderate' or 'serious' challenges and not more than a quarter of primary principals identified any of the listed challenges as 'moderate' or 'serious'.
- About three-quarters of primary and special school principals and three-fifths of post-primary principals reported that 'all or nearly all' students enjoy being at school. Across all school contexts, a large majority of principals reported that 'all or nearly all' students were well-behaved in class and in the yard or playground<sup>5</sup>, were respectful to teachers, or were rewarding to work with.
- Almost all teachers and principals reported that the environment for students in their school was 'happier' or 'as happy' as other similar sized schools.
- At least two-fifths of principals across school types and at least three-in-ten teachers reported that their school had a 'happier' environment for teachers relative to other schools of the same size. However, more than one-in-ten special school teachers and more than one-in-six post-primary teachers indicated that the environment in their school was 'less happy' than that in other similar sized schools. At primary level, about one-in-eleven teachers reported a 'less happy' environment.

4 Of primary schools participating in the survey, 13% were reported by principals to have one or more special classes. The corresponding percentage at post-primary levels was 37%. While the percentage at post-primary level (37%) is very close to the percentage of post-primary schools in the population with a special class (39%), at primary level, the percentage in the survey (13%) is considerably lower than in the population (22%).

5 Note, 'on the playground/yard' was changed to 'in the corridor and communal areas' on the post-primary questionnaire.



- Over 90% of principals in special schools reported that ‘all or nearly all’ teachers were positive about the school compared to 85% of primary principals and 72% of post-primary principals.
- Two-thirds to three-quarters of principals across school types reported that ‘all or nearly all’ teachers were open to new developments and challenges.
- Not more than half of principals in any school context indicated that ‘all or nearly all’ teachers were eager to take part in professional learning activities. At post-primary level, just two-fifths of principals reported that ‘all or nearly all’ teachers were eager to take part in professional learning activities. In primary and special schools, at least one-in-ten principals reported that ‘less than half’ of teachers were eager to take part in professional learning activities.
- All of the post-primary principals indicated that their school offered *Droichead*, compared to 42% of primary school principals and 48% of special school principals. There was some evidence that primary and special schools with larger enrolment sizes were more likely than smaller schools to offer *Droichead*.
- About one-third of primary principals, a similar percentage of post-primary principals and one-quarter of special school principals rated unemployment as a ‘moderate’ or ‘serious’ challenge in their school’s community. According to special school principals, drug and alcohol abuse was the greatest challenge in their school’s community with about one-third of special school principals indicating that drug and alcohol abuse represented a ‘serious’ or ‘moderate’ challenge. In general, the challenges posed by the community context appeared to be somewhat lesser for primary schools than for post-primary and special schools, although on an overall index comprising community context and other indicators of stress in the school environment, differences between the school types were not statistically significant.
- Principals in DEIS schools at both primary and post-primary levels were much more likely to rate the various community issues as ‘moderate’ or ‘serious’ challenges than their counterparts in non-DEIS schools, with problems particularly pronounced at post-primary level.

### Views on teachers’ professional learning

- Very large majorities of teachers and principals in the three school types agreed (strongly or moderately) with the statement that ‘professional learning activities often help teachers to develop new teaching approaches’ and with the statement ‘I have been enriched by the professional learning activities in which I have participated’.
- Across all school types, principals had a higher mean score on attitudes to professional learning activities than teachers, indicating more positive attitudes to professional learning activities. The gap between principals and teachers was largest in post-primary schools.
- Post-primary teachers had a statistically significantly lower mean score on the attitudes to professional learning than their counterparts in primary and special schools, indicating a less favourable attitude.
- High percentages of principals and teachers across the three school types included school-based support (including school visits from support service personnel) in their top five preferred modes of TPL<sup>6</sup>. At least two-thirds of principals and over half of teachers included this mode in their top five. Single-day workshops were also positively viewed by respondents, although there was variation in the extent to which they were included in respondents’ top five preferred modes. While 40% of post-primary principals included single-day workshops in their top five preferred modes, 70% of special school teachers rated them as such.
- For other modes of TPL, there was considerable variation across teachers and principals in the three school types in the extent to which activities were included in the top five preferences. In-school workshops led by colleagues were included in the top five preferred

6 Respondents were *not* asked to indicate which particular aspects of school-based support were preferred, e.g., aspects such as convenience of location, opportunities to collaborate with colleagues, or availability of sustained support. In the absence of this detailed information, it is not possible to determine why high percentages included this mode in their top five preferred modes yet percentages varied in rating this mode as ‘highly effective’.

modes by almost half of post-primary principals and one-third of post-primary teachers. In primary and special schools, higher percentages of teachers than principals included team teaching in their top five.

- At post-primary level, one-third of teachers had never experienced residential workshops, one-quarter had not experienced lesson study, and one-fifth had not experienced research. About one-in-ten post-primary teachers indicated that they had not experienced workshops held over a number of days; similar percentages had not experienced team teaching, mentoring/coaching, or Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).
- Sizeable percentages of respondents in primary and special schools indicated that they had not experienced various forms of the listed TPL activities. Nearly one-fifth of special school teachers, one-third of primary teachers, two-fifths of primary principals, and three-fifths of special school principals indicated that they had not experienced lesson study. One-quarter to one-half of respondents from primary or special schools had not experienced residential workshops or research. Compared to their post-primary counterparts, primary and special school principals were more likely to indicate never having experienced several forms of TPL.
- Learning through practice received a high level of endorsement as an effective form of TPL across all groups of respondents.
- Attitudes to school-based support varied considerably between principals and teachers. While at least two-thirds of principals identified school-based support as ‘highly effective’ in informing professional knowledge, competence, and skills, percentages were considerably lower amongst teachers (ranging from 29% of post-primary teachers to 54% of primary teachers).
- Research, reading academic literature, and evening workshops were least likely to be considered ‘highly effective’ forms of TPL by principals and teachers.
- By and large, principals and teachers viewed the same forms of TPL as effective in informing attitudes, values, and practice as were effective in informing professional knowledge, competence, and skills.
- Turning to the evaluation of TPL, substantially higher percentages of principals than teachers reported that it was ‘very useful’ to evaluate TPL against nine criteria with value for money least likely to be considered ‘very useful’ by participants. The percentages of teachers indicating that the specified criteria were ‘very useful’ for assessing the impact of TPL were generally considerably lower than the corresponding percentages of principals.
- There were differences between principals and teachers and between those working in primary, post-primary, and special schools, on the instruments they considered most effective for evaluating TPL impact. For several of the instruments presented, post-primary principals were considerably more likely than other respondents to indicate that the instrument was ‘very useful’ in evaluating the impact of TPL. Half to three-quarters of post-primary principals reported that participant interviews; participant questionnaires or surveys; student learning outcome measures; classroom observation; and student interviews or questionnaires were ‘very useful’ in evaluating the impact of TPL. Lower percentages of post-primary teachers, primary principals, primary teachers, special school principals, and special school teachers viewed these instruments as ‘very useful’. Principals in special schools were unlikely to endorse participant interviews, pupil interviews or questionnaires, or classroom observation as ‘very useful’ approaches.
- In identifying the most effective TPL they had experienced, participants had the opportunity to describe in detail features of a particular TPL, its impact on their professional practice, its impact on student outcomes, and its impact on school policy and practice. Key issues identified as features of effective TPL were the methods of instruction used, cognitive outcomes, relationship building, and the TPL having a sustained duration. At least one-in-ten respondents across groups also cited the importance of having a high-quality facilitator.

- A key impact on professional practice identified by respondents was a change in their approaches to lesson planning and implementation. Post-primary principals mentioned having an increased awareness of good practice and having opportunities for greater engagement with colleagues. Increased confidence and motivation was a key outcome referenced by principals in special schools. Teachers in all contexts emphasised the development of skills and knowledge that can be applied in practice. This was also a key outcome for special school principals.
- Focusing on outcomes for students, respondents considered that students benefited from exposure to new teaching and learning approaches. Across school contexts, at least one-fifth of respondents identified improved student engagement, confidence, and participation as important student outcomes. Student enjoyment was more frequently identified as an important student outcome of the TPL by respondents at primary level compared to post-primary level.
- Turning to the impact of TPL on policy and practice, two themes were most commonly referenced by respondents across school types. These were: improved knowledge or more widespread implementation of particular approaches/policies, and, greater reflective practice in a collaborative manner and improved whole-school commitment to teachers' learning. Post-primary principals were most likely to indicate that they identified the impact through improved student outcomes whereas primary and special school principals were more likely to indicate that they identified the impact through changes in the practices of school leaders or teachers.

### Recent uptake of teachers' professional learning

- Principals in special schools were somewhat more likely to report being able to facilitate all TPL requests from teachers (special school principals 82%, compared to approximately two-thirds of primary and post-primary principals).
- Availability of a substitute teacher was identified as a key issue impacting on decisions to participate in TPL by primary (85%) and special school (80%) principals but less frequently by post-primary principals (40%).
- When asked to select from a list of factors likely to influence decisions on TPL participation, teachers most commonly selected *changes to the curriculum* as an influencing factor (selected by at least 80% of teachers across school types).
- Almost all post-primary principals and teachers reported engaging in TPL for Junior Cycle, with the majority spending between 1 and 8 days on TPL for this purpose. Over two-thirds of post-primary principals and a similar percentage of post-primary teachers reported engaging in 1-8 days of other professional learning.
- All of the principals in primary and post-primary schools reported having received scheduled time for TPL; 87% of special school principals reported that they received scheduled time. Approximately three-quarters of primary teachers indicated that they received scheduled time for TPL; the corresponding percentages were higher in post-primary (83%) and special schools (82%).
- Focusing on TPL since 2018, *external workshops* were reported to be the most common form of TPL for both principals (over 90% across all school levels) and teachers (primary 80%; post-primary 88%; special school 71%).
- High percentages of principals (79%-90% across school types) and teachers (68%-72% across school types) indicated that they had participated in *in-school support* (e.g., support from a PDST facilitator, NEPS psychologist, or NCSE advisor). Participation in *online courses* (such as an approved summer course) was also common amongst primary and special school respondents.
- Principals were more likely than teachers to report having attended an *external lecture or*

- seminar* or to have participated in *formal networking opportunities* or *mentoring* or *coaching*.
- *School self-evaluation and planning* was selected as the main purpose of recent TPL by a large majority of principals (primary 77%; post-primary 78%; special school 60%). *Professional collaboration and support of colleagues* was selected as the main purpose by 78% of post-primary principals (primary 61%; special 79%). *Planning and preparation* was selected by a large percentage of principals in special schools (86%) as the main purpose of the TPL but was less frequently selected by primary (54%) and post-primary (47%) principals.
  - *Knowledge about the teaching and learning of a particular subject* was reported to be the main purpose of TPL (undertaken since September 2018) by 69% of primary, 68% of special school, and 61% of post-primary teachers.
  - Of those principals who had experienced *in-school support*, half to three-quarters reported that it had had 'a large impact' on their development as a school leader (primary 48%; post-primary 58%; special 79%). Percentages of teachers rating *in-school support* as having had 'a large impact' ranged from 26% to 40%.
  - *External workshops* were reported to have had 'a large impact' by a majority of special school principals (85%) who had experience of them, but percentages of post-primary (38%) and primary principals (42%) indicating a 'large impact' were lower. A similar pattern was observed for special, post-primary, and primary teachers (56%, 33%, and 43% respectively).
  - The percentage of primary principals (44%) who reported that *formal networking with colleagues* had 'a large impact' was somewhat lower than post-primary (60%) and special school principals (61%).
  - *Cognitive change* was identified as a result of participation in recent TPL by 65% of special school principals (primary 48%; post-primary 44%). *Cognitive change* was also reported by one-third to two-fifths of teachers (primary 40%; post-primary 46%; special school 33%).
  - Over two-thirds of the principals in special schools noted a *practical change* in their role as a school leader (primary 46%; post-primary 42%). A very high percentage of teachers in special schools (83%) reported *practical change* as a result of participation in TPL activities (primary 65%; post-primary 43%).
  - *Improved learning outcomes for pupils* were reported by 40% of primary principals but smaller percentages of principals in post-primary (14%) and special schools (22%).
  - Across all school types, teachers were more likely than principals to indicate that all TPL was evaluated by the facilitator. Evaluation of TPL appears to be less common for participants from special schools; this is a particular issue for TPL undertaken by special school principals.
  - Over three-quarters of principals and teachers across the three school types reported that they were prevented from integrating the ideas/methods that were presented to them at TPL activities into their day-to-day practice. *Limited/no time* (primary 57%; post-primary 57%; special school 66%) was commonly identified as a barrier to implementation of TPL learning by principals. Similarly, *limited/no time* was noted by one-third to two-fifths of teachers across school types.
  - *Lack of sustained support from TPL provider* was reported as a barrier to TPL implementation by one-fifth to one-third of principals (primary 33%; post-primary 35%; special school 20%). Across school types, teachers were more likely than principals to identify as an issue the *lack of sustained support from TPL provider*.
  - *Limited/no resources* was also noted as an issue for implementation of TPL learning by principals (primary 24%; post-primary 11%; special school 67%). This was also identified as a challenge by teachers (primary 31%; post-primary 26%; special school 32%).
  - In terms of what works well for TPL, *gaining knowledge and resources/skills that I can apply in my practice* was reported by a sizeable minority of principals (primary 44%; post-primary 37%; special school 20%) and teachers (primary 29%; post-primary 27%; special school 48%).



- In relation to how TPL could be changed or improved, approximately two-fifths of primary principals provided answers related to the *improved availability/accessibility of courses* (post-primary 43%; special school 22%). On average 23% of teachers across the three school types provided answers relating to *improved availability/accessibility* of courses (ranging from 19% to 25% of teachers across school types).
- Principals reported *time/resources required for attendance/implementation of learning following TPL* as a key concern (primary 37%; post-primary 48%; special school 22%). This issue was also identified in the responses of one-quarter to one-third of teachers.
- In terms of improving or changing TPL, teachers also referenced the need for *course content which is practical and relevant to classroom practice (or relevant to special schools for special school respondents)* (primary 21%; post-primary 33%; special school 45%).

### Views on student wellbeing

- Principals at post-primary level were more likely than their counterparts in primary and special schools to report that the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* (WPSF) has had at least ‘a little’ influence at a whole-school level in their school. Similarly, two-thirds of post-primary teachers (68%) indicated that the WPSF has had at least ‘a little’ influence on their role as teacher; the corresponding percentages for primary and special schools were 53% and 54% respectively.
- Principals and teachers reported that a wide variety of approaches are used in schools to support the physical and emotional/psychological wellbeing of students. The use of wellbeing initiatives or programmes was identified as a key approach by a large majority of primary principals. Post-primary principals were particularly likely to identify pastoral care as central to how the school supports student wellbeing. A smaller number of responses was available from special school principals who were most likely to identify sport and Physical Education (PE) and a whole-school approach as the primary means of supporting wellbeing. Teacher responses broadly mirrored those of principals.
- Almost all teachers and principals reported spending at least some time on tasks related to student wellbeing in the most recent complete calendar week although one-fifth to one-third of respondents had not spent any time on extra-curricular activities related to wellbeing in that period. There was little difference between the responses of teachers in DEIS and non-DEIS schools with both groups of teachers equally likely to have spent ‘no time’, ‘up to one hour’, ‘1 – 3 hours’, or ‘more than 3 hours’ on tasks related to student wellbeing. More than one-quarter of respondents (up to three-quarters amongst post-primary principals) reported having spent ‘more than 3 hours’ on tasks related to student wellbeing in the most recent complete calendar week. It is difficult to determine if that was a typical investment of time or an increased investment arising from COVID-19 related school closures.
- In general, principals and teachers reported a high level of involvement in extra-curricular activities with about half of principals in primary and post-primary schools reporting that they were ‘very involved’. Just one-quarter of primary and special school teachers and one-eighth of post-primary teachers reported that they were ‘not involved’ in extra-curricular activities. Reasons, including a lack of time, were put forward to explain low levels of involvement on the part of those who were not involved.
- Post-primary teachers and principals were somewhat less likely than their primary and special school counterparts to indicate that they had not undertaken any wellbeing-related TPL since September 2018.
- At primary and post-primary level, principals were more likely than teachers to report a ‘high’ level of learning need associated with various aspects of student wellbeing. About half of primary principals (compared to 13% of primary teachers) reported a ‘high’ level of need for whole-school TPL to implement curriculum changes. Almost two-thirds of post-primary

principals (compared to one-third of post-primary teachers) reported a 'high' level of need for TPL related to mental health. Priorities for teachers rated as 'high' by about half of teachers in special schools were: the inclusions of students with special needs in the wider school community; teaching students with special learning needs; and student discipline and behaviour management.

## Using the survey findings to inform the development of a TPL evaluation framework in Ireland

In the concluding chapter of this report, findings from the survey of teachers and principals are mapped to a conceptual model of effective TPL which draws on the work of Compen, De Witte, and Schelfhout (2019) whose model was designed to describe and evaluate TPL for financial learning. Several adaptations are made to the model of Compen et al. in the current work. Most importantly, the model is adapted to place at its centre 'improving learning, outcomes, and wellbeing, for students, teachers, and school leaders'. Further modifications include the addition of: 'reflective practice' under teacher behaviour; 'facilitator quality' and 'supports diffusion' under the key features of professional development; 'content focus' updated to 'TPL focus' under core features; and 'accessibility' (location, cost, and language) as structural features of TPL. We have also broadened the contextual factors included in the model and our model includes several factors under the heading of 'system' (organisational factors, policy, curriculum, standards, frameworks, and parents as partners). The features of the model are considered in light of the survey findings. Arising from this exercise, Chapter 8 outlines nine sets of proposition statements for the overarching TPL framework which will be developed further once findings from subsequent phases of the research are available:

1. **Overall goal specification:** If one of the ultimate goals of TPL is to impact positively on student outcomes by supporting teachers in enhancing their practice, the design stage of TPL should consider which student outcomes are likely to be impacted by TPL participation, and in what way or to what extent. This consideration should in turn be linked to the manner in which student outcomes may be assessed in terms of standards or other relevant and clearly definable, measurable output and outcome metrics, at system, school, and class level. Improving learning, outcomes, and wellbeing for teachers should also be considered as core to the goals of TPL.
2. **TPL aims and focus:** TPL should include an explicit and consistent description of its focus (beginning with its aims) which distinguishes between: inter alia, curriculum/subject knowledge; pedagogical knowledge; legal/compliance-based; technical; or leadership, management, and strategy. TPL may have a single or dual focus (e.g., developing pedagogical knowledge and technical expertise with particular software) and it is likely that most or all TPL activities should involve a focus on reflective practice. The relative weightings given to subject matter and pedagogical content focus should be cognisant of differences in needs and preferences across primary, post-primary, and special schools, as well as between principals and teachers, and to the fit between the mode of TPL and the specific aims/focus of the TPL programme.
3. **Coherence:** The TPL framework should include a mechanism and checklist to ensure coherent alignment with relevant curricula, frameworks, standards, and policy reforms, including *Cosán* and the School Self-Evaluation (SSE) process. Such coherence will help ensure that the new framework builds on what is known in the system. TPL providers should be enabled to ensure alignment with these elements in the design phase of new TPL programme development. Given that time and curriculum overload are frequently cited as barriers to engagement with and participation in TPL programmes, commonalities and synergies across related TPL programmes should be actively sought by TPL providers and encouraged and supported through leadership and guidance from the DoE. To achieve this, a multi-year TPL strategic plan could be a useful accompaniment to the TPL framework.

4. **Ownership:** School leaders and teachers should be encouraged and enabled to take ownership for decision-making in who participates in TPL, and which TPL programmes are prioritised, although it is recognised that this may be a longer term aim. Sense of ownership should be built into each stage of TPL at the TPL provider, school, and individual level through consultation (and where feasible co-construction) at the design phase, planning for facilitation (in terms of participants' needs and preferences), feedback at the facilitation phase, and the use of tools for TPL providers and schools at the evaluation phase of TPL.
5. **Active learning and match to participants' needs and preferences:** Approaches to teaching and learning which emphasise active and constructivist methodologies should be strongly embodied in all TPL programmes. The manner in which TPL is delivered (e.g., school-based, observational, online) should be matched to both its content focus and the needs and preferences of the participants. When online approaches are employed, detailed consideration should be given to how active learning methods may be encouraged.
6. **Duration:** The design and facilitation should include a consideration both of time span and number of hours, while also maintaining a distinction between quantity and quality<sup>7</sup>. Sustained duration should be built into the design of TPL where relevant to the content focus of the TPL programme.
7. **Collective focus:** TPL programmes should incorporate collective activities (such as inclusive participant discussion; team teaching) and promote a collective response (such as collaborative leadership practices; collaborative development and sharing of information, ideas, or solutions) in a manner that provides a good fit to their content focus. This in turn supports diffusion – the unplanned, often informal, positive ripple effect of effective TPL.
8. **Effective facilitation:** TPL providers need to enable their facilitators to work effectively and ensure that consistency of messaging across facilitators is balanced with empowering facilitators to respond flexibly to the individual circumstances of schools and teachers. Effective facilitators are well-prepared and skilled at listening and responding to a diversity of questions, perspectives, and concerns.
9. **Diversity of contexts:** School communities are very diverse; therefore, consideration should be given at the TPL design, facilitation, and evaluation stages as to how diversity (e.g., in terms of educational disadvantage, special educational needs (SENs), linguistic and cultural diversity) is to be incorporated.

Next steps in the overall project comprise data analysis and reporting on a survey of TPL providers (data collection completed); consultation with children and young people conducted in partnership with Hub na nÓg (data collection completed); the development of a draft framework; and, in partnership with the PDST, testing of the draft framework by application to a specific wellbeing-related TPL in the academic year 2021/2022. It is intended that the final framework will be published in late 2022.

7

Desimone (2009) suggests that TPL needs to be of a “sufficient” duration (p. 184). This refers to both the span of time over which the activity is spread and the number of hours spent on the activity. She suggests that there is support in the literature for activities that are spread over a semester and include at least 20 hours of contact time.

# CHAPTER 1:

## Introduction

The current report is the second in a series of publications emanating from a research project which aims to develop a framework for the evaluation of Teachers' Professional Learning (TPL)<sup>8</sup> in Ireland. The area of student wellbeing has been selected to test the draft framework when developed. In the *Action Plan for Education 2018* (DES, 2018a, p. 43), a commitment was made to evaluate the impacts of CPD activities. This commitment made a specific reference to the evaluation of CPD related to student wellbeing. The research project is funded by the Department of Education (DoE)<sup>9</sup> and managed by the Teacher Education Section (TES) of the DoE, under the guidance of a Steering Committee<sup>10</sup> comprising members of key TPL support organisations, DoE representatives, and other stakeholders. The Educational Research Centre (ERC) is responsible for implementing the study which commenced in 2019. The first report from this project detailed the findings of desk-based research which included a systematic review of previously published evaluation frameworks for TPL; a discussion of best practice for TPL process evaluation and impact assessment; a review of key findings relating to the wellbeing of 5- to 18-year-olds in Ireland from national and international research; a summary of key DoE and Government of Ireland policies relating to TPL and student wellbeing; and a review of TPL provided in the area of student wellbeing over the previous five years in Ireland (Rawdon, Sampson, Gilleece, & Cosgrove, 2020).

The current report describes the findings from a survey of principals and teachers outlining their views and experiences of TPL; their recent participation in TPL; their understanding of pupil/student<sup>11</sup> wellbeing and views on student wellbeing in their school; and their needs in relation to TPL in the area of student wellbeing<sup>12</sup>. The remainder of this chapter comprises four sections. Section 1.1 outlines the key concepts and definitions used in the overall research project; Section 1.2 provides an overview of TPL models and frameworks outlined in the literature to date; Section 1.3 provides a brief summary of TPL in the area of student wellbeing in Ireland; and Section 1.4 outlines the aims and objectives of the current survey in more detail.

### 1.1 KEY CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

Definitions of the key concepts, agreed by the Steering Committee and the ERC for the purposes of the current research, are outlined in this section. Draft definitions of some of the key concepts were provided in the Terms of Reference for the research. Following the development of the Terms of Reference for the research, the Steering Committee further refined and agreed definitions of some of the key concepts relevant to this research, including *teacher*, *Teachers' Professional Learning (TPL)*, *wellbeing*, *framework (descriptive and evaluative components)*, and *impact*.

8 In this report, the term *Teachers' Professional Learning (TPL)* is preferred and usually replaces *Continuing Professional Development (CPD)* or other analogous terms used in the literature. Exceptions to this are direct quotations or if the original term is required to conserve the intended meaning.

9 Previously named the Department of Education and Skills (DES), until October 2020.

10 A list of Steering Committee members' names and affiliations is included in the front matter of this report.

11 In the current report, the term *pupil* is used when referring to primary and special schools and *student* is used for post-primary schools. The term *student* may also be used in some instances when referring to primary, post-primary, and special school levels collectively.

12 Figure 8.2 (Chapter 8) situates the survey component of the current project within the overall study design.



## Teachers

The Terms of Reference for the current research project defines *teachers* as those registered with the Teaching Council. Professional learning for support staff, such as Special Needs Assistants (SNAs), is not within the scope of this study and as such, participation in the present survey was limited to school leaders (principals) and teachers registered with the Teaching Council.

## Teachers' professional learning

According to the Terms of Reference, the focus of this research is the various types of continuing professional learning and development activities for teachers and school leaders which are funded, facilitated, accredited, or otherwise supported by the DoE, its support services, or its agencies and a small number of other relevant bodies. Organisations within scope of the project are: CSL<sup>13</sup>, NIPT, PDST, JCT, NEPS, NCSE, the Education Centres, the Teaching Council, ETBI, and relevant HSE activities. Professional learning activities provided by private organisations and funded by teachers themselves are not within the scope of the overall project.

For the purposes of the current research, TPL does not include Initial Teacher Education (ITE). However, the definition used in this study is intended to reinforce the continuous and ongoing nature of the professional development process. It is recognised that TPL ranges from highly informal<sup>14</sup> to structured and formal. For the purposes of the overall research project, it is not possible to include all forms of TPL, particularly those which are highly informal and self-directed. In selecting TPL for examination for the overall project, preference is given to TPL activities with objectives that may be linked to measurable outcomes.

## Wellbeing

For the purposes of the present research, the definition of wellbeing is taken from the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023* (DES, 2018b). According to this definition which is adapted from a definition originally proposed by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2001, cited in DES, 2018b, p. 10), wellbeing is present when:

*"...a person realises their potential, is resilient in dealing with the normal stresses of their life, takes care of physical wellbeing and has a sense of purpose, connection and belonging to a wider community. It is a fluid way of being and needs nurturing throughout life."*

Although the definition of wellbeing is based on individuals, the present study recognises that wellbeing is in part determined by the person's environments and interpersonal relationships within those environments. This is in line with a number of policy and curriculum documents published in recent years including the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023* (DES, 2018b) and *Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines* (NCCA, 2017) which acknowledge the importance of relationships in maintaining wellbeing. Indeed, both documents list four aspects of wellbeing in schools: culture, curriculum, relationships, and policy & planning, which underscore the importance of a whole-school approach to wellbeing and the consideration of the school environment as well as relationships between pupils/students, teachers, families, and community organisations. For the purpose of the current research, wellbeing is viewed as a teachable and learnable set of skills that include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

13 These acronyms are explained in the Glossary of Acronyms/Abbreviations in the front matter of this report.

14 Informal TPL could include learning from conversations and discussions among teachers, and other learning which may happen in an informal and unstructured way. Lloyd and Davis (2018) categorise informal TPL as activities that have fewer concrete outcomes than formal TPL. At the other end of the spectrum, formal activities typically require more structured engagement from participants and are more likely to have pre-defined, measurable outcomes. However, these terms are not defined in the current research.

## TPL framework

As the overarching aim of the present research is to develop a framework for the evaluation of TPL, the Steering Committee agreed a definition of the content and scope of a TPL framework including both the descriptive and evaluative components of the framework.

### Descriptive part of the framework

The descriptive component of the framework is defined as a unified, coherent, interlinked, and flexible structure capable of describing and classifying all relevant features of TPL.

### Evaluation part of the framework

The evaluation component of the framework is defined as a multi-layered structure capable of supporting both qualitative and quantitative evaluation of TPL to include design, development, facilitation, implementation, and improvement.

### Aim of the TPL framework

Taken together, the descriptive and evaluative components of the framework aim:

1. To facilitate the building of an evidence-base to support ongoing planning and policy development in relation to TPL at local, regional, and national levels;
2. To promote understanding and enable improvements on the efficiency, effectiveness, inclusivity, and impact of TPL;
3. To be useful at all stages of TPL at multiple levels, e.g., as a tool for TPL design; for decision-making; for categorising, recording, and revising TPL; and for evaluating the impact and effectiveness of TPL.

### Intended audience for the TPL framework

According to the project's Terms of Reference, the TPL evaluation framework once developed will be of value to the following stakeholders<sup>15</sup>:

- DoE support services involved in designing and facilitating TPL activities for teachers;
- Teacher Education Policy (ITE & Professional Development) Section of the DoE as the section with responsibility for oversight and funding of the supports provided by the PDST, JCT, NIPT, CSL, and locally by Education Centres;
- Other sections of the DoE involved in facilitating or overseeing TPL activities, including Special Education (closely linked to NCSE), ICT Policy, Social Inclusion, and NEPS;
- The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Section of the DoE as the section with responsibility for the development of overall policy relating to assessment, curricula, and guidance;
- The Wellbeing Steering Committee, which will be overseeing implementation of the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice*;
- The Inspectorate, in its inspection and policy work;
- The Teaching Council and its work in the development of *Cosán*, the national framework for teachers' learning;
- Boards of Management, schools, teachers, students, and parents<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> Following the development of the Terms of Reference, it has become apparent that the framework will be of interest to additional bodies not originally identified such as management bodies and professional bodies. It may also be informative for NIPT in the monitoring and evaluation of *Droichead*, the integrated professional induction framework.

<sup>16</sup> For parents, it is likely that the impact of the framework will be experienced through the SSE process which acknowledges the important role of parents as partners in education.

## Impact

The Terms of Reference recognise that *impact* is complex and acknowledge that it is particularly challenging in the present study where both the TPL framework and the area of student wellbeing are quite broad and layered. In terms of the assessment of impact, a multi-method approach that includes cross-validation of measures is preferred, with the overall goal of identifying which forms of assessment may be best suited to understanding impact at various levels.

The five levels of professional development evaluation identified by Guskey (2000, 2002) provide an initial structure for measuring impact and evaluating TPL. These five levels outlined by Guskey (2000, 2002) are: *participants' reactions*; *participants' learning*; *organisation support and change*; *participants' use of new knowledge and skills*; and *student learning outcomes*. For the purpose of the survey outlined in the current report, the work of Guskey (2000, 2002) guided some of the content of the survey questionnaires.

## 1.2 TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

The review carried out for the first phase of this research (Rawdon et al., 2020)<sup>17</sup>, identified the ways in which TPL activities have been previously described in research and policy publications. This desk-based research also identified a number of existing descriptive and/or evaluative frameworks from both national and international research, including three TPL frameworks developed in Ireland by the Teaching Council, the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), and the Centre for School Leadership (CSL)<sup>18</sup>. A brief overview of the key findings presented in our previous report are outlined in this section.

### Existing TPL evaluation frameworks

A systematic search identified a number of evaluation frameworks which have featured in the TPL literature to date. While it was agreed in the Terms of Reference that work by Thomas Guskey (2000, 2002) would act as a starting point for the development of an evaluation framework for TPL in the current research, a number of other relevant publications were identified through a systematic literature review.

Work relating to effective TPL and its evaluation by Borko (2004), Desimone (2009), Bubb and Earley (2010), and King (2014) provides useful additional content for the purposes of developing the TPL evaluation framework. Borko's work recognises the importance of sociocultural features on TPL, while an important contribution to the field by Desimone is the proposed use of a critical features approach for the evaluation of TPL (see Table 1.1). Bubb and Earley advocate the inclusion of teachers' attitudes as an explicit component of an evaluative model. King's (2014) work was developed in the Irish context and therefore is of particular interest to the current research. She advocates the addition of systemic factors to the evaluation model and includes the concept of diffusion, i.e., "*unplanned rippling of practices*" (King, 2014, p. 106).

Recent publications from Compen, De Witte, and Schelfhout (2019); Merchie, Tuytens, Devos, and Vanderlinde (2018); and Soebari and Aldridge (2015) were also summarised in our previous report. The extended evaluative framework presented by Merchie et al. comprises: *features of the intervention*; *teacher quality*; *teacher behaviour*; *student results*; *contextual factors*; and *teachers' personal characteristics*. Using broadly similar framework elements, Compen et al. argue for a cyclical model (rather than a linear model) and place student learning at the centre of their model. An important additional contribution of Soebari and Aldridge (2015) is the proposed inclusion of student attitudes as one of five phases of their evaluation framework. Taken together, these TPL evaluation frameworks outline where impact/change can be expected as a result of participation in TPL activities.

<sup>17</sup> The full report and executive summary are available at <https://www.erc.ie/TPLwellbeing/publications>

<sup>18</sup> Other TPL frameworks not reviewed by Rawdon et al. (2020) include the TPL framework used by JCT.

**Table 1.1: Critical features proposed by Desimone (2009)**

Feature	Description
1. <b>Content focus</b>	Desimone suggests that the most important and influential feature is that the TPL focuses on subject matter content and how students learn that content.
2. <b>Active learning</b>	Desimone cites a number of studies which show that the effectiveness of TPL is linked to opportunities for teachers to experience active learning (e.g., Garet et al., 2001). This active learning could be carried out in a variety of ways including interactive feedback discussions, observing or being observed, and leading discussions.
3. <b>Coherence</b>	This is the extent to which the material that the teacher is learning during a TPL activity is consistent with their knowledge and beliefs <sup>19</sup> . Coherence between TPL and wider policy (e.g., school, district, and state) is also important.
4. <b>Duration</b>	Although Desimone does not explicitly identify a particular “ <i>tipping point</i> ”, she suggests that TPL needs to be of a “ <i>sufficient</i> ” duration (p. 184). This refers to both the span of time over which the activity is spread and the number of hours spent in the activity. She suggests that there is support in the literature for activities that are spread over a semester and include at least 20 hours of contact time.
5. <b>Collective participation</b>	This refers to the participation of multiple teachers from the same class, school, or department as this allows for greater potential interaction and discourse between teachers.

Recent work by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (Boeskens, Nusche, & Yurita, 2020; OECD, 2020) has focused on TPL, with international research aimed to assist countries to identify TPL challenges and to support TPL at both system- and school-level across countries. The OECD’s TPL study seeks to cover the full range of TPL from formal to informal and acknowledges the various settings in which teachers learn (i.e., private, school-based, and off-site). The OECD’s work is centred on five analytical dimensions of TPL: *motivation*, *access*, *provision*, *content*, and *quality*. *Motivation* to participate in TPL activities may be driven by intrinsic (e.g., teachers’ own motivation or interests) or extrinsic (e.g., requirements) factors. *Access* refers to the barriers and constraints that may impact teachers’ ability to participate in TPL. *Provision* refers to how and by whom TPL is facilitated and also considers teachers as both recipients and providers of TPL. *Content* refers to how the content of TPL is developed and matched to local need. Importantly, *quality* refers to assessing TPL and ensuring a high standard. The OECD recognises the challenges involved in assessing the quality of TPL due to the many settings, providers, actors, and formats of TPL available. The OECD framework considers three levels of analysis as follows: *teachers* (individually and collectively); the *school*, including its leadership team; and the *system*, including school administration, higher education institutions, teacher unions or professional associations, and private training providers. The OECD considers intended and unintended outcomes of TPL such as quality teaching, including impact on classroom processes and student wellbeing, as well as student achievement. The TPL study also considers the impact of quality professional development opportunities on teachers’ wellbeing and retention, as well as employee mobility and skills obsolescence.

19 Using terminology from cognitive psychology (e.g., Maynard, 2018), fitting new information into what one already knows represents ‘assimilation’. Arguably, ‘accommodation’ – restructuring what one already knows to better fit new information – is also an important process in learning and development and it is likely that effective TPL would not only require participants to assimilate new information but also to accommodate.

## Models of TPL

In terms of the ways in which teachers and schools engage in TPL activities, Kennedy (2005, 2014) proposed a spectrum of CPD models (or models of TPL) from *transmissive* to *malleable* to *transformative*. Kennedy categorises training, deficit, and cascade models as transmissive models of TPL. She identifies award-bearing, standards-based, coaching/mentoring, and community of practice models as malleable models of TPL and, while she does not identify any specific models of TPL as transformative, she notes that transformative TPL includes “*collaborative professional inquiry models*” (p. 693). She expands on this definition to state that this includes the identification of a problem and subsequent inquiry to address the problem, which may include engagement with research, as well as inquiry into the teacher’s own practice or other practices. The breadth of TPL models identified by Kennedy (2005, 2014) highlights one of the key challenges in developing a framework for TPL evaluation, namely, creating a framework that can be broadly applied to evaluate an extensive and diverse range of activities.

## TPL frameworks in the Irish context

In the Irish context, the Teaching Council developed the *Cosán Framework for Teachers’ Learning* (The Teaching Council, 2016) which describes, inter alia, the various dimensions of teachers’ learning as well as the learning processes in which teachers engage (see Table 1.2). In addition, a strong emphasis is placed on reflective practice, with reflective practice encompassing all other elements of this professional learning framework. While *Cosán* offers a valuable descriptive framework for TPL, the framework does not contain a specific evaluation component<sup>20</sup>.

The PDST, one of the organisations providing TPL for teachers in Ireland, has also developed a conceptual framework for professional development provision (PDST, 2017). The PDST framework is influenced by Kennedy’s (2005, 2014) work and also draws on a published framework for TPL evaluation by Desimone (2009). In designing their framework, the PDST was also informed by research findings (e.g., Desimone et al., 2002; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001) indicating that it is the features, rather than the form (e.g., mentoring, workshop, or seminar), of professional development that impact on desired teacher and student outcomes. However, the PDST argues that certain forms of professional development are more conducive to certain features and therefore they consider that it is reductive to examine one without the other. Five features are central to the PDST model. In addition to the five features identified by Desimone (content focus; active learning; coherence; duration; and collective participation), the PDST framework refers to characteristics of effective Professional Learning Communities (PLCs); key conditions for effective collaborative professional inquiry; and effective pedagogies for teacher learning (Brennan, 2017).

The CSL has devised a model of professional learning for school leaders in Ireland (CSL, 2019). This model identifies the six essential elements for effective professional learning for school leaders at every stage of the continuum: *professional standards*; *reflection on practice*; *individual & collaborative learning*; *relevant experiential learning*; *flexible and sustainable*; and *cognitive development*. At its centre, the model places the moral imperative of improving learning experiences, outcomes, and wellbeing for students and school communities. It recognises that professional learning is a process that impacts on both the person and the practice of the leader.

20 The NCSE (2013) recommend that the Teaching Council and the DoE should ensure that teachers are provided with the necessary knowledge, skills, understanding, and competence to meet the diverse learning needs of students with special educational needs. NCSE (2013) states “*The Teaching Council should stipulate mandatory levels and frequency of CPD that teachers are required to undertake for teaching students with special educational needs within an overall framework of CPD*”.



**Table 1.2: Dimensions of teachers' learning and learning processes described in *Cosán***

<b>Dimensions of teachers' learning</b>	
<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Description</b>
1. Formal and informal	Both formal and informal learning are acknowledged as important aspects of teachers' learning. Teacher feedback during the consultation process for <i>Cosán</i> emphasised the importance and value of informal learning processes.
2. Personal and professional	These are " <i>inextricably linked</i> ", and teachers who have a deep interest in professional development tend to also have a strong interest in personal development. <i>Cosán</i> recognises how interconnected these concepts are alongside their mutually beneficial relationship.
3. Collaborative and individual	Many theorists have argued that all learning is social (Stoll, Fink, & Earl, 2003, cited in The Teaching Council, 2016), and collaborative teacher learning was considered to be of central importance based on teacher feedback. However, <i>Cosán</i> acknowledges that it is important for teachers to strike a balance between the development of their practice as an individual and the creation of a positive community of practice.
4. School-based and external	Both school-based and external teachers' learning have important positive aspects, and a combination of both tends to exhibit the best results.
<b>Teachers' learning processes</b>	
<b>Process</b>	<b>Example</b>
1. Mentoring/coaching	Supporting a colleague to develop their teaching.
2. Practice and collaboration	Engaging in team teaching, action research, or piloting new initiatives.
3. Research	Research carried out as part of an academic programme or action research or participation in a research event.
4. Reading and professional contributions	Reading books/articles/research/web-based information on teaching, learning, and assessment, writing an article based on teaching or research.
5. Immersive professional activities	A study visit, overseas volunteering, or secondment to a support service.
6. Courses, programmes, workshops, and other events	Post-graduate academic studies, participating in a conference, workshop, or Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), or attending a lecture or seminar.

## Context of TPL

### Changing context of TPL

A report on the design and implementation plan for the OECD's (2020) TPL study identified a number of contextual factors and trends which may impact TPL. The report emphasises the changing nature of teacher training<sup>21</sup> and the teaching environment. The report highlights the influence of students' needs and changing learning objectives; new evidence on which TPL practices are more or less effective; the availability of new technology and, hence, new modes of TPL delivery<sup>22</sup>; greater diversity in the routes which candidates can take to commence a career in teaching; and reduced resources, i.e., greater requirement for schools to use resources efficiently. Indeed, some of the contextual issues outlined in the OECD's design and implementation plan have previously been described as challenges in relation to TPL participation, e.g., lack of resources (see section on challenges and enablers of TPL below).

21 Rawdon et al. (2020) note that the term 'trainer' is often eschewed in the literature because of perceived technical-rational connotations that are not fully compatible with contemporary understandings of good practice in TPL. Following a similar logic, the term 'Initial Teacher Education (ITE)' is usually adopted in Ireland, rather than the term 'teacher training'.

22 While the OECD (2020) report uses the term 'delivery', 'facilitation' is preferred for the purpose of the current research project.

In Ireland, recent policy has highlighted the importance of evaluating the impact of TPL. In the *Action Plan for Education 2018* (DES, 2018a) the (then) DES made a commitment to evaluate the impacts of CPD activities. According to Action 46.1 of the Action Plan, a research-based framework will be developed for the purposes of evaluating CPD in the area of student wellbeing, i.e., the overarching aim of the current research. Action 45.2 aims to develop a new evidence-based strategic policy framework for the provision of a continuum of quality professional learning and supports for teachers and schools and it is intended that work will include consideration of the future structure of support services engaged in CPD.

### Irish teachers' views on TPL

A report commissioned by the Teaching Council used data from Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) to examine the factors influencing Irish primary teachers' participation in CPD activities (Banks & Smith, 2010). The report explored teacher- and school-level variables which impact teachers' participation in CPD activities, including broad school issues such as school climate and leadership. Gender differences in CPD uptake were observed (with female teachers participating in more CPD activities than male teachers) and level of teaching experience was also found to be a factor which influenced CPD uptake (with teachers who had 20 or more years of teaching experience availing of most CPD) (Banks & Smith, 2010). The presence of a Special Needs Assistant (SNA) in the classroom contributed to an increase in teachers' level of CPD uptake and teachers who had one or more students with Special Educational Needs (SENs) were somewhat more likely to participate in CPD (Banks & Smith, 2010). A positive school climate and principal length of service were found to increase teachers' CPD participation (Banks & Smith, 2010). Lower levels of CPD uptake were noted in schools where principals were recently appointed or long-serving; whereas high levels of CPD participation were found among teachers in schools where principals were in their role for between 3 and 10 years. A high number of principals reported that teachers in their school were 'eager to participate in in-service training' (Banks & Smith, 2010).

Barriers to TPL participation in the Irish context were examined in the OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS; OECD, 2009) where it was also noted that around 50% of teachers in Ireland reported that they would have liked to have participated in more professional development than they had done in the previous 18 months (Gilleece, Shiel, Perkins, & Proctor, 2009). Other barriers in the Irish context were a lack of suitable opportunities, family responsibilities, and conflict with teachers' work schedules (Gilleece et al., 2009)<sup>23</sup>. It may be noted that more recent national research in this area is lacking and the present report aims to contribute to a more up-to-date picture on these issues.

The initial application of this framework is to TPL related to student wellbeing. Rawdon et al. (2020) reviewed some findings that point to an association between teacher wellbeing and student wellbeing. Furthermore, there is some evidence of a positive impact of TPL on teacher wellbeing such as reductions in self-reported levels of burnout (Kennedy, Flynn, O'Brien, & Greene, 2021). The OECD (2014) also report a positive association between teacher self-efficacy and positive relationships with colleagues and students. This report suggests that teachers who participate in collaborative professional learning have higher levels of self-efficacy<sup>24</sup>.

Earlier Irish research has also identified a role for professional development in supporting wellbeing of teachers and principals. A report by Darmody and Smyth (2010), commissioned by the Teaching Council and drawing on data from GUI, reported on job stress and satisfaction among teachers and principals in primary schools in Ireland. Professional development support was highlighted as a need for principals. In their report, Darmody and Smyth (2010) found that the majority of principals and teachers were happy in their jobs (93% and 98% respectively). Over two-thirds of principals

23 Data collection for subsequent TALIS reports also took place in 2013 and 2018 but Ireland did not participate.

24 Note, Ireland did not participate in data collection for TALIS reported in this publication.

(70%) and almost half of teachers (45%) reported experiencing stress in their jobs. The publication highlights a number of micro- (gender, age, and length of service) and meso-level factors (related to the teacher, school, and pupils) which impacted on job satisfaction and stress. Micro-level findings included: higher levels of job satisfaction reported by female teachers; teachers in their forties and principals over 40 years of age reported higher stress levels; and newly recruited teachers and principals, as well as those in service for longer periods, reported higher job satisfaction. Teacher- and principal-reported stress was associated with the numbers of pupils with emotional/behavioural difficulties in the school and higher parental involvement was associated with lower levels of teacher stress. Availability of adequate resources was associated with lower stress and higher job satisfaction in principals. Although COVID-19 issues are outside of the scope of the current survey, it is likely that the pandemic has had an impact on teaching and learning, as well as teacher wellbeing<sup>25</sup>.

### Challenges and enablers of TPL

Key challenges and enablers of TPL have been outlined in the international literature to date (see Rawdon et al., 2020 for further discussion of these issues). Relatively little is known about the barriers and enablers of TPL in the Irish context. Further research is required to build on the work carried out by Banks and Smith (2010) and findings from Ireland's participation in OECD's TALIS (OECD, 2009), as both studies were carried out over a decade ago. The current survey aims to address the challenges and enablers of TPL participation and implementation in a sample of principals and teachers in Ireland.

Key challenges outlined in the international literature to date are linked to the *school context* (Buczynski & Hansen, 2010; Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017; Guskey & Yoon, 2009), school culture (Kwakman, 2003; Moir, 2018), school leadership (Halverson, 2003; Spillane, 2006; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, 2009), *time* (Birman, Desimone, Porter, & Garet, 2000; Desimone, 2002; Garet et al., 2001; Guskey, 1999), and *lack of resources* (Buczynski & Hansen, 2010; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

## 1.3 TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN THE AREA OF STUDENT WELLBEING IN IRELAND

A review of TPL provision in the area of student wellbeing is included in our previous report (Rawdon et al., 2020), focusing on nine organisations currently providing TPL in this area, i.e., NIPT, PDST, JCT, NEPS, HSE, NCSE, ETBI, ESCI, and The Teaching Council. Student wellbeing is a key focus of the DoE at present as evidenced by the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023* (DES, 2018b), as well as recent revisions to the primary and post-primary curriculum, including the *Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines* (NCCA, 2017) and *Primary Curriculum Review and Redevelopment* (NCCA, 2019). Also, the recent COVID-19 pandemic which led to school closures and remote schooling in March 2020 has put student wellbeing at the forefront the DoE and schools' attention.

Organisations were asked to provide details of their TPL provision related to student wellbeing over the previous five-year period. It was noted that these organisations varied considerably in relation to their approaches to TPL design, facilitation, implementation, and the level of impact assessment each carried out. It is clear that a variety of TPL options are available to teachers and school leaders in Ireland in the area of student wellbeing at present. For the most part, the TPL activities listed by providers were optional (for teachers and school leaders) and uncertified (other than certification of attendance). Participant evaluation on completion of a TPL activity was found to be very common

<sup>25</sup> Research indicates that teachers reported higher stress and lower self-efficacy as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Burke & Dempsey, 2020; Devitt, Bray, Banks & Ní Chorcara, 2020). Burke & Dempsey (2021) report that 68% of primary school leaders (out of 583 participants) indicated that the pandemic affected their wellbeing a lot. Research findings indicate that maintaining student engagement and balancing work and home life were challenges for second-level teachers (Devitt et al., 2020). Devitt et al. (2020) also report that the most commonly attended CPD events attended by second-level teachers during school closures included CPD for technology, wellbeing, and SENs.



and was typically found to focus on what would usually be viewed as Level 1 (*participants' reactions*) in Guskey's (2000, 2002) five-level model for evaluating TPL, with some evaluation evident at Level 2 (*participants' learning*). While the views of TPL providers have been described in our previous report, a more detailed account of school leaders' and teachers' understanding of student wellbeing as well as their views on student wellbeing needs is required. Chapter 7 of the current report addresses these issues.

## 1.4 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE SURVEY

As noted in the opening section of this chapter, the overall aim of the current research project is to develop a framework for the evaluation of TPL in Ireland. The survey findings outlined in this report aim to address some of the knowledge gaps which remained following our extensive review of the literature.

The specific aim of this phase of the research project was to survey a nationally representative sample of principals and teachers in Ireland representing those working in primary, post-primary, and special schools in relation to their:

- Thoughts about TPL, i.e., their views and experiences of TPL;
- Participation in TPL activities since September 2018;
- Understanding of pupil/student wellbeing;
- Views on pupil/student wellbeing in their school; and
- Needs in relation to pupil/student wellbeing TPL.

It is hoped that the findings of this research will add to the international literature on principals' and teachers' views on professional learning, as well as providing some insights into principals' and teachers' understanding of student wellbeing and their TPL needs in this area. Specifically for the purposes of the development of the TPL evaluation framework, the intention is that findings from the survey will inform various aspects of the framework to facilitate the evaluation of:

- TPL design, by providing a better understanding of teacher and principal preferences for various modes of facilitation and their perceptions of barriers and enablers of TPL participation. In evaluating TPL design, it is relevant to examine the consideration which has been given at design stage to these issues.
- TPL facilitation, by providing information on the priorities for teachers and principals regarding TPL facilitation; e.g., timing, mode of facilitation, and/or facilitator quality. At the evaluation stage, how is facilitator quality assessed? What is the duration of the TPL and is it sufficient to achieve the intended outcomes?
- Assessment of TPL impact: In what areas do principals and teachers perceive TPL to have the greatest impact? What are their suggestions for demonstrating impact? What are the most important criteria for evaluating TPL according to teachers and principals? What instruments are useful for the purposes of evaluating TPL in their experience?

# CHAPTER 2:

## Questionnaire content and methodology

### 2.1 SURVEY DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

In total, six versions of the survey on Teachers' Professional Learning (TPL) and student wellbeing were created using SurveyHero<sup>26</sup>, an online survey platform. Separate versions of the survey were developed for principals and teachers at each school level (primary, post-primary, and special). Whilst many of the questions remained the same across each version of the survey, some questions were appropriate for certain participants only (i.e., either principal or teacher) or a certain school level (i.e., primary, post-primary, and/or special). Additional questions were included on the principal versions of the survey to gather contextual information about each school. An e-Appendix is published alongside this report which outlines the full list of questions included in the survey (e-Appendix available at <https://www.erc.ie/TPLsurvey>).

