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Covid-19 Practice in Primary Schools in Ireland Report: A Two-month Follow-up

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Table of Contents

Table of Figures

List of Tables

1. Introduction

The current study is a partial follow-up from an earlier study on *Practice in Primary School two weeks post COVID-19-related school closure* (Burke and Dempsey, 2020). The original research was commissioned by a group of stakeholders [1], including the Department of Education and Skills (DES), and Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN). The content of the survey in the previous study was created by the stakeholders and included questions about school leaders' opinions about the effect of COVID-19 on pupils and teachers, helpful policies, school strategy for distance learning, digital capacity, the frequency and method of social engagement, support for minority groups and wellbeing.

The current follow-up research included a selected number of questions from the original survey, relating to communication, concerns and school leaders' wellbeing. It also included additional questions relevant to the current stage of the adaptation process. Therefore, the objective of this research was threefold. It aimed to (1) identify the changes in communication, concerns and wellbeing from week two to month two after the COVID-19-related school closure; (2) explore wellbeing of school leaders in the middle of the COVID-19-related school closure; (3) investigate the intricacies in wellbeing between teaching and administrative principals, given that their daily duties differ significantly. Teaching principals engage in both teaching and managing schools. Administrative principals engage only in school management. Quantitative data was analysed using SPSS, and qualitative data was analysed using MAXQDA. Where we talk about parents we mean parents and guardians. In total, 939 participants completed the survey. Majority of the respondents were from

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1 The research was commissioned by a stakeholder group including the Department of Education and Skills (DES), the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), Catholic Primary Schools Management Association (CPSMA), the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO), An Foras Pátrúnachta, Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI), National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education (NABMSE), Educate Together, Church of Ireland Board of Education, Gaeloideachas, and the Muslim Primary Education Board.

mainstream school (n=699, 74%), followed by mainstream with special classes (n=207, 22%) and special schools (n=33, 6%). Most of the participants were administrative principals (n=407, 43%), followed by teaching principals (n=313, 33%), teaching deputy principals (n=194, 21%), and administrative deputy principals (n=22, 2%).

It is encouraging to see how well school leaders and communities have adapted to the changes forced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Three months ago, most primary school leaders considered online learning a feature of a distant future; two months ago, they were barely getting used to the idea of sustaining the continuity of learning via this medium (Burke and Dempsey, 2020). This report demonstrates that today, not only have they adjusted to the "new normal" of distance learning, but over 70% of them have made arrangements to contact their students daily or every other day.

Two weeks after the school closure, some of the challenges leaders were faced with and the decisions they had to make were different to their concerns of today. At the beginning, they grappled with the practical aspects of how to maintain the continuity of learning, the frequency of contact and the best media via which to do it. These issues are no longer a concern, as most schools have developed a good communication structure, supported mainly by email, followed by platforms such as Aladdin. However, some of their concerns from two months ago continue, as they struggle with 'the digital divide' in their community and continue to request support with distance learning for their teachers.

Two weeks after the school closure, wellbeing was a high priority with many leaders remarking on schools as 'safe places' for children and that the absence of 'safe places' was a concern because of the impact it would have on children's wellbeing. They were also very focused on the practical aspects of remote managing of their schools. Two months after the closure, the situation is much the same with wellbeing now a central concern for the leaders. Their concerns relate to their pupils' wellbeing, many of whom are anxious about falling

behind and fret about the safety of returning to school in September. It relates to parents, many of whom worry about their children's wellbeing and who recognise their limitations in relation to teaching their children the curriculum. It relates to the staff, some of whom work extra hard, while others are disengaged during this process. It also relates to their own wellbeing.

The stress of managing schools remotely for over two months has taken a toll on many primary school leaders. While they have shown great mental agility and maintained moderate levels of wellbeing, not one of almost 1,000 respondents sees themselves as thriving psychologically. A group that is of particular concern are the teaching principals, who reported lower levels of wellbeing, across all dimensions when compared with administrative principals. Some leaders mention that everyone's focus has been on pupils' and teachers' wellbeing, but forget that leaders need support, too. Some are dealing not only with managing schools remotely, but are also looking after their own family, or experiencing COVID-19 – related health-issues and fears.

Two weeks after the school closures, leaders asked DES for guidance in relation to distance learning, as many didn't know what was expected of them at the time (Burke and Dempsey, 2020). This represented short-term goals that were relevant to the COVID-19 emergency situation. Two months later, however, leaders' focus has shifted towards medium- and long-term goals. They are becoming increasingly stressed about the uncertainty of the schools re-opening in September. They need an immediate action from DES to advise them as to what needs to be done to ensure their school community's safety. Delaying that decision will have implications for both leaders and staff as well as encroach on their well-deserved summer break, which they need more than ever to recover from the ordeal of the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a tension here between the need for clarity and the recognition that circumstances can change (a second COVID-19 wave, for example), and the need for delayed decision making on the part of the DES.

2. Executive Summary

- In total, 939 participants completed the survey. Majority of the respondents were from mainstream school (n=699, 74%), followed by mainstream with special classes (n=207, 22%) and special schools (n=33, 6%). Most of the participants were administrative principals (n=407, 43%), followed by teaching principals (n=313, 33%), teaching deputy principals (n=194, 21%), and administrative deputy principals (n=22, 2%).

- Wellbeing
    - Not one of the principals sees themselves as flourishing psychologically through the COVID-19 crisis.
    - However, the good news is that the wellbeing of the vast majority of principals is at moderate levels, and the percentage of principals who are languishing during COVID-19 stands at less than 1%, which is at least 10 times below the general population average.
    - The most affected aspect of principals' wellbeing is their social wellbeing, which relates to social inclusion. This is understandable given the social distancing measures introduced during the COVID-19 lockdown.
    - The highest level of psychological wellbeing is reported in having trusting relations with others and the lowest is environmental mastery.
    - Teaching principals' wellbeing is lower than Administrative principals' wellbeing across all wellbeing measures.
    - Many teaching principals are asking for advice as to how to deal with all the demands while also looking after teaching classes. In supporting parents they cite moving from giving technical advice to supporting families' wellbeing. In

this survey 43% of respondents are administrative principals and 33% are teaching principals. Nationally 56% of principals also have teaching duty with 44% being administrative principals. The unique challenges faced by teaching principals is very evident in these data.

o 7 out of 10 principals took specific actions to support their wellbeing during the lockdown.

o When leaders were asked why they had not taken any action on their wellbeing the majority cited time constraints. There were over 300 mentions of leaders having increased workload and time constraints. Many cite have multiple roles to fulfil, leader, teacher, mother/ father, care giver, partner, homemaker and so on.

o For leaders who are looking after their wellbeing, the supports they are using do not differ from those reported in the survey after two weeks (Burke and Dempsey, 2020), 558 mention taking walks, regular exercise, mindfulness, pilates or yoga. Some mention taking up a new hobby. Many mention the importance of regular contact with others, friends, family, other leaders in their area and attending webinars where they can virtually 'meet' people.

o Many respondents are feeling the pressure of the previous nine weeks leading their schools from a distance. They are also dealing with personal issues around COVID-19. This is having an impact on their own wellbeing.

- Communication

o Two weeks after the closure, 3 out of 10 schools contacted pupils daily or every other day. Two months after the closure, this number has increased to 7 out of

10. Therefore, nowadays the majority of pupils are contacted frequently during the week.

o The platforms used for contacting pupils/parents have not changed significantly. Email continues to be the primary medium of contact, more schools are now using it to keep in touch with their pupils and their parents.

o The online resources used by schools have not changed significantly in the last two months. The primary resources continue to be the textbook publisher websites, Twinkl, and the PDST website.

- Concerns

   o For pupils their concerns are around missing their friends, their teacher and their school. They are concerned that they might miss out on key learning and might have to stay back in school.

   o Sixth class students are very concerned about the transition to second level. They are concerned that they will not have covered all they have to do. They are very sad at missing out on graduation. Leaders are concerned that this may impact on their ability to settle in second level.

   o Parents are concerned for the social and mental wellbeing of their children. Some report their children are suffering anxiety at not being in school. They are concerned at their ability to teach and parent at the same time. They are concerned about academic progress especially in mathematics and Gaeilge.

   o Leaders are concerned about how to welcome a new class in junior infants and about the transition into second level for their 6th class pupils. They are concerned about their special education needs (SEN) pupils and their families.

   o In this survey there are still concerns around distance learning, however, they mostly concern the use of different platforms and the safety of these. Some

schools have issues with lack of technological support. A majority of schools seem to have mastered the move to distance teaching quite well. It appears that this move was primarily due to internal expertise, leadership and commitment rather than because of external support. Further research is needed on this topic.

- Support
    - Many respondents commended IPPN on their support. The need for central auditing of the myriad of information coming at school leaders was mentioned many times.
    - There were over 200 comments on needing specific advice for reopening the schools in September. In general the comments were about the logistics of opening. However, leaders also remind us that they need a break so decisions need to be communicated as soon as is possible. Guidance needs to be clear and focused on precise details for all involved.
    - When asked what other supports they needed in schools, many respondents again spoke about their pupils from ASD units and with SEN. This issue came up in the earlier survey (Burke and Dempsey, 2020) but appears to still be an issue of concern for leaders.
    - Leaders are looking for guidance on sending end of year reports.
    - The complexity of leading a Primary School and the myriad of agencies they deal with [31 apart from the DES mentioned in comments] while also teaching in some cases needs further exploration. The social role of schools in communities cannot be taken for granted and needs support.
    - Many respondents are critical of the lack of guidelines from the DES and the timing of guidance to date with announcements coming on Friday evening in

many cases. Many cite the frustration of reading about announcements in the media ahead of official communication. One respondent described it as 'like doing the cryptic crossword without the clues'.

3 Policy Implications

The following are conclusions from our analysis of data from 939 responses from leaders in Primary Schools.

3.1 Leading a Primary School is a complex role

All leadership is complex especially in times of crisis such as the COVID-19 school closures. However, from our analysis of the concerns voiced in these data our leaders at primary level face additional complexity arising from the role their schools play in communities. This complexity is more evident in DEIS schools. Due to the size of our primary schools in Ireland see Table 18. in Appendix 1, the scope for distributive leadership is not always realised and most of the duties fall to the principal, and, in over half our schools this leader also has teaching duties. The number of agencies they deal with for various supports is considerable. In addition, our data indicated that leaders play a crucial role in supporting pupils' families who are experiencing difficulties. The need for clear guidance on a variety of issues is very important. We would suggest that an audit be carried out of the role leaders have in filling out forms to apply for supports and cognisance be taken of the diversity of needs schools have depending on the community they serve.

3.2 Need for precise and timely communication from the DES

Our leaders are looking for guidance on a variety of issues such as access to the school building, SEN allocation, school meals, distance teaching, GDPR and safety of teaching and learning platforms and so on.

3.3 Teaching Principals need additional supports to be put in place

There is a significant difference between the work of a teaching and administrative principal. In a time of crisis we often see cracks in our systems and we feel this workload for teaching principals is not sustainable or desirable. The precise supports needed merits further research.

3.4 Our young people are missing out on the social aspects of learning

It is significant that when asked about their own concerns, their parents' concerns and their pupils' concerns almost all respondents talked about the social role of school in learning. It is well researched that learning is a social activity and that we take cues for our learning from the people we learn with (Wegerif, 2000; Gillies and Ashman, 2003; Dunphy, 2008). Learning at home at the kitchen table lacks this valuable feedback that we get through learning with others. We learn from other's mistakes, from the dialogical exchanges in class and from the feedback our peers give on our work. This is all being missed by our young people at this time. It is important to acknowledge that some children do not have a kitchen table or space for learning, children in direct provision, hotel rooms, and other living situations.

In addition, the concerns voiced by parents and pupils on their learning in mathematics and Gaeilge is significant. Research from the Growing up in Ireland study tells us that there are key periods in children's learning of mathematics and Gaeilge and that their attitude to these subjects in Primary School can impact how they engage with them in second level (McCoy, Smyth and Banks, 2012).

3.5 Technology in the school and the home

The access to and ability to afford key technological supports are having an impact on distance teaching for many schools and their pupils. While it is to be celebrated the pace at which our

schools have adapted to distance teaching it is also a time to take stock of the supports needed for some schools and families.

4. Demographics

In total, 939 participants completed the survey.

4.1 School type

School type	Frequency	Percent
Mainstream school	699	74.4
Mainstream school with special classes	207	22
Special school	33	3.5

Table 1. Participants' school type.
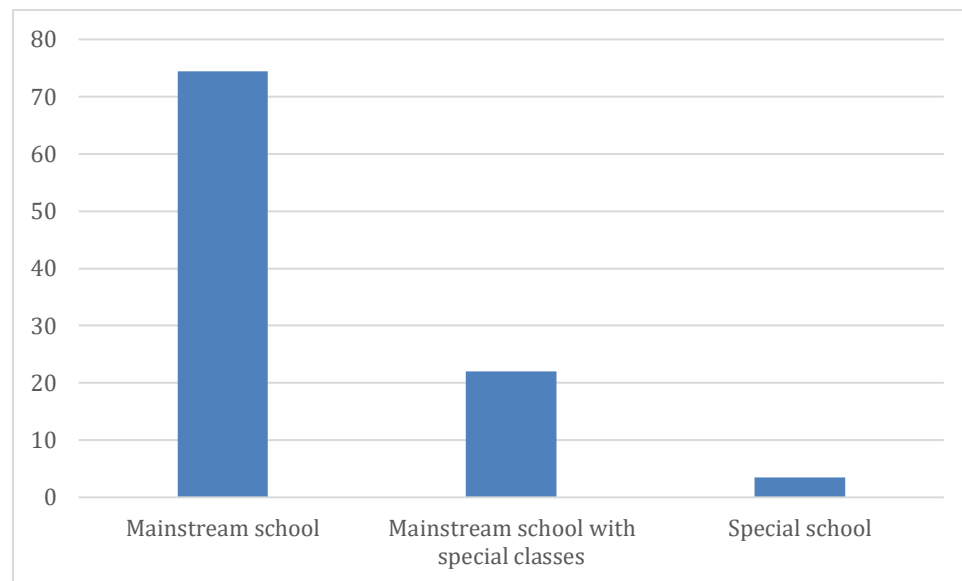
Figure 1. Participants' school type.

Majority of the respondents were from mainstream school (n=699, 74%), followed by mainstream with special classes (n=207, 22%) and special schools (n=33, 6%).

