

Catholic Primary School Management Association

Cumann Bhainistíochta na mBunscoil Caitliceach

14th March 2013

Dear Principal,

CPSMA, on behalf of Boards of Management, is very concerned about the recently negotiated Croke Park II Proposals. These Proposals, if accepted, will have an extremely negative impact on educational outcomes. Boards of Management will not be in a position to deliver an appropriate education to pupils in accordance with the requirements of the 1998 Education Act. Schools will also be faced with significant health & safety issues.

CPSMA is acutely conscious that the country is in a very difficult economic situation. The primary school sector, however, has already made very significant sacrifices through the efforts of the pupils, parents, voluntary members of boards of management, teachers, principals and other school personnel.

CPSMA was not a party to either the first or second Croke Park deals. CPSMA has repeatedly pointed out to the Department of Education & Skills that it is vital that management is represented at these talks. The fact that the voice of management has not been heard is now very evident in the Proposals which have emerged.

A child's earliest years in education are crucial to his/her life chances. Let's view the cuts already made through the eyes of a child who started in primary school in 2008. This child, now in third class, will have suffered as a result of a cut of €24 per pupil (almost 12%) to the capitation grant, is more likely to be in substandard accommodation due to the abolition of the school's maintenance grant, will be suffering a reduction of 15% in resource hours if s/he has special educational needs and must already do without a teacher on the first day his/her teacher needs uncertified sick leave. This pupil's parents will probably have had to engage in fundraising for the school, despite the likelihood that they themselves have suffered a serious fall in living standards. CPSMA's survey regarding Board Finances, in November 2012, highlighted the fact that half of schools rely on fundraising to make ends meet.

What is proposed as part of the recent Croke Park II Deal is simply a bridge too far. Two very significant areas of concern arise: (1) substitute cover being provided by teachers for their absent colleagues and (2) a mooted redeployment panel for SNAs.

1. Substitute Cover Proposal

Under the proposed arrangements, schools will no longer be able to employ a substitute to provide cover for a teacher on any uncertified sick leave day/s, the first day of certified leave, the first day of force majeure leave, death in a family leave, etc. In total this could amount to seven days per annum per teacher and substantially more if certified sick leave is required by a teacher for a number of different periods during the year. There is already a significant number of teacher absences where substitute cover is not provided e.g. Extra Personal Vacation (EPV) days, exam leave, marriage leave, to name but a few. Pupils will find themselves without a teacher for a significant number of days and have additional pupils in their class on other days when their own teacher is required to cover for an absent colleague/s.

Under the Proposals, the current requirement on each teacher to provide 37 hours supervision is to be increased to 49 hours per teacher per annum. The additional time (12 hours) may only be used for *substitution*. The distinction between the primary and post primary sectors in regard to *substitution* was not taken into account. The Department of Education & Skills has long since recognised that the concept of *substitution* does not apply at primary level and as recently as Circular 14/2013 referred to *substitution* as applying in the post primary context only. At the primary level teachers cannot provide

substitute cover for absent colleagues because, in the main, all of them are engaged in full time class teaching themselves. To take the example of a 5/6 teacher school, based on a reasonable estimate of teacher absences, one could predict between 30 to 40 days on which a substitute teacher might be required. Without the facility to employ a substitute teacher, how can a school provide education for the pupils whose teachers(s) is/are absent.

Consider the prospect of dividing classes. How can this work in different sizes of schools? How can this work where there is more than one teacher absent on any given day? How can this work where there is simply no space available in a classroom? How can this be termed education? Alternatively it seems to be posited that teachers who do not teach in the mainstream classroom can be "poached" to provide cover for absent colleagues, which would have the effect of yet again disproportionately affecting those with special educational needs - the most vulnerable - those in need of additional rather than less resources.

The Proposals also create an impossible situation in special schools. One can only imagine that those who dreamed up the Proposals had no understanding of primary schools in general or special schools in particular, nor did they consider the impossibility of asking one colleague in an autism unit to cover the absence of another.

In primary schools 70% of the principals have full time teaching duties. With the erosion of in-school management, principals are being left with an increasingly impossible task. School management owes a debt of gratitude to principals who already give above and beyond the call of duty.

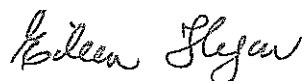
Needless to say there was no consideration of the Health & Safety dilemmas created for Boards of Management or the duty of care owing to pupils or consideration of the requirements on schools to comply with legal obligations under the Organisation of Working Time Act 1997.

2. Mooted Redeployment panel for SNAs

The mooted redeployment panel for SNAs is not contained in the actual agreement but unions have indicated that provision has been made for it. This would be a very retrograde step. It is vital that Boards of Management can ensure that the best person for any particular post is employed in a school. Children with special educational needs should not be used as pawns to secure a deal. There is a suggestion that SNAs delivered an extra 72 hours as part of the first Croke Park Deal (Croke Park 1). This is incorrect. SNAs were always required to work these hours. SNAs agreed to work the hours more flexibly and in doing so in fact got a reduction from 76 to 72 hours under Croke Park 1. Essentially what is being proposed is what could be described as a "closed shop." This is not good for schools, is definitely not good for pupils and is specifically not good for those with special educational needs.

CPSMA has written to the Department of Education & Skills and the Labour Relations Commission regarding its very serious concerns. Schools should also make their voices heard. These arrangements, while possibly generating short term savings in substitution costs will generate far higher and longer lasting costs in terms of pupils' education and opportunities. The third class pupil referred to above has, in effect, become a third class citizen.

Yours sincerely,



Eileen Flynn,
GENERAL SECRETARY

cc Chairperson BoM