The Impact of the Newly Appointed Principal National Mentoring Programme

Report for the Centre for School Leadership in the Republic of Ireland

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In August 2015, a small team of three experienced principals were seconded from their roles and the Centre for School Leadership (CSL) began its work. The organisation, which is a tripartite arrangement between the Department of Education (DE) and the two professional associations representing school leaders, the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) at primary level and the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD) at post-primary level, was charged with initiating a number of key supports for school leaders, amongst them, a formal mentoring programme for all newly appointed principals. In January 2016, the team began the process of inviting experienced school principals to train as mentors with a view to engaging in a mentoring relationship with newly appointed principals.

Mentoring was already part of the culture in Irish education, but this was the first attempt to organise mentoring for newly appointed principals on a formal basis. The programme of training formulated by CSL was guided by the belief that an experienced school leader who worked with a newly appointed colleague in a mentoring role could have a significant impact both at an individual level and also at system level and that indeed, the relationship presented significant learning opportunities for both the mentor and mentee.

Since 2016, over 600 experienced school principals have generously volunteered to train as mentors with CSL and the sharing of experiences at professional learning days has been a joy to witness. I would like to pay tribute to the dedication of the CSL team and associates who have worked extremely diligently over those past six years to ensure that mentoring is now an integral part of the induction of newly appointed principals in the Irish system. I would also like to acknowledge the vision of the Department of Education in resourcing this support for newly appointed principals.

We are indebted to Professor Christine Forde for this excellent report on the impact of mentoring on both the individual school leader (mentor and mentee) but also on the system as a whole. We are privileged to have someone of the academic stature of Professor Forde, whose experience of facilitating and writing about professional learning has brought so much to bear on this report.

We look forward to further developing mentoring as a powerful leadership tool in the Irish system and to fostering mentoring as a way of working in Irish schools.

Mary Nihill
National Director Centre for School Leadership
May 2022

The Impact of the CSL Newly Appointed School Principal Mentoring Programme: Report for the Centre for School Leadership in the Republic of Ireland

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Part 1: Overview

Introduction

The mentoring programme for newly appointed primary and post-primary school principals was established by CSL in 2016 to complement the existing induction programme, Misneach. A survey of participants on the Mentoring Programme was included in the evaluation report on the work of CSL (Fitzpatrick 2018). A review based on the collated evaluation data was conducted in 2019 to support the ongoing development of the Programme (Forde 2019). This current report builds on the two previous reports and focuses specifically on the question of the impact of the programme.

Part One

Part one presents the main findings related to the impact of the CSL Mentoring Programme. The Mentoring Programme is outlined and the question of impact in the evaluation of professional learning is discussed. The criteria defining levels of impact used to analyse the data are set out.

1.1   Summary of Findings

Key Findings:

- the programme is well-established in the Irish education system

- high levels of recruitment indicate that the majority of school principals appointed to their first post, have participated in the programme

- retention rates are also high, with between 96%-98% of pairings annually continuing through to the end of the programme

- the response to the programme on the part of both mentees and mentors is very positive

- there is strong evidence of a focus on the professional growth of the mentee - building confidence, strengthening self-care and a sense of self-efficacy

- there is strong evidence of building the leadership practice of the mentee including dimensions of relational and of strategic leadership

- mentors consistently report substantial benefits for themselves - a place for for reflection and an opportunity to review of their own leadership practice

- mentors highlight their increased appreciation of the importance of active listening, active listening skills, open-ended questioning and solution-focused discussions with staff, which they look to transfer into their role as principal

- the Professional Learning days are highly appreciated by mentors, providing high quality learning opportunities for experienced principals

- there is evidence to indicate that the mentoring process supports school development, the building/strengthening of strategic and curriculum

leadership, and leadership of change:

- *the Professional Learning days provide a simple but effective means of sustaining high quality mentoring over the course of the programme*
- *there is evidence of system level impact*
- *the proportion of newly appointed principals engaging with the programme has increased*
- *evidence of increasing leadership capacity*
- *building greater connections between school principals*
- *creation of communities of practice through the Professional Learning days*
- *networking of highly experienced principals across the system, building a professional learning culture.*

1.2 The CSL Mentoring Programme for Newly Appointed School Principals

The CSL Mentoring Programme was established initially as a three-year pilot project that began with principal mentor training in January 2016 to prepare participants to begin formal mentoring in September 2016. Despite initial limits on the numbers, the geography and diversity of contexts in Irish schools necessitated an expansion of the programme with over 130 mentors being trained in 2016. The programme has continued to grow since 2016 increasing from 128 pairings in 2016 to now over 300 pairings per year. The mentoring programme continued during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Mentees apply to the Misneach Induction Programme and simultaneously apply to CSL to be matched with a mentor. On completion of the CSL Mentoring module, the mentees are matched with a mentor. This module is designed to give the mentee an understanding of what is involved in the formal mentoring relationship and to be prepared for its commencement. The mentoring relationship lasts for one academic year with additional accommodation for exceptional circumstances. In the second year in the role, mentees will have access to group mentoring facilitated by the professional associations, the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) and the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD).

The participation rate among newly appointed principals in their first principal post, is very high. Since 2016, 1670 newly appointed school principals have participated in the programme. It is estimated that between 97%-98% of school principals who are eligible, participate with only between 2%-3% not enrolling. Further, retention is also very high. 96%-98% of pairings complete the programme, with only 2%-4% of pairings annually discontinuing before the end of the programme. This is largely due to either personal/professional challenges experienced by the mentee/mentor or personality clashes in the pairing.