4.2 School size

	Frequency	Percent
less than 50	110	11.7
51-150	314	33.4
151-300	280	29.8
301-500	167	17.8
501-700	47	5
700+	21	2.2

Table 2. Participants' school size.
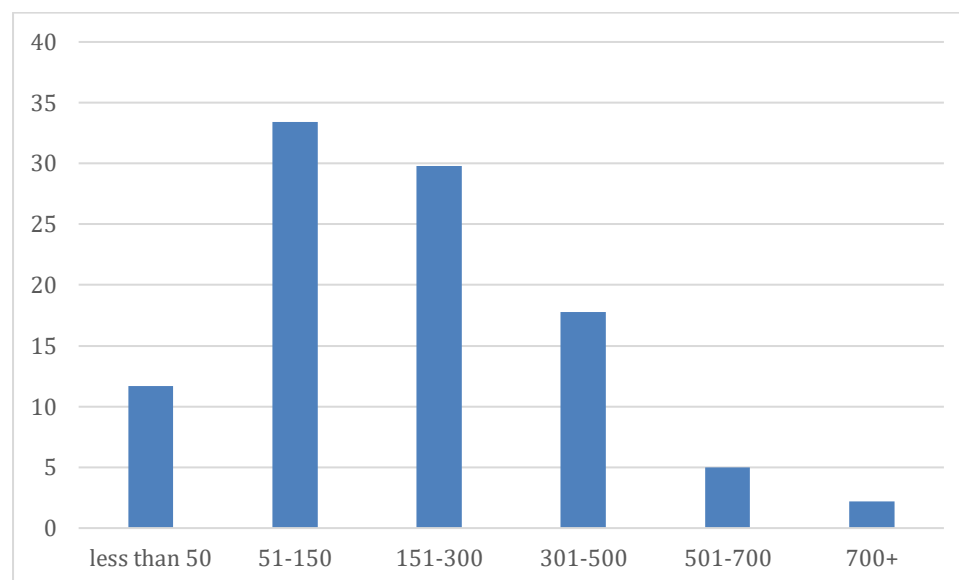
Figure 2. Participants' school size.

Majority of participants were from schools with 51-150 children (n=314, 33%), followed by 151-300 (n=280, 30%), 301-500 (n=167, 18%), schools with less than 50 pupils (n=110, 12%) and schools with more than 500 pupils (n=68, 7%).

4.3 Role

Role	Frequency	Percent
Administrative Principal	407	43.3
Teaching Principal	313	33.3
Administrative Deputy Principal	22	2.3
Teaching Deputy Principal	194	20.7
Other	3	0.3

Table 3. Participants' role in the school.
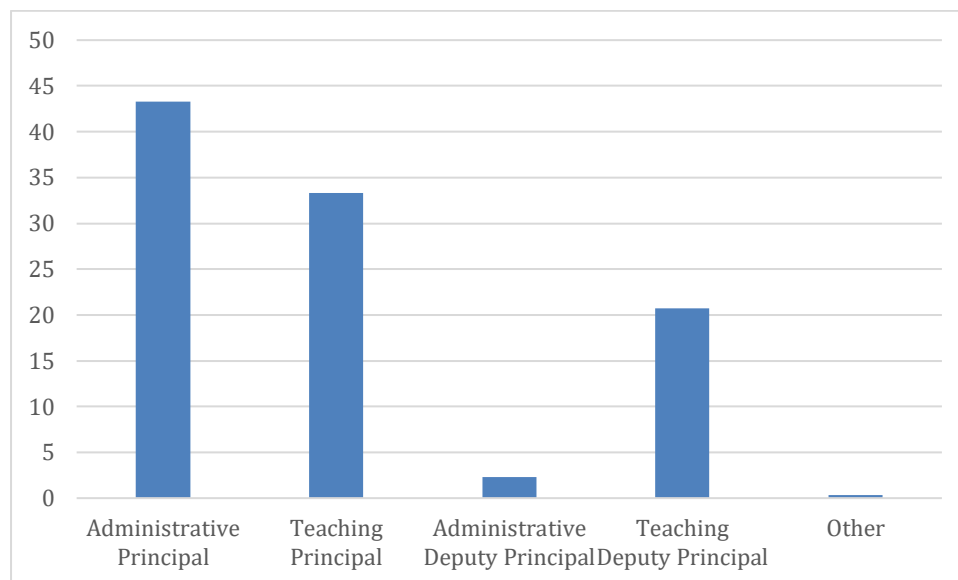
Figure 3. Participants' role in the school.

Most of the participants were administrative principals (n=407, 43%), followed by teaching principals (n=313, 33%), teaching deputy principals (n=194, 21%), and administrative deputy principals (n=22, 2%). Three participants mentioned "other" roles which included a principal on secondment, ISLM member, and an acting principal. All participants' responses were analysed in this report.

5. Wellbeing

5.1 Wellbeing measure

The psychological scale applied in the current study was the Mental Health Continuum- Short form (Keyes, 2002), based on a three-factor wellbeing model consisting of 14 questions, on a 6-item Likert scale, ranging from "never" to "every day". Participants were asked about the frequency of experiences over a two month-period, such as: feeling interested in life, feeling that life has a sense of direction or meaning to it. Past studies demonstrated high reliability of the scale (Żemojtel‑Piotrowska et al., 2018, Keyes, 2009), as did the current research (alpha=.94). The survey was administered online and sent out to the IPPN network to complete.

5.11 Levels of flourishing

Vast majority of participants reported to be moderately well (n=936, 99.3%) and only .3% were languishing (n=3). However, none of the leaders were flourishing psychologically. According to past research, on average approximately. 17-20% of participants report flourishing (Keyes, 2002). Similar studies in Ireland showed flourishing levels as high as 60% (Burke et al., forthcoming, Burke and Hackett, 2017). Therefore, it is unusual that not even one participant scored very high in their overall wellbeing. Their lower scores may be due to the impact of COVID-19 on school leaders' wellbeing.

According to the Mental Health Continuum model, wellbeing consists of three elements:

1. Emotional wellbeing – incorporates the experiences of positive emotions and life satisfaction.
2. Social wellbeing – incorporates social contribution, social integration, social actualization, social acceptance, social coherence.

3. Psychological wellbeing – incorporates self-acceptance, environmental mastery, positive relations with others, personal growth autonomy, purpose in life.

The three elements are then further divided into two, whereby the emotional wellbeing constitutes hedonic wellbeing, whereas the social and psychological wellbeing constitutes eudaimonic wellbeing. For participants to flourish, they need to score high (at least 5 out of 6) in both hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing. In order to be moderately well, they need to score high in either hedonic or eudaimonic wellbeing. When participants score low in hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing, they are reported as languishing.

5.12 Elements of wellbeing

Wellbeing type	M	SD
Overall wellbeing	4.24	.84
Emotional wellbeing	4.68	1.02
Social wellbeing	4.44	1.03
Psychological wellbeing	4.62	.98

Table 4. The mean and standard deviation for wellbeing elements.
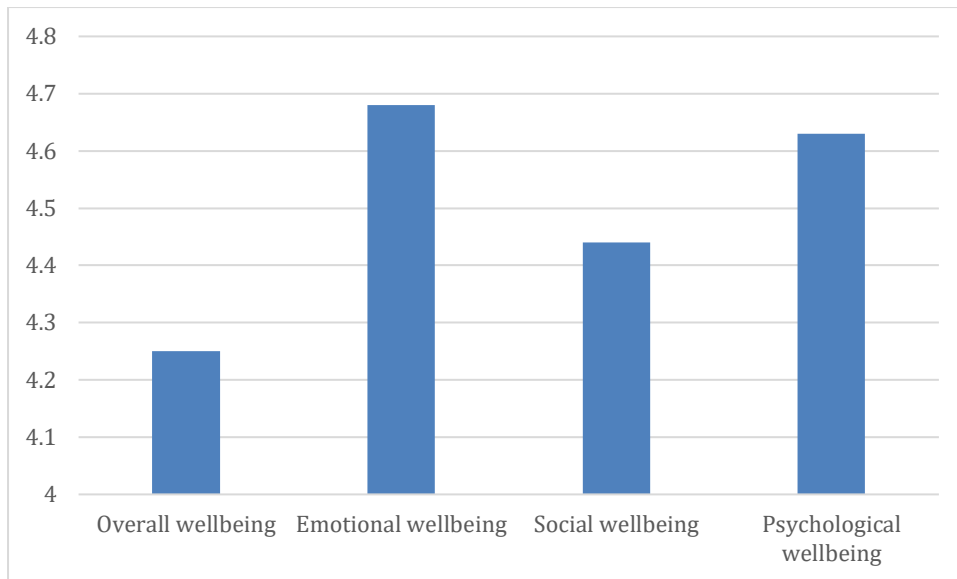
Figure 4. Wellbeing measure.

Participants scored the highest in Emotional wellbeing (M=4.68, SD=1.01), followed by Psychological wellbeing (M=4.63, SD=.98), and the lowest scores were reported in Social wellbeing (M=4.44). Social wellbeing refers to feeling that leaders can well integrate in their social network, contribute to it and are fully accepted by the network. Given the social isolation associated with COVID-19 lockdown restrictions and the need to manage a remote team, it is understandable that the social wellbeing aspect of their overall wellbeing is showing lower than the other two elements. That said, their emotional wellbeing is maintained at a relatively high level, meaning that despite findings themselves in a challenging situation, such as managing schools, leading pupils and teachers from a distance, they are able to manage their emotions well.

5.13 The elements of Psychological Wellbeing

Wellbeing type	M	SD
Self-acceptance	4.48	1.18

Environmental mastery	4.33	1.21
Positive relations with others	5.03	1.07
Personal growth	4.53	1.30
Autonomy	4.75	1.16
Purpose in life	4.65	1.29

Table 5. The elements of Psychological Wellbeing
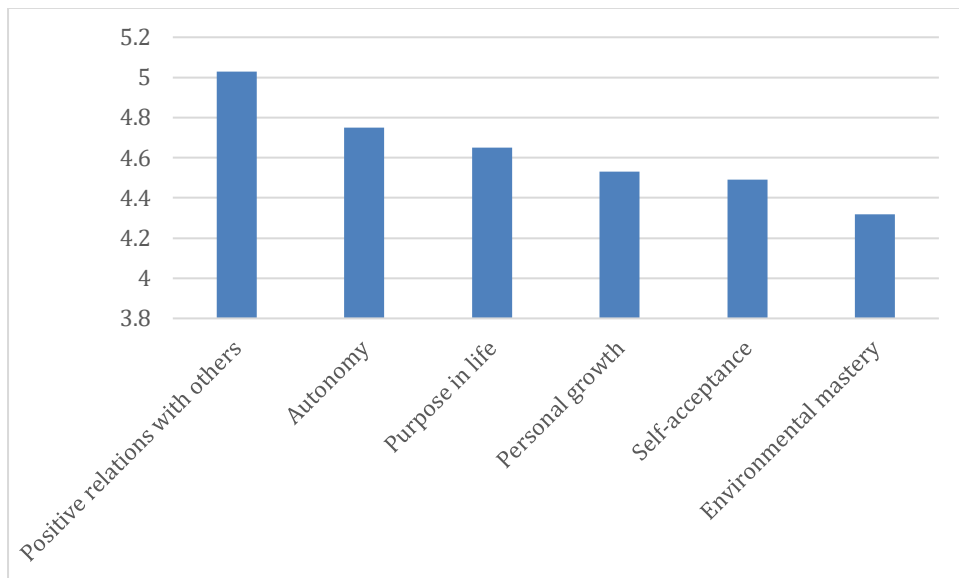
Figure 5. The elements of Psychological Wellbeing

Positive relations with others refer to whether participants have warm and trusting relationships with people around them. They differ from social wellbeing in that the latter is related to the social contribution, social acceptance and integration, not relationships per se. School leaders scored highest on the positive relations with others (M=4.48, SD=1.18), meaning that they are surrounded by people who offer them support. The second highest component of psychological wellbeing was autonomy, which related to their confidence to think or express their own ideas

and opinions (M=4.75, SD=1.15). Leaders' lowest levels of psychological wellbeing were reported in environmental mastery (M=4.33, SD=1.18), which relates to their self-assessment of being good at managing the responsibilities of their daily lives. Considering the heightened level of responsibility associated with school closures, it is not surprising that they scored the lowest on environmental mastery. That said, the score is above 4 of the maximum of 5, which means it is still relatively high.

5.14 Differences in wellbeing between administrative and teaching principals

	Administrative		Teaching	
Overall wellbeing	4.30	0.83	4.14	0.90
Emotional wellbeing	4.75	0.99	4.57	1.07
Social wellbeing	4.49	1.03	4.31	1.09
Psychological wellbeing	4.69	0.97	4.50	1.05

Table 6. Wellbeing differences between administrative and teaching principals.
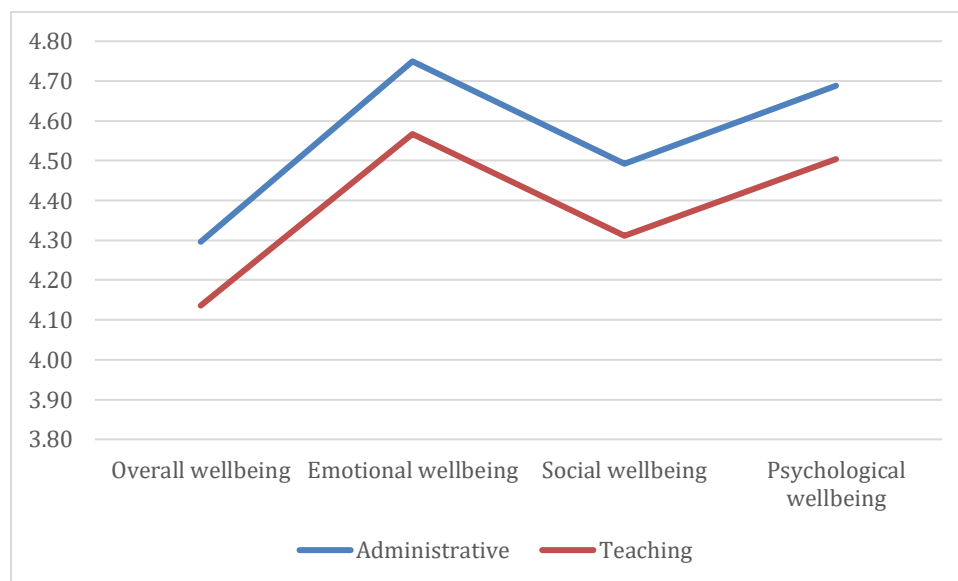
Figure 6. Wellbeing differences between administrative and teaching principals.

