Incompetent Teachers in Irish Voluntary Secondary Schools: Principals’ Assessments, Attitudes and Reactions

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by

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Incompetent teachers
in Irish voluntary secondary schools:
Principals' assessments, attitudes and reactions

This study attempts to identify, describe and quantify the problem of allegedly incompetent teachers in Irish voluntary secondary schools through the perceptions of their principals. Its central thesis is that the nature, extent and effects of teacher incompetence in Irish voluntary secondary schools are similar to those in the international experience. The thesis is argued by developing eight inter-related themes.

1. The nature of incompetence;
2. The existence and extent of the problem;
3. Incompetent teachers;
4. Attitude of the teacher union;
5. The principals' attitudes;
6. The principals' reactions;
7. Support and remediation;
8. Dismissal and induced exits.

A postal questionnaire containing 46 questions and spaces for optional comments was administered to every voluntary secondary school principal in the Republic of Ireland. The response of 325 represents a return rate of 75%.

Principals were asked to accept a given strict definition of an incompetent teacher and then to estimate how many of their teaching staff fitted that description. Then they filled in a type of 'census form' describing the characteristics of each incompetent teacher, noting their effects and examining the attitudes and reactions of management and detailing the outcomes of interventions. This produced 257 variables as well as written comments. The data were analysed using simple frequencies, descriptive statistics, cross-tabulations, chi-squares, ANOVA and T-tests.

Principals assess teacher incompetence at six percent. Management reaction includes ineffective remediation attempts and accommodation by judicious timetabling. Principals expressed concern and felt that the issue needed to be addressed.
Dedication

To Celia, Solfa and Robert with all my love

Acknowledgements

I'd like to thank my wife Celia, daughter Solfa and son Robert for their love and patience,
all the staff in my school for making my life so easy that I had time to do this,
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTION</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>xviii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>xxi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER 1

**INTRODUCTION**

- Assumptions ......................................................... 3
- Procedures .............................................................. 4
- Key Variables .......................................................... 4
- Delimitations ............................................................ 5
- Timeliness ............................................................... 6
- Wider Implications ..................................................... 8

**SUMMARY** ............................................................. 9

## CHAPTER 2

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**OVERVIEW OF CHAPTER** ........................................... 11

1. THE NATURE OF INCOMPETENCE ................................. 13
   - The struggle for a definition .................................. 14
   - Marginal teachers ............................................... 14
   - Incompetent teachers ........................................... 16
   - Legal Definition .................................................. 16
   - Case Law ............................................................ 17
   - England and Wales ............................................... 18
   - Ireland ............................................................... 21
   - Definition based on failure ..................................... 22
   - Implied Research Question: ................................... 22

2. EXISTENCE AND EXTENT OF THE PROBLEM .............. 23
   - Ubiquity .............................................................. 23
   - History ............................................................... 23
   - Media interest ..................................................... 24
   - Academic estimates ............................................. 25
   - England and Wales ............................................... 26
   - Ireland ............................................................... 27
   - Implied Research Questions .................................... 28
# Table of Contents

1. Implied Research Questions

2. Why the issue is tackled

3. Why the issue is avoided

4. Advice sources

5. How they diagnose

6. Protection

7. Professionalism

8. United States

9. England and Wales

10. Ireland

11. Implied Questions

## 3. INCOMPETENT TEACHERS

- Characteristics .................................................. 28
- United States ....................................................... 28
- England and Wales .............................................. 29
- Ireland ............................................................... 32
- Implied Research Questions .................................. 32

## 4. ATTITUDES OF TEACHER UNION

- Protection .......................................................... 33
- Professionalism .................................................. 33
- United States ...................................................... 34
- England and Wales ............................................. 35
- Ireland ............................................................. 36
- Implied Research Questions .................................. 36

## 5. THE PRINCIPALS' ATTITUDES

- United States ..................................................... 37
- England and Wales ............................................. 38
- Ireland ............................................................. 39
- Implied Research Questions .................................. 39