#### Consultation with Steering Committee

In October 2019, an initial outline of the proposed survey was reviewed by members of the Steering Committee<sup>27</sup>. A proposed structure and provisional questions for each section of the survey were put forward by the research team at the ERC. Steering Committee members were asked to rate the importance of each question on a scale of 1 (*low priority*) to 3 (*high priority*) for the purposes of addressing the research questions and informing the development of a framework for evaluating TPL. Based on the responses from the Steering Committee, the questions which were rated as highest priority for informing the development of the framework were brought forward to the next stage of survey development.

A draft of the full survey was sent to the Steering Committee in late January 2020 and feedback was sought. Steering Committee members were asked to include any comments or suggestions for text changes that they had for each question, e.g., to ensure clarity of phrasing and to ensure all potential response options were included for each question. Following feedback on this survey draft, the wording of a number of questions was refined and some questions were removed. The final draft of the survey was then prepared. A second round of feedback from Steering Committee members was used to finalise the survey content.

#### Development of survey items

##### School information

Each survey began with an introductory section, *School Information*, which aimed to gather contextual information about the participant and their school. Questions contained in this section included school roll number, school phone number, and the participant's role in the school. In both the primary and post-primary principal and teacher versions of the survey, the School Information section also contained a question which required the participant to rate how happy they believed their school environment to be ('happier', 'as happy', or 'less happy'), for both teachers and students, relative to other schools. The school environment had previously been assessed in this way as part of the data

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.surveyhero.com>

<sup>27</sup> See the front matter of this report for a full list of Steering Committee members and their affiliations.

collection for Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) Child Cohort at 9 years old<sup>28</sup>.

In the primary teacher and special school teacher versions of the survey, one extra question was included in the School Information section, which asked about the proportion of parents who would approach the teacher informally to discuss their child's progress and responses were rated on a scale which ranged from 'all or nearly all' to 'only a few'. This question was also previously used by GUI Child Cohort at 9 years old. For the purpose of the current survey, the first response option 'nearly all' was changed to 'all or nearly all' as it was felt that this response option offered a more complete answer.

The School Information section of the principal version of this survey contained several questions which were not present in the teacher versions. Questions drew on the principal questionnaire used in data collection with the GUI Child Cohort at 9 years old; the principal questionnaire for NAMER 2021; and the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS; Schulz, Fraillon, Ainley, Losito, & Kerr, 2008; Schulz, Ainley, & Fraillon, 2011). Principals were asked about challenges including those present in the local community as well as the number of students in their school from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds or minority groups. They were also asked about parental attendance at school meetings, special classes in the school, and whether their school was registered to offer *Droichead*<sup>29</sup>.

### Teacher/principal information

The next section of the survey was named either *Teacher Information* or *Principal Information* depending on the survey version. In both the principal and the teacher versions of the survey, participants were asked about their employment status, how long they had been teaching for, when they began employment in their current school, their gender, and age. Participants were asked whether they had acquired any additional formal certified qualifications relating to their job as a teacher, a question which was adapted from NAMER 2014. This section also contained a question asking teachers how stressed, satisfied, and supported they felt in their role as a teacher. This question was adapted from GUI and NAMER 2021.

Lastly participants were asked what class (primary and special) or subjects (post-primary and special) they taught, and whether they taught any subjects which were specifically related to wellbeing (post-primary level only, i.e., SPHE, CSPE, Physical Education, and/or Wellbeing<sup>30</sup>). They were also required to state the amount of time they spent on tasks related to student wellbeing, and teaching student wellbeing in the last calendar week. This question was adapted from the OECD's (2013) Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) Teacher Questionnaire<sup>31</sup>.

### Thoughts on teachers' professional learning (TPL) in general

In both the principal and teacher versions of this survey, participants were asked various questions related to their preferred modes of TPL, how effective they believed different modes of TPL to be in informing a number of outcomes (professional knowledge, competence, skills, attitudes, values, and practice), how useful they found the evaluation of TPL to be, and how useful they believed various instruments for evaluating the impact of TPL to be (e.g., questionnaires, classroom observations etc.). Questions relating to the usefulness and effectiveness of TPL were adapted from Goodall, Day, Lindsay, Muijs, and Harris (2005).

28 <https://www.growingup.ie/pubs/9-Year-Cohort-Teacher-on-Self-Questionnaire.pdf>

29 *Droichead* is an integrated professional induction framework for newly qualified teachers in Ireland (The Teaching Council, 2017).

30 It was assumed that teachers working in primary or special schools teach subjects relating to student wellbeing such as SPHE, Physical Education, etc.

31 <http://www.oecd.org/education/school/TALIS-2013-Teacher-questionnaire.pdf>

Participants were also asked questions about their attitudes towards professional development, which were adapted from the *Teachers' Attitudes about Professional Development (TAP) scale* (Torff, Sessions, & Byrnes, 2005). The language used in this scale was changed to better reflect the language used throughout the rest of the survey. For example, where Torff et al. (2005) used 'in-service training' the current survey used 'professional development activities'. Also, the statement 'staff development initiatives have not had much impact on my teaching' was separated out into three different statements; 'professional learning activities have not had much impact on my learning', 'professional learning activities have not had much impact on my teaching or professional practice', and 'professional learning activities have not had much impact on my students' outcomes' in line with feedback received from the Steering Committee.

Several optional open-ended questions were included in this section, which gave participants the opportunity to provide more information regarding their views on TPL. Participants were asked to describe the most effective TPL they had experienced and how this TPL impacted on their professional practice, outcomes of their pupils/students, and practice and policy within their school.

### **TPL since September 2018**

September 2018 was decided as an appropriate starting point for information gathered in this section as it was felt that two years was sufficient time to get a sense of the amount of TPL that was being undertaken by principals and teachers and that two years was also a reasonable amount of time to ask participants to recall and report accurately when answering the survey.

Both the principal and teacher versions of this survey contained questions regarding the factors which determined decisions on TPL participation, questions regarding how much time (measured in days) the participant had spent on TPL, what types of TPL the participant had taken part in, what the purpose of this TPL was, what impact this TPL had, what prevented them from participating in more TPL than they did, and what prevented them from implementing what they had learned in the classroom. The principal version of the survey also included questions regarding the schools' TPL priorities, and whether it is generally possible for the principal to facilitate all requests from teachers for TPL participation.

### **Your understanding of pupil/student wellbeing**

The principal and teacher versions of the survey contained the same questions in this section. This section included questions about the introduction of the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023* (DES, 2018b), and whether this had influenced their role as a teacher/principal. Participants were also asked to describe how their school supports the physical and emotional/psychological wellbeing of its pupils.

### **Pupil/student wellbeing in your school**

In this section participants were asked questions regarding their level of involvement in extra-curricular student wellbeing activities within their school. Participants were also specifically asked to indicate how many minutes they had spent on extra-curricular activities related to student wellbeing during their most recent calendar week. This question was adapted from OECD's (2013) TALIS Teacher Questionnaire<sup>32</sup>. This section contained the same questions on both the principal and teacher versions of the survey.

### **Your needs in relation to pupil/student wellbeing**

In the final section of the survey, participants were asked to indicate, out of all the TPL they had taken part in since September 2018, what percentage of this TPL was focused specifically on student wellbeing. Participants were then asked whether the professional learning activities they had participated in since September 2018 had met their learning needs in the area of student

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<http://www.oecd.org/education/school/TALIS-2013-Teacher-questionnaire.pdf>

wellbeing, and the extent of their professional learning needs in relation to a number of areas of student wellbeing (e.g., SPHE curriculum, teaching students with special learning needs, including students with special needs in the wider school community, social and emotional skills etc.). A total of 17 areas of student wellbeing were included in this list. The DES's (2019) *Directory of Wellbeing CPD September 2019 to June 2020* was used as a reference when deciding on the areas of student wellbeing TPL to be included in the list. A concerted effort was made to cover all wellbeing areas mentioned in the directory in this question on the survey.

### Open-ended questions

Throughout the survey, most tick-box questions were mandatory; however, there were several open-ended questions included which allowed participants to add more detail or context to their answers if they wished. These open-ended questions were optional as it was decided that requiring open-ended responses could have discouraged some participants from completing the survey. The inclusion of optional open-ended responses allowed participants to include more information on certain topics, if they wished.

### Pilot study

Piloting of the survey took place in February 2020. One post-primary school leader, one post-primary teacher, one primary school leader, one primary teacher, and one primary learning support teacher participated in the pilot study.

Initially, each participant was sent an email from the ERC inviting them to participate in the pilot study. This email contained key information about the survey and explained to each potential participant what would be required of them if they agreed to complete the pilot study. The email also explained that to give feedback on the survey, each participant would be required to take a phone call from a researcher from the ERC. Each potential participant was asked to confirm their participation by email.

Once each of the five potential participants had confirmed their willingness to participate, they were sent a subsequent email which contained a PDF copy of the version of the survey relevant to their role and a set of comprehensive instructions detailing what they were required to do. Each participant was asked to complete the survey and to record the amount of time that it took to complete the survey. Participants were also asked to note any positive or negative feedback that they had regarding the survey and any changes that they would suggest for the survey content, response options etc.

Four participants were contacted by phone and one participant sent their observations on the survey via email. All participants indicated the time it had taken them to complete the survey and detailed their individual feedback. Calls lasted between 20 minutes and 1 hour 30 minutes depending on the level of feedback provided by each participant.

Some general changes were made to the survey based on the feedback received during the pilot study. Several questions were removed as participants noted that the survey took too long to complete. The order that questions appeared in throughout the survey was also altered as it was felt that all questions relating to wellbeing should appear sequentially and not be spread out throughout the survey. Some extra response options were added to multiple choice questions to accommodate the suggestions made by pilot study participants.

### Survey translation

The principal and teacher versions of the survey for both primary and post-primary levels were translated for Irish-medium schools. Translation of these surveys was outsourced by the ERC to an independent translation company. Once the translation of the surveys was complete, the Irish version of each survey was then reviewed internally and imported into SurveyHero. All correspondence with Irish-medium schools was translated into Irish in-house in the ERC.



## 2.2 SAMPLE DESIGN AND ADMINISTRATION

### Sample

The sample of 280 schools for this survey consisted of 150 primary, 100 post-primary, and 30 special schools. In drawing the samples, random start, fixed interval probability proportional to size (PPS) sampling was used to draw a representative sample of primary, post-primary, and special schools (as with other national and international school-based surveys overseen by the ERC). A number of schools that were already sampled for other studies<sup>33</sup> being carried out by the ERC were excluded from the database prior to sampling.

Prior to sampling, the schools were sorted into clusters or strata. The stratifying variables were as follows:

- Primary: Region (Dublin, Rest of Leinster, Munster, Connacht, Ulster (part of)); DEIS status (DEIS Band 1, DEIS Band 2, DEIS Rural, non-DEIS); School enrolment size category (Small, 1-80 pupils; Medium, 81-200 pupils; Large, >200 pupils)
- Post-primary: Region (Dublin, Rest of Leinster, Munster, Connacht, Ulster (part of)); School type (ETB, community/comprehensive, secondary); DEIS status (DEIS, non-DEIS); School enrolment size category (Small, 1-350 students; Medium, 351-600 students; Large, >600 students)
- Special: Region (Dublin, Rest of Leinster, Munster, Connacht, Ulster (part of)); School enrolment size category (Small, 1-35 pupils; Medium, 36-70 pupils; Large, >70 pupils).

### Recruitment

Schools were sent a letter inviting them to take part in the survey by post in January 2020. In this letter, schools were asked to confirm their participation by email by the 31<sup>st</sup> of January. At that point, a small number of schools confirmed their participation and a small number of schools declined participation. Further email and phone contact was made with non-responding schools in advance of the survey opening.

The survey opened on March 11<sup>th</sup> and both schools that had confirmed their participation and non-responding schools received two emails (a principal email and a teacher email) inviting them to take part in the survey. Both emails were sent to the school principal's email address with instructions for the principal to forward the teacher questionnaire to all registered teachers at the school.<sup>34</sup> Schools with low response rates at the beginning of April were sent reminder emails from the ERC and the Teacher Education Section of the Department of Education (DoE) and the survey closed on May 22<sup>nd</sup>.

### Data collection

Once the final draft of the survey was complete, survey links were created to send the survey to schools via email. Emails were sent out in batches. In total, six survey links were created at primary level, four survey links were created at post-primary level, and two survey links were created for special schools. Each school was sent an email containing the principal survey first, followed by an email containing the teacher survey. Each email contained instructions for the survey, alongside a link to the online version of the survey and a link to the PDF version of the survey on the ERC website.

Participants were asked to submit their responses within two weeks of receiving the emails. As the survey links were originally sent out on the 11<sup>th</sup> of March 2020, the opening of the survey coincided with school closures due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. This was an unprecedented event

33 Other evaluation studies or large-scale national or international assessments for which the ERC has responsibility for sampling.

34 Note, schools throughout Ireland closed from close of business on March 12<sup>th</sup> 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

which caused additional stress and increased workload and disruption in schools across the country and had a considerable impact on the response rate to the survey. Although the closing date of the survey was extended several times, eventually closing on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May 2020, the response rate was lower than anticipated, and it is likely that the low level of responses are partially attributable to the global pandemic and the inevitable disruption that it brought.

## 2.3 RESPONSE RATES

Overall response rates are contained in Table 2.1 and response rates are explained by school level and teacher/principal returns in the following sections.

**Table 2.1: Survey response rates**

Level	Respondent	Sample	Available for analysis	Response rate (%)
Primary	Principal	149	53	35.6
	Teacher	1684*	354	21.0
Post-primary	Principal	99	41	41.4
	Teacher	3717*	547	14.7
Special	Principal	29	11	37.9
	Teacher	313*	72	23.0

\* indicates best estimate of total number of sampled teachers, based on DoE-provided data and principal questionnaire data.

### Primary school response rates

#### School

After removal from the sample of one ineligible primary school (due to permanent closure of the school), 149 primary schools were eligible for participation there were 70 records entered for the primary principal questionnaire. After removal of duplicates and exclusion of cases with 90% or more missing data, there were 53 primary school questionnaires available for analysis. **This represents a return rate of 35.6%.**

#### Teacher

A total of 354 primary teacher surveys (from 61 schools) were retained for analysis after deletion of cases with 90% or more missing and deletion of duplicates. To determine the teacher response rate, it is necessary to know the total number of teachers in the sampled schools. There were two sources of information for primary teacher numbers in the schools. For schools with a returned principal questionnaire, the total number of teachers in the school was reported by the principal. For schools that did not return a principal questionnaire, an estimate of teacher numbers derived from data provided to the ERC by the Teacher Education Section of the DoE. Some analyses were conducted to examine, for those schools with both available, the degree to which teacher numbers reported by principals matched those provided by the DoE. There was some discrepancy in the figures, with slightly higher numbers reported by principals. However, although principal numbers were likely the most up-to-date available, these were only available for schools with a completed principal questionnaire.

The estimate of the total number of teachers in sampled primary schools was computed on the basis of principal data where available and DoE data where principal data were unavailable (i.e., school questionnaire not returned). This gives an expected total of 1684 teachers in the sampled schools. With 354 teacher questionnaires available for analysis, **this represents a response rate of 21%.**

## Post-primary school response rates

### School

The post-primary sample that was originally drawn comprised 100 schools. At the stage of study administration, two post-primary schools were identified as ineligible as they had converted to Colleges of Further Education. One additional post-primary school was added to the sample for convenience as the additional school was co-located with a sampled school and collaborative work practices across the two schools meant that it was not possible to separate the full cohort of teachers into those from the sampled school versus those from the non-sampled school. Therefore, the final sample of eligible post-primary schools comprised 99 schools. A total of 41 school questionnaire records are available for analysis after removal of duplicates and cases with 90% or more missing data. **This represents a response rate of 41.4%.**

### Teacher

After data cleaning and removal of duplicates, a total of 547 post-primary teacher surveys were available for analysis from 54 schools. Data on total teacher numbers were drawn from three sources: (a) the principal questionnaire when available; (b) data from Teacher Education Section for schools (excluding ETBI schools); (c) for ETBI schools with no other data available on teacher numbers, an estimate was computed from total student enrolment and an assumed teacher-student ratio of 1:19.

An estimate of the total number of teachers in the eligible sampled schools ( $n=99$ ) is 3717 (based on principal report if available, else DoE estimate if provided, otherwise estimate based on total enrolment divided by 19). While this is the best estimate available of the total number of teachers in the sampled schools, it is at best an approximation.

Assuming a total of 3717 teachers in the sampled schools and 547 surveys available for analysis, **this represents a response rate of 14.7%**. This is an approximation in the absence of detailed information on teacher numbers in ETB schools.

## Special school response rates

### School

One special school indicated that it had closed after sampling took place, resulting in 29 special schools eligible for participation. Twelve principal records were submitted from special schools with 11 of these retained for analysis. **This represents a response rate of 37.9%.**

### Teacher

Of the 82 records submitted for the special school teacher survey, 72 (from 14 schools) are retained for analysis after deletion of duplicates and those missing 90% or more of data.

As with primary and post-primary schools, there are two sources for the total number of teachers in each school. The first is the database provided by DoE Teacher Education Section and the second is the principal report of the number of teachers for schools with a completed principal questionnaire. These two sources do not provide identical information for schools with both available. For one sampled school, no DoE information is available on the number of teachers (similar to post-primary schools above, estimates are not available for ETB schools). Also, the school did not return a principal questionnaire (nor any teacher questionnaires) so no information is available on the total number of teachers in that school. In other sampled schools categorised as having 'small' enrolment size, the number of teachers ranges between 1 and 7.6 (based on DoE data). This school is one of the smaller 'small' schools so is likely to have 1 to 2 teachers.

Across the 28 eligible schools with DoE data available (i.e., one eligible school has no DoE data), the total number of teachers is 296, based on DoE records. Assuming the school with no DoE data may have 2 teachers, the total number of teachers in the 29 eligible schools is 298. Across the 11



schools with principal estimates available, there are 124 teachers according to the principal reports. In the same 11 schools, there are 109 teachers according to the DoE database.

As previously, an estimate of the total number of teachers across the sampled schools is computed as the principal value if available, the DoE value when the principal value is unavailable, and where neither of these is available, a value is assigned based on the number of teachers in schools of similar enrolment size. This gives an expected total number of teachers in the sampled schools as 313. Given 72 teacher questionnaires available for analysis, **this represents a response rate of 23%.**

## 2.4 WEIGHTING, CODING, AND DATA ANALYSIS

### Sampling weights

Although response rates to the current survey were low, much is known about the characteristics of the responding schools compared to the schools in the population. This information can be used to compute school and teacher weights which allow the survey responses to be weighted in such a way as to be representative of the population. Note that survey weights do not account for all possible characteristics of schools and also weights cannot correct for low response rates; rather, weights allow for some generalisation to be made from the sample to the population. The impact of low response rates is that the precision of estimates is reduced. The remainder of this section presents some technical information on the computation of weights for the current analysis and may be of less interest to the general reader.

At primary level, school-based weights were computed on the basis of the percentages of schools represented in each of 8 category combinations (region and DEIS status) (see Appendix 1 Table A1.1 for population and achieved sample numbers). The weight consists of the proportion of schools in the population in each category combination divided by that proportion in the sample. For example: there are 11 Dublin, non-DEIS, schools in the sample, and 282 such schools in the population. The weight for these eleven schools is  $(282/11) = 26.64$ ; i.e., each such school represents 26.64 similar schools in the population. For analysis purposes, the weight was standardised (divided by the mean of the weights) so that the N would not be artificially inflated, thereby increasing the risk of a type I error (inferring that a difference is statistically significant when, in fact, the difference is not significant).

The calculation of the teacher weight required information on the numbers of teachers in the schools. Exact teacher numbers in schools are not published, therefore, from one of three sources of information, a 'best estimate' of the teacher numbers in each school was generated:

- (a) For schools **with a completed principal questionnaire**, the 'best estimate' of the number of teachers is the principal's response to the item asking about the number of teachers in the school.
- (b) For **non-ETB schools, without a completed principal questionnaire**, the number of teachers provided by the DoE was used at the 'best estimate'.
- (c) For **ETB schools, without a completed questionnaire**, a 'best estimate' was computed on the basis of total enrolment size and, on the advice of the DoE, an assumed teacher-student ratio of 1:19.

Teacher non-response was then computed by dividing the 'best estimate of the number of teachers in the school' by 'the number of teachers returning a questionnaire'.

At primary level, a teacher-based weight was computed by multiplying the school-based weight<sup>35</sup> by the teacher non-response adjustment, and then standardising the result. Analysis of the impact of applying teacher-based weights to the computation of sample statistics (e.g., frequency of

35 If at least one teacher responded, the school was then considered to have responded for the purposes of the teacher weight.

teacher gender) shows that compared to using an unweighted teacher dataset, application of the weights results in sample statistics that are more in line with published population statistics<sup>36</sup> for the background characteristics examined.

At post-primary level, school-based weights were computed on the basis of the percentages of schools represented in each of four category combinations (school sector and DEIS status) and then standardised. The calculation of the teacher-based weight for post-primary schools did not follow precisely the same procedure as for the primary school teacher weight due to the larger variation in total numbers of teachers in each post-primary school and the larger variations in non-response. To adjust for some schools having a much larger response rate than others (and thereby contributing more to the weights), the teacher non-response component was adjusted by proportionally capping the response rate to 10. A teacher-based weight was then computed by multiplying the school-based weight<sup>37</sup> by the adjusted teacher non-response component and the result was standardised. Similar to the analysis of the teacher-based weight for the primary schools, examination of published statistics<sup>38</sup> compared to sample statistics showed that the weights appear to work robustly given the data and response rates that are available.

At the special school level, school-based weights were computed on the basis of the percentages of schools represented in each of six category combinations (region and school enrolment) and then standardised. The calculation of the teacher-based weight for special school followed the same procedure as that done for post-primary school teachers where the teacher non-response component was adjusted by proportionally capping the response rate to 10. A teacher-based weight was then computed by multiplying the school-based weight<sup>39</sup> by the adjusted teacher non-response component and the result was standardised. Data provided by the DoE on gender breakdown of teachers in special schools enabled the weights to be checked and on examination the weights appear to work robustly given the data and response rates that are available.

All analyses of the TPL survey data are weighted using these weights. While both the school and teacher survey datasets are weighted for analyses to reflect the characteristics of the populations more broadly, results from school principals or teachers cannot be generalised to the population since the extent to which responses may be biased on factors relating to TPL and wellbeing is not possible to determine empirically. The survey was conducted at a time of unprecedented upheaval in the Irish education system (as a result of school closures associated with COVID-19) and therefore teacher and principal responses may not accurately reflect their attitudes and practices at times of greater stability.

## Coding of open-ended items

Six Excel files were created for coding the open-ended responses. Separate files were created for each of the following: primary principal, primary teacher, post-primary principal, post-primary teacher, special school principal, and special school teacher. The first sheet in each file consisted of a codebook containing information on the codes that were used for each question. Subsequent sheets contained responses to each of the open-ended questions. Each sheet included a columns containing the responses submitted to the question and a column for each of the codes used for the responses to that question.

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36 Government of Ireland (2020). Teacher Statistics. Retrieved Jan 2020 at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c97fbd-teacher-statistics/>

37 If a teacher responded the school was then considered to have responded for the purposes of the teacher weight.

38 Government of Ireland (2020). Teacher Statistics. Retrieved Jan 2020 at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c97fbd-teacher-statistics/>

39 If a teacher responded the school was then considered to have responded for the purposes of the teacher weight.

Responses for each open-ended question (along with their corresponding TPL ID and roll number) were exported from SPSS into Excel. An inductive approach was taken when coding the data. Starting with the primary principal file, the researcher responsible for qualitative coding of open-ended items read the responses for each question and recurring phrases or sentiments in the responses were noted. The researcher re-read their notes and began to create some preliminary codes for each question in the data set. Each response was given either a '1' or a '0' for each code ('1' if the response was relevant to that particular code and '0' if it was not).

Codes for each question were refined through discussion with other members of the TPL research team. Once the coding for the primary principal file was complete, coding for each of the questions in the remaining five files took place. Where relevant, similar codes were applied across data files for responses to each open-ended question; however, in certain files some codes were removed (as they were not relevant) and new codes were added (as new themes and ideas relevant to the particular school level were noted). Any removal or addition of codes was noted as analysis progressed. Once coding was complete, the files were exported back into SPSS where frequencies could be run to determine reoccurring themes in the data sets for principals and teachers across each school level.

## **Data analysis**

Data analysis was conducted in SPSS 27. Descriptive statistics are presented in Chapters 3 to 7 of this report. In a limited number of instances, tests of statistical significance (e.g., chi-square tests) were conducted on groups of interest, e.g., comparisons of responses from principals and teachers working in DEIS versus non-DEIS schools.

# CHAPTER 3:

## A profile of principals and teachers

This chapter provides a profile of the primary, post-primary, and special school principals and teachers who responded to the survey of teachers' professional learning (TPL). The results of this chapter are presented in seven sections:

- Current roles and responsibilities;
- Gender;
- Age;
- Teaching experience;
- Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and additional qualifications;
- Employment status; and
- Job satisfaction, stress, and support.

Results are weighted (see Chapter 2, Section 2.4) in order to reflect the characteristics of the population of principals and teachers in primary, special, and post-primary schools in the country<sup>40</sup>. In this chapter, some findings are presented separately for DEIS and non-DEIS schools. Analysis by DEIS status are provided for primary and post-primary schools only as special schools are not eligible for additional supports under the DEIS programme (DES, 2017).

### 3.1 CURRENT ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Table 3.1 presents a breakdown of roles and responsibilities for respondents to the principal questionnaire. Across primary, post-primary, and special schools, a very large majority of respondents completing the principal questionnaire held the post of 'Principal' (Table 3.1). About one-in-twelve primary school respondents indicated that they held another role (such as Deputy Principal or Assistant Principal, Table 3.1) but this was less common amongst special school and post-primary school respondents. Given that almost all respondents were principals, the term principal is used throughout this report to refer to respondents to the principal questionnaire (even though a small minority of respondents were Deputy Principals or Assistant Principals).

At primary level, 58% of the principals described their role as a 'Teaching Principal/Deputy Principal' (rather than 'Administrative') compared to only 2% at post-primary level and 13% in special schools (Table 3.1). Two-fifths of teaching principals at primary level reported teaching pupils at a single grade while about three-fifths taught across multiple grades (Table 3.2). Amongst principals at post-primary level who reported having teaching responsibilities, all indicated that they taught multiple years (Table 3.2). Given the very low number of principals in special schools who reported having teaching responsibilities, a detailed breakdown is not shown in Table 3.2. In summary, it was rare for special school principals to have teaching responsibilities and for the very small number who did, they reported teaching older students, aged 13 and above.

Turning to teacher responses to items asking about multi-grade teaching, two-thirds of primary teachers reported teaching multiple grades and almost all post-primary teachers (98%) reported teaching across year levels, see Table 3.2.

40 As discussed in Chapter 2, the survey datasets are weighted to reflect the characteristics of the population more broadly. However, the capacity to generalise from the sample to the population is limited by the low response rates as it is not possible to determine how responses may be biased according to a variety of factors. Appendix 1 Table A1.1 provides a comparison between the sampled schools and the population on various characteristics. As explained in Chapter 2, survey data were compared to published statistics on the gender breakdown of the teaching workforce. These analyses showed that weights appear to work robustly given the available data and response rates.

**Table 3.1: Percentages of principals' current role and responsibilities**

	Primary (n=53)	Post-primary (n=41)	Special (n=11)
Principal	92.4	97.7	94.4
Other (e.g., DP, AP)	7.6	2.3	5.6
Administrative	42.3	97.7	87.5
Teaching	57.7	2.3	12.5

Note. DP is Deputy Principal and AP is Assistant Principal.

Table 3.2 presents details of the percentages of teaching principals and teachers by the class/year they teach. Although based on a small absolute number (n=27), there is a higher percentage of teaching principals at primary level teaching senior classes (Fifth class 30%; Sixth class 30%) compared to junior classes (Junior Infants 17%; Senior Infants 20%). Just over 40% of these primary level teaching principals reported being a special education teacher.

No post-primary principals reported being a special education teacher (Table 3.2). Of the seven post-primary principals who reported that they teach, more than half indicated that they taught Fifth year students, about a quarter indicated teaching Transition year students, and a small minority reported teaching First years, Third years, or Sixth years. No post-primary principal reported teaching Second years (Table 3.2). From these findings, it appears that post-primary principals are much less likely than their primary counterparts to have a teaching role and when this occurs, it tends to be teaching of Fifth year or Transition year classes.

**Table 3.2: Percentages of teaching principals and teachers teaching more than one class/year and the class/year they teach in primary and post-primary schools<sup>a</sup>**

	Primary		Post-primary	
	Principals	Teachers	Principals	Teachers
	(n=27)	(n=352)	(n=7) <sup>b</sup>	(n=547)
	%	%	%	%
Does not teach multiple grade/year	42.5	34.1	0.0	1.8
Teaches multiple grade/year	57.5	65.9	100.0	98.2
<b>Broken down by class/year</b>	<b>(n=27)</b>	<b>(n=352)</b>	<b>(n=7)</b>	<b>(n=547)</b>
Junior Infants	17.3	9.3	0.0	0.0
Senior Infants	20.0	11.8	0.0	0.0
First class/year	16.3	10.0	14.3	85.4
Second class/year	13.2	14.4	0.0	83.1
Third class/year	17.0	12.1	14.2	83.9
Fourth class/TY	28.2	14.1	28.6	72.4
Fifth class/year	30.1	9.8	57.2	77.7
Sixth class/year	30.1	10.4	14.2	77.7
Special class	0.0	2.2	0.0	12.9
Special education teacher	42.5	34.1	0.0	22.4

<sup>a</sup>All teaching in special schools covered multiple years.

<sup>b</sup>According to Table 3.1 above, 2.3% of post-primary principals were 'Teaching Principals'. However, a higher percentage reported currently teaching a year group. It is unclear why this difference arose but may relate to principals who provided substitute cover for absent teachers.

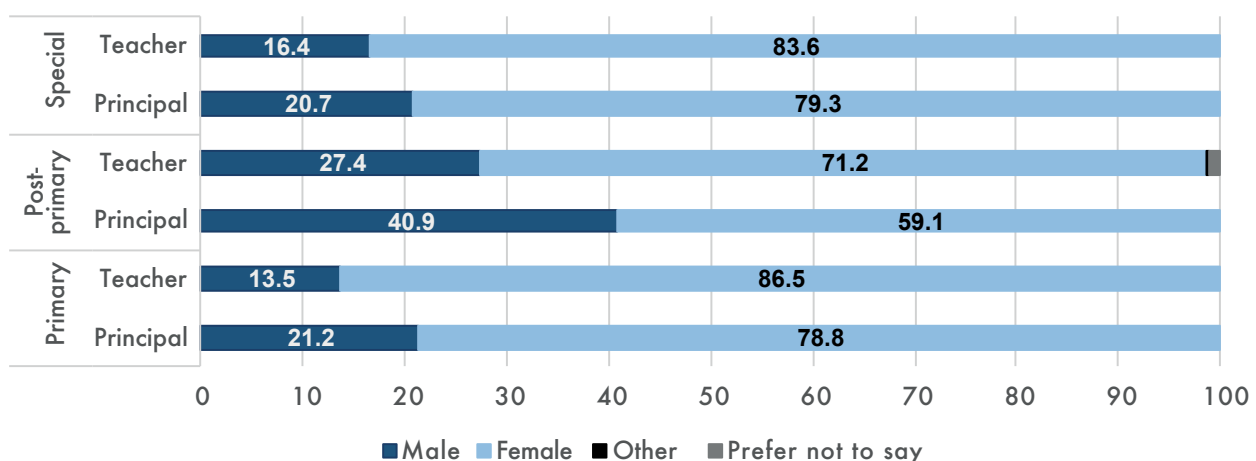
One-third of primary teachers reported that they are special education teachers (Table 3.2). A further 2% indicated that they were special class teachers. Amongst teachers teaching mainstream classes, there is a fairly even distribution across grade levels, ranging from 9% to 14% (Table 3.2).

About one-fifth of post-primary teachers reported being a special education teacher; a further one-eighth indicated that they taught a special class (Table 3.2). Excluding Transition year, there is an even distribution of teachers teaching across the years; the percentages range from 78% to 85%. A slightly lower percentage of teachers (72%) reported teaching Transition year students (Table 3.2).

## 3.2 GENDER

Survey respondents were asked to indicate their gender by selecting one response from a list of four options: female; male; other (including non-binary, agender, and gender fluid); or prefer not to say. Figure 3.1 shows that a large majority of respondents in each group were female. At primary school level, females comprised 87% of the teachers and 79% of the principals. The gender breakdown in special schools was similar to that in primary schools (84% of teachers were female and 79% of principals). At post-primary level, 71% of teachers and 59% of principals indicated that they were female; a tiny minority of post-primary teachers selected response options 'other' and 'prefer not to say' (Figure 3.1).

**Figure 3.1: Principal and teachers' gender in primary, post-primary, and special schools (percentages)**



\* (includes non-binary, agender, gender fluid)

Turning to special education teachers (not shown in Figure 3.1), females comprised 84% of the special education teachers<sup>41</sup> at primary level and 74% at post-primary level (see Appendix 2, Table A2.1).

41 The analysis carried out on special education teachers was based on teachers who ticked 'special education teacher' (Q15 on the primary teacher questionnaire and Q14 on the post-primary teacher questionnaire). Due to the very small absolute number of primary principals who ticked 'special education teacher', they were not included in the analysis of special education teachers.



### 3.3 AGE

Table 3.3 shows the age breakdown of principals and teachers in primary, post-primary, and special schools. At primary level, three-quarters of principals were in the 40-59 age range with a very small percentage under 30 (2%) or aged 60 or over (6%). For primary teachers, the largest group was the 30-39 age group (44%), with a further quarter aged between 40 and 49. Thus while three-quarters of primary principals were aged between 40 and 59, a majority of primary teachers (70%) were aged between 30 and 49. While one-in-six primary teachers was aged 29 or less, it was rare for primary principals to be aged less than 30 (Table 3.3).

At post-primary level, half of the principals were in the 40-49 age group and a further 47% were aged 50 or above (Table 3.3). Thus, at post-primary level, virtually all principals were aged 40 or more, and almost half were aged 50 or more indicating that post-primary principals tend to be older than their primary counterparts where one-in-five principals was aged less than 40.

Turning to post-primary teachers, approximately one-third of post-primary teachers were in the 40-49 age group with a further 29% in the 30-39 age group and 22% in the 50-59 age group. As with principals, Table 3.3 shows evidence of an older teaching workforce at post-primary level compared to primary. While 14% of primary teachers are aged 50 or over, at post-primary level, 26% of teachers are in this age group (Table 3.3). Conversely, while 60% of primary teachers are aged less than 40, 40% of post-primary teachers are aged less than 40.

Amongst principals in special schools, the largest age group was the 50-59 age group (57%) with no principals under the age of 30 or aged 60 or over (Table 3.3). Approximately one-third of special school teachers were in the 30-39 age group with a further 24% in each of the next two age groups (40-49 and 50-59). A higher percentage of special school teachers (8%) were aged 60 or over compared to primary (2%) or post-primary (4%).

**Table 3.3: Principal and teachers' age (by six categories) in primary, post-primary, and special schools (percentages)**

	Primary		Post-primary		Special	
	Principal	Teacher	Principal	Teacher	Principal	Teacher
<i>Age category</i>	(n=51)	(n=339)	(n=39)	(n=547)	(n=11)	(n=72)
Under 25	0.0	4.5	0.0	2.2	0.0	0.0
25 – 29	1.5	12.1	0.0	9.0	0.0	9.9
30 – 39	17.0	43.5	2.4	28.9	32.1	34.4
40 – 49	40.9	25.6	50.6	34.2	11.6	23.5
50 – 59	34.2	12.6	39.7	22.1	56.3	23.8
60 or over	6.4	1.7	7.3	3.5	0.0	8.4

### 3.4 TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Principals and teachers were asked to indicate how long they had been working as a teacher overall, as a teacher in their current school, and, as a principal (where relevant). Table 3.4 presents findings for principals in primary, post-primary, and special schools. At primary and post-primary levels, over two-thirds of the principals responding to the survey had over 20 years' teaching experience (67% and 77% respectively), while the percentage in special schools with this level of experience was somewhat lower (55%). One-quarter of primary school principals had only one year's experience as a principal compared to 7% of principals in post-primary schools. Over one-third of principals in post-primary schools had two to five years' experience as a principal and a further 29% had six to 10 years' experience as a principal. None of the principals in special schools had more than 20 years' experience as a principal, compared to 59% of principals in post-primary schools and 8% at primary level (Table 3.4).

The teaching experience of teachers is presented in Table 3.5. While there is a small percentage of teachers at primary level having only one years' experience (4%), there is generally an even distribution of years of experience as a teacher (ranging between 14% and 19% across the available options). Similarly at post-primary level, there is a small percentage of teachers with one year's experience as a teacher (3%), with a fairly even distribution across the two to twenty years' experience (ranging between 11% and 22% across the year groups) but with a higher percentage (33%) of teachers having more than 20 years' experience as a teacher. The teaching experience of teachers in special schools is similar to that of teachers in primary schools. At primary and post-primary levels, close to two-thirds of the teachers had been teaching in their current school since 2014 -2015 academic year or earlier with a slightly lower percentage for teachers in special schools (58%).

**Table 3.4: Principals' teaching experience (experience as a teacher, as a principal and length of service in their current school) in primary, post-primary, and special schools (percentages)**

	Primary (n=51)	Post-primary (n=39)	Special (n=11)
<i>Experience as a teacher (overall)</i>			
1 – 5 years	1.5	0.0	0.0
6 – 10 years	3.0	2.4	19.6
11 – 20 years	28.5	20.5	25.4
More than 20 years	67.0	77.1	55.0
<i>Experience as a principal (overall)</i>			
1 year (i.e., first year)	25.5	7.2	33.4
2 – 5 years	23.5	35.0	21.3
6 – 10 years	18.2	28.9	6.0
11 – 15 years	12.4	21.7	12.5
16 – 20 years	12.4	2.4	26.9
More than 20 years	8.0	4.8	0.0
<i>Year of appointment (as teacher OR principal) to current school</i>			
2019 – 2020	0.0	4.8	12.9
2018 – 2019	6.2	4.8	0.0
2017 – 2018	4.4	9.6	5.6
2016 – 2017	1.5	6.0	0.0
2015 – 2016	8.6	4.8	22.4
2014 – 2015 or earlier	79.3	69.9	59.1

Table 3.6 provides a breakdown by DEIS status of the year of appointment for principals and teachers. At primary level, approximately 80% of principals in DEIS and non-DEIS schools were appointed to their current school in the academic year 2014/2015 or earlier. At post-primary level, 65% of non-DEIS principals and 86% of DEIS principals are in their current school since 2014/2015 or earlier (the difference is not statistically significant).

Approximately two-thirds of post-primary teachers in both DEIS and non-DEIS schools have been in their current school since 2014/2015 or earlier (Table 3.6). At primary level, 65% of non-DEIS teachers, compared to 54% of DEIS teachers have been in their current school since 2014/2015 or earlier. A chi-square test showed that the difference is statistically significant ( $\chi^2=12.044$ ;  $df=5$ ;  $p=0.034$ ), indicating that teachers in non-DEIS primary schools are more likely to have been working in their current school longer than teachers in DEIS primary schools. Conversely, teachers in DEIS primary schools are more likely to have been more recently appointed to their current school although focusing on the last two academic years only, there is very little difference between the two with 21% of non-DEIS teachers and 23% of DEIS teachers appointed to their current primary school in the last two academic years (Table 3.6).

**Table 3.5: Teachers' teaching experience (experience as a teacher and length of service in their current school) in primary, post-primary, and special schools (percentages)**

	Primary	Post-primary	Special
<i>Experience as a teacher (overall)</i>	(n=354)	(n=547)	(n=72)
1 year (i.e., first year)	4.1	3.3	2.3
2 – 5 years	13.5	11.2	18.8
6 – 10 years	19.1	16.2	14.4
11 – 15 years	24.8	21.9	26.3
16 – 20 years	19.3	14.1	18.2
More than 20 years	19.2	33.3	20.1
<i>Year of appointment to current school</i>			
2019 – 2020	13.3	10.4	13.6
2018 – 2019	8.4	9.0	10.2
2017 – 2018	5.7	6.5	1.2
2016 – 2017	6.3	6.2	8.9
2015 – 2016	4.0	2.1	8.7
2014 – 2015 or earlier	62.4	65.8	57.5

**Table 3.6: Year of appointment (as teacher or principal) to current school by DEIS status, primary and post-primary schools (percentages appointed by year)**

	Primary schools				Post-primary schools			
	Principals		Teachers		Principals		Teachers	
	Non-DEIS	DEIS	Non-DEIS	DEIS	Non-DEIS	DEIS	Non-DEIS	DEIS
	(n=41)	(n=12)	(n=278)	(n=76)	(n=29)	(n=10)	(n=389)	(n=145)
2019 – 2020	0.0	0.0	11.9	18.3	6.4	0.0	11.8	6.8
2018 – 2019	8.1	16.6	9.5	4.2	6.5	0.0	7.9	12.2
2017 – 2018	0.0	0.0	4.8	8.9	12.9	0.0	6.0	7.9
2016 – 2017	2.0	0.0	6.3	6.2	3.2	14.2	7.2	3.6
2015 – 2016	11.2	0.0	2.7	8.6	6.4	0.0	2.0	2.3
2014 – 2015 or earlier	78.7	81.4	64.8	53.8	64.5	85.8	65.3	67.2

### 3.5 INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION AND ADDITIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

Table 3.7 presents details on the academic year in which principals and teachers completed Initial Teacher Education (ITE). All of the responding principals in post-primary schools had completed ITE by 2009, compared to 93% of the principals in primary schools and 86% in special schools. By 2015, nearly nine-in-ten of the teachers had completed their ITE (88% of teachers in primary schools, 91% in post-primary schools and 92% in special schools).

Respondents were asked if they had any additional formal (certified) qualifications relating to their work as a teacher and to tick all that applied. The data was recoded to represent the 'highest level of additional qualifications'. For example, if 'Ph.D.' was ticked it was assumed the qualifications below had already been attained and so on. The category of 'other' includes respondents who ticked 'other' but did not provide detail on courses completed and also includes those who specified the name of a qualification in a field of study not relevant to their job.

**Table 3.7: Year completed initial teacher education, principals and teachers in primary, post-primary, and special schools (percentages)**

	Primary		Post-primary		Special	
	Principal	Teacher	Principal	Teacher	Principal	Teacher
	(n=52)	(n=354)	(n=38)	(n=547)	(n=11)	(n=72)
Before 1990	29.5	11.2	39.7	17.3	39.7	13.8
1990 – 1999	33.9	14.5	42.2	22.1	15.3	18.5
2000 – 2009	29.2	39.2	18.1	31.6	31.2	33.9
2010 – 2015	5.9	23.1	0.0	19.7	13.8	25.3
2016 – 2018	1.5	8.1	0.0	7.4	0.0	7.3
2019	0.0	3.9	0.0	1.9	0.0	1.2

Table 3.8 shows that 35% of primary school principals had no additional qualifications. Conversely, all post-primary principals reported having additional qualifications, with 60% reporting a Masters level qualification (i.e., M.Ed., M.Sc. (Ed), or M.A. (Ed)). Nearly half of primary school teachers had no additional qualifications compared to a quarter of post-primary and special school teachers. One-eighth of special school principals indicated that they had no additional qualifications (Table 3.8).

**Table 3.8: Highest levels of additional qualifications reported by teachers and principals**

	Primary		Post-primary		Special	
	Principal	Teacher	Principal	Teacher	Principal	Teacher
	(n=51)	(n=354)	(n=39)	(n=547)	(n=11)	(n=72)
Ph.D./Ed.D.	0.0	0.0	2.4	2.8	0.0	0.0
Masters <sup>a</sup>	18.1	13.3	60.3	22.6	23.5	20.0
Cert/Diploma	43.7	36.5	34.9	46.2	63.6	54.2
Other <sup>b</sup>	3.1	2.3	2.4	3.7	0.0	2.9
No additional qualifications	35.1	47.9	0.0	24.6	12.9	22.9

<sup>a</sup>Masters includes M.Ed., M.Sc. (Ed.), M.A. (Ed).

<sup>b</sup>Includes other not specified/masters subject specific, not relevant to job.

Turning to special education teachers, percentages with or without additional qualifications were broadly in line with the percentages across the sample generally. About half of special education teachers at primary level reported that they had no additional qualifications relevant to their role while about two-fifths indicated that they had an additional qualification at the level of Cert/Diploma (Table A2.2, Appendix 2). At post-primary level, almost a quarter of special education teachers had no additional relevant qualifications, over half had an additional qualification at the level of Cert/Diploma, and one-quarter had a Masters qualification (see Table A2.2, Appendix 2).

### 3.6 EMPLOYMENT STATUS

The employment status of principals and teachers responding to the survey is presented in Table 3.9. All the principals at primary, post-primary, and special schools were employed on a full-time basis compared to about 90% of teachers (Table 3.9).

All or almost all principals indicated that they had a permanent contract (Table 3.9). Teacher contracts were more varied with at least 70% of primary and special school teachers indicating that they had a permanent contract compared to just 47% of post-primary teachers. A further 38% of post-primary teachers reported that they had a contract of indefinite duration. Similar percentages of teachers across the school types had fixed term contracts, either whole-time or part-time while, compared to their post-primary counterparts (1%), higher percentages of primary (5%) and special school (6%) teachers indicated that they were employed on a substitute basis (Table 3.9).

**Table 3.9: Employment status of principals and teachers in primary, post-primary, and special schools (percentages)**

	Primary		Post-primary		Special	
	Principal	Teacher	Principal	Teacher	Principal	Teacher
	(n=52)	(n=354)	(n=41)	(n=547)	(n=11)	(n=72)
Full-time	100.0	86.2	100.0	89.8	100.0	90.3
Part-time	0.0	13.8	0.0	10.2	0.0	9.7
Permanent	100.0	78.7	97.6	47.4	100.0	70.8
Contract of indefinite duration	0.0	2.7	2.4	37.9	0.0	7.4
Fixed term (whole-time)	0.0	11.8	0.0	8.5	0.0	12.0
Fixed term (part-time)	0.0	2.0	0.0	5.0	0.0	3.7
Substitute	0.0	4.7	0.0	1.2	0.0	6.2

Table 3.10 show the relationship between the type of contract teachers hold and their years of experience as a teacher and also their age. Approximately 18% of primary teachers on a fixed/substitute contract are in their first year of teaching with a further 41% having 2-5 years' experience as a teacher. Approximately half of the teachers in post-primary schools with a fixed/substitute contract have less than 6 years' experience as a teacher.

**Table 3.10: Teachers level of experience and age with employment status, in primary, post-primary, and special schools**

	Primary		Post-primary		Special	
	Permanent/ CDI <sup>a</sup>	Fixed <sup>b</sup>	Permanent/ CDI <sup>a</sup>	Fixed <sup>b</sup>	Permanent/ CDI <sup>a</sup>	Fixed <sup>b</sup>
	(n=288)	(n=66)	(n=467)	(n=80)	(n=56)	(n=16)
<b>Number of years as a teacher</b>						
1 year, i.e., this is my first year teaching	1.1	17.6	0.3	21.1	0.0	10.5
2-5 years	7.3	40.8	8.3	28.0	13.4	38.1
6-10 years	19.4	17.6	12.7	36.3	10.9	26.9
11-15 years	27.0	15.4	24.1	9.2	29.8	13.4
16-20 years	21.7	8.6	16.3	1.2	20.1	11.1
More than 20 years	23.5	0.0	38.3	4.2	25.8	0.0
<b>Age group</b>						
Under 25	1.0	20.1	0.2	13.7	0.0	0.0
25-29	8.0	29.9	6.3	25.1	5.5	25.6
30-39	44.2	40.6	27.2	38.7	27.9	57.7
40-49	30.8	2.6	37.2	16.7	28.5	5.7
50-59	14.0	6.8	25.0	5.8	27.3	11.1
Over 60	2.1	0.0	4.1	0.0	10.8	0.0

<sup>a</sup>Permanent or contract of indefinite duration (CDI).

<sup>b</sup>Fixed term contract including whole-time, part-time, or substitute.

At primary level approximately half of the teacher on a fixed/substitute contract are under the age of 30 and this compares to 39% in post-primary schools and 26% in special schools (Table 3.10). Chi-square tests<sup>42</sup> revealed that there was a significant relationship between teachers' level of experience and their age with the type of contract they hold. The younger and less experienced teachers were more likely to have a fixed term contract (whole-time or part-time) or be a substitute teacher.

### 3.7 JOB SATISFACTION, STRESS, AND SUPPORT

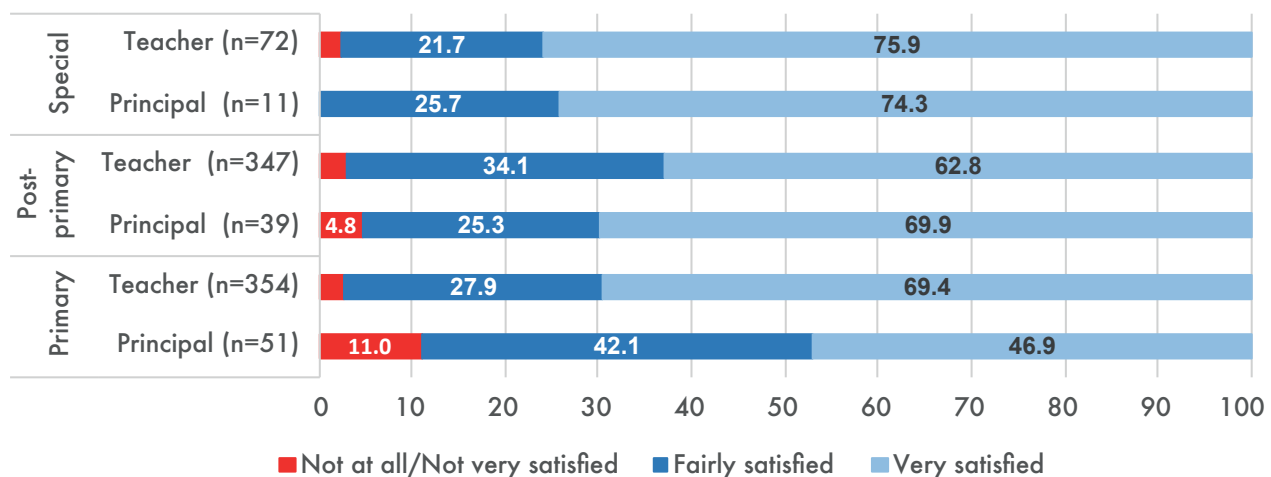
Respondents were asked a number of questions regarding job satisfaction, stress in the job, and how supported they feel in their role.

#### Job satisfaction

At primary school level, 47% of principals reported being 'very' satisfied with their job compared to 69% of teachers (Figure 3.2). Compared to primary principals, a somewhat higher percentage of post-primary principals (70%) reported that they were 'very' satisfied with their job. The percentage of 'very' satisfied teachers at post-primary level (63%) was very similar to the corresponding percentage at primary level (69%). Three-quarters of special school principals indicated that they were 'very' satisfied with their job (74%); the corresponding percentage for special school teachers was very similar (76%).

Turning to those who reported that their job was 'not at all' or 'not very' satisfying, more than one-in-ten primary principals was in this category (shown in red in Figure 3.2). It was much less common for respondents in other groups to indicate that their job was 'not at all' or 'not very' satisfying, ranging from about 2% of special school teachers and about 3% of primary and post-primary teachers, to about 5% of post-primary principals. No special school principals indicated that their job was 'not at all' or 'not very' satisfying (Figure 3.2).

**Figure 3.2: Principal and teachers' job satisfaction, primary, post-primary, and special schools (percentages)**



Note. Where values are less than 4%, value labels are not shown.

