

## **Members Meeting November 6<sup>th</sup>**

### **Issues Raised**

#### **Mental Health**

- The majority of post primary students are glad to be back in school as they found online learning very difficult.
- There is some shaming of students with special needs who can't wear a mask.
- Teachers are reporting how worried they are about the mental health of students but there has been no additional investment in mental health.
- There has been a large increase in mental health issues with more and more students accessing therapy services in Cork Life Centre.
- Targeted educational supports are needed as well as mental health supports.

#### **Teaching**

- Teaching and learning through masks is proving to be extremely difficult.
- Masks are making it harder to communicate with students.
- Higher numbers of staff are needed to meet demands of guidelines, especially when teachers have to self-isolate.
- There has also been a drastic increase in requests for places in Cork Life Centre, with the centre sometimes receiving numerous requests a day that they simply don't have the capacity to take on.
- Due to the amount of time students were staying at home, the habit of speaking English in Irish speaking schools has increased drastically and become a major problem for teachers to deal with.

#### **Online Learning**

- Some schools are not providing adequate online resources and tuition for students.
- Online working is not effective for younger children particularly.
- The digital divide needs to be highlighted. If students/parents/teachers/etc can't access the online world, they're completely cut off.

- Online learning clarity came out too late.
- High risk students are in a difficult position.
- Traveller children have very little access to study space and often do not have the same available family support.

### **Students with additional needs**

- Resource teachers are being redirected which is having a huge impact on children with additional needs who have already regressed.
- SNA's are being shared between different classes which poses a risk to both them and the children that they're supporting.
- External health supports – Speech and Language, Psychologists have all gone or been redeployed which has a huge impact on children with disabilities.
- Online learning does not work for many children with disabilities. The visiting teacher service has been almost completely abandoned.
- Some children are not independent enough to work on a laptop by themselves.
- Mask wearing is proving to be a major difficulty for many students and increases anxiety as they can't see facial expressions.
- Lack of integration is a key problem in schools; children with special needs are not being integrated to other classes.
- Home tuition applications have been delayed.

### **Parents**

- The majority of parents are happy with the way in which schools have reopened.
- Transport to school has caused a significant level of anxiety.
- Mental health supports for children are needed but mental health supports for parents are just as important. Parents not managing their own anxiety has impact on child's ability to attend and engage with their education.
- Lack of communication and the digital divide applies to parents too.
- Parent teacher meetings cancelled, no phone calls, no informal comms, at a time when relationships need to be enhanced, it has gone the other way.

### **Exams**

- Students are being over assessed due to fear of calculated grades in 2021.
- LC and JC students feel strongly about remaining in school as they are stressed about the effect that Covid-19 may have on their academics.
- There are huge disparities between the grades that teachers awarded in Irish compared to the overall grade awarded.
- Calculated grades were a necessary evil but should be avoided at all costs in the future.
- There is uncertainty in terms of the plan for 2021 which is causing stress and anxiety.

### **Communication**

- Communication between the Department and Irish speaking schools has been problematic as it has all been issued in English.

- Communication and clarity from the department needed on a wide range of issues.
- Parents have been critical of communication from department, describing them as too vague.
- Lack of communication between some schools and parents is a real problem, parents are not sure as to exactly what is happening.

### **Supports to School**

- The grants and supports to schools have been welcome.
- Support for school leaders needed.
- Rapid testing is key – there has been agreement with the Department of Education and Health – really important this commences and continues.
- External supports such as Speech and Language and NEPS are harder to access.
- Alternative education centres are having difficulties accessing circulars.