When the overall wellbeing and each component of wellbeing was analysed, teaching principals had lower levels of wellbeing than administrative principals across all elements of wellbeing. This may be due to the fact that the role of both is different and teaching principals manage schools along with performing school management duties, whereas administrative principals are able to focus solely on school management. However, further, longitudinal research needs to be carried out to confirm this finding.

5.2 Actions taken to support wellbeing

Have you taken any specific actions to support your own wellbeing?
If no, why not?
If yes, what actions have you taken to support your wellbeing?

	Frequencies	Percentage
Yes	709	75.5
No	216	23

Table 7. Percentage of participants who have taken action to support their own wellbeing.
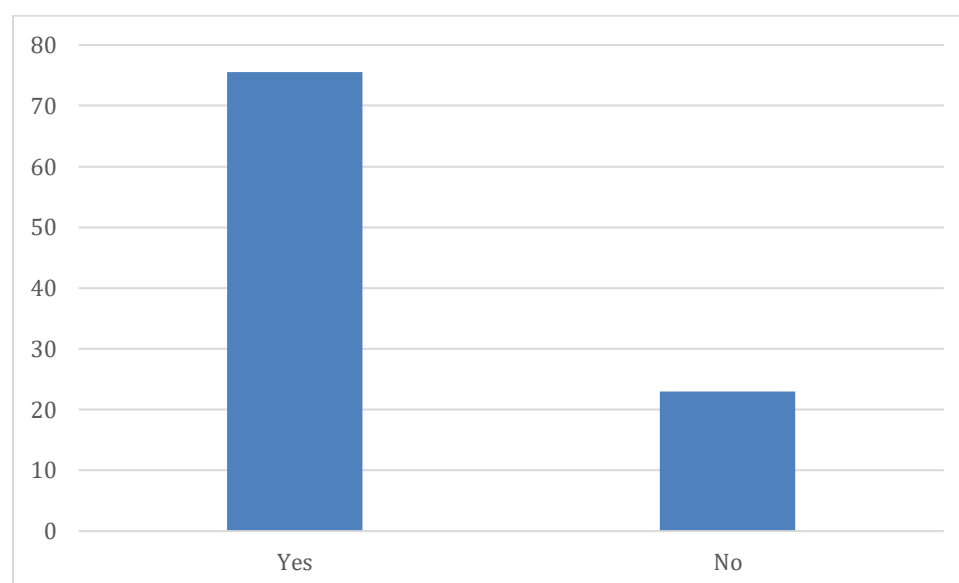
Figure 7. Percentage of participants who have taken action to support their own wellbeing.

Majority of participants (n=709, 76%) took action to support their own wellbeing. Only less than a quarter did not (n=216, 23%).

5.21 Reasons for not taking any action

When leaders were asked why they had not taken any action on their wellbeing the majority cited time constraints. There were over 300 mentions of leaders experiencing time pressures due to work. Some have multiple roles to fulfil, leader, teacher, mother/ father, care giver, partner, homemaker and so on. These data would support recent data from the CSO (2020) where it was found that women's well-being is being more adversely affected by the COVID-19 crisis. In Primary Schools in Ireland, 59% of leaders are female and 41% male according to 2016 CSO statistics. Typical responses to this question are as follows:

Just have not made this a priority, see everything else as more necessary.

I haven't had the time as I have been so overworked.

Time constraints, home schooling my children and working from home as a single parent
Family commitments - no time to myself with young children. Difficult to justify when children and work have so many demands of me.

I have small children, I run a fairly big school, we had a family bereavement and I was unwell. No time.

A considerable amount of my day is taken up by schoolwork. Any time that I am not doing schoolwork, I am caring for my children.

I try to exercise daily but find it difficult to switch my mind off - I have so much to plan for and manage. My Senior Management team are very willing to help once tasks are allocated but they're not trained in strategic development, so they still need me to come up with the ideas of what has to be done.

Just trying to get the best quality learning packs to my pupils every fortnight and look after my children and my husband, who is not well, at the same time.

No time between supporting my school, engaging with online forums and homeschooling/ caring for my children.

Consumed by ongoing challenges in work.... just want to relax at the end of the day/weekends.

Some answered 'no' as they do not feel they have any issue with their wellbeing; however, these were in the minority.

I am not in the least stressed and am enjoying this slow down.

I don't have a problem with my wellbeing. I continue to have a brisk daily walk as usual.

5.22 Actions taken

For leaders who are looking after their wellbeing, the supports they are using do not differ from those reported in the survey after two weeks (Burke and Dempsey, 2020), 558 mention taking walks, regular exercise, mindfulness, or yoga. Some mention taking up a new hobby. Many mention the importance of regular contact with others, friends, family, other leaders in their area and attending webinars where they can virtually 'meet' people. Typical quotes include the following:

Devising a flexible daily plan. Prioritising breaks with frequent physical exercise. Keeping in contact with colleagues, friends and family.

The main themes from these data are:

- o the power of exercise
- o need for 'virtual' contact to enhance wellbeing
- o the need for routine.
- o taking up new hobbies
- o stress and wellbeing

5.221 The power of exercise

Exercise is used by most respondents as a way to enhance their wellbeing and destress.

I am working more than I would be in the school building. I have to force myself to leave the laptop and get out for a walk. Overall, I am coping ok though and leave work in one room in the house.

Daily exercise. Pre COVID-19 school closure I might get to go on a short walk two evenings a week. I now get to go for a walk every day.

I'm availing of the chance to go for walks and get fitter; this is something I didn't manage for myself during my day when school was open.

5.222 Need for 'virtual' contact to enhance wellbeing

Contact and communication are very important for leaders' wellbeing.

Pilates Class Cycling   Walking   Talking to other principals

Try to exercise more. More collaboration with fellow principals in my area.

Exercise   Bible Study Zoom Group   Staff Zoom quiz.

Resilience Webinar with Shane Martin.   Webinars on various issues to support actions.

"Off" time. Exercise and fresh air. Socialising online - zoom quizzes with family, zoom drinks with friends.

Connecting with our local network for advice and in making decisions on teaching approaches etc. Lots of walking in the fresh air!

I'm part of a local principals WhatsApp group. I find this very helpful and beneficial as I can interact in a different way with these people than with the rest of my own staff. Peer support and collegiality very important for my own wellbeing.

I work with an incredible team who are giving everything they have for our pupils and still find time to support each other and me too.

I am lucky to work with good people, live with good people and have good relationships with friends and neighbours.

Regular family walks/ activities and very regular contact with fellow staff.

5.223 Need for routine

Respondents cited the need to have a regular routine and to take time away from the screen.

Getting support from my husband, leaving phone out of bedroom and going to bed earlier.

Limit news...exercise...turning off phone

Timetable for day. Regular exercise. Mindfulness classes.

Avoiding listening to the News. Trying to set aside dedicated downtime each day.

5.224 Taking up new hobbies

Taking up a new hobby or having more time for an old hobby was cited as a good way to enhance wellbeing.

Daily exercise, communicating with family and friends on what's app, engaging in hobbies like painting and gardening.

Exercise every day. Learning to play the piano, gardening, sitting in sun, reading.

My hobbies of painting and quilting are both creative outlets which can be done in the home.

5.225 Stress that impacts wellbeing

The evidence of enhanced stress and its impact on wellbeing was illuminated in many comments.

It is harder to teach online. I'm definitely getting more exercise, but I am using this as a method to destress.

It is near impossible to switch off from work now. Being newly appointed since last October I worked very hard to ensure I had a switch off time every day and walked away from work as I have seen first-hand the effect the stress of this role has on people. Now it is impossible to switch off.

Hard to get "down time" especially as I know many of our families are struggling, especially with at-home behaviours. On the plus side, my 3.5-hour daily commute is something I don't miss; I can go for a walk and cook proper meals now!

5.23 Other comments

Please comment here if you have anything further to add in relation to your wellbeing.

There were many additional comments, some link to other sections of this report. The following themes emerged on analysis.

- o   Leading, learning and enjoying a different pace of life
- o   The stressors that emerge when leading from afar

- o Dealing with pressure from parents

- o Welcome focus on leader wellbeing

- o The lack of clear guidance is impacting wellbeing

However, as one leader reminds us *The good weather has been a huge help to everyone..... including the children.*

5.231 Leading, learning and enjoying a different pace of life

The change has brought some positive impacts for our leaders.

I feel I am working well with distance learning. I'm learning loads of new stuff that I will bring to the classroom in September.

I feel despite more switched-on work wise I have never had such a relaxed home life/ pace of life.

I feel in a very good place and think that lockdown will have a positive effect on happy families but be detrimental to those who are struggling.

Good relationships on the home front are the key to wellbeing in my opinion.

The only one that has changed is my sense of belonging to a community, this has improved at this time.

I have all my family back home, so I am looking on this time from a positive perspective. I do feel hugely challenged though with the distance learning and I feel inadequate for the first time in my 34 years of teaching.

A large part of wellbeing is your level of resilience, the ability to deal with change and uncertainty and operate outside your comfort zone. I might prefer to be in the comfort zone, but I do realise my growth occurs outside it.

It's important to have a mindset open to challenge and change and also to have empathy and remember people view the world through different windows and be respectful of this whilst endeavoring to work and communicate with a moral purpose.

I think the slower pace of being at home has given me time to process my thoughts. I had a very difficult month in school just before we closed, and it has been nice to sit and think about everything. I have also decided to look at how I do things and think about what changes I can make when we return.

5.232 The stressors that emerge when leading from afar

Primary principals have many agencies to deal with in addition to pupils, parents and teachers, and doing this from a distance is difficult. This is especially the case when the principal also has teaching duties, care in the home and other life concerns.

There is only one principal, agencies need to remember that. Each agency has their own agenda and as a Principal I struggled to keep up with the day on day circulars, changes. I'm 1 person dealing with multiple requests and trying to run a school!

Principals cannot sustain the workload and extra responsibility being put on them by outside agencies on an almost weekly basis now.

The following quote really captures the challenges being faced trying to lead and teach from afar. Our Primary Schools tend not to have the same supports as our second level schools. Many second level schools have moved to blended learning where schools had introduced platforms for students to access work from home, especially in schools where all students have devices such as iPad or surface pros. There are schools using platforms such as Schoology and Google Classroom, however, the move to integrate technology in Primary Schools is not as advanced leading to extra challenges in this sudden move to distance learning during school closures. In 2016 McCoy and colleagues indicated three policy concerns for integrating technology in second level schools, supporting school leaders and ICT co-ordinators in ICT-integration; investment in infrastructure; and addressing structural and curricular constraints. These policy imperatives also exist for Primary Schools. Research consistently highlights how effective leadership is crucial to the smooth and effective integration of digital technologies in schools (McCoy *et al*., 2016). To lead this move to distance learning while not being in school is a mammoth task and the stress of doing so is evident in leaders responses in the comment section on wellbeing.

I feel challenged trying to manage a school that is closed. I feel there are limited opportunities for staff to upskill re IT and remote teaching. There is a lack of guidance on remote teaching/face to face contact and there is an expectation that teachers can plan, record, assess as if they were in school when they can't make contact with some pupils. There needs to be direction on whether online teaching is obligatory for teachers - can principals require this? Teachers are worried about being recorded and need support around this. The inspector's

friendly phone call added to my stress and while it appeared to be supportive it was in fact auditing what the school was doing on a day to day basis. Teachers have no IT support to work remotely.

No support given for principals' wellbeing. All supports for teachers, parents and children. For someone who is usually upbeat and positive, I have had days / periods where I feel really low (not normal and didn't have practiced strategies to deal with it). Don't have the usual resilience to cope with things that normally wouldn't rattle me.

No internet access where I live. I'm working around when and where I can get access and not ideal. Work day seems longer even though I sit 2 hour every day in the car.

I feel that there are so many demands at the moment, from all angles, that I bound to fail or make a mistake at some stage.

Leading a school community where most teachers are on board, but some are not has been very challenging.

I just feel overwhelmed at times by fear and uncertainty.

I have tried to prioritise my wellbeing now. Teaching principals will absolutely need more weekly release time to lead, manage and support their children and staff during these new transitions. Despite my focus on wellbeing I am now coming out the other side of an attack of vertigo. My last bout was 5years ago! I am quite confident that trying to juggle and navigate very new and choppy waters while keeping a ship afloat has added to this recent attack. It's not easy.

The additional pressures external sources are placing on principals is just not OK. Receiving circulars at 5:30 every Fri evening. Trying to forward plan but receiving no guidance in relation to this, end of year reports, setting your school calendar, interview process for filling positions. Delayed allocation of SNA's due to having to re do paperwork for the NCSE. Expected to source and hand out electronic devices...but having to write a policy to outline how you will do this. Insurance excess for the devices more than the device itself!! The pressure is just CONSTANT and is really a joke what is expected of school leaders.

This situation is testing everyone. It can become very overwhelming though for school leaders because everyone is so used to the structure of the school year and when it is turned upside down it is nearly still expected that the Principal will know what's coming next and should know the answers! I think it is so important to keep things in perspective with regard to school. We are all doing our best. School staff spending all day on Zoom and uploading, and correcting work may not actually be in the best interests of anybody.

I feel that I have too many things to attend to and the list seems never ending.

Homeschooling my own children has taken a back seat to my work as principal and this leads to guilt. Ensuring my staff feel supported is important but inevitably has a negative effect on making time to look after my own wellbeing.

Very stressful. My children are suffering due to my workload therefore I feel guilty about the impact on their mental health. Frustrated because some of our parents couldn't give a damn and I'm killing myself trying to reach everyone and support both staff and pupils.

5.233 Dealing with pressure from parents

Some leaders feel pressure from parents around expectations for more online classes and comparisons with other schools in the community.

I am feeling a lot of anxiety over reopening the school and not knowing what measures are needed. Some parents have unrealistic expectations of what to expect from schools in this time. I had a complaint from a parent that I hadn't rang her personally as schools in Dublin with more pupils are receiving weekly phone calls from their principal. It is hard to keep going without the relationships with children and staff that make our job so special.