For primary and post-primary schools, Figure 3.3 presents principal and teacher levels of job satisfaction by school DEIS status. Similar percentages of principals in DEIS (49%) and non-DEIS (46%) primary schools reported being 'very' satisfied with their job. A higher percentage of non-DEIS principals (14%) than DEIS (<1%) reported being 'not at all' or 'not very' satisfied with their job.

42 Primary teachers with number of years as a teacher ( $\chi^2 = 102.994$  df=5;  $p < .001$ ) and with age group ( $\chi^2 = 85.050$ ; df=5;  $p < .001$ ); Post-primary teachers with number of years as a teacher ( $\chi^2 = 178.320$ ; df=5;  $p < .001$ ) and with age group ( $\chi^2 = 111.391$ ; df=5;  $p < .001$ ); Special school teachers with number of years as a teacher ( $\chi^2 = 17.972$ ; df=5;  $p = .003$ ) and with age group ( $\chi^2 = 13.915$ ; df=5;  $p = .008$ ).

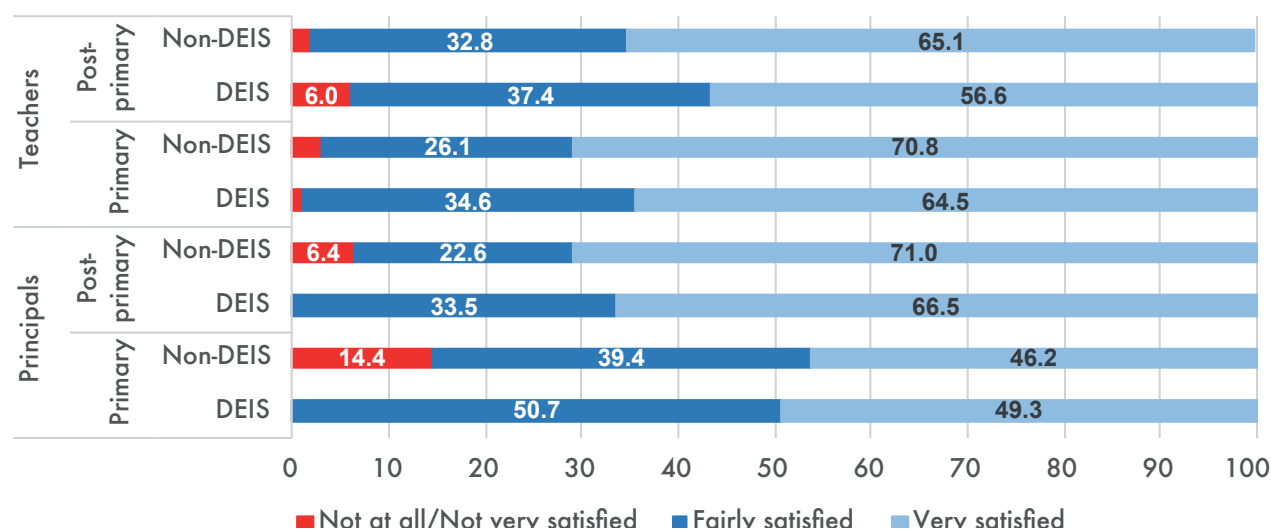


In post-primary schools, very similar percentages of principals in DEIS (67%) and non-DEIS schools (71%) indicated that they were ‘very’ satisfied with their job. Mirroring the pattern at primary level, a higher percentage of non-DEIS principals (6.4%) reported being ‘not at all’ or ‘not very’ satisfied with their job compared to less than 1% of DEIS principals.

Turning to levels of job satisfaction amongst teachers, a very small minority of teachers at primary level indicated that they were ‘not at all’ or ‘not very’ satisfied with their job (DEIS <1%, non-DEIS 3%). At post-primary level, a somewhat higher, albeit still very small, percentage of teachers in DEIS schools (6%) reported being ‘not at all/not very’ satisfied with their job; the corresponding percentage in non-DEIS schools was 2% (Figure 3.3).

Conversely, large majorities of primary and post-primary teachers in DEIS and non-DEIS schools reported that they were ‘very’ happy in their role; percentages were somewhat higher amongst primary teachers than post-primary with comparatively small differences between DEIS and non-DEIS schools (Figure 3.3). Nearly two-thirds of post-primary teachers in non-DEIS (65%) schools and more than half in DEIS schools (57%) reported being ‘very’ satisfied with their job. This compares to 71% of primary teachers in non-DEIS schools and 65% in DEIS schools.

**Figure 3.3: Principal and teachers’ satisfaction in their job, by school level and DEIS status (percentages)**



Note. Where values are less than 4%, value labels are not shown.

Further breakdown of principal and teacher job satisfaction is presented in Tables A2.3 to A2.8 (Appendix 2). Readers are reminded that the numbers in some groups are small (e.g., male principals). Therefore, limited generalisations can be drawn from findings of these analyses although they may serve as useful pointers for further research. Table A2.3 shows that amongst primary teachers, 15% of males reported that their job was ‘not at all’ or ‘not very’ satisfying compared to less than 1% of female primary teachers. There is some evidence at primary level that principals in medium-sized schools (81-200 pupils) were somewhat less likely than their counterparts in small or large schools to report that their job was ‘very’ satisfying (29% of principals in medium schools; 50% in small schools; 65% in large schools; Table A2.4), although numbers in each group are small.

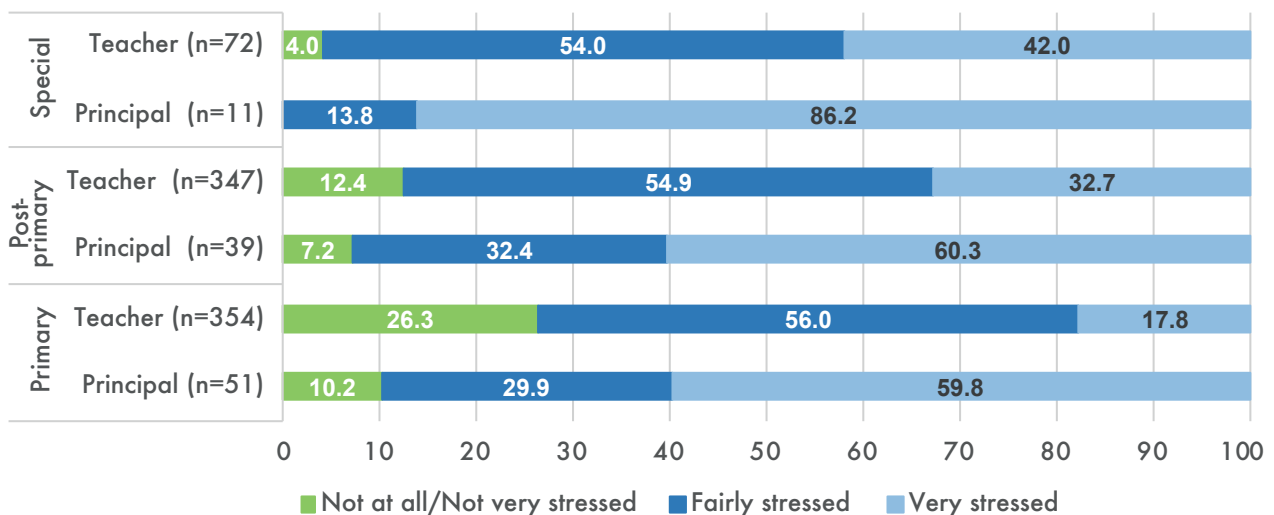
At post-primary level, principals in medium schools (351-600 students) were more likely to report their job was ‘not at all or ‘not very’ satisfying (15%) compared to principals in smaller (<350 students) or larger schools (601+ students). A majority of teachers across special schools of all enrolment sizes reported being ‘very’ satisfied (see Table A2.7).

## Stress in the job

Respondents were also asked 'how stressful is your job' and findings show comparatively large differences in reported levels of stress between principals and teachers and between teachers in different school levels. (In Figure 3.4, green is used for 'not at all'/'not very' stressed to denote low levels of stress as good). It should be noted that survey administration took place at a time of particular stress for teachers and principals as it coincided with school closures for COVID-19. It is therefore unclear whether levels of stress reported in this survey are indicative of broader levels of stress or are symptomatic of particular challenges faced in Spring 2020.

Approximately 60% of principals in primary schools reported being 'very' stressed in their job; a similar percentage of post-primary principals reported being 'very' stressed (Figure 3.4). In special schools, 86% of principals reported being 'very' stressed in their job. Thus across all school types, very high percentages of principals reported high levels of stress in their job.

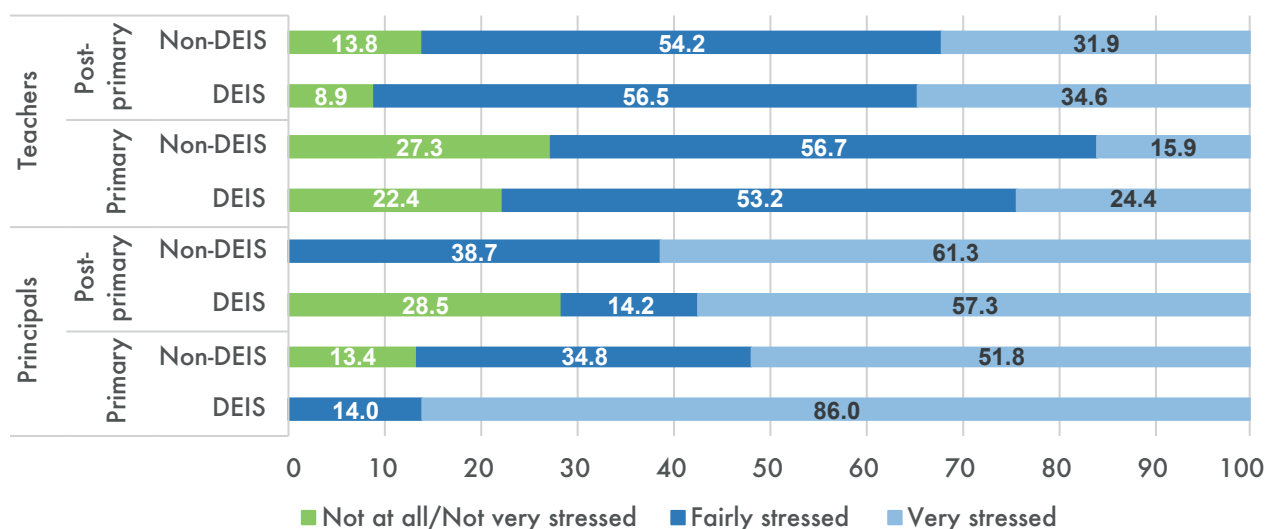
**Figure 3.4: Principal and teachers' stress in their job, primary, post-primary, and special schools (percentages)**



Less than one-fifth of primary school teachers reported being 'very' stressed compared to nearly one-third of post-primary teachers and 42% of special school teachers. Conversely, one-quarter of primary teachers indicated that they were 'not at all' or 'not very' stressed (Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.5 presents the level of stress in the job reported by principals and teachers in DEIS and non-DEIS schools. Although the difference between DEIS and non-DEIS schools is not statistically significant, there is some evidence of higher levels of stress amongst DEIS primary principals than amongst non-DEIS primary principals. A very large percentage of primary principals in DEIS schools (86%) indicated that they had 'very' high levels of stress in their role; the corresponding percentage in non-DEIS schools was 52%. While 13% of non-DEIS principals indicated that their role was 'not very' or 'not at all' stressful, no DEIS principals were in this group (Figure 3.5).

**Figure 3.5: Principal and teachers' stress in their job, by school level and DEIS status (percentages)**



About three-in-five post-primary principals reported 'very' high levels of stress in both DEIS and non-DEIS schools. About one-quarter of DEIS post-primary principals reported that their role was 'not very' or 'not at all' stressful (Figure 3.5).

Teachers were much less likely than principals to report high levels of stress associated with their role. However, about one-quarter of primary teachers in DEIS schools and nearly one-in-six in non-DEIS schools reported 'very' high levels of stress. About one-third of post-primary teachers reported 'very' high levels of stress with little difference between DEIS and non-DEIS schools.

Tables A2.8 to A2.13 (Appendix 2) provide further breakdown of principal/teacher stress. As previously noted, numbers in each analysis category are small. Approximately 36% of male teachers in primary schools reported that their job was 'not at all' or 'not very' stressful compared to 25% of female primary teachers. Approximately, 65% of female principals in primary schools reported that their job was 'very' stressful compared to 43% of male principals. At post-primary level, 72% of female principals reported that their job was 'very' stressful compared to 44% of male principals (Table A2.9).

Turning to principal stress by school enrolment size, approximately 72% of primary principals in medium-sized schools (81-200 pupils) reported being 'very' stressed in their job compared to 50% of principals in smaller schools (1-80 pupils) and 54% of principals in larger schools (201+ pupils; Table A2.10). Findings are broadly similar at post-primary level although based on a smaller number of responses (Table A2.11).

Amongst teachers, approximately 31% of teachers in larger primary schools reported their job was 'not at all' or 'not very' stressful compared to 21% in medium-sized schools and 14% in smaller schools (Table A2.10). At post-primary level, broadly equal percentages of teachers reported being 'not at all' or 'not very' stressed across school enrolment sizes (Table A2.11).

Teachers in small special schools (1-35 pupils) were somewhat more likely than their counterparts in larger special schools to indicate that their job was 'very' stressful (see Table A2.13). However, this finding is based on a comparatively low number of teachers in each enrolment size group. Approximately 16% of special education teachers at primary level and 39% at post-primary level indicated that they were 'very' stressed (see Table A2.8).

Looking at stress by post-primary school sector, 82% of principals in secondary schools reported that their job was 'very' stressful compared to 39% of principals in ETB schools (data were available on this variable for just four community schools so a breakdown is not provided). Approximately 48% of teachers in community schools reported that their job was 'very' stressful compared to 37% of teachers in ETB schools and 27% in secondary schools (see Table A2.12).

## Support received in their role

Respondents were asked ‘how supported do you feel in your job?’ and asked to indicate whether they felt ‘very’, ‘fairly’, or ‘not at all/not very’ supported. A large percentage of special school principals (60%) indicated that they felt ‘not at all’ or ‘not very’ supported (shown on red in Figure 3.6). The corresponding percentages in primary (36%) and post-primary (21%) schools were lower but nonetheless represent a sizeable minority of principals who felt inadequately supported in their roles (Figure 3.6).

Lower percentages of teachers (primary 12%; post-primary 16%; special school 10%) indicated that they felt ‘not at all’ or ‘not very’ supported. It is again difficult to ascertain the extent to which COVID-19 may have impacted on respondents’ perceptions of support and the extent to which particular supports may have been required at that time as a consequence of moving to online teaching and learning.

**Figure 3.6: Principal and teachers’ support in their job, primary, post-primary and special schools (percentages)**

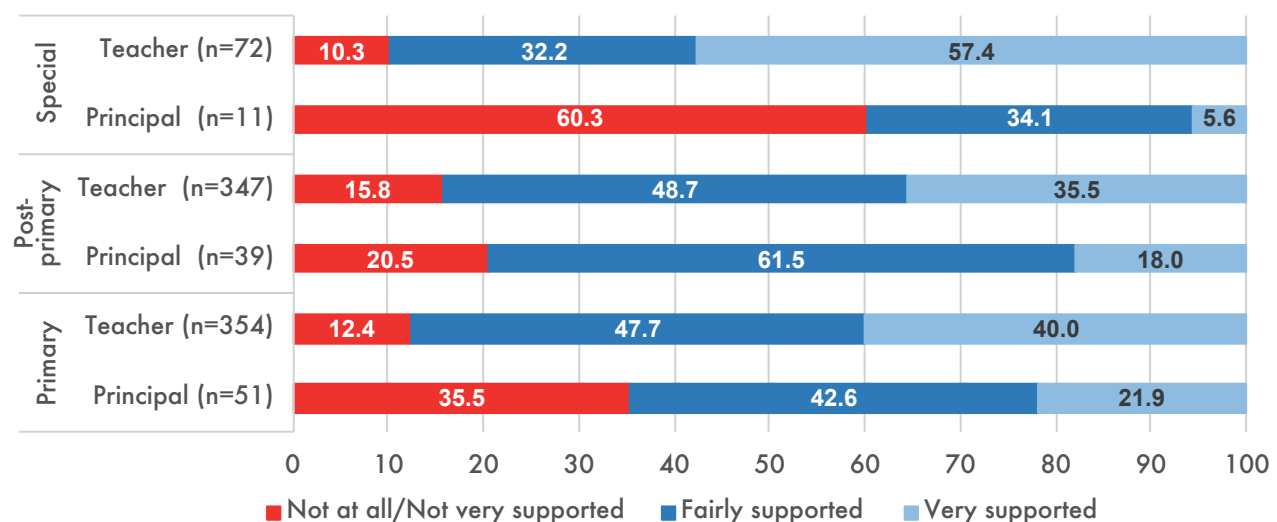
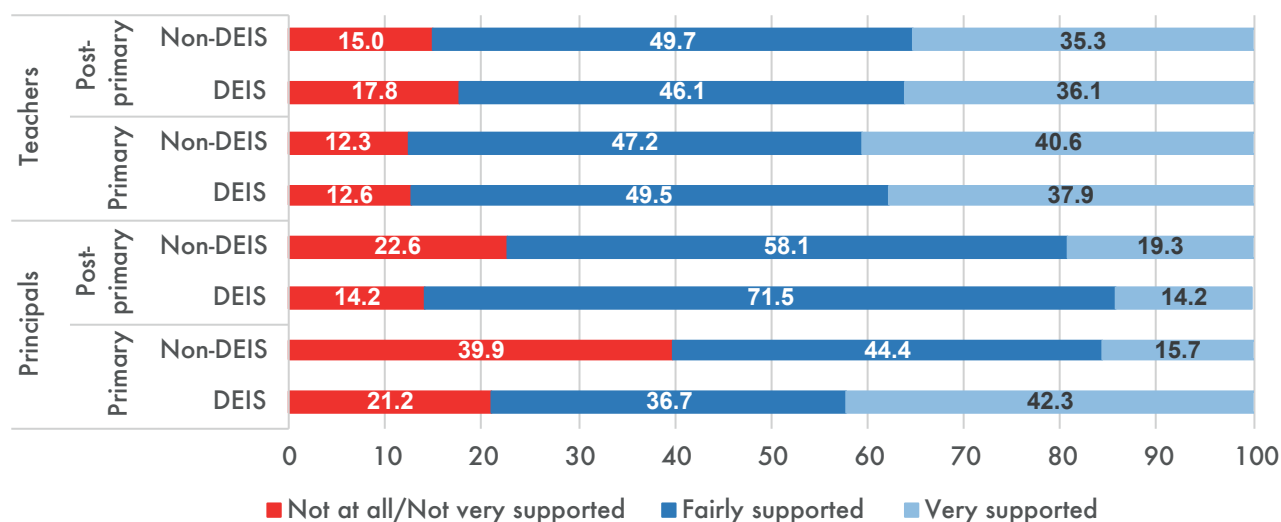


Figure 3.7 shows the breakdown by DEIS status of principal and teacher responses regarding perceptions of feeling supported in their role. Compared to their counterparts in non-DEIS schools (primary 40%, post-primary 23%), lower percentages of principals in DEIS schools at both primary (21%) and post-primary (14%) levels reported feeling ‘not at all’ or ‘not very’ supported. Conversely, principals in DEIS schools at primary level (42%) were much more likely to indicate that they felt ‘very’ supported; the corresponding percentage in non-DEIS schools was 16%. Differences are not statistically significant which may relate to the comparatively small sample sizes of DEIS schools. Percentages of teachers in each of the categories were very similar in DEIS and non-DEIS schools and at primary and post-primary levels (Figure 3.7).

**Figure 3.7: Principal and teachers' perceptions of support in their roles, by school level and DEIS status (percentages)**

Further breakdown of perceived job support is provided in Appendix 2. Approximately 56% of male principals in primary schools reported that they felt 'not at all' or 'not very' supported in their job compared to 30% of female primary principals (Table A2.14). As previously noted, the number of male principals was small ( $n=11$ ). The pattern was in the opposite direction at post-primary level where a somewhat larger percentage of female principals felt 'not at all' or 'not very' supported in their job (Table A2.14). Again, the number of male post-primary principals ( $n=15$ ) was small.

Turning to perceptions of support by school enrolment size, approximately 40% of primary principals in larger schools (201+ pupils) reported feeling 'very' supported in their job compared to 18% of principals in medium-sized schools (81-200 pupils) and just 6% of principals in small schools (1-80 pupils; Table A2.15). Conversely, a higher percentage (54%) of principals from small schools reported feeling 'not at all' or 'not very' supported. Amongst teachers, over half of those in small schools (57%), two-fifths in medium schools (44%), and over one-third in large schools (35%) reported that they felt 'very' supported in their job (Table A2.15).

Similar to the picture amongst primary principals, a higher percentage of post-primary principals from large schools reported feeling 'very' supported (36%) compared to their counterparts in medium (7%) or small (11%) schools (Table A2.16). Amongst post-primary teachers, perceptions of support were broadly similar across school enrolment sizes (Table A2.16) and sectors (Table A2.17).

A minority of special education teachers (16% at primary level, 19% at post-primary level) reported feeling 'not at all' or 'not very' supported in their role (Table A2.8). Percentages were broadly similar in special schools, where low percentages reported feeling 'not at all' or 'not very' supported (Table A2.18).

### 3.8 KEY POINTS FROM CHAPTER 3

- Primary school principals were much more likely than their post-primary or special school counterparts to report working as a teaching principal. Almost two-thirds of primary principals (compared to 2% of post-primary school and 13% of special school principals) indicated that they were teaching principals. Conversely, just two-fifths of primary principals were administrative principals compared to 98% of post-primary principals and 88% of special school principals.
- About two-fifths of primary principals who had teaching responsibilities reported working as a special education teacher. There was some evidence that teaching principals at primary level were more likely to have senior classes (Fourth class and above) compared to junior classes.

- A large majority of respondents was female. In primary and special schools, over 80% of teachers were female and more than three-quarters of principals were female. In post-primary schools, over 70% of teachers were female and about three-fifths of principals were female.
- Compared to post-primary (40%) and special school (44%), higher percentages of primary teachers (60%) were aged under 40. One-in-six primary teachers, one-in-nine post-primary teachers, and one-in-ten special school teachers was aged less than 30. Conversely, just 14% of primary teachers were aged 50 or over compared to 26% of post-primary teachers and 32% of special school teachers.
- Almost one-in-five primary principals and nearly one-in-three special school principals was aged less than 40. At post-primary level, 98% of principals were aged 40 or above and almost half were aged 50 or above.
- High levels of teaching experience were reported by school principals, particularly in post-primary schools where 77% of principals had over 20 years of teaching experience and just 7% had only one year's experience as a principal. At primary level, 67% of principals had over 20 years of teaching experience; one-quarter had one year's experience as a principal; and half had been appointed as principal within the last 5 years. In special schools, 55% of principals had over 20 years' experience as a teacher; one-third were in their first year as a principal; and half had been appointed as principal in the last 5 years.
- A large percentage of teachers in primary schools (48%) reported having no additional qualifications relevant to their role compared to teachers in post-primary and special schools (25% and 23%, respectively). All post-primary principals reported that they had additional qualifications compared to 35% of primary school principals and 13% of principals in special schools.
- Younger and less experienced teachers were more likely to have a fixed-term contract (whole-time or part-time) or to be a substitute teacher.
- High percentages of teachers and principals reported being 'very' satisfied with their job. However, at primary level, more than one-in-ten principals indicated that they were 'not at all' or 'not very' satisfied with their job and this was somewhat more likely in non-DEIS compared to DEIS schools.
- High percentages of principals (primary 60%; post-primary 60%; special 86%) reported that their job was 'very' stressful. Principals in primary DEIS schools were particularly likely to indicate high levels of stress with 86% reporting that their role was 'very' stressful (compared to 52% in non-DEIS schools).
- Teachers were less likely than principals to indicate that their role was 'very' stressful although one-fifth of primary teachers, one-third of post-primary teachers, and two-fifths of special school teachers categorised their job as 'very' stressful.
- A sizeable minority of primary (36%) and post-primary (21%) principals indicated that they felt 'not very' or 'not at all' supported in their role. Amongst special school principals, 60% reported feeling inadequately supported in their role.





# CHAPTER 4:

## A profile of schools and the school community

This chapter draws mainly on data from the principal questionnaire and presents a profile of the schools and the school community in which principals and teachers work. There are five sections outlining:

- Special education provision;
- Student background, behaviour, and attitudes;
- Parental involvement;
- School culture; and
- The community context.

### 4.1 SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

This section describes the provision of special education classes within mainstream schools (primary and post-primary) and the prevalence of students who have additional learning needs (in primary, post-primary, and special schools).

#### Special classes and types of special class

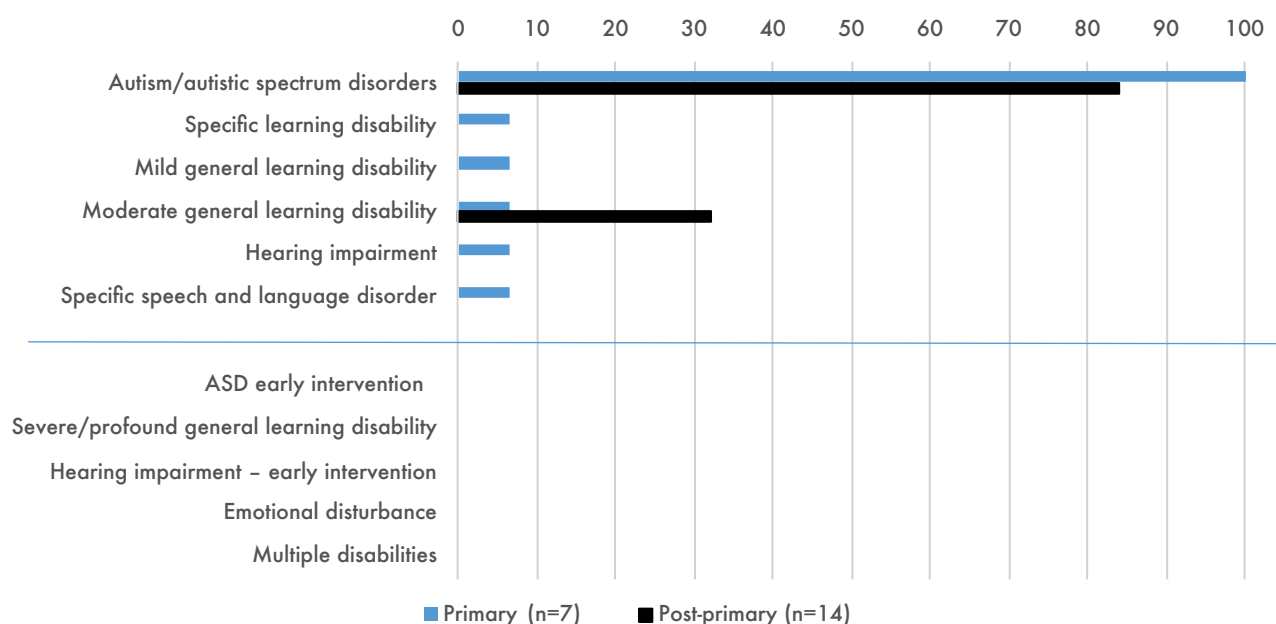
Principals of primary and post-primary schools were asked if their school had one or more special education classes. At primary level, approximately 13%<sup>43</sup> (n=7) of principals reported having one or more special education classes compared to 37% (n=14) at post-primary level. The percentage of post-primary principals reporting a special class was broadly in line with the population of post-primary schools, whereas the percentage of primary principals in the survey reporting a special class was considerably lower than in the population primary schools.

Figure 4.1 shows that amongst schools with special classes, the most common type of special class was an 'autism/autistic spectrum disorders' class. Of the 7 primary schools with a special class, all had a class for students with autism/autistic spectrum disorder. Of the 14 post-primary schools with a special class level, a large majority (84%) had a class for students with autism/autistic spectrum disorder.

The variety of special classes at primary level was greater than at post-primary. As well as 'autism/autistic spectrum disorders' classes, several additional types of special classes were present in the primary schools of at least one respondent (classes for students with: specific learning disabilities; mild general learning disabilities; moderate general learning disabilities; hearing impairment; and specific speech and language disorder). At post-primary level, special classes for students with moderate general learning disability were represented but other types of special class were not (Figure 4.1). None of the participating principals came from schools with classes for: ASD early intervention; severe/profound general learning disability; hearing impairment – early intervention; emotional disturbance; or multiple disabilities (Figure 4.1).

43 In the current academic year (based on September 2020), a total of 678 (21.8%) primary schools have one or more special classes out of a total of 3107 mainstream schools. At post-primary level, 284 (38.9%) schools have one or more special classes out of a total of 730 mainstream schools (NCSE, 2020).

**Figure 4.1: Of schools with at least one special class, percentages with special classes of various types (primary and post-primary schools)**



### Students with additional learning needs

Table 4.1 presents the prevalence of additional learning needs across primary and post-primary (with data for special schools presented separately in Table 4.2). At primary level, the most prevalent of the listed disabilities was the category 'specific learning disability'. Based on principals' reports, an average of just under 5% of primary pupils<sup>44</sup> had a specific learning disability and the average number of pupils per school in this category was 7.5 (Table 4.1). Across participating schools, the percentages of primary pupils in this category ranged from 0% to 22%.

At post-primary level, 'specific learning disability' was also the most commonly identified additional learning need. On average, 6.4% of post-primary students were identified as having a specific learning disability and the mean number of students per school was about 27 (Table 4.1). Percentages of students with specific learning disabilities ranged from 0% to 15%, meaning that in schools with the highest prevalence of additional learning needs, one-in-seven students was categorised as having a specific learning disability (Table 4.1).

Lower percentages of students were identified as having additional learning needs associated with autism/autistic spectrum disorder; a general learning disability; specific speech and language disorders; social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties; or physical impairments. Mean percentages for these ranged between about 1% and 3% at primary and post-primary levels (Table 4.1). It was comparatively less common for students to have additional learning needs associated with sensory impairments or assessed syndromes; on average, less than 1% of students were in these categories according to principal reports (Table 4.1).

Table 4.2 presents the prevalence of additional learning needs in special schools. As the range is much wider than in primary and post-primary schools, both the mean percentage and median percentage are presented (for primary and post-primary schools, the mean percentage was very close to the median percentage so Table 4.1 includes only the mean percentage). Additional learning needs associated with a general learning disability was most common in special schools. Based on principal reports, over half of students on average in special schools are categorised as having additional learning needs associated with a general learning disability (Table 4.2), although this ranges from 0% in some schools to 100% in others.

<sup>44</sup> In general, the term 'pupil' is used for primary and special schools and the term 'student' is used at post-primary level. In this chapter, the term 'student' is used occasionally to cover all levels to avoid the use of pupil/student throughout.

Autism/autistic spectrum disorders were also prevalent in special schools with about two-fifths of students on average in this group (Table 4.2). Assessed syndromes and sensory impairments were considerably less prevalent and on average, not more than 10% of students were diagnosed with these, according to principals' reports. For each of the listed disabilities, some schools had no students in that category whereas in other schools, all students had a particular diagnosis.

**Table 4.1: Prevalence of additional learning needs across primary and post-primary schools (ordered in descending order of mean % at primary level)**

	Primary (n=52)			Post-primary (n=33)		
	Mean	Mean	Range	Mean	Mean	Range
	N	%	[Min %, Max %]	N	%	[Min %, Max %]
Specific learning disability (e.g., dyslexia, dyscalculia)	7.5	4.8	[0, 21.9]	27.2	6.4	[0, 15.2]
Autism, autistic spectrum disorders	5.5	2.8	[0, 19.4]	8.9	2.3	[0, 9.3]
General learning disability (including mild, moderate, and profound)	5.3	2.3	[0, 29.2]	12.0	2.8	[0, 14.1]
Specific speech and language disorders	4.1	2.2	[0, 18.2]	4.4	1.2	[0, 8.2]
Social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties (including ADHD, ODD, etc.)	4.0	2.4	[0, 18.3]	11.6	3.1	[0, 16.8]
Physical impairments (e.g., dyspraxia, cerebral palsy)	2.5	1.2	[0, 9.1]	6.9	1.8	[0, 11.4]
Sensory impairments (e.g., hearing, vision)	1.2	0.7	[0, 6.7]	3.0	0.7	[0, 3.2]
Assessed syndrome (e.g., Down, William's, Tourette's syndrome)	0.4	0.2	[0, 3.3]	0.6	0.2	[0, 2.3]

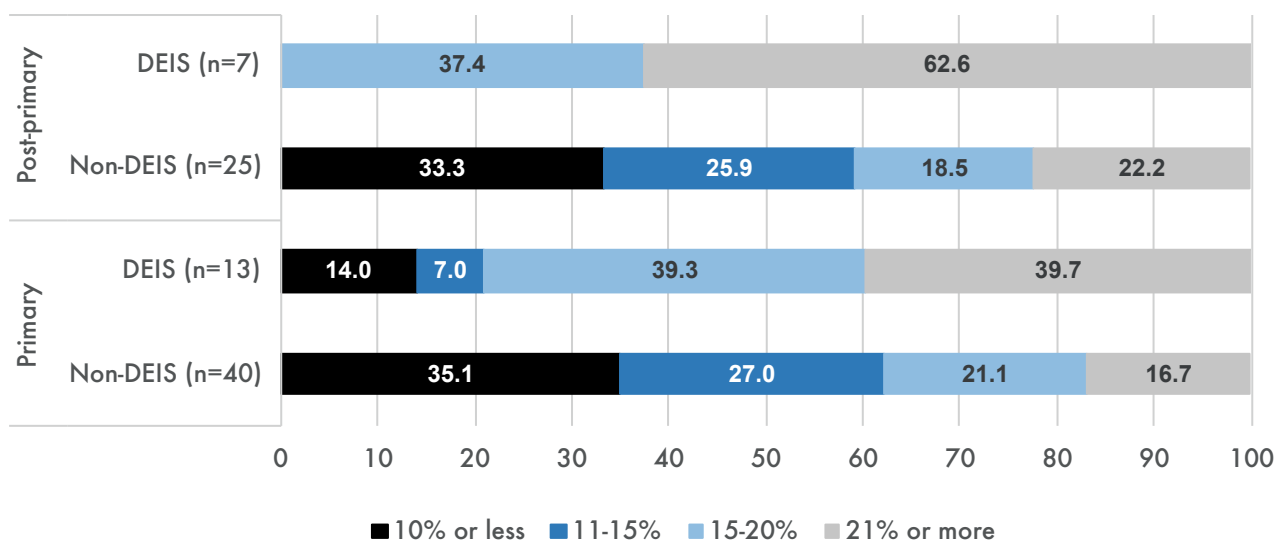
Figure 4.2 presents the prevalence of additional learning needs by school DEIS status, using four categories, i.e., 10% or less of students have additional needs; 11-15% have additional needs; 15-20% have additional needs; or 21% or more have additional needs. The total numbers of students with additional needs were calculated from the numbers in individual categories presented in Table 4.1 and percentages were computed on the basis of total school enrolment.

At primary level, about one-in-three non-DEIS principals (35%) compared to one-in-seven DEIS principals reported having '10% or less' of their pupils with additional learning needs. Approximately 40% of principals in DEIS schools reported having '21% or more' of their pupils with additional learning needs compared to 17% in non-DEIS schools. While the differences are relatively large, they are not statistically significant ( $p=.09$ ) but this may reflect the comparatively small sample size.

At post-primary level, almost two-thirds of DEIS principals, compared to less than a quarter of non-DEIS principals, reported that 21% or more of students had additional needs. While this difference is statistically significant ( $p=.04$ ), the number of DEIS schools ( $n=7$ ) was small and may limit generalisation.

**Table 4.2: Prevalence of additional learning needs in special schools (n=11) (sorted in decreasing order of mean percentage)**

	Mean N	Mean %	Median %	Range %
General learning disability (including mild, moderate, and profound)	37.2	60.5	56.8	[0%, 100.0%]
Autism, autistic spectrum disorders	15.5	39.6	41.9	[0%, 100.0%]
Social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties (including ADHD, ODD, etc.)	7.3	31.9	8.5	[0%, 100.0%]
Physical impairments (e.g., dyspraxia, cerebral palsy)	20.6	27.4	8.5	[0%, 100.0%]
Specific speech and language disorders	11.5	25.6	2.5	[0%, 100.0%]
Specific learning disability (e.g., dyslexia, dyscalculia)	10.6	24.4	0.0	[0%, 100.0%]
Assessed syndrome (e.g., Down, William's, Tourette's syndrome)	6.8	10.3	4.3	[0%, 43.1%]
Sensory impairments (e.g., hearing, vision)	12.4	5.9	6.7	[0%, 16.1%]

**Figure 4.2: Prevalence of additional needs in primary and post-primary schools by DEIS status (percentages)**

## 4.2 STUDENT BACKGROUND, BEHAVIOUR, AND ATTITUDES

This section examines student background across primary, post-primary, and special schools as reported by the principals in the survey. It also covers how principals perceive the behaviour of their students and challenges they experience with students. Finally, principal reports of student engagement and attitudes to school are considered.

### Student background

Principals were asked about the numbers of pupils/students in their school from various sub-groups (immigrant background; members of the Traveller or Roma communities; speaking a main home language other than English or Irish; living in direct provision accommodation; or who are homeless or living in temporary accommodation). Of the groups listed, principals in each of the school types were most likely to indicate that students were from an immigrant background. At primary level, 16% of pupils on average were reported to come from an immigrant background, where immigrant background was defined as having one or both parents born outside Ireland or the U.K. (Table

4.3). In primary schools with the highest concentration of immigrant pupils, over two-thirds of pupils were reported to have an immigrant background. At post-primary level, about one-in-ten students on average was reported to have an immigrant background; in special schools, the average was closer to one-in-five (Table 4.3).

Principals reported that about one-in-ten primary pupils on average, one-in-twenty post-primary students, and one-in-eight special school pupils have a main home language other than English or Irish (Table 4.3). Note that the average of 6% at post-primary level is just slightly lower than that found in PISA 2018 (9%; see Nelis, Gilleece, Fitzgerald, & Cosgrove, 2021).

On average, much lower percentages of students were reported to identify as members of the Traveller or Roma communities (primary 2%; post-primary 1%; special 7%); live in direct provision (primary <1%; post-primary <1%; special 1%); or are homeless or living in temporary accommodation (primary <1%; post-primary <1%; special 3%) (Table 4.3). While the average percentage for these groups are low, there is considerable variation across schools. For example, in primary schools with the highest concentration of pupils from the Traveller and Roma communities, almost one-quarter of pupils identify as belonging to these groups; the corresponding figures in post-primary and special schools are one-eighth and one-seventh respectively. Turning to homelessness and students living in temporary accommodation, in the special school where this was reported to be at the highest level, almost one-third of pupils were in this category (note that the total enrolment size of that school was small, therefore the absolute number of pupils in this group was quite small).

**Table 4.3: Prevalence of key sub-groups across primary, post-primary, and special schools (ordered in descending order by primary school mean %)**

	Primary (n~51)			Post-primary (n~33)			Special (n~11)		
	Mean	Mean	Range	Mean	Mean	Range	Mean	Mean	Range
	N	%	%	N	%	%	N	%	%
Students...									
from an immigrant background (one or both parents born outside Ireland/U.K.)	29.9	15.5	[0%, 68.3%]	35.8	9.7	[0%, 57.3%]	9.4	18.6	[0%, 53.9%]
who speak a main home language other than English/Irish	21.2	10.3	[0%, 56.1%]	25.7	5.8	[0%, 30.6%]	5.1	12.8	[0%, 38.5%]
identifying as members of the Traveller/ Roma communities	3.5	1.7	[0%, 22.8%]	6.1	1.3	[0%, 12.0%]	2.9	6.9	[0%, 15.4%]
living in direct provision accommodation	0.2	0.1	[0%, 3.7%]	2.2	0.3	[0%, 6.7%]	0.3	1.1	[0%, 7.7%]
who are homeless or in temporary accommodation (other than direct provision)	1.6	0.6	[0%, 8.1%]	1.3	0.4	[0%, 5.5%]	0.9	3.4	[0%, 30.8%]

*Note.* Students may belong to more than one category.



## Student behaviour and attitudes

Principals were asked to rate the degree of challenge posed by various issues (including student behaviour, absenteeism, and achievement; transitions; and school-family partnerships) in their schools. Principals were asked for each of the challenges to indicate whether it represents a 'serious challenge', 'moderate challenge', 'minor challenge', or 'not a challenge'. Figure 4.3 shows the percentages of principals by school type reporting that various challenges were serious or moderate.

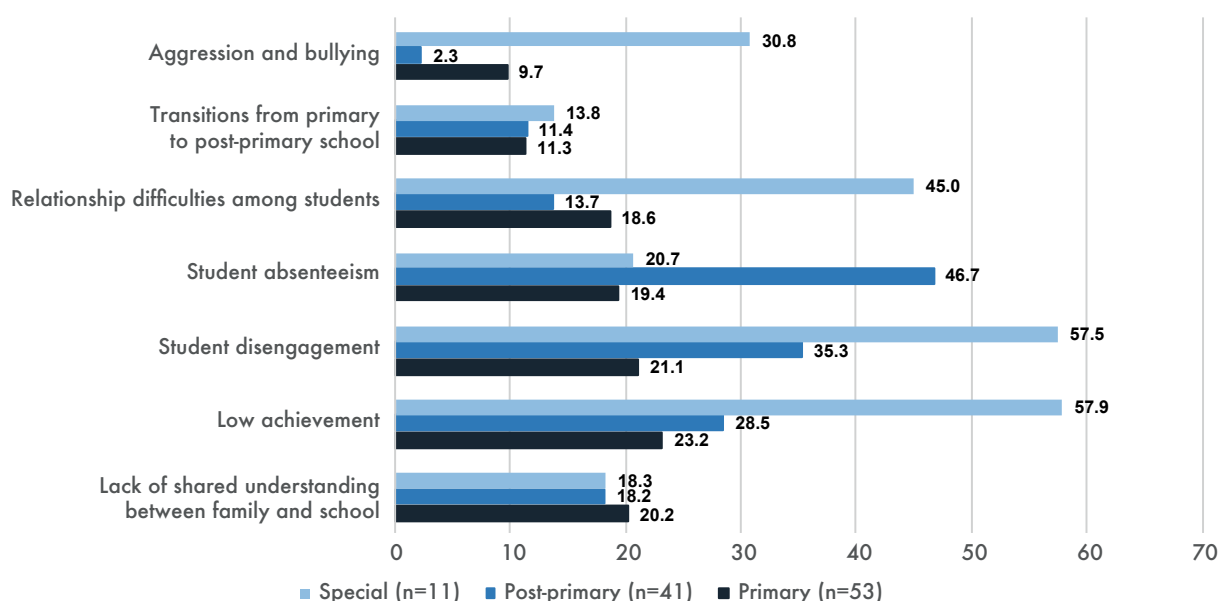
On four of the items (aggression and bullying; relationship difficulties among students; student disengagement; and low achievement), percentages of principals in special schools indicating that these issues represented a 'moderate' or 'serious' challenge were considerably higher than in primary and post-primary schools. While almost one-in-three special school principals reported that aggression and bullying posed a 'serious' or 'moderate' challenge, just one-in-ten primary principals considered aggression and bullying to be a 'serious' or 'moderate' challenge. Aggression and bullying were rarely considered to be a 'serious' or 'moderate' challenge by post-primary principals (Figure 4.3). About half of special school principals reported that relationship difficulties among pupils, pupil disengagement, and low achievement represented 'moderate' or 'serious' challenges; percentages were lower amongst primary and post-primary principals (Figure 4.3).

A particular challenge at post-primary level was reported to be student absenteeism; 47% of principals reported that this was a 'moderate' or 'serious' challenge. The problem posed by unauthorised student absence was also raised by post-primary principals in PISA 2018, where principals of over-three quarters of students in DEIS schools and over half in non-DEIS schools reported that unauthorised student absence was a hindrance to learning (Nelis et al., 2021).

Primary principals were less likely than post-primary or special school principals to indicate that issues posed 'moderate' or 'serious' challenges and not more than a quarter of primary principals identified any of the listed challenges as 'moderate' or 'serious' (Figure 4.3).

Principals were also asked about their students' general behaviour. Table 4.4 shows that in general, principals believe that students enjoy being at school. About three-quarters of primary and special school principals and three-fifths of post-primary principals reported that 'all or nearly all' students enjoy being at school (Table 4.4).

**Figure 4.3: Moderate/serious challenges faced by principals in relation to student behaviour, in primary, post-primary, and special schools (percentages)**



Over 80% of primary principals reported that ‘all or nearly all’ pupils were well-behaved in class; the percentage was also very high at post-primary level (84%). In special schools, 55% of principals reported that ‘all or nearly all’ of the pupils were well-behaved (Table 4.4). Very high percentages of principals from the three school types indicated that ‘all or nearly all’ students show respect for their teachers and at least three-quarters of principals in each context reported that ‘all or nearly all’ students are well-behaved in the yard or playground. Large majorities of principals in each school type indicated that ‘all or nearly all’ students are rewarding to work with (Table 4.4). Overall, responses to these items paint a positive picture of school life with the perception that a majority of students enjoy school according to their principals, most students are well-behaved in class and in the yard or playground, and the majority are respectful and rewarding to work with.

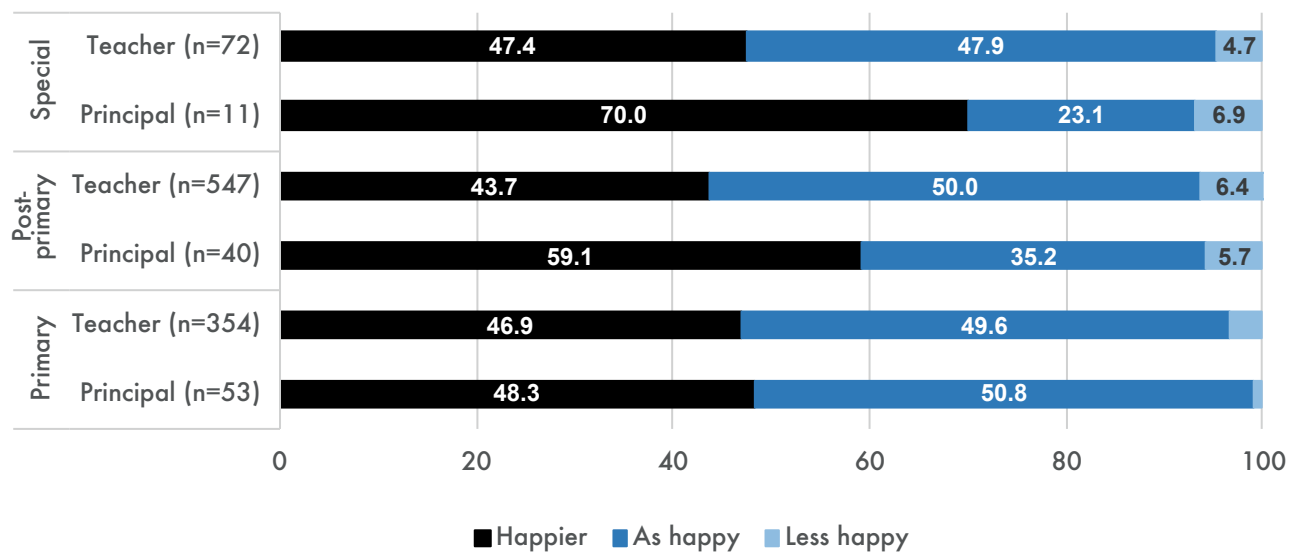
Principals and teachers were asked to report on the extent to which their school had a happy environment for students and teachers. They were asked to indicate for both groups (students and teachers) whether, relative to other schools of the same size, their school environment was ‘happier’, ‘as happy’, or ‘less happy’.

**Table 4.4: Principals’ perceptions of student enjoyment of school, student behaviour (in class, showing respect, and in the yard), and extent to which work with students is rewarding (percentages of principals reporting less than half, more than half, and all or nearly all)**

		Primary (n=53)	Post-primary (n=41)	Special (n=11)
<b>Students, in general:</b>				
Enjoy being at school	Less than half of students	0.0	0.0	0.0
	More than half of students	22.5	39.8	26.7
	All or nearly all students	77.5	60.2	73.3
Are well-behaved in class	Less than half of students	0.0	0.0	5.6
	More than half of students	17.0	16.0	39.4
	All or nearly all students	83.0	84.0	55.0
Show respect for their teachers	Less than half of students	0.0	0.0	0.0
	More than half of students	9.7	13.6	5.6
	All or nearly all students	90.3	86.4	94.4
Are well-behaved on the playground/yard <sup>a</sup>	Less than half of students	0.0	0.0	6.9
	More than half of students	22.1	12.5	17.5
	All or nearly all students	77.9	87.5	75.6
Are rewarding to work with	Less than half of students	0.0	0.0	0.0
	More than half of students	8.9	17.1	6.9
	All or nearly all students	91.1	82.9	93.1

<sup>a</sup> ‘on the playground/yard’ was changed to ‘in the corridor and communal areas’ on the post-primary questionnaire.

**Figure 4.4: Principal and teacher perceptions of the happiness of the school environment for students relative to schools of a similar size (percentages)**



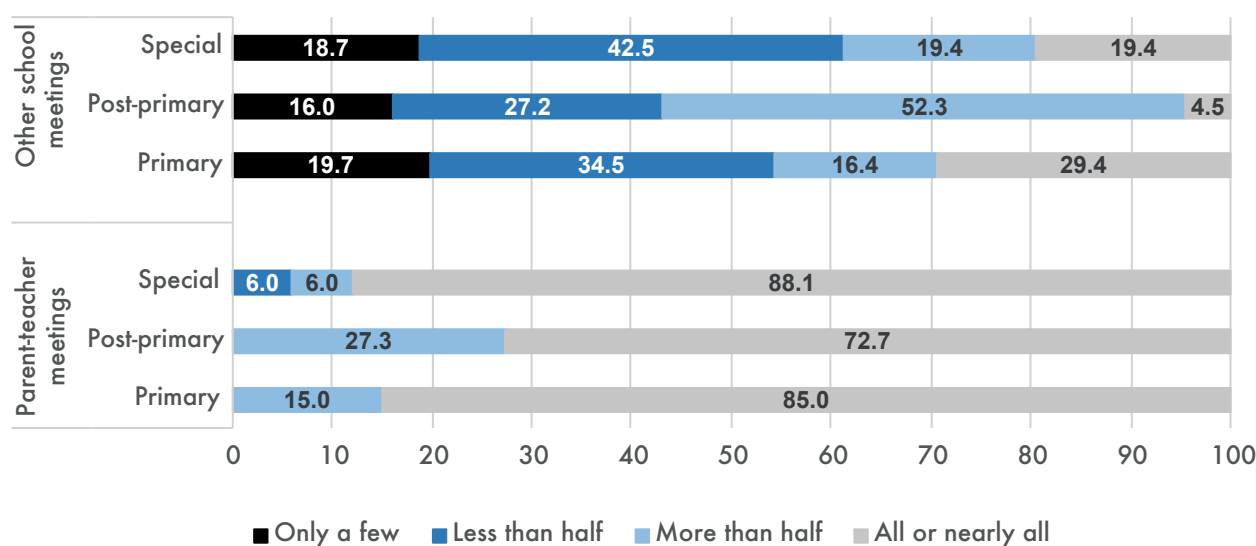
Note. Where values are less than 4%, value labels are not shown.