## 6. THE PRINCIPALS' REACTIONS

- How they diagnose ............................................. 40
- Advice sources .................................................. 41
- Why the issue is avoided ..................................... 41
- Circling the wagons ............................................ 42
- Hideouts .......................................................... 42
- Why the issue is tackled ...................................... 44
- England and Wales ............................................. 45
- Ireland ............................................................. 46
- Implied Questions ............................................... 46

## 7. SUPPORT AND REMEDIATION

- United States ..................................................... 47
- England and Wales ............................................. 47
- Ireland ............................................................. 48
- Implied Research Questions .................................. 49

## 8. DISMISSAL AND INDUCED EXITS

- Dismissal .......................................................... 50
- Due Process ...................................................... 51
- Induced Exits ..................................................... 53
- England and Wales ............................................. 54
- Ireland ............................................................. 55
- Implied Research Questions .................................. 56
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTER ............................................................................................................... 58

1. THE NATURE OF INCOMPETENCE ........................................................................................... 61
   What is the nature of the incompetence? ............................................................................................. 63

2. EXISTENCE AND EXTENT OF PROBLEM ................................................................................. 64
   What is the extent of the problem of incompetent teachers in Irish voluntary secondary schools? ...... 64
   Are incompetent teachers distributed equally throughout the voluntary secondary sector? ................. 65

3. INCOMPETENT TEACHERS ........................................................................................................ 66
   What are the characteristics of incompetent teachers in Irish voluntary secondary schools? ................. 66
   What is the relationship between teaching qualifications and the subjects being taught? ................. 67
   What was the reaction of the incompetent teacher if confronted? ......................................................... 68

4. ATTITUDE OF TEACHER UNIONS ........................................................................................... 69
   To what extent does the teacher union get involved? ........................................................................... 69

5. THE PRINCIPALS’ ATTITUDES .................................................................................................. 70
   What are the opinions of principals concerning incompetent teachers generally? ................................. 70

6. THE PRINCIPALS’ REACTIONS .................................................................................................. 71
   How do principals diagnose the existence of incompetent teachers? ................................................. 71
   Where do principals seek advice? ....................................................................................................... 72
   Why do principals intentionally avoid tackling teacher incompetence? ............................................. 73
   Why do principals tackle teacher incompetence? ................................................................................. 74

7. SUPPORT AND REMEDIATION ................................................................................................... 75
   What are the strategies employed by principals in managing incompetent teachers? ............................ 75
   How do principals apply pressure? ...................................................................................................... 76
   How do principals timetable incompetent teachers? ............................................................................ 77
   How do principals attempt to remedy incompetence? .......................................................................... 78

8. DISMISSAL AND INDUCED EXITS .............................................................................................. 79
   What is the situation concerning incompetent teachers who left the school permanently? ................. 79
   What are the characteristics of the incompetent teachers who left school permanently? ........................ 80
   What is the relationship between the teaching qualifications of the incompetent teacher who left and the subjects being taught? ................................................................. 81
   What was the nature of the incompetence of the teachers who had left? ........................................... 82

RESEARCH QUESTIONS .................................................................................................................. 83

QUESTION 1
   What is the extent of the problem of incompetent teachers in Irish voluntary secondary schools? ...... 83

QUESTION 2
   Are incompetent teachers distributed equally throughout the voluntary secondary sector? ............... 83

QUESTION 3
   What are the characteristics of incompetent teachers in Irish voluntary secondary schools? ............... 84

QUESTION 4
   What is the relationship between teaching qualifications and the subjects being taught? ................. 84

QUESTION 5
   What is the nature of the incompetence? ........................................................................................... 85
CHAPTER 4

METHOD

I PARTICIPANTS

Rationale for selecting principals ................................................................. 93
Suitability of Principals .............................................................................. 93
Source ......................................................................................................... 93
Sample Size ............................................................................................... 94
Why Voluntary Secondary Schools .......................................................... 94
Why not other types of schools ................................................................. 95
Unsuitability of other possible subjects ..................................................... 95
teachers themselves .................................................................................. 95
Unions ......................................................................................................... 96
Students .................................................................................................... 96