Table 1.1: Number of CSL Mentoring Relationships Year by Year since 2016

YEAR	PRIMARY	POST-PRIMARY	TOTALS
16/17	93	35	128
17/18	187	52	239
18/19	271	61	332
19/20	260	70	330
20/21	249	81	330
21/22	238	73	311
Totals	**1298**	**372**	**1670**

With the very high recruitment and retention rates among newly appointed school principals, there is strong evidence to suggest that the CSL Mentoring Programme for Newly Appointed School Principals is now well-established in the Irish education system. Further indication of the value placed on the programme is suggested by the number of former mentees coming forward to be trained as mentors for the programme. As mentors need at least 4 years experience, the mentor training programme delivered in March-May 2022 is the first opportunity for this group of school principals, who had been mentored themselves, to be involved as mentors. In the current cohort of mentors, 52 primary principals are former mentees and 16 post-primary principals (39% of participants at primary and 38% post-primary).

1.3 The Issue of Impact

The issue of the impact of professional learning has become a focus for both policy development and research as education systems internationally invest heavily in promoting and providing for the professional learning of teachers as part of system-wide improvement. However, the impact of professional learning is complex, particularly charting any direct impact of a specific set of professional learning opportunities on the learning and achievement of pupils (O'Brien and Forde 2016). Therefore, it is productive to consider the impact of professional learning in terms of different dimensions.

Guskey (2002) identified different dimensions of impact in relation to professional learning opportunities: participants' reaction, participants' learning, organisational development, participants' use of the new knowledge and skills and the impact of professional learning on student learning outcomes. Guskey's model focuses on the development of the individual teacher's pedagogic skills. However, the CSL Mentoring Programme is a structured leadership development programme for newly appointed school principals, where the key focus is on supporting the transition into principalship

and the building of effective leadership practice (Crow, 2006). Therefore, there are different dimensions to be considered such as the impact of this programme on the mentors, on the school and on the wider Irish education system. Guskey's framework has been adapted to consider the impact of the mentoring programme in a number of different areas:

- reaction of mentees and mentors
- impact on the professional growth of the mentees and mentors
- the development of new (renewed) skills and knowledge for the leadership practice of the mentees and mentors
- school development - impact on the school's culture and improvement
- impact on the wider Irish education system.

Figure 1.1 Levels of Impact
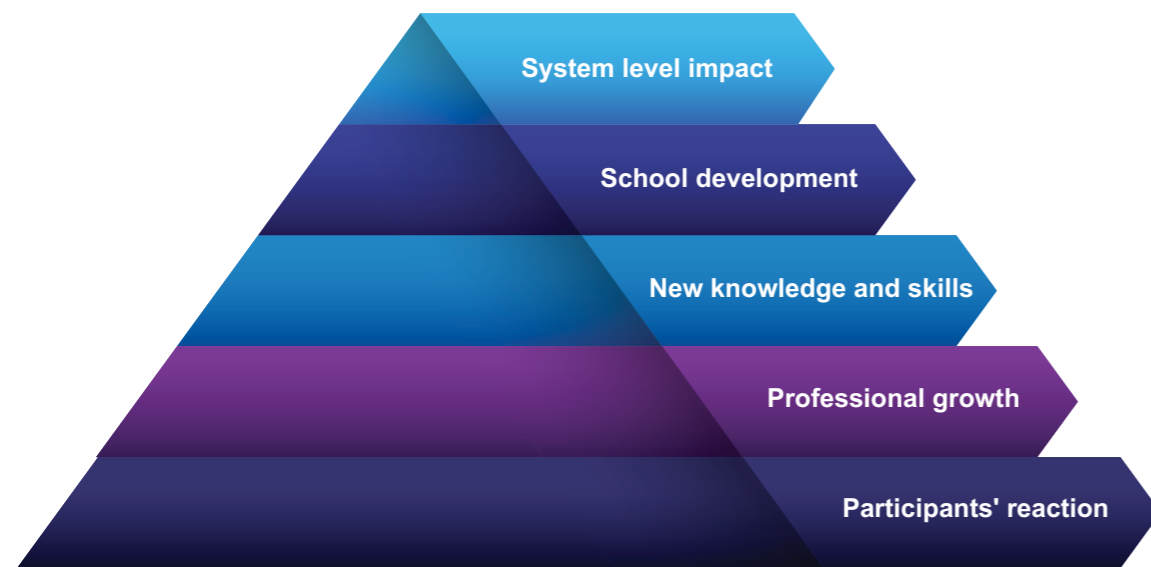
[Further details of the analysis tool can be found in Part 3.]

Part 2: Detailed Findings

Introduction to Part Two

Part Two provides a detailed presentation of the findings using the criteria from the evaluation framework. The main themes emerging from the data are presented and verbatim quotes are used to illustrate these themes. Additionally, a summary of the findings from data gathered during the Covid-19 pandemic is presented.

2.1. Participants' Reaction to the Mentoring Programme

> ## Key Message
> **– A very positive reaction to the programme from mentees and mentors**

Across all the data sets, the evidence points to a very positive reaction to the CSL mentoring programme by both the mentees and mentors.