Figure 4.4 shows that almost all teachers and principals reported that the environment for students in their school was ‘happier’ or ‘as happy’ as other similar sized schools. Principals of special schools were particularly likely to indicate that their school had a ‘happier’ environment for pupils than other similar sized schools; 70% of special school principals reported a ‘happier’ environment (Figure 4.4). Somewhat lower percentages of teachers than principals in primary and special schools reported that their schools had ‘happier’ environments than other schools although almost all considered their school to be at least ‘as happy’ for pupils as other schools. (Findings for teachers are discussed in the context of school culture, later in this chapter).

### 4.3 PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Principals in primary, post-primary, and special schools were asked about parental attendance at parent-teacher meetings and at other meetings organised by the school. Principals reported very high levels of attendance at parent-teacher meetings with at least seven-in-ten principals reporting that ‘all or nearly all’ parents attended parent-teacher meetings (Figure 4.5). This finding mirrors similar findings in other Irish research which point to a strong culture of attendance at parent-teacher meetings (e.g., Nelis et al., 2021).

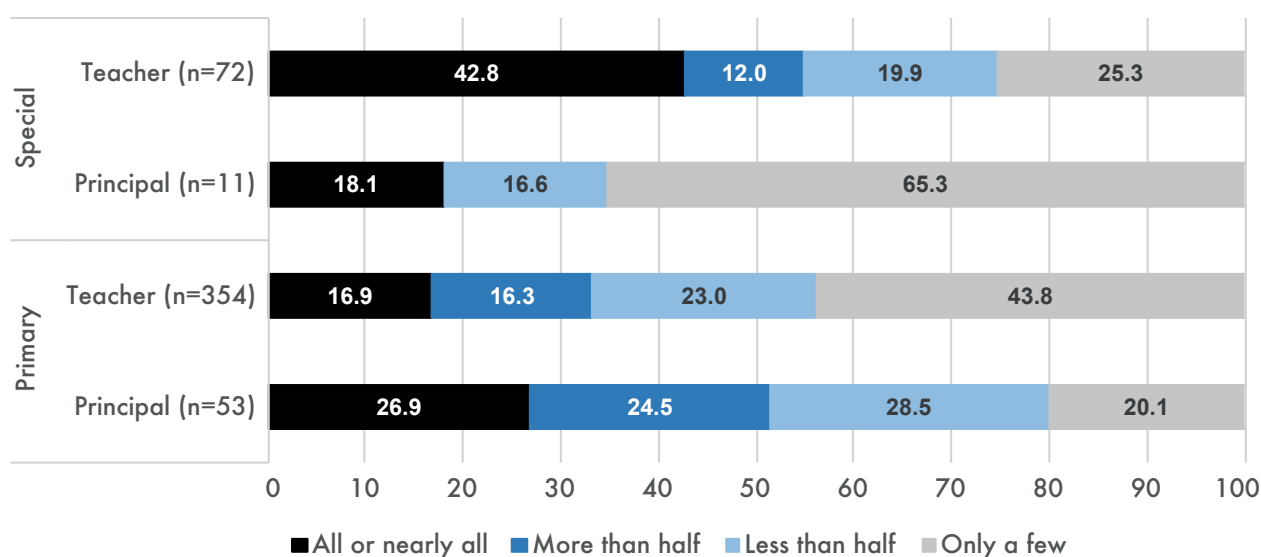
**Figure 4.5: Principal reports of parental attendance at parent-teacher meetings and other school meetings (primary, post-primary, and special)**



Other meetings organised by the school were reportedly less well-attended by parents. Approximately 30% of primary principals, 20% of special school principals, and just 5% of post-primary principals reported that ‘all or nearly all’ parents attended other meetings organised by the school. Almost one-in-five principals across the school types indicated that ‘only a few’ parents attended other meetings organised by the school (Figure 4.5). Differences in attendance patterns between parent-teacher and other meetings may reflect a different priority placed by parents on the opportunity to discuss their own child’s progress versus an opportunity to attend a more general information briefing. The question did not provide further clarification on what was to be understood by ‘other meetings organised by the school’.

Principals and teachers in primary and special schools were asked about the proportion of parents who would approach the school to informally discuss their child’s progress. Compared to the percentage of primary school teachers (17%), a higher percentage of special school teachers (43%) indicated that ‘all or nearly all’ parents would approach them informally to discuss their child’s progress (Figure 4.6). Conversely, a substantially higher percentage of primary (44%) than special (25%) teachers reported that ‘only a few’ parents would approach them informally to discuss their child’s progress.

While it appears that in special schools, parents are more likely to approach the teacher than the principal to informally discuss their child’s progress, the reverse is true in primary schools. Over a quarter of primary principals reported that ‘all or nearly all’ parents would approach them informally and a further quarter of primary principals indicated that ‘more than half’ of parents would approach them informally (Figure 4.6).

**Figure 4.6: Proportion of parents approaching the principal or teachers in primary and special schools for informal discussion of their child's progress (percentages)**

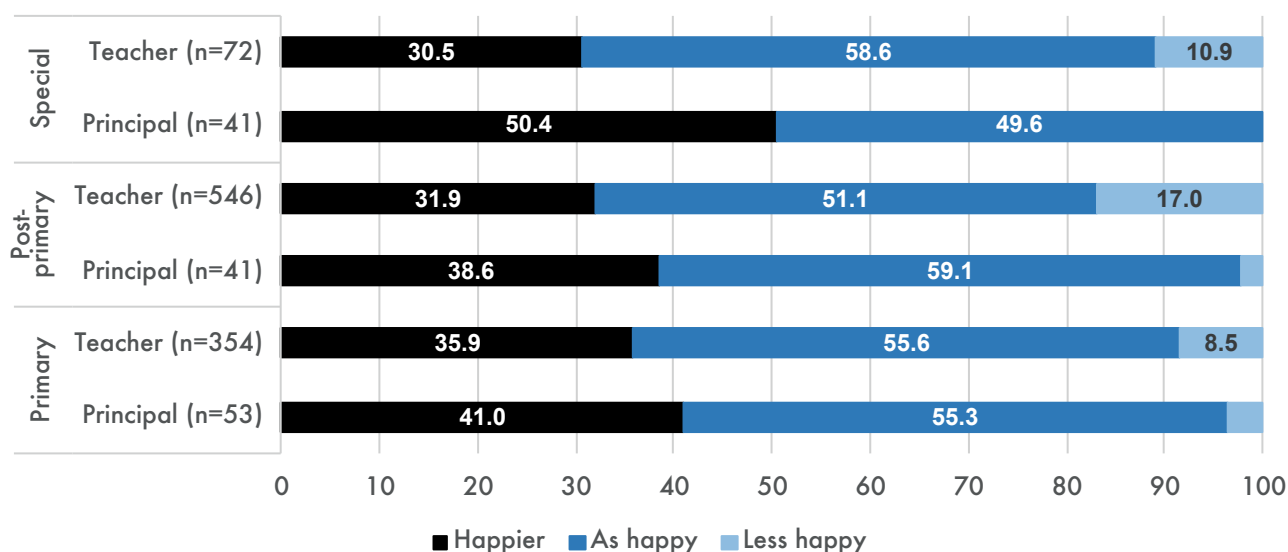
Further analysis by school DEIS status (for primary schools only) shows that 30% of non-DEIS principals indicated that 'all or nearly all' parents would approach them informally to discuss their child's progress compared to 16% of DEIS principals. However, parents in DEIS schools may be somewhat more likely to approach their child's teacher rather than the principal as 21% of DEIS teachers reported that 'all or nearly all' parents would approach them informally (compared to 16% of teachers in non-DEIS schools). Similar percentages of teachers in DEIS (40%) and non-DEIS (45%) schools reported that 'only a few' parents would approach them informally to discuss their child's progress.

## 4.4 SCHOOL CULTURE

Principals and teachers were asked to report on the general happiness of the school environment for teachers in the school, relative to other schools of the same size. Although sizeable percentages of principals (at least two-fifths across school types) and teachers (at least three-tenths across school types) reported that their school has a 'happier' environment for teachers relative to other schools of the same size, more than one-in-ten special school teachers and more than one-in-six post-primary teachers indicated that the environment in their school is 'less happy' than in other similar sized schools (Figure 4.7). At primary level, about one-in-eleven teachers reported a 'less happy' environment.

Table 4.4 presents details on teacher engagement as reported by school principals. Over 90% of principals in special schools reported that 'all or nearly all' teachers were positive about the school compared to 85% of primary principals and 72% of post-primary principals. At least 80% of principals across school contexts indicated that 'all or nearly all' teachers get a lot of help and support from colleagues (Table 4.4).

**Figure 4.7: Principal and teacher perceptions of the relative happiness of the school environment for teachers (percentages)**



Note. Where values are less than 4%, value labels are not shown.

Somewhat lower percentages of principals (67% - 74% across school types) reported that 'all or nearly all' teachers were open to new developments and challenges (Table 4.5). Just over half of principals in any school context indicated that 'all or nearly all' teachers are eager to take part in professional learning activities. At post-primary level, two-fifths of principals reported that 'all or nearly all' teachers are eager to take part in professional learning activities. In primary and special schools, at least one-in-ten principals reported that 'less than half' of teachers are eager to take part in professional learning activities (Table 4.5).

*Droichead*<sup>45</sup> (The Teaching Council, 2017) is an integrated professional induction framework for newly qualified teachers. NIPT is the support service operationalising the *Droichead* policy<sup>46</sup>. Principals were asked if their school was registered to offer *Droichead* as a route to teacher induction. All of the principals in post-primary schools indicated that their school offers *Droichead*, compared to 42% of primary school principals and 48% of special school principals<sup>47</sup>.

The larger primary schools are more likely to offer *Droichead*, approximately 80% of the primary schools that offer *Droichead* are the larger schools (201+ pupils). Close to one-third of the primary schools that offer *Droichead* are from Dublin and a further 21% from the rest of the Leinster region. Similar to primary schools, approximately 80% of the special schools that offer *Droichead* are the larger schools (71+ pupils) and nearly half of them are located in Dublin (see Appendix 2, Table A2.19).

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/teacher-education/droichead>

<sup>46</sup> See <https://www.teacherinduction.ie/en/supports/droichead> for *Droichead* school information compiled and published by NIPT.

<sup>47</sup> *Droichead* is the sole route of induction in Irish schools; therefore, it may be the case that the schools in the current sample that are not registered for *Droichead* are schools which have not hired a newly qualified teacher in some time.



**Table 4.5: Principals' perceptions of teacher engagement, in primary, post-primary, and special schools (percentages)**

		Primary (n=53)	Post-primary (n=41)	Special (n=11)
<b>Teachers, in general:</b>				
Are positive about the school	Less than half	3.7	0.0	0.0
	More than half	11.5	28.4	6.9
	All or nearly all	84.8	71.6	93.1
Get a lot of help and support from colleagues	Less than half	2.9	0.0	0.0
	More than half	15.0	17.0	19.6
	All or nearly all	82.1	83.0	80.4
Are open to new developments and challenges	Less than half	9.3	0.0	0.0
	More than half	23.9	31.8	25.6
	All or nearly all	66.8	68.2	74.4
Are eager to take part in professional learning activities	Less than half	10.6	0.0	12.7
	More than half	35.2	58.0	33.8
	All or nearly all	54.2	42.0	53.5

## 4.5 COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Principals were asked to rate the extent to which a number of social issues posed a challenge in their school community and the degree to which each issue impacts on teaching and learning in the school. Figure 4.8 shows that amongst primary and post-primary principals, unemployment was perceived to be the biggest challenge. About one-third of primary and post-primary principals and one-quarter of special school principals rated unemployment as a 'moderate' or 'serious' challenge.

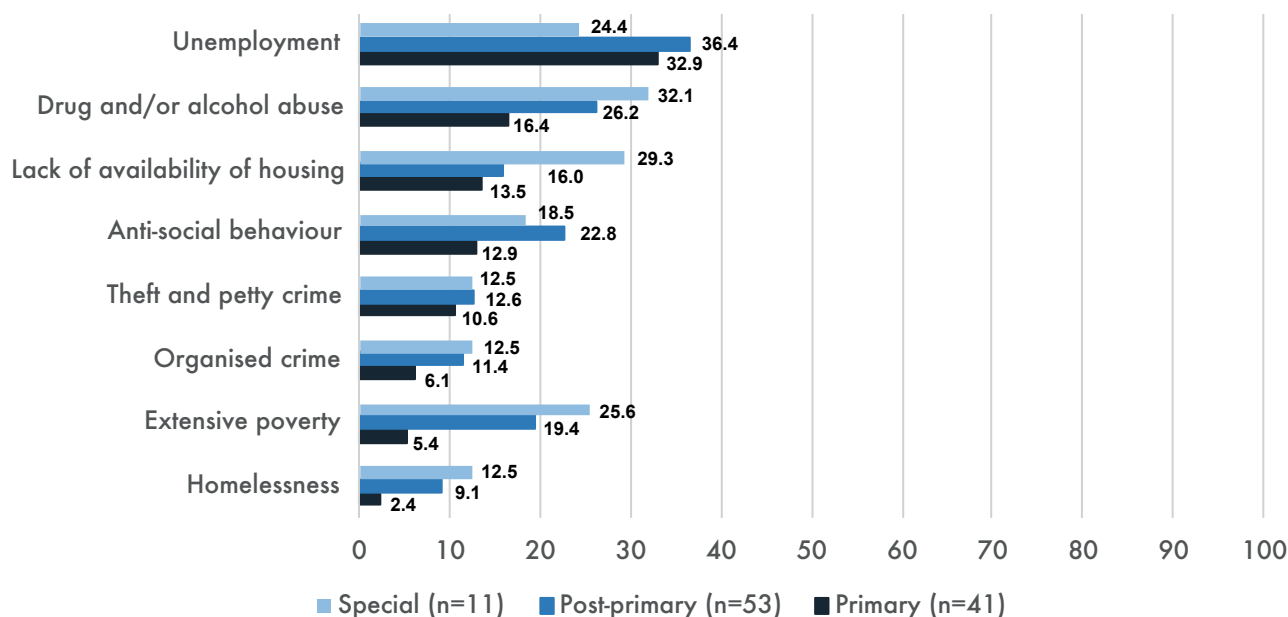
According to special school principals, drug and alcohol abuse was the greatest challenge in their school's community with about one-third of special school principals indicating that drug and alcohol abuse represented a 'serious' or 'moderate' challenge (Figure 4.8). Corresponding percentages for primary and post-primary schools were 26% and 16%, respectively.

At least one-quarter of special school principals identified a lack of availability of housing and extensive poverty as 'moderate' or 'serious' challenges (Figure 4.8). Just 5% of primary principals identified extensive poverty as a 'moderate' or 'serious' challenge. In general, the challenges posed by the community context appeared to be somewhat lesser for primary schools than for post-primary and special schools.

Table 4.6 presents the percentages of principals in DEIS and non-DEIS schools (separately for primary and post-primary levels) that indicated that various issues represented 'moderate' or 'serious' challenges for their schools. At primary level, 67% of DEIS principals reported that unemployment was a 'moderate' or 'serious' challenge compared to 23% of non-DEIS principals (Table 4.6). At post-primary level, unemployment was considered to be a 'moderate' or 'serious' challenge by 83% of DEIS principals compared to 19% of non-DEIS principals.

For all the items presented, principals in DEIS schools were much more likely to rate the issue as a 'moderate' or 'serious' challenge than their counterparts in non-DEIS schools. On six of the eight items, differences between DEIS and non-DEIS schools were statistically significant although the comparatively small number of DEIS schools means that caution should be exercised in interpreting results.

**Figure 4.8: Principals' reports of moderate/serious challenges in the community across a number of areas, in primary, post-primary, and special schools (percentages)**



**Table 4.6: Percentages of principals, by school DEIS status, rating various community challenges as 'moderate' or 'serious', primary and post-primary schools**

	Primary			Post-primary		
	Non-DEIS (n=41)	DEIS (n=12)	Sig* p =	Non-DEIS (n=30)	DEIS (n=11)	Sig* p =
Unemployment	22.9	67.3	.006	18.8	83.2	.001
Drug and/or alcohol abuse	7.7	46.3	.003	15.6	54.2	.021
Extensive poverty	2.9	14.0	.001	9.4	45.8	.005
Anti-social behaviour	7.7	30.7	.024	9.4	58.2	.002
Lack of availability of housing	10.8	22.6	ns	6.3	41.8	.013
Organised crime	1.1	23.6	.017	3.1	33.3	.014
Theft and petty crime	4.8	30.7	.012	0.0	45.8	<.001
Homelessness	1.1	7.0	ns	0.0	33.3	.004

\*Chi-square test.

## 4.6 OVERALL CHALLENGES TO WELLBEING

An overall challenges score was created using a number of indicators derived from the principal questionnaire: principal stress (high), principal job satisfaction (low), pupil enjoyment (low), pupil behaviour (low), parental involvement (low), teacher enjoyment/involvement (low), and community problems (high). For additional learning needs (high), schools were split into quartiles where schools in the top quartile had the highest percentage of students with additional learning needs.

The mean score ranged from 0 (no challenges) to 4 (a lot of challenges). The mean score is not significantly different between the three school types; however, there is a significant difference between DEIS and non-DEIS schools at primary and post-primary levels with DEIS schools at both levels indicating higher overall challenges to wellbeing (see Table 4.7).

**Table 4.7: Overall challenges to wellbeing based on principal reports**

		‘Overall challenges score’		
		Mean	SD	SE
Principal	Primary (n=53)	1.36	1.03	0.14
	Post-primary (n=41)	1.18	0.91	0.14
	Special (n=11)	1.35	0.73	0.22
Primary	DEIS (n=12)	<b>2.16</b>	0.67	0.19
	Non-DEIS (n=41)	1.13	1.01	0.16
Post-Primary	DEIS (n=11)	<b>1.75</b>	0.69	0.21
	Non-DEIS (n=30)	0.97	0.90	0.16

Note. Significant differences are highlighted in **bold**.

## 4.7 KEY POINTS FROM CHAPTER 4

- Amongst schools with special classes, the most common type of special class was an ‘autism/autistic spectrum disorders’ class. The variety of special classes at primary level was greater than at post-primary.
- Both at primary and post-primary levels, the most prevalent disability was the category ‘specific learning disability’. An average of just under 5% of primary pupils had a specific learning disability and the average number of pupils per school in this category was 7.5. The percentages of primary pupils in this category ranged from 0% to 22%. At post-primary level, an average of 6.4% of students were identified as having a specific learning disability and the mean number of students per school was about 27.
- Additional learning needs associated with a general learning disability was most common in special schools. Over half of students on average in special schools were categorised as having additional learning needs associated with a general learning disability.
- At primary level, 16% of pupils on average were reported to come from an immigrant background. In primary schools with the highest concentration of immigrant pupils, over two-thirds of pupils were reported to have an immigrant background. At post-primary level, about one-in-ten students on average was reported to have an immigrant background; in special schools, the average was closer to one-in-five.
- On average, low percentages of students were reported to identify as members of the Traveller or Roma communities (primary 2%; post-primary 1%; special 7%); live in direct provision (primary <1%; post-primary <1%; special 1%); or to be homeless or living in temporary accommodation (primary <1%; post-primary <1%; special 3%).
- On items relating to student aggression and bullying; relationship difficulties among pupils; pupil disengagement; and low achievement, percentages of principals in special schools indicating that these issues represented a ‘moderate’ or ‘serious’ challenge were considerably higher than in primary and post-primary schools. A particular challenge at post-primary level was reported to be student absenteeism; 47% of principals reported that this was a ‘moderate’ or ‘serious’ challenge. Primary principals were less likely than post-primary or special school principals to indicate that issues posed ‘moderate’ or ‘serious’ challenges and not more than a quarter of primary principals identified any of the listed challenges as ‘moderate’ or ‘serious’.
- About three-quarters of primary and special school principals and three-fifths of post-primary principals reported that ‘all or nearly all’ students enjoy being at school. Across all school contexts, a large majority of principals reported that ‘all or nearly all’ students were well-behaved in class and in the yard or playground, are respectful to teachers, and are rewarding to work with.

- Almost all teachers and principals reported that the environment for pupils in their school was 'happier' or 'as happy' as other similar sized schools.
- At least two-fifths of principals across school types and at least three-in-ten teachers reported that their school had a 'happier' environment for teachers relative to other schools of the same size. However, more than one-in-ten special school teachers and more than one-in-six post-primary teachers indicated that the environment in their school was 'less happy' than that in other similar sized schools. At primary level, about one-in-eleven teachers reported a 'less happy' environment.
- Over 90% of principals in special schools reported that 'all or nearly all' teachers were positive about the school compared to 85% of primary principals and 72% of post-primary principals.
- Two-thirds to three-quarters of principals across school types reported that 'all or nearly all' teachers were open to new developments and challenges.
- Approximately half of principals in any school context indicated that 'all or nearly all' teachers were eager to take part in professional learning activities. At post-primary level, just two-fifths of principals reported that 'all or nearly all' teachers are eager to take part in professional learning activities. In primary and special schools, at least one-in-ten principals reported that 'less than half' of teachers were eager to take part in professional learning activities.
- All of the post-primary principals indicated that their school offered *Droichead*, compared to 42% of primary school principals and 48% of special school principals.
- About one-third of primary and post-primary principals and one-quarter of special school principals rated unemployment as a 'moderate' or 'serious' challenge in their school's community. According to special school principals, drug and alcohol abuse was the greatest challenge in their school's community with about one-third of special school principals indicating that drug and alcohol abuse represented a 'serious' or 'moderate' challenge. In general, the challenges posed by the community context appeared to be somewhat lesser for primary schools than for post-primary and special schools.
- Principals in DEIS schools at both primary and post-primary levels were much more likely to rate the various community issues as 'moderate' or 'serious' challenges than their counterparts in non-DEIS schools, with problems particularly pronounced at post-primary level.
- An overall challenges to wellbeing score did not indicate significant differences between the three school types; however, a significant difference between DEIS and non-DEIS schools was observed at both primary and post-primary levels with DEIS schools at both levels indicating higher overall challenges to wellbeing.



# CHAPTER 5:

## Views on teachers' professional learning

This chapter outlines the attitudes of teachers and principals to professional learning in general; their preferred forms of professional learning activities; the forms of Teachers' Professional Learning (TPL) perceived to be most effective; and their views on assessing the impact of TPL. The chapter also summarises teacher and principal responses to open-ended items on the most effective TPL they experienced, the impact of that TPL on their professional practice, the impact on student outcomes, and the impact on school policy and practice. As in earlier chapters, the total numbers on which percentages are based are provided to guide the reader with interpretation; i.e., when the total number is small, greater caution should be exercised in generalising to the population.

### 5.1 ATTITUDES TO PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Principals and teachers were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with seven statements about professional learning. Very large majorities of principals and teachers across post-primary, primary, and special schools 'strongly' or 'moderately' agreed with the positively worded statements (a, c, and d; Table 5.1). Conversely, small minorities of respondents 'strongly' or 'moderately' agreed with negatively worded statements which means that most respondents 'strongly' or 'moderately' disagreed with the negatively worded statements (b, e, f, and g; Table 5.1).

**Table 5.1: Percentages of principals and teachers indicating that they 'strongly agree' or 'moderately agree' with statements about professional learning activities**

	Post-primary		Primary		Special	
	Principal n=38	Teacher n=503	Principal n=47	Teacher n=354	Principal n=11	Teacher n=70
a) Professional learning activities often help teachers to develop new teaching approaches	93.8	85.7	95.6	93.7	87.3	85.8
b) If I did not have to, I would not attend professional learning activities <sup>a</sup>	2.5	9.8	8.3	4.0	0.0	5.1
c) Professional learning activities are worth the time they take	100	67.3	97.3	83.2	74.8	74.8
d) I have been enriched by the professional learning activities in which I have participated	95.1	71.3	95.6	83.4	80.4	91.7
e) Professional learning activities have not had much impact on my learning <sup>a</sup>	2.5	10.9	3.3	5.1	0.0	8.0
f) Professional learning activities have not had much impact on my teaching or professional practice <sup>a</sup>	2.5	9.1	2.7	5.0	0.0	6.6
g) Professional learning activities have not had much impact on my pupils' outcomes <sup>a</sup>	4.9	13.1	2.7	4.6	0.0	6.6

<sup>a</sup>Items were reverse-coded for scale analysis.

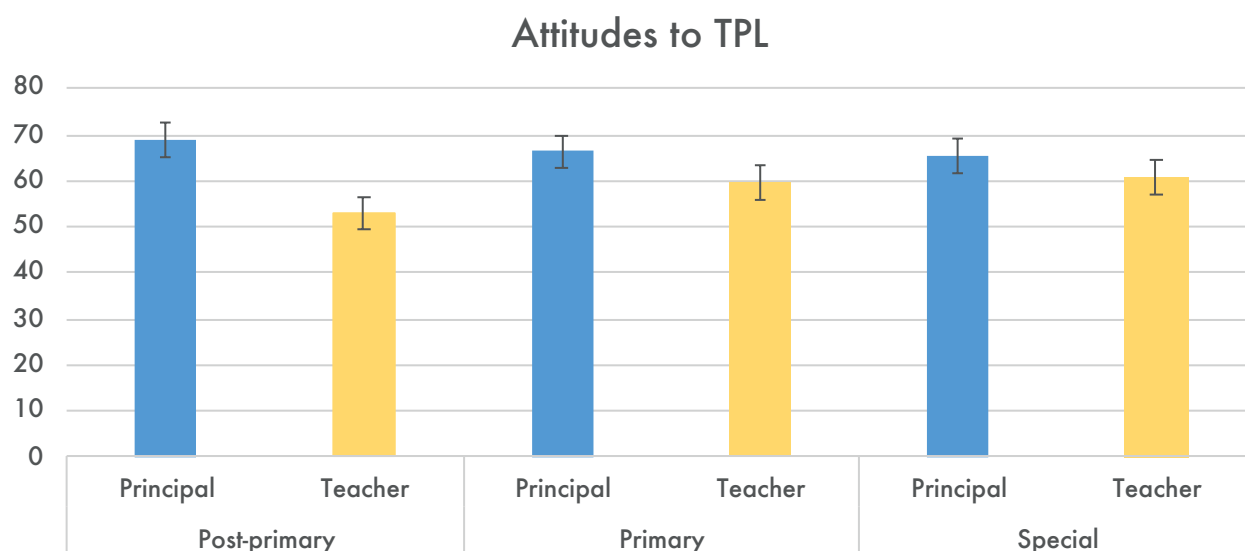


An overall measure of attitudes to professional learning was computed from responses to six of the seven individual items. As there were very low inter-item correlations between item (a) and the other statements for post-primary principals, the index score was computed from responses to items (b) to (g). For consistency across principals and teachers in the different school types, items (b) to (g) were used for each dataset resulting in index scores with acceptable levels of scale reliability (ranging from  $\alpha=0.77$  for post-primary principals to  $\alpha=0.87$  for primary teachers).

Across all school types, principals had a higher mean score on attitudes to professional learning activities than teachers. In primary and post-primary schools, the difference was statistically significant. The gap was largest in post-primary schools, and at 16-points represents more than one-standard deviation (the standard deviation across post-primary principals was 13.2).

Post-primary teachers also had a statistically significantly lower mean score on the attitudes to professional learning than their counterparts in primary and special schools. Comparing attitudes to professional learning, there were no significant differences between teachers (or principals) in DEIS and non-DEIS schools at either primary or post-primary level.

**Figure 5.1: Mean scores on index of attitudes to TPL – principals and teachers (post-primary, primary, and special schools)**



Compared to primary teachers as a whole, special education teachers had a higher mean score on the index measuring attitudes to professional learning, suggesting more positive attitudes to TPL activities amongst special education teachers. At post-primary level, there was no difference in the mean scores of special education teachers and teachers as a whole group (see Appendix 2, Table A2.20).

## 5.2 PREFERRED MODES OF TPL

Principals and teachers were asked to select up to five of their preferred modes of TPL from a list of 19 options<sup>48</sup>. Table 5.2 uses a colour gradient (from green to red, where green represents higher percentages) to show, for various modes of TPL, the likelihood of that mode being included in respondents' top five preferred modes. High percentages of principals and teachers across the three school types included school-based support (including school visits from support service personnel) in their top five preferred modes. At least two-thirds of principals and over half of teachers included this mode in their top five (Table 5.2). Single-day workshops were also positively viewed by respondents, although there was variation in the extent to which they were included in respondents' top five preferred modes. While 40% of primary principals included single-day workshops in their top five preferred modes, 70% of special school teachers rated them as such.

For other modes of TPL, there was considerable variation across teachers and principals in the three school types in the extent to which activities were included in the top five preferences. While in-school workshops led by colleagues were included in the top five preferred mode by almost half of post-primary principals and one-third of post-primary teachers, percentages were lower across the other groups (ranging from 4% of primary principals to 22% of special school teachers; Table 5.2). Similarly, the inclusion of team teaching in the top five varied across teachers and principals. In primary and special schools, higher percentages of teachers than principals included team teaching in their top five (primary teacher 48%; primary principal 21%; special school teacher 21%; special school principal 0%). About one-quarter of post-primary principals and teachers included team-teaching in their top five preferred modes of TPL (Table 5.2).

Turning to items that were rarely included in respondents' top five preferred modes, these included residential workshops (an exception was special school principals where one-quarter included this mode in their top five); evening workshops; lesson study; reading academic literature; and conducting research. For some of these, it is likely that respondents' lack of experience of this mode means that they were not well placed to comment on that type of TPL (see Table 5.3 below). In general, respondents appear to prefer collaborative work, including workshops and networking, as compared to more independent work such as engaging with academic literature or conducting research. These findings suggest that there may be merit in further exploring the potential of collaborative approaches to promote research among teachers more broadly. Subsequent phases of the research may usefully give further consideration to this issue.

Similar to that reported by all teachers in primary schools, special education teachers included school-based support (including school visits from support service personnel) in their top five preferred modes. This was also the case with post-primary special education teachers, 59% included school-based support and 54% also included single day workshops (58% of all post-primary teachers included both of these in their top five preferred modes (see Appendix 2, Table A2.21).

Principals and teachers were provided with a space to list other preferred modes of TPL that were not included amongst the types listed. Excluding special school principals, about one-in-ten respondents provided some additional information on alternative modes of TPL that they preferred (additional responses were provided by post-primary principals n=3; post-primary teachers n=55; primary principals n=6; primary teachers n=31; and special school teachers n=10; special school principals did not provide any responses to this item).

48 As a result of a technical error in survey administration, post-primary principals were presented with 18 of the 19 options. They were not presented the option of 'Networking – informal networking with colleagues'. All other options were the same across respondent groups.

**Table 5.2: Percentages of respondents indicating that various modes of TPL are in their top five preferred modes (sorted in descending order by percentages of post-primary principals; n = total valid responses)**

	Post-primary		Primary		Special	
	Principal n=38	Teacher n=502	Principal n=47	Teacher n=353	Principal n=11	Teacher n=70
School-based support (including school visits from support personnel)	71.6	58.1	87.1	75.5	66.6	62.5
Workshops - in-school/colleague	48.2	33.5	4.4	16.3	19.8	21.7
Networking - informal networking	(a)	26.1	34.7	25.7	64.0	35.5
Networking - formal networking	46.9	22.5	24.2	18.4	25.6	16.1
Workshops - single day	40.7	57.9	51.3	62.0	47.6	70.3
Professional Learning Communities	39.5	23.4	20.0	13.4	6.0	21.4
Working with others - mentoring/coaching	38.3	14.3	22.6	11.8	13.8	18.1
Events - single day	30.8	31.9	47.2	38.8	61.6	52.9
Events - conferences/showcases	28.5	22.9	27.8	11.1	16.6	20.9
Events - presentations by facilitators	28.4	39.5	42.6	30.5	47.7	36.3
Team teaching	27.1	25.9	21.3	47.5	0.0	21.0
Workshops - series over multiple days	23.5	24.0	33.6	28.0	53.5	29.3
Learning through practice	21.0	38.9	33.7	42.8	18.7	39.3
Resources online	16.0	27.1	18.9	24.7	5.6	20.1
Workshops - residential	14.8	2.8	10.5	3.5	26.9	1.8
Workshops - evening	8.6	13.0	5.0	10.9	0.0	14.1
Lesson study	2.5	3.4	0.0	7.1	0.0	4.9
Reading academic journals/reports	2.5	5.4	3.6	7.0	0.0	4.4
Research (e.g., action research)	0.0	2.2	0.9	2.4	0.0	3.2

(a) Option was not presented due to a technical error.

Of the 55 post-primary teachers who provided additional responses, about two-thirds referred to online resources, including webinars, online learning generally, Zoom sessions, and Twitter. Two of the three post-primary principals who provided additional comments also referred to online resources, mentioning specific online programmes. About one-in-six post-primary teachers who provided additional commentary referred to developing subject-specific knowledge, including cluster workshops and subject association meetings, noting that these can be particularly useful for minority subjects. Small numbers of post-primary teachers referred to the benefits of observing the classes of other teachers, being observed, and learning through a facilitator modelling skills.

Amongst the 31 primary teachers who provided additional responses, many identified similar topics to those identified by post-primary teachers. For example, several primary teachers referred to the benefits of online learning and learning by observing the lessons of others or by observing an experienced facilitator. The following comments illustrate the additional remarks provided by primary teachers regarding online learning and the benefits of modelling and observation:

- *"Online courses as they are easier to access than after-school workshops due to childcare issues."*
- *"Online Professional Learning Communities."*
- *"Modelling – an experienced teacher modelling the new skill in your class."*
- *"Seeing how something works in another school – observation of good practice."*
- *"Teacher observation in schools that are implementing a certain programme."*

- *"...the opportunity to observe fellow teachers. It would be great if there was a structure where subs could be paid to take over classes while permanent staff were given the chance to observe other teachers' particular lessons."*

A very small number of primary principals provided additional responses, referring to TeachMeet style events, webinars, and residential conferences.

Teachers from special schools (n=10) who provided additional comments addressed similar issues as their primary and post-primary colleagues. In particular, teachers from special schools also mentioned the benefits of observing colleagues teaching, modelling, and doing TPL online. Teachers from special schools also underlined the importance of TPL being tailored for their specific context, noting that some TPL is too general to be of benefit to them. Examples of responses from teachers in special schools include:

- *"Presentations from <agency name> are generally excellent and are the presentations that make the most impact on how I teach. They target their presentations appropriately – taking into account that their audience has a previous knowledge of the subject. <agency name> tends to offer at least two presenters, offering both practice and theory in their presentations."*
- *"Further relevant studies in a special school. Many/most of the <agency name> training is not specific or relevant enough."*
- *"Webinars – I can do it at home at my own pace, in my comfy clothes, with my dog. But there needs to be something that holds teachers accountable, to make sure it is completed."*
- *"Observations – as part of my NQT I got to observe other teachers and have found this very valuable."*
- *"In terms of gaining knowledge for actual teaching and learning, I would prefer supports that can come and meet the needs you require in specific areas not somebody coming to give blanket advice."*

### 5.3 PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS OF VARIOUS FORMS OF TPL

Principals and teachers were asked to rate the effectiveness of various forms of TPL in informing their professional knowledge, competence, and skills and given the opportunity to indicate that they had not experienced particular types of TPL. Very small minorities of post-primary principals indicated that they had not experienced each of the activities. Lesson study was the type of TPL that post-primary principals were most likely to indicate that they had not experienced.

Other groups of respondents were much more likely to indicate that they had not experienced various forms of TPL. One-third of post-primary teachers had never experienced residential workshops, one-quarter had not experienced lesson study, and one-fifth had not experienced research (Table 5.3). About one-in-ten post-primary teachers indicated that they had not experienced workshops held over a number of days; similar percentages had not experienced team teaching, mentoring/coaching, or PLCs.

Sizeable percentages of respondents in primary and special schools indicated that they had not experienced various forms of the listed TPL activities. For example, nearly one-fifth of special school teachers, one-third of primary teachers, two-fifths of primary principals, and three-fifths of special school principals indicated that they had not experienced lesson study (Table 5.3). One-quarter to one-half of respondents from primary or special schools had experienced neither residential workshops nor research. As respondents from primary and special schools were more likely to indicate not having experienced several forms of TPL than their post-primary counterparts, it may be the case that primary and special school principals in particular have access to a narrower range of professional learning opportunities.

Table 5.4 presents the percentages of respondents that indicated that each form of TPL was 'highly effective' in informing their professional knowledge, competence, and skills. Colour gradient from green to red is used where green represents the highest percentages and red the lowest (i.e., green shows that a particular form of TPL was widely considered to be effective). The numbers of respondents (n) that provided valid effectiveness ratings vary across items in Table 5.4 because as shown in Table 5.3, there was substantial variation across forms of TPL in the extent to which respondents indicated that they had not experienced that form of TPL. Only those respondents who had experienced a particular form of TPL are included in Table 5.4.

Of those who had experienced learning through practice (i.e., virtually all respondents, based on Table 5.3 above), very large majorities indicated that it was 'highly effective' at informing their professional knowledge, competence, and skills (Table 5.4). Post-primary principals were the only group where a large majority reported that in-school workshops led by colleagues were 'highly effective' in this regard. While three-quarters of post-primary principals expressed this opinion, one-quarter to two-fifths of other respondents identified in-school workshops led by colleagues as 'highly effective' (Table 5.4). From Table 5.3 above, post-primary principals were the group with the greatest experience of colleague-led in-school workshops and it is likely that this may have influenced perceptions of effectiveness.

Attitudes to school-based support varied considerably between principals and teachers. While at least two-thirds of principals identified school-based support as 'highly effective' in informing professional knowledge, competence, and skills, percentages were considerably lower amongst teachers (ranging from 29% of post-primary teachers to 54% of primary teachers; Table 5.4). Principals and teachers in special schools were particularly likely to endorse informal networking as 'highly effective' with at least two-thirds of respondents in special schools indicating that informal networking was 'highly effective' in informing professional knowledge, competence and skills (Table 5.4).

**Table 5.3: Percentages of respondents who indicated that they had not experienced various forms of TPL (ordered in descending order by primary principal)**

	Post-primary		Primary		Special	
	Principal n=41	Teacher n=547	Principal n=53	Teacher n=354	Principal n=11	Teacher n=72
Lesson study	12.5	25.5	42.5	32.8	59.0	18.2
Workshops - residential	0.0	34.8	34.4	48.6	38.1	44.8
Research (e.g., action research)	0.0	20.3	31.3	32.4	51.1	24.8
Workshops - in-school/colleague	0.0	6.8	16.2	15.3	6.9	20.6
Professional Learning Communities	0.0	10.2	15.2	22.9	19.6	11.5
Networking - formal networking	2.3	5.9	14.6	22.9	0.0	17.5
Events - conferences/showcases	0.0	7.2	8.3	19.4	0.0	9.4
Resources online	2.3	3.3	7.8	3.5	5.6	7.1
Working with others - mentoring/coaching	0.0	11.6	7.4	16.8	6.9	15.9
Workshops – series over multiple days	2.3	10.7	7.3	8.4	6.9	11.1
Networking - informal networking	0.0	3.3	6.4	10.3	0.0	7.6
Workshops - single day	0.0	1.4	4.4	3.9	0.0	5.4
Events - single day	0.0	3.0	2.9	5.2	0.0	1.2
Workshops - evening	2.3	6.7	2.9	15.3	19.8	17.4
Reading academic journals/reports	0.0	7.3	1.4	8.4	0.0	3.7
Team teaching	2.3	9.3	0.8	5.7	33.8	3.8
School based support	0.0	1.2	0.0	2.7	0.0	1.0
Events - presentations by facilitators	0.0	2.4	0.0	6.1	0.0	6.5
Learning through practice	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.2	0.0	0.0



**Table 5.4: Percentages indicating that specified TPL was 'highly effective' in informing professional knowledge, competence and skills (based on only those respondents who had experienced various forms of TPL; Ordered in descending order by percentages of post-primary principal)**

	Post-primary		Primary		Special	
	Principal 33 ≤ n ≤ 38	Teacher 304 ≤ n ≤ 494	Principal 25 ≤ n ≤ 47	Teacher 181 ≤ n ≤ 348	Principal 7 ≤ n ≤ 11	Teacher 38 ≤ n ≤ 70
Workshops - in-school/colleague	76.5	36.8	34.1	32.1	26.3	42.6
Learning through practice	75.2	70.4	69.9	72.8	83.4	82.1
Working with others - mentoring/ coaching	72.9	40.7	50.0	44.1	39.7	46.3
Professional Learning Communities	70.4	39.0	48.0	37.0	37.4	43.1
School-based support	70.3	29.0	65.4	54.3	80.6	32.4
Working with others - team teaching	68.3	44.9	53.5	53.3	47.3	47.2
Networking - formal networking	60.7	38.7	57.7	35.9	31.2	45.0
Networking - informal networking	59.2	47.6	59.7	45.7	77.8	67.4
Lesson study	42.8	20.6	20.0	28.7	28.2	35.5
Workshops - single day	40.7	33.1	40.5	46.3	49.1	51.0
Events - presentations by facilitators	35.7	24.3	29.9	25.5	22.2	18.7
Workshops - series	32.9	31.0	42.1	43.6	57.5	37.4
Workshops - residential	24.6	15.8	36.8	17.1	43.4	13.0
Resources online	22.7	28.5	13.4	26.7	5.9	27.2
Events - conferences/showcases	19.8	25.3	26.4	18.1	22.2	24.1
Events - single day	19.7	21.9	32.6	32.3	22.2	30.0
Research (e.g., action research)	19.7	17.3	20.0	16.3	25.6	13.5
Reading academic journals/ reports	12.3	13.1	10.6	9.1	5.6	11.2
Workshops - evening	10.1	12.6	9.2	19.2	0.0	12.6

Turning to activities which lower percentages of respondents identified as 'highly effective' in informing professional knowledge, competence, and skills, these included: online resources, conferences and showcases, single day events, research, academic literature, and evening workshops. Not more than one-third of respondents in any of the school types rated any of these activities as 'highly effective' (Table 5.4).

Respondents were also asked to indicate the effectiveness of the various forms of TPL in informing their attitudes, values, and practice. Table 5.5 uses gradient colouring from green to amber to red to illustrate decreasing percentages. As in Table 5.4, only those respondents who experienced a particular type of TPL are included in Table 5.5 and the numbers providing effectiveness ratings for each type of TPL vary considerably depending on the extent to which that TPL had been experienced (the range of Ns is shown in the table).

While perceived effectiveness is broadly comparable across principals and teachers in the three school types, an exception is evening workshops where 49% of special school principals rated these as 'highly effective' in informing attitudes, values, and practice. This compares to not more than 14% in the other groups. In general, teachers were much less likely than principals to endorse various forms of TPL as 'highly effective' in informing attitudes, values, and practice, with larger gaps amongst post-primary respondents and smaller gaps amongst primary school respondents.



The gap between principals and teachers is particularly pronounced for mentoring and coaching in post-primary and special schools, where two-thirds to three-quarters of principals rated mentoring/coaching as 'highly effective' in informing attitudes, values, and practice compared to one-third to two-fifths of teachers (Table 5.5).

In general, the ordering in Table 5.5 is very similar to that in Table 5.4, indicating that by and large, principals and teachers viewed the same forms of TPL as effective in informing attitudes, values, and practice as were effective in informing professional knowledge, competence, and skills. For example, learning through practice (rated as 'highly effective' by 81% of post-primary principals, Table 5.5) also received strong endorsement as a 'highly effective' means of informing professional knowledge, competence, and skills (rated as 'highly effective' by 75% of post-primary principals, Table 5.4).

**Table 5.5: Percentages indicating that specified TPL was 'highly effective' in informing attitudes, values and practice (based on respondents who had experienced the particular form of TPL; ordered in descending order by percentages of post-primary principal)**

	Post-primary		Primary		Special	
	Principal 34 ≤ n ≤ 37	Teacher 311 ≤ n ≤ 483	Principal 29 ≤ n ≤ 47	Teacher 184 ≤ n ≤ 341	Principal 7 ≤ n ≤ 11	Teacher 33 ≤ n ≤ 70
Learning through practice	81.0	62.4	68.1	63.0	83.4	68.2
Working with others - mentoring/ coaching	67.0	34.8	47.8	43.6	79.4	38.8
Team teaching	66.1	39.4	44.8	48.4	45.6	38.5
School-based support	64.5	29.4	66.5	52.5	80.6	47.8
Professional Learning Communities	62.0	32.9	48	36.2	35.9	41.3
Workshops - in-school/colleague	60.7	33.0	35.6	32.9	23.4	39.7
Networking - formal networking	54.4	36.0	46.8	36.9	38.1	27.3
Networking - informal networking	53.1	45.0	60.1	41.2	72.2	38.8
Workshops - single day	34.1	24.4	28.5	38	43.5	46.8
Lesson study	33.2	19.1	19.2	27.5	30.6	21.1
Workshops - residential	32.8	14.3	42.7	18.7	54.5	15.9
Events - single day	31.6	18.7	26.8	33.1	49.1	33.2
Events - presentations by facilitators	29.1	16.0	30.0	28.0	34.9	20.6
Workshops - series	27.8	29.3	32.7	29.3	63.7	39.3
Events - conferences/showcases	25.3	19.1	25.5	21.5	16.6	19.9
Resources online	24.0	25.1	15.0	24.0	18.3	23.5
Research (e.g., action research)	20.2	12.9	20.0	17.4	22.9	19.1
Reading academic journals/reports	12.9	12.7	16.1	11.9	0.0	13.9
Workshops - evening	12.6	12.1	6.1	13.5	49.3	8.9

## 5.4 VIEWS ON EVALUATING TPL IMPACT

Principals and teachers were asked to indicate how useful they considered it to be to evaluate the impact of TPL against nine criteria. Table 5.6 shows that the percentages of teachers indicating that criteria were 'very useful' were generally considerably lower than the corresponding percentages of principals (as previously, green indicates a higher percentage and red indicates a lower percentage). For example, while almost three-quarters of primary principals reported that it was 'very useful' to evaluate the impact of TPL against changes in participant practice, just half of primary teachers considered changes in participant practice to be a 'very useful' criterion (Table 5.6).

Value for money was the criterion least likely to be considered 'very useful' by participants, with about one-quarter of post-primary respondents, up to one-third of primary respondents, and about half of special school principals indicating that it was a 'very useful' criterion (Table 5.6). While alignment to the curriculum was considered to be 'very useful' by about three-quarters of primary and post-primary principals, this criterion was considered less useful by special school principals where only one-third rated it as a 'very important' factor.

**Table 5.6: Percentages of respondents indicating that it is 'very useful' to evaluate the impact of TPL against nine criteria (ordered in descending order by percentage of post-primary principals)**

	Post-primary		Primary		Special	
	Principal n=37	Teacher n~483 <sup>a</sup>	Principal n=46	Teacher n=345	Principal n=11	Teacher n=70
Changes in participant practice	84.8	47.4	72.6	51.4	74.3	68.4
Changes at whole school level	82.2	48.6	75.4	51.9	80.2	63.0
Student learning outcomes	82.2	54.6	82.2	56.7	87.1	64.3
Relevance to classroom practice	78.4	61.1	88.6	68.2	80.2	80.8
Alignment to the curriculum	75.9	54.1	73.2	60.1	33.8	64.5
Participant knowledge skills and competence	73.4	50.4	71.1	57.9	86.2	70.5
Participant views attitudes and values	68.3	49.6	68.7	58.2	81.2	65.8
Participant satisfaction with TPL experience	63.3	49.6	70.0	62.6	93.1	69.2
Value for money	22.7	24.0	35.5	27.0	56.0	33.4

<sup>a</sup>Across items in the table, there was some minor variation in the numbers of post-primary teachers providing usefulness ratings.

Respondents were given the opportunity to outline additional criteria they believe to be useful when evaluating the impact of TPL. Additional responses were provided by a comparatively small percentage of respondents (post-primary principals n=6; post-primary teachers n=49; primary school principals n=4; primary teachers n=28; special school principals n=2; special school teachers n=15).

Primary principals suggested other useful criteria for assessing impact may be: *"relevance of what you have learned"*; *"opportunity to share experiences"*; and *"feedback"*. More than half of the primary teachers who provided additional information also referred to the relevance and usefulness of the learning while factors mentioned by one or two respondents included: duration of course; participant interest; availability of resources; and participant confidence and wellbeing.

Three post-primary principals provided additional information and referred to the effectiveness of the TPL facilitator, the timeframe of the course, and the level of implementation of the new material. Post-primary teachers also referred to the skills of the TPL facilitator; the level of follow-up support; changes to confidence and wellbeing; value for time invested; student opinion; extent to which content was interesting or engaging; and the extent to which content was practical and applicable.

The two special school principals who provided additional information referred to the content being tailored to those with additional needs; the extent to which they would recommend the TPL to a colleague; and the extent to which the TPL is adapted to their specific school context. Turning to teachers in special schools, a key concern was the need for TPL to address the needs of pupils with SENs. Other comments by teachers in special schools referred to the importance of effective facilitation of the TPL and the need for time to discuss learning from TPL activities with colleagues to derive full benefit. Other comments from teachers in special schools included:

- “Ability to amalgamate easily within current curriculum framework.”
- “Capacity to positively impact on wellbeing.”
- “Creating a new excitement in teaching and learning. Bringing back a more positive approach to particular issues within a classroom – particularly issues relating to behaviour management.”

Principals and teachers were asked to rate the usefulness of eight approaches in evaluating the impacts of TPL. For several of the instruments presented, post-primary principals were considerably more likely than other respondents to indicate that the instrument was ‘very useful’ in evaluating the impact of TPL (Table 5.7). For example, half to three-quarters of post-primary principals reported that participant interviews; participants questionnaires or surveys; student learning outcome measures; classroom observation; and student interviews or questionnaires were ‘very useful’ in evaluating the impact of TPL. Lower percentages of post-primary teachers, primary principals, primary teachers, special school principals, and special school teachers viewed these instruments as ‘very useful’ (Table 5.7). In particular, principals in special schools were unlikely to endorse participant interviews, pupil interviews or questionnaires, or classroom observation as ‘very useful’ approaches. Using pupil interviews or surveys to assess TPL impact may be particularly challenging in a special school context given the diverse student needs and this may account for the low percentage of special school principals endorsing this approach.

**Table 5.7: Percentages of respondents indicating that various instruments are ‘very useful’ in evaluating the impact of TPL (ordered in descending order by percentage of post-primary principals)**

	Post-primary		Primary		Special	
	Principal n=37	Teacher n~480 <sup>a</sup>	Principal n=46	Teacher n=345	Principal n=11	Teacher n=70
Interviews with students/student questionnaires	77.1	42.5	30.9	30.0	12.5	26.8
Classroom observation of participants	63.3	38.7	39.1	31.1	12.5	45.9
Student learning outcome measures	63.2	39.5	42.9	32.9	31.2	48.0
Participant questionnaires/surveys	58.2	34.5	21.9	26.5	29.3	30.9
Participant interviews	51.8	42.9	32.5	37.0	11.6	43.3
Reflective learning logs and journals completed by participants (either online or paper)	30.3	26.2	23.2	18.5	38.4	25.2
Collection of documentary evidence (minutes/planning materials)	30.3	20.4	19.7	14.0	19.4	27.0
Follow up emails from the service provider	25.2	16.1	18.3	21.9	22.6	17.9

<sup>a</sup>Across items in the table, there was some minor variation in the numbers of post-primary teachers providing usefulness ratings.

## 5.5 MOST EFFECTIVE TPL EXPERIENCED

In addition to the multiple choice items on preferred modes of TPL and measuring TPL impact, principals and teachers were asked four open-ended questions regarding the most effective TPL they had ever experienced. Specifically, principals and teachers were asked to describe (a) the most effective TPL they had experienced; (b) to indicate how that TPL impacted on their professional practice and how they knew it had an impact; (c) to indicate whether or not the TPL had impacted on the outcomes of their students and how they knew; and (d) to indicate if the TPL impacted on practice and policy in their school and how they knew. For each of the questions, a coding

system was devised as outlined in Chapter 2 whereby a response was coded one if it was described by a particular code and zero otherwise. Codes were generated through analysis of participants' responses and an iterative process of refining the coding scheme. It was possible for a response to contain reference to multiple codes.

