

## Newly Appointed Senior Leaders

Newly appointed senior school leaders require targeted professional learning and system support during that critical period at the beginning of their career. This induction phase usually lasts for the first two years of their role. In the international context, specific support and professional learning is generally provided for these first two years. In the research, the likes of Reeves et al, (1997) outlined two stages, the settling into a head teacher post (up to two years) to feeling thoroughly settled (4-10 years).<sup>1</sup> In the 2008 OECD Report, it was stated that “...in other countries, they (induction programmes), run from one to three years and provide a variety of support arrangements for taking up the position and initial steps into school leadership.”<sup>2</sup>

Newly appointed senior school leaders require the highest quality induction process. Providing this is challenging by nature due mainly to the variance in aspirant professional learning experienced by newly appointed senior leaders which currently remains non-compulsory in many jurisdictions including Ireland, and to the demands of the school culture and context they find themselves in. According to recent research by Fitzpatrick’s Consultants commissioned by CSL, the challenges in the provision of learning in the induction period are similar in many jurisdictions and include:

- The contradiction between being theoretically and conceptually challenging, and being practically relevant
- The different work situations of participants
- Solving their problems or dissemination of evidence-based knowledge<sup>3</sup>

The writings of Mc Beath et al. (2009) and Mc Beath et al. (2012) in which international and Scottish studies are combined, list the satisfiers and dissatisfiers associated with the role and the latter are cited by Draper (2003) as:

“No time to do the job, buck stops with the head, limited discretion over staffing appointments, multiple conflicting accountabilities, multiple auditing and reporting, salary differentials and anomalies, inspectorial accountability and work-life balance”<sup>4</sup>

In his presentation, “Reflections on Leadership Challenges in Irish Schools” to the Annual Conference of European Network for Improving Research and Development in Education Leadership and Management, Dr Harold Hislop, Chief Inspector, lists the broad challenges for leadership in the Irish context as:

“The Leading and Assessment Challenge, the Evaluation and Accountability Challenge and the Sustainability and Growth Challenge” stating; “I readily admit that none of the

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<sup>1</sup> Reeves et al (1997) cited by Draper, J (2003) “*Expectation and Experiences of Headship*” Chapter 3 in “*School Leadership*” Third Edition edited by Jim O’ Brien, Donedin Academic Press Ltd. London

<sup>2</sup> Pont B, Nusche D and Moorman H (2008) *Improving School Leadership, Volume 1: Policy and Practice*, OECD

<sup>3</sup> Fitzpatrick Associates: *School Leadership in Ireland and the Centre for School Leadership: Research and Evaluation 2018*.

<sup>4</sup> Draper, J (2016) “*Expectation and Experiences of Headship*” Chapter 3 in “*School Leadership*” Third Edition edited by Jim O’ Brien, London, Donedin Academic Press Ltd.

leadership challenges that I have spoken about is easily addressed and few of the practical tasks arising from them are readily solved.”<sup>5</sup>

According to Earley and Bubb (2013): <sup>6</sup>

“No matter how good leadership preparation programmes and head teachers’ prior experiences are, a major transition occurs in the first year of headship that requires bespoke responses to that particular situation.”

One principal’s experience of the isolation associated with the overwhelming responsibility of their new role is cited by Earley and Bubb – “I have to fight hard against ‘the bunker syndrome’. So much can come at you that if I’m not careful I find I hardly get out of my office into the real world where there’s children and joy and happiness and creativity”.

Cited by the TES Working Group on Leadership (2014), Spillane and Lee (2014) found that “the volume, diversity, and unpredictability of tasks emerge early in the tenure of a newly appointed principal and intensify over the first 3 months on the job, largely due to new principals’ sense of ultimate responsibility.”<sup>7</sup>

Induction therefore, is that critical period in the senior school leader’s role, directly after recruitment and for the first two years in the role. The main challenges include the newly appointed leader understanding context, demonstrating respect for the school’s culture and building sustainable relationships with the school community in order to develop a collaborative vision and to set goals to achieve it.

It is evident from the research that the learning experiences of the newly appointed senior leader is crucial to their successful progression and retention, and that this period in their leadership development warrants the highest quality of professional learning and targeted system support.

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<sup>5</sup> “Reflections on Leadership Challenges in Irish Schools”- Address by Dr Harold Hislop, Chief Inspector, to the Annual Conference of European Network for Improving Research and Development in Education Leadership and Management (2015)

<sup>6</sup> Earley, P. & Bubb, S. (2013). “A Day in the Life of New Head Teachers: Learning from Observation”, *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, 41. 782-799.

<sup>7</sup> Spillane, J.P. and Lee, L.C. (2014). Novice school principals' sense of ultimate responsibility: Problems of practice in transitioning to the principal's office cited by The Report of the TES Working Group on School Leadership (2014), DES Publications