IE Ireland: Sustainable Leadership & Whole-School Wellbeing

🎙️ **Segment Summary**

The Ireland segment focuses on how school leadership and wellbeing are being re-imagined so that **leaders can flourish** [1], **small rural schools can be sustainably led** [2], and **students' wellbeing is truly at the centre** of school life[3]. It also highlights the **WILL network** [4], which supports women in educational leadership and tackles barriers such as confidence, culture, and childcare[5].

🧑‍🏫 **Re-Imagining School Leadership**

- **From "Surviving" to "Thriving" Leaders:** The Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) has focused on **sustainable leadership** [6], arguing that principals are drowning in administration and have too little time for their core purpose: leading teaching and learning[7].

  - Their research was picked up in the **UNESCO Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report 2024 on Leadership** [8], which recommends reducing admin, distributing leadership, and avoiding "lone hero" models[9].

- **Small Schools Action Research Project & Executive Officer Role:** Ireland's **Small Schools Action Research Project** [10]pilots **cluster executive/administrative officers** [11]who handle procurement, audits, policy drafting, and compliance across several small schools[12].

  - This frees **teaching principals** to focus on pedagogy[13].

  - Early evidence from clusters like Donegal shows reduced stress, fewer interruptions, better collaboration, and more time for teaching, planning, and professional dialogue[14].

💖 **Whole-School Wellbeing and Inclusion**

- **Whole-School Wellbeing in Practice (Mary Mother of Hope SNS):** Mary Mother of Hope Senior National School in West Dublin shows what wellbeing "in action" looks like [15]: a diverse, inclusive Catholic school with over 20 nationalities and strong support for pupils with additional needs, including an autism class[16].

- **Integrated Approach:** Their approach blends national policies (Wellbeing Policy Statement & Framework, Primary Curriculum Framework) with rich school life[17]:

    - SPHE & PE, Active School status, Friendship Week, Intercultural Week ("Many cultures, one community")[18].

    - They implement "hot chocolate" check-ins for vulnerable pupils and a smartphone-free voluntary code[19].

- **Inclusive Support Frameworks – NCSE "Relate":** The school is engaging with **NCSE's RELATE framework** [20], a relational, neurodiversity-affirming approach that emphasises pupil voice, regulation first, universal design for learning, and **unconditional positive regard** for the child[21].

🔯 Women in Learning and Leadership (WILL Network)

- Dr. Katherine Corbett and Rachel O'Connor co-founded **WILL – Women in Learning and Leadership** [22], a free network of $\sim 2,500$ members[23].

- Through online **"WILL Chats"** and in-person **"WILL Brunch"** events, they provide mentoring, role models, and networking for aspiring and serving women leaders[24].

- The network explicitly addresses barriers of **confidence, culture, and childcare** that often keep women from applying for leadership roles[25].

🌐 Global Links & Future Collaboration

- Irish leadership work is being linked to international bodies such as the **International Confederation of Principals (ICP)** and the **European School Heads Association (ESHA)**[26].

- This global collaboration is aimed at a joint research project responding to the UNESCO GEM report and an international conference on school leadership in Ireland in 2027[27].

🔗 Useful URLs

Irish & School Leadership

- **Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) – sustainable leadership & projects:** https://www.ippn.ie

- **Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO):** https://www.into.ie

- **Catholic Primary School Management Association (CPSMA):** https://www.cpsma.ie

- **UNESCO GEM Report 2024 – Leadership in Education (overview page):** https://www.unesco.org/reports/gem/2024/leadership

Wellbeing & Inclusion

- **Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice (Department of Education, Ireland):** (policy overview) https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/a0195-wellbeing-policy-statement-and-framework-for-practice/

- **Primary Curriculum Framework (NCCA – curriculum reform):** https://www.ncca.ie/en/primary/primary-curriculum-framework

- **National Council for Special Education – RELATE framework:** https://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/RELATE_Overview-Accessible.pdf

- **Mary Mother of Hope Senior National School:** https://www.hopens.ie

Networks & International Bodies

- **WILL – Women in Learning and Leadership (example CPD event/info page):** https://www.blackrockec.ie/cpd-courses/10045-women-in-learning-and-leadership-will

- **International Confederation of Principals (ICP):** https://www.icponline.org

- **European School Heads Association (ESHA):** https://www.esha.org