In this section, sample responses are presented to give a flavour of participants' answers. For each answer provided, the categories to which the response was assigned are indicated along with the respondent's school type (primary, post-primary, or special) and role (principal or teacher). Then, the percentages of responses coded in various categories are presented. In each table, the number of respondents that provided an answer to the question is provided and readers are advised to use caution when the number of responses is very small. This is particularly an issue for special school principals where just eight responses were available for each question in this section.

**Please describe the most effective TPL that you have experienced (themes, respondent type):**

- *"One of the most effective TPL that I've experienced was a summer course on Aistear in the classroom. It was held in the national school in <place> and it was a five day course. What was brilliant about it was that it was a very practical and hands on course which allowed us to be the children participating in Aistear. The facilitator focused on a different theme every day and set up the different stations that we could go to, take photos of and try out for ourselves. Another thing that was hugely beneficial was that the facilitator allowed some time each day for knowledge and ideas to be shared, not only relating to Aistear and the themes in question, but also on any other areas of teaching they felt worked for them."* (Methods of instruction, Sustained duration, Cognitive outcomes; Primary teacher)
- *"When a professional comes to the school and carries out TPL in the whole school setting - in class bands it's particularly useful and practical. Observations in a classroom setting are helpful."* (School-based location, Methods of instruction; Primary teacher)
- *"Face to face collaborative endeavours with solid clear and succinct goals."* (Methods of instruction; Primary principal)
- *"Digital planning framework day. Excellent facilitator ... for those of us who are IT challenged we left that day feeling confident and competent re putting a plan in place."* (Affective outcomes; Primary principal)
- *"Workshops relating to practical applications relating to my job – e.g. Allocation seminars/ budget workshops/ employment law etc. These workshops offer training and practical tips for doing tasks effectively and efficiently."* (Methods of instruction, Cognitive outcomes; Post-primary principal)
- *"I attended a two-day Chemistry course during the Summer of 2019 at <institution>. It was very suitable for most classroom teaching exercises. We had excellent guest speakers on various aspects of chemistry not only related to chemistry in industry. We visited a local water service center, met engineers who work in these centers. It was invaluable for enriching your content and getting the latest weather information. I also met with teachers from all over the country rather than from teachers from the school area."* (Sustained duration, Methods of instruction, High-quality facilitator, Cognitive outcomes, Building relationships; Post-primary teacher)

The methods of instruction were one of the most frequently mentioned aspects of the most effective TPL experienced by participants. About two-fifths of primary school teachers and principals, one-third of special school principals, and over one-quarter of post-primary principals cited methods of instruction as a key feature of their preferred TPL (Table 5.8).

One-quarter of post-primary principals emphasised cognitive outcomes in their responses; the same percentage underlined the importance of building relationships (Table 5.8). About one-in-four to one-in-five post-primary teachers mentioned cognitive outcomes, building relationships, or sustained duration as key features of the most effective TPL.

Cognitive outcomes or sustained duration were important elements according to about two-fifths of primary school principals (Table 5.8). Responses from special school principals were particularly likely to focus on building relationships (55%), sustained duration (55%), or school-based location (55%). About half of special school principals referenced affective outcomes while one-third mentioned cognitive outcomes (Table 5.8).

Turning to special education teachers (see Table A2.22, Appendix 2), their responses were particularly likely to focus on methods of instruction (referenced by about 30% of special education teachers in post-primary schools and 42% in primary schools). Cognitive outcomes were important aspects of the most effective TPL experienced according to about 27% of special education teachers at post-primary level and 25% at primary level (Table A2.22).

**Table 5.8: Categorisation of respondents' answers describing the most effective TPL they had experienced (Percentages in decreasing order of post-primary principal)**

	Post-primary		Primary		Special	
	Principal n=24	Teacher n=300	Principal n=37	Teacher n=249	Principal n=8	Teacher n=55
Methods of instruction	27.5	20.0	36.4	40.3	37.0	15.0
Cognitive outcomes	25.5	21.0	42.0	23.3	37.3	25.0
Building relationships	25.5	25.1	17.4	9.2	55.2	6.8
Sustained duration	15.7	19.1	41.6	16.3	55.2	19.7
High-quality facilitator	15.6	14.3	27.0	10.8	9.6	6.7
School-based location	9.8	5.0	26.0	13.0	55.2	18.4
Affective outcomes	9.8	2.3	6.7	1.5	46.9	0.0
Ongoing personal support for upskilling and development	0.0	2.7	24.3	3.0	0.0	0.6
Reflect and evaluate/reflection	0.0	2.9	8.7	2.2	0.0	3.5
Other	21.5	30.6	11.7	26.2	7.8	33.2



### How did this TPL impact on your own professional practice? How did you know it had an impact?

- *"I knew it had an impact because it helped me to become much more reflective in my practice and also encouraged me to do further reading in the area. I was enabled to share what I had learnt with my colleagues."* (Increased reflection on current practice; Primary principal)
- *"Makes you look inwardly and self-assess."* (Increased reflection on current practice; Special school teacher)
- *"I learned about various teaching strategies and was able to incorporate them into my lessons. These strategies were fun and simple I know they had an impact as the students were much more content and confident throughout the learning process."* (Developed skills and knowledge that I could apply in my practice; Post-primary teacher)
- *"I left the course with a treasure trove of practical ideas and strategies that I could use immediately and effectively in the classroom. The children enjoyed the projects and I felt there was an increase in their enthusiasm and engagement during our lessons."* (Developed skills and knowledge that I could apply in my practice; Primary teacher)
- *"TPL provided good practical advice on a particular strand of PE that we felt we had somewhat neglected as a staff."* (Increased awareness of good practice; Primary principal)
- *"All of the above had an impact on the practical methodologies in the classroom and made me aware of the difficulties children with Autism, Dyslexia or DS may face and why children may react in particular ways. It informed my attitude towards children with additional needs and would have changed it in certain ways: e.g. keep instructions short and simple, avoid sensory overload, pre -warn children about transitions, do not treat a child as a "school mascot"- ensure full equality of treatment. It is more difficult to quantify how I knew it had an impact -I suppose I am much more aware of the whole child - emotional, sensory, motor and social needs than earlier in my career, when I would have prioritized academic needs."* (Increased awareness of good practice, Changes to lesson planning and implementation; Primary teacher)
- *"It changed my approach to Maths, led to my implementing more practical approaches."* (Changes to lesson planning and implementation; Primary principal)
- *"Both of the above have linked me in with peers who have helped to inform my views and both support and refine my professional practice. I introduced the Accelerated Reading Programme into the school which have resulted in five additional literacy classes for first year students."* (Increased engagement/sharing with colleagues; Post-primary principal)
- *"From discussing successes and challenges within the classroom, I found that we were working collaboratively. There wasn't any authoritarian attitudes behind the advice. I felt supported in my teaching and any critiques were taken on board because I simply wanted to improve. It helped me to feel more confident in my teaching and also to take risks and try new techniques."* (Increased engagement/sharing with colleagues, Increased confidence and motivation; Primary teacher)
- *"The positive feedback that was given through these tutor visits were informative, kind, and focused on the strengths of the teacher. As a result my focus, motivation, creativity, willingness to lead projects, collaboration skills, and work rate increased and made me a more effective teacher."* (Increased confidence and motivation; Special school teacher)



Table 5.9 presents the percentages of responses to the question 'How did this TPL impact on your own professional practice?' assigned to various categories. The bottom part of Table 5.9 focuses on responses to the question 'How did you know it had an impact?' and presents the percentages of responses assigned to various categories.

At post-primary level, responses of teachers and principals frequently referred to changes in lesson planning and implementation. Responses of about one-in-three post-primary principals and teachers were coded in this way. About one-quarter of post-primary principals mentioned an increased awareness of good practice; a similar proportion referenced increased engagement or sharing with colleagues (Table 5.9). These were less frequently mentioned by post-primary teachers who were more likely to discuss the development of skills and knowledge that they can apply in their practice.

Teacher responses at primary level covered broadly similar priorities as at post-primary. The development of new skills and knowledge that can be applied in practice was mentioned by almost one-in-three primary teachers while about one-in-four emphasised making changes to lesson planning and implementation in the classroom. About one-quarter of primary principals identified increased reflection on their current practice as an impact of TPL.

Responses from special school principals focused on two key themes: increased confidence and motivation, and, the development of skills and knowledge that could be applied in practice (the limited range of responses may reflect the low number of responses rather than a narrower focus by special school principals). Similar to teachers in primary and post-primary schools, special school teachers noted as key areas, the development of skills and knowledge that can be applied in practice, and changes to lesson planning and implementation (Table 5.9).

**Table 5.9: Categorisation of respondents' answers regarding the impact of TPL on their own professional practice (Percentages in decreasing order of post-primary principal)**

	Post-primary		Primary		Special	
	Principal n=22	Teacher n=296	Principal n=38	Teacher n=241	Principal n=8	Teacher n=52
Changes to lesson planning and implementation	39.7	29.7	12.5	26.9	0.0	28.8
Increased awareness of good practice	27.1	2.5	12.4	21.2	0.0	18.7
Increased engagement/sharing with colleagues	27.1	8.1	6.4	7.1	0.0	3.9
Increased confidence and motivation	16.6	14.3	4.5	17.7	55.2	13.4
Increased reflection on current practice	8.3	7.4	23.9	3.6	0.0	3.5
Developed skills and knowledge that I could apply in my practice	0.0	35.9	0.0	30.7	80.8	49.7
Greater understanding of the challenges facing pupils	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	27.5	17.8
Increased openness to change	0.0	0.0	7.5	4.4	0.0	3.6
Increased understanding of pupils' learning, behaviour and wellbeing	0.0	5.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Other	4.2	8.1	26.3	5.2	0.0	4.3
<b>How did you know...?</b>						
Noticeable change in practice	35.5	3.3	37.0	11.2	9.6	2.8
Noticeable improvement in pupils' learning/wellbeing	16.8	6.2	9.0	11.5	17.4	5.9
Feedback	4.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	28.8	0.0

Respondents were asked to indicate how they knew that TPL had an impact. Reasons provided mentioned that the TPL had a noticeable change in practice (about one-third of primary and post-primary principals); a noticeable improvement in pupils' learning/wellbeing (ranging from 6% to 17% across respondent categories); and feedback (cited by about one-quarter of special school principals).

**How did this TPL impact on the outcomes of your students? How did you know it had an impact?**

- *"Because I was focused on being better prepared for the lesson and wanted to reflect on the lesson, I was conscious of pupil engagement. This meant I was constantly looking at who was engaged, who was having difficulties with the task, who found the task too easy. Gave me a better sense of the class and their individual needs."* (Improved pupil engagement and participation; Primary principal)
- *"I can see how my students enjoy doing different games and movement break songs."* (Enhanced pupil enjoyment of lessons; Special school teacher)
- *"The kids became much more interested in ecology and loved discussing it and doing nature trails around the school gardens. They loved doing Art work and projects based on ecology-nature."* (Enhanced pupil enjoyment of lessons; Primary teacher)
- *"I was able to identify, accommodate and support the needs of my students."* (Increased inclusivity and targeted supports for those with additional needs; Post-primary teacher)
- *"Students are happier as teachers are employing a wide range of teaching methodologies and willing to try and sometimes fail."* (Pupils benefitted from exposure to new teaching and learning approaches; Post-primary principal)
- *"More work handed in for correction. Depth of opinion and engagement with question asked improved. Student confidence levels improved also- more hands going up to try the higher order questions."* (Improved learning and assessment outcomes; Post-primary principal)
- *"Children picked up on the dangers of sun and the importance of physical activity. Parents reported back that children were protecting themselves wearing caps and sun cream without being asked."* (Positive feedback from pupils and parents; Primary teacher)
- *"This was wonderful for the pupils because instead of dealing with behaviour all the time I could focus on lessons more effectively. The pupils verbally said how happy they were not having to evacuate the classroom 4 times a day often more. The worked better, could focus and concentrate."* (Positive feedback from pupils and parents; Special school teacher)

**Table 5.10: Categorisation of respondents' answers regarding the impact of TPL on outcomes of students (Percentages in decreasing order of post-primary principal)**

	Post-primary		Primary		Special	
	Principal n=20	Teacher n=288	Principal n=36	Teacher n=236	Principal n=8	Teacher n=51
Students benefited from exposure to new teaching and learning approaches	38.1	33.8	22.6	36.8	63.5	29.4
Improved student engagement, confidence, and participation	21.5	24.3	19.9	20.9	19.2	30.9
Enhanced student enjoyment of lessons	9.5	8.5	24.6	14.6	17.9	9.2
Indirect impact	9.5	5.1	14.3	11.8	26.2	21.3
Increased inclusivity and targeted supports for those with additional needs/understanding of pupil needs	0.0	2.2	21.2	1.2	9.6	14.0
Other	11.9	12.9	8.6	5.8	17.4	3.8
<b>How do you know...?</b>						
Improved student learning, assessment, and behavioural outcomes	28.6	22.9	31.2	29.6	0.0	20.4
Positive feedback from students and parents	9.5	9.8	20.0	3.8	0.0	1.8

In terms of TPL impact on student outcomes, about one-third of post-primary principals and one-third of post-primary teachers referenced the benefit students experienced from exposure to new teaching and learning approaches. This theme was also mentioned by about one-quarter of primary principals and over one-third of primary teachers. Two-thirds of special school principals and almost one-third of special school teachers mentioned the benefit to students of experiencing new approaches to teaching and learning (Table 5.10).

At least one-fifth of respondents in each group cited improved pupil engagement, confidence, and participation as an impact of TPL on student outcomes. Increased pupil enjoyment of lessons was cited as a student outcome by about one-quarter of primary principals and lower percentages across other groups. One-quarter of special school principals referenced indirect impact but again, the total number of responses from special school principals was small (Table 5.10).

Respondents indicated that the benefits to students were identified through improved student outcomes related to learning, assessment, and behaviour. Lower percentages of respondents indicated that positive feedback from pupils and parents helped them to know that TPL had had an impact on student outcomes (Table 5.10).

Principals and teachers were also asked about the impact of the most effective TPL they had experienced on practice and policy in the school and how they knew it had an impact. One-fifth to two-fifths of respondents cited improved knowledge or more widespread implementation of particular approaches or policies (Table 5.11). One-fifth to half of respondents mentioned an improvement in reflective practice, taking place in a collaborative manner and with a whole-school commitment to teachers' learning. Principals were more likely than teachers in each context to refer to improvements in planning, identifying more structured approaches to planning and record keeping (post-primary 10% of principals; primary 15% of principals; special school 37% of principals; Table 5.11).

### How did this TPL impact on practice and policy within the school? How did you know it had an impact?

- *"Teachers felt that we were all learning new things together and nobody appeared to feel intimidated or afraid to try something new. It also impacted on the layout and practice of our teachers planning and reporting."* (Openness to new ideas; Special school principal)
- *"Discussed at whole staff level the focus of the curriculum and the way to plan fortnightly for the curriculum. All staff then had a clear understanding of planning for their own classes with this new curriculum."* (More structured approach to planning; Primary teacher)
- *"Communication and unity of direction - full staff involvement in discussion and decision on policy/practice in school. Buy-in and assistance of other staff members received."* (Greater reflective practice in a collaborative manner and whole-school commitment to teachers' learning; Primary teacher)
- *"The teachers involved in the workshops have regular informal meetings to discuss progress. We are in the process of sharing the <name of resource> with a wider group of interested teachers. This is through a collaborative process and will take some time. It is important that it is on a voluntary basis and not enforced."* (Greater reflective practice in a collaborative manner and whole-school commitment to teachers' learning; Post-primary teacher)
- *"As well as being able to recognise the different ways children were struggling to deal and cope with situations they had found themselves in I found I could recognise it in staff and parents too and offered supports where appropriate and necessary."* (Improved knowledge or more widespread implementation of particular approaches/policies; Primary principal)
- *"We developed an induction policy. Other teachers were observed and so it encouraged us all to reflect on our teaching."* (Increased recognition of policy requirements, Greater reflective practice in a collaborative manner; Primary teacher)
- *"In my current role, I have had the opportunity, through TPL, to discuss and shared ideas with other members of senior management. I have then been able to share these ideas in my own school. This has filtered through to policy reviews and how we do things in the school. I would consider the impact to be a series of small little changes that have helped the school and the staff/students within the school. However, the small things matter and are appreciated. It is important to say also that some things gathered through TPL might 'only' be a small idea or suggestion that can have a big impact on the atmosphere/wellbeing of staff and students."* (School leaders'/teachers' practices have changed as a result of TPL; Post-primary principal)
- *"Each class worked on a specific area at the level of that class. For example when we worked on questioning, each class covered it at the same time."* (Whole-school approach; Primary teacher)
- *"Improved grades and better understanding of expectations."* (Improved student outcomes; Post-primary teacher)
- *"It has allowed more children access to mindfulness and meditation and helped them self-regulate as a result."* (Improved student outcomes; Primary teacher)
- *"New ideas will take time to percolate, important to recognise and protect what is working well also. Remembering to be excited about my subject is the best driver I can think of in relation to policy and practice."* (Indirect impact; Post-primary teacher)
- *"Decrease in the number of incidents of behaviours that challenge."* (Decrease in challenging behaviour; Special school principal)
- *"The impact was evaluated through assessing the levels of overall parent satisfaction and pupil progress."* (Parental satisfaction and pupil progress; Special school principal)

In offering reasons for how they knew TPL had had an impact on policy and practice, about one-third of post-primary principals emphasised improved student outcomes (Table 5.11). Principals in primary and special schools more frequently identified changes in the practices of school leaders and or teachers with up to half of principals in the two contexts mentioning reasons related to this theme. Small percentages of respondents highlighted other issues such as positive feedback (not more than 10% of any group); a decrease in challenging behaviour; and parental satisfaction and student progress (Table 5.11).

**Table 5.11: Categorisation of respondents' answers regarding the impact of TPL on practice and policy within the school (Percentages in decreasing order of post-primary principal)**

	Post-primary		Primary		Special	
	Principal n=21	Teacher n=252	Principal n=37	Teacher n=212	Principal n=8	Teacher n=45
Improved knowledge or more widespread implementation of particular approaches/policies	32.6	22.8	31.4	37.1	19.2	43.2
Greater reflective practice in a collaborative manner and whole-school commitment to teachers' learning	21.7	21.9	33.0	20.2	45.6	37.3
More structured/improved approach to planning and/or recording	10.9	4.4	14.9	8.5	37.3	6.8
Openness to new ideas	0.0	0.0	26.5	0.0	37.3	0.0
Whole school approach	0.0	0.0	0.0	14.2	0.0	0.0
Increased recognition of policy requirements	0.0	3.1	30.3	9.5	19.2	10.0
Indirect impact	0.0	2.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Other	4.3	26.4	11.6	20.2	0.0	18.4
<b>How do you know...?</b>						
Improved student outcomes	30.4	6.8	0.0	8.3	0.0	1.2
School leaders/teachers practices have changed as a result of TPL	26.2	0.0	43.8	4.2	46.9	0.0
Positive feedback	8.7	3.9	4.6	3.1	0.0	1.2
Decrease in challenging behaviour	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	7.8	0.0
Parental satisfaction and student progress	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.3	0.0

## 5.6 KEY POINTS FROM CHAPTER 5

- Large majorities of teachers and principals in the three school types expressed agreement with the statement that 'professional learning activities often help teachers to develop new teaching approaches' and with the statement that 'I have been enriched by the professional learning activities in which I have participated'. In general, respondents expressed positive views about TPL activities.
- Across all school types, principals had a higher mean score on attitudes to professional learning activities than teachers. The gap was largest in post-primary schools.
- Post-primary teachers had a statistically significantly lower mean score on the attitudes to professional learning than their counterparts in primary and special schools.
- Comparing attitudes to professional learning, there were no significant differences between teachers (or principals) in DEIS and non-DEIS schools at either primary or post-primary level.



- High percentages of principals and teachers across the three school types included school-based support (including school visits from support service personnel) in their top five preferred modes of TPL. At least two-thirds of principals and over half of teachers included this mode in their top five. Single-day workshops were also positively viewed by respondents, although there was variation in the extent to which they were included in respondents' top five preferred modes. While 40% of post-primary principals included single-day workshops in their top five preferred modes, 70% of special school teachers rated them as such.
- For other modes of TPL, there was considerable variation across teachers and principals in the three school types in the extent to which activities were included in the top five preferences. In-school workshops led by colleagues were included in the top five preferred mode by almost half of post-primary principals and one-third of post-primary teachers. In primary and special schools, higher percentages of teachers than principals included team teaching in their top five.
- At post-primary level, one-third of teachers had never experienced residential workshops, one-quarter had not experienced lesson study, and one-fifth had not experienced research. About one-in-ten post-primary teachers indicated that they had not experienced workshops held over a number of days; similar percentages had not experienced team teaching, mentoring/coaching, or PLCs.
- Sizeable percentages of respondents in primary and special schools indicated that they had not experienced various forms of the listed TPL activities. Nearly one-fifth of special school teachers, one-third of primary teachers, two-fifths of primary principals, and three-fifths of special school principals indicated that they had not experienced lesson study. One-quarter to one-half of respondents from primary or special schools had not experienced residential workshops or research. Compared to their post-primary counterparts, primary and special school principals were more likely to indicate never having experienced several forms of TPL.
- Learning through practice received a high level of endorsement as an effective form of TPL across all groups of respondents.
- Attitudes to school-based support varied considerably between principals and teachers. While at least two-thirds of principals identified school-based support as 'highly effective' in informing professional knowledge, competence, and skills, percentages were considerably lower amongst teachers (ranging from 29% of post-primary teachers to 54% of primary teachers).
- Research, reading academic literature, and evening workshops were least likely to be considered 'highly effective' forms of TPL by principals and teachers.
- By and large, principals and teachers viewed the same forms of TPL as effective in informing attitudes, values, and practice as were effective in informing professional knowledge, competence, and skills.
- Turning to the evaluation of TPL, substantially higher percentages of principals than teachers reported that it was 'very useful' to evaluate TPL against nine criteria with value for money least likely to be considered 'very useful' by participants. The percentages of teachers indicating that the specified criteria were 'very useful' for assessing the impact of TPL were generally considerably lower than the corresponding percentages of principals. For example, while at least three-quarters of principals across school types considered changes in participant practice to be a useful criterion in the evaluation of TPL, just half to two-thirds of teachers rated it as such.
- There were differences between principals and teachers and between those working in primary, post-primary, and special schools, on the instruments they considered most effective for evaluating TPL impact. For several of the instruments presented, post-primary principals were considerably more likely than other respondents to indicate that the instrument was 'very useful' in evaluating the impact of TPL. Half to three-quarters of post-primary principals

reported that participant interviews; participants questionnaires or surveys; pupil learning outcome measures; classroom observation; and pupil interviews or questionnaires were 'very useful' in evaluating the impact of TPL. Lower percentages of post-primary teachers, primary principals, primary teachers, special school principals, and special school teachers viewed these instruments as 'very useful'. Principals in special schools were unlikely to endorse participant interviews, pupil interviews or questionnaires, or classroom observation as 'very useful' approaches.

- In identifying the most effective TPL they had experienced, participants had the opportunity to describe in detail features of a particular TPL, its impact on their professional practice, its impact on student outcomes, and its impact on school policy and practice. Key issues identified as features of effective TPL were the methods of instruction used, cognitive outcomes, relationship building, and the TPL having a sustained duration. At least one-in-ten respondents across groups also cited the importance of having a high-quality facilitator.
- A key impact on professional practice identified by respondents was a change in their approaches to lesson planning and implementation. Post-primary principals mentioned having an increased awareness of good practice and having opportunities for greater engagement with colleagues. Increased confidence and motivation was a key outcome referenced by principals in special schools. Teachers in all contexts emphasised the development of skills and knowledge that can be applied in practice. This was also a key outcome for special school principals.
- Focusing on outcomes for students, respondents considered that students benefited from exposure to new teaching and learning approaches. Across school contexts, at least one-fifth of respondents identified improved student engagement, confidence, and participation as important student outcomes. Student enjoyment was more frequently identified as an important student outcome of the TPL by respondents at primary level compared to post-primary level.
- Turning to the impact of TPL on policy and practice, two themes were most commonly referenced by respondents across school types. These were: improved knowledge or more widespread implementation of particular approaches/policies, and, greater reflective practice in a collaborative manner and improved whole-school commitment to teachers' learning. Post-primary principals were most likely to indicate that they identified the impact through improved student outcomes whereas primary and special school principals were more likely to indicate that they identified the impact through changes in the practices of school leaders or teachers.
- Post-primary principals were the only group of respondents where a majority rated instruments as 'very useful' to assess the impact of TPL; i.e., half to three-quarters of post-primary principals indicated that five of the eight listed instruments were 'very useful'. These were: interviews with pupils/pupil questionnaires; classroom observation of participants; pupil learning outcome measures; participant questionnaires/surveys; and participant interviews). These and other instruments (reflective learning logs; documentary evidence; follow-up email from the service provider) were much less likely to be rated as 'very useful' by other respondents. This suggests that principals and teachers may benefit from support to identify instruments that are useful in their context for the purposes of evaluating TPL.



# CHAPTER 6:

## Recent uptake of teachers' professional learning

This chapter examines teacher and principal participation in Teachers' Professional Learning (TPL) activities between September 2018 and the time of survey administration (Spring 2020). In responding to questions in this section of the questionnaire, respondents were reminded that for the purposes of the survey, TPL was defined as:

*all of the various types of continuing professional learning and development activities for teachers and school leaders which are funded, facilitated, accredited or otherwise supported by the Department of Education, its support services and agencies (including but not limited to NEPS, NCSE, PDST, JCT, NIPT, CSL, FESS, and the Education Centres). TPL does not include initial teacher education. TPL is continuous and ongoing and ranges from highly informal to structured and formal.*

This chapter comprises eight sections which describe:

- factors determining TPL participation;
- time spent on TPL;
- types of TPL in which respondents participated between September 2018 and Spring 2020;
- main purpose of TPL undertaken;
- impact of TPL on development as a teacher;
- evaluation of TPL activities;
- integration of TPL activities into day-to-day practice as a teacher/school leader; and
- general views on TPL.

### 6.1 DECISION-MAKING AROUND TPL PARTICIPATION

Principals were asked to indicate whether or not, at their school, it was generally possible to facilitate all requests from teachers for TPL participation. Approximately two-thirds of principals in primary and post-primary schools reported that their school was generally able to facilitate all requests from teachers for TPL participation, with a slightly higher percentage in special schools (82%).

Principals and teachers were presented with a list of factors that may influence decisions on TPL participation and were asked to select which factors they thought were important. Table 6.1 presents the percentages of teachers and principals that selected each of the listed factors as one they believed determines TPL participation (colour gradient from green to red is used to show decreasing percentages).

Approximately 85% of primary school principals and 80% of special school principals reported that the *availability of a substitute teacher or teacher cover* was an important factor to consider. The percentage of principals from post-primary schools and the percentages of teachers selecting this as a factor were much lower (average among them was 47%), suggesting that substitute availability is a key issue for primary and special school principals but less so for post-primary principals and teachers (Table 6.1). It is likely that this difference may be due to the organisational differences between primary and post-primary level timetabling.

*Development and promotion of teacher knowledge and skills* was identified as a factor determining TPL participation by 84% of post-primary principals, 78% of primary principals and 80% of special school principals. *Teacher's own interest* was considered by 94% of principals in special schools compared to 74% on average among principals in primary and post-primary schools and teachers in all schools. The factor that was most widely identified by teachers as determining TPL participation was *changes to the curriculum*; identified by 80% of primary teachers, 90% of post-primary teachers, and 90% of special school teachers (Table 6.1). A whole-school strategic approach to TPL appears to be a less important influence on decision-making around TPL participation, with about half of primary principals, almost two-thirds of post-primary principals and four-fifths of special school principals indicating that an *overall school plan/priorities* was a determinant of TPL participation (Table 6.1).

In addition to the listed factors, respondents were given the opportunity to provide details of other factors that determine TPL participation. A small number of respondents considered other factors that were not presented to them in the survey. Among the other responses provided by principals as factors in determining TPL participation were *genuine interest from teachers*; *staff willingness*; and *sharing out TPL opportunities between teachers*. Teachers provided other factors such as *the attitude of principal/management*; *the needs of the children*; and *personal interest in a particular area*.

**Table 6.1: Percentages of teachers and principals selecting factors which may determine decisions on TPL participation, primary, post-primary, and special schools (ordered in descending order of primary principal)**

	Primary		Post-primary		Special	
	Principal (n=44)	Teacher (n=333)	Principal (n=33)	Teacher (n=452)	Principal (n=10)	Teacher (n=70)
Availability of a substitute teacher or teacher cover	84.7	55.0	40.1	40.9	80.0	49.5
Development and promotion of teacher knowledge and skills	77.9	67.6	84.3	64.5	79.2	80.2
Changes to curriculum	77.6	79.6	78.6	90.1	71.9	89.8
Teacher's own interest	72.7	74.2	71.5	75.5	94.1	76.1
Overall school plan/priorities	54.9	38.3	62.9	30.9	79.2	43.6
Location of TPL	46.5	48.9	48.7	53.4	23.9	45.6
Time available inside of school hours	44.0	33.7	38.6	44.5	24.9	38.4
Changes to policy	43.0	42.5	31.5	35.1	51.8	48.1
Cost	40.0	43.4	21.5	33.5	38.7	41.5
Time available outside of school hours	37.3	27.8	15.7	34.9	23.9	38.9
Time of year, e.g. summer courses	28.9	46.4	8.5	28.0	24.9	44.1
Teachers who had fewer TPL opportunities	28.2	15.3	22.8	18.3	66.0	14.7

Note. Multiple factors could be selected by respondents.

## 6.2 TIME SPENT ON TPL

Principals and teachers were asked about the amount of time they spent on TPL between September 2018 and Spring 2020. Principals and teachers at post-primary level were asked to indicate how many days they had spent on professional learning activities related to (a) the Junior Cycle and (b) all other professional learning. Respondents were advised that one day is about five hours and asked to indicate whether they had spent: 'none'; 'up to half a day'; '1-3 days'; '4-8 days'; '9-14 days';

'15 or more days'; or 'prefer not to say'. For primary and special school respondents, the focus was on when the TPL had been undertaken; i.e., (a) over the summer holidays, and (b) at other times of the year. Response options for primary and special school respondents were the same as for post-primary respondents. Respondents were advised not to count undergraduate or postgraduate courses.

Approximately half of primary principals and a similar percentage of primary teachers (55%) reported spending 4-8 days on TPL over the summer holidays (Table 6.2). A further 44% of primary principals and 31% of primary teachers reported spending 9 or more days on TPL. Very low percentages of primary teachers (7%) and principals (2%) reported spending half a day or less on TPL during the summer holidays.

Similarly in special schools, a large majority of principals reported spending at least 4 days on TPL during the summer holidays and two-fifths indicated that they had spent 15 or more days. Three-quarters of special school teachers reported spending at least 4 days on TPL during the summer holidays. However, about one-in-seven special school teachers had spent no more than half a day on TPL over the summer holidays; this was considerably more common amongst special school teachers than amongst primary teachers (Table 6.2).

**Table 6.2: Days spent on TPL over the summer holidays and at other times of the year since September 2018, primary, and special schools (percentages)**

	Over the summer holidays				At other times of the year			
	Primary		Special		Primary		Special	
	Principal (n=44)	Teacher (n=325)	Principal (n=10)	Teacher (n=62)	Principal (n=44)	Teacher (n=325)	Principal (n=10)	Teacher (n=62)
None	1.7	5.9	0.0	13.2	0.0	1.7	0.0	8.7
Up to half a day	0.0	1.1	0.0	1.1	0.0	3.9	0.0	0.0
1-3 days	4.4	7.4	7.8	7.6	12.6	37.5	19.6	17.7
4-8 days	49.8	54.9	14.5	41.2	38.8	31.7	21.9	29.1
9-14 days	27.3	19.8	37.0	18.5	17.5	12.1	16.6	10.2
15 or more days	16.8	11.0	40.8	18.3	31.1	13.2	41.9	34.3

Table 6.2 also shows the number of days spent on TPL at other times of the year. At primary level, 39% of principals and 32% of teachers reported spending 4-8 days on TPL at other times of the year; the corresponding percentages in special schools were 22% and 29% respectively. More than one-third of primary teachers (38%) compared to one-eighth of primary principals (13%) reported spending 1-3 days on TPL at other times of the year; the corresponding percentages in special schools were 18% and 20% respectively.

At post-primary level, almost all principals and teachers reported having spent at least one day since 2018 on TPL related to the Junior Cycle<sup>49</sup> (Table 6.3). Over one-third of post-primary principals reported spending 1-3 days on Junior Cycle-related TPL and a further 53% reported spending 4-8 days; the corresponding percentages for teachers were 42% and 43% respectively.

A very small percentage of post-primary teachers (3%) reported not spending any time on other professional learning activities. At the other end of the spectrum, 11% of post-primary teachers and 9% of post-primary principals reported spending 15 or more days on other professional learning activities (Table 6.3).

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At post-primary level, TPL for JCT requires two school closure days per annum since 2014.

**Table 6.3: Days spent on TPL relating to the Junior Cycle and all other professional learning since September 2018, post-primary schools (percentages)**

	Relating to the Junior Cycle		All other professional learning	
	Principal (n=32)	Teacher (n=427)	Principal (n=32)	Teacher (n=424)
None	0.0	0.4	0.0	3.4
Up to half a day	0.0	0.7	2.9	7.5
1-3 days	36.8	41.5	33.8	39.7
4-8 days	52.9	43.2	35.3	27.8
9-14 days	7.4	10.1	19.2	10.7
15 or more days	2.9	4.1	8.8	11.0

Figure 6.1 shows the percentages of principals and teachers who indicated that, for TPL taking place during work hours, they received scheduled time for TPL (i.e., were permitted to be absent from classes/duties) and the percentages for whom a substitute teacher was provided. All the principals in primary and post-primary schools reported having received scheduled time; 87% of special school principals reported that they received scheduled time. Approximately three-quarters of primary teachers indicated that received scheduled time; the percentages were higher in post-primary and special schools (83% and 82% respectively).

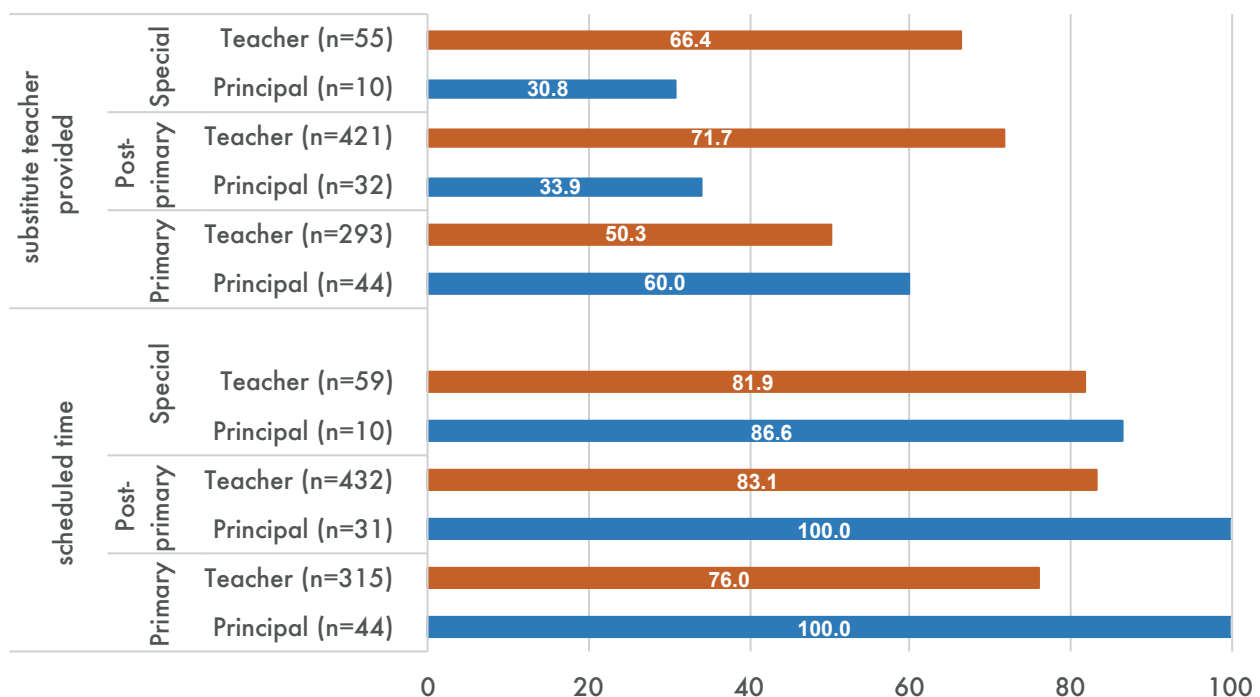
**Figure 6.1 Scheduled time received and substitute cover provided for TPL completed during work hours since Sept 2018, primary, post-primary, and special schools (percentages)**

Figure 6.1 shows that 72% of post-primary teachers reported that a substitute teacher was provided for TPL that took place during work hours. This compares to 67% of special school teachers and 50% of primary school teachers. Primary schools principals (60%) were more likely than their post-primary (34%) or special school (31%) counterparts to indicate that a substitute was provided. This likely reflects the higher percentage of teaching principals at primary level.

Turning to special education teachers, 11% indicated that since September 2018, they had spent no more than half a day on TPL over the summer holidays. The corresponding value across all primary

teachers was 7%. Approximately 23% of special education teachers reported spending 15 or more days on TPL at other times of the year (since September 2018). This compares to 13% across all primary teachers and 34% across teachers in special schools (see Appendix 2, Table A2.23).

Similar to all teachers at post-primary level, almost all special education teachers reported having spent at least one day since 2018 on TPL related to the Junior Cycle. A slightly higher percentage of special education teachers reported spending 9-14 days on TPL related to the Junior Cycle compared to all teachers (15% and 10% respectively). A slightly higher percentage of special education teachers reported spending nine or more days on other professional learning compared to that reported by all teachers at post-primary level, 28% and 22% respectively (see Appendix 2, Table A2.24).

### 6.3 TYPES OF TPL PARTICIPATED IN SINCE SEPTEMBER 2018

Principals and teachers were asked to select from a list, the types of TPL in which they had participated since September 2018. Table 6.4 shows that the most frequent type of TPL was the *external workshop*, held away from school premises in locations such as an Education Centre. Across all school types, over 90% of principals indicated that they had participated in an *external workshop*. While percentages of teachers participating in *external workshops* were lower than for principals (80% primary schools, 88% post-primary, and 71% special schools), *external workshops* were nonetheless widely attended by teachers.

**Table 6.4: Types of TPL in which teachers and principals participated since September 2018, primary, post-primary, and special schools (percentages in descending order by primary principal)**

	Primary		Post-primary		Special	
	Principal (n=44)	Teacher (n=329)	Principal (n=32)	Teacher (n=439)	Principal (n=10)	Teacher (n=64)
External workshop (i.e., held away from school premises, e.g., in an Education Centre)	93.3	80.1	97.1	88.2	92.7	70.8
In-school support (e.g., support from a PDST facilitator, NEPS psychologist, or NCSE advisor)	89.4	68.1	83.8	67.8	79.4	72.2
Online course (e.g., approved online summer course)	81.9	64.3	14.7	20.0	73.1	71.8
Webinar	76.4	50.8	38.2	54.4	62.8	38.7
External lecture or seminar	67.5	26.9	72.0	38.4	94.1	58.7
Formal networking with colleagues (e.g., clustering)	46.0	15.1	67.6	43.0	40.7	20.7
School-based workshop	44.4	39.1	72.1	62.4	61.7	45.4
Mentoring/coaching	38.0	13.2	50.1	16.8	69.2	22.7
Team teaching	33.4	47.4	10.3	32.0	0.0	12.5
Research (e.g., an action research project)	10.1	6.3	11.8	4.7	0.0	8.5

Note. Multiple factors could be selected by respondents.

High percentages of principals and teachers indicated that they had participated in *in-school support*, e.g., support from a PDST facilitator, NEPS psychologist, or NCSE advisor. In each school type, percentages of principals were higher than the corresponding percentage of teachers (Table 6.4).

Participation in *online courses* was widespread amongst primary and special school respondents



with 64% of primary teachers, 72% of special school teachers, 73% of special school principals, and 82% of primary principals indicating that they had participated in *online courses* (Table 6.4). This was much less common at post-primary level where one-fifth of teachers and one-seventh of principals reported having participated in an *online course* since September 2018. Post-primary respondents were more likely to indicate that they had done a *webinar* (54% of teachers, 38% of principals) than an *online course*.

Principals at all levels were much more likely than teachers to report having attended an *external lecture or seminar* or to have participated in *formal networking opportunities* (Table 6.1). TPL involving *mentoring or coaching* was also reported to have been more widely attended by principals (52% on average across all school types) than teachers (18% on average across all school types).

*Research* (such as an action research project) had been undertaken by very few principals and teachers and not more than one-in-eight across any of the respondent groups reported having undertaken *research* (Table 6.4).

Compared to the percentage of primary teachers who had participated in *in-school support* (68%), a slightly higher percentage of special education teachers (74%) reported participating in 'In-school support' (see Table A2.25, Appendix 2). While participation in *online courses* was reported by 64% of all primary teachers, a slightly lower percentage of special education teachers reported participating in this type of TPL (58%). At post-primary level, a slightly higher percentage of special education teachers reported participating in *formal networking with colleagues* (54%) and *team teaching* (48%) compared to that reported by all post-primary teachers in the survey (43% and 32% respectively).

## 6.4 MAIN PURPOSE OF TPL

Principals and teachers were asked to select from a list, the main purpose of the TPL in which they had participated since September 2018. Participants were advised that they could select multiple options. *School self-evaluation and planning* was selected as the main purpose of recent TPL by a large majority of primary school principals (77%), post-primary principals (78%), and special school principals (60%). *Professional collaboration and support of colleagues* was selected as the main purpose by 78% of post-primary principals, 61% of primary principals, and 79% of special school principals. *Planning and preparation* was selected by a large percentage of principals in special schools (86%) as the main purpose of the TPL but was less frequently selected by primary (54%) and post-primary (47%) principals.

Teachers placed a strong emphasis on *knowledge about teaching methods*; *knowledge about the teaching and learning of a particular subject*; and *subject knowledge*. *Knowledge about the teaching and learning of a particular subject* was reported to be the main purpose of TPL by 69% primary teachers, 68% of special school teachers, and 61% of post-primary teachers. Nearly two-thirds of post-primary teachers reported that the main purpose of TPL was *subject knowledge*; this compares to 62% of teachers in special schools and 57% in primary schools. Findings for special education teachers are provided in Table A2.26, Appendix 2 which shows a broadly similar emphasis of recent TPL for this group.

In general, *planning for inclusion*; *classroom management and organisation*; and *working with parents* were reported by a small proportion of principals and teachers to be the main purpose of the TPL undertaken since September 2018 (Table 6.5). Focusing specifically on *planning for inclusion*, 30% of special education teachers at primary level and 35% at post-primary level reported that this represented a main purpose of TPL since September 2018 (Table A2.26, Appendix 2).

**Table 6.5: The main purpose of TPL since September 2018 reported by principals and teachers, primary, post-primary, and special schools (percentages in descending order by primary principal)**

	Primary		Post-primary		Special	
	Principal (n=44)	Teacher (n=329)	Principal (n=32)	Teacher (n=439)	Principal (n=10)	Teacher (n=64)
School self-evaluation and planning	76.4	37.2	77.9	36.0	59.7	31.9
Knowledge about teaching methods	68.4	56.0	50.0	62.3	49.4	48.4
Personal learning and development (e.g., professional development, teacher wellbeing)	64.9	48.6	58.9	43.2	77.5	50.6
Knowledge about the teaching and learning of a particular subject	64.5	69.0	10.3	61.3	49.4	68.3
Professional collaboration and support of colleagues	60.9	26.9	78.0	37.8	79.4	31.0
Planning and preparation	54.4	36.2	47.0	42.9	86.4	44.9
Subject knowledge	53.4	55.6	30.9	64.5	71.9	61.8
Planning for inclusion	36.5	23.4	35.2	21.4	35.8	26.0
Classroom management and organisation	22.0	20.8	10.3	18.1	16.6	34.0
Working with parents	11.3	5.1	8.9	4.9	28.5	7.4

*Note.* Multiple factors could be selected by respondents.

Respondents were provided with the opportunity to suggest other purposes of the TPL they had undertaken. A small number of respondents identified alternative purposes. Among the other responses provided by principals were *leadership*; *legal frameworks within the school*; *developing the student voice*; *building a school community*; and *responding effectively to behavioural difficulties*. Teachers provided other reasons for TPL participation such as *Droichead*; *knowledge around the use of technology in the classroom*; and *specific learning about mental health*.

## 6.5 IMPACT OF TPL ON DEVELOPMENT AS A TEACHER/SCHOOL LEADER

Principals and teachers were asked to indicate the impact, on their development as a teacher or school leader, of the TPL in which they had participated since September 2018. They were advised to consider the impact it might have had on their learning, their use of new knowledge and skills, and/or student learning outcomes. Table 6.6 shows the percentages of principals who reported 'a large impact' on their development as a school leader for each of the TPL activities in which they had participated. At primary level, of principals who had participated in *in-school support*, almost half reported that it had had 'a large impact' on their development as a school leader. A slightly larger percentage of post-primary principals (58%) and a substantially larger percentage of special school principals (79%) reported that in-school support had had 'a large impact'.

Of principals who participated in TPL concerned with *formal networking with colleagues*, up to 60% reported that it had 'a large impact'; the percentage was somewhat lower amongst primary principals (44%). Approximately 85% of special school principals who had participated in *external workshops* reported that these had 'a large impact'; corresponding percentages for post-primary and primary principals were 38% and 42%, respectively (Table 6.6).



**Table 6.6: Principals and teachers reporting 'a large impact' on their development as a teacher for the TPL in which they had participated, primary, post-primary, and special schools (percentages in descending order by primary principal)**

	Primary		Post-primary		Special	
	Principal	Teacher	Principal	Teacher	Principal	Teacher
In-school support (e.g., support from a PDST facilitator, NEPS psychologist, or NCSE advisor)	48.4	39.5	58.4	26.4	79.1	40.1
Mentoring/coaching	44.9	33.7	44.5	26.7	26.1	42.7
School-based workshop	44.8	31.6	54.3	24.2	68.5	46.4
Formal networking with colleagues (e.g., clustering)	44.1	32.6	60.0	34.0	61.2	28.8
External workshop (i.e., held away from school premises, e.g., in an Education Centre)	42.0	43.1	38.3	33.4	85.3	56.1
External lecture or seminar	25.9	30.8	23.5	21.6	56.9	33.8
Research (e.g., an action research project)	25.6	16.5	9.1	18.2	0.0	17.6
Team teaching	19.6	38.1	34.0	35.6	0.0	38.3
Online course (e.g., approved online summer course)	19.1	23.1	4.3	13.6	29.8	25.6
Webinar	15.8	7.0	4.0	11.3	25.5	15.2

*Note.* The number of principals and teachers in this table are based on the numbers/percentages of principals and teachers participating in each TPL in Table 6.4 above.

Table 6.6 also shows the percentages of teachers who reported 'a large impact' on their development as a teacher for each of the TPL activities they had completed (findings for the group of special education teachers in primary and post-primary schools are presented in Table A2.27, Appendix 2). Approximately 56% of special school teachers who had participated in *external workshops* reported that these had 'a large impact' on their development as a teacher; percentages of post-primary and primary teachers rating external workshops as having a large impact were somewhat lower (33% and 43% respectively). Focusing on teachers who had participated in *team teaching*, more than one-third across school types reported it as having 'a large impact' on their development as a teacher (Table 6.6).

In general, relative to other forms of TPL, principals and teachers who had participated in *webinars*, *online courses*, and *research* did not report them as having 'a large impact'.

Principals and teachers were asked how they recognised that these professional learning activities had had an impact on their development as a teacher or school leader. They were advised to consider the development of their skills, knowledge, and competencies; changes to their attitudes, beliefs, and values; changes to their practice; organisational level changes within their school; and improvements or lack of improvements in student outcomes.

Table 6.7 shows that *cognitive change* was identified by 48% of primary principals (44% of post-primary and 65% of special school principals) to be a result of participation in TPL activities. *Cognitive change* (such as 'learning all the time', 'development of my teaching skills', and 'greater knowledge') was also reported by one-third to two-fifths of teachers (40% primary school, 46% post-primary school, and 33% special schools).

Over two-thirds of the principals in special schools noted a *practical change* in their role as a school leader. Examples of *practical change* were 'changes in the way I teach', 'using new methods/resources when I was back in the classroom', and 'using strategies and ideas learned'. A very high percentage of teachers in special schools (83%) reported *practical change* as a result of participation

in TPL activities; corresponding percentages were lower amongst primary (65%) and post-primary (43%) teachers.

**Table 6.7: Changes reported by principals and teachers as a result of participation in TPL activities, primary, post-primary, and special schools (percentages in descending order by primary principal)**

	Primary		Post-primary		Special	
	Principal (n=43)	Teacher (n=228)	Principal (n=20)	Teacher (n=232)	Principal (n=7)	Teacher (n=46)
Cognitive change	48.0	39.8	44.2	45.9	65.2	33.1
Practical change	46.0	64.5	41.9	43.2	68.3	83.2
Improved learning outcomes for students	40.2	13.0	14.0	13.5	21.6	13.4
Affective change	35.9	30.5	18.7	35.3	68.3	27.9
Improved organisational practices within the school	33.7	5.0	48.8	6.7	66.8	0.4
Positive feedback	13.4	0.6	0.0	1.6	0.0	0.4
Other	4.6	1.7	4.6	5.8	0.0	0.0
Increased sharing with colleagues	0.0	1.2	0.0	6.1	0.0	0.0

*Note.* Multiple factors could be selected by respondents.

*Improved learning outcomes for pupils* were reported by 40% of primary principals but substantially smaller percentages of principals in post-primary (14%) and special schools (22%). *Affective change* (such as 'change of attitude', 'change in mind-set towards certain activities', and 'personal reflection') was reported by 68% of principals in special schools (36% in primary schools and 19% in post-primary schools). In general, principals were more likely to report *improved organisational practices within the school* as a result of participating in TPL activities (34% primary principals, 49% post-primary, and 69% special school principals) compared to teachers (less than 10% across all school types).