Mentees

The mentees' reaction to the CSL mentoring programme is overwhelmingly positive. There was much appreciation of the support and guidance that mentors provide. The readily available support as issues arise in school, is described as invaluable. The personal attributes and skill of the mentor are an important aspect of the positive reaction of the mentees. Among the most frequently cited attributes and skills are the following:

Figure 2.1: Mentees' Views on the Attributes and Skills of an Effective Mentor
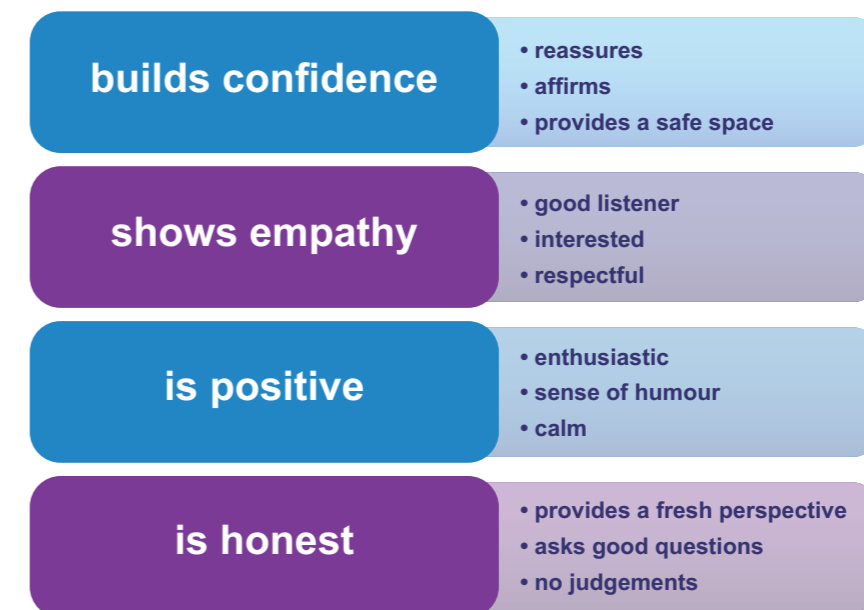
For mentees, the professional experience of the mentor as a school principal is also a significant factor. The mentor brings "wisdom from past experience" which is critical in the mentoring process, "I think mentoring is invaluable because there is no substitute for talking to someone who is walking in your shoes every day." It is this experience combined with the mentor's skills and attributes that the mentees appreciated: "The extent of my mentor's expertise has pleasantly surprised me. I have been impressed with his honesty and firm appreciation of the demands of the job, especially the challenge in handling people!".

Initially, the main benefits of mentoring for some mentees was the practical advice and guidance they received regarding specific aspects of management and administration. However, one of the interesting trends in the evaluation, is the developing understanding on the part of mentees about the nature and purpose of mentoring. Initially, the data indicates a strong perception of mentoring as a form of transmission learning, of "advice giving". Increasingly, mentoring is seen as a reflective space: "The temptation is to use the mentor as a source of information rather than as a general sounding board". This is an opportunity to explore the challenges of leadership and plan ways forward. The mentoring process creates time away from the relentless demands of a school day, "It made me stop and think, to discuss what has been going on since the last visit and I would not have done this myself". Reflection is underlined by mentees as an important element of the process, "It has allowed me to think out loud. Good to make time to reflect on my own practice"; "Mentoring made reflection mandatory".

The very small number of negative comments (n= 3-6) relate to logistics. Time and workload are cited as the major obstacles to the mentoring process: "Time, finding time to meet, maybe not once a month but as you need it". For some mentees, the distance they need to travel to meet up with their mentors is an issue. However, even where the obstacles exist, "It's really hard to make time to meet but totally worth it when we do". Most mentees value the structured approach and advise "trusting the process", but a small number comment on the need for flexibility.

Mentors

Similarly with the mentors, their reaction to the CSL Mentoring Programme is overwhelmingly positive, a vital way of supporting the development of newly appointed principals. "I genuinely believe it [the mentoring programme] affords a real opportunity to develop their practice in a very professional manner. I believe it embeds the practices of professional dialogue and reflection as basic leadership practices". Many mentors reported that they would have found being mentored as a newly appointed principal very helpful in their first years in post. The mentors report that they find working with a newly appointed principal a rewarding activity: "I think the enthusiasm of a mentee becomes contagious and you look at the job of principal in a new more joyful way". The mentors value the opportunity to talk through issues

and practices with their mentees, "really appreciate talking to another principal" and through this process, one mentor notes that "your own experiences are validated". Mentoring is a period of reflection and a positive developmental experience for themselves: "It has enriched it without doubt - requires me to take time out to reflect on my own practice as a means of working with the mentee - didn't always allow myself this time prior to taking this role".

2.2 Impact on the Professional Growth as a Leader

> ## Key Message
> – A positive impact on mentees, supporting their transition into school principalship
> – A strengthening of the relational leadership of mentees and mentors

Given the nature of mentoring as a form of experiential professional learning, it is not surprising that there is strong evidence of a significant positive impact on the professional growth of the mentees. Through mentoring, mentees can explore the emotional and relational aspects of leadership and build the personal and interpersonal skills of leadership. For mentors, this is also an opportunity to reflect on these dimensions of leadership and renew their role as a school leader.

Mentees

The impact on the professional growth of the mentees is evident in several areas. The mentoring process supports their transition into principalship. The first year in post is a critical period (Purdie 2015) where newly appointed principals can feel overwhelmed: "To trust someone enough to say, 'I don't know what I'm doing.' I spend so much of my day pretending to be sure of myself that it is hard to say to someone that I'm doubting myself". As mentees experience the isolation and loneliness of school principalship (DeMatthews 2021), mentoring is a vital source of support: "It can be lonely and isolating. Despite the fact other principals are helpful, it's good to have a designated mentor" and "Good support in a lonely position". Mentoring also provides a safe space: "Good to have someone to ask about issues you are unsure of in safe environment."