II INSTRUMENTS ....................................................................................... 97

Rationale for using a survey method ......................................................... 97
Importance of independence ..................................................................... 97
Expense .................................................................................................... 98
Why suited to Participants ........................................................................ 98
Validity of questionnaire ......................................................................... 99
III PROCEDURE ............................................................................................................................... 107

DATA ANALYSIS .............................................................................................................................. 122

ACTUAL SURVEY ............................................................................................................................ 112

III PROCEDURE ............................................................................................................................... 107

Pilot stage ........................................................................................................................................ 107
Participants ...................................................................................................................................... 107
Suitability ....................................................................................................................................... 107
Sample Size .................................................................................................................................... 108
Source ............................................................................................................................................ 108
Procedure for the Pilot ...................................................................................................................... 109
Result of Pilot ................................................................................................................................... 109
Analysis and Changes Because of the Pilot Stage .............................................................................. 110
Improvements in the questions .......................................................................................................... 110
The Computer Analysis ....................................................................................................................... 111
Technical improvements .................................................................................................................... 111

ACTUAL SURVEY ............................................................................................................................ 112

Procedure ....................................................................................................................................... 112
Source of Mailing List ......................................................................................................................... 112
Encouraging a high response ............................................................................................................ 112
Mailing ........................................................................................................................................... 113
Mailing Contents ............................................................................................................................... 114
Anonymity Safeguard ........................................................................................................................ 115
Timing and Follow-up ....................................................................................................................... 118
Sequence ....................................................................................................................................... 118

DATA ANALYSIS ............................................................................................................................ 122

Error checking ................................................................................................................................ 122
Splitting into separate files ............................................................................................................... 122
Principals' Comments ....................................................................................................................... 122
Statistical treatment ........................................................................................................................... 123
CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

INTRODUCTION .............................................................................................................................. 125
Response Rate.................................................................................................................................. 125
Note Concerning Non-response ........................................................................................................ 126

CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS .................................................................................... 126
Gender............................................................................................................................................. 126
Age.................................................................................................................................................. 126
Religious Status ............................................................................................................................... 126
Qualifications ................................................................................................................................... 126
Experience as a Principal .................................................................................................................. 127

RESEARCH QUESTIONS ................................................................................................................ 128
Preamble to questions....................................................................................................................... 128
Definition of incompetent teacher .................................................................................................. 128

QUESTION 1:
WHAT IS THE EXTENT OF THE PROBLEM OF INCOMPETENT TEACHERS IN IRISH VOLUNTARY SECONDARY SCHOOLS? ........................................................................... 129
Total Number of Incompetent Teachers ............................................................................................ 129
Total Percentage of Incompetent teachers ......................................................................................... 129
Gender breakdown of Incompetent Teachers.................................................................................... 129
School breakdown of incompetent teachers ....................................................................................... 130
Percentage of Incompetent Teachers in each School .......................................................................... 131

QUESTION 2:
ARE INCOMPETENT TEACHERS DISTRIBUTED EQUALLY THROUGHOUT THE VOLUNTARY SECONDARY SECTOR? ......................................................................................... 132
Urban-Rural Breakdown................................................................................................................... 132
Fee-paying - Non Fee-paying ......................................................................................................... 133
Day - Boarding School Comparison ................................................................................................. 133
Single-Sex - Coed ............................................................................................................................ 134
School Size ...................................................................................................................................... 135

INCOMPETENT TEACHER 'CENSUS' .......................................................................................... 135

