

Most primary principals feel drained by challenges of virus

By Carl O'Brien

The majority of primary school principals feel overwhelmed by the scale of extra tasks and challenges linked to the Covid-19 pandemic, according to a new study.

A survey of 600 principals by researchers at Trinity College Dublin shows most feel their schools have performed well and that teaching staff have adapted to the new conditions.

However, a large majority (78 per cent) feel drained at the end of the work day due to the scale of challenges they face daily.

Head teachers feel their schools have adapted well with the vast majority (92 per cent) agreeing that their teachers changed quickly to adapt to new conditions, solved problems as they arose and quickly responded to change.

Positive attitudes

A similar proportion (96 per cent) also feel their schools have carried out and completing core tasks well.

However, principals are divided in their attitude towards online learning. Almost one-third had positive attitudes towards it and another third had negative attitudes.

From the findings gathered, the researchers have identified three core recommendations.

They include improved communications and greater involvement of principals in decisions which affect them.

This was on the basis that principals expressed a need for clear instructions on how to execute directives, specifically with regard to selection of online learning platforms and communicating with parents.

The study also recommends professional development opportunities such as leadership crisis management training for principals and their teams in order to enhance their ability to cope during the pandemic and future potential crises.

IT infrastructure

In addition, it is recommended that adequate IT infrastructure and support needs are put in place for principals.

This includes ensuring adequate wifi is available, and that teaching staff are equipped with devices and provided with IT professional development in the areas of digital learning and communication.

Dr Na Fu, co-author of the study and an associate professor at Trinity, said primary principals and staff had played a “monumental role” in educating children during the crisis.

“Their contributions have also enabled working parents to continue with their work and keep our economy and society functioning,” she said.

“We appreciate the principals and their staff’s work and acknowledge the urgent support needed for them. This report was based on a collaboration between education and management disciplines. We hope it serves as a tool to make the missing voice of principals to be heard so that we can come together and collectively build a stronger nation beyond the crisis.”

The Irish Primary School Leadership During Covid-19 Principals’ Study was undertaken by academics at Trinity including PhD student Amy Fahy, associate professors Dr Colette Murphy and Dr Fu, along with research assistant Tam Nguyen.