Mentoring helps the mentees to build their role and strengthen their identity as a school principal: "Every day presents a challenge, and it is great to have time with the mentor to discuss some of the challenges in depth". The socio-emotional dimensions of being a school leader is a significant area of development. Mentees describe the way in which they become more aware of the need to build themselves emotionally, and to take care of themselves, especially given the relentless pressures they experience as a newly appointed principal. Mentoring helps build their confidence as a school leader and provides support as they face the inevitable challenges of

leading a school: "All principals struggle with the same issues, it's not just me" and further, "My problems are universal". Mentoring enables mentees to understand that their own well-being is an element of effective leadership. The issues of the "self-care and well-being" of mentees are explored in the mentoring discussions, and mentees report that they feel calmer and more assured in their practice, learning: "to trust their own instincts". Mentees also report that they are more aware of the need to pace themselves, to manage their workload and be able to leave the day-to-day challenges of principalship behind when they go home.

Overall, these mentoring discussions enable mentees to explore the relational dimensions of leadership and consider the impact of their actions on members of the school community. Mentees report that mentoring not only provides time away from the constant and urgent demands of principalship but also gives them a space to reflect on their experiences and practice, and to grow in confidence as a school leader.

Mentors

There is substantial evidence that mentors also see their involvement in the mentoring programme as a process of professional growth for themselves as experienced school leaders. The mentors derive a sense of satisfaction from supporting a new principal and helping them develop as a school leader. "The mentee's enthusiasm for the leadership role restores the mentor's faith in the profession". Mentors found that engaging in this process also strengthens their own leadership. The mentoring conversations for the mentors are opportunities for their professional growth. "I always enjoy beginning a new mentoring relationship as it inserts a pause for me about what kind of leader and even person I want to be". This is a period of reflection on their practice: "It reminds me to stop and listen and that I have the answers within for dealing with issues in my own school". As they work through issues and strategies with their mentee, mentors point to ways they gain deeper insight into school leadership: "talking through concerns/issues helps me reflect on my own practice as well", which reaffirms their own role and practice: "I really enjoy it and I feel it has given me more confidence in my own abilities and skills."

2.3. The Development of New Knowledge and Skills

> ### Key Message
>
> **For mentees**
> **– A strong focus on relationships across the school community**
> **– Building understandings of self-management and care**
> **– Some focus on teaching and learning and on strategic leadership**
>
> **For mentors**
> **– Development of high quality mentoring skills**
> **– A period of reflection and renewal**
> **– High quality professional learning on current developments and policy through the PL days**

Again, the data highlights a wide range of areas where mentees and mentors reported that they gained new knowledge and skills - for the mentees through the mentoring conversations; for the mentors also through both the mentoring process and from the Professional Learning days.

As part of the survey evaluation of mentoring, both mentees and mentors were asked to indicate what areas are discussed during the mentoring sessions. This survey was conducted during 2021-22, and so the category of 'specific pandemic issues' was included. The majority of mentees report that their mentoring discussions ranged over several areas, which chimes with the pattern of responses from the mentors.

Table 2.1 Topics Covered in Mentoring Sessions [2020-2021] n=126

TOPIC	NO OF MENTEES REFERENCING AREA
communication	88
relationships	73
conflict	64
parental expectations	36
specific pandemic related issues	64
well-being	43
workload	74
curriculum	41
strategic development	20
administration	16

These responses can be divided into five broad clusters: *(see overleaf)*

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Figure 2.2 Clusters of areas and issues discussed in mentoring

Table 2.2: Clusters of areas covered in mentoring discussions

YEAR	FREQUENCY	% OF TOTAL REFERENCE
Relational leadership	261	50.4
Self-Management	117	22.6
Specific pandemic issues	64	12.4
Strategic development including teaching and learning	58	11.2
Administration	18	3.7
Total	**518**	

Mentees

The mentees readily cite areas where the mentoring process has informed their practice as school leaders. For mentees, the mentor's experience as a school principal is the foundation of the mentoring process, helping them plan strategies, and rehearse ways of dealing with the challenging situations of principalship (Shoho and Barnett 2010). Mentoring supports them tackling the range of new administrative and management demands they face for the first time: "I am genuinely more challenged by the administrative side of things". However, the shift from perceiving mentoring as a source of advice on administrative matters to a process of exploration, reflection and development is evident in the data. Two aspects in the development of the leadership practice of mentees are worth highlighting, firstly, the development of relational leadership (Uhl-Bien 2006) and secondly, the development of strategic leadership (Davies and Davies 2004).

The evaluation data highlights the development of the more nuanced aspects of the mentees' leadership, notably relational leadership, including working to build collaborative practice with staff, working with parents and the community. Through mentoring, mentees have the opportunity to explore issues concerning the building and strengthening of relationships, and ways of communicating and dealing with conflict. Thus, mentees report that through mentoring, the mentor "coached me through conflict" and "guides me through challenging situations". For some mentees, this relationship is building "confidence in making difficult decisions" and enabling them "to plan for difficult conversations". Aside from dealing with conflict, mentoring enables mentees to explore practices related to working constructively with staff, appreciating, "the benefits of consultation and collaboration".