5.234 Welcome focus on leader wellbeing

The fact that respondents tell us that this is the first time their wellbeing has been considered is significant. It points to an apparent gap in the support for leaders.

This is the first time that anyone seemed interested in the wellbeing of the leader. Usually we are burdened with looking after the wellbeing of everyone else and then there is an empty nod at the leader. It's refreshing not to be dwelling on the wellbeing of everyone else for a change!

Really hard to keep all the balls in the air and it's a huge pressure not being allowed to go to school. Thanks for listening.

It would be nice to be acknowledged by the IPPN. I read a document about teacher wellbeing and how we need to be aware of teacher situations and how they may be minding children, others at home. We as principals in the same situation don't seem to be acknowledged to teachers. Why is no one reminding teachers/parents that they should realise their principal

may have children at home or in my case also cocooning. It just feels like we are completely neglected!

Some leaders report to feeling isolated:

I'm not really suited to remote working and I need the social interaction and buzz of the workplace, feel quite alone as a school principal actually.

Living alone so the last weeks have been unusual

5.235 The lack of clear guidance is impacting wellbeing

This topic is discussed further in section 7 of the report.

Please, please send guidelines to principals on how to engage in a realistic sustainable reasonable and manageable way with their staff. It's urgently needed in many schools.

In school there is a structure, a routine and an ebb and flow to the year. This has been quite challenging and most days I am up for the challenge and feel that I am doing a good job leading my school community. The lack of leadership from the DES is disappointing. They actually started well enough with guidance and advice but that had stopped. Looking forward I have zero confidence that they will give guidance on how to reopen in a clear and meaningful way. Already that is starting to impact my wellbeing as everyone will be looking at me for leadership on how we are to reopen safely. How do I decide who is fit to return to work, who can stay at home and mind their kids, how often we need to clean the school and to what standard, how we will pay for that service?

5.24 Differences between administrative and teaching principals

	Administrative		Teaching	
	n	%	n	%
Yes	307	75.4	229	73.2
No	94	23.1	80	25.6

Table 8. Differences between administrative and teaching principals in relation to the actions taken to support their own wellbeing.
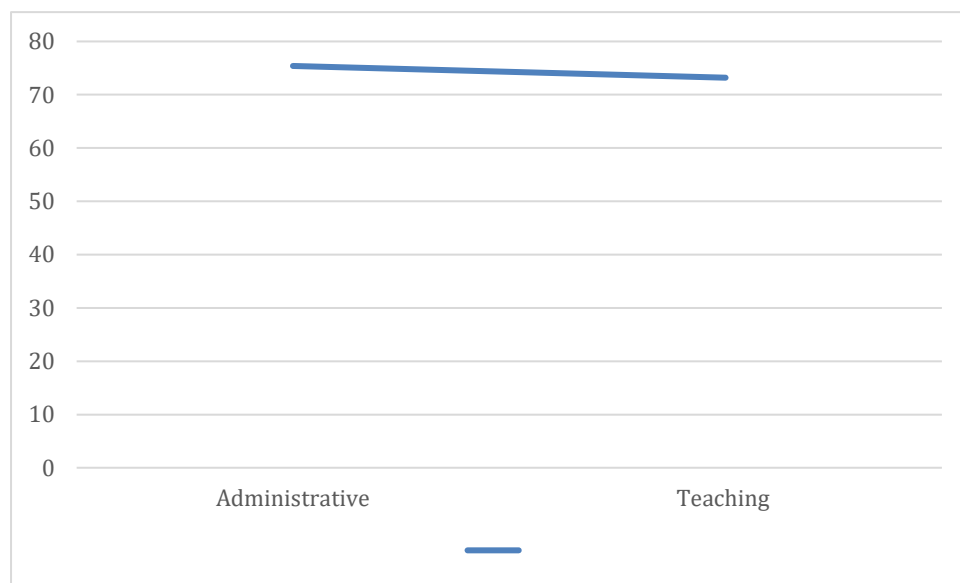
Figure 8. Percentage of administrative and teaching principals who have taken actions to support their own wellbeing.

No significant differences were found between teaching and administrative principals in relation to the actions they have taken during the COVID-19 school closure to support their wellbeing.

6. Communication in school

6.1 Frequency of teachers' interaction with pupils

On average, how often are teachers interacting with pupils?

	Frequency	Percent
Daily	513	54.6
Every other day	199	21.2
Once a week	154	16.4
As per their normal class timetable (resource teaching)	6	0.6
Every fortnight	8	0.9
Ad hoc	24	2.6
Other	35	3.7

Table 9. Frequency of teachers' interaction with pupils.
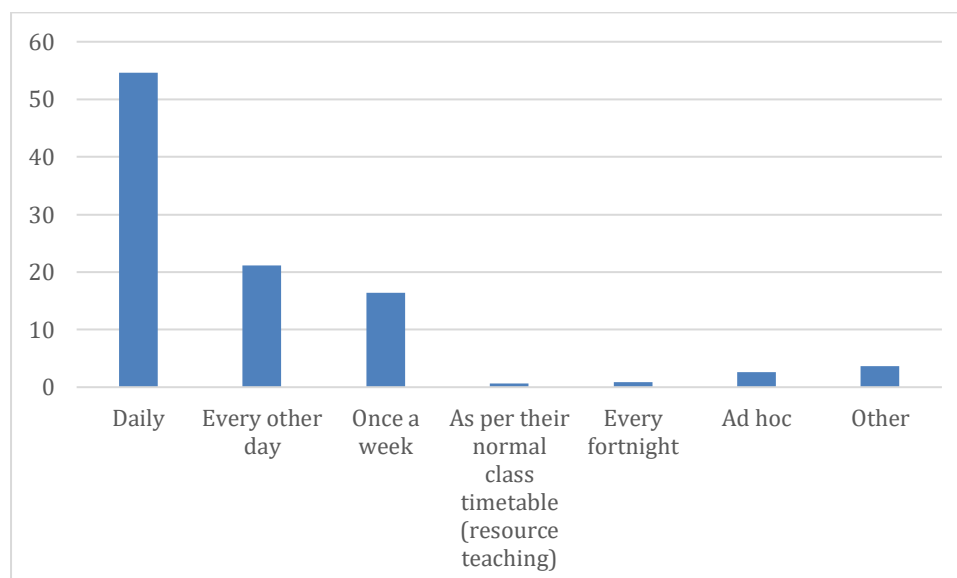
Figure 9. Frequency of teachers' interaction with pupils.

Majority of leaders reported that their school contacts pupils daily (n=513, 55%), followed by every other day (n=199, 21%) and once a week (n=154, 16%). Only 2.6% (n=24) of leaders reported that their schools contact pupils ad hoc.

6.11 Two-weeks vs two-month comparison

	2 weeks	2 months
Daily	28.9	54.6
Every other day	5.9	21.2
Once a week	45	16.4
Other	25.9	16.4

Table 10. Comparison of the frequency of pupil contact between two weeks and two months after school closure.
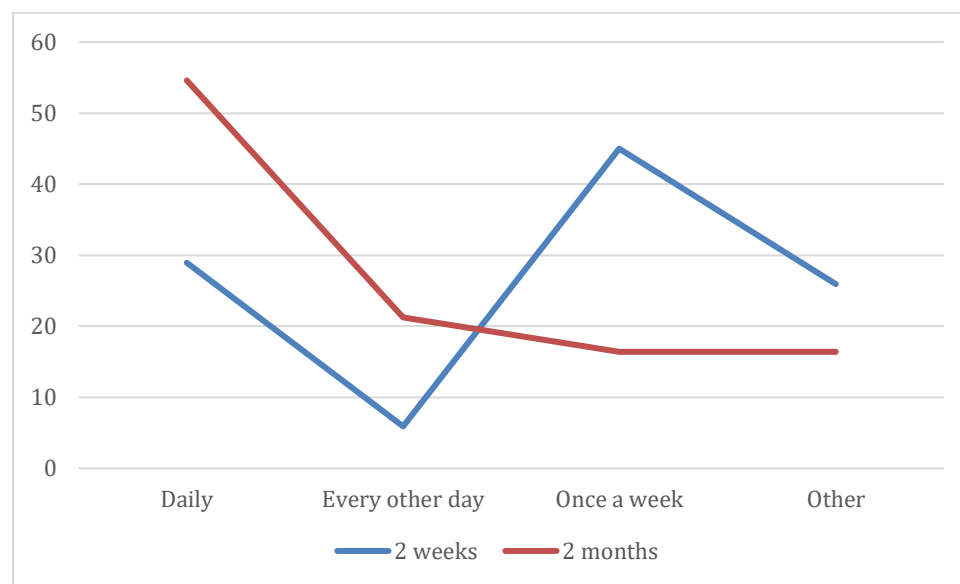
Figure 10. Comparison of the percentage in relation to the frequency of parental contact between two weeks and two months after school closure.

Two weeks after the school closure, vast majority of pupils were contacted once a week and only less than a third of schools have made arrangements to contact their pupils daily. Two

months later, vast majority of pupils (75.8%) are contacted by their school every day or every other day. This increase is closely linked to the comments on increased workload.

6.2 Pupils concerns

What concerns, if any, have pupils raised with you and your teachers in recent weeks?

We asked respondents "What concerns, if any, have pupils raised with you and your teachers in recent weeks?" . There were over 700 comments to this questions. The following comments capture many of the concerns voiced by pupils to their schools.

- Access to technology and WIFI - frustration when it doesn't work   - Some have siblings with high level SEN needs   - Missing friends and school   - Missing going outside - for some in city centre, parents are too afraid to allow children outside as physical distancing is so difficult   - Worried about parents or grandparents   - Worried about getting sick themselves   - Keeping safe.

Lack of momentum, lack of interest, difficulty with workload - a lot of written work. Missing social interaction with teachers and classmates. School classroom cannot be simulated at home irrespective of communication tools used. Worry also about what the future will look like on their return. Want things back to 'normal'

That they are missing the last term of being in sixth class. Concerned about leaving school without being able to thank teachers and without the fun and excitement of a graduation ceremony. That the First Holy Communion day will not be the same in four or five months' time. That the good habits and routines built up over the past few terms might be undone.

Mammy can't help me. I need to finish all this work today- pacing. I miss my friends. I missed my first communion day' Will there be a "slán le R6" event this year.

There were a few comments that indicated that there were no concerns voiced by their pupils.

Absolutely none. All pupil engagement has been really positive, delighted to hear from Teacher/SNA and only queries they have are directly related to their work and how to do it type thing!

Pupils seem to be managing ok. 6th class pupils are pretty anxious and disappointed that they won't get to do all of the nice activities that we traditionally would have done. We have reassured them that we will do something to mark their time with us.

Following a thematic analysis the following key themes emerged.

- o Transition from Primary School to second level
- o Missing the social aspects of school
- o Anxiety experienced by pupils
- o Pupils' curriculum concerns
- o Concerns around technology
- o Children with special educational needs concerns

6.21 Transition from Primary School to second level

There were 295 mentions of 6th class transition issues. These ranged from the need to celebrate to anxiety around academic progress. Many comments were linked to faith events.

Mainly 6th class and their concerns and anxieties around missing out on the final term, they are extremely worried, anxious and upset. I am extremely worried that this will create buffer problems in September when they begin secondary school - they have missed out on such an important transition step.

6th class are very upset about their graduation and tours and worried about transferring to secondary school. We have developed an online graduation plan, have a series of transition to secondary school webinars planned and are doing circle-time check-in Zoom meetings with them. Other children report missing their friends - even though they see them on Facetime etc. and in Zoom. They are also very worried about going back to school and what school will be like when we do return. Missing friends, missing the final few weeks of 6th class.

Missing school, 6th class leaving very upsetting. 6th class pupils missing the normal rituals and events of the final year in primary school and the closure they bring.

Missing their friends and teachers. 6th class devastated they won't be returning to our school, upset as no Confirmation or Communion.

Lack of clarity from DES proving to be stressful for older pupils.

6.22 Missing the social aspects of school

Almost all comments mentioned that pupils were missing school and missing their friends. This social aspect of education was also highlighted by leaders in the previous survey (Burke and Dempsey, 2020) but it was even more prevalent in this survey. It also came up in the question around concerns parents have. Many comments point to how this social isolation is causing anxiety and mental health issues for young people. There is also evidence of how pupils

are missing the peer support the classroom provides for their learning, they lack the usual markers (peer and teacher feedback) that indicate where they are in their learning.

Missing their friends; Longing to be back doing the fun things, events we do in school during last term. Missing their teachers, bored at home; The novelty of distance learning is wearing off; Missing the structure of school in their daily lives; Luckily, we are a rural school in a farming area, or the list could be longer!

I teach 6th class only. General disappointment at not returning to school for a period of time at the end of June. A few days back in school adhering to social distancing and dividing the pupils into small groups throughout empty classrooms would have had such a positive impact on these children.

They are missing the company of the other children. They are afraid of coronavirus. They are missing the extended family like grans and grand dads. They are even missing the teachers.

The main concern here is that pupils want to be back in their classroom with their peers. They miss school. I don't think any of our pupils are enjoying this crisis at all.

Social isolation: missing their friends.

Feedback from the pupils has been positive. All missing school and their classmates
Missing their friends.   Feel they are missing vital parts of their education.   Afraid that they will be left behind by their peers.

Some are bored and missing social interaction this is leading to a huge lack of motivation for schoolwork.

Missing out on school and friends from school. Definite need for some face to face time in September at school. Don't like remote learning.

Missing friends and putting too much on their own shoulders, even though we stress to work at your own pace and take breaks.

Over the past week when it was announced that schools were closed until September 4th,5th 6th class admitted to feeling lonely, missing friends and requested Zoom class calls. (Which we are going to start next week)

6.23 Anxiety experienced by pupils

The pupils anxiety is not different to the leaders own anxiety around getting back to school, coping with transition to second level, heath worries about family and academic progress.

Anxiety about missing out; poor understanding that school is closed for ALL (teachers did video of empty school and carpark); worry about health of peers and staff; partial understanding of situation coupled with inability of some to rationalise caused stress.

Returning safely in September

Children with anxiety fear for the future.

Afraid they are missing out and falling behind-media reporting is not helping.

Anxiety about secondary school (6th class pupils). Anxiety about COVID-19. Children are bored. Lonely. Anxious.

Anxiety about returning to school. Anxiety in 6th Class pupils leaving.

Worries about being unable to do the work set.