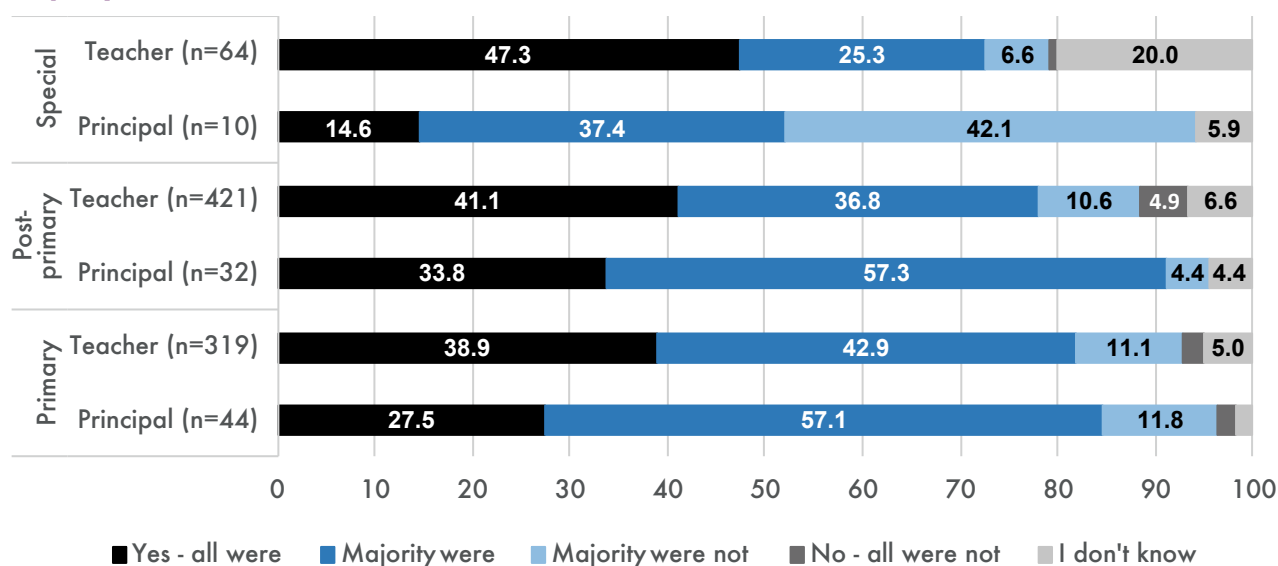
Of special education teachers (see Table A2.27, Appendix 2) who had experienced *research* (e.g., action research) as a form of TPL, 31% reported that it had 'a large impact' on their development as a teacher (the corresponding percentage across all primary teachers was 17%). A higher percentage of special education teachers (51%) indicated that *in-school support* had had 'a large impact' on their development (Table A2.27, Appendix 2). At post-primary level, 32% of special education teachers who had experienced *in-school support* reported that it had 'a large impact' on their development as a teacher (see Appendix 2, Table A2.27).

## 6.6 EVALUATION OF TPL ACTIVITIES

Principals and teachers were asked if the professional learning activities in which they had participated were evaluated by the facilitator. One-fifth of special school teachers indicated that they 'did not know' if TPL had been evaluated by the facilitator (Figure 6.2). It was much less common for other respondents to indicate that they 'did not know' if activities were evaluated.

In each school type, teachers were more likely to indicate than principals that all TPL was evaluated by the facilitator. The gap was particularly pronounced in special schools where 47% of teachers reported that all activities were evaluated, compared to 15% of principals (Figure 6.2). Figure 6.2 shows that evaluation of TPL appears to be less common for participants from special schools than for participants from primary and post-primary schools; this is a particular issue for TPL undertaken by special school principals.

**Figure 6.2: Extent to which TPL activities were evaluated by the facilitator - Percentages of teachers and principals indicating that 'all were evaluated', 'a majority were evaluated', 'a majority were not evaluated', 'none were evaluated', or 'I don't know'**



Note. Value labels are not shown when percentages in the category are less than 4%.

## 6.7 INTEGRATION OF TPL ACTIVITIES INTO DAY-TO-DAY PRACTICE AS A TEACHER

Principals and teachers were asked if there was anything which had prevented them from integrating what they learned at the TPL activities into their day-to-day practice as a teacher or school leader. Figure 6.3 shows that over three-quarters of principals and teachers across the three school types reported that they were prevented from integrating the ideas/methods that were presented to them at the professional learning activities into their day-to-day practice. All special school principals reported that there were barriers preventing them integrating the learning from TPL into their day-to-day practice.

**Figure 6.3: Principals and teachers reporting the integration of learned TPL activities into day-to-day practice had been in some way prevented, primary, post-primary, and special schools (percentages)**

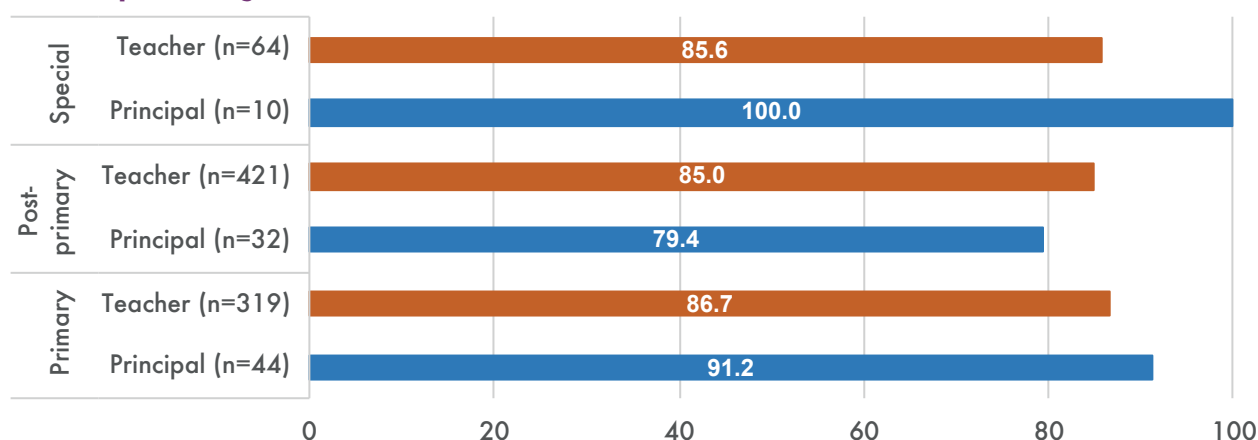


Table 6.8 shows some of the issues that prevented principals and teachers integrating what they had learned at the TPL activities into their day-to-day practice as a teacher or school leader. Approximately 57% of principals from primary schools reported that there was *limited/no time* to integrate what they had learned. A similar percentage of post-primary principals identified time as an issue; this issue

was identified by a somewhat higher percentage of special school principals (66%). Limited/no time was also noted by one-third to two-fifths of teachers across school types.

*Lack of sustained support from TPL provider* was reported by 33% of primary school principals, 35% of post-primary principals, and 20% of special school principals. Across school types, teachers were more likely than principals to identify as an issue the *lack of sustained support from TPL provider*.

*Limited/no resources* was noted as an issue by 24% of principals from primary schools, 11% from post-primary and a substantially larger percentage from special schools (67%). This was also identified as a challenge by 31% of primary teachers, 26% of post-primary teachers, and 32% of special school teachers. *Financial issues* were identified as a barrier by an average of 15% of principals and teachers across the three school types (percentages ranged from 10% to 19%).

Respondents were provided with space to identify barriers in addition to those listed. A small number of respondents provided other factors. Among the other responses provided by principals were *lack of interest from colleagues*; *unrealistic expectations from inspectorate*; and *overwork*. Teachers provided other reasons such as *lack of substitute cover*; *initiative overload*; *information gained was not relevant/realistic for current post*; and *limited physical space in the school building*.

Nearly 60% of special education teachers in primary schools (Table A2.28, Appendix 2) reported that a *lack of sustained support from the TPL provider* was an issue that prevented the integration of learning from TPL into their day-to-day practice (reported by 41% of all teachers in primary schools; Table 6.8). Approximately 35% of special education teachers in post-primary schools reported that *limited/no resources* was an issue that prevented the integration learning from TPL into their day-to-day practice (Table A2.28); the corresponding percentage across the whole group of post-primary teachers was 26% (Table 6.8).

**Table 6.8: Principals and teachers reporting issues that prevented the integration of learned TPL activities into day-to-day practice, primary, post-primary, and special schools (percentages)**

	Primary		Post-primary		Special	
	Principal (n=41)	Teacher (n=277)	Principal (n=25)	Teacher (n=358)	Principal (n=10)	Teacher (n=55)
Limited/no resources	23.8	30.9	11.1	26.0	66.8	32.2
Financial issues	16.7	10.5	18.6	12.2	13.4	15.9
Limited/no time	56.9	37.6	57.4	45.9	65.8	40.2
Limited/no support from school management	3.8	3.7	0.0	7.5	0.0	3.4
Limited/no understanding of what I had learned during the TPL activity	7.5	0.4	0.0	4.2	0.0	0.0
Lack of sustained support from TPL provider	32.6	40.8	35.1	40.9	19.6	41.1

Note. Multiple factors could be selected by respondents.

## 6.8 VIEWS ON TPL

Principals and teachers were asked to think of their own role and to explain what, in their view, works well in terms of TPL. Results from open-ended responses are summarised in Table 6.9. *Gaining knowledge and resources/skills that I can apply in my practice* was reported by a large proportion of principals and teachers. Approximately 44% of primary principals, 37% of post-primary principals, and 20% of special school principals provided responses that were coded as *gaining knowledge and resources/skills that I can apply in my practice*. Sizeable percentages of teacher responses (primary 29%; post-primary 27%; special 48%) also referred to this theme.

The theme of *collaboration and involvement of multiple staff members/learning from peers* covered the responses of 40% of principals from primary schools and 37% of post-primary principals (no special school principals provided answers related to this theme). About one-quarter of teachers across school types provided responses relating to *collaboration and involvement of multiple staff members/learning from peers*.

In contrast to principals from primary and post-primary schools, principals from special schools reported a number of different areas that they considered to work well in terms of TPL. Approximately 70% of special school principals provided responses related to *networking and informal learning from peers*; 41% identified *TPL held offsite*; and 30% provided responses related to *training which involves the whole school and/or takes school context into account*. It should be noted that there was a small number of responses from principals in special schools which limits the generalisability of responses.

**Table 6.9: Principals and teachers reporting on what works well in terms of TPL, primary, post-primary, and special schools (percentages)**

	Primary		Post-primary		Special	
	Principal (n=34)	Teacher (n=229)	Principal (n=21)	Teacher (n=223)	Principal (n=7)	Teacher (n=47)
Gaining knowledge and resources/skills that I can apply in my practice	43.8	28.7	37.0	25.8	19.8	48.0
Collaboration and involvement of multiple staff members/learning from peers	39.7	20.7	28.3	28.9	0.0	23.8
School based location	25.5	6.9	13.0	4.1	0.0	7.1
Availability of time and resources to facilitate attendance	24.1	8.5	26.0	12.0	0.0	17.0
Practical, hands-on methods of instruction	21.2	22.4	13.0	10.9	0.0	12.8
Availability of time and resources for reflection and evaluation/implementation	13.9	5.2	8.7	8.5	0.0	4.5
Ongoing personal support for upskilling and development	13.2	5.2	0.0	2.4	0.0	0.0
High quality facilitator	7.9	9.2	0.0	14.3	28.9	21.0
Sustained duration	0.0	7.9	4.3	1.8	0.0	3.7
Training which involves the whole school and/or takes school context into account	0.0	7.1	0.0	4.0	30.4	10.0
TPL held offsite	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	41.3	0.0
Networking and informal learning from peers	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	69.6	0.0
Genuine interest and motivation from teachers to attend	0.0	7.0	0.0	5.3	0.0	0.0
Other	0.0	3.2	0.0	6.5	0.0	2.2

Note. Multiple factors could be selected by respondents.

In an open-ended response item, principals and teachers were asked what in their view could be changed or improved about TPL. Approximately two-fifths of primary principals provided answers related to the *improved availability/accessibility of courses*; corresponding percentages were 43% at post-primary level and 22% for special schools (Table 6.10). On average 23% of teachers across the three school types provided answers relating to *improved availability/accessibility of courses* (ranging from 19% to 25% of teachers across school types). Responses in this category referred to issues such as offering TPL opportunities in more locations around the country, providing more online opportunities, and having greater choice regarding TPL during the school day or outside of school hours to allow participants to select the most suitable times. A very small number of post-primary teachers specifically referred to the benefits of TPL during the summer holidays and the incentive for primary teachers of Extra Personal Vacation (EPV) days (not available for post-primary teachers).

A further concern reported by a relatively large proportion of principals was increased *time/resources required for attendance/implementation of learning following TPL*. Answers related to this theme were provided by 48% of post-primary principals, 37% of primary principals, and 22% of special school principals. This issue was also identified in the responses of one-quarter to one-third of teachers (Table 6.10). Responses under this theme noted that good TPL takes time and that there is a need for greater recognition of the already full workload of teachers. Some respondents referred to the need for incentives to attend TPL, particular reimbursement for time spent on TPL outside of school hours.

In terms of improving or changing TPL, a relatively large proportion of teachers referenced the need for *course content which is practical and relevant to classroom practice (or relevant to special schools for special school respondents)*. This issue was evident in the responses of 21% of primary teachers, 33% of post-primary teachers, and 45% of special school teachers (Table 6.10). Principals in primary schools (15%) reported that TPL needed to *cover a broader range of curricular subjects*.

Other areas of potential change or improvement noted by respondents were: *opportunity for schools/teachers to choose the TPL they engage with* (4% of post-primary teachers); *skilled and experienced facilitators* (12% of special school principals; 5-7% of teachers); and *less pressure placed on schools to facilitate experimentation with new learning approaches* (18% of primary principals).



**Table 6.10: Principals and teachers reporting on how TPL should be changed or improved, primary, post-primary, and special schools (percentages in descending order by primary principal)**

	Primary		Post-primary		Special	
	Principal (n=32)	Teacher (n=212)	Principal (n=20)	Teacher (n=221)	Principal (n=7)	Teacher (n=46)
Improved availability/accessibility of courses	38.5	25.4	42.8	18.7	21.6	23.3
Increased time/resources required for attendance/implementation of learning following TPL	37.2	38.1	47.6	30.0	21.6	24.6
Less pressure placed on schools to facilitate experimentation with new learning approaches	17.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
TPL required covering a broader range of curricular subjects	15.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Increased follow up and in school support	11.8	9.0	0.0	1.5	11.6	1.5
Increased opportunities for networking and discussion	7.3	10.7	9.6	5.8	56.7	11.2
Gaining relevant information/knowledge/skills in a direct and targeted way	0.0	0.0	23.7	0.0	43.3	0.0
Availability of more contextualised and individualised TPL	0.0	0.0	4.8	0.0	0.0	0.0
Skilled and experienced facilitators	0.0	5.8	0.0	7.1	11.6	4.9
Face to face facilitation	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	45.1	0.0
Sustained duration of TPL	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.0	0.0
Opportunity for schools/teachers to choose the TPL that they engage with	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.5	0.0	0.0
Listening to teachers' views/ responding to their needs	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.7	0.0	0.0
Course content which is practical and relevant to classroom practice/special schools	0.0	21.4	0.0	33.3	0.0	44.6
Other (not belonging to any earlier categories)	19.1	10.8	4.8	15.9	0.0	18.9

Note. Multiple factors could be selected by respondents.

## 6.9 KEY POINTS FROM CHAPTER 6

- Principals in special schools were somewhat more likely to report being able to facilitate all TPL requests from teachers (special school principals 82%, compared to approximately two-thirds of primary and post-primary principals).
- Availability of a substitute teacher was identified as a key issue impacting on decisions to participate in TPL by primary (85%) and special school (80%) principals but less frequently by post-primary principals (40%).
- Teachers in each school context were most likely to identify changes to the curriculum as a factor influencing TPL participation; at least four-in-five teachers selected changes to the curriculum as a factor influencing TPL participation.
- Primary school principals (60%) were more likely than their post-primary (34%) or special school (31%) counterparts to indicate that a substitute was provided while they undertook TPL during work hours. (This likely reflects the higher percentage of teaching principals at primary level.) Amongst teachers, higher percentages of post-primary teachers (72%) than primary (50%) or special school (67%) teachers reported that a substitute teacher was provided while they did TPL during work hours.
- Almost all post-primary principals and teachers reported engaging in TPL for Junior Cycle,

with the majority spending between 1 and 8 days on TPL for this purpose. Over two-thirds of post-primary principals and a similar percentage of post-primary teachers reported engaging in 1-8 days of other professional learning.

- All of the principals in primary and post-primary schools reported having received scheduled time for TPL; 87% of special school principals reported that they received scheduled time. Approximately three-quarters of primary teachers indicated that received scheduled time for TPL; the corresponding percentages were higher in post-primary (83%) and special schools (82%).
- Focusing on TPL since 2018, *external workshops* were reported to be the most common form of TPL for both principals (over 90% across all school levels) and teachers (primary 80%; post-primary 88%; special 71%).
- High percentages of principals (79%-90% across school types) and teachers (68%-72% across school types) indicated that they had participated in *in-school support* (e.g., *support from a PDST facilitator, NEPS psychologist, or NCSE advisor*). Participation in *online courses* (such as an approved summer course) was also common amongst primary and special school respondents.
- Principals were more likely than teachers to report having attended an *external lecture or seminar* or to have participated in *formal networking opportunities* or *mentoring or coaching*.
- *School self-evaluation and planning* was selected as the main purpose of recent TPL by a large majority of principals (primary 77%; post-primary 78%; special 60%). *Professional collaboration and support of colleagues* was selected as the main purpose by 78% of post-primary principals (primary 61%; special 79%). *Planning and preparation* was selected by a large percentage of principals in special schools (86%) as the main purpose of the TPL but was less frequently selected by primary (54%) and post-primary (47%) principals.
- *Knowledge about the teaching and learning of a particular subject* was reported to be the main purpose of TPL (undertaken since September 2018) by 69% of primary, 68% of special school, and 61% of post-primary teachers.
- *In-school support* was reported to have had 'a large impact' on principals' development as a school leader (primary 48%; post-primary 58%; special 79%).
- *External workshops* were reported to have had 'a large impact' by a majority of special school principals (85%), but percentages of post-primary (38%) and primary principals (42%) indicating a 'large impact' were lower.
- The percentage of primary principals (44%) who reported that *formal networking with colleagues* had 'a large impact' was somewhat lower than post-primary (60%) and special school principals (61%).
- Across almost all types of recent TPL, higher percentages of principals than teachers indicated that the TPL had 'a large impact' on their development. One important exception was team teaching where teachers in each context were more likely than principals to indicate that participation had had a 'large impact'.
- *Cognitive change* was identified by as a result of participation in recent TPL by 65% of special school principals (primary 48%; post-primary 44%). Cognitive change was also reported by one-third to two-fifths of teachers (primary 40%; post-primary 46%; special 33%).
- Over two-thirds of the principals in special schools noted a *practical change* in their role as a school leader (primary 46%; post-primary 42%). A very high percentage of teachers in special schools (83%) reported practical change as a result of participation in TPL activities (primary 65%; post-primary 43%).
- *Improved learning outcomes for pupils* were reported by 40% of primary principals but smaller percentages of principals in post-primary (14%) and special schools (22%).
- Across all school types, teachers were more likely than principals to indicate that all TPL was

evaluated by the facilitator. Evaluation of TPL appears to be less common for participants from special schools; this is a particular issue for TPL undertaken by special school principals.

- Over three-quarters of principals and teachers across the three school types reported that they were prevented from integrating the ideas/methods that were presented to them at TPL activities into their day-to-day practice. *Limited/no time* (primary 57%; post-primary 57%; special 66%) was commonly identified as a barrier to implementation of TPL learning by principals. Similarly, *limited/no time* was noted by one-third to two-fifths of teachers across school types.
- *Lack of sustained support from TPL provider* was reported as a barrier to TPL implementation by one-fifth to one-third of principals (primary 33%; post-primary 35%; special 20%). Across school types, teachers were more likely than principals to identify as an issue the *lack of sustained support from TPL provider*.
- *Limited/no resources* was also noted as an issue for implementation of TPL learning by principals (primary 24%; post-primary 11%; special 67%). This was also identified as a challenge by teachers (primary 31%; post-primary 26%; special 32%).
- In terms of what works well for TPL, *gaining knowledge and resources/skills that I can apply in my practice* was reported by a large proportion of principals (primary 44%; post-primary 37%; special 20%) and teachers (primary 29%; post-primary 27%; special 48%).
- In relation to how TPL could be changed or improved, approximately two-fifths of primary principals provided answers related to the need for *improved availability/accessibility of courses* (post-primary 43%; special 22%). On average 23% of teachers across the three school types provided answers relating to *improved availability/accessibility of courses* (ranging from 19% to 25% of teachers across school types).
- Principals reported *time/resources required for attendance/implementation of learning following TPL* as a key concern (primary 37%; post-primary 48%; special 22%). This issue was also identified in the responses of one-quarter to one-third of teachers.
- In terms of improving or changing TPL, teachers also referenced the need for *course content which is practical and relevant to classroom practice (or relevant to special schools for special school respondents)* (primary 21%; post-primary 33%; special 45%).
- Turning to key differences between primary, post-primary, and special schools, findings show that:
  - Availability of substitute cover is a key challenge in facilitating TPL participation in primary and special schools.
  - Online courses (e.g., approved summer courses) were much more commonly undertaken by principals and teachers in primary and special schools, as compared to principals and teachers in post-primary schools.
  - Webinars were much more commonly undertaken by post-primary principals than by primary school principals.
  - Principals were much more likely than teachers in each context to have undertaken external lectures or seminars and mentoring/coaching.
  - Team teaching was more common in primary schools than in post-primary or special schools.
  - Post-primary principals were much less likely than their primary or special school counterparts to have participated in recent TPL related to the development of pedagogical knowledge.
  - A much higher percentage of primary principals indicated that improved learning outcomes for pupils were a result of participation in TPL.
  - Special school principals were more likely to report affective change as a result of TPL participation than principals in other school types.

- Compared to primary school principals, higher percentages of special school and post-primary school principals reported improved organisational practices as a result of TPL participation.
- Evaluation of TPL was less common for principals from special schools.
- Where special school principals placed a higher value on TPL held off-site, primary school principals identified school-based location as a positive feature.



# CHAPTER 7:

## Views on student wellbeing

### 7.1 THE WELLBEING POLICY STATEMENT AND FRAMEWORK FOR PRACTICE (WPSF)

Principals were asked to indicate the level of influence they believe the introduction of the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* has had at a whole-school level in their schools. Findings show that while over half of primary principals and a similar percentage of special school principals indicated that it was ‘too soon to say’ whether or not the WPSF has had an impact, principals at post-primary level were much more likely to report a whole-school influence of the WPSF (Table 7.1)<sup>50</sup>. Over 80% of post-primary principals indicated that the WPSF has had either ‘a lot of influence’, ‘some influence’, or ‘a little influence’; this is twice the percentage of primary principals (40%) and over two-and-a-half times the percentage in special schools (31%).

**Table 7.1: Principals’ perceptions of the influence of the WPSF at a whole-school level (Percentages of principals in primary, post-primary, and special schools)**

	Primary (n=44) %	Post-primary (n=32) %	Special (n=10) %
No, too soon to say	58.6	16.2	55.3
No, none	1.7	2.9	13.4
Yes, a little influence	2.7	17.7	0.0
Yes, some influence	17.4	36.7	20.9
Yes, a lot of influence	19.5	26.4	10.3

Principals who reported that the WPSF had at least ‘a little influence’ were asked to describe how it had influenced whole-school policy or practice. Table 7.2 shows that a somewhat higher number of post-primary principals than primary responded to this question<sup>51</sup>, in line with the findings above that post-primary principals were more likely to indicate that the WPSF had had an influence in their school.

Of principals who responded to this question, a large majority cited practical actions and outcomes. Focusing on responses from post-primary principals, examples of responses that were coded as ‘practical actions and outcomes’ include:

- “*Lots of excellent initiatives have been introduced and formalised.*”
- “*Health Promoting Schools Policy, Introduction of Life Skills modules at Junior Cycle.*”
- “*Whole-school approach – students are happy and feel safe and comfortable in the school setting – they are aware of how to ask for help.*”

<sup>50</sup> A sub-set of schools were also participating in a pilot study for the introduction of the WPSF. Amongst principals, there is some evidence that schools in the WPSF pilot study reported that the WPSF had ‘a lot of influence’ at a whole-school level; however, the number of schools participating in the pilot study for the WPSF was small. Differences were less pronounced for teachers.

<sup>51</sup> Just two special school principals responded to this question; their answers are not presented to protect confidentiality and as the number is too small for conclusions to be generalisable.



Examples of ‘practical actions and outcomes’ at primary level include:

- *“Awareness and more emphasis on mindfulness, yoga exercised, relaxation techniques, healthy eating, general exercises, Green School Programme, and SPHE.”*
- *“Greatly - we have put in place many incremental large and small practices to have our children seen and heard and valued - to give them a sense of purpose (our school has no ‘old-fashioned’ problems so we have many children with many devices, many ‘things’ and entitlements and often no sense of purpose).”*
- *“We do a special Values assembly once a term/half-term and the children have bought into each theme. So far we have discussed kindness & helping others. Our SSE targets and actions are manageable and easy for our school community to understand.”*

Nearly one-fifth of primary principals and almost one-third of post-primary principals mentioned ‘increased awareness’ (Table 7.2). For example, one post-primary principal noted that one influence of the WPSF was that there was *“Awareness among staff that students are under pressure in many ways outside of school. Their needs are changing as the world around them does.”* One primary principal noted that the WPSF *“created more of an awareness. Highlighted for us what we already do well”*.

Smaller percentages of respondents referred to their involvement in the Wellbeing Action Research Project; for example *“We are part of the Wellbeing Pilot and have spent a lot of time working on it this year. It has had an effect on pupil and teacher wellbeing”* (Primary principal) and *“We are a pilot school for its roll out, therefore have had a good focus throughout the year”* (Post-primary principal).

**Table 7.2: Percentages of principals<sup>a</sup> reporting that WPSF has influenced whole school policy or practice in various ways**

	Primary (n=16) %	Post-primary (n=20) %
Practical actions and outcomes	77.5	65.9
Awareness	30.7	18.2
Involvement in the Wellbeing Action Research Project	20.2	9.1
Other	0.0	6.8

<sup>a</sup>Just two special school principals responded to this question and referenced practical actions and outcomes

Note. Responses could be assigned to multiple categories.

Similar to the pattern of responses from principals, teachers at post-primary level were less likely than their primary and special school counterparts to indicate that it was ‘too soon to say’ regarding the influence of the WPSF on their role. One-quarter of post-primary teachers reported that it was ‘too soon to say’ compared to about two-fifths of primary teachers and a similar percentage of special school teachers. Conversely, post-primary teachers (26%) were more likely to indicate that the WPSF had ‘a lot of influence’ than their primary (16%) and special school (17%) colleagues (Table 7.3).

In providing an explanation of how the WPSF influenced their role as a teacher, respondents commonly referenced ‘increased awareness’ or ‘practical actions and outcomes’. A higher percentage of primary teachers (58% of respondents) referred to ‘increased awareness’ while teachers in post-primary and special schools were more likely to refer to ‘practical actions and outcomes’. Responses coded as ‘other’ (10% at post-primary level and 7% of special school teacher responses) included statements indicating that wellbeing was already an important part of school life (*“Always have considered it and now more”*, Post-primary teacher; *“Gave formality to what I am doing as a teacher anyway to promote student wellbeing”*, Special school teacher); negative sentiments (*“It puts more pressure on teachers that we now care about the well-being of students as well as everything else”*; Post-primary teacher); and references to the Action Research Project.

**Table 7.3: Teachers' perceptions of the influence of the WPSF on their role as a teacher (Percentages of teachers in primary, post-primary, and special schools)**

	Primary (n=319) %	Post-primary (n=407) %	Special (n=64) %
No, too soon to say	43.7	27.1	39.8
No, none	3.0	4.9	5.8
Yes, a lot of influence	15.5	26.1	17.2
Yes, some influence	27.5	31.4	26.7
Yes, a little influence	10.3	10.5	10.5

**Table 7.4: Percentages of teachers reporting that the WPSF has influenced them in various ways in their role as a teacher**

	Primary (n=125) %	Post-primary (n=208) %	Special (n=29) %
Awareness	58.1	39.0	35.2
Practical actions and outcomes	46.0	55.1	64.7
Other	0.0	10.1	6.7

*Note.* Responses could be assigned to multiple categories.

## 7.2 SCHOOL SUPPORTS FOR STUDENT WELLBEING

Principals and teachers were asked to indicate how their school supported the physical and emotional/psychological wellbeing of its students and provided with a free-text box in which to provide their answer. Examples of principal and teacher responses to this question are provided to show the variety of activities and to illustrate the level of detail provided by several respondents (codes are given in parentheses along with respondent role):

**Please describe how your school supports the physical and emotional/psychological wellbeing of its students:**

### Primary

- *"Too many ways to list! therapy, sport, wellbeing, mental health, physical activities, creative schools programme, ICT, music programme, afterschool clubs, HSCL, SCP, gardening, woodwork, parent classes, engagement with outside agencies/expertise etc. etc."* (Extracurricular, Engaging in initiatives, Sport & PE, Open communication with students and parents, Additional support; Principal)
- *"We have always placed huge emphasis on wellbeing in the school. I did a course in Circle Time with <NAME> and I have promoted it for years. We have yoga, mindfulness, a programme on wellbeing. Our teachers are very interested in all aspects of wellbeing. We have a care policy regarding bullying."* (Engaging in initiatives, Anti-bullying policies and initiatives; Principal)
- *"Wellbeing is one of our priorities. We have such an emphasis it would be impossible to mention everything. We use many programmes such as Weaving Wellbeing for example, we have a special garden in tractor tyres as we have no green space in our school, we have wellbeing week, we carry out activities in the classrooms every day. It is incorporated into everything that we do."* (Engaging in initiatives, Whole-school approach; Principal)

- *“PE and swimming lessons. External coaches provide football, rugby and basketball lessons. School soccer leagues and after school soccer. Yoga and mindfulness classes. Children in need attend Play and Art Therapy and Rainbow Bereavement Group Support. After school Orchestra and Choir.”* (Engaging in wellbeing initiatives, Extra-curricular activities, Sport & PE, Additional supports for students and parents; Teacher)
- *“Positive relationships, pleasant, safe, clean environment. School policies on healthy eating, exercise and environment. Buddy bench. Friends for Life programme. Mindfulness breaks. School rules are school ethos.”* (Engaging in wellbeing initiatives, Whole-school approach; Teacher)

### Post-primary

- *“We have significant leaders in Pastoral care, regular meetings with students, regular individual sessions for all students, wellbeing built into PE, SPHE, CSPE and guidance classes. We have Positive Health Week annually and many different extra-curricular activities to promote wellbeing and collaboration. We also promote physical activity through Health Promotion Schools, PE, Basketball, Football, Camogie. The school also has an annual school walk.”* (Engaging in initiatives, Sport & PE, Extra-curricular activities, Pastoral care, Open communication with students and parents; Principal)
- *“PE, CSPE, SPHE timetabled. Career guidance class timetabled, wellbeing, learning to learn class timetabled; student support team; SEN team; DEIS team; pastoral role of tutors; year head structure; review of code of behaviour with focus on respect... cycle against suicide involvement; active school flag; green school - working on 7th flag; HSCL coordinator; SCP worker; school meals; homework club; supervised study ...”*(Engaging in initiatives, Sport & PE, Extracurricular activities, Pastoral care, Additional support for students and parents; Principal)
- *“Our school has always supported the above via our care system and pastoral approach to student wellbeing. We have a very caring staff who has promoted and maintained wellbeing amongst the student body long before it was ever imposed on us as a formality or a quantifiable entity (i.e., 400 hours).”* (Pastoral care, Whole-school approach; Principal)
- *“There are a lot of plans in place by our school to support the physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing of our students. One is good channels of communication between management and staff. Staff are kept informed of any issues that particular students may be undergoing and there is a “lean in, lean out” programme that some students are listed under if they seem to be in a poor place psychologically. This allows teachers to know that there are concerns there and to not place too much emphasis on time missed by the pupil or homework/ classwork missed out on. It essentially encourages the pupils to be in school where they can be supported and also distracted from the issues they are undergoing without having extra concerns. These pupils are monitored and the names in this programme change as necessary as situations change. The school has a chaplain which caters for student's needs. Pupils are aware that they can access her anytime for any reason. She also can provide lunch tokens for anyone in need to ensure physical needs such as food are being met despite possible financial difficulties. Wellbeing classes are now in place for junior cycle students, particularly first years. These groups change teachers every so often so they get a range of different experiences in these classes such as gardening, active classes or general wellbeing awareness. A range of workshops are catered in the school with outside facilitators for different aspects of wellbeing. Mental health workshops have been introduced to all year groups, and retreats for all years assist. Physical wellbeing is encouraged. All students have PE classes twice a week and despite the small school, a number*

of extra-curricular sports are available and participation encouraged: basketball, volleyball, football, athletics, handball Other extra-curricular activities are provided such as chess and draughts and every week during lunchtime Tuesday a classroom is open to allow pupils to practice these activities but also to allow pupils a safe place to come and play board games also if wished. Music is encouraged in the school with regular choir performances and every two years a musical is catered for in the school with access available for all school years. In general student staff relations are good and many students have felt comfortable in talking to some staff about concerns they have” (Engaging with initiatives, Extra-curricular activities, Sport & PE, pastoral care, Open communication with students and parents, Additional support, Timetabled wellbeing classes; Teacher)

### Special school

- “We have always put SPHE as a core priority subject in our school - it is a huge part of what we do - to promote and develop the whole child from mental to spiritual to academic wellbeing. We always had emphasis on promoting the physical wellbeing of children through PE - this is evident by the fact we achieved our 3rd Active Flag last year. We encourage full school attendance in as much as possible for children with serious medical conditions and intellectual needs. Teachers spend a lot of time talking with senior students especially about friendships, safety on a personal level and also online safety. We link with social workers regularly on the welfare of students and we also link with parents regularly to support them too.” (Whole-school approach, Sport and PE, Open communication with students and parents, Additional support for students and parents; Principal)
- “We emphasise, value and work on building relationships - staff and students eat meals together every day, the pupil teacher ratio is 5:1 so individual plans are feasible. We have a full time social worker who is available for counselling or lower lever support on a daily basis. Students have a say in what non-core subjects they study. Our thinking and practices are informed by solution-focused approach and restoratives practices theory. Lessons in swimming, horse riding, climbing are provided along with regular P.E and football sessions.” (Extra-curricular activities, Sport & PE, Open communication with students and parents, Additional support for students and parents; Principal)
- “At the junior end of the school-I.E.P. Individual Education Programme for each child each year, weekly P.E. lessons, daily relaxation sessions for all the children in my class, visits to the Multi-sensory room for children requiring calming or stimulation and change of position, Use of Stay Safe programme, TacPac sessions for children with severe and profound intellectual ability, visits to the school garden and playground weather permitting. We have regular consultation with class assigned occupational therapist re seating/activities, speech therapist re communication difficulties/programmes and physiotherapist re splints/walking aids. Class nurse visits daily to assist with peg feeds and is available for any health issues that may arise during the day. Daily record of feeding for most children and bowel movement. Feeding is assessed for each child by a SLT and recommendation given to class teacher for SNA's. Home/school notebook for communication with parents and class phone available for urgent messages to home.” (Engaging in wellbeing initiatives, Sport & PE, Open communication with students and parents, Additional support for students and parents; Teacher)
- “We cover all areas of wellbeing through SPHE, PE. Teachers have been trained in the importance of mindfulness and Mini-me yoga so encouraged pupils to take part in weekly.” (Engaging in wellbeing initiatives, Sport & PE, Teaching wellbeing-related subjects; Teacher)

Table 7.5 shows the percentages of principal responses reflecting various themes. Primary principals (83%) most commonly provided responses pertaining to the school's engagement in wellbeing initiatives or the development of such initiatives. This was less common at post-primary level (40%) and in special schools (8%). A large majority of post-primary principals (77%) referred to the school's pastoral care system; this was not a feature of responses from primary or special school principals. Key approaches identified by special school principals were: sport and PE; a whole-school approach; additional supports; and open communication; at least half of special school principals provided responses pertaining to these themes (Table 7.5).

**Table 7.5: Categorisation of principal reports of how the school supports student wellbeing (physical and emotional/ psychological wellbeing) (Percentages in descending order by primary principal)**

	Primary (n=38) %	Post-primary (n=14) %	Special (n=9) %
Engaging in wellbeing initiatives/Development of wellbeing programmes	82.6	40.3	7.7
Sport and timetabled PE	40.3	29.9	60.0
Whole school approach	39.4	22.8	67.4
Additional support for students and parents	34.9	26.4	52.3
Open communication with students and parents	32.0	26.4	50.6
Anti-bullying policies and initiatives	15.5	3.5	7.7
Extra-curricular activities	10.4	33.3	17.7
Pastoral care	0.0	77.2	0.0
Other	1.2	0.0	0.0

*Note.* Responses could be assigned to multiple categories.

More than three-fifths of primary teachers referred to the engagement of their school in wellbeing initiatives (Table 7.6); this was less common amongst post-primary teachers (33%) and special school teachers (44%). Pastoral care was the approach most commonly mentioned by post-primary teachers. Responses from special school teachers covered all themes (except pastoral care), and were most likely to reference wellbeing initiatives (44%); sport and PE (40%); additional support for students and parents (36%); open communication (32%); and a whole-school approach (30%).

**Table 7.6: Categorisation of teacher reports of how the school supports student wellbeing (physical and emotional/ psychological wellbeing) (Percentages in descending order by primary teacher)**

	Primary (n=246) %	Post-primary (n=271) %	Special (n=46) %
Engaging in wellbeing initiatives	62.4	32.7	44.4
Teaching of wellbeing-related subjects/ Timetabled wellbeing classes	27.5	25.4	21.8
Sport and timetabled PE	26.9	23.6	40.0
Whole-school approach	25.0	13.5	29.7
Open communication with students and parents	19.5	12.8	32.4
Additional support for students and parents	15.7	10.5	35.5
Extra-curricular activities	14.0	20.9	7.5
Pastoral care	0.0	60.1	0.0
Other (including anti-bullying policies)	6.0	9.5	11.2



Under ‘other’, a small percentage of post-primary teachers identified some negative aspects that impact on the school’s capacity to support the wellbeing of its students. For example: *“I do believe that before supervision and substitution of classes began we had more time to talk to students, to listen to them where I feel now that time is lost and students are suffering as a result”* (Post-primary teacher). The development of an anti-bullying policy was also cited by a small number of respondents and coded as ‘other’.

### 7.3 TIME ON TASKS RELATED TO STUDENT WELLBEING

Principals and teachers were asked a series of questions about the time they had spent on various tasks related to student wellbeing in the most recent complete calendar week. They were advised to give their answers in minutes and informed that ‘a complete calendar week is one that was not shortened by breaks, public holidays, sick leave, etc.’ Respondents were advised that tasks related to student wellbeing ‘include time spent on teaching, planning lessons, co-curricular activities (Active Schools Flag, Mindfulness minutes etc.), marking, collaborating with other teachers, participating in staff meetings, participating in professional development, and other work tasks. Also include tasks that took place during evenings, weekends, or out-of-class hours’. Also, they were advised that teaching student wellbeing: ‘includes but is not limited to teaching SPHE and Physical Education<sup>52</sup>. Include any teaching relating to student wellbeing across any subject/curriculum area’.

As noted earlier in this report, the survey content was finalised in advance of the COVID-19 public health restrictions in Ireland yet many respondents completed the survey after schools closed. Although respondents were advised to refer to the most recent complete calendar week, it is unclear to what extent COVID-19-related disruptions may have impacted on answers regarding time spent on wellbeing-related tasks. Anecdotal evidence suggests that in the early days of school closures, principals and teachers spent considerable amounts of time putting plans in place which might be considered to fall within the scope of wellbeing-related tasks. Given the wide range of responses (with a small number of primary principals reporting that they spent 35 hours in the most recent calendar week on wellbeing-related tasks), responses have been recoded into four categories: ‘no time’; ‘from one minute up to and including one hour’; ‘from one hour to three hours’; ‘more than three hours’.

Table 7.7 shows that a small minority of teachers and no principals reported spending ‘no time’ on tasks related to student wellbeing in the most recent complete calendar week. However, about one-in-ten primary teachers and one-in-three post-primary teachers reported spending ‘no time’ on teaching student wellbeing in the most recent complete calendar week.

At the other end of the spectrum, considerable percentages of teacher and principals reported spending more than 180 minutes (3 hours) on tasks related to student wellbeing. One-quarter to two-fifths of teachers and two-fifths to three-quarters of principals reported spending three hours or more on tasks of this nature. About one-in-ten primary and post-primary teachers and more than one-quarter of special school teachers reported spending three hours or more on teaching wellbeing in the most recent complete calendar week.

52 Post-primary principals and teachers were also instructed to include CSPE and Wellbeing.



**Table 7.7: Percentages of principals<sup>a</sup> and teachers who spent 'no time', 'up to and including one hour', '1-3 hours', or 'more than 3 hours' on tasks related to student wellbeing and on teaching student wellbeing in the most recent complete calendar week**

	Primary		Post-primary		Special
	Principal (n=27)	Teacher (n=350)	Principal (n=7)	Teacher (n=523)	Teacher (n=66)
<b>Tasks related to student wellbeing</b>	%	%	%	%	%
No time	0.0	3.6	0.0	7.5	1.6
From 1 min up to and including one hour	20.6	28.9	0.0	22.8	16.4
Between 61 and 180 minutes	34.7	35.7	28.5	30.0	54.0
More than 180 minutes	44.7	31.8	71.5	39.6	28.0
<b>Teaching student wellbeing</b>	(n=27) %	(n=349) %	(n=3) %	(n=526) %	(n=65) %
No time	14.0	9.1	0.0	30.8	4.4
Up to and including one hour	32.8	25.9	100	31.4	15.9
Between 61 and 180 minutes	38.6	54.8	0.0	23.9	50.4
More than 180 minutes	14.6	10.2	0.0	13.8	29.3

<sup>a</sup>Just two special school principals responded to this question; therefore data are not presented for this group of respondents.

One-fifth to one-third of respondents across school types reported that they had spent 'no time' on extra-curricular activities related to student wellbeing in the most recent complete calendar week (Table 7.8). The remainder of each group was spread broadly evenly across those who spent 'up to and including one hour', 'between 61 and 180 minute', and 'more than 180 minutes'. At primary level, respondents were less likely to report having spent 'more than 180 minutes' and more likely to have spent 'up to and including one hour' or 'between 61 and 180 minutes'.

**Table 7.8: Percentages of principals<sup>a</sup> and teachers who spent 'no time', 'up to and including one hour', '1-3 hours', or 'more than 3 hours' on extra-curricular activities related to student wellbeing in the most recent complete calendar week**

	Primary		Post-primary		Special	
	Principal (n=42)	Teacher (n=309)	Principal (n=32)	Teacher (n=392)	Principal (n=10)	Teacher (n=58)
	%	%	%	%	%	%
No time	23.3	32.4	20.6	19.9	17.9	32.0
Up to and including one hour	24.7	42.9	38.2	30.3	22.2	32.1
Between 61 and 180 minutes	40.8	20.4	20.6	33.6	29.2	31.7
More than 180 minutes	11.2	4.3	20.6	16.2	30.7	4.3

**Figure 7.1: Percentages of post-primary teachers by school DEIS status, reporting 'no time', 'up to and including one hour', 'from 1 to 3 hours', or 'more than 3 hours' on tasks related to student wellbeing, teaching student wellbeing, and extra-curricular activities related to wellbeing in the most recent calendar week**

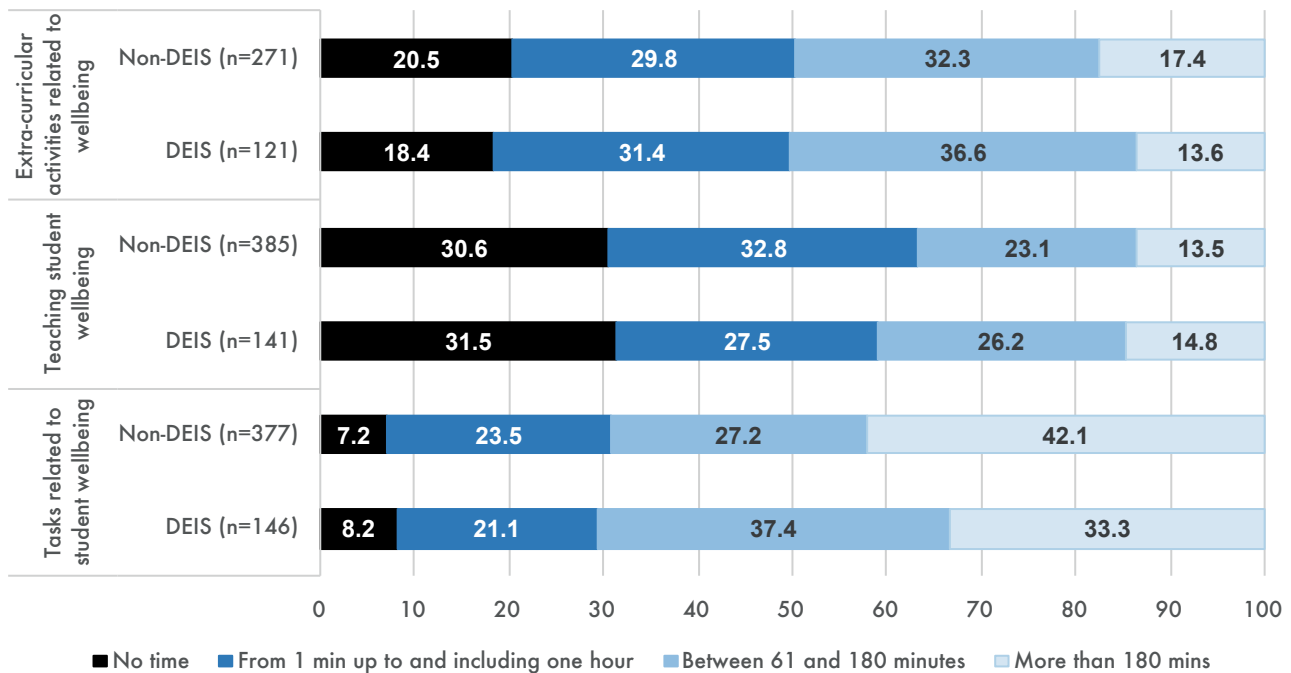


Figure 7.1 presents a breakdown by DEIS status of the time spent in the most recent calendar week by post-primary teachers on tasks relating to student wellbeing; teaching student wellbeing; and extra-curricular activities related to student wellbeing. The percentages in each of the time categories are very similar in DEIS and non-DEIS schools, indicating that despite the more challenging socioeconomic circumstances in DEIS schools (see Chapter 4), teachers spent similar amounts of time on wellbeing-related activities in the two contexts. A very similar pattern was identified at primary level (not shown) although at primary level, a somewhat higher percentage of teachers in DEIS schools (11%) than in non-DEIS schools (3%) reported spending more than 180 minutes on extra-curricular activities in the most recent complete calendar week.

## 7.4 INVOLVEMENT IN EXTRA-CURRICULAR WELLBEING ACTIVITIES

In addition to asking principals and teachers to provide detailed estimates of the time they had spent on extra-curricular wellbeing activities in the most recent complete calendar week, they were also asked to indicate at a more global level the extent of their involvement in extra-curricular activities. Between one-in-ten (principals at all levels and post-primary teachers) and one-in-four (primary and special school teachers) reported that they were 'not involved' in extra-curricular activities (Table 7.9). These findings are broadly in line with the time estimates provided above where one-fifth to one-third of respondents indicated that they had spent no time in the past week on extra-curricular activities.

A large majority of respondents reported at least some involvement in extra-curricular activities with about half of post-primary respondents reporting that they were 'very involved'; a similar percentage of primary principals (53%) indicated that they were 'very involved' (Table 7.9). Teachers in primary and special schools were somewhat less likely to report that they were 'very involved' with about one-quarter of each group reporting this level of involvement.

**Table 7.9: Percentages of principals and teachers reporting that they were ‘very involved’, ‘somewhat involved’, or ‘not involved’ in extra-curricular activities relating to student wellbeing**

	Primary		Post-primary		Special	
	Principal (n=43)	Teacher (n=318)	Principal (n=32)	Teacher (n=399)	Principal (n=10)	Teacher (n=64)
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Very involved	52.6	26.8	52.9	47.3	13.6	23.3
Somewhat involved	37.3	46.6	38.3	40.1	76.1	49.1
Not involved	10.1	26.6	8.8	12.6	10.3	27.6

Following on from the question on classifying their level of involvement, principals and teachers were ‘why’. Thematically-related responses were coded into categories and the percentages in each category are shown in Table 7.10. A large majority of primary and special school principals provided further detail on the types of extra-curricular activities in which they are involved (shaded in Table 7.10 as these responses serve as justification for *why* principals rated their level of involvement as they did; e.g., rating of ‘very involved’ was provided because respondent was involved in activities x, y, and z. Non-shaded response categories in Tables 7.10 and 7.11 represent reasons for getting involved/not getting involved in extra-curricular activities; e.g., lack of time as a rationale for not getting involved, or, belief in the value of such activities provided as a rationale for getting involved).

Examples of responses that appear to provide a justification for the broad classification provided by respondents in the earlier question include:

- *“I meet with the Student Council a number of times during the year to discuss their concerns and take on board some of their suggestions. I am involved in the School Choir and organise Music week and a pupil concert each year.”* (Primary principal)
- *“DLP for school. I have led many projects to promote pupil and family wellbeing. Examples, homework reduction, walk to school initiatives, NEPS evidence based programmes, IY&FF, Staff wellness during Croke Park, Mindfulness, Pilates after school, debrief time during school etc.”* (Primary principal)

One-in-four to one-in-five principals mentioned that they hold a post specifically related to wellbeing which accounts for their involvement in extra-curricular activities (Table 7.10). For example:

- *“As the DLP, I report any concerns regarding Child Protection to Tusla. I also try to develop a one-to-one relationship with all students. I have also put a lot of effort into improving the school environment which in a very real sense improves student well-being.”* (Post-primary principal)

Post-primary principals, in particular, considered extra-curricular involvement as a central part of their role as principals (Table 7.10). Two-fifths of post-primary principals explained their extra-curricular involvement in this way, citing reasons such as:

- *“I am Principal. I like to get involved.”*
- *“I am the principal.”*
- *“As Principal - I co-ordinate and ensure these activities take place.”*
- *“As Principal, leading by example.”*

Compared to principals and teachers in primary and special schools, holding a specific post or role (whether formal or informal) related to student wellbeing was mentioned by a higher percentage of post-primary teachers. A reason in this category was provided by about two-fifths of post-primary teachers (43%) as an explanation for their involvement in extra-curricular activities. Roles mentioned

by post-primary teachers included: anti-bullying co-ordinator; Green Schools co-ordinator; coach for basketball, rugby or other sports; PE teacher; year head; class tutor; guidance counsellor; PAL (President's Award Leader) for Gaisce; Member of the Student Support Team; or more generally *"It is my assigned role"*.

