⇒ In the era of Zoom, are school leaders under a lens? An analysis of the contemporary discourse surrounding educational leadership in Irish primary schools. ⇐

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Abstract

Education systems nationally and internationally are in a state of flux due to an increased focus on institutional accountability and school improvement initiatives (Devine, Fahie and McGillicuddy, 2013; Rhodes and Brundrett, 2009). As a result of these demands, the concept of a 'school' is "dramatically and irrecoverably changing", with school leaders having to adapt to change in "a much shorter time frame of innovation than ever before" (Harris, 2012, p. 15). This has recently been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic which is "shaking the very fabric of education" (Harris & Jones, 2020, p. 243). It is clear that school leaders are ultimately responsible for responding to the rapid and ever-evolving changes to the concept of a 'school', while also maintaining the status quo of accountability and school improvement initiatives. "The speed of change in this pandemic is unprecedented", which has arguably cemented distributed leadership as the prevailing model of leadership for responding proactively to challenges (Harris & Jones, 2020, p. 246). Rather than view the contemporary context only as a time of turmoil for educational leadership, it should be seen as an opportunity to "reflect on the status quo" (Facer, 2020) and as an "opportunity for real change" (Schleicher, 2020, p. 26). Chief amongst these changes is the need for a reorganisation of the systemic forces acting upon schools and school leaders in order to provide more transparent governance, greater clarity of expectations and additional rapid supports.

Keywords: **educational leadership; distributed leadership; Irish primary schools; discourse analysis; COVID-19.**

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Introduction

This article interrogates leadership in Irish primary schools through the lens of contemporary discourse, and in so doing, demonstrates that school leaders are the 'pinch-point' of the system (McCoy & Carroll, 2020). It is argued that school leaders are gaining greater power in contemporary discourses of educational leadership as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Firstly, this article will define contemporary discourse as this is the lens through which educational leadership is examined. The focus will then turn to exploring school leadership, including the distributed leadership model. Next it

will consider the context in question in order to establish an understanding of the forces which act upon and observe school leaders. This is followed by an analysis of the discourse surrounding educational leadership as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, suggestions are made to address both the difficulties faced by school leaders, as well as opportunities created as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Discourse as an analytical lens

In broad terms, discourse refers to "written or spoken communication" (Pitsoe & Letseka, 2013, p. 24). Discourse can be analysed in different ways, but a Foucauldian approach is utilised in this paper as power is at the core of the discourse of educational leadership. Foucault writes that it is through discourse that we demonstrate who we are. He believed discourse to be, "systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs, and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak" (Lessa, 2006, p. 285). It is through discourse that school leaders are enabled to construct meaning about who they are in relation to others and how their success is understood (Skerritt, 2019). However, discourse is not just about what is said. Of equal importance is who said it, and what is not said, as well as the identification of who can speak as well as those who cannot (Foucault, 1972). Discourse enables those in power to exercise their authority by deciding what is discussed and can support the oppression and marginalisation of others in society (Pitsoe and Letseka, 2013). Those in power use measures of accountability in order to maintain order and control over those subject to control. Power is maintained through observation, the ever-present gaze of the "panopticon" (Foucault, 1977). Observation in contemporary times is aided by the immanent presence and use of social media and digital recording devices. School leaders have always been vigilant of observation by systemic forces, however, they now find themselves also observed by the media and parents. This expectation of being observed increases the self-imposed pressures upon school leaders, including the modification of their behaviour to match what they believe is expected of them.

In brief, those with power control the narrative through a variety of means. These include expectations set, accountability, and what is said (and not said) in national educational policy, academic research, issued guidance, and traditional news media. As discourse is a means of exercising control and influencing behaviour, this paper focuses upon the subjects of control, school leaders, and those who seek to exercise control, the actors at a systems level. In order to understand fully the contemporary discourse of educational leadership, we must first establish who school leaders are, and how leadership is practised within Irish primary schools.