6.24 Pupils' curriculum concerns

The two subjects mentioned in relation to curriculum concerns were mathematics and Gaeilge. The other curriculum concerns were more general and concerned academic progress in general. These concerns need to be taken into account when pupils go back to school. There will need to be some formal way of auditing the learning missed during the school closures in order to alleviate the negative impacts on pupils.

The students in my class are really missing school and their friends. They feel lonely. They are worried that they will not be where they should be academically at the end of 6th class. Not be able to complete all the activities.

Mainly around missing ceremonies and events rather than schoolwork. - except for maths and Gaeilge- which children would struggle the most.

Pupils are concerned about Maths and Gaeilge.

Difficulties doing maths, Hard to focus at home

Difficulty doing maths, difficulty with Irish Dialect in stories

Concern re missing teacher contact time and impact on academics. Pupils concerned about general curricular areas.

Becoming tired and fed up.   Work overload at times. We did a survey from 3rd to 6th and asked how parents and children felt. Their feedback will be taken on board and reflected in the work given over remaining weeks.

6.25 Concerns around technology

Some pupils have been in touch with their schools with concerns about accessing lessons due to technology issues. This also features in parental concerns.

Issues around lack of or poor technology at home.

Inability to access IT facilities.

Missing friends. We have encouraged parents to use technology available to connect. Not all staff are in a position to facilitate online video classes and calls due to family circumstances and poor broadband. This needs to be highlighted more to the public.

Ability to access learning content due to inappropriate device (one publishing house has digital resources as a download only accessible on a computer, rather than tablet/phone/Chromebook). Also, digital literacy in relation to intricacies of platform being used, and returning work for marking etc.

NO INTERNET!! Big problem in our area and also poor technology and printers at home.

6.26 Children with special educational needs concerns

Throughout the survey there are mentions of how we need to put more focus on how we are catering during this time of distance teaching for children with special educational needs.

Very hard on parents with special needs children, DES as usual have forgotten about special educational needs and as always, we are a last thought.

SEN Children struggling with work. Further measures need to be planned for these children for assistive technology, differentiated work.

6.3 Parental contact

How many parents has your school made contact with in the past two weeks?

	Frequency	Percent
None	2	0.2
A few	61	6.5
Some	150	16
Most	309	32.9
All	417	44.4

Table 11. The number of parents contacted in the last fortnight.
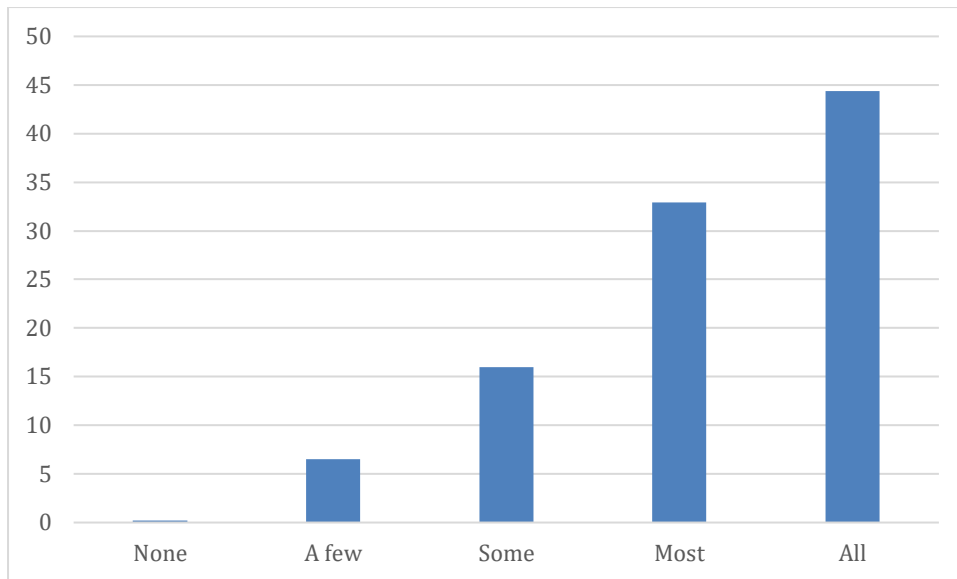
Figure 11. The number of parents contacted in the last fortnight.

Most of the schools (n=417, 44%) have contacted all parents in the last 2 weeks. Only two participants (.2%) reported that they have not contacted parents during the preceding fortnight.

6.4 Reasons for parental contact

What are the main reasons for parental contact? Please tick all that apply.

	Frequency	Percentage
Pace and flow of work	748	79.7
Pupil wellbeing	722	76.9
Distribution of books	230	24.5
Distribution of school meals	143	15.2
Other	245	26.1

Table 12. The reasons for parental contact.
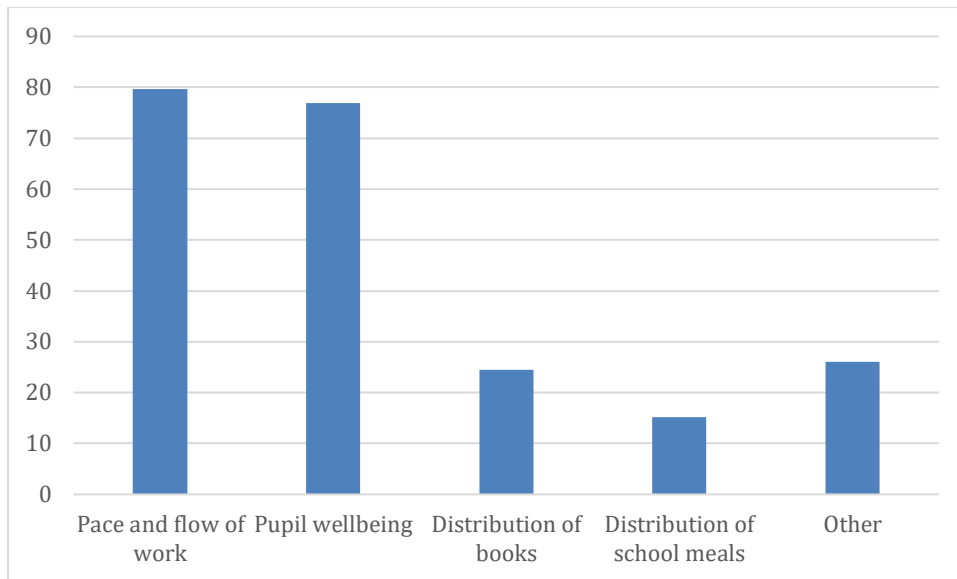
Figure 12. The reasons for parental contact.

Vast majority of school leaders reported that they contacted parents in the last two weeks to check if the pace and flow of work was suitable for them and children (n=748, 80%), and to enquire about pupil's wellbeing (n=722, 77%).

6.41 Other

When asked about what other reason they may be contacting parents the comments are very insightful and further illuminate the complex role of the Primary School leader. There is evidence of the leader moving between being the technical expert to one of councillor. The following comment captures the concerns of our leaders for parents:

We all get the structure bit for the children but are we considering the parents ?"Coping and managing" were the two most used words in response to a questionnaire that I sent out a short time ago. Whatever interest there was at the beginning in schoolwork certainly waned once the announcement that schools are off till September. I think this was the incorrect decision at the time and we should have at least made an attempt to return 6th class to school for the last two weeks in June. It would have given teachers a chance to see how modified arrangements would

work in practice and provide 6th with the chance to finish their last year in primary school in a somewhat organised fashion.

The thematic analysis yielded the following main themes:

- Contact about school work and technological issues

- Contact to support parental and family wellbeing

- Contact for administrative issues

- Contact to ensure two way communication and feedback on the work

- Contact to support parents with SEN pupils

6.411 Contact about school work and technological issues

Leaders talked about how a lot of contact with parents was around pupils accessing work and technical issues parents were facing.

Over this past two weeks we have initiated deliberate catch up chats with parents and pupils (with parents present) for all families if they wish. We are also using this as research around connectivity and devices etc.. to inform further work.

The main reason for contacting families is to keep that sense of school community and to stay connected. A weekly email bulletin is sent with updates and to check in with everyone at home. I sent a pre-recorded video announcement on Seesaw to all classes to check in with everyone and to give a few updates. Most children are really missing school.

Seesaw is daily, those who are unable to use Seesaw due to internet etc, they are contacted weekly via phone call.

Keeping in touch with those who hadn't signed up to Aladdin Connect Now at 98% and have spoken to remaining 2%.

Non engagement in school activities. Call to ask why.

Queries regarding work and distribution of IT devices.

Accessibility to internet connection a concern.

Teachers made contact with work and personal check in. Parents made contact with queries around work to teachers. Parents contact with me to query Communion, confirmation, transfer, new intake, books, work. All positive. I emailed birthday wishes each day.

6.412 Contact to support parental and family wellbeing

Many respondents spoke of the need to support the wellbeing of their pupils families through contact.

To see how they are coping, school asking if they are happy with levels of work, do they want work for their child. Complete forms. Family wellbeing is also a priority for us.

Supporting families that struggle. Weekly distribution of school meals by staff.

Thanking school for the support parents are getting e.g. one parent said our contact made her feel less alone.

To offer support and encouragement with home teaching.

Parent well-being and reassurance.

Assignment of class work and check in that their family are keeping well.

Reaching out to those who are vulnerable and reaching out to those who are not engaging

6.413 Contact for administrative issues

Administrative issues included the distribution of school meals, SNA allocation and other policy imperatives that schools need parents to address.

Make sure every home has access to a device suitable for remote learning. Contact regarding SNA allocation / appeals and reviews due to a deficit in our allocation for 20/21 year. Follow up on HSE applications for assessments from school age team and assessment of need. Huge delays before virus, worse now.

Refund of swimming fees. School meals, school lunches [contact around school meals was cited by a number of respondents]

New information re Web Ex meetings. Parents attend meetings at the start.

Keep parents updated on matters arising/school announcements.

Specific communication with 6th class parents and children with SET i.e. July provision,

A significant number of respondents spoke on doing parent surveys and inviting feedback on their distance teaching. The move to distance teaching in such a short period and the need to learn from the process was evident. This is commendable when one considers all the responsibilities leaders in Primary Schools have responsibility for.

To check on frequency / timing of Zoom classes / groups and make some changes - I wanted feedback from parents first and a chance to explain my rationale for any changes.

Rang all parents to keep in touch and to see if there was any more support we could offer

I sent a survey re homework. Approximately half the families replied positively. Another teacher and I requested that the children send in samples of their activities/creations/ May Altar and we are getting a great response.

Addressing possible concerns following announcement of closure until September; Email to parents of 6th Class to address concerns re transition and transfer to Secondary School; Email to parents of Confirmation Class which should have been this week; General message to parents, teachers, pupils, to congratulate all on their great efforts, despite many difficulties, etc

Open communication and maintaining connections.

Survey on distance learning programme.

To help address concerns for the future, Communion cancellation, technical issues and so on.

Seeing how students' parents are to set targets for the week to discuss management of behaviour to listen to parents and be a support to support them in using the seesaw to seek what further supports they need.

I send weekly updates to parents to keep them informed and also to try and give answers to all parents on the common issues arising.

6.415 Contact to support parents with SEN pupils

Leaders appear to need to put a lot of time into trying to support SEN pupils and their parents during this time.

I have contacted at risk pupils - phone call. Also contacted incoming pupils parents' of children with complex needs.

Support calls to parents of SEN pupils. Organising IT equipment for those who don't have it. Explaining how to use some of the online platforms.

As our pupils have very particular needs, Principal has liaised with parents to see how best we can support, if there are any specific issues etc.

Support for the family and gathering permission for NCSE docs.

Offer support, parent wellbeing particularly of SEN pupils, acknowledgement of special occasions, communication, reassurance.

NEPS applications, SNA situation.

Getting consent for SNA exceptional review. Relaying the news that we need to complete exceptional review as our SNA applications sent in were not going to be accepted.

Could SEN child have more support. Asking about a password, and if I can make an app work more easily.

Incoming students re: NCSE forms and orientation. School Leaver parents re: Graduation transition to Adult Services, Debs etc. Parents of some were contacted by us, or they made contact re: collection/ delivery of occupational therapy/physio equipment and aids.

6.5 Parents' concerns

What concerns, if any, have parents raised in relation to supporting their children's learning?

Parental concerns were very similar to leaders' and pupils' concerns. The following quotes sum up the overall sentiment of the data from this open ended question.

Lack of teaching skills. Too much pressure at home. Lack of equipment.

Parents too busy juggling working from home and minding their children, can't cope with school work also. Very poor Broadband in the area, causing huge problems Parents unsure of the Gaeilge and maths methods. Afraid they may teach kids wrongly.   Parents wishing DES and schools would take a more holistic approach to the lockdown and leave the academics for when we return to school.   Parents comparing our school's platforms in their of distance

learning to other schools. Very good schools now being spoken of negatively for not having Seesaw, Google classroom etc. Yet broadband does not allow for this in places. Other comments include; "Why is my 3rd class child getting more work than his sibling in Leaving Cert."! "Seesaw is the most stressful part of COVID in my house" ... parents looking for reassurance that they are doing well in whatever ways they are teaching their kids.

There are some very specific circumstances that impact on distance learning such as parents having to work.

One parent stated that both herself and her husband were working on the front-line and that she did not feel it appropriate that they would spend their spare time with their children working on schoolwork. A minority of parents are finding it hard to motivate their children to engage with school tasks!

There were over 900 comments in this section and the main themes emerging were:

- I am not concerned
- I am not a teacher
- Concerns for pupils missing out on social aspects of school
- Technology and cost of supporting distance learning
- Curricular concerns
- Concerns around SEN pupils

6.51 I am not concerned

A few respondents said their parents did not have any concerns.

Parents have been in contact, supportive of the endeavours we've gone to, and we had 84% response rate to survey in relation to distance learning. One parent has requested pupil be retained in their current class.

Parents have communicated positively about our efforts to keep continuity of education

The parents email us on the children's work and then it is myself who contacts the parents to link in and offer support to them. The general consensus is that they are happy with the workload being given each week, they don't want to be overloaded, children are only able with 1-2 hour max work each day. Activities online are difficult due to poor internet access in our rural area. Momentum dropping a little with children applying themselves to their work.