**Table 7.10: Percentages of principals providing various explanations for their level of involvement in extra-curricular activities relating to student wellbeing (ordered in descending order by primary principal)**

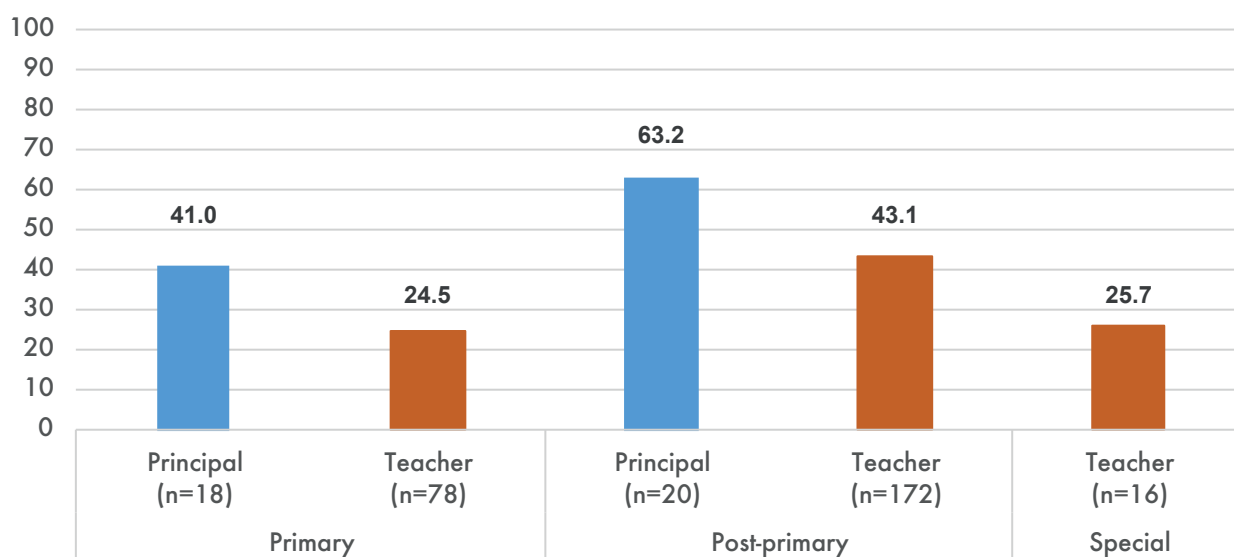
	Primary (n=42)	Post-primary (n=27)	Special (n=6)
	%	%	%
Involved in extra-curricular activities relating to student wellbeing	61.5	20.4	75.5
Hold a specific student wellbeing-related post	22.5	18.7	24.5
Lack of time/Family commitments	16.7	20.3	0.0
Values the impact of wellbeing	16.3	32.2	62.4
Leading and supporting wellbeing as principal	0.0	40.6	0.0
Other (including vague content)	10.9	0.0	13.1

About one-fifth of principals and teachers cited a lack of time (which was occasionally attributed to family commitments) as an explanation for a lower level of involvement in extra-curricular activities (Tables 7.10 and 7.11). About one-third of teachers in special schools cited a lack of opportunity to get involved in extra-curricular activities (often related to the particular complex needs of the pupils they teach) while about one-fifth of primary teachers provided various 'other' reasons (Table 7.11), including for example:

- *"We don't have extra-curricular activities."*
- *"I'm a substitute teacher and won't be in the school permanently."*
- *"Child protection policy very clear."*
- *"Never been motivated to do it."*
- *"I have a fairly challenging class this year so for the sake of my own wellbeing I have decided not to commit to extra-curricular activities."*

**Table 7.11: Percentages of teachers providing various explanations for their level of involvement in extra-curricular activities relating to student wellbeing (ordered in descending order by primary teacher)**

	Primary (n=224)	Post-primary (n=264)	Special (n=49)
	%	%	%
Involved in extra-curricular activities related to student wellbeing	35.8	20.0	15.9
Hold a specific student wellbeing-related post	25.8	43.3	12.3
Lack of time/Family commitments	16.5	19.9	22.2
Values the impact of wellbeing	7.6	10.3	18.6
General support of students/parents that comes as part of role	0.0	7.1	1.1
Lack of opportunity	0.0	0.0	29.5
Other (including low pupil numbers; lack of management support; new to the school)	21.8	8.6	1.2

**Figure 7.2: Percentages of principals<sup>a</sup> and teachers with additional responsibilities for pupil wellbeing at school**

<sup>a</sup>Just three special school principals responded to this item. Responses are not shown to protect confidentiality.

Principals and teachers were asked to indicate whether or not they had additional responsibilities for student wellbeing at their school. Promoted posts and voluntary duties were presented as examples. At primary and post-primary levels, a higher percentage of principals than teachers indicated that they have additional responsibilities for student wellbeing in the school (Figure 7.2). Compared to primary principals (41%), a higher percentage of post-primary principals (63%) reported that they had additional duties. About one-quarter of primary and special school teachers and two-fifths of post-primary teachers indicated that they had additional duties (Figure 7.2).

In describing their additional responsibilities, principals and teachers provided reasons similar to those given to explain their involvement in extra-curricular activities (see Tables 7.10 and 7.11). A majority of principals indicated that they viewed wellbeing as a key element of their role as principal, reporting for example:

- “As Principal of the school, it is vital that I promote and foster wellbeing for all.” (Post-primary)
- “Duty as principal to look after the most vulnerable / vulnerable students.” (Post-primary)
- “As principal I am heavily involved in all aspects of wellbeing in our school community with all stakeholders. This is one of the areas I enjoy cultivating and enriching as principal.” (Primary)
- “My role as principal involves regularly dealing with student wellbeing.” (Special school)

Teachers in primary, post-primary, and special schools typically provided examples of wellbeing-related posts that they held, with substantial overlap between their examples of extra-curricular activities and their examples of additional responsibilities for student wellbeing. At post-primary level, teachers frequently mentioned their role as year head, guidance counsellor, or class tutor. Primary teachers commonly referred to duties associated with sports, choir, First Aid, Active Flag, or Health Promoting Schools Flag. Responses from special school teachers referred to responsibilities for particular subjects (e.g., PE, SPHE, or CSPE), a broader role in wellbeing (e.g., participation in the school’s wellbeing management team or policy development), and extra-curricular activities (e.g., GAISCE).

## 7.5 TPL NEEDS IN RELATION TO STUDENT WELLBEING

Principals and teachers were asked to estimate the percentage of their TPL since September 2018 that had focused on student wellbeing and advised to indicate whether this was ‘0% (i.e., no TPL

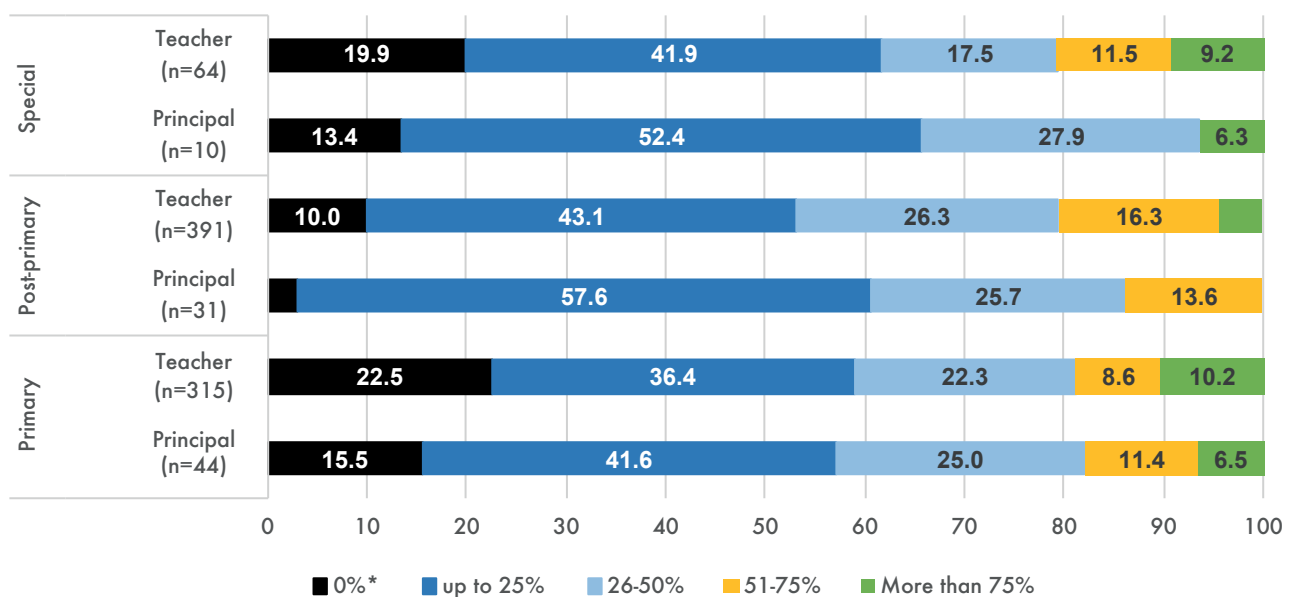
related to student wellbeing since September 2018); 'up to 25%', '26-50%', '51-75%', or 'More than 75%'.

At primary level, almost one-quarter of teachers indicated that they had not undertaken any TPL related to student wellbeing since September 2018; the corresponding value for primary principals was 16% (Figure 7.3). Percentages of special school respondents that had not undertaken any TPL related to wellbeing were comparable to those at primary level. It was considerably less common for principals (3%) and teachers (10%) at post-primary level to report that they had not undertaken any wellbeing-related TPL since September 2018. These findings are notable in the context of the greater perceived impact to date, at post-primary level, of the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* (discussed in the first section of this chapter).

Across all respondent groups, a majority reported that not more than 50% of recent TPL had focused on student wellbeing. For example, more than half of primary teachers (59%) and two-thirds of primary principals (67%) indicated that wellbeing was the focus of up to 50% of recent TPL (i.e., either the focus of 'up to 25%' of recent TPL or the focus of '26-50%'). Findings were similar amongst respondents from post-primary and special schools (Figure 7.3).

A majority of principals and teachers at primary and post-primary level reported that TPL since September 2018 had met their learning needs in the area of student wellbeing. Although a higher percentage of special school principals (49%) reported that the recent TPL had not met their learning needs, the total number of responses from special school principals (n=10) should be borne in mind in interpreting findings.

**Figure 7.3: Percentage of TPL since September 2018 that focused on student wellbeing - principals and teachers reports, primary, post-primary, and special**



\*Did not participate in any TPL in the area of student wellbeing since September 2018. Value labels are not shown where the percentage in the category is 5% or below.

Principals and teachers were asked to indicate the extent of their professional learning needs in relation to various areas of student wellbeing. In Table 7.12, colour gradient from red to green is used where red is used for the highest percentages reporting a 'high' level of need for a particular aspect of TPL. Green shows a low percentage (or zero) indicating a 'high' level of need; i.e., green shows that there was not a widespread 'high' level of need in a particular area.

Table 7.12 shows that at primary level, half of principals reported a 'high' level of need for whole-school TPL to implement curriculum changes. At post-primary level, the most widespread 'high' level



of need on the part of principals was for TPL related to mental health. High percentages of special school principals identified that they had ‘high’ levels of professional learning needs in several of the areas presented; over half reported ‘high’ levels of needs for whole-school TPL to implement curriculum changes; mental health; leadership support for principals; and dealing with critical incidents.

At primary and post-primary levels, lower percentages of teachers reported a ‘high’ level of need in each of the areas presented (Table 7.12). About half of special school teachers reported a ‘high’ level of need for TPL related to mental health; including students with special needs in the wider school community; teaching students with special learning needs; and student discipline and behaviour management.

**Table 7.12: Percentages of principals and teachers reporting a ‘high level’ of professional learning needs in relation to various areas of student wellbeing (ordered in descending order by percentage of primary principals)**

	Primary		Post-primary		Special	
	Principal (n ~ 44)	Teacher (n ~ 315)	Principal (n ~ 32)	Teacher (n ~ 391)	Principal (n ~ 10)	Teacher (n ~ 64)
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Whole school TPL to implement curriculum changes	50.5	13.2	36.7	16.8	55.5	26.0
Mental health	49.1	26.6	61.7	34.7	62.8	46.4
Leadership support for principals	45.0	0.0	47.1	0.0	70.2	0.0
Whole school TPL to implement policy changes	43.2	12.5	14.7	14.4	48.2	34.6
Responsible use of digital technologies/ cyber bullying	37.9	20.5	19.2	28.2	48.2	20.4
Child protection	37.5	10.9	27.9	19.9	7.3	28.5
Including students with special needs in the wider school community	35.9	22.3	30.9	25.1	20.8	50.3
Critical incident	35.4	15.3	29.3	20.8	59.5	34.7
Teaching students with special learning needs	32.8	25.9	42.7	29.2	40.3	52.7
Teaching in an inclusive manner in a diverse setting	30.8	13.1	0.0	22.7	7.3	30.6
Social and emotional skills	29.6	18.0	38.2	27.7	42.1	27.1
SPHE curriculum	26.3	11.4	11.7	15.5	20.8	21.9
Developing positive relationships between parents and teachers/principals	24.2	14.9	22.0	20.4	13.6	30.4
Student discipline and behaviour management	19.1	17.2	16.2	23.8	33.0	49.7
Physical Education curriculum	14.9	9.6	14.6	14.6	7.3	13.2
CSPE curriculum	0.0	0.0	11.7	10.4	0.0	0.0
Wellbeing at Junior Cycle	0.0	0.0	25.0	20.3	0.0	0.0

Principals and teachers were given the opportunity to indicate wellbeing needs in addition to those listed. Very small numbers of respondents provided additional responses which covered a wide variety of issues. Responses included: teacher/staff wellbeing (including for those on temporary or substitute contracts); improved staff communication and collaboration; liaison with the Gardaí; the availability of guidance provision through the Irish language; transitions from primary to post-primary school; First Aid; wellbeing for students with SEN; wider availability of training in mental health issues; supporting families in providing for their child's wellbeing; and behaviour management in the special school context.

Approximately 27% of special education teachers in primary schools reported a 'high level' of professional learning need in relation to the *responsible use of digital technologies/cyber bullying* (Table A2.29, Appendix 2). The percentage of special education teachers with this need was about the same as the percentage of primary teachers generally with this level of need (21%; Table 7.12). At post-primary level, 42% of special education teachers reported a 'high level' of professional learning needs in relation to *including students with special needs in the wider school community* (Table A2.29, Appendix 2). The percentage of special education teachers with this need was higher than the percentage with this need in the post-primary sample generally (25%; Table 7.12). *Student discipline and behaviour management* and *teaching students with special learning needs* were both identified by 40% of special education teachers at post-primary level as areas with a 'high level' of need (see Appendix 2, Table A2.29).

## 7.6 KEY FINDINGS FROM CHAPTER 7

- Principals at post-primary level were more likely than their counterparts in primary and special schools to report that the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* has had at least 'a little' influence at a whole-school level in their school. Similarly, two-thirds of post-primary teachers (68%) indicated that the WPSF has had at least 'a little' influence on their role as teacher; the corresponding percentages for primary and special schools were 53% and 54% respectively.
- Principals and teachers reported that a wide variety of approaches are used in schools to support the physical and emotional/psychological wellbeing of students. The use of wellbeing initiatives or programmes was identified as a key approach by a large majority of primary principals whereas post-primary principals were particularly likely to identify pastoral care as central to how the school supports the wellbeing of students. A smaller number of responses was available from special school principals who were most likely to identify sport and PE and a whole-school approach as the primary means of supporting wellbeing. Teacher responses broadly mirrored those of principals with a high percentage of primary teachers referring to wellbeing initiatives and a high percentage of post-primary teachers identifying pastoral care as central to the school's approach to supporting wellbeing.
- Almost all teachers and principals reported spending at least some time on tasks related to student wellbeing in the most recent complete calendar week although one-fifth to one-third of respondents had not spent any time on extra-curricular activities related to wellbeing in that period. There was little difference between the responses of teachers in DEIS and non-DEIS schools with both groups of teachers equally likely to have spent 'no time', 'up to one hour', '1 – 3 hours', or 'more than 3 hours' on tasks related to student wellbeing. More than one-quarter of respondents (up to three-quarters amongst post-primary principals) reported having spent more than 3 hours on tasks related to student wellbeing in the most recent complete calendar week. It is difficult to determine if that was a typical investment of time or an increased investment arising from COVID-19 related school closures.
- In general, principals and teachers reported a high level of involvement in extra-curricular activities with about half of principals in primary and post-primary schools reporting that they were 'very involved'. Just one-quarter of primary and special school teachers and one-eighth

of post-primary teachers reported that they were 'not involved' in extra-curricular activities. Reasons, including a lack of time, were put forward to explain low levels of involvement on the part of those who were not involved.

- Post-primary teachers and principals were somewhat less likely than their primary and special school counterparts to indicate that they had not undertaken any wellbeing-related TPL since September 2018.
- At primary and post-primary level, principals were more likely than teachers to report a 'high' level of learning need associated with various aspects of student wellbeing. For example, about half of primary principals (compared to 13% of primary teachers) reported a 'high' level of need for whole-school TPL to implement curriculum changes. Almost two-thirds of post-primary principals (compared to one-third of post-primary teachers) reported a 'high' level of need for TPL related to mental health. Priorities for teachers rated as 'high' by about half of teachers in special schools were: the inclusions of students with special needs in the wider school community; teaching students with special learning needs; and student discipline and behaviour management.

# CHAPTER 8:

## Using survey findings to inform Ireland's TPL evaluation framework

*"The wellbeing of a student is at the core of our teaching."* (Post-primary teacher)

The survey of teachers and principals represented Phase 2 of the overall project to develop an evaluation framework for Teachers' Professional Learning (TPL). In this chapter, we consider how survey findings link with findings from the Phase 1 desk-based research and in particular, how they align with a specific conceptual framework for the evaluation of TPL identified in the Phase 1 work. We draw some parallels between the current survey findings and learning from the national evaluation of the Digital Learning Framework (DLF) which also examined aspects of TPL (Cosgrove, Moran, Feerick, & Duggan, 2019). We consider how subsequent phases of the ongoing TPL research project will address remaining knowledge gaps. In general, this chapter summarises findings from earlier chapters although several quotations from teachers and principals are presented which have not been previously presented. Where relevant, reference is made to particular tables or figures in earlier chapters to facilitate cross-referencing. Quotations are drawn from across survey questions to illustrate how similar concepts were referenced across items. The intention is for this chapter to provide a theoretical and conceptual underpinning to future development work which aims to design a practical, user-friendly framework for describing and evaluating TPL. Moving from the conceptual work in this chapter to a practical framework that will facilitate evaluation in practice represents a subsequent step in the project. Therefore, the practical aspects of the framework, such as templates, checklists, and guidelines, are not discussed in detail in this chapter.

Given the intended application of the evaluation framework to TPL related to student wellbeing, it is useful at this juncture to reassert the definition of wellbeing used in this research (from WHO, 2001, cited in DES, 2018b, p. 10):

*"...a person realises their potential, is resilient in dealing with the normal stresses of their life, takes care of physical wellbeing and has a sense of purpose, connection and belonging to a wider community. It is a fluid way of being and needs nurturing throughout life."*

As noted in Chapter 1, for the current project, wellbeing is viewed as a teachable and learnable set of skills that include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. In this chapter, specific variables which may moderate the relationship between TPL and student wellbeing outcomes are recognised. These include the particular need to support student wellbeing in disadvantaged contexts, wellbeing for students for whom English is an Additional Language (EAL), students with Special Educational Needs (SEN), and students from minority ethnic backgrounds. Readers are reminded that response rates to the survey were lower than anticipated which limits the appropriateness of generalising results from principals or teachers to the population.

## 8.1 DEVELOPING A CONCEPTUAL MODEL FOR THE EVALUATION OF TPL

Figure 8.1 presents a model for effective teacher professional learning. The model is based largely on Compen et al. (2019) with some modifications (identified in red text in Figure 8.1). Working out from the centre of the model, the first change in Figure 8.1 from Compen et al.'s original model is a move from 'student learning' to broader outcomes at the centre of the model. Specifically, the centre of the model now refers to 'improving learning, outcomes, and wellbeing, for students, teachers, and school leaders'. The intention of this change is to better reflect the full spectrum of intended educational outcomes, including cognitive, affective, and behavioural. Also, this change better recognises that in addition to benefiting students, teachers' learning has value in its own right, in terms of the professional growth of teachers and the further development of the profession.

A second change is the addition of 'reflective practice' to teaching behaviour. This addition reflects the strong emphasis placed on 'reflective practice' in the *Cosán* framework for teachers' learning (the Teaching Council, 2016). Other Irish frameworks, such as the CSL model for professional learning, the PDST conceptual framework (see Rawdon et al., 2020 for details), and the JCT framework for the design of professional learning experiences (unpublished) also emphasise the importance of reflective practice.

Moving to the level of 'key features of professional development', a third change in our model is the addition of the feature 'facilitator quality'. Merchie et al. (2016) use the term 'trainer quality' in their model which we have adapted to 'facilitator quality', because the term 'facilitator' is preferred in the Irish context (for discussion, see Rawdon et al., 2020).

Fourthly, we add 'diffusion', a concept introduced by King (2014) which refers to the "*organic unplanned rippling of practices*" rather than a "*deliberate planned, downward movement*" of learning (p. 106). Another change is the adaptation of 'content focus' to 'TPL focus'. Desimone (2009) suggests that content focus has a considerable impact on the effectiveness of professional development where content focus refers to either subject matter knowledge (content knowledge) or knowledge of how to teach that subject matter (pedagogical content knowledge). Our evaluation framework needs to be sufficiently broad to account for TPL where the focus is on topics not directly related to curriculum/subject knowledge or pedagogical knowledge. These might include: legal or compliance topics (e.g., child protection), technical issues (e.g., upskilling in the use of ICT for assessment), or leadership or management skills.

A further change at this level in our model is the addition of 'accessibility', incorporating location, cost, and language, as a structural feature. Geographic accessibility of TPL was one of the areas identified by survey participants as an area that could be improved in Ireland. Furthermore, online and blended approaches to TPL have taken on much greater importance since the time of survey administration. Although the major growth in online TPL over the last year was, in the first instance, a consequence of COVID-19 restrictions, it is likely that online and blended approaches will remain an important part of TPL provision in the future, in addition to traditional face-to-face TPL. Therefore, location, whether online or in-person, is a salient structural feature for the TPL evaluation framework in Ireland. It is likely that online options may improve the accessibility of TPL and this is linked to the issue of ancillary costs associated with attending TPL. Travel costs and childcare costs can represent hidden costs associated with participating in TPL and therefore cost is included under the structural feature of accessibility. However, a key challenge with online TPL is how it can support features of effective provision such as active learning methods and collaboration between participants.

Language has been added to the model in Figure 8.1 because while the availability of TPL through the medium of Irish or tailored to the particular context of Irish-medium schools was not raised by participants in the current survey, it is recognised that teachers and school leaders working in Irish-medium schools need TPL opportunities that are tailored to their particular needs and contexts (DES Inspectorate, 2015).

Moving to the outer level of the model (contextual factors), we have made a number of modifications to the original model. We have added a new heading called 'system' incorporating the educational policy aspect of Compen et al.'s model but also several other relevant components. We have modified 'educational policy' to 'policy' to reflect the impact of broader policy on education. Examples include aspects of health policy with a direct impact on education. Other elements added under the heading of 'system' are: organisational factors (such as time to implement learning from TPL), curriculum, standards, frameworks, and parents as partners. The inclusion of parents at this level reflects the legislative underpinnings to the partnership between parents and schools, recognised in The Education Act 1998 (Government of Ireland, 1998) which acknowledges the rights of parents to establish a parents' association and the role of the National Parents Council (NPC) in representing parents. While time may be considered an organisational issue, from the survey findings presented in this chapter it will be seen that time is very closely linked with curriculum in the Irish context where a lack of time to implement learning from TPL was attributed to an overloaded curriculum by some survey respondents.

School characteristics identified in the literature as likely to influence teachers' access to TPL, its setup, content and effectiveness include: school leadership, school climate and culture, school size, and the socioeconomic status of the school (Compen et al., 2019). School context has also been shown to play an important role in teacher burnout and teacher wellbeing (e.g., Van Droogenbroeck, Spruyt, Quittre, & Larontaine, 2021). Van Droogenbroeck et al. (2021) identify a problem of conceptual confusion in the literature regarding teacher burnout (relevant also to literature on TPL reviewed for the current study) whereby characteristics can be measured at the school- or teacher- level and studies vary in their approaches. Furthermore, statistical and methodological problems may arise if studies do not adequately account for the clustered nature of teacher data.

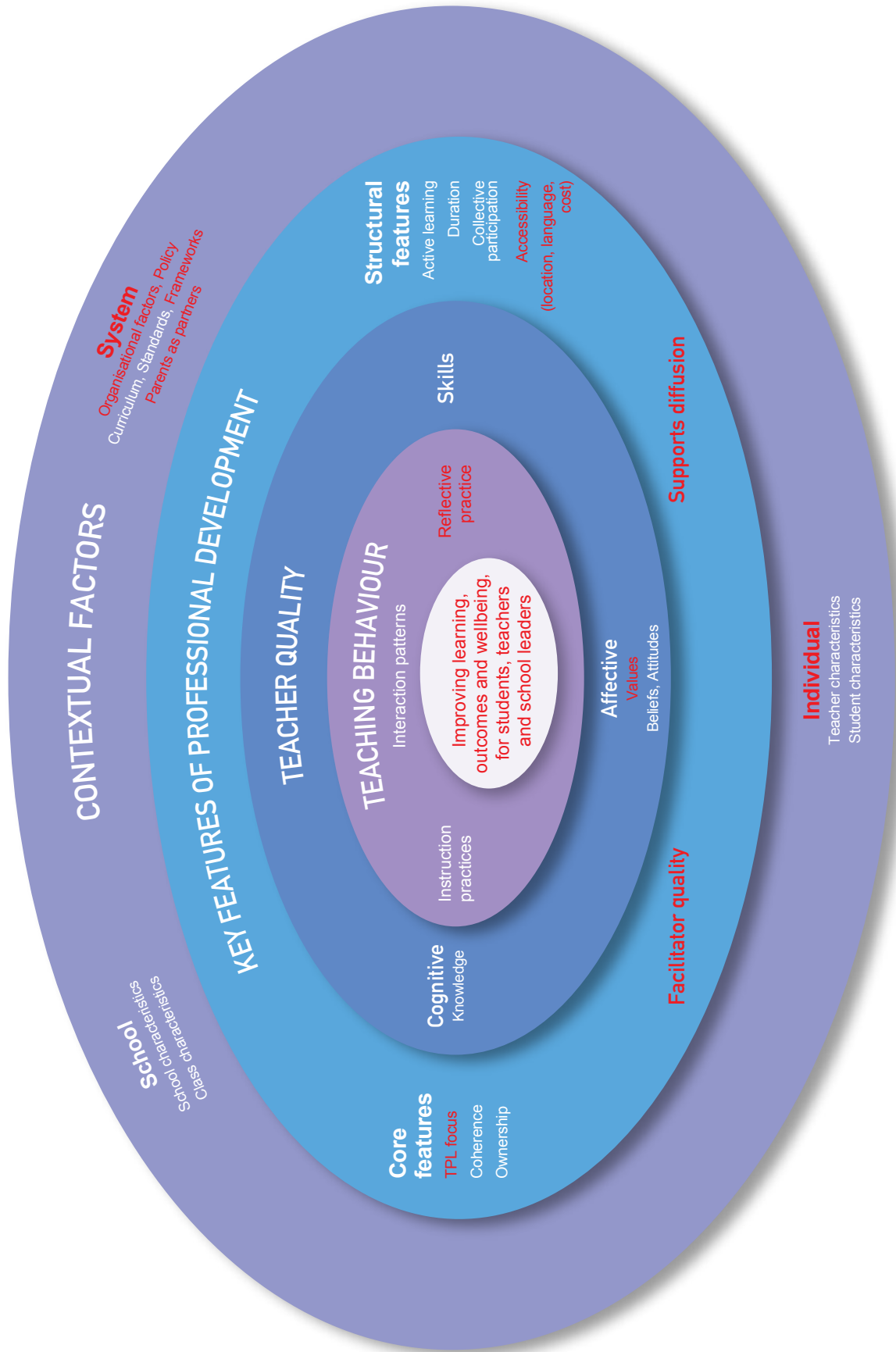
The outer level of the model also refers to student characteristics which are useful to consider in the context of wellbeing. In PISA 2018, students from socio-economically advantaged backgrounds had higher average levels of self-efficacy (i.e., self-belief about their own resilience) than students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds; immigrant status was also associated with a higher level of self-efficacy in some countries, including Ireland (OECD, 2019a). Therefore, such characteristics are relevant considerations in planning and delivering TPL for student wellbeing (while recognising that students from all socio-economic groups can experience challenges to wellbeing; Nixon, 2021).

Recent Irish research has also shown differences in socio-emotional wellbeing between students in DEIS and non-DEIS schools, pointing towards an association between socioeconomic status and socio-emotional wellbeing (Smyth, 2020). Significant differences in wellbeing were noted between students who attended DEIS schools at both primary and post-primary levels and those who attended DEIS schools at one level only. Specifically, students who attended Urban DEIS Band 1 schools at primary level and DEIS post-primary schools demonstrated higher levels of emotional difficulties, conduct problems, hyperactivity, and peer problems. Moving from a non-DEIS primary school into a DEIS post-primary school was also associated with higher levels of conduct problems and hyperactivity (Smyth, 2020). National analyses of Ireland's PISA 2018 data have shown that compared to students in non-DEIS schools, students in DEIS schools have a lower mean score on an index measuring value of schooling (Nelis, Gilleece, Fitzgerald, & Cosgrove, 2021).

The model by Compen et al. identifies many of the same features of effective professional development as the conceptual model used by the PDST (see Rawdon et al., 2020) and the JCT framework for the design of professional learning experiences (unpublished). Therefore, using this model as a starting point for the current framework provides not only a theoretical basis but also a reassurance of its applicability in the national context. The mapping exercise in this chapter represents a further step in the process of developing the TPL evaluation framework. It indicates the extent to which survey data lend empirical support to a theoretical model based on Compen et al.'s work. However, Figure 8.1 does not translate directly into a practical tool for the evaluation of TPL.



Figure 8.1: Adapted version of the general model presented by Compen, De Witte, and Schellhout (2019)



## 8.2 LINKING SURVEY FINDINGS TO THE CONCEPTUAL MODEL

In this section, we provide detailed discussion of the survey findings in the context of the model presented in Figure 8.1 which places learning, outcomes, and wellbeing, for students, teachers, and school leaders at its centre. As discussed in Rawdon et al. (2020), well-designed TPL should outline the desired and expected outcomes<sup>53</sup> which are anticipated as a result of participation in the TPL. If one of the ultimate goals of TPL is to impact on student outcomes, the design stage of TPL should consider which student outcomes are likely to be impacted by TPL participation, and in what way or to what extent. Survey findings indicate that two-fifths of primary principals perceive improved learning outcomes for pupils to be an outcome of TPL participation (Table 6.7); percentages were lower amongst other groups (13-22%). Placing teachers and school leaders at the centre of the model along with students underscores the importance of learning outcomes for these groups in addition to the learning outcomes of students.

Section 8.2.1 focused on the key features of professional development. These features are examined first as they are directly related to the characteristics of the TPL activity. We then turn to the broader contextual influences in Section 8.2.2. Next, findings related to teacher quality and teaching behaviour are presented (Section 8.2.3). An asterisk is used to mark those features on which the survey gathered limited data. The features marked with an asterisk (and listed in the final section of this chapter) may usefully be explored in detail in subsequent phases of the research as they are known to be of central importance in learning from TPL having an impact in the classroom.

### 8.2.1 Key features of professional development

This section focuses on the key features of professional development as set out in Figure 8.1. These are: core features, structural features, facilitator quality, and the extent to which diffusion is supported.

#### Core features

Core features refer to the content of the TPL activity and comprise TPL focus, coherence, and ownership (Figure 8.1).

#### TPL focus

Principals and teachers were asked to indicate, from a list of several options, the main purpose of their TPL undertaken since September 2018 (multiple responses could be selected). The move from 'content focus' to 'TPL focus' in the model in Figure 8.1 was informed by the high percentages of survey respondents who indicated that recent TPL had a main focus other than content knowledge or pedagogical content knowledge (terms used in the original model). For example, about three-quarters of primary and post-primary principals and about 60% of special school principals reported that the main purpose of recent TPL was school self-evaluation and planning (Table 6.5). Furthermore, two-fifths to three-quarters of respondents indicated that personal learning and development was the main purpose of recent TPL. Similarly, high percentages of principals identified professional collaboration and support of colleagues as the main purpose. Planning and preparation was also widely selected. Therefore, it appears overly restrictive to limit the preferred focus of TPL to content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge for the purposes of developing an evaluation framework for use in Ireland.

Nonetheless, as would be anticipated by Desimone's features of effective TPL, survey findings show that a major focus of recently undertaken TPL was content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and/or pedagogical content knowledge.

53 Alternative terms such as 'learning intentions' are also used by some TPL providers in Ireland.

For example, knowledge about teaching methods was identified as the main purpose of TPL since September 2018 for half to two-thirds of survey respondents across school types (Table 6.5). The percentages of respondents that selected content knowledge varied from 31% of post-primary principals to 72% of special school principals.

Primary and post-primary principals were somewhat more likely to report that pedagogical knowledge was the main focus of recent TPL compared to content knowledge. The opposite was true in special schools with both principals and teachers more likely to indicate that content knowledge rather than pedagogical knowledge was the main focus. Of all respondent groups, post-primary principals were least likely to indicate that content knowledge was the main focus of recent TPL, which likely reflects the lower percentage of post-primary principals with teaching responsibilities.

In discussing preferred modes of TPL, reference to subject matter knowledge was most likely to be raised by post-primary teachers. About one-in-six post-primary teachers who provided additional commentary to a question on preferred modes of TPL referred to developing subject-specific knowledge, including cluster workshops and subject association meetings, noting that these can be particularly useful for minority subjects (Chapter 5).

In discussing the impact of TPL, teachers were more likely to refer to an impact on the teaching of a subject rather than an impact on subject matter knowledge. In commenting on the impact of TPL on their own professional practice, about one-third of primary and post-primary teachers and half of special school teachers indicated that an impact of TPL was that they developed skills and knowledge that they could apply in their practice (Table 5.9). This is illustrated by:

*"I left the course with a treasure trove of practical ideas and strategies that I could use immediately and effectively in the classroom. The children enjoyed the projects and I felt there was an increase in their enthusiasm and engagement during our lessons."* (Primary teacher)

*"Subject-specific content attracts teachers as they see the relevance to their own classroom and generally enjoy discussions with other teachers of their subject area."* (Post-primary teacher)

## **Coherence\***

Coherence represents an alignment between TPL and the curriculum, standards, and policy reforms (Compen et al., 2019). Findings from the survey indicate that alignment with the curriculum is a key determinant of decisions to participate in TPL. About three-quarters of principals in each context and up to 90% of teachers indicated that changes to the curriculum represented a factor influencing TPL participation (Table 6.1).

In terms of evaluating TPL, alignment to the curriculum was not the most highly ranked criterion by principals and teachers. Relevance to classroom practice was somewhat more likely to be rated as a 'highly useful' criterion against which to evaluate TPL. About three-quarters of primary and post-primary principals (and half to two-thirds of teachers) indicated that it is 'very useful' to evaluate the impact of TPL against its alignment to the curriculum (Table 5.6). The following response illustrates this:

*"Ability to amalgamate easily within current curriculum framework."* (Special school teacher)

It will be important for future data collection with TPL providers to examine how coherence with the curriculum is considered at the design stage of planning for TPL.

**Ownership\***

*"We are adults. We are professionals. We should be able to manage our own 'TPL'." (Post-primary teacher)*

*"More freedom for schools to choose their own priorities and not be pressured by ones that are not worthwhile for us as a school." (Primary principal)*

This feature refers to the extent to which TPL participants have 'ownership' over the structure, content and approaches of the TPL activities. The key principles of *Cosán* encompass this feature, according to which teachers are recognised as autonomous and responsible learning professionals who should have choices in identifying and pursuing learning opportunities relevant to them (The Teaching Council, 2016).

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are one form of TPL where participants are particularly likely to have a high degree of ownership (Compen et al., 2019). The term 'professional learning community' describes a process of teachers working collaboratively towards improvements in teaching and learning and while Brennan (2017) suggests that there is no single definition in the literature for the term PLC, a commonly shared understanding views PLCs as *"a group of people sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning oriented, growth-promoting way"* (Stoll et al., 2006, p. 223). Tschannen-Moran (2009, p. 226) suggests that when schools operate as effective PLCs, *"the teachers themselves ensure that poor practice is not allowed to persist"*. Brennan (2017) notes that PLCs are intended to foster collaborative relationships among teachers but there is a risk that they will simply embed existing practice unless critical dialogue and a focus on student needs is maintained.

About one-in-ten post-primary teachers and a similar percentage of special school teachers reported that they had no previous experience of PLCs. Amongst special school principals and teachers and principals at primary level, about one-in-five indicated that they had not experienced PLCs (Table 5.3).

There was limited evidence from the survey findings that teachers and principals prioritised ownership as a key feature of TPL, although there were calls to *'listen to teachers'*. Principal and teacher ratings of factors that influence decisions on TPL participation suggest that the overall school plan ranks well below several other influences on TPL participation (Table 6.1), suggesting that there is limited ownership at school level for determining strategic priorities for TPL.

The following post-primary teacher's response highlights the need to recognise teachers as agentic professionals and to ensure that TPL offers them an opportunity to build on their existing knowledge. While they do not directly refer to ownership, they reflect teacher dissatisfaction with their lack of ownership over the structure, content, and timing of recent TPL (emphasis added to illustrate references to lack of ownership).

*"TPL needs to be less "top down" - demanding more and more with less and less. I am very interested in TPL but it needs to be practicable. A lot of TPL overburdens the teacher and assumes a low level of knowledge or competence. ... I feel that the focus should be and MUST be on enriching the student experience and empowering the teacher as an already qualified professional." (Post-primary teacher)*

In the DLF evaluation, the lack of ownership over TPL was seen in respondents' frustrations with local organisational issues where some participants were unaware that seminars were taking place and others had technical challenges with the registration process (Cosgrove et al., 2019).

## Structural features

In the model presented in Figure 8.1, structural features comprise active learning, duration, collective participation, and accessibility (location, language, and cost).

### Active learning

Active approaches are those which are more hands-on, experiential, or practical and contrast with more passive activities such as listening to a lecture. Several of the survey findings show strong endorsement on the part of teachers and principals for active learning methods. The value placed on active methods is illustrated in the following responses (emphasis added to illustrate reference to active methods):

*"One of the most effective TPL that I've experienced was a summer course on Aistear in the classroom. It was held in <place> and it was a five day course. What was brilliant about it was that it was a very practical and hands on course which allowed us to be the children participating in Aistear. The facilitator focused on a different theme every day and set up the different stations that we could go to, take photos of and try out for ourselves. Another thing that was hugely beneficial was that the facilitator allowed some time each day for knowledge and ideas to be shared, not only relating to Aistear and the themes in question, but also on any other areas of teaching they felt worked for them."* (Primary teacher)

*"I think sitting and listening for hours is hard for most humans. We need to move, interact etc. to learn."* (Special school teacher)

*"As the teacher of a practical subject there are always new skills and methods to learn... For me the most effective forms of TPL have been workshops where I, as a participant, get involved and learn by doing while being led by a practical expert in their field..."* (Post-primary teacher)

Cosgrove et al. (2019) report that seminar participants in their study welcomed the practical approaches taken in the seminars provided as part of professional development for the DLF.

The responses to the TPL survey indicate that respondents have varying preferences for the manner in which TPL is delivered for it to be effective, and these preferences are useful to consider in light of the content and purpose of the TPL. For example, a majority of respondents selected school-based support (including school visits from support personnel) in their top five preferred modes of TPL (Table 5.2). The percentage of post-primary teachers (58%) including school-based support in their top five was somewhat lower than amongst other groups (ranging from 63% of special school teachers to 87% of primary principals). It is expected that school-based support typically encompasses active learning methods.

Small numbers of primary, post-primary, and special school teachers referred to the benefits of observing the classes of other teachers, being observed, and learning through a facilitator modelling skills (Chapter 5). The following examples serve as illustrations:

*"Modelling – an experienced teacher modelling the new skill in your class."*  
(Primary teacher)

*"Observations – as part of my NQT I got to observe other teachers and have found this very valuable."* (Special school teacher)

### Duration\*

Duration includes time span and total number of hours. The issue of whether or not follow-up activities form part of the TPL is also relevant to duration. Desimone (2009) suggests that TPL needs to be of a "sufficient" duration (p. 184). This refers to both the span of time over which the activity is spread



and the number of hours spent in the activity. She suggests that there is support in the literature for activities that are spread over a semester and include at least 20 hours of contact time.

Survey findings show that there is some evidence that teachers and principals recognise the benefits of TPL with sustained duration. Nonetheless, high percentages reported that single-day workshops were effective, with a higher percentage of post-primary teachers endorsing single day workshops as 'highly effective' as compared to the percentage endorsing school-based support as 'highly effective' (Table 5.4). Principals, in particular, were likely to identify school-based support (which often has sustained duration) as 'highly effective'; percentages of teachers rating school-based support as 'highly effective' were considerably lower (than percentages of principals) in each context (Table 5.4).

In commenting on the most effective TPL they had experienced, sustained duration was mentioned by about two-fifths of primary principals; half of special school principals; and up to one-fifth of other respondents (Table 5.8). One-third to one-half of respondents indicated that single day workshops were 'highly effective' in informing their professional knowledge, competence and skills (Table 5.4). The benefits of follow-up in the school setting are illustrated in the following example from a special school teacher:

*"Practical follow up in school setting".*

When asked for characteristics of the most effective TPL that they had experienced, sustained duration was not widely identified by teachers; however, when provided with a list of types of TPL, high percentages of principals and teachers selected school-based support in their top five preferred modes. It may be useful for future data collection to examine the aspects of school-based supports that are particularly valued by teachers and the extent to which sustained duration is viewed as an important element. The DLF study reported that the TPL provider identified insufficient continued support to schools as a risk to the successful rollout of the DLF and it was proposed that there was a need for both technical and pedagogical support (Cosgrove et al., 2019). Future data collection with TPL providers will examine this issue in the current study.

### **Collective participation**

Collective participation refers to activities such as PLCs or other TPL activities which promote interaction, discussion, and collaboration.

Survey findings provide evidence that principals and teachers prefer TPL activities with a collective focus. Collective activities (such as PLCs and team teaching) were more likely to be rated as 'highly effective' than more individual activities such as research or reading academic journals/reports (Table 5.4). Almost three-quarters of post-primary principals reported that PLCs were 'highly effective' in informing their professional knowledge, competence, and skills. Percentages of other respondents rating PLCs as 'highly effective' were lower (37% - 48%). Approximately half to two-thirds of respondents rated team teaching as 'highly effective' in informing their professional knowledge, competence, and skills. Not more than one-quarter of any group rated research as a 'highly effective' mode of TPL; the corresponding percentage for reading academic journals or reports was 13% (Table 5.4). The comparatively low percentages of respondents indicating that research and/or reading journals were 'highly effective' modes of TPL emphasises the need for TPL providers to ensure that findings from up-to-date research are disseminated as part of teachers' preferred methods of TPL, in order to ensure that teaching and learning are evidence-informed. TPL is one mechanism for providing research evidence for teachers and school leaders in the form of short bite-sized summaries, online spaces where teachers can engage with research, infographics, and key points from research collated thematically. The importance of having opportunities to collectively reflect on learning is illustrated by the comment below, which in turn ties in with a whole-school approach to school improvement, as exemplified in the *Looking At Our School* framework (DES, 2016a, 2016b):



*"More needs to be done at school level. There is very little point in having a whole day of in-service in school, without any time to discuss how that can be brought into the subject and changes that can be made as a department. Staffs have very limited opportunity to meet as a whole group, we have <N> teachers in our <subject> department and would never be able to meet under normal circumstances."*  
(Post-primary teacher)

### Additional structural features (location, cost, and language)

The accessibility of TPL was raised by survey participants when asked about how TPL could be improved. Given the increasing importance of online TPL, location may also include online or blended provision but in the event of online TPL, it is imperative that appropriate consideration is given to supporting active learning methods. Survey findings show that high percentages of respondents from primary and special schools (64% - 82%, Table 6.4) indicated that they had participated in an online course (e.g., an approved online summer course) between September 2018 and the time of survey administration. Attendance at webinars varied across participant groups, ranging from 38% of post-primary teachers to 76% of primary principals (Table 6.4). However, in rating perceived impact of various modes of TPL, online courses and webinars were less likely than other forms to be rated as having a 'large impact'. Future research could usefully examine how best to exploit the flexibility of online learning but to retain the benefits of face-to-face approaches involving active methods and collaborative opportunities. In assessing the benefits of online approaches, consideration should be given to how these may lower costs associated with travel.

### Facilitator quality

The importance of a high quality facilitator was evident in survey responses. One-quarter of primary principals and 10-15% of other respondents reported that a high-quality facilitator was a feature of the most effective TPL they had experienced (Table 5.8). The following examples illustrate the value placed by respondents on facilitator quality:

*"...The facilitator focused on a different theme every day and set up the different stations that we could go to, take photos of and try out for ourselves. Another thing that was hugely beneficial was that the facilitator allowed some time each day for knowledge and ideas to be shared, not only relating to Aistear and the themes in question, but also on any other areas of teaching they felt worked for them."*  
(Primary teacher)

*"<TPL name> day. Excellent facilitator ... for those of us who are IT challenged we left that day feeling confident and competent re putting a plan in place."*  
(Primary principal)

The following examples illustrate the frustrations expressed by teachers regarding their participation in TPL where the facilitator was perceived to be less skilled or effective.

*"Better training for facilitators who seem unable to answer questions. They seem to have a limited agenda which doesn't always fit the need of the school."*  
(Primary teacher)

*"...needs to be given at appropriate times not after the task ... Providers should be trained to deal with legitimate concerns of teachers and avoid dismissing them. I have seen a room turn on a dismissive comment."* (Post-primary teacher)

### Supports "diffusion"\*

There is some evidence in open-ended responses that principals and teachers recognise the opportunities and benefits of "diffusion" (i.e., the "organic unplanned rippling of practices"; King, 2014, p. 106). Future data collection could usefully examine this issue more explicitly.

*"The teachers involved in the workshops have regular informal meetings to discuss progress. We are in the process of sharing the <name of resource> with a wider group of interested teachers. This is through a collaborative process and will take some time. It is important that it is on a voluntary basis and not enforced."*

(Post-primary teacher)

*"In my current role, I have had the opportunity, through TPL, to discuss and share ideas with other members of senior management. I have then been able to share these ideas in my own school. This has filtered through to policy reviews and how we do things in the school. I would consider the impact to be a series of small little changes that have helped the school and the staff/students within the school. However, the small things matter and are appreciated. It is important to say also that some things gathered through TPL might 'only' be a small idea or suggestion that can have a big impact on the atmosphere/wellbeing of staff and students."*

(Post-primary principal)

## 8.2.2 Contextual factors

In the model in Figure 8.1, the outer circle consists of contextual factors at three levels (system, school, and individual) which influence the inner circles. The context is believed to have an influence in three main areas:

- It determines the extent to which teachers have flexibility in delivering the curriculum;
- It influences the teaching approaches that can be adopted (in response to characteristics of the class/school); and
- It determines the need for differentiated teaching styles (due to heterogeneous class composition).

### System

System comprises organisational factors, relevant policy, curriculum, standards, frameworks, and including parents as partners.

### Organisational factors

Organisational factors include the provision of time and support for participation in TPL activities as well as the provision of time and resources to integrate learning from TPL into teaching practice. The current survey reports that about 80% of principals in primary and special schools and approximately 40% of principals at post-primary level indicated that the availability of a substitute teacher was a determining factor in TPL participation (Table 6.1). Over one-third of teachers indicated that time available *inside* of school hours was a determining factor in TPL participation (primary 34%; post-primary 44%; special schools 38%).

The issue of time was one of the most widely recognised barriers to implementing learning from TPL into day-to-day practice. A large majority of respondents indicated that they encountered some barriers in this regard. Of those who had faced barriers, at least half of principals and approximately two-fifths of teachers identified limited/no time as a factor which limited their capacity to integrate learning from TPL into day-to-day practice (Table 6.8).

The impact of limited/no time is illustrated by the following responses:

*"Time to engage with changing practice or to gather resources."*

(Primary teacher)

*"More time to learn, more time to reflect, more time to plan. Teachers need more time. I am not sure if this is possible but it is aspirational."* (Post-primary teacher)

## Policy

Findings from the current survey provide limited evidence of linkages between the SSE process and planning and participation in TPL. Principal and teacher ratings of factors that influence decisions on TPL participation suggest that the overall school plan ranks well below several other influences on TPL participation (Table 6.1), suggesting that there is limited ownership at school level for determining strategic priorities for TPL.

## Curriculum

The important influence of the curriculum on determining decisions to participate in TPL is seen in the current findings. In general, across school contexts, at least three-quarters of principals and teachers indicated that changes to the curriculum represent one factor influencing decisions on TPL participation (Table 5.1).

The influence of the curriculum is also seen on the high levels of participation by post-primary respondents in TPL related to the Junior Cycle. Half of post-primary principals and two-fifths of post-primary teachers reported spending 4-8 days on TPL related to the Junior Cycle since September 2018 (Table 6.3).

Specifically turning to wellbeing curricular areas, high percentages of principals reported a 'high level' of need across several wellbeing-related areas, indicating the extent and breadth of current needs. Mental health was identified as a topic with a 'high' level of need for TPL by half to two-thirds of principals (Table 7.12). Half of primary and special school principals indicated that they had a 'high' level of need for whole-school TPL to implement curriculum changes. Leadership support was also widely identified as an area with a 'high' level of need for TPL.

The issue of an "*overloaded curriculum*" was raised as a barrier to the integration of learning from TPL in day-to-day activities. This is illustrated by the following response from a primary teacher: "*My biggest obstacle is Time. Priorities can frequently shift in an already overloaded curriculum.*"

## Standards\*

Compen et al. suggest that in the context of TPL for financial education, the lack of academic standards may be used as a justification for teachers not engaging in the teaching of that particular subject. Measurement of student wellbeing outcomes is more challenging than the measurement of student outcomes in many other domains, although achievement in certain curricular subjects may be considered to provide a limited picture of wellbeing outcomes. At a school level, measures such as attendance, retention, and school completion may contribute to evidence on wellbeing (for more detail, see Rawdon et al., 2020). Furthermore, incidents of bullying or onward referrals to appropriate services may represent appropriate metrics to consider when examining wellbeing. Therefore, standards in wellbeing may be considered less definable than those for many other subjects.

A large majority of principals in the current survey indicated that student learning outcomes represent a 'very useful' criterion against which to evaluate the impact of TPL (Table 5.6). Half to two-thirds of teachers rated student learning outcomes as a 'very useful' criterion in the evaluation of TPL. It will undoubtedly be challenging to identify appropriate student learning outcomes related to wellbeing against which to evaluate wellbeing-related TPL and this will form part of a detailed case study in Phase 3 of the current research.

## Frameworks

Questions pertaining to one framework, the WPSF, were included in the current survey. Principals at post-primary level were more likely than their counterparts in primary and special schools to report that the WPSF has had at least 'a little' influence at a whole-school level in their school. Similarly, two-thirds of post-primary teachers (68%) indicated that the WPSF has had at least 'a little' influence on their role as teacher; the corresponding percentages for primary and special schools were 53%

and 54% respectively. Other relevant frameworks which will be considered when developing the draft evaluation framework for TPL include *Cosán*, the national framework for teachers' learning (The Teaching Council, 2016).

### Parents as partners

The current survey did not include questions relating to parents; however, it is acknowledged that parents are important partners in the school community and effective communication with parents regarding teacher participation in TPL activities is likely to form part of a school culture that values ongoing professional learning.

### School

#### School characteristics\*

The current survey gathered detailed information on school climate, school size, socioeconomic status, special education provision, parental involvement, and the community context but did not examine school leadership in detail. Subsequent phases of the research may usefully examine school leadership in detail, given its important influence on TPL (see section below on implications for Phase 3).

Survey findings show a diversity of student needs across schools, with much higher levels of needs in some schools than others. While characteristics, such as additional learning needs associated with SEN and student socioeconomic status, are individual level characteristics, they can have a multiplicative effect and therefore, at a school-level, such characteristics become a feature of the school context. Indeed the DEIS programme is premised on the existence of a 'multiplier effect' which suggests that *"students attending a school with a concentration of students from disadvantaged backgrounds have poorer academic outcomes, even taking account of individual social background"* (DES, 2017, p. 15-16). As noted in the introduction to this chapter, challenges have been identified in the literature regarding the appropriate measurement and analysis of contextual variables measured at individual teacher level compared to those measured at school level.