Educational leadership in Irish primary schools

The importance of school leaders has been well established in the literature (Brown et al., 2019) but leadership in education continues to be a rather nebulous concept with many competing definitions and models proposed (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005). This is in part due to the sheer increase in the volume of research investigating leadership since the year 2000, as well as attempts by researchers to "clarify the definition and practices of

effective leadership from different perspectives" (Gumus et al., 2018, p. 41). Taken more broadly, the practice of leadership in schools has been described as "a process of social influence, which maximizes the efforts of others, towards the achievement of a goal" (Kruse, 2013). Leithwood and Riehl build upon this definition by stating that "at the core of most definitions of leadership are two functions: providing direction and exercising influence" (2003, p. 4). In a later work by the same authors, school leadership is defined as, "the work of mobilizing and influencing others to articulate and achieve the school's shared intentions and goals" (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005, p. 14). Common across these definitions, and indeed all definitions of leadership, are two key ideas: influence and vision. School leaders influence others. Yet, this is not dependent on an individual being in a formal leadership position (Bush and Glover, 2014). On the contrary, informal school leaders i.e., those with no titles, may exercise greater influence over others than formal school leaders, such as the principal. They may be motivated by a genuinely held purpose and are not corralled by the managerial burdens of a formal leadership position. A second common theme across these definitions is the notion of direction, vision, or goals. Identifying and setting a goal or vision is not an easy task, and can be difficult to maintain (Fullan, 1992). How ideas are realised in Irish primary schools and who is involved in the process varies depending on the model of leadership adopted.

Leadership in schools has been conceptualised in a number of different models; distributed, transformational, transactional, teacher leadership, as well as the 'great' (wo) man. The distributed leadership model has become the dominant discourse of leadership in the 21st century (Bush and Glover, 2014), with systemic forces in Ireland reinforcing this model as the normative approach (The Inspectorate, 2016; Department of Education and Skills (DES), 2018b; DES, 2018d). The popularity of the distributed leadership model could be attributed as a reaction to the criticisms aimed at hierarchical leadership models such as the 'Great Man' Theory (Gumus et al., 2018; Harris, 2018) and instructional or learning-centred models (Bush and Glover, 2014), as well as the shift toward more democratic collaborative decision-making (Gumus et al., 2018). Furthermore, the distributed leadership model aims to overcome shortcomings in the expertise of school leaders (Cuban, cited in Gumus et al., 2018) by "engaging expertise wherever it exists within the organisation rather than seeking this only through formal position or role" (Harris, 2004, p. 13). In addition, distributed leadership models can harness multiple sources of agency (Leithwood and Mascall, 2008), which can facilitate change initiatives from informal school leaders across the school. Despite its reported benefits, application of distributed leadership is not always straightforward. It requires a "fundamental change" in the ways formal leaders such as principals understand and apply their roles; a move from "exclusive leadership" to "brokering, facilitating and supporting others" (Harris, 2012, p. 8). Within the Irish context, this has not always been successful, with some leaders choosing to simply delegate tasks in "tightly prescribed contexts" to colleagues, a practice termed "licensed leadership" (King & Stevenson, 2017, p. 657). However committed school leaders are to an authentic distribution of leadership, the reality in practice is more complex, with critics claiming distributed leadership to be "chameleon-like" and a "convenient catch all" for any sharing of leadership (Harris, 2012, p. 11).

Educational leadership in Irish primary schools is set out most clearly in *Looking at Our School 2016: A Quality Framework for Primary Schools* (The Inspectorate, 2016). This piece of contemporary discourse identifies school leaders as those in formal leadership roles, while also recognising and valuing the strengths of all teachers as educational leaders regardless of any formal leadership position. Such a categorisation bears an uncanny resemblance to the forms of distributed leadership described by Preedy (2016). Within this policy document distributed leadership models are specifically advocated as an example of the type of highly effective leadership and management which schools should strive to achieve; "He/she **empowers** teachers to take on leadership roles and to lead learning, through the **effective use of distributed leadership models.**" (2016, p. 29, emphasis from original source). *Circular 0070/2018* further demonstrates the importance of distributed leadership and a formal school leadership team. This circular identifies the formal leadership roles in schools, including the designated posts of principal, deputy principal, and assistant principal (I and II), and sets out the distribution of formal leadership posts in Irish schools (Department of Education and Skills, 2018b). Finally, this circular links the criteria for promotion of staff to leadership positions with the aforementioned *Looking at Our School 2016: A Quality Framework for Primary Schools*. In other words, any staff member seeking a promoted post, with the associated increase in pay, must align themselves with the normative approach to school leadership in Ireland – distributed leadership.