At this point in their career as a principal, one of the issues for newly appointed principals is being able to become more strategic in their thinking, and the mentoring process has contributed to that for a number of mentees. Through mentoring discussions, the mentee's purposes and goals as a principal are grappled with, which helps sustain their commitment to leading their school. One mentee notes that: "having a long-term agenda", as required in the mentoring programme, is a challenge. Many mentees find the plan a useful tool for the strategic development of the school: "fantastic time to learn challenges of the role and, set goals, evaluate.". It takes considerable skill on the part of some mentors to prompt this more strategic stance: "some mentees are finding it difficult to see the bigger picture of mentoring in the sense of sticking to a plan, and particularly keeping teaching and learning to the fore" and so mentoring is looking for "a shift in mindset". Mentoring discussions have helped mentees to focus on strategies rather than become overwhelmed by the operational detail of the administrative demands.

For some mentees, there are opportunities to discuss the leadership of change initiatives in school, again vital skills for school leaders: "I am thoroughly enjoying my job, I have no challenges or problems, just projects and boy do I have a lot of projects. I think the mentoring role is important for that talking piece, but it is important to be able to talk to the person". Reflecting on the decision-making process and enabling the mentee to consider different possible approaches is an important outcome: the mentor provides another perspective on issues the mentee is facing in school, thereby enabling the mentee to make informed decisions: "not giving answers but instead walking through possible solutions".

Mentors

The evaluation data from mentors similarly highlights the strengthening of the facets of relational leadership practice. There are two aspects, firstly, the renewal of the mentor's own leadership practice through the mentoring process and secondly, the acquisition and enhancement of skills and understandings through the Professional Learning days. Furthermore, mentors regularly cite areas which they intend to take forward in their own school, notably around staff relationships, school culture, leadership capacity and the strategic development of their school. Mentors also report

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that the skills they gain and refine through the process of mentoring, are applied more systematically to their role as a school principal: listening, asking questions, helping the staff to develop their own solutions and reflect on practice.

Mentor Professional Learning Days

Additionally, the Professional Learning days for mentors are an important opportunity, providing professional learning for experienced school principals with input from a range of highly regarded speakers. The provision of relevant professional learning opportunities for experienced school principals is an area often difficult to address. (Stroud 2006; Woods et al. 2009). There is very strong evidence in the evaluation data that these Professional Learning days for mentors, have a considerable impact on both their practice as a mentor and as a school principal. As one principal said: "I also return to school more refreshed having had time to reflect and talk through school issues". These days are important opportunities for gaining new or deeper insights into particular areas and renewing skills. Some mentors comment that these professional learning experiences have validated them as leaders: "I am also affirmed in my own practice". Equally important are the opportunities that these Professional Learning days provide, enabling experienced school principals to come together as part of a learning community. These are vital opportunities for a role where issues related to stress and burnout are prevalent (DeMatthews et al. 2021).

Table 4: Ratings of the Professional Learning Days by Mentors n=1810

RATING	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Excellent	1181	65.2
Very good	582	32.2
Fairly good	38	2.09
Mildly good	8	0.44
Not good	1	0.05
Incomplete responses	91	5

When asked if they had learned anything new from the Professional Learning days, the mentors' response is overwhelmingly positive. A further question looked at the transfer of learning: 'As a result of this CPD, will you make a change/improvement to your own practices?' Again, the responses are overwhelmingly positive. These Professional Learning days are viewed as high quality learning experiences, valuable in sustaining the practice of experienced school principals.

The topics covered in the Professional Learning days are deemed to be relevant to the challenges the participants face as a mentor and as a school leader. Mentors highlight

a range of outcomes including emotional intelligence, the importance of positivity and issues around stress and self-care. Other examples relate to leadership practice, such as empowering others, building leadership capacity and engaging in difficult conversations. Mentors highlight a range of mentoring skills: "I will try to listen more actively" and "more aware of my own behaviour in terms of empathy, listening and providing feedback", "more aware of my communication and negotiating skills when dealing with people". The development of skills in mentor training is also renewing their leadership practice in school: "yes, I will use some of the powerful questions and coaching skills to encourage the staff and/or mentees to maximise their potential". Many mentors identify specific areas where the learning gained from the Professional Learning days will be drawn on: "Yes. Am going back more positive and clear on things I need to do re: BOM, staff and parents"; "Yes I will especially in my working relationship with my Deputy".

2.4. School Development - Impact on School Culture and Improvement

> ## Key Message
>
> **For mentees**
> **– A focus on building and enhancing a developmental and collaborative culture**
> **– Building effective relationships in school**
> **– Building strategic improvement of the school**
>
> **For mentors**
> **– Transfer of mentoring skills to their role as a school principal**
> **– Drawing on PD days to build greater staff engagement, distributive leadership**
> **– Strengthening strategies to build and sustain a positive developmental and collaborative culture**

The issue of impact on the schools can be explored through the data in which mentees and the mentors report on ways in which these learning experiences have been applied to their practice in school. Two specific areas of the school's development where the data indicates that the mentoring programme is having an impact are: 1. the enhancement of the school's culture and 2. the strategic development of the school.

Mentees

School culture is a key topic in mentoring discussions and includes building relationships across the school community and fostering a professional learning culture. The focus on aspects of relational leadership provides the foundation for the enhancement the culture of the school. Mentees indicate that they are: "getting to know the staff" and "building relationships with individual members of staff". Furthermore, mentees report that their focus was on greater collaboration across the staff group: "collaborative practice" and "building the management team". Ability to address parental expectations and wider community links is a significant area, building relationships with the BOM

or parents. Mentees report that they look to enhance the professional learning of staff "encouraging teachers to engage in continuing professional development". As one mentee reported, it is an important step for staff to see that the mentee as a principal, "was asking for support" and another suggests that being mentored "shows staff you are learning too". The experiences of being mentored is helping to foster a professional learning culture in school, where professional learning is valued by both the newly appointed principal and members of staff.