Survey findings related to school socio-economic context include (largely from Chapter 4):

- Principals in DEIS schools were more likely than their non-DEIS counterparts to report that at least one-fifth of students had special educational needs (although differences were not statistically significant which may relate to the comparatively small number of DEIS schools).
- On average, 10-20% of students were reported to have an immigrant background. Percentages of students from an immigrant background varied considerably across schools and were as high as two-thirds of pupils in some primary schools (Table 4.3).
- There was variation across schools in the extent to which students spoke main home languages other than English or Irish, ranging from an average of 6% in post-primary schools to 13% in special schools; primary schools had an average of 10% of pupils with a main home language other than English or Irish (Table 4.3).
- On average, low percentages of students were reported to identify as members of the Traveller or Roma communities although in primary schools with the highest representation of these groups, almost one-quarter identified as a member of the Traveller or Roma communities (Table 4.3).
- On average, not more than 1% of students were reported to live in direct provision and no more than 3% were reported to be homeless or living in temporary accommodation.
- When presented with a list of challenges that might be applicable in their school's community (e.g., unemployment, drug/alcohol abuse, lack of availability of housing), principals in DEIS schools were much more likely to rate the issue as a 'moderate' or 'serious' challenge than their counterparts in non-DEIS schools (Figure 4.8).

The survey also provided data on aspects of the school disciplinary climate. Findings show that:

- Student absenteeism was identified as a widespread problem at post-primary level with almost half of principals reporting that it was a 'moderate' or 'serious' challenge (Figure 4.3).
- About half of special school principals described as 'moderate' or 'serious' challenges relationship difficulties among pupils, pupil disengagement, and low achievement (Figure 4.3).
- Despite the challenges, very high percentages of principals reported that 'all or nearly all' students were rewarding to work with, well-behaved, and show respect to their teachers (Table 4.4).
- More than one-in-ten special school teachers and more than one-in-six post-primary teachers indicated that the environment in their school is 'less happy' than in other similar sized schools (Figure 4.7)
- All post-primary principals indicated that their school offered *Droichead*, compared to 42% of primary school principals and 48% of special school principals.

The issue of identifying appropriate substitute cover (in primary and special schools) to facilitate TPL participation represents an important barrier to TPL participation in Ireland. At least 80% of primary and special school principals reported that the availability of a substitute teacher or teacher cover was one of the factors determining TPL participation (Table 6.1). The percentage was substantially lower amongst post-primary principals suggesting that substitute cover poses less of a challenge in that sector, likely a consequence of different timetabling arrangements at post-primary level. It is relevant to note that the issue of substitute cover was also raised as a challenge to TPL participation by those participating in the DLF evaluation (Cosgrove et al., 2019).

School culture is recognised as an enabler of TPL (Kwakman, 2003; Moir, 2018). It is likely that teachers and principals experiencing high levels of stress will be less able to engage in TPL and to participate in the subsequent collective reflection that is needed for the TPL to have a long-term impact. To derive full benefit from TPL, it is likely that teachers and principals need to feel supported; this was not the case for a minority of respondents in primary and post-primary schools and a majority of special school principals. For those who perceive a lack of support, the gap appears to be at a wider level than the school as very low percentages of respondents reported that a lack of support from school management was a barrier to implementing learning from TPL. Specifically regarding stress and perceived levels of support:

- Very high percentages of principals ( $\geq 60\%$  across levels) reported high levels of stress in their job (Figure 3.4). Percentages of teachers indicating that they were 'very' stressed were lower but nonetheless sizeable (one-third of post-primary teachers and two-fifths of special school teachers). These high levels of stress are unlikely to support teacher wellbeing which is an important precursor for student wellbeing (see further discussion below in the context of teacher characteristics). It is notable that the percentages of teachers and principals reporting high levels of stress are considerably larger than the percentages reporting high levels of stress in the 2007/2008 school year. Reporting on primary teachers and principals only, Darmody and Smyth (2010) showed that about 5% of teachers and almost 20% of principals reported 'very' high levels of occupational stress in the 2007/2008 school year (compared to 18% and 60% respectively in the current study).
- One-third of primary principals and three-fifths of special school principals reported that they did not feel supported in their role. Up to one-in-six teachers indicated that they did not feel supported in their role (Figure 3.6). Recent international research (which includes a sample of principals in Ireland) posits that social capital, including both internal (bonding) and external (bridging and linking) social capital may play a role in maintaining principal wellbeing (Beausaert, Froehlich, Riley, & Gallant, 2021). Findings of Beausaert et al. show that support



from colleagues outside the school and supervisor support (external social capital) and collaboration and trust in management (internal social capital) positively predicted wellbeing across time and the authors suggest that these highlight the importance of social support from colleagues and supervisors as well as the need to collaboration in maintaining the wellbeing of school principals.

- Despite the sizeable percentages who indicated that they did not feel supported in their role, very few principals (4% of primary) or teachers (8% of post-primary) indicated that limited/no support from school management was a barrier to implementing learning from TPL (Table 6.8). Respondents were much more likely to identify as a barrier a lack of sustained support from the TPL provider (identified as a barrier to implementing learning by up to one-third of principals and two-fifths of teachers; Table 6.8).

The importance of having a culture that encourages trying out new approaches was emphasised.

*“Teachers felt that we were all learning new things together and nobody appeared to feel intimidated or afraid to try something new. ...”* (Special school principal)

The issue of resources may also be considered within the school context (note ‘time’ as a resource that may impact on the implementation of learning from TPL was considered above within the context of curriculum). Teachers and principals who indicated that they had experienced barriers to integrating what they had learned from TPL into their day-to-day activities were asked to select from a list the barriers they had faced (see Table 6.8). As noted previously, limited/no time was the barrier most commonly selected across respondent groups (about two-fifths of teachers across school types) and half to two-thirds of principals. Limited/no resources was identified as a barrier to integrating learning from TPL by up to one-third of teachers across contexts, one-tenth of post-primary principals, one-quarter of primary principals, and two-thirds of special school principals. One-in-ten to one-in-five respondents identified financial issues as a barrier (Table 6.8).

Teachers and principals had the opportunity to identify barriers in addition to those listed and some provided more detail on the listed barriers. For example, resource issues of class sizes and outdoor spaces such as playgrounds and gardens were mentioned by a small number primary teachers. One primary principal commented generally that *“developments cost money and funding available to schools is wholly inadequate to support such”*. Little additional information was provided by other respondent groups.

### **Class characteristics\***

Buczynski & Hansen (2010) identify several barriers to maximising the impact of professional development, including classroom management issues. Survey findings provide a largely positive impression of classroom management in Irish schools.

Over 80% of primary and post-primary principals reported that ‘all or nearly all’ students were well-behaved in class (Table 4.4); the corresponding percentage in special schools was 55%. At least three-quarters of principals in each context indicated that ‘all or nearly all’ students were well-behaved in the playground/yard.

Future data collection focusing on a case study TPL may usefully gather further information on classroom characteristics including classroom management and consider how these impact on the successful implementation of learning from TPL.



## Individual

### Teacher characteristics

Research has shown that teachers' individual characteristics play a role in their responses to professional development (see Compen et al., 2019). On an overall measure of attitudes to TPL, principals had a higher mean score, i.e., a more positive attitude, than teachers (Figure 5.1). Post-primary teachers had a statistically significantly lower mean score on the attitudes to professional learning than teachers in primary and special schools.

The survey provided detailed information on teacher demographics, including age, gender, and experience (Chapter 3). Findings include:

- A large majority of respondents was female.
- Compared to post-primary (40%) and special school (44%), higher percentages of primary teachers (60%) were aged under 40.
- High levels of teaching experience were reported by school principals, particularly in post-primary schools where 77% of principals had over 20 years of teaching experience.
- A large percentage of teachers in primary schools (48%) reported having no additional qualifications relevant to their role compared to teachers in post-primary and special schools (25% and 23%, respectively).
- Younger and less experienced teachers were more likely to have a fixed-term contract (whole-time or part-time) or to be a substitute teacher. This may have implications for teacher wellbeing and may need to be considered when reflecting on how teacher wellbeing supports student wellbeing. This issue is illustrated in the following example:

*"Contractual clarity and security is vital for staff teaching in a really challenging special school where ensuring and fostering student wellbeing is of such critical importance. It's a difficult and testing job, but it's hard to perform optimally if you yourself, as a staff member, don't have the job security, say, a permanent member of staff has...."* (Special school teacher)

Survey findings also show that support for student wellbeing is distributed across teachers and principals; i.e., very small minorities of respondents reported having spent 'no time' on tasks related to student wellbeing in the most recent calendar week (Table 7.7). This emphasises that teachers of all subjects and at all levels of the education system play a role in supporting student wellbeing in a broad sense. A large majority of teachers across sectors indicated that they had spent at least some time in the most recent calendar week 'teaching' student wellbeing (Table 7.7). This reinforces the need for TPL related to student wellbeing to take into account teachers' prior experience as knowledge for teaching wellbeing subjects is likely to vary considerably on the basis of teachers' qualifications and subjects of expertise.

Teacher capacity to engage in TPL outside of school hours may be limited by other responsibilities, commitments, and attitudes, e.g., family, and/or by an expectation that TPL outside of school hours should receive additional reimbursement. The following examples show how teacher personal characteristics, including family responsibilities, impact on preferred timing of TPL. They also show how a 'one-size fits all' approach does not work with some respondents expressing a preference for TPL during school time and others expressing a preference for TPL during the summer holidays:

*"A lot of TPL is already excellent. However, teaching is a stressful, time consuming job. Trying to fit TPL in with working full time and raising a family can be difficult especially when most TPL around teachers' interests are out of school hours. e.g. it would be impossible for me to ever attend something in the evening although there are many opportunities to do this available."* (Post-primary teacher)

*"Most of the courses I have been on are outside of school time (e.g. evening) and last 2-3 hours. I think teachers should be reimbursed in time or cost for these. There seems to be an ad hoc way of signing up for courses run by different providers. If you are not on all of the mailing lists, it is easy to miss out on opportunities."*

*(Post-primary teacher)*

*"More summer options perhaps? The primary school setup is good where they have a good range of approved courses running over the summer and some online."*

*(Post-primary teacher)*

*"For secondary schools I would like to see a system where courses are provided during the summer or over Easter that are relevant to their classroom. During the summer teachers may have more time to engage and enjoy the courses..."*

*(Post-primary teacher)*

*"Available during working hours only - should not impinge on evening/weekend time - if it's needed for my work, it should be part of my working week."*

*(Post-primary teacher)*

*"More allocated time for teachers with Sub support Croke parks hours allocated to evening courses completed or webinars as this would entice teachers to take part."*

*(Special school teacher)*

*"More on in summer to avail of holidays to all less time missed in school and class contact time as planning work and correcting working after absence increases work load."*

*(Post-primary teacher)*

Teacher wellbeing is an important consideration for TPL focusing on student wellbeing. This issue is illustrated in the following examples:

*"I think it needs to focus more on teacher wellbeing. We had a day last year and to be honest it was dreadful as it did not focus on the topic. Staffs are made up of individuals who come to school each day to work and at times people forget that is what we are colleagues, it's wonderful when friendships form but I have seen people struggle within the staffroom so I would recommend a TPL on professionalism and self-care. We are lucky we have an excellent atmosphere but I am certain this is not always the case."*

*(Post-primary teacher)*

*"There is a huge need for teacher wellbeing. We are being asked to provide all this to students but are getting no support from management for teacher wellbeing. We are doing our full working week and the Croke Park hours and an additional 10 discretionary hours that are fully accountable by management and not used for planning or collaborating with your subject department. As a staff we are being accused of not doing our discretionary hours and only allowed to use 2 hours for CPD outside school. A very controlling and micro-managing management. Teachers are under huge pressure in schools to be everything to students (parent, social worker, mentor and teacher to get results) in 40 minutes. Extremely difficult."*

*(Post-primary teacher)*

*"To ensure that we deliver a meaningful wellbeing programme for the pupils, the staff in the school need to be also supported in their wellbeing and safety within the school. Special Education schools have a significant number of severe behaviours that challenge that require a coordinated, calm and regulated approach. Although the whole school support each other, there is a lack of time within the school day to process and deal with the issues being dealt with...."*

*(Special school teacher)*

*"Teacher wellbeing. I feel that there is a huge emphasis on student wellbeing but unless more emphasis placed on teacher wellbeing to combat recent overwhelm all of these changes will count for nothing."*

*(Primary teacher)*

## Student characteristics

The survey gathered data on some characteristics of students likely to impact on the teaching and learning of wellbeing and as discussed in the section on school context, there is considerable variation across schools in the representation of students from ethnic minority backgrounds, who speak languages other than English or Irish at home, and who come from socioeconomically disadvantaged households.

According to principals' reports from the current survey, an average of 5% of primary pupils had additional learning needs associated with a specific learning disability, although the percentage ranged from 0% to 22%. Findings were broadly similar at post-primary level. Previous research has shown significantly lower levels of wellbeing amongst children with SENs compared to children with no SENs (e.g., Cosgrove et al., 2018).

SENs and socioeconomic status are just two of several student characteristics that may be associated with variations in wellbeing needs across schools. In Ireland as in other countries, gender differences have been noted in wellbeing indicators such as self-efficacy and fear of failure (see e.g., Nelis et al., 2021) and therefore student gender may be a relevant consideration when putting learning from TPL into practice in the classroom.

### 8.2.3 Teacher quality\*

Teacher quality in the model of Compen et al. comprises cognitive and affective factors. The cognitive element refers to teacher knowledge about their subject while affective factors encompass beliefs and attitudes.

#### Cognitive

The current survey did not directly assess whether or not teachers and principals are sufficiently knowledgeable to teach wellbeing-related subjects. However, there are several relevant findings that suggest some knowledge gaps. One relevant finding is that while a majority of teachers and principals reported that TPL since September 2018 met their learning needs in the area of student wellbeing, about one-third of post-primary teachers and nearly half of special school principals indicated that their learning needs related to student wellbeing had not been met by recent TPL. Percentages for primary principals, primary teachers, and special school teachers were 16%, 19%, and 12% respectively. Also, substantial percentages of respondents reported a 'high' level of needs across a variety of wellbeing areas (Table 7.12) suggesting that there may be outstanding needs in the system for TPL related to student wellbeing. Data collection in later phases of the research may usefully focus on the knowledge that teachers and principals require to feel fully equipped to support student wellbeing.

#### Affective

The survey gathered comparatively little information on teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning generally or beliefs about one's competences as a teacher (two types of beliefs that may be influenced by TPL according to Merchie et al., 2016)<sup>54</sup>. However, the survey gathered information on teacher and principal perceptions of the impact of the most effective TPL they had experienced. The issue of confidence and increased confidence arising from TPL participation emerged in responses to the question on the impact of TPL. About half of special school principals reported increased confidence or motivation as one impact of the most effective TPL they had experienced (Table 5.9). Percentages were lower amongst other group; not more than one-in-six post-primary teachers or principals, primary teachers, or special school teachers reported an increase in confidence as an impact of the most effective TPL (the percentage of primary principals was considerably lower at 5%).

54 Affective outcomes comprise attitudes, values, beliefs, and dispositions. OECD (2019b) define these and other relevant terms likely to influence TPL engagement and impact. Figure 8.1 refers to attitudes, beliefs, and values as these are most likely to be measurable constructs in an educational context.

Teacher and principal responses across a number of open-ended items show that an increase in confidence is recognised by teachers as an important purpose and outcome of TPL (emphasis added to illustrate references to confidence), for example:

*"Knowledge sharing and time to practice new skills to help build confidence."*  
(Post-primary teacher)

*"Areas of interest to the individual teacher to promote confidence and deeper knowledge of role within the classroom and school community."*  
(Post-primary teacher)

*"When I return from courses in leadership I am far more confident and more sure of why I drive certain initiatives. In every school including my own there are the negative voices among the staff which can bring you down, I know it has an impact when I can move beyond the negativity and can enthuse about a new initiative regardless of less enthusiastic reactions."* (Primary principal)

### 8.2.4 Teaching behaviour

In line with Merchie et al. (2016), the model of Compen et al. distinguishes between two types of relevant teaching behaviour: instruction practices and interaction patterns. As noted, we have added reflective practice to the area of teaching behaviours (Figure 8.1). As the recent survey did not focus in detail on the teaching behaviours best suited to the development of student wellbeing, these are discussed together in this section.

Given the breadth of the wellbeing domain, it is important that teaching practices support both the development of students' knowledge and the development of behaviour and attitudes that promote wellbeing. In considering best practice for financial education, Compen et al. advocate interaction patterns such as environments that support experiential learning; methods that support creativity and initiative; use of examples that are relevant to students' lives; and lessons that are differentiated for different learners. It is likely that many of these also represent best practice for teaching and learning of wellbeing. Also, engaging in reflective practice may be considered to represent best practice across the teaching of all subject areas; hence reflective practice has been added to the conceptual model in this chapter.

High percentages of teachers and principals reported that knowledge about teaching methods was one main purpose of TPL undertaken since September 2018. Half to two-thirds of post-primary and primary respondents and up to half of special school respondents indicated that knowledge about teaching methods was a main purpose of recent TPL (Table 6.5). As most respondents had undertaken at least some TPL related to student wellbeing since September 2018 (Figure 7.3) and teaching methods were a common purpose of TPL undertaken, it could be inferred that many respondents are likely to have experienced TPL regarding appropriate teaching methods to employ to support student wellbeing. Greater reflective practice as an outcome of TPL was reported by between one-fifth and almost half of participants across school types (Table 5.11).

## 8.3 CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND NEXT STEPS

This chapter drew together survey findings and theoretical models for TPL evaluation. Findings show that the survey provides rich and detailed data on several components of the model by Compen et al., particularly regarding the key features of professional development and the broader contextual factors. An important contribution of this report is the rich qualitative data provided in the extended answers of teachers and principals to open-ended questions. Several of the findings show that contemporary challenges in Ireland mirror those presented in the international literature (e.g., related to having time to implement learning from TPL). Furthermore, in line with international research, current findings emphasise the diversity of student characteristics across school contexts and show the need for TPL design and implementation to be sensitive to contextual diversity.

Moving most TPL online as a consequence of COVID-19 was an important development in the facilitation of TPL which occurred around the time of survey administration. Because of the timing of the survey, detailed information was not gathered on teachers' experiences and preferences regarding online TPL. It is likely that blended models of TPL will become a more significant feature of provision as a consequence of recent online experiences and it is likely that online or blended provision may help address some of the barriers to TPL raised by participants in this study. For example, online TPL may be more geographically accessible and allow for flexibility regarding timing. There may be scope to support PLC models across schools, promoting communities of practice using online learning platforms. Nonetheless, it should be recognised that participants in the current survey placed a high value on hands-on, active methods and it would be important for online or blended provision to explore how such approaches could be encouraged in an online environment.

### 8.3.1 Implications for Phase 3 of the present study

Survey findings show a less clear endorsement for TPL with sustained duration in Ireland; rather, broadly similar percentages endorsed single-day workshops and activities with sustained duration. Future data collection may usefully probe the issue of duration in more detail as in instances where teachers' previous experience of TPL was largely limited to single-day workshops, they may not have been well placed to comment on the benefits of TPL with more sustained duration. Thus it is possible that survey findings reflect teachers' preference for the mode with which they have most experience. The current research project involves at least two more phases of data collection. The first will gather data from TPL providers; the second involves a case study of a particular TPL. Issues identified in this chapter which should usefully form a focus of either or both subsequent phases are (in the order presented in this chapter, not necessarily in order of priority):

- **Coherence** with the curriculum: This emerged as an important priority for teachers and principals and will be examined from the perspective of the TPL providers in the next stage of the research, particularly regarding the role of the curriculum at TPL design stage.
- **Ownership:** The survey findings suggest a relatively low sense of ownership of TPL on the part of school leaders and teachers and point towards an approach to TPL which is largely top-down; i.e., a lot of TPL takes place in response to curriculum change. Data collection with TPL providers and the case study will explore ways in which sense of ownership and agency may be enhanced. For example: How does the School Improvement Plan inform TPL priorities, if at all? How does individual and collective reflection on learning and on practice, and the connections between them, inform TPL priorities? How can learning from reflection at school level contribute to systemic sharing of learning? How do TPL providers support teachers and principals to have ownership of TPL content and modes? Who has ownership of TPL evaluation?
- **Duration:** Unpacking the perceived benefits of single-day workshops versus TPL of sustained duration will be an important part of the case study.
- **Diffusion:** Is there evidence of diffusion in the TPL case study?
- **Standards:** How does the assessment of wellbeing outcomes influence demand for TPL? What student outcomes are identified at the design stage as targets for change as a consequence of TPL participation?
- **System-level barriers to TPL participation:** Survey findings indicate that the identification and provision of substitute cover is a significant structural barrier to TPL participation. This in turn raises issues relating to equitable TPL participation opportunities. Therefore, effective solutions to this barrier are needed in order to fully realise the effectiveness of current and future TPL programmes.
- **School characteristics – school leadership:** King and Nihill (2019) underline how recent policy and curriculum changes in Ireland have the intention of shifting the focus of school leaders from managerial and administrative duties to learning. There is a considerable body



of international literature on the importance of school leadership as an influence on TPL (e.g., Halverson, 2003; Spillane, 2006; Spillane et al., 2001; Tschannen-Moran, 2009). For example, Halverson (2003) contends that school leaders construct the conditions in their school for 'professional community', considered to be a form of social capital, through the design and implementation of artifacts, such as policies, programmes, and procedures. Principal leadership style and orientation can influence structural elements (e.g., providing time for collaborative planning) which in turn influence the extent of professional community. In an Irish context, PDST (2013) research evidences the impact of school leadership on diffusion of TPL through the creation of a professional environment and conditions to support diffusion. Tschannen-Moran (2009) provides evidence of associations between the professional orientation of school leaders and the degree of teacher professionalism. In considering the impact of school leadership, it is important to consider not only the school principal but to take into account distributed leadership, i.e., to *"move beyond an analysis of individual knowledge and consider what these leaders know and do together"* (Spillane et al., 2001, p. 25). Data collection with TPL providers may usefully examine their perspective on the role of school leaders in Ireland while data collection for the case study will examine the role of school leaders in the context of implementing a specific TPL and how the conditions are created in the school for learning from the TPL to have an impact.

- **School characteristics – support:** Survey findings provided evidence of a perceived lack of support on the part of some teachers and principals yet a lack of support from school management was rarely identified as a barrier to TPL implementation. Further information is needed on perceived gaps in support and the support which is needed from schools from TPL providers.
- **School characteristics – diversity in student intake (educational disadvantage, SENs, minority ethnic backgrounds, and EAL learners):** In considering wellbeing as the specific example in which to consider the framework more broadly, we note that wellbeing is viewed in the present study as a teachable, learnable set of skills and practices, and includes the concept of fulfilling potential. Therefore, the impact of TPL on the wellbeing of learners from diverse groups should be examined.
- **Classroom management:** The case study will provide an opportunity to further understand how issues of classroom management impact on the implementation of learning from TPL.
- **Teacher quality (knowledge):** High levels of need were identified for several wellbeing related areas. The case study will provide an opportunity to understand how teacher knowledge about a particular topic develops over the course of a sustained TPL activity.

### 8.3.2 Implications for the forthcoming TPL descriptive and evaluative framework

The conceptual model presented in this chapter will guide the development of the TPL descriptive and evaluative framework. The conceptual model in this chapter draws on the model for effective teacher professional development developed by Compen et al. (2019), with several important adaptations: changing 'student learning' to broader outcomes for teachers, school leaders, and students; adding the feature of 'facilitator quality'; modifying 'educational policy' to 'policy'; including the concept of 'diffusion' to allow for the incorporation of unplanned, positive rippling effects of TPL; changing 'content focus' to 'TPL focus'; adding 'reflective practice' as a teaching behaviour; and adding three structural features under the heading 'accessibility' (location, cost and language). The model has many features in common with effective professional learning approaches already in use in Ireland, such as that of the PDST.



The key features of the model of effective TPL are considered in light of the survey findings and from these we have developed nine sets of proposition statements for the overarching TPL framework. These will be further developed once the Phase 3 findings are available:

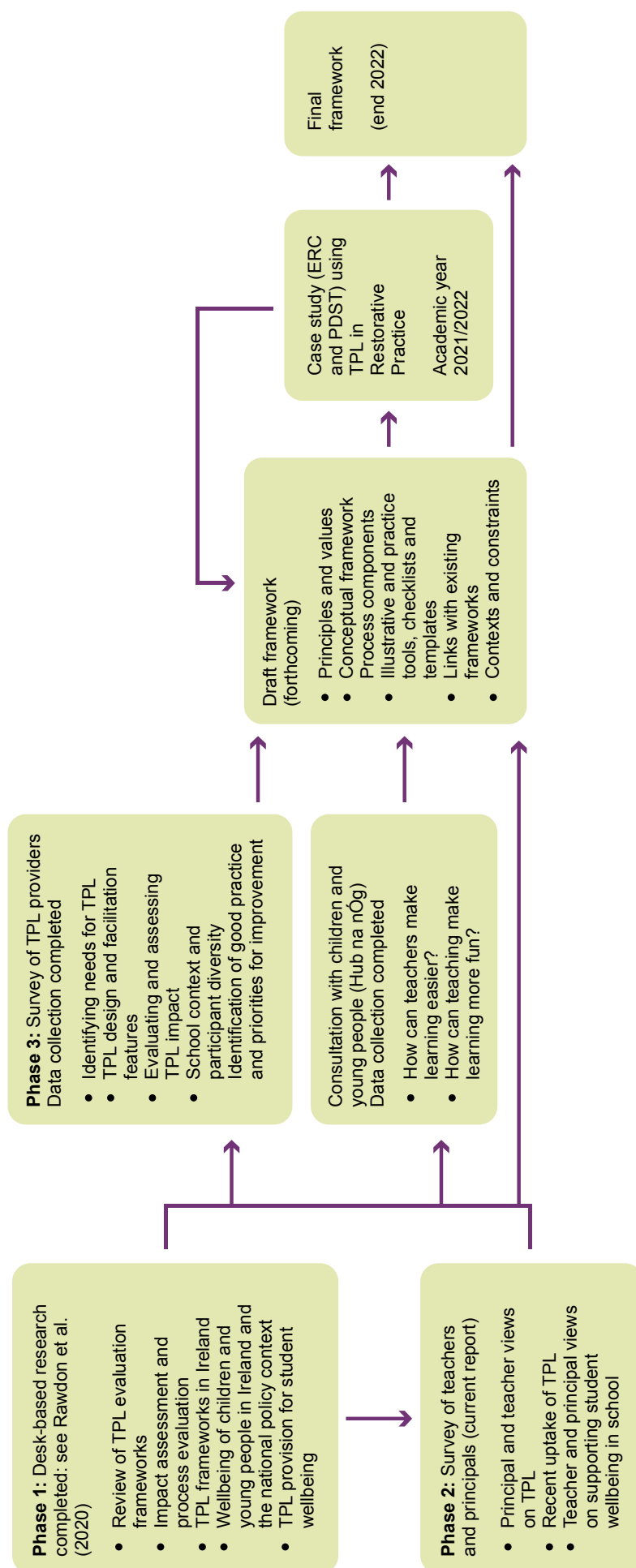
1. **Overall goal specification:** If one of the ultimate goals of TPL is to impact positively on student outcomes by supporting teachers in enhancing their practice, the design stage of TPL should consider which student outcomes are likely to be impacted by TPL participation, and in what way or to what extent. This consideration should in turn be linked to the manner in which student outcomes may be assessed in terms of standards or other relevant and clearly definable, measurable output and outcome metrics, at system, school, and class level.
2. **TPL aims and focus:** TPL should include an explicit and consistent description of its focus (beginning with its aims) which distinguishes between: inter alia, curriculum/subject matter knowledge; pedagogical knowledge; legal/compliance-based; technical; or leadership, management, and strategy. TPL may have a single or dual focus (e.g., developing pedagogical content knowledge and technical expertise with particular software) and it is likely that most or all TPL activities should involve a focus on reflective practice. The relative weightings given to subject matter and pedagogical content focus should be cognisant of differences in needs and preferences across primary, post-primary, and special schools, as well as between principals and teachers, and to the fit between the mode of TPL and the specific aims/focus of the TPL programme.
3. **Coherence:** The TPL framework should include a mechanism and checklist to ensure coherent alignment with relevant curricula, frameworks, standards, and policy reforms. Coherence with existing frameworks and processes will help ensure that the new framework builds on what is known in the system. TPL providers should be enabled to ensure alignment with these elements in the design phase of new TPL programme development. Given that time and curriculum overload are frequently cited as barriers to engagement with and participation in TPL programmes, commonalities and synergies across related TPL programmes should be actively sought by TPL providers and encouraged and supported through leadership and guidance from the DoE. To achieve this, a multi-year TPL strategic plan could be a useful accompaniment to the TPL framework.
4. **Ownership:** School leaders and teachers should be encouraged and enabled to take ownership for decision-making in who participates in TPL, and which TPL programmes are prioritised, although it is recognised that this may be a longer term aim. Sense of ownership should be built into each stage of TPL at the TPL provider, school, and individual level through consultation (and where feasible co-construction) at the design phase, planning for facilitation (in terms of participants' needs and preferences), feedback at the facilitation phase, and the use of tools for TPL providers and schools at the evaluation phase of TPL.
5. **Active learning and match to participants' needs and preferences:** Approaches to teaching and learning which emphasise active and constructivist methodologies should be strongly embodied in all TPL programmes. The manner in which TPL is delivered (e.g., school-based, observational, online) should be matched to both its content focus and the needs and preferences of the participants. When online approaches are employed, detailed consideration should be given to how active learning methods may be encouraged.
6. **Duration:** The design and facilitation should include a consideration both of time span and number of hours, while also maintaining a distinction between quantity and quality. Sustained duration should be built into the design of TPL where relevant to the content focus of the TPL programme.
7. **Collective focus:** TPL programmes should incorporate collective activities (such as inclusive participant discussion; team teaching) and promote a collective response (such as collaborative leadership practices; collaborative development and sharing of information, ideas, or solutions) in a manner that provides a good fit to their content focus. This in turn supports diffusion – the unplanned, often informal, positive ripple effect of effective TPL.

8. **Effective facilitation:** TPL providers need to enable their facilitators to work effectively and ensure that consistency of messaging across facilitators is balanced with empowering facilitators to respond flexibly to the individual circumstances of schools and teachers. Effective facilitators are well-prepared and skilled at listening and responding to a diversity of questions, perspectives, and concerns.
9. **Diversity of contexts:** School communities are very diverse; therefore, consideration should be given at the TPL design, facilitation, and evaluation stages as to how diversity (e.g., in terms of educational disadvantage, SENs, linguistic and cultural diversity) is to be incorporated.

### 8.3.3 Next steps

The conceptual model presented earlier in this chapter (Figure 8.1) emerged from the findings of the Phase 1 report on this study (Rawdon et al., 2020) and is considered to provide a good basis for the development of an evaluation framework for TPL in Ireland. The TPL evaluation framework – the development of which represents the overarching objective of the current study – will be developed in the final phase of the study (see Figure 8.2 for a process map). It is essential that the framework provides a clear and practical guide to schools and TPL providers alike and that these practical elements are reflective of the views and priorities of TPL providers and schools. Hence, the more abstract conceptual framework will be supplemented with a complementary practical, process- or phase-oriented framework. This more practical aspect of the framework will be illustrated with clear guidelines, practical checklists and other tools such as templates. At the same time, the final framework will build on and complement existing frameworks in use by teachers and schools, including *Looking at Our Schools* (DES 2016a; DES 2016b) and *Cosán* (The Teaching Council, 2016). The practical material will be developed from Phase 3 of the study (the survey with TPL providers), the survey results reported in this report (Phase 2), and the Phase 1 literature review. The final framework will be completed by the end of 2022; prior to this, a draft framework will be submitted for review by the DoE and the TPL study Steering Committee. The examination of PDST restorative practice (in the academic year 2021-2022) will provide a case study or proof of concept of the draft framework and also provide practical examples for inclusion in the final framework.

Figure 8.2: The process of developing an evaluation framework for TPL in Ireland with initial application to TPL for student wellbeing



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# APPENDIX 1:

## Additional comparison between characteristics of achieved sample and population

**Table A1.1: Category combinations (stratums) in each school type, population numbers, and achieved sample**

Primary stratum	Population	Achieved sample
Rest Leinster and Non-DEIS	712	16
Rest Leinster and DEIS	109	1
Dublin and Non-DEIS	282	11
Dublin and DEIS	165	1
Munster and Non-DEIS	817	9
Munster and DEIS	130	1
Connaught/Ulster and Non-DEIS	597	8
Connaught/Ulster and DEIS	294	6
<b>Post-primary stratum</b>		
Secondary Non-DEIS	328	20
Secondary DEIS	50	3
Community/Comprehensive/ETB Non-DEIS	196	12
Community/Comprehensive/ETB DEIS	148	6
<b>Special school stratum</b>		
Rest Leinster and 1-70 pupils	15	2
Rest Leinster and 71 or more pupils	16	2
Dublin and 1-70 pupils	37	4
Dublin and 71 or more pupils	13	1
Connaught/Munster/Ulster and 1-70 pupils	36	1
Connaught/Munster/Ulster and 71 or more pupils	17	1



# APPENDIX 2:

## Additional analysis of variables examined in Chapters 3 to 7

**Table A2.1: Special education teachers' gender in primary and post-primary schools (percentages)**

	Primary (n=120)	Post-primary (n=122)
Male	16.4	23.4
Female	83.6	74.2
Other*	0.0	0.0
Prefer not to say	0.0	2.3

\*(incl. non-binary, agender, gender fluid)

**Table A2.2: Highest levels of additional qualifications reported by special education teachers**

	Primary (n=120)	Post-primary (n=122)
Ph.D./Ed.D.	0.0	0.0
Masters <sup>a</sup>	6.6	24.0
Cert/Diploma	41.2	51.9
Other <sup>b</sup>	2.8	1.5
No additional qualifications	49.4	22.6

<sup>a</sup>Masters includes M.Ed., M.Sc. (Ed.), M.A. (Ed).

<sup>b</sup>Includes other not specified/masters subject specific, not relevant to job.

**Table A2.3: Principal and teachers' job satisfaction by gender, primary, post-primary, and special schools (percentages)**

	Not at all/ Not very		Fairly		Very	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Primary principal (M=11, F=40)	4.1	12.9	73.4	33.7	22.6	53.5
Post-primary principal (M=15, F=23)	5.9	4.1	32.4	20.4	61.7	75.5
Primary teacher (M=48, F=306)	15.2	0.7	28.6	27.8	56.2	71.5
Post-primary teacher (M=150, F=390)*	3.6	2.6	36.4	33.2	60.1	64.1
Special school teacher (M=12, F=60)	0.0	2.9	42.4	17.6	57.6	79.5

\*Other gender not included, number too few. Special school principal not included, number too few.

**Table A2.4: Principal and teachers' job satisfaction by school size at primary level (percentages)**

	Not at all/Not very			Fairly			Very		
	1-80 pupils <sup>#</sup>	81-200 pupils	201+ pupils	1-80 pupils	81-200 pupils	201+ pupils	1-80 pupils	81-200 pupils	201+ pupils
Principal*	17.1	14.2	2.5	33.1	56.8	32.2	49.7	29.0	65.3
Teacher <sup>^</sup>	4.0	0.9	3.7	44.1	29.6	24.9	52.0	69.4	71.4

\*Principal (n: 1-80 pupils=13, 81-200 pupils=20, 201+ pupils=17)

<sup>^</sup>Teacher (n: 1-80 pupils=21, 81-200 pupils=140, 201+ pupils=193)<sup>#</sup>Sums to 100 within school size**Table A2.5: Principal and teachers' job satisfaction by school size at post-primary level (percentages)**

	Not at all/Not very			Fairly			Very		
	<350 students <sup>#</sup>	351-600 students	601+ students	<350 students	351-600 students	601+ students	<350 students	351-600 students	601+ students
Principal*	0.0	14.8	0.0	39.3	14.9	21.4	60.7	70.3	78.6
Teacher <sup>^</sup>	2.7	4.3	2.6	36.9	33.2	31.7	60.4	62.5	65.7

\*Principal (n: &lt; 350 students=13, 351-600 students=13, 601+ students=13)

<sup>^</sup>Teacher (n: < 350 students=198, 351-600 students=166, 601+=182)<sup>#</sup>Sums to 100 within school size**Table A2.6: Principal and teachers' job satisfaction by school sector at post-primary level (percentages)**

	Not at all/Not very			Fairly			Very		
	Secondary	ETB <sup>#</sup>	Community	Secondary	ETB	Community	Secondary	ETB	Community
Principal*	4.5	6.4	0.0	22.8	22.6	50.2	72.6	71.0	50.0
Teacher <sup>^</sup>	2.9	4.5	0.0	33.2	31.4	46.1	63.9	64.2	53.9

\*Principal (n: Secondary=21, ETB=14, Community=4)

<sup>^</sup>Teacher (n: Secondary=286, ETB=196, Community=65)<sup>#</sup>Sums to 100 within school type**Table A2.7: Teachers' job satisfaction by school size at special schools (percentages)**

	Not at all/Not very			Fairly			Very		
	1-35 pupils <sup>#</sup>	36-70 pupils	71+ pupils	1-35 pupils	36-70 pupils	71+ pupils	1-35 pupils	36-70 pupils	71+ pupils
Teacher <sup>^</sup>	0.0	0.0	7.1	15.0	38.5	22.0	85.0	64.2	71.0

<sup>^</sup>Teacher (n: 1-35 pupils=33, 36-70 pupils=15, 71+ pupils=25)<sup>#</sup>Percentages sum to 100 within school size*Note.* Principals' satisfaction by category is not reported due to low absolute numbers in each group.

**Table A2.8: Levels of job satisfaction, stress in the job, and support received among special education teachers (percentages)**

		Not at all/Not very	Fairly	Very
Primary (n=120)	Job satisfaction	5.5	20.8	73.7
	Stress in the job	30.2	53.7	16.1
	Support received in their role	15.9	39.0	45.2
Post-primary (n=122)	Job satisfaction	4.8	33.8	61.4
	Stress in the job	17.2	44.4	38.5
	Support received in their role	18.7	49.9	31.4

**Table A2.9: Principal and teachers' stress in the job by gender, primary, post-primary, and special schools (percentages)**

	Not at all/Not very		Fairly		Very	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Primary principal (M=11, F=40)	0.0	13.0	57.4	22.5	42.6	64.5
Post-primary principal (M=15, F=23)	8.8	6.1	47.0	22.4	44.2	71.5
Primary teacher (M=48, F=306)	35.9	24.8	46.9	57.4	17.2	17.9
Post-primary teacher (M=150, F=390)*	13.9	12.2	53.7	55.1	32.4	32.7
Special teacher (M=12, F=60)	1.5	4.5	92.5	46.4	6.0	49.1

\*Other gender not included, number too few. Special school principal not included, number too few.

**Table A2.10: Principal and teachers' stress in the job by school size at primary level (percentages)**

	Not at all/Not very			Fairly			Very		
	1-80 pupils	81-200 pupils	201+ pupils	1-80 pupils	81-200 pupils	201+ pupils	1-80 pupils	81-200 pupils	201+ pupils
Principal*	16.9	6.4	9.4	33.1	21.8	36.7	49.9	71.8	53.9
Teacher^	14.4	21.0	31.3	68.8	59.3	52.2	16.9	19.7	16.5

\*Primary principal (n: 1-80 pupils=13, 81-200 pupils=20, 201+ pupils=17)

^Primary teacher (n: 1-80 pupils=21, 81-200 pupils=140, 201+ pupils=193)

**Table A2.11: Principal and teachers' stress in the job by school size at post-primary level (percentages)**

	Not at all/Not very			Fairly			Very		
	<350 students	351-600 students	601+ students	<350 students	351-600 students	601+ students	<350 students	351-600 students	601+ students
Principal*	21.4	0.0	0.0	32.0	22.2	42.8	46.6	77.8	57.2
Teacher^	11.2	16.1	10.5	52.8	57.5	54.7	36.0	26.4	34.7

\*Principal (n: < 350 students=13, 351-600 students=13, 601+ students=13)

^Teacher (n: < 350 students=198, 351-600 students=166, 601+=182)



**Table A2.12: Principal and teachers' stress in the job by school sector at post-primary level (percentages)**

	Not at all/Not very			Fairly			Very		
	Secondary	ETB	Community	Secondary	ETB	Community	Secondary	ETB	Community
Principal*	0.0	19.4	*	18.1	41.9	*	81.9	38.7	*
Teacher^	16.6	8.0	7.5	56.2	56.5	44.2	27.1	35.6	48.3

\*Principal (n: Secondary=21, ETB=14, Community=4 so a breakdown is not provided)

^Teacher (n: Secondary=286, ETB=196, Community=65)

**Table A2.13: Teachers' stress in the job by school size at special schools (percentages)**

	Not at all/Not very			Fairly			Very		
	1-35 pupils	36-70 pupils	71+ pupils	1-35 pupils	36-70 pupils	71+ pupils	1-35 pupils	36-70 pupils	71+ pupils
Teacher^	7.3	0.0	2.2	30.9	62.3	79.5	61.9	37.7	18.3

\*Principal (n: 1-35 pupils=4, 36-70 pupils=3, 71+ pupils=4)

^Teacher (n: 1-35 pupils=33, 36-70 pupils=15, 71+ pupils=25)

Note. Principals' satisfaction by category is not reported due to low absolute numbers in each group.

**Table A2.14: Principal and teachers' support in the job by gender, primary, post-primary, and special schools (percentages)**

	Not at all/Not very		Fairly		Very	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Primary principal (M=11, F=40)	55.6	30.1	26.0	47.0	18.5	22.9
Post-primary principal (M=15, F=23)	11.8	26.5	55.9	65.4	32.3	8.2
Special principal^	-	-	-	-	-	-
Primary teacher (M=48, F=306)	20.7	11.0	50.0	47.3	29.3	41.7
Post-primary teacher (M=150, F=390)*	20.7	13.6	48.5	48.7	30.8	37.6
Special teacher (M=12, F=60)	15.6	9.3	65.2	25.8	19.3	64.9

\*Other gender not included, number too few.

^Gender breakdown not provided because of small total number

**Table A2.15: Principal and teachers' support in the job by school size at primary level (percentages)**

	Not at all/Not very			Fairly			Very		
	1-80 pupils	81-200 pupils	201+ pupils	1-80 pupils	81-200 pupils	201+ pupils	1-80 pupils	81-200 pupils	201+ pupils
Principal*	54.1	35.0	21.5	40.3	47.4	38.8	5.6	17.6	39.6
Teacher^	22.3	10.8	12.4	21.2	45.0	52.5	56.5	44.1	35.1

\*Primary principal (n: 1-80 pupils=13, 81-200 pupils=20, 201+ pupils=17)

^ Primary teacher (n: 1-80 pupils=21, 81-200 pupils=140, 201+ pupils=193)

**Table A2.16: Principal and teachers' support in the job by school size at post-primary level (percentages)**

	Not at all/Not very			Fairly			Very		
	<350 students	351–600 students	601+ students	<350 students	351–600 students	601+ students	<350 students	351–600 students	601+ students
Principal*	24.9	22.2	14.3	64.4	70.4	50.0	10.7	7.4	35.7
Teacher^	14.6	18.1	15.0	46.8	46.6	52.8	38.7	35.4	32.2

\*Principal (n: < 350 students=13, 351-600 students=13, 601+ students=13)

^Teacher (n: < 350 students=198, 351-600 students=166, 601+=182)

**Table A2.17: Principal and teachers' support in the job by school sector at post-primary level (percentages)**

	Not at all/Not very			Fairly			Very		
	Secondary	ETB	Community	Secondary	ETB	Community	Secondary	ETB	Community
Principal*	22.6	22.6	0.0	63.7	54.9	75.0	13.6	22.6	25.0
Teacher^	14.4	15.5	22.6	47.6	51.2	46.4	38.0	33.3	31.0

\*Principal (n: Secondary=21, ETB=14, Community=4)

^Teacher (n: Secondary=286, ETB=196, Community=65)

**Table A2.18: Teachers' support by school size at special schools (percentages)**

	Not at all/Not very			Fairly			Very		
	1-35 pupils	36-70 pupils	71+ pupils	1-35 pupils	36-70 pupils	71+ pupils	1-35 pupils	36-70 pupils	71+ pupils
Teacher^	2.2	22.6	13.9	32.0	11.3	44.9	65.8	66.1	41.2

^Teacher (n: 1-35 pupils=33, 36-70 pupils=15, 71+ pupils=25)

*Note.* Principals' satisfaction by category is not reported due to low absolute numbers in each group.

**Table A2.19: Breakdown of primary and special schools offering Droichead by school enrolment size and region (percentages)**

	Does offer Droichead (n=22)	Does <i>not</i> offer Droichead (n=30)
<b>Primary schools:</b>		
<b><i>School size</i></b>		
1-80 pupils	6.9	39.7
81-200 pupils	13.3	56.3
201+ pupils	79.9	4.0
<b><i>Region</i></b>		
Dublin	32.4	1.5
Rest of Leinster	20.6	28.9
Munster	28.0	33.1
Connacht/Ulster (Part of)	19.0	36.5
<b>Special schools:</b>	(n=5)	(n=6)
<b><i>School size</i></b>		
1-35 pupils	28.7	48.2
36-70 pupils	0.0	51.8
71+ pupils	71.3	0.0
<b><i>Region</i></b>		
Dublin	48.8	26.6
Rest of Leinster	24.8	21.6
Connacht	26.4	51.8

**Table A2.20: Mean scores on index of attitudes to TPL – all teachers and special education teachers (primary and post-primary)**

	Primary		Post-primary	
	Mean	SE	Mean	SE
All teachers	59.51	(0.82)	53.03	(0.90)
Special education teachers	64.04	(1.29)	53.38	(1.73)

**Table A2.21: Percentages of special education teachers that various modes of TPL are in their top five preferred modes (sorted in descending order by percentages of post-primary principals Table 5.2)**

	Primary (n=120 )	Post-primary (n=122)
School-based support (including school visits from support personnel)	76.3	58.6
Workshops - in-school/colleague	14.8	27.2
Networking - informal networking	21.4	26.9
Networking - formal networking	24.8	20.6
Workshops - single day	60.7	54.4
Professional Learning Communities	23.8	35.4
Working with others - mentoring/coaching	9.0	14.1
Events - single day	38.6	32.8
Events - conferences/showcases	8.6	20.9
Events - presentations by facilitators	29.4	35.6
Team teaching	46.5	40.0
Workshops – series over multiple days	29.9	24.1
Learning through practice	38.5	45.8
Resources online	18.5	26.3
Workshops - residential	4.3	0.6
Workshops - evening	6.1	7.3
Lesson study	6.7	5.0
Reading academic journals/reports	9.2	5.2
Research (e.g., action research)	4.7	1.8

**Table A2.22: Categorisation of special education teachers' answers describing the most effective TPL they had experienced (Percentages in decreasing order of post-primary principal from Table 5.8)**

	Post-primary (n=70)	Primary (n=90)
Methods of instruction	31.5	42.0
Cognitive outcomes	26.6	24.9
Building relationships	25.6	11.6
Sustained duration	20.0	16.8
High-quality facilitator	18.8	13.9
School-based location	2.8	6.2
Affective outcomes	1.6	2.0
Ongoing personal support for upskilling and development	0.8	1.0
Reflect and evaluate/reflection	0.0	0.0
Other	25.3	23.3

**Table A2.23: Days spent on TPL over the summer holidays and at other times of the year since September 2018 by special education teachers in primary schools (percentages)**

	Over the summer holidays (n=107)	At other times of the year (n=107)
None	8.0	2.2
Up to half a day	3.4	0.6
1-3 days	5.3	27.8
4-8 days	50.1	29.9
9-14 days	20.0	16.1
15 or more days	13.2	23.4

**Table A2.24: Days spent on TPL relating to the Junior Cycle and all other professional learning since September 2018, special education teachers in post-primary schools (percentages)**

	Relating to the Junior Cycle (n=94)	All other professional learning (n=93)
None	0.0	2.5
Up to half a day	0.5	4.0
1-3 days	37.3	33.5
4-8 days	43.8	31.9
9-14 days	15.2	16.8
15 or more days	3.3	11.3

**Table A2.25: Types of TPL in which special education teachers participated in since September 2018, primary and post-primary (percentages in descending order by primary principal, Table 6.4)**

	Primary (n=108)	Post-primary (n=95)
External workshop (i.e. held away from school premises, e.g., in an Education Centre)	75.4	90.7
In-school support (e.g., support from a PDST facilitator, NEPS psychologist, or NCSE advisor)	73.6	73.6
Online course (e.g., approved online summer course)	57.7	17.6
Webinar	50.3	43.4
External lecture or seminar	32.7	37.9
Formal networking with colleagues (e.g., clustering)	17.4	53.5
School-based workshop	31.7	60.5
Mentoring/coaching	11.2	16.4
Team teaching	49.3	48.0
Research (e.g., an action research project)	5.0	4.0

*Note.* Multiple factors could be selected by respondents.

**Table A2.26: The main purpose of TPL since September 2018 reported by special education teachers, primary and post-primary schools (ordered as per Table 6.5)**

	Primary (n=108)	Post-primary (n=95)
School self-evaluation and planning	36.7	39.4
Knowledge about teaching methods	65.5	63.2
Personal learning and development (e.g., professional development, teacher wellbeing)	52.0	41.7
Knowledge about the teaching and learning of a particular subject (pedagogical knowledge)	62.7	69.7
Professional collaboration and support of colleagues	37.3	39.9
Planning and preparation	41.1	52.7
Subject knowledge (content knowledge)	53.0	62.3
Planning for inclusion	29.9	35.3
Classroom management and organisation	17.0	20.7
Working with parents	7.5	5.3

Note. Multiple factors could be selected by respondents.

**Table A2.27: Special education teachers reporting 'a large impact' on their development as a teacher for the TPL in which they had participated, primary and post-primary schools (ordered as per Table 6.6)**

	Primary	Post-primary
In-school support (e.g., support from a PDST facilitator, NEPS psychologist, or NCSE advisor)	50.7	32.3
Mentoring/coaching	40.0	17.3
School-based workshop	39.8	29.0
Formal networking with colleagues (e.g., clustering)	41.5	31.0
External workshop (i.e., held away from school premises, e.g., in an Education Centre)	47.1	36.1
External lecture or seminar	41.4	18.7
Research (e.g., an action research project)	31.3	17.5
Team teaching	38.8	33.6
Online course (e.g., approved online summer course)	23.2	5.3
Webinar	11.4	3.2

Note. The number of special education teachers in this table are based on the numbers/percentages of teachers participating in each TPL in Table A25 above.

**Table A2.28: Special education teachers reporting issues that prevented the integration of learned TPL activities into day-to-day practice, primary and post-primary schools (percentages)**

	Primary (n=83)	Post-primary (n=77)
Limited/no resources	19.6	35.3
Financial issues	6.2	16.3
Limited/no time	23.9	41.6
Limited/no support from school management	1.6	13.1
Limited/no understanding of what I had learned during the TPL activity	1.1	0.6
Lack of sustained support from TPL provider	58.7	39.9

Note. Multiple factors could be selected by respondents.



**Table A2.29: Percentages of special education teachers reporting a 'high level' of professional learning needs in relation to various areas of student wellbeing (ordered as per Table 7.12)**

	Primary (n ~101)	Post-primary (n ~92)
Whole school TPL to implement curriculum changes	6.8	30.7
Mental health	28.1	39.0
Leadership support for principals	0.0	0.0
Whole school TPL to implement policy changes	9.3	26.5
Responsible use of digital technologies/cyber bullying	27.1	34.1
Child protection	8.6	19.8
Including students with special needs in the wider school community	26.1	42.2
Critical incident	18.7	26.4
Teaching students with special learning needs	25.4	40.4
Teaching in an inclusive manner in a diverse setting	12.1	34.7
Social and emotional skills	21.1	36.7
SPHE curriculum	13.6	27.6
Developing positive relationships between parents and teachers/principals	17.5	32.1
Student discipline and behaviour management	17.3	39.6
Physical Education curriculum	6.9	22.6
CSPE curriculum	0.0	24.7
Wellbeing at Junior Cycle	0.0	34.6



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