The reality of leadership in schools as experienced by the author exposes a far more nuanced situation, where distributed leadership is the espoused approach yet a range of approaches to leadership are employed. This supports claims that leadership models are partial and provide "ideal types" for leaders to "aspire to" (Bush & Glover, 2014, p. 565). There also exists a "slippage between conception and practice" (Macdonald, 2013, p. 141), where the approach advocated in the discourse of educational policy has been transformed at a local level in response to the complex realities of each school. In their role as a member of a national support service for teachers, the author witnessed a range of leadership styles in schools. While each school is governed by the same systemic forces, the leadership approach employed by the school leaders is informed by a range of unique contextual factors. These include the professional skills and experiences of the principal and other leaders, the support provided by the patron body, and the makeup of the school community. Upon reflection, the author agrees with Gumus et al. When they conclude that "there is no best leadership practice" suitable to all contexts and situations; hence, effective leadership practices are highly dependent on the situation in which leaders work" (2018, p. 28).

Educational leadership in Irish primary schools – The reality

While school leaders are being encouraged by policy documents to act in a way that aligns with a distributed model of school leadership, the actions by other actors with 'power' over them can often make this difficult to achieve. School leaders in the Irish primary school sector are subject to systemic forces who implement control through the multiple layers of governance and accountability acting upon school leaders. Chief amongst these systemic forces are the patron body and the Department of Education. The Irish primary school

sector is composed of state-funded primary schools who are categorised based upon their patronage, including religious, multi-denominational and non-denominational bodies (DES, 2020e). The management of schools falls under the auspices of the patron body, who appoint a board of management whose duty it is to "manage the school on behalf of the patron" (Government of Ireland, 1998, p. 19). This management is carried out in adherence with the religious ethos of the patron body and includes the recruitment and employment of staff, including the principal of the school (Government of Ireland, 2012). The principal, who is "accountable to the board of the school for that management", acts as the formal leader of the school and has responsibility for the "day-to-day management of the school", including the guidance and management of teachers and other school staff (Government of Ireland, 2012, p. 5). This management must fall within the beliefs and expectations of the patron body. While principals are accountable to the board of management, they typically also serve as members of the board. This presents a potentially interesting power dynamic where the principal is both the observer and the observed.

Further accountability and regulation are placed upon school leaders as each school is required to "conduct its activities in compliance with any regulations made from time to time by the Minister" (Government of Ireland, 1998, p. 13). These regulations and guidance take the form of policy documents and circular letters issued by the DES. Observation of the compliance of school leaders is undertaken by the DES's equivalent of the 'panopticon', the Inspectorate. Their role is to evaluate and assess the compliance of school leaders (Government of Ireland, 1998), and they are swiftly becoming the sole arbiters of "good teaching" (Simmie et al., 2019). The globalisation, neoliberal policy borrowing and increasing accountability seen in other districts (Devine, Fahie and McGillicuddy, 2013) are also evident in the context of Irish primary schools. School leaders are being held increasingly accountable under national policies of school improvement. In particular, *Looking at Our School 2016: A Quality Framework for Primary Schools* (The Inspectorate, 2016) sets out the framework for the Irish version of school improvement policy, school self-evaluation (SSE).

In relation to SSE, *Circular 0016/2018* states that "schools should take a whole-school approach to identifying the … area to prioritise" (DES, 2018a, p. 3). This approach is supported and further developed in other SSE related documents such as the *Digital Learning Planning Guidelines* (DES, 2018c). This document adds that the vision statement prepared by school leaders should be shared with the school community and amended as necessary to meet the needs of the school. Both national policy documents advocate vision statements being guided by the unique needs of the school; however, the reality is that the discourse of school improvement has prescribed objectives. School leaders were strongly advised by *Circular 0039/2016* to use the SSE process to support the investigation and implementation of the new *Primary Language Curriculum* (DES, 2016). Furthermore, the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018 – 2023* explicitly states that all schools are "required by 2023, to use the SSE process to initiate a wellbeing promotion review and development cycle" (DES, 2018e, p. 5). This contradicts the espoused guidance that school leaders must identify the unique needs of their school when implementing the SSE process and reveals the SSE process as a form of discourse designed to compel school leaders to implement policy goals as set by systemic forces. This demonstrates the power

systemic forces wield over school leaders. It also highlights school leaders as being the 'pinch point' of the system, attempting to address the contextual needs of their schools, while expected to enact all policy directives placed upon them.

Consequently, formal school leaders are striving to enact adopted visions and goals foisted upon them through the discourse of school improvement. This has had mixed results, as some school leaders may be unclear as to the how to achieve the adopted, or artificial, vision in their context. A clear example of this from the author's experience is where school leaders have drawn up a digital learning plan as part of the requirements placed upon them by the *Digital Learning Framework* (DES, 2018d). In some instances, the school leaders are unclear as to their ultimate vision for digital learning in their unique school context and set visions based on their perceptions of what is expected by the instruments of accountability, the Inspectorate. Sadly, this is not unique to the Irish context as school leaders in other jurisdictions are also accountable to external forces and must meet centralised expectations (Hoyle and Wallace, 2018). The key difficulty facing school leaders in Irish primary schools is the inconsistency between the increasing demands placed upon them by systemic factors and the levels of agency and autonomy they are afforded in order to meet these expectations. While it can be argued that the affordance of autonomy and agency at the individual school level is a strength of the Irish context, the difficulty facing school leaders is that as measures of accountability increase, their autonomy and agency decrease and are replaced by licensed leadership (King & Stevenson, 2017, p. 657). Irrespective of the model of leadership in effect in a given Irish primary school, the reality is that school leaders are the pinch point of the system, facing pressures from the top down (systemic forces), as well as the bottom up (relating to their school context).

The ultimate responsibility for the day-to-day running of an Irish primary school falls to the school principal, supported by the school leadership team. These formal school leaders have been shown to be accountable to the Department of Education, patron body, and board of management. This creates an unnecessarily complicated web of governance and accountability which must be navigated on a daily basis. Matters were further complicated during the COVID-19 pandemic as school leaders were forced to ensure that all local arrangements met the guidelines and expectations of their multiple masters, as well as advice from new masters in the form of public health (Health Service Executive (HSE), 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic also served to amplify the power of parents and the media who increased their scrutiny of school leaders as a result of the pandemic (Burke & Dempsey, 2020).

Schooling under a microscope – Leading Irish primary schools during the COVID-19 pandemic

School leaders in the era of COVID-19 find themselves facing a wave of new challenges without any previously identified solutions. As evidence and needs associated with COVID-19 are rapidly changing, schools and school leaders find themselves in an environment where rapid and constant change is to be expected, adding to the complexity and demands of their role (Dunn, 2020). Cognisant of the evolving context of COVID-19

and its impact upon school leaders, this analysis is restricted to events which took place between the months of March and December 2020. In an attempt to curb the spread of COVID-19, education systems around the world were halted abruptly in early 2020 (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2020; Netolicky, 2020; Harris and Jones, 2020). In line with their international counterparts, the DES closed Irish primary schools on 12 March 2020. While school buildings were closed, greater autonomy and power were handed over by the DES to school leaders, to make local arrangements to facilitate learning to continue in an altered way from students' homes (Doyle, 2020; Fahy et al., 2020). Moving education from the classroom to the sitting room is not a change that school leaders, or parents, were prepared for. The following section analyses the contemporary discourse of educational leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic. Where-in the additional pressures and increasing perceptions of surveillance experienced by school leaders reportedly pushed them toward burnout (Mangan, 2020; Fahy et al., 2020).

Over the course of the months of March to December 2020, the author contends that previously established power relationships began to shift as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is in part due to previously less prominent actors, including parents and the media, exerting greater power over the discourse of Irish primary education. These shifts in power relationships corresponded to different events during the COVID-19 pandemic and led to certain reactions in school leaders. These can be represented in three key phases; surviving, preparing, and approaching burnout, represented below. Across these three phases the power dynamic in contemporary discourse began to shift as the subjects of control, school leaders, began to gain greater power over the discourse through use of traditional and social media. Correspondingly, systemic forces, particularly the DES, began to lose control over the discourse of educational leadership as they came under increased scrutiny from the media and parents (Burke & Dempsey, 2020).

Key phases of COVID-19 for school leaders in Irish primary schools (March – December 2020)

Phase one: Surviving

During the initial 'survival' phase, the DES and related systemic forces, exercised power over school leaders through their control of the discourse and by maintaining a Foucauldian gaze. This phase was typified by an increased perception of observation of school leaders, by parents in particular, as they initially scrambled to "continue to plan lessons and, where possible, provide online resources for students or online lessons" as tasked by guidance documents (DES, 2020c). Arrangements for continuing educational provision during school closures were put in place by school leaders. However, the initial absence of clear direction from systemic forces resulted in a variability of approaches to distance learning across schools (McBride & O'Brien, 2020). This in turn led to school leaders and teachers fearing comparison of teachers and schools by parents (Burke and Dempsey, 2020). Despite vast numbers of requests by school leaders for clear guidance (Burke and Dempsey, 2020), successive documents issued by systemic forces failed to provide any firm direction to school leaders (DES, 2020a). Rather, principals were advised

to use their "professional expertise to decide upon appropriate online resources that match the intended learning". This constituted a further example of licensed leadership and this resulted in a fragmentation of approaches to remote learning provision across the sector, with two negative outcomes. Firstly, the potential widening of inequalities in education and skills between students. Variability in a school's capacity and approach to providing distance learning opportunities could compound pre-existing socio-economic differences in educational attainment (Doyle, 2020, p. 2). Secondly, variability of approach across schools came under the lens in the discourse from parents and the media, with the work of school leaders scrutinised and even demeaned by some media outlets (O'Connell, 2020). The increased pressure caused by the 'panopticon' was further substantiated when school leaders identified "action to reduce the fear of competition and comparison between schools and teachers" amongst the key supports required during COVID-19 (Burke & Dempsey, 2020, p. 18). The scrutinous Foucauldian gaze has only added to the pressures facing school leaders who judge their own successes (or failures) and identity based upon popular discourse.

The additional pressures placed upon school leaders have had a negative impact on their well-being. School leaders are the 'pinch point' of the primary education system. If their well-being is not considered and protected it could result in the loss of such leaders, which would ultimately cause even greater difficulties for the education system. During the initial 'survival' phase McCoy and Carroll reported that many school leaders felt the support provided to them by systemic forces did not match the support they were providing to their school communities (2020). Measures need to be put in place for any future school closures which account for the additional workload and support provided by school leaders, including supporting and motivating staff and students, communicating with the school community as well as reacting to unforeseen challenges.

Phase two: Preparing

The second phase proposed by the author, 'preparing', was chiefly characterised by preparations to re-open schools for the new academic year and the loss of trust between school leaders and the systemic forces acting upon them (Fahy et al., 2020; Golden, 2020). For school leaders preparing to re-open schools during these demanding and chaotic circumstances, the pressure is relentless, the options are limited, the sleepless nights are frequent (Harris and Jones, 2020). In addition to the normal preparations for a new term, school leaders were attempting simultaneously to find solutions to new challenges including social distancing, additional cleaning procedures, as well as how to cater for staff and students who are immunocompromised. The well-being of school leaders was again flagged during this phase with school leaders reporting "severely impacted" work-life balances (Carroll & McCoy, 2020). Well-being of school leaders was further eroded during this phase in tandem with a loss of trust in systemic forces. Trust is an important component of leadership (Daly, 2009), with trustworthiness considered essential when leading within a crisis (Netolicky, 2020). However, during this phase trust in systemic forces began to waver, both from school leaders and in the wider national discourse. This was attributed to a perceived a lack of support and guidance from the DES (Fahy et al., 2020;

Burke and Dempsey, 2020; Casey and McConnell, 2020), and further compounded by the issuance of communications to school leaders at times that did not facilitate the seeking of clarifications. These include school holidays or at the close of business on a Friday (Fahy et al., 2020; Department of Education and Skills, 2020b; Department of Education and Skills, 2020d). Due to the timings, rate and variety of discourse issued by systemic forces, confusion arose amongst school leaders. Successive guidance and document updates were published in part due to the evolving understanding of COVID-19 but can also be attributed to omissions or errors within documents (Moore, 2020). An attempt to allay this confusion was made by the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) (2020) through the creation of a COVID-19 Support Hub; an action which correspondingly enabled the INTO to exercise some control over contemporary discourse. While the INTO is not a new actor in the discourse of educational leadership in Irish primary schools, this action further demonstrates how school leaders and the forces supporting them began to exert power over the popular discourse during this phase of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Phase three: Approaching burnout

The third phase is associated with a shift in the power dynamic, whereby the power held over school leaders by systemic forces was lessened and school leaders began to use contemporary discourse to exercise power over systemic forces through the 'panopticon'. This phase is labelled to reflect the discourse of school leaders at the time, who were reportedly pushed toward burnout (Mangan, 2020; Fahy et al., 2020). At this stage of the pandemic, in part due to the experience of remote learning, parents and the media had come to acknowledge the true workload of teachers and school leaders (Gottlieb and Schneider, 2020). This resulted in an increase in observation and expectation of systemic forces, particularly the DES, to provide guidance and support to school leaders as the new term began. The DES came under scrutiny within contemporary discourse in relation to perceived failures in supporting school leaders, most notably "#fakesanitiser" (Lydon, 2020). An incident involving a hand sanitiser widely used in schools due to its inclusion on the DES procurement framework was being recalled due to safety concerns (McNulty, 2020). Resultingly, school leaders were placed under additional pressures to remove and replace these defective products at short notice, which proved an unnecessary addition to the workload of school leaders. Some school leaders reported feeling increasingly over-worked during this phase, in part due to a lack of time off as a result of the COVID-19 crisis (Fahy et al., 2020). Despite summer preparations, school leaders faced novel organisational challenges in the new term relating to social distancing of staff and intensified cleaning. An unexpected challenge reported by school leaders was the emotional burden relating to COVID-19 contact tracing (Fleming et al., 2020) and the reported inefficiencies of this system in relation to schools (O'Kelly, 2020). The dissatisfaction of school leaders during this phase was best captured in a statement from the President of the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) where he severely criticised the lack of support and guidance from systemic forces (White, 2020). This criticism of systemic forces extended beyond school leaders and their supporters, with elected representatives stating that, "school leaders are keeping schools open in spite of the DES" (Ó Ríordáin, 2020). Power relationships within

contemporary discourse have shifted so that school leaders are no longer subjects of control, instead they have begun to wield power of their own. A question that needs to be asked, however, is whether this shift in power relationships will continue to progress as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve?

Conclusion

This paper has analysed contemporary discourse of educational leadership in the Irish primary school sector through a Foucauldian lens. It has explored school leadership practices and the forces which acted upon the work of school leaders prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. With this contextual understanding, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic between March – December 2020 were then interrogated, with a focus on the power dynamic within contemporary discourse. This, however, is not a time to be disheartened. The pandemic has shown the complexities of vision and action undertaken by school leaders within their unique contexts in order to overcome the most pressing challenges and keep schools operating. Following this time of change, it is this author's view that we disrupt the status quo (Facer, 2020) and provide a system of governance whereby professional school managers take the administrative burdens of management from school leaders so that they may focus their full attention on learning, teaching and assessment within their schools. It is anticipated that such a reform would help to alleviate the conflicting demands placed upon school leaders by their multiple masters at a systemic level as the professional school manager would serve as a form of filter or conduit, where school leaders are presented only with communications and initiatives relevant to their role as leaders of education within their schools. Such a reform would have to be financed correctly at a systemic level to ensure a uniformity of approach across schools and avoid a fractured system where school managers function differently based upon the beliefs of the patron body. While school leaders will ultimately always be accountable to systemic forces, perhaps the COVID-19 pandemic provides an opportunity for distributed leadership to be truly enacted across the primary education system. This would facilitate school leaders to "respond to rapidly changing circumstances" by enabling policies and practices to move quickly from "high-level rhetoric to implementation down through the organisation" (Brown et al., 2019, p. 470). Furthermore, the DES could also strive to provide clear guidance, along with the requisite supports as mandated by school leaders (Burke and Dempsey, 2020). Alongside the appointment of professional school managers, these proposed changes could benefit the well-being of school leaders and lead to an improved system of primary education in Ireland. A system where schools are understood as more complex and valuable to students than "getting them into seats and raising their scores" (Gottlieb and Schneider, 2020, p. 25).

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