Most parents were very happy with the online learning via the school's website with a dedicated shared email for teachers. At least 2 teachers commented on each email sent by children. There were a small number of requests for specific activities for their children (e.g. SEN children) or requests for more interactive lessons. We are addressing this via the school's website. The feedback has been very positive, very appreciative of everything teachers are doing to assist in these challenging circumstances.

Most seem happy that they are not getting pressure from school to complete work as they have a lot of other stresses in their lives at the moment.

All parents who have contact are very happy and some parents are actively engaged in posting videos and photos on the school's closed Facebook page.

6.52 I am not a teacher

Many parents report that they are struggling with trying to juggle the role of parent with the role of parent as teacher.

Many parents find it difficult taking on role of main educator of their children. They feel that children don't engage with them as they would with their teacher.

A lot of concerns about behaviour and the stress of coping with a child with behaviour issues. Parents report how this impacts on their relationships with spouse, children and most parents just want to get pupils back into a routine.

They are out of their depth, challenge of juggling work and school work, behaviour and motivating children.

Parents are concerned that other schools doing more, this leads to unhelpful comparisons.

Children are missing a vital part of their education as education is individual and personalised and not a broad cast.

6.53 Concerns for pupils missing out on social aspects of school

As in other areas of the survey the social aspect of education is highlighted in comments. Parents are concerned on how this lack of social contact with peers and teachers is leading to anxiety and mental health issues for their children.

Learning in isolation, there are mental health concerns for pupils and family members.

Parents report that pupils miss the social contact with peers and teacher and the personal educational guidance from teachers.

Concerns have been raised about pupils' social and mental wellbeing.

Concerns from mainstream parents pertain in the main to lack of social interaction of children.

Parents finding it hard to keep going with tasks. Needing some breaks away from work. Fears that child will fall behind. Concerns over their child's mental wellbeing.

Anxiety over pupil wellbeing...missing structure/friends etc.

Have concerns about the social aspect of missing school.

Parents are worried they are not doing enough and we have reassured them that they are doing their best. They are also worried about their children's social needs.

Children becoming frustrated and missing their friends.

6.54 Technology and cost of supporting distance learning

It is not surprising that access to technology would be a parental concern as the digital divide was evident in the previous survey (Burke and Dempsey, 2020). What is more evident here is the cost to parents with distance teaching, parents having to purchase printers, paper and additional devices in homes where there are other children also trying to access classes. The issues around access to broadband is still a worry for leaders as reported in this survey. Technology and access to on-line platforms is not universal for all schools. Respondents in

DEIS schools in particular find this is impacting on their pupils learning and they worry about how they will compensate for this loss of learning when schools reopen.

Lack of IT devices, poor broadband, no school books, lack of expertise, parents trying to work from home and do home schooling at the same time.

Parents working from home, older siblings using devices to study for LC, broadband issues, motivation of pupils to work.

Difficulty getting children to engage. Lack of devices. Poor internet.

They are concerned about not getting work done or uploaded due to busy house or other family issues. Some have poor broadband or internet connection or have no printing facilities. Many families have had to purchase additional equipment. This is not always possible for all families. The school tries to help out where possible.

No access to devices. Parent feels inadequate - lack of ICT skills. Parents find it hard to motivate and engage the pupils.

Behavioural issues Lack of motivation. Lack of resources, printers, ICT etc. Screen time poor WIFI, lack of devices, not being able to explain/understand the work, having difficulty getting their children to concentrate.

No access to printers. Not enough screen's Working from home.

Lack of structure. Lack of motivation. Lack of broadband (some parents drive to the nearest town to download our emails on town Wi-Fi (there is no mobile coverage or broadband in parts of Monaghan).

6.55 Curricular concerns

The two subjects that parents are most concerned about are mathematics and Gaeilge. It will be important that curriculum support is provided in schools when they reopen to address these real concerns. Lot of parents are also concerned their children will regress in their learning with some voicing the desire for pupils to repeat the year of school. Others asking that the class teacher does not change.

Lack of confidence in their ability to teach the children.   A fear of 'not doing it right'. Fear that the children will 'miss out' or fall behind. Concern about damaging child/parent relationship now that the parent has effectively become the teacher, especially for very young children. Lack of social contact.   6th class-transition to Post-primary, no graduation etc. Concerned about lack of engagement, wellbeing, many have asked about repeating the year and many want their child to go back to the same teacher in September.

Both parents working at home. More than one child, different ages, all needing attention/support to do school work. Parents need online devices for work and therefore online schoolwork isn't possible. Children not motivated/hard to motivate (children who were perhaps hard to motivate in a classroom also). Parents lack skills to work with child in certain areas (i.e. Gaeilge)

Mostly feeling they will fall behind as they can't work with them every day as both parents are working from home and finding it very difficult to work from home and homeschool at the same time. School work ends up being a weekend activity.

Asking for help with phonics and maths.

Very concerned about 6th class and if they will be able for secondary school.

Working parents are finding home teaching difficult. Parents are growing weary the longer distance learning is continuing and finding it increasingly difficult to motivate their children who are increasingly missing their friends and their lives.

That they may need to repeat, that they are having difficulties accessing work online, that they're missing out especially 6th class.

Some are feeling overwhelmed and find subjects like Gaeilge difficult. Others haven't technology needed.

Many parents struggle with Gaeilge, when they are not proficient in speaking Irish. High levels of anxiety, children afraid of falling behind, afraid they will be 'kept back a year', no access to school books and not all have access to print materials.

Anxiety amongst 6th class pupils- Some are restricted with Irish/ teaching maths/ challenge of one or both parents working and also teaching them.

Some families are really struggling. They find the summer term impossible usually. Children who don't sleep / one parent families / very difficult behaviour / children with complex medical needs who require 24/7 supervision. Parents are at burn-out level. It's very worrying. From too much material to too little in terms of their ability/ opportunity to support their children . Difficulty with motivation as closure is extended. Children's need to interface with friends and teacher. Some specific requests for individual tutoring in areas of curriculum e.g. Maths.

Frustration - we repeatedly hear that children are saying - that's not the way the teacher does it. Parents are worried that pupils are racing through work but are they actually learning.

Some parents are overwhelmed - finding the actual work very challenging - can't help e.g. maths in senior classes. Gaeilge for those parents who don't have knowledge of the language themselves. Some parents worry that children are going to fall behind no matter what they do.

6.56 Concerns around SEN pupils

The complex needs of SEN children is a cause of concern for parents and schools.

Children with special educational needs diagnoses being difficult to manage at home without the structure of a physical school day.

EAL children can't be supported.

ASD parents in general are reporting a regression in both behaviours and wellbeing of their children.

Some are stressed trying to work and help children's learning at the same time, ASD children are finding it particularly difficult and parents are really under pressure.

Stress with children with SEN, homelessness and overcrowded accommodation, no OT or any other supports, lack of access to appropriate parks, no printers, lack of electronic devices, lack of paint etc. We have provided a lot from school funds to help alleviate this.

Many parents struggle with Gaeilge, when they are not proficient in speaking Irish
Many parents are feeling stressed and overwhelmed trying to balance working from home and home schooling. Some parents of children with special needs feel isolated because of restrictions e.g. unable to bring child to playgrounds or visit relatives in order to release energy and so on.
Special needs kids don't find learning easy. Parents tired and stressed. Kids stressed.

Families with children with special needs, I know are struggling and find remote teaching doesn't help them in any way and they are left with nothing. If there was some way they could physically access a school and the child could get a break from home , feel some school structure and allow their family a break, I think that would be helpful. September seems so far away.

Feeling like the children are falling behind, lack of motivation, lack of time as they are working at home, lack of confidence supporting children and parents of pupils with SEN are really struggling with behaviour management, anxiety and routine.

Some parents of SEN pupils are struggling to complete work so the teachers and SNAs have increased their support of them.

Our students have autism and many see home as home and school work is for school   The increase in behaviours concern. Lack of student interest in technology. Needing support as they are single parents. Parents managing other siblings home from school also parents not having internet access, parents not interested in taking up the opportunities provided for learning as happy with their own routine to help their child cope through the day.   Parents struggling to cope with aggressive behaviour so feel can't engage in the learning.

Children easily distracted. Parents finding it very difficult to manage pupils with special needs e.g. ASD. Anxiety in children due to COVID-19. Parents working from home worried that children will fall behind. Lack of IT devices.

6.6 Platforms used

Which of the following platforms does your school use to connect with parents?		
	Frequency	Percentage
Email	766	81.6
Aladdin	390	41.5
Hard Copy	320	34.1
Class DoJo	183	19.5
Googleclass	151	16.1
PowerPoint	140	14.9
GSuite	126	13.4

Microsoft Classroom	25	2.7
Other	549	58.5

Table 13. Platforms that are currently used in schools.
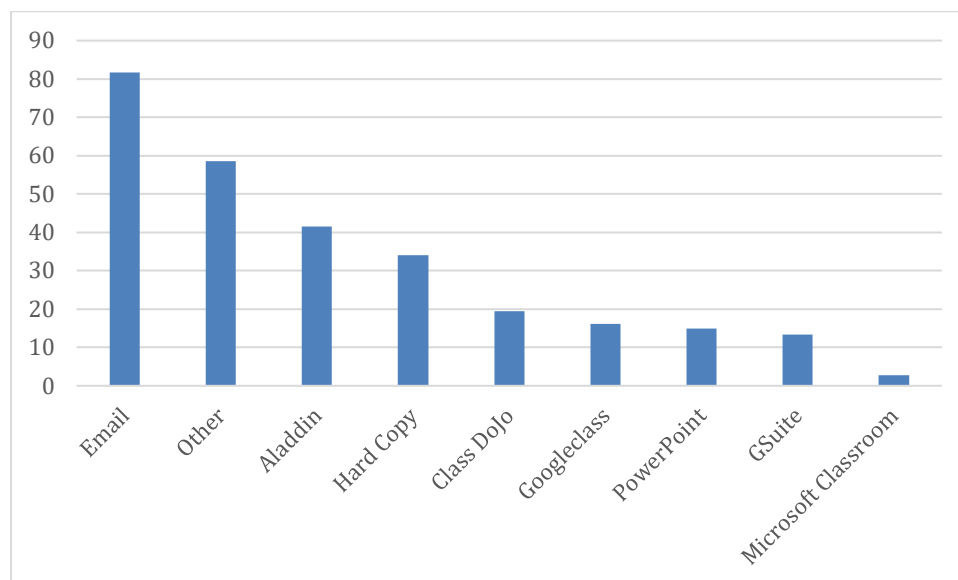
Figure 13. Platforms that are currently used in schools.

The most prevalent platform used in school is email (n=766, 82%) followed by other platforms, Aladdin (n=390, 42%) and hard copies for those who do not have access to online learning (n=320, 34%).

6.61 Two-weeks vs two-month comparison

	2 weeks	2 months
Email	67.6	81.6
Aladdin	42.3	41.5
Other	37.3	58.5
Hard Copy	36.5	34.1
Class DoJo	21.2	19.5
Googleclass	14.9	16.1
PowerPoint	9.7	14.9

GSuite	9.2	13.4
Microsoft Classroom	4.8	2.7

Table 14. Comparison of the platforms used two weeks and two months after the school closure.
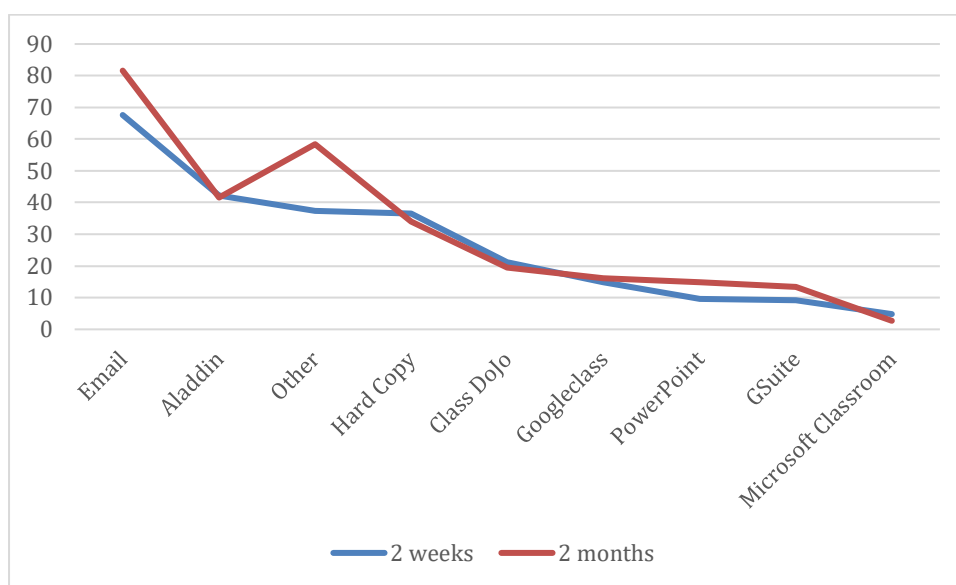
Figure 14. Comparison of the percentage of leaders using various platforms two weeks and two months after the school closure.

Apart from a slightly higher use of email (68% vs 82%) and other devices (37% vs 59%), there are no significant differences in the use of learning platforms in schools two week and two months after the Covid-19 school closure.

6.7 Online resources used

What specific online resources does your school find helpful when planning for distance learning?

	Frequency	Percentage
Textbook publisher websites	821	87.4
PDST	589	62.7

Twinkl	782	83.3
IPPN website and resources	352	37.5
Twitter	162	17.3
Instagram	74	7.9
Online patron resource bank	98	10.4
TES.co.uk	82	8.7
NCSE	377	40.1
Other	201	21.4

Table 15. Online resources that are used in schools.
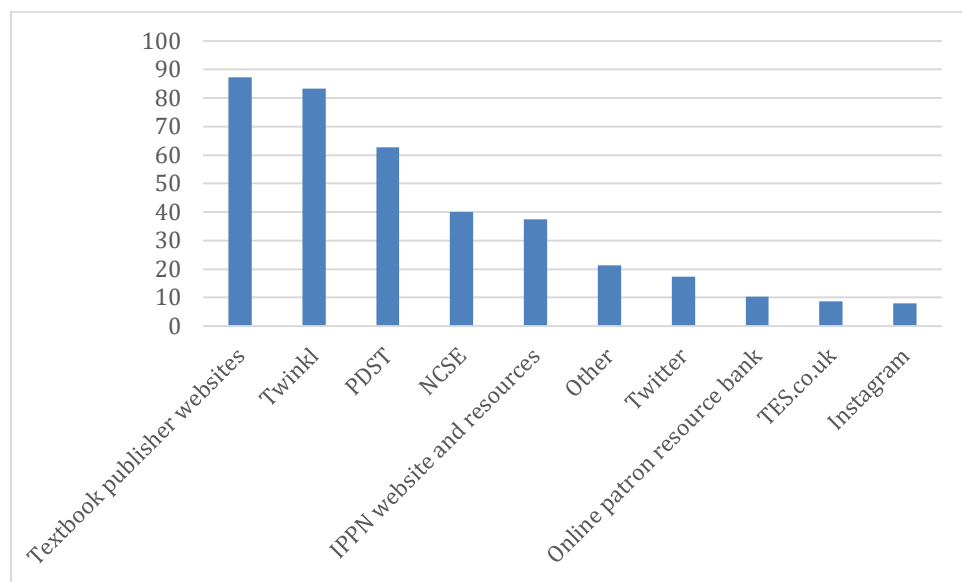
Figure 15. Online resources that are used in schools.