QUESTION 3:
WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF INCOMPETENT TEACHERS IN IRISH VOLUNTARY SECONDARY SCHOOLS? ...................................................................................... 136
Gender Breakdown........................................................................................................................... 136
Gender breakdown compared to teachers generally ........................................................................... 136
Note Concerning Numbers .............................................................................................................. 137
Age Profile of Incompetent Teachers ............................................................................................... 137
Combined Gender and Age Profile ................................................................................................... 138
Permanent / Temporary ...................................................................................................................... 139
Permanent - Temporary Breakdown compared to Total Staff .......................................................... 139
Experience Profile of Incompetent Teachers .................................................................................... 140
Religious - Lay Breakdown ................................................................................................................ 140
Qualifications of Incompetent Teachers ................................................................. 141
Competence in the Past ......................................................................................... 141
Post of Responsibility ............................................................................................ 142

QUESTION 4:

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHING QUALIFICATIONS AND THE
SUBJECTS BEING TAUGHT?.......................................................................................................... 143
- Subjects incompetent teachers are qualified to teach ........................................ 143
- Subjects that incompetent teachers actually teach .......................................... 144
- Main subject taught = Main subject qualification .............................................. 146
- Main Subject = Main or Second subject qualification ........................................ 147

QUESTION 5:

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THE INCOMPETENCE?................................................................. 149
- Discipline Quality .................................................................................................. 149
- Discipline Type ...................................................................................................... 150
- Student Feelings .................................................................................................. 150
- Attitude to Students .............................................................................................. 151
- Classroom Climate ............................................................................................... 151
- Subject Knowledge ............................................................................................... 152
- Timekeeping ......................................................................................................... 152
- Attendance ............................................................................................................ 153
- Curriculum Following .......................................................................................... 153
- Exam Performance ............................................................................................... 154
- Co-operation Level .............................................................................................. 154
- Relationship with Colleagues ............................................................................. 155
- Emotional Stability ............................................................................................... 155

QUESTION 6:

HOW DO PRINCIPALS DIAGNOSE THE EXISTENCE OF INCOMPETENT TEACHERS?.... 156
- Diagnostic Methods ............................................................................................. 156
- Other Methods of diagnosis ............................................................................... 157

NOTE ON SUPERSCRIPTS .............................................................................................................. 157
- Personality Factors ............................................................................................... 157
- Discipline Problems ............................................................................................. 158
- Unpopularity with students and parents ............................................................ 158
- Punctuality and attendance ............................................................................... 159
- Technical Weaknesses ....................................................................................... 159
- Male and female principals’ diagnostic methods compared ............................ 159
- Religious and lay principals’ diagnostic methods compared ......................... 159
- Top Three Methods ............................................................................................ 160
- Male and female principals’ most important diagnostic methods compared ... 160
- Religious & lay principals’ most important diagnostic methods compared ...... 161

QUESTION 7:

WHERE DO PRINCIPALS SEEK ADVICE? ........................................................................ 162
- Note concerning Numbers .................................................................................. 162
- Department of Education ..................................................................................... 162
- Secretariat for Secondary Schools ..................................................................... 163
- Another Principal ............................................................................................... 163
### Question 8: Why Do Principals Avoid Tackling Teacher Incompetence?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for Avoiding</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male and female principals compared</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious and lay principals compared</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top Three Reasons</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male and female ranking of the main reason for avoidance compared</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious and lay ranking of the main reason for avoidance compared</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Matters</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastoral Approach</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Change Possible</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helplessness</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tough Approach</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Question 9: Why Do Principals Tackle Teacher Incompetence?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for Tackling</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male and female principals compared</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious and lay principals compared</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top Three Reasons</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious and lay ranking of the main reason for tackling compared</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male and female ranking of the main reason for tackling compared</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Question 10: What Are the Strategies Employed by Principals in Managing Incompetent Teachers?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management Strategies</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comments</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastoral Approach</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inservice</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Move ............................................................................................................................................... 185
Miscellaneous .................................................................................................................................. 185
Male and female principals compared ............................................................................................... 186
Religious and lay principals compared .............................................................................................. 187
Top Three Reasons........................................................................................................................... 188
Male and female ranking of the most important strategies compared ................................................. 189
Religious and lay ranking of the most important strategies compared ................................................ 190

QUESTION 11:

HOW DO PRINCIPALS APPLY PRESSURE?................................................................................ 191

Methods of applying pressure ........................................................................................................... 191
Comments ........................................................................................................................................ 192
Pressure ......................................................................................................................................... 192
Pastoral ............................................................................................................................................ 193
Miscellaneous .................................................................................................................................. 193
Support ......................................................................................................................................... 193
Teacher Development .................................................................................................................... 193
Male and female principals compared ............................................................................................... 194
Religious and lay principals Compared ............................................................................................. 195
Top Three Methods .......................................................................................................................... 196
Male and female ranking of the most important strategies for applying pressure compared ............... 197
Religious and lay ranking of the most important strategies for applying pressure compared .......... 198

QUESTION 12:

WHAT WAS THE REACTION OF AN INCOMPETENT TEACHER IF CONFRONTED? ........ 200

Reaction of Incompetent teacher when confronted ........................................................................... 200
Comments ....................................................................................................................................... 201
Shifting blame ................................................................................................................................. 201
Aggressive defensive ........................................................................................................................ 202
Miscellaneous ................................................................................................................................ 202
Partial Compliance .......................................................................................................................... 202
Excuses .......................................................................................................................................... 202
Reaction of male and female incompetent teachers .......................................................................... 203
Male teachers ................................................................................................................................. 203
Female Teachers ............................................................................................................................. 204
Top Three Reactions ....................................................................................................................... 204

QUESTION 13:

TO WHAT EXTENT DOES THE TEACHER UNION GET INVOLVED? ................................. 205

Numerical ...................................................................................................................................... 205
Union Reaction ............................................................................................................................... 205
Top Three Reactions of the Union .................................................................................................... 206
Comments ....................................................................................................................................... 207
Mediation ....................................................................................................................................... 207
A certain amount of incompetence must be accepted .................................................................... 207
Defensive ....................................................................................................................................... 207
Co-operative .................................................................................................................................. 207
QUESTION 14:

HOW DO PRINCIPALS TIMETABLE INCOMPETENT TEACHERS? .................................................. 208

Timetabling Strategies.................................................................................................................. 208
Comments.................................................................................................................................... 209
Motivated classes........................................................................................................................... 209
No concession............................................................................................................................... 210
Make things easy......................................................................................................................... 210
No room to manoeuvre............................................................................................................... 210
Spread the damage .................................................................................................................... 210
Support structure........................................................................................................................ 211
H. Dip Students............................................................................................................................ 211
Job sharing.................................................................................................................................... 211
Junior classes............................................................................................................................... 211
Timetabling Strategies of male and female principals............................................................. 212
Timetabling Strategies of Religious and lay principals compared ........................................... 212
Top Three Strategies.................................................................................................................. 213
Male and female timetabling strategies compared ................................................................. 214
Religious and Lay Timetabling Strategies compared............................................................. 215

QUESTION 15:

HOW DO PRINCIPALS ATTEMPT TO REMEDY INCOMPETENCE? ........................................... 216

Note concerning Numbers.......................................................................................................... 216
Popularity of a strategy............................................................................................................... 216
Effectiveness of a strategy.......................................................................................................... 216
Inservice Courses....................................................................................................................... 216
Principals Sitting in on classes................................................................................................. 217
Regular Advice Sessions......................................................................................................... 217
Colleague as Mentor.................................................................................................................. 218
Giving pedagogy books............................................................................................................ 218
Invoking the support of Department Inspectorate................................................................. 219
Comparison of remediation strategies..................................................................................... 220
Comments.................................................................................................................................... 221
Miscellaneous............................................................................................................................. 221
Pastoral Approach..................................................................................................................... 222
Teacher Resistance..................................................................................................................... 223
Tough........................................................................................................................................ 223
Advice....................................................................................................................................... 223
Hopelessness............................................................................................................................. 224
Discipline.................................................................................................................................... 224
Support...................................................................................................................................... 224
Progress...................................................................................................................................... 225
Punctuality................................................................................................................................. 225
Policy......................................................................................................................................... 225
QUESTION 16:
WHAT IS THE SITUATION CONCERNING INCOMPETENT TEACHERS WHO LEFT A SCHOOL PERMANENTLY? ................................................................. 226
   Incompetent teacher permanently leaving a school .............................................................. 226

STORIES OF EXITS ...................................................................................................................... 227
   Note on coding ......................................................................................................................... 227
   Stories Categorised .................................................................................................................. 228
   Early Retirement ..................................................................................................................... 228
   Temporary and not re-appointed ............................................................................................ 230
   Resignation .............................................................................................................................. 231
   Miscellaneous ........................................................................................................................ 231
   Disability pension .................................................................................................................. 232
   Sick Leave ............................................................................................................................... 232
   Teaching Post in a different school ......................................................................................... 233
   Dismissal ................................................................................................................................. 233

'CENSUS' OF INCOMPETENT TEACHERS WHO LEFT .......................................................... 234

QUESTION 17: 
WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE INCOMPETENT TEACHERS WHO LEFT A SCHOOL PERMANENTLY? ........................................ 234
   Gender Breakdown .................................................................................................................. 234
   Religious Status ....................................................................................................................... 234
   Age Breakdown ....................................................................................................................... 235
   Employment Status ................................................................................................................ 236
   Experience ............................................................................................................................... 236
   Past Competence .................................................................................................................... 237
   Main Qualification .................................................................................................................. 238
   Post of Responsibility ............................................................................................................. 238

QUESTION 18:
WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TEACHING QUALIFICATIONS OF THE INCOMPETENT TEACHER WHO LEFT AND THE SUBJECTS BEING TAUGHT? ........................................ 239
   Subjects that incompetent teachers who left were qualified to teach .................................. 240
   Subjects Actually Taught by incompetent teachers who left ................................................. 241
   Match between subject qualification and subject taught ....................................................... 242
   Main subject taught = Main subject qualification ................................................................. 242
   Main Subject = Main or Second subject qualification .......................................................... 243
   Main subject taught not the main subject qualification ...................................................... 244
   Main subject taught neither the main nor the second subject qualification ....................... 245
   Main subject taught not mentioned in the first three subject qualifications ...................... 245
   Main subject taught not mentioned at all in subject qualifications .................................... 245
QUESTION 19:

WHAT WAS THE NATURE OF THE INCOMPETENCE OF THE TEACHERS WHO HAD LEFT? ................................................................................................................................................. 246

- Discipline Quality .......................................................... 246
- Discipline Type ............................................................... 247
- Student Feelings ............................................................. 247
- Attitude to students .......................................................... 248
- Classroom Climate .......................................................... 248
- Subject Knowledge .......................................................... 249
- Timekeeping ................................................................. 249
- Attendance ................................................................. 250
- Curriculum Following .................................................... 250
- Students' exam performance ........................................... 251
- Co-operation Level ......................................................... 251
- Relationships ............................................................... 252
- Emotional Stability ......................................................... 252

QUESTION 20:

WHAT ARE THE OPINIONS OF PRINCIPALS CONCERNING INCOMPETENT TEACHERS IN GENERAL? ......................................................................................................................................... 253

OPINIONNAIRE ................................................................................................................................ 253

COMMENT ON QUESTIONNAIRE ........................................................................................................ 261

- Theories ........................................................................... 261
- Encouragement ............................................................. 264
- Miscellaneous .............................................................. 266
- Degrees of incompetence .............................................. 267
- Please Publish ............................................................... 269
- Need for action .............................................................. 269
- Probation ......................................................................... 270


### CHAPTER 6

#### DISCUSSION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. NATURE OF INCOMPETENCE</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Failure</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Failure</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical Failure</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Productive Failure</td>
<td>274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Failure</td>
<td>274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A theory of incompetence</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. EXISTENCE AND EXTENT OF THE PROBLEM</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extrapolation</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary Secondary</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Second Level Schools</td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Schools</td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. INCOMPETENT TEACