



# 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Management Systems Essential to Implementing and Sustaining Educational Reform in Irish Second-level Schools



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## Good Management Key to Organisational Success

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There is general acknowledgement that the success of any organisation or project depends heavily on the way it is managed, irrespective of whether it is a football team, a bank, a nation, Irish Water, or the Microsoft Corporation. Critical here is organisational structure and the capacity, authority, responsibility and accountability of each manager in the management matrix; and every successful organisation is only too aware of this. Even those with an elementary understanding of organisational theory appreciate that unless organisations establish cohesive and efficient management structures their capacity to set and achieve organisational goals will hinge on a confluence of chance developments.

Besides, management experts generally concur that the notion of the single omnipotent, heroic leader is redundant in today’s organic and complex organisations. Today, dispersed leadership and management are deemed critical to organisations defining and achieving their macro and micro goals. Here the term ‘manager’ is applied to someone who has clear responsibility for a particular set of functions, has the authority required to undertake those functions, and is held accountable for those functions being carried out to an agreed standard.

While our earlier understanding about the number of subordinates that should report to any particular manager has changed, given developments in information technology and organisational structure, there is, nevertheless, a limit to the number of staff that should report to a manager of any kind.

## School Management Structures Ignore Organisational Theory and Management Science

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Regrettably, the management structures that have been put in place for Irish schools substantially ignore decades of development and research in the cognate fields of organisational theory and management science. Notwithstanding the very significant resources invested in the post of responsibility structures in our schools, the principal is still the only person with the manifest authority to lead and manage other staff. Of course many post holders lead and manage staff; but they do not necessarily have the authority to do so, nor do they have clear responsibility for doing so, nor are they held accountable for doing so.

Essentially, the post of responsibility system (middle management) in our schools is not fit-for-purpose and this is not the fault of principals, deputy principals or post holders. The management structure is simply not appropriate to what is required to ensure the effective management of schools in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and there is little that can be done to the present structure to remedy this fatal defect. We need a new paradigm.

## Current Post of Responsibility System

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The current post system may be characterised as follows. Most post holders were appointed on the basis of seniority. Schools can only advertise posts that all qualified teachers can undertake – irrespective of their subject or other expertise; consequently, posts,

such as ICT coordinator or subject faculty coordinator can only be advertised if it is demonstrable that the post's duties can be undertaken by all qualified teachers with a stipulated number of years of experience. While there is a list of duties associated with each post there is no clear connection between those duties and the person who fills the post. Post holders do not have explicit authority, or feel they do not have such authority, to carry out the functions associated with their post. Indeed, the whole management culture of schools runs counter to anyone other than the principal having the authority to manage other staff. There is no real evaluation of the way duties are carried out. And, most importantly, post holders are not held accountable for the performance of those duties in the way that they could expect to be held accountable in industry and commerce.

Many post holders go well beyond what is required of them in carrying out their duties. But even in a school where every post holder carries out his/her duties in a highly conscientious manner, the whole nature of the posts system is such that principals still carry an unreasonable proportion of responsibility for the management of their schools.

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## Workload of Principals Unconscionable

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In effect, in a school with 60 teachers, all report to the principal and no other member of staff has the authority to either lead or manage staff. Even if the principal's sole function was to lead and manage the teaching staff, this situation would be impossible to defend in other than extremely small schools. Of course, the reality is that the workload of second level principals is unconscionable and growing by the day as raft after raft of new responsibilities land on his/her desk. S/he is not only ultimately responsible for everything that happens in a school, as any CEO is, but s/he has practical day-to-day responsibility for even the most prosaic of activities – caretaking, maintenance, fundraising, cleaning, security and so on.

To illustrate the growing workload of principals we need only look at the new obligations that have appeared on principals' in-trays in relatively recent times – procedures for addressing teacher underperformance, the

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implementation of the Junior Cycle Framework, school self-evaluation, new models for the placement of trainee teachers in our schools, new models for the induction and probation of newly qualified teachers, the action plan and procedures on bullying, implementing the Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention, and establishing and sustaining student support teams. The instinctive rejoinder to this is: why do they not delegate more? But to whom can they delegate given the structure and culture of our school management system?

## Principals and Deputy Principals Need Time and Space to Lead Reforms

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If principals and deputy principals are to lead these and other reforms, we must provide them with the middle management structures and supports essential to doing so. The reality is that without fit-for-purpose middle management, our schools will not be able to deliver sustainable reform. So we are faced with a dilemma: introduce reforms without any real prospect of them being sustainable or commit to changing the way we manage our schools and devise a management structure that has the capacity to meet the needs of schools.

In stating a stark case for reforming the way we manage our schools, the current budgetary imperatives facing the State are not being ignored. While we may not, at this point, be able to resource fully a new middle management system for schools, we must urgently devise a new fit-for-purpose management model for schools and, from the moment this has been devised, all subsequent

appointments to posts of responsibility must be made in accordance with the new framework.

The longer we delay the construction of a new management architecture, the longer it will take us to reach our goal of all schools having a 21<sup>st</sup> century management structure in place – a structure where each post holder is appointed exclusively on the basis of his/her capacity to fill the post effectively, where each post holder has authority and responsibility for specific functions (functions that include the management of other staff and students) and is held accountable for the way these functions are performed. When we reach that goal we can truly say that we have had real public service reform in the management of our schools.

## What Might a 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Management System Look like?

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Recently, I had the opportunity to look at how schools are managed in New South Wales (NSW) and to talk with teachers, unions and management about their system. In a sense, it was a trip down memory lane because I had worked in NSW for most of the '70s and '80s and saw the system develop at first hand.

The first thing to say about the management system in NSW schools, both Catholic and State, is that the management function (including the management of staff) is shared across a significant number of senior staff, thus providing principals with the time and space to take on a strategic leadership role.

The following describes the management

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system in one of the Catholic high schools I visited and spoke with the principal, one of the deputy principals, several senior post holders and members of the teaching and support staff. The school is coeducational and has an enrolment of 990 students. The entitlement of schools to middle management posts is related to school size so not all schools would have the same number of management posts. Also, depending on the size of the school, posts with similar titles attract different salary allowances but the detail of this is beyond the scope of this paper.

A diagrammatic representation of the school's management system is set out on pages 8 & 9.

The school has two assistant principals (analogous to deputy principals in Ireland) – one with responsibility for student welfare and the other with responsibility for the curriculum. A team of six student coordinators (one per year group) report to the assistant principal for student welfare and a team of 11 studies coordinators report to the assistant

principal with responsibility for the curriculum. In smaller schools, a studies coordinator would have responsibility for more than one subject area.

All appointments to middle management posts are made on the basis of capacity to undertake all duties associated with a specific post to a high standard. Those appointed to these posts serve a period of probation and, in the Catholic schools' system, appointments to all posts below the level of assistant principal are made for a five-to-six year period, though it is open to those whose term of office is concluding to reapply for the posts they are vacating.

## Assistant Principal – Student Welfare

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The assistant principal for student welfare, as well as serving as a member of the School Executive Team has two key areas of responsibility:

- the leadership and management of the student pastoral care programme and team – the six student coordinators, the school counsellor, and other staff as appropriate; and
- the daily organisation and smooth running of the school.

These two overarching responsibilities comprehend, inter alia, responsibility for the following.

- Providing staff with access to appropriate professional development around student pastoral care.
- The development and implementation of a student leadership development programme.
- Working with student coordinators around matters of good order, including

matters such as student behaviour, punctuality, tone of the school, school uniform, and attendance.

- The operation of the student discipline system – entailing responsibility for contacting parents in cases where suspension or other major disciplinary action is being considered and keeping the principal informed on such developments as appropriate.
- Holding regular meetings with student coordinators in order to coordinate and support their work.
- Preparing and disseminating daily substitution rosters and daily notices to staff and students.
- Facilitating whole school and year group assemblies and sharing responsibility with the Assistant Principal – Curriculum for the running of School Assemblies.
- Supervising and monitoring school maintenance.
- The coordination of school events and the management of school's induction and transition programmes – as students enter the school in year 7 and

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as students move from Junior Cycle to Senior Cycle at the interface between years 10 and 11.

- Consulting with the Assistant Principal Curriculum regarding staffing and timetabling matters.

## Assistant Principal – Curriculum

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The assistant principal for curriculum matters is a member of the School Executive Team and has responsibility for the total school curriculum, including the co-curriculum. This covers its content, its quality, its delivery, and how it interfaces with staff and students. The work of this assistant principal comprehends the following.

- The daily organisation and smooth running of the school from a curricular perspective.
- Maintaining an overview of the needs and content of all curriculum areas and ensuring that the curriculum is appropriate to the needs of all students.
- Keeping staff, students and parents fully informed on all curricular matters.
- Leading, supervising and coordinating the work of the studies coordinators, chairing their regular meetings and maintaining academic standards.
- Providing leadership and professional development for all staff in curricular, pedagogical (teaching and learning) and assessment matters.
- Ensuring that appropriate education programmes are available for gifted students, English as an additional language (EAL) students and those with special education needs.
- Leading curricular reform.

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- Leading the implementation, evaluation and updating of the school assessment policy and other associated policies.
- Ensuring the realism, validity and reliability of all student assessment procedures.
- Ensuring that all requirements in relation to the School Certificate and Higher School Certificate are observed.
- Constructing an assessment calendar for each year group, examination timetables and supervision rosters.
- The reporting and recording procedures used for all subject areas.
- The allocation of students to subject groups and keeping staff informed about new and departing students.
- Organising the ordering of mock exam papers.
- Providing leadership and support for studies coordinators in ensuring good order and discipline in the classroom and advising staff on appropriate responses to disciplinary situations arising in the classroom.
- In consultation with the relevant Studies and Student Coordinator contacting parents in cases where

# Management System in a 990 student high school in Australia

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Assistant Principal (student welfare) is a member of the School Executive Team and has two key areas of responsibility:

- the leadership and management of the student pastoral care programme and team – 6 student coordinators, the school counsellor, and other staff as appropriate; and
- the daily organisation and smooth running of the school.



English Studies  
Coordinator



Maths Studies  
Coordinator



Modern Languages  
Studies Coordinator



Science Studies  
Coordinator



Technical Subjects  
Studies Coordinator



Artistic Subjects  
Studies Coordinator



A total of 11  
Studies Coordinators



**Studies coordinators** are responsible for the promotion, direction and coordination of an efficient and effective operation within the subject areas for which they have responsibility. Their authority extends to those staff members (teachers and specialised staff) and those courses and elements of school administration operating under the umbrella of their specific subject area/s. They are concerned with the quality of education in the school.



1st Year Student  
Coordinator



2nd Year Student  
Coordinator



3rd Year Student  
Coordinator



4th Year Student  
Coordinator



5th Year Student  
Coordinator



6th Year Student  
Coordinator



School Counsellor  
and other staff  
as appropriate



**Student coordinators** are responsible to the Principal, through the Assistant Principal (Student Welfare) for all aspects of student welfare in a particular year group. They also have responsibility for administration and organisation for the year group. In this role, the coordinator has to work in close cooperation with the class tutors and the other teachers teaching the year group and his/her authority extends to those staff (teachers and specialised staff) who are involved in one way or another with the students under their care.

suspension or other major disciplinary action is being contemplated and keeping the Principal informed on such developments as appropriate.

- Alternating with the Assistant Principal – Student Welfare in the running of School Assemblies.
- Overseeing staffing and staff planning, in consultation with the studies coordinators.
- Overseeing the construction of the school timetable.
- Maintaining an open communication with parents regarding students' courses of studies and any changes that may need to be made to those courses.
- Providing relevant curriculum information and guidance to students and their parents as part of the school's transition and induction programmes.
- Motivating staff to promote amongst students a positive attitude towards learning and towards achieving to their full academic potential.
- Informing all staff of in-service courses.

## Studies Coordinators

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The studies coordinators are responsible for the promotion, direction and coordination of an efficient and effective operation within the subject areas for which they have responsibility.

The authority of the studies coordinators extends to those staff members (teachers and specialised staff) and those courses and elements of school administration operating under the umbrella of their specific subject area/s. Studies Coordinators are concerned with the quality of education in the school. On an individual basis, each studies coordinator is responsible for excellence in his/

her subject department, and jointly, the studies coordinators in collaboration with the Assistant Principal (Curriculum) are responsible for the school's academic standards. Studies coordinators are expected to be available to teachers to assist them to achieve the aims and objectives of the courses they teach and, in this context have the following duties.

- Maintaining, developing and promoting the academic curriculum.
- Providing educational leadership for their subject area/s.
- Directing and supervising the use and maintenance of equipment and other teaching and learning resources within their subject areas.
- Specifying curricular policy, aims and objectives for each year group and/or course.
- Producing and maintaining teaching programmes.
- Evaluating current courses and making recommendations for curriculum revision.
- Ensuring that all curricular requirements of the NSW Syllabi are met.

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- Assisting the School Executive in: the timetabling of classes, the allocation of teachers to classes, the organisation and implementation of assessment programmes (conveying information and marks to students and parents; processing and keeping secure records of assessment marks) and supporting and promoting school policies around curricular matters, e.g. homework.
- Holding regular subject department meetings and providing minutes of such meetings to department staff, assistant principals and principal.
- Coordinating and assisting teachers in the formulation of their teaching strategies and assessment procedures.
- Being thoroughly aware of the manner in which courses are being taught by staff.
- Facilitating the setting of examinations, the marking of papers and the computation, recording and updating of results.
- Encouraging and giving direction and assistance to individual teachers.
- Fostering a professional approach to the teaching of their subject/s by: keeping abreast of current developments, maintaining relevant text books and other instructional materials, and drawing the attention of staff to relevant publications, new teaching materials/technology and in-service training opportunities.
- Facilitating the professional development of subject department staff.
- Giving special assistance to newly qualified teachers.
- Evaluating staff working under their supervision and assisting teachers in relation to attendance and punctuality.
- Maintaining good communication with Student Coordinators.
- Supporting staff with student discipline issues that occur in classes in their subject/s area.
- Counselling and encouraging students as appropriate about course and subject choice/change.
- Maintaining accurate class lists for all classes within their department.

## Student Coordinators

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the class tutors and the other teachers teaching the year group.

The Student Coordinator has specific responsibility for the following.

- Assisting the School Executive in educational leadership through participation in decision making processes especially in relation to pastoral care and welfare programmes.
- Fostering a culture that enhances educational outcomes, and emotional, social and spiritual development, for all students.
- Engaging with studies coordinators in establishing the conditions for learning through pastoral care.
- Modelling exemplary teaching practice.
- Supporting school staff in the delivery of quality teaching and learning.
- Building positive partnerships with parents/carers and the wider community.
- Having a personal interest in and concern for all students in the year – especially those with special needs.
- Being available to students for the discussion of their personal concerns.
- Being aware of the overall academic, behavioural, emotional, medical and social development of each student, with a view to providing assistance and guidance, and if necessary communicating with staff and parents.
- Liaising with studies coordinators when subject-specific issues arise.
- Fostering student respect (for self, others and property) and courtesy.
- Liaising with the School Counsellor, the Learning Support Coordinator and appropriate external support agencies, as appropriate.
- Promoting opportunities for student social development, at their level of development.
- Providing age-appropriate opportunities for student leadership.
- Interviewing students, where appropriate, and liaising with classroom teachers and relevant studies coordinators about teaching and learning problems.
- Communicating regularly with class tutors regarding student welfare and administration.
- Communicating with subject teachers, as required, to discuss student progress or needs.
- Reading and checking term reports and working with class tutors and others to ensure a follow up process following the issuing of term reports.
- Maintaining effective student welfare records.
- Monitoring student punctuality and attendance daily and contacting parents when necessary.
- Meeting regularly with the Assistant Principal (Welfare) and other Student Coordinators.

## Where to from Here?

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The description of the disparate functions that need to be managed in a school may seem over-elaborate. Yet, in this writer's 17-year experience as a second level principal, it very much understates the complexity of today's second-level school. Regrettably, many whose actions impact on the job of a school principal, lack a real appreciation of what effective principalship demands in 2014. From a compliance perspective alone, schools have their actions circumscribed by hundreds of Department of Education and Skills (DES) circulars (500 active circulars on the DES website), as well as a growing body of forms, guidelines, procedures, legislation and strategy documents. And ultimately it is the principal who is responsible for ensuring such compliance. It is hardly surprising to note that the number of suitable applicants for principalships is dwindling to the point of crisis. If we are to improve our school management structures, we must first understand the nature of the task.

We need to build a consensus about what the practice of management means for the 21<sup>st</sup> century school. Currently, there is real suspicion in the education sector about the implications of establishing effective management structures in our schools, with many believing that doing so would amount to implementing something along the lines of what Fayol, Taylor or Weber would have advocated in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century – with the emphasis on division of labour and managers 'commanding and controlling' those they manage. Not unreasonably, teachers see themselves as highly qualified professionals and fear the imposition of 'control systems' that would seriously

limit their capacity for independent professional practice tailored to meet the needs of individual learners. For that reason, a flat, minimalist management approach, with the principal as *primus inter pares* and the only member of staff with the authority to manage others, has become embedded in our schools. Indeed, even in the case of the principal, his/her capacity is seriously circumscribed.

This flat management system may not have presented serious difficulties in schools delivering a relatively static curriculum to a rather homogeneous group of learners. But in the complex organic organisation that is the 21<sup>st</sup> century school, where emphasis is placed not only on the delivery of a permanently evolving curriculum but also on the holistic welfare and development of a student group whose needs are changing by the day, the need for a contemporary management system is manifest – not a system that focuses on 'commanding and controlling' but a system that focuses on a decentralisation of managerial decisions, change management, capacity building, mentoring, empowerment, professional discussion, teamwork and the interdependence of all staff, the school as a learning organisation and the commitment and capacity of

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all staff to updating continuously their knowledge, skills and competences; and performance management for all staff, those who teach and those who manage.

In the second decade of the third millennium, effective management not only enables the school to set and achieve its goals but it can be a powerful force for empowering teachers and improving their sense of professional satisfaction at a time when the morale of teachers is being seriously undermined right across Europe. It can reduce the feeling of isolation that many teachers feel and build collaboration among teachers and support systems for teachers. But, before this can be done effectively, we need to build a clear understanding between the Department of Education and Skills, school management bodies and the teachers' unions about what leadership and management entails in the school context.

Our current economic situation limits our capacity to implement a whole new school management structure at this point. It does not, however, limit our ability to develop a new management

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architecture nor does it prevent us from making a real start to reforming the way we manage our schools by ensuring that all future post appointments are in accordance with the new paradigm, once it is in place.

Indeed, we could commence immediately, in advance of the new architecture being developed, if the posts it is hoped will be established to support the realisation of the Junior Cycle Framework were to be filled entirely on the basis of the capacity of applicants to 'do the job' and if the job specification made specific provision for the management of staff. Those appointed to these positions would need to be given explicit authority to undertake all functions associated with their roles. And they would need to be held accountable for carrying out their functions by instituting a clear performance management process.

If a new management structure were in place, we should be able to incentivise current post holders to transfer to the new system. Remember, this was done some dozen years ago when deputy principals who had been appointed on the basis of seniority agreed to take on expanded roles in return for increased deputy principal allowances.

The implementation of a fit-for-purpose middle management system in schools would provide opportunities for building leadership and management capacity in schools. Currently, a new principal only really gets to appreciate what management and leadership really entail when s/he takes on the role. A re-imagined middle management structure, along the lines of what operates in NSW, would give aspirant school leaders the opportunity to experience the management role at a number of levels before ever applying for a principalship. It is only in a school that one can be appointed CEO without having been exposed to the challenges of management and leadership on a graduated scale before assuming the CEO's position and, at that point, it really is too late to realise that one might not be suited to such a role.

If we insist on waiting until the economy has recovered before we commence

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to reform our school management system, there is every possibility that the very necessary educational reforms we are currently seeking to implement will have floundered and a generation of young people will have been deprived of opportunities critical to them making the most of their lives – in the family, in the community and in the workplace. The time for postponing action is well past.

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