The most frequently used online resources are (1)Textbook publisher websites (n=821, 87.4%), (2) Twinkl (n=782, 83%), and (3) PDST (n=589, 63%). Around 40% participants reported that they use NCSE and IPPN website and resources.

	2 weeks	2 months
Textbook publisher websites	68.4	87.4
PDST	65.9	62.7
Twinkl	90	83.3
Twitter	15.4	17.3
Instagram	7.9	7.9
Online patron resource bank	19.2	10.4
TES.co.uk	8.7	8.7

Table 16. Comparison of the percentage of the online resources used two weeks and two months after the school closure.
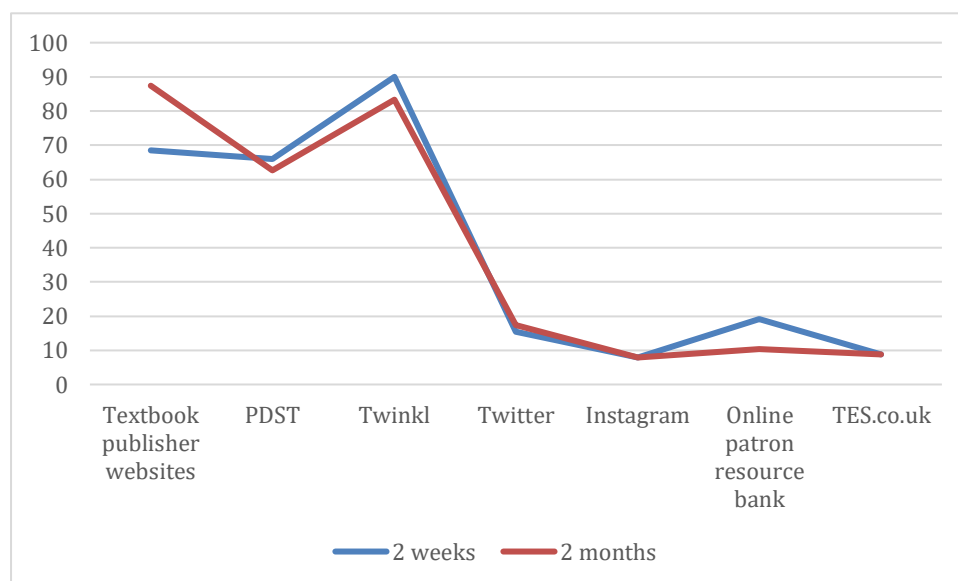
Figure 16. Comparison of the percentage of the online resources used 2 weeks and 2 months after the school closure.

Overall, there is no significant changes between the online resources used two weeks and two months after the school closure, except for one resource, i.e. approx. 20% more school leaders

reported using textbook publisher website two months after the closure than two weeks afterwards. At the same time, fewer school leaders reported using Twinkl (90% vs 83%), PDST (66% vs 63%), and the online patron resource bank (19% vs 10%).

7. Other support required

What additional support do you need?

In this open question, most of the comments were directed to the DES. The responses are discussed under the following headings

- Guidance from the DES

    o Guidance that is focused and timely

    o Guidance for key transitions

- Planning for reopening in September

    o Impact of lack of guidance on wellbeing

- Guidance on distance learning

    o Digital divide

    o Online security

    o Supporting teachers with digital learning

- SEN in the COVID crisis

- Leadership issues and wellbeing- Like trying to do a cryptic crossword without the clues at times.

    o Complex role of the leader

    o How being a teaching principal impacts on wellbeing

    o Leadership and personal wellbeing

- Supports that have worked in enhancing wellbeing since school closures

7.1 Guidance from the DES

Under DES guidance the topics ranged from questions about "how will we get back to teach in September" to the need for information from "the School Meals division", information on "cleaning companies for schools". Some respondents had questions around building works and how they might get answers from the "Building Department of DES". One respondent put it as "Department needs to cop on and give guidance". Responses can be summed up by the following comment from a leader.

Coping well overall but stressed at the thought of how to reopen the school from Monday 18th May for staff, what should we have in place etc.? I do not want to be still waiting in July for directive from HSE, department etc. as to what to do. Need guidance urgently. Also, funding will be an issue. I would hope every school is supported in same way so that we're all approaching this in the same way.

Similar to the previous report, the complexity of being a leader in a Primary School while also dealing with working from home is highlighted many times in leader responses such as the following.

Also, I have yet to hear an acknowledgement from DES to parents nationally that teachers have families too and some are in dire situations with parents in ICU or recently bereaved, children in their homes to 'home school' and partners in frontline services working 12 hour shifts etc. Some parents seem to have the attitude that teachers are at home getting paid while they are the ones doing all the work!

Calls for guidance here can be organised under following main themes:

7.11 Guidance that is focused and timely

There was a lack of guidance in the early days of closure and this added to the complexity of the task of organising distance teaching and learning and putting support in place for students. Also, getting guidance last thing on Friday is causing stress.

The initial weeks were incredibly stressful with little to no guidance from the DES. We devised our own school approach to distance learning at the end of March and things have been going as well as they can since then.

I feel lack of direction from the DES is causing huge stress for principals. We seem to be finding out information in the media rather than any correspondence. Also, there needs to be directive regarding many elements of school return - it cannot be left up to individual schools.

All info from DES arrives far too late e.g. Guidance on supporting students. Even today's [Friday 22nd] advice on accessing schools is too late. Zoom staff meetings are done and arrangements made for Monday. This has been a constant feature. School Leaders are feeling their way…Schools have systems in place by the time guidance arrives. We need guidance now for Sept and not at the end of July when trying to get some form of a break!

I hope direction will be given from the DES for ALL schools, not leaving it up to schools to decide what may work best for them (e.g. children coming back week on/week off etc.)
advise the dept that the response needs to be the same across all schools the current situation where some schools opened to give out books and others did as they were told has caused countless hassle. All because the wording is unclear.

I am and always have been a hard worker, but the hidden expectations and the actual work weight is unbelievable and unsustainable. DES have been atrociously inept. Too many ifs, buts, and maybes.

7.12 Guidance for key transitions

The two transitions mentioned most was the need to get infant pupils into school and the need to help with sixth class transition into secondary school. The sixth-class transition was mentioned as an issue for concern by leaders, parents, teachers and pupils.

7.121 Infant classes

There were many comments around the issue of taking in a new class in September 2020 and how to manage this in such a way so as to help the pupils adjust and embed into Primary School experience. The need to make a connection with the pupil, family and the school is important.

One commentator said "*Infants = highest priority*"

Incoming pupils for September 2020 support for incoming junior infant children.

Enrolment and induction of new intake. How to welcome in June the new infant intake remotely.

Transitions from preschool to Primary school. How to manage new infants - can't do an open day/school visit - how to establish a connection.

7.122 Transition to secondary school

There was various concern voiced here including the communication gap between primary schools and secondary schools in some communities; the lack of celebration and recognition of a period of schooling coming to an end. This inability to mark the ending of a period of schooling was seen as negative for pupil well-being and progression.

I feel support is really needed for sixth class pupils and teachers. Sixth teachers are very concerned for their pupils' emotional wellbeing, their disappointment at not finishing out their school year and teaching them about their transition to secondary school.

My main concern now is the 6th class students - how to help them transition to secondary school and keeping their well-being in mind as they have now missed out on such an important and huge transition, I am hugely concerned for their wellbeing especially in September!

Secondary schools re transition, have had no communication since closure.

For special education settings respondents talked about the need for their pupils to transition into placement. *Transitioning pupils to further placement is very important in my school.*

Students have missed their 6th class graduation. Support for pupils in 6th class due to make confirmation and graduate. However, some respondents commented that the focus should be on feedback that would help the pupils in this transition rather than an event.

7.2 Planning for reopening schools in September

There were over 200 comments on needing specific advice for reopening the schools in September. In general the comments were about the logistics of opening. However, leaders also remind us that they need a break so decisions need to be communicated as soon as possible. Guidance needs to be clear and focused on precise details for all involved. The following comments capture the sentiment of the respondents to this survey. The concerns are complex and very focused on the school as a community. How to plan for social distancing in school was mentioned by the majority of respondents with comments such as: *Support on how to prepare for a return to school with social distancing.*

Respondents like many in society are struggling to reconcile their practices with the demand for social distancing.

How to implement social distancing in special school where there is a lot of hands on contact.

Physical lack of space in many school buildings was mentioned.

Additional accommodation, we have one extra class and nowhere to put them due to delays in school building and have concerns about space in all classes re physical distancing??

Clear guidelines on how to manage hygiene and a 2m physical distance when reopening. How to fast track emergency funding to install toilets and handwashing facilities in time to reopen.

7.21 Impact of lack of guidance on wellbeing for leaders

Many respondents are feeling the pressure of the previous nine weeks leading from a distance. They are also dealing with personal issues around the COVID-19 restrictions. This is having an impact on their own well-being. Many fear not getting a break in July and August if the plans to reopen are not developed ahead of the summer break for schools. This stress is summed up in the follow quote:

Stress has gone from managing the crisis to worrying about managing school re-opening and are we as principals as usual expected to do so on our own. Suddenly we had to become experts on distance learning with no genuine consideration given that we and our staff too were affected and stressed by Covid-19. I suppose now we'll be issued with a circular on 30th June and expected to become experts in health care in schools for managing Coronavirus.

Return to school and practical aspects such as cleaning standards, social distancing aids etc are concerning me. I hope schools will be treated like other public buildings in this regard and

provided with the tools needed. Principals and teachers need to be able to focus on pupils and people not ordering stickers and similar equipment.

We need help in finding out what level of PPE we will need for the return in September, in particular for staff in our ASD classes. What will we need? Where will we source it? Who will pay for it. We need this clarified by June, not in late July or August.

Definitive templates for policy reviews well before deadlines, e.g. Admissions Policy
Clear procedures on what access to buildings means and what employers must have in place. We have engaged very well with our school community and have a good 2 way communication system in place with home - staff. My biggest concern will be how we manage return to the physical school building.

Uncertainty regarding how schools may open is September is now becoming highly stressful for school leaders. Options on how this may occur needs to be addressed in order that leaders can prepare somewhat. Free fall speculation in media comments etc is not helpful. A possible plan forward needs to be set down.

We are well versed and set up for distance learning at this stage. What we need is a roadmap to how we can reopen - guidelines, answers to all the obvious questions like will we need PPE, how can we put 30 pupils in one room, will Junior Infants start on 1st September...and about 100 more questions to go with those!

We need advice and guidance now on preparing to return to school in September. Having worked 7 days a week since school closed I want to prepare for September now and not when

I am supposed to be on holidays in summer. I am exhausted and need a break and can't be waiting day by day for advice and support and advice on July 1st is too late. Any support or guidance that has come has been too late. We have managed prompt responses on our own without guidance.

One of my main concerns is when we return in September and if it is a staggered approach how do I manage my own childcare, teach the children in front of me and those at home. Planning for the class as a whole at home is taking days so I can't imagine having to do this and actually go into school.

I am finding it difficult as I have a young child and my husband has been working part-time and from today back fulltime. I have good days and bad days but very difficult trying to juggle it all. I am exhausted if I am honest but I am happy to follow guidance and advice and do what is actually possible, I think all school leaders should have a common approach for the big things. For example my understanding of access to the building next week is to allow for collection of materials to facilitate remote learning. Yet you hear that some principals are expecting their staff to come in and organise classrooms for Sept etc, To me that is for further down the line. I am also concerned that as a principal I will end up working all Summer to prepare for THE RETURN.

7.3 Distance learning issues and impact on wellbeing

In this survey there are still concerns around distance learning, however, interestingly they mostly concern the use of different platforms and the safety of these. It is clear that respondents have moved to distance teaching in most cases.

Teachers do not need any pressure put on them about providing work, correcting work, supporting pupils' well-being, (NOT our job when children are at home), etc. etc. At the end of the day we have only missed three months. This is not the end of the world and we will catch up next year if we are allowed to concentrate on the basics, the important things, and not be fixated on including things like developing 'scientific method'!!! Teachers are parents too and even they are finding it impossible to keep up with what people are calling 'home-schooling', (which it is actually not!!). We need to not lose the plot and the IPPN need to make sure that this does not happen. Teachers role now should be to point parents in the direction of activities that they might find useful if it is possible for them to do so, without putting any pressure on an already pressurized situation. Teachers should be available to communicate with, advise and reassure parents in this horrible time. This is not a holiday for anyone and teachers should not be under pressure to do 'stuff' purely for the sake of it.

Inadequate professional development on remote teaching for teachers/ leaders, to date.
I appreciate all schools and personnel are different. Some days, I feel I am doing better than other days. I am concerned about pupils who are not engaging with work, yet I don't feel it is appropriate to be phoning stressed parents to encourage engagement especially giving feedback of work or use of additional platforms. Requests for access to schools is ongoing and I feel somewhat incapacitated in not being able to grant that and arrange a suitable mechanism for allowing it.

Recorded videos are not suitable for senior end of the school and don't allow for the important interactions that clarify and consolidate concepts. The kernel of teaching is the interaction, spotting the puzzled look, changing your strategy to ensure understanding, listening, questioning, being responsive and remembering that each student and class is different. It's

about eliciting responses and developing the oral communication skills of the quiet students. It's also a frustrating experience for teachers. Most would run back to the classroom this minute if given the opportunity especially the teachers who also have children at home .

Please give us some definite information as to whether we should be having zoom calls with children and whether children sending images/videos of themselves to teachers is suitable or advised. I have my reservations about both of these issues and feel schools may be leaving themselves wide open without guidance.

I am finding this a huge learning curve for my school. I suppose everyone is in a different situation (staff and families) so it is hard to judge. I feel our biggest challenge with staff is getting them to come on board with new features and platforms. A lot of staff complaining about new platforms like seesaw or zoom and voicing their opinions on this quite loud. This is creating stress for management but also for other staff. Some staff are also doing as little work as possible while others are working overtime. Difficult to manage staff most at this time in my opinion. If department could issue a circular with more specific guidelines, that would be very helpful.

7.31 The digital divide

The issues around access to broadband is still a worry for leaders as reported in this survey. Technology and access to on line platforms is not universal for all schools. Respondents in DEIS schools in particular find this is impacting on their pupils learning and they worry about how they will compensate for this loss of learning when schools reopen.

Access to internet and IT a huge issue for us. No help forthcoming re broadband installation.

All the talk about e learning and online teaching has me feeling completely overwhelmed and inadequate. We're using email and the parents are extremely happy but I'm feeling under huge pressure to do more.

Offer proper internet support to principals and teachers. I've already replaced the hard drive in my laptop and spent a fortune on data for phone etc.

This is an extremely stressful time as we are unable to provide no/very little online help due to broadband issues and lack of devices in homes. We have been providing work packs and it is adequate for moment but if we do not open in September this will be a real issue. Supporting parents via phone is fine for now but....

7.32 Online security

Concerns around online security is very evident in the survey results. This is an issue that requires immediate response from the DES.

Clear guidance re data protection/security re platforms, what should we use/not use for contact - clear direction from DES.

I think an absolute guide step by step from DES about expectations of schools between now and June. Managing parental demands for zoom teaching is getting very difficult. Statement re primary suitability for same is badly needed.

Guidance and specific guidelines on GDPR and legal issues in relation to the use of seesaw, zoom, google classroom etc

7.33 Supporting teachers with distance learning

There is a call for more guidance on distance learning to help teachers negotiate an acceptable level of safe engagement with their pupils.

Raise awareness about Child Protection and to remind teachers that the guidelines still apply and to be vigilant about Child Protection now that pupils are at home all of the time.

Guidance on Child Protection re SEN pupils and individual video calls, clarity that all platforms mentioned are supported by DES assuming correct use, the levels of intrusiveness in the family home when making contact, supporting motivational and focus levels of all given that secondary school students are effectively finished and this impacts on younger primary pupil.

How to support teachers who have no idea what to do in this scenario + Working from home resources (non-existent) and expectations (way too high).

Teacher well-being . Far far too many demands and expectations are too high. I do not agree with the use of Zoom to teach children and it is being forced upon us.

Dealing with teacher expectations as a result of so much emphasis by all on online teaching when realistically you can't teach 30 in one class online... no differentiation, no support for weak children.

7.4 Special Education Needs in COVID crisis

When asked what other supports they needed in schools, many respondents again spoke about their pupils from ASD units and with SEN. This issue came up in the earlier survey (Burke and

Dempsey, 2020) but appears to still be an issue of concern for leaders. This is a significant source of stress for leaders. It comes up in data from all open questions in some form.

I feel that my SEN pupils are losing out. They need very specific hands on guidance which I cannot provide right now. They are losing out daily.

We need transition teams for pupils with SEN, OT, SPEECH AND LANGUAGE, VISITING SERVICES.

Other disability agencies who link in with our ASD children. Our SEN families have not received any contact from social workers, OT, behaviour specialist etc. since school closure.

Supporting vulnerable, at risk children.

Support for children with SEN whose parents are struggling on a daily basis at home.

Support for special schools and support services for families in crisis.

DEIS specific - low education attainment in parents, poverty, addiction in households and child welfare as a result.

Please make urgent recommendations for support for parents of children in ASD units. Some of them are on crisis and feel abandoned.

NABMSE has been a great support for Special Schools re: compliance and legal/Admission to Schools policy etc. However, the pressures on Sp. School Principals that existed pre-COVID-

19 are now magnified. Small ISM Team trying to provide, arrange and/or coordinate support 52 pupils, their families and 60 (yes SIXTY) staff is very wearing, especially given the levels of pay and conditions.

I was appalled with the turn around by the NCSE in relation to the SNA applications. The amount of paperwork requested for an appeal is preposterous considering they are not even considering our initial applications.

I have been really disappointed by the lack of support for school leaders. The front loading model has now come in for SNAs under a different name with not a word of dissent despite all the promises. We've been left for 8 weeks with almost no guidance and there's so many opinions out there about what one can and can't do. I need the IPPN to engage directly.

And as for the deferring of the SNA model, this is abject nonsense, and a total fallacy, the workload has now increased for principals who must justify every second of support provided to students last year and projected for next year in order to try and get a somewhat adequate level of SNA support for their students.

7.41 Leadership issues and wellbeing- Like trying to do a cryptic crossword without the clues at times.

The complexity of leading a Primary School is evident throughout these data. However, we feel it is best captured in the following quote.

It's full on all day even busier than being physically in school.....mentally exhausting! Like trying to do a cryptic crossword without the clues at times!!

The following comments capture the complex role leaders in our schools have and give some insight into the many agencies they need to deal with.

I feel the speed and volume of work is not sustainable. No stakeholder has consideration for the fact that you are supporting 20 staff, 130 families, the wider school community, suppliers, external agencies, parish priests, engaging in CPD, webinars, video conferences with no childcare and 2 parents working from home. People expect prompt responses like they usually receive. It's a most unpleasant experience. I hope that when schools re-open in September the health and well-being of principals is taken into consideration. This is not sustainable and we will be exhausted and suffering from burn out by October.

There is a wealth of information out there but that is half of the problem! Too much information coming in too many directions. The expectations are very difficult to manage. Myself and my staff are online for an average of 10 hours per day, e-mailing, upskilling, messaging, engaging...I know because I surveyed them. This is unsustainable. Many of us have our own young children at home too so as for many other working parents it is very difficult to juggle. We have upskilled in IT at breakneck speed and it is beginning to take its toll. I'm in a group with 28 other principals so I know that it isn't just an experience limited to my school. We want to do our very best for our pupils but that is very challenging at present. To top it all off we are a WBS school and will have to relocate 16 classrooms before September - no idea how to do that while socially distancing etc. Trying to only plan ahead three weeks in advance as the landscape of this job is constantly shifting at present. Honestly thinking of quitting at this point and I LOVE teaching.

Given the circumstances I feel the school community has responded extremely well. I find trying to communicate regularly with so many stakeholders a huge challenge, along with limited IT equipment and support at home and it is extremely time consuming. I'm exhausted! I've found this extremely stressful - can't please everyone. At home on my own with two children. School work never ending answering queries, questions, trying to plan only to have plan overturned. Really difficult.

Trying to find the time to go through all the emails and information available from different organisations is beyond time consuming, especially when coupled with managing numerous work email accounts now in place. A central place for information would be ideal. Many school leaders are also minding their own children while at home, looking after their own parents and there are not enough hours in the day to read everything or watch every webinar.

The school meals initiative while welcome resulted in an extraordinary amount of work for the principal. The notion that principals too are entitled to some holidays seems to be a bizarre notion to the DES. Principals must be always on 24/7/365. This conflicts with the concept of well-being and indeed health and safety. Enough is enough.

7.412 How being a teaching principal impacts on wellbeing

Many respondents are asking for advice as to how to deal with all the demands while also looking after teaching classes. In this survey 43% of respondents are administrative principals and 33% are teaching principals. Nationally 56% of principals also have teaching duty with 44% being administrative principals. The unique challenges faced by teaching principals is very evident in these data.

As a teaching principal I find I am working 7 days a week at present. Saturdays are completely taken over with recording materials for 2 classes. I have 3 young children and a husband who works in a pharmaceutical company. I've never been so stressed and I'm a principal almost 12 years. Having said all this I do find IPPN a huge help. So thank you and well done.

Teaching principals are managing classes(3 in my case) as well as trying to do Admin without Admin days!

As a teaching principal of a very small school, I am finding this very isolating. I have a part time teacher and a part time secretary. There is very little in the way of colleagues to bounce ideas off. I think that is the most difficult part for me. I was on Misneach last week and found that really helpful especially the feeling that you weren't alone in all of this and it was really good to connect with principals in a similar situation. I think it would be really helpful to have meetings like that during this time.

As a parent of two small children under the age of three, and as a teaching principal I find the entire situation unmanageable and stressful.

As a teaching deputy in a large school of 250 pupils with special classes. I am currently thinking of the challenges and stresses that will be facing us now and the months going ahead to have all this in place. And then again in September and the months following that while I teach my class of 30 pupils and continue my admin role and middle management in the school.

I am managing my 3 classes Junior, Senior Infants and 1st class as well as trying to keep up to date with Admin. I also do my best to engage and communicate with all families and children in the school by sending weekly emails. I feel I never leave my laptop!

I find it very overwhelming to have a constant flow of emails and webinars coming in about using zoom seesaw etc. They make me panic about whether I or my teachers are doing enough. Worried that if schools locally start using something different we will be pressurised to jump down the rabbit hole with them. With my own family situation childcare and teaching my own child I cannot possibly commit to webinars at particular times and that is a source of guilt for me.

Working as a teaching principal on line is a serious challenge, far worse than it was before COVID. There is no end to the day, as solving the end of year admin issues gains momentum. Doing well enough and staff really rising to challenge too. Finding it's hard to switch off and really know when I have done enough any day/week. Parents seem very happy so that's reassuring.

7.413 Leadership and personal wellbeing

The complexity of leaders' role during the school closure is having an impact on their well-being.

A lot of mixed opinions from teachers and parents ranging from one extreme to the other. A lot of pressure on principals and schools to keep everyone happy. Discussion on social media can have a negative impact. There are lots of considerations when making decisions that teachers and parents do not see. It is a stressful situation for people which heightens emotions. As school leaders we have to tread carefully and take staff and parent wellbeing into consideration. No one looking out for wellbeing of school leaders. Trying to do the day to day jobs such as class

allocation, junior infant intake, emergency works is taking a backseat to planning for distance learning.

Working from home blurs the lines between work and rest. Having to work from home means I am always "on" and I find myself working from early in the morning until late at night e.g. doing this survey late in the evening. No time to switch off.

Wellbeing, ways to deal with stress. I am generally a calm person who does not stress easily but I have been under pressure on occasions since the closure.

I do feel quite isolated as a principal. I only know about 3 other principals to link in with. I am home schooling 2 children and minding/distracting a 2 year old, all the while doing 9 hours a day of work. I worked through St Patricks weekend and most of Easter. It now looks like no decision will be made about September by the end of June. I think all principals should be allowed a break for July before the madness ramps up again in August. It is an exhausting life at the moment!!

This is all very hard. I have three children who also need support with distance learning on top of trying to support everyone else.

Dealing with ancillary staff. More stressed than normal. Working longer and irregular hours. Coping with the stress from staff members and parents.

The SNA applications has been very stressful. All Principals are frontline and should have full daily access to travel to school. We need childcare as well. My wife is a nurse so frontline

working daily. I am trying to run a school and home school young children as no support available. Working from 7.15 am till 11pm to get everything done, very stressful and no relief in sight until July.

I am a newly appointed principal since last October. This year has become a baptism of fire and the main thing I notice now is my own wellbeing - I feel I haven't time to look after it. There is so much information coming at school principals now and every little thing comes to you now. There is no switch off time. The amount of information is completely overwhelming and some of it not useful at all. There are reminders about looking after the wellbeing of the staff, the wellbeing of the students but I am at a point now where my own wellbeing is beginning to suffer and I am at a burn out point.

7.42 Supports that have worked in enhancing wellbeing since school closures

The following supports were mentioned as being helpful since the school closures. It is important that these supports are continued and enhanced where needed.

INTO website is very helpful though. Principals' email network a huge support. Networking online is the best support for me. The blogs by CEO are very reassuring. Keep this up.

Thanks to all at the IPPN for your outstanding support. You have held the torch to guide us all through this together.

I am very happy overall with the level of support from the IPPN and would hope that it will continue in a similar vein. Knowing IPPN exists and has our backs has helped me to cope. IPPN has done nothing to alarm or pressure me at any time.

Keep us informed on updates on a weekly basis because at home principal have family commitments as well so reminders are vital. The E-scéal updates have been very helpful and really the advice on taking breaks, minding oneself and putting a perspective on expectations.

I found phone support from IPPN very helpful in the past week. We are concerned about managing the return to school for the new school year. Schools need clear, specific, consistent advice from DES on how to manage this. NCSE exceptional review was helpful.

I am so thankful for the IPPN weekly updates. As a newly appointed principal I would be lost without them! Please keep up the wonderful work! And stay safe. I have found Pat Goff's emails to the network very helpful. He sums up the problems and finds the answers. It's helpful to have the information in a nutshell as it were.

Thank you for the regular general support - and prompt telephone support when required
I am satisfied with IPPN support to date, and appreciate how hard you are all working right now. Feel I'm firefighting responding to immediate concerns of parents and staff while seeing principals on network writing policies. Don't think IPPN can do more. Thanks.

7.5 Conclusions

Data from this open question concern the leaders' need for guidance from the DES that is focused and timely. The two key transition moments in Primary Schools, that of introducing pupils to school and helping pupils transition from Primary School are highlighted as being areas of concern for leaders. Planning for reopening in September without clear guidance is causing leaders stress. While distance learning is happening in almost all schools the need for

guidance and training around safety of platforms and good practice is needed. There are concerns about meeting the needs of SEN learners.

The complex role of leading our schools while also working from home is highlighted with many respondents citing that the IPPN and the INTO were good support during this time.

8. Appendix 1 – Key Statistics 2018-2019

Source: https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Key-Statistics/key-statistics-2018-2019.pdf

Pupils in Primary School	
Total number of pupils	567,772
Mainstream	559,548
Of which Special Class Pupils in Mainstream Schools	6,229
Special schools	8,224

Table 17. Pupil numbers in Primary School in 2018-2019

Number of Schools	
Mainstream	3106
Special Schools	134
Total	3240

Table 18. Number of Primary Schools

School Size	
Fewer than 50	566
50-99	681
100-199	748
200-299	547
300-499	428
500+	136
Total	3,106

Table 19. School size

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