The areas of the curriculum and the strategic development of the school form a key part of the mentoring discussions for some mentees. They report that part of their task in this first year of the principalship, is "finding where the school is right now in relation to planning areas of the curriculum". For others it is "focusing on vision" and "building a collaborative culture in the school" and getting the staff involved in the school's development: "building a school plan" and "sustaining the numbers of learners in the school for the next year". However, one area where there are differences, is the attention paid to teaching and learning. Some mentees feel that in the face of "the firefighting of daily school life", teaching and learning is an area where they feel more secure: "I am an experienced teacher and need more help with other things" and "Issues related to teaching and learning are simpler and not as sensitive as so many other issues which arise". Mentees report that "there was little time for leading teaching and learning". Building the leadership of teaching and learning and strategic leadership seems to be an area for further development in the mentoring programme. Mentors comment on "the challenge of introducing teaching and learning into the conversation" and "Some mentees are finding it difficult to see the bigger picture of mentoring in the sense of sticking to a plan, particularly keeping teaching and learning to the fore".

Mentors

A recurring theme from data gathered from the mentors is the transfer of mentoring skills to their role as a school leader to enhance relationships with staff. Mentors describe areas that will be developed in school: "I will try to practise the mentoring skills I have learned, at school with staff/ children/ parents"; "take a mentoring/ coaching approach to build capacity among staff in my school"; "… inform my own approaches to dealing with problematic situations". In addition, discussions from the Professional Learning days highlight different areas of current policy and thinking which they look to build in school: building school cultures: "will be more aware of the need to remain positive; that I do not have all the answers but I am equipped to find them"; strengthening professional learning: "To give staff more opportunities to empower themselves by reflecting on their own practice"; increasing leadership capacity: "I will further encourage teachers to engage in CPD and leadership"; "I will look at endeavouring to distribute leadership in some different ways"; strengthening collaborative practice: "Looking at relationships within my school and foster them in different ways"; "I'm going to try and work on expanding our curriculum grps

[groups] beyond literacy and numeracy"; and enhancing well-being: "I have certainly received so many good ideas to put in place regarding furthering wellbeing in our school". Again, the evidence indicates that the mentors appreciate the inputs and discussions, and these help strengthen insights into policy expectations and provide understandings and skills to take these forward in school. One mentor neatly sums up the impact on the school: "The plan may have been to develop us as mentors for NAPs but in doing so, we all developed and our schools are better places".

2.5 Impact on the Irish Education System

> ## Key Message
> – Establishing mentoring and leadership development as essential elements for newly appointed school principals
> – Building collaborative practice among school principals
> – Creating learning communities of highly experienced school principals
> – Creating a network of school principals to advocate for professional learning
> – Building leadership capacity across the system

The final level to consider is the impact of the CSL Mentoring Programme on the Irish education system. There has been a trend internationally to rely on benchmarking tools such as PISA and TALLIS to assess the performance of a system (Grek and Ozga 2009). Systems are complex and dynamic, and education is a deeply contextualised practice. To explore system-level impact, we need to explore what contributes to system-level development. Greater coherence in the national/state level leadership systems in bringing forward system-level change and improvement is deemed critical in achieving system-level and system-wide improvement: the structural alignment of policy development processes, national education administration structures and school level leadership (Augustine et al. 2014). However, effective system development does not rest solely on structural alignment. Social or process alignment is a means of enhancing interorganisational connections between schools and leaders at different levels in a system. Social alignment of a system comes about through connections between individual leaders, between different organisations, through networks and through communities of practice. Common understandings are developed, and agreement is built around key principles. Through social alignment, there is a flow of ideas through a system with opportunities for collaborative self-evaluation and inquiry (Looney 2011). Several examples of the building of these connections are evident in the data.

The creation of a national mentoring programme is making an important contribution to the task of consolidating understandings about the contribution of school leadership for both school and system-level development and improvement. The CSL mentoring programme complements Misneach, the induction programme for newly appointed school principals. Through the Misneach programme and the

CSL mentoring programme, newly appointed principals build on their pedagogic experience and acquire a range of skills and understandings necessary for the role of school leadership. Further, the CSL mentoring programme is contributing to the development of a culture of professional learning across the system: engagement in mentoring is helping to underscore the importance of this area in schools.

The design of the CSL mentoring programme is also important in relation to system-wide impact. The programme is creating and sustaining critical connections across the whole education system, contributing to greater social and process alignment necessary for system-wide improvement across Irish education. The data indicates that consistently, these connections are positive and constructive working relationships. Such collaboration is evident in the relationship between two school principals which builds important long term bonds between schools: "My relationship with my mentor is excellent. I'd hazard that it had been mutually beneficial. I'm fairly sure that we will keep in touch in the future". However, connections across groups of school principals are also being fostered.

One of the strengths of the design of the CSL Mentoring Programme is the Professional Learning days for mentors. A common issue in mentoring schemes in education is the sustaining of high quality mentoring after the initial mentor training (Daresh 2004). The Professional Learning days have enabled CSL to address this critical issue of supporting mentors over the programme. Initial training on the principles and practice of mentoring is provided and revisited regularly in the Professional Learning days: "the practical triad sessions were excellent, skill building and thought provoking." In addition, the reports of the mentor group discussions indicate that the Professional Learning days also provide a forum in which issues, questions and concerns can be aired with CSL that ensure high quality mentoring is sustained. These Professional Learning days also provide access to the latest thinking and practice around current policy initiatives. The Professional Learning days provide opportunities for not only renewal for experienced principals but also for their schools: "Everything I learn impacts on my school life. Great to get new ideas and to have old ideas renewed".

The Professional Learning days were initially conceived of as a means of keeping in touch with mentors and, in lieu of any renumeration for mentors, providing high quality professional learning experiences. However, there have been other outcomes which are contributing to social/process alignment necessary for system-level improvement. The evaluation data indicates that there has been the creation and sustaining of a substantial network of experienced school principals working with and participating in the CSL programmes, which are designed to have a system-wide impact.

The bringing together of experienced school principals is greatly valued by the mentors, providing them with opportunities to share ideas, develop strategies and reflect deeply on their practice: "The two days afforded me the opportunity to collaborate with fellow professionals, brainstorming solutions to current issues".

These experiences have important personal outcomes for the school principals: "Meeting other principals made me feel less isolated in my role. Above all, the positive atmosphere throughout the whole session made me reaffirmed that we are all doing a great job in our respective schools." However, there are other benefits that have been accrued from this programme: "Establishing a professional network of principals gives great support, affirmation and networking opportunities that are needed and valued." The mentors describe themselves as communities of practice or learning communities and greatly appreciate these experiences.

One of the challenges in many education systems is the flow of ideas between policy development and the site of practice through policy relays. In policy relays there are key points of transition particularly the transition into a school (Reeves and Drew 2012). At such points of transition, policy ideas and practices have to be contextualised. Potentially, such networks or communities of practice of highly experienced and successful school principals, provide a cadre to help inform policy development and its implementation by providing feedback on the process of contextualising policy initiatives in school.

2.6 Mentoring During the Pandemic

> ## Key Message
> **– Mentoring provided a much needed safe space to discuss issues in a unique context, a sense of both mentors and mentees working together to find ways forward**
> **– Mentors were concerned to ensure they were being supportive of mentees**

The evidence gathered during 2020-21 indicates that the mentoring programme for newly appointed principals took on further significance in the sustaining of participants during the Covid-19 pandemic as schools closed and migrated to online learning and then re-opened. In this turbulent context, school leaders were at 'the pinch point' (Harris and Jones 2020) where across education systems internationally, they were called upon to make often urgent decisions in an uncertain context.

Data was gathered from mentors and mentees as schools and school principals grappled with the effects of the pandemic. Within the 'situational ambiguities' of the pandemic, Beauchamp et al. (2021, 388) report that: 'Within their schools, the values, attitudes and moral imperatives of headteachers invoked a strong sense of emotional leadership of all members of the school community'. Providing this form of leadership made huge demands on school leaders. Although mentors and mentees reported they missed the face-to-face meetings, the mentoring process in the majority of cases was transferred effectively to zoom, telephone calls and emails. The virtual mentoring programme remained a positive developmental process, supportive of both mentees and mentors as they jointly faced the uncertainties posed by the pandemic.

The mentors were concerned that mentoring during the pandemic would be productive for the newly appointed principals, and not just another activity in a long list of demands. Indeed, a number of mentors questioned their effectiveness as mentors in the context of the pandemic and the demands made on all school principals, and were concerned that they did not add further to the pressures being experienced by their mentees. However, the evidence suggests that the mentoring programme was less about pressure. In the context of the pandemic where school principals were called upon to make rapid decisions, mentoring provided an important space for mentees and mentors alike. There were only two negative comments about lack of engagement. Instead, this cohort of mentees identified the similar benefits of reassurance, confidence building, reflection from the programme, as previous cohorts of mentees: "it has been very reassuring to have a sounding board, advice from an experienced individual, who is looking at an issue/event from the outside"; "Having experience and wisdom of a mentor has had a huge impact on decision making and prioritising workload."; "Gives me an outlet for discussion with things I am unsure of, and reaffirms what I am doing in school". The mentees highlight the ways in which working with their mentor informs their practice in working with the school community. The circumstances of the pandemic made demands on all school leaders but newly appointed principals were particularly vulnerable, and mentoring provided much needed and appreciated support in relation to their self-care: "I also need to work on work life balance. Failing at this abysmally and particularly during lockdown".

This was a context where all school leaders - experienced and newly appointed principals - faced new challenges in a dynamic context. This cohort of mentors cited similar benefits of being involved in the mentoring programme as previous cohorts: "It reminds me to stop and listen and that I have the answers within for dealing with issues in my own school"; "It actually keeps things fresh as it causes me to reflect on my practice" and "The experience has been very positive, being able to feel my experience as a principal has helped a young newly appointed principal". There seems to be an additional dimension to mentoring during the pandemic. This was "unexplored terrain, though many of the principles of mentoring and guiding still apply". Mentors report on the mutual benefits of writing "a new script" with their mentee to address these unprecedented demands. Many mentors comment that they missed the Professional Learning days which had previously been very valuable in their professional growth and the opportunities to work with other school principals.

Part 3: Technical Report

Introduction

Part Three begins with a discussion of the issue of the impact of professional learning programmes. Then details of the data, the samples and analysis of data are provided.

3.1 The Issue of the Impact of Professional Learning

Professional learning including leadership development is a cornerstone of school improvement strategies in many education systems internationally. Therefore, the question of the impact of professional learning is significant. There are a range of studies exploring the effectiveness of specific leadership development programmes and activities, but these tend to focus on the development of the individual participant and to a far lesser degree, leadership processes in school. Greater attention has been paid to the impact between teacher professional learning and the improvement of learner outcomes. However, this is not a straightforward linear process where a clearly defined set of practices are applied to a classroom setting with readily perceived effects on learner achievement (Yoon et al. 2007). Instead the values, concepts and practices that underpin and are developed through professional learning opportunities, must be mediated through the context of practice.

There have been broadly, two sets of studies which have attempted to trace the impact of professional learning. The first set related to several studies using criteria of effectiveness of professional learning activities (Desimone 2009) to evaluate specific programmes or approaches. The focus of these studies is on the components of a professional learning programme or activity. Largely these have been professional learning to underpin curriculum or pedagogic development (Garet et al. 2001).

The second set of studies examine the process of change in relation to the individual teacher. The alignment of the professional learning process with the goals of the participant is critical (Cordingley et al. 2015). In addition, other factors shape the impact of professional learning. Ingvarson et al. (2005) for example, examined three aspects of impact on the teacher: knowledge, practice and efficacy. Ingvarson et al. sought to take into account not only the influence of the professional learning activity itself and factors related to the participant but also the school context. King (2014) notes the potential of professional learning in terms of cultural development in school through increased collaboration and use of professional learning communities. Opher and Pedder (2011) suggest that impact is not simply in relation to the potential of changed curricular programmes or sets of pedagogic practices on the part of the teacher, and on the learning outcomes of pupils. They recognise the influence of the school context but extend the scope of the question of impact. They suggest that there is a tendency in teacher learning research to focus on the micro (individual) and ignore the meso (institution) and the macro (system) levels.

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In charting the impact of the CSL Mentoring Programme for newly appointed principals, there are several dimensions of impact that can be considered. While the impact on the mentee is a central focus, studies of mentoring have noted potential benefits for the mentors, for the schools of mentees and mentors. However, given that this is a national programme of mentoring, we need to consider the different levels and connections with and beyond schools that shape change processes.

3.2. Evaluation Framework

The idea of dimensions of impact is highlighted in Guskey's (2002) evaluation tool. This tool was used as the starting point so the response of individual participants and the impact on them, in terms of their learning, comprised the first three levels. The reaction of mentees and mentor, whether this was positive or negative, is the first issue. The second relates to the impact on the professional growth of the mentees and mentors. Here, given mentoring takes place during a period of transition, is there an impact on the affective domain such as growth in confidence, purpose and self-efficacy? The fourth is the acquisition of new skills and knowledge. The next level concerns the impact on the schools of the mentee and the mentor. Is there evidence of mentoring shaping or reshaping the leadership practice of the mentees and mentors to bring about changes to the school's culture and improvement? The final level is concerned with the national dimension of the programme and considers what evidence there is of a system-level impact.

Table 3.1 Evaluation Framework

LEVEL	ASPECT	QUESTIONS: WHAT EVIDENCE FOR:
1	The reaction of mentees and mentors	• initial reactions • reactions in later evaluations
2	The impact on the professional growth of the mentees and mentors	• increased confidence • greater sense of self efficacy • purposeful activity • self-care
3	The development of new skills and knowledge for the leadership practice of the mentees and mentors	• development of understandings of nature of leadership in school • development of aspects of practice
4	School development - impact on the school's culture and improvement	• supporting the enhancement of school culture • evidence of leading strategic development
5	Impact on the wider Irish education system.	• appreciation of contribution of mentoring • developmental collaborations and networks • building leadership capacity • building a professional learning culture

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

There is a complex and varied set of data related to the CSL Mentoring Programme for newly appointed principals gathered from the launch of the programme in 2016 onwards and includes data gathered during the pandemic. Data was collected from each cohort of mentors and mentees through a variety of methods including questionnaires and group discussions of mentors, mentees and cairde (mentors who supported other mentors). The specific questions asked varied according to the cohort and the timing of the evaluation. Further items were changed to reflect emerging issues. The design of questionnaires included a ratings scale on a 'useful' to 'not useful' scale, questions asking for details of the mentoring programme as well as experiences and opinions of the respondent on the mentoring programme. Reports on progress and emerging issues prepared by CSL staff are included in the data set as well as guidelines, training material presentations from the Professional Learning days and policy documents.

For the purposes of this study on impact, data was divided into two subsets and then collated under the five levels in the evaluation framework. Within each level, the collated data was then thematically analysed using Clarke and Braun's (2018) six stage analysis. This process of analysis identified the emerging dominant themes as well as minor themes from across the different cohorts of mentees and mentors.

3.4 Author Biography

Professor Christine Forde is an Emeritus Professor in the School of Education at the University of Glasgow where she was Associate Dean and held a personal chair in Leadership and Professional Learning. Professor Forde continues to work with policy communities in Scotland, Wales and Ireland including CSL, on the development of professional learning and leadership. She is a member of the Future of Headship Research team at the University of Glasgow where she continues to supervise doctoral studies. Professor Forde continues to publish widely on professional learning and on educational leadership. Current research includes social justice leadership, middle leadership in schools, life histories and headship, and governance in small systems. She is a Fellow of the International Professional Development Association and a life-time member of the Scottish Educational Research Association, and received the Robert Owen Award for services to Scottish education in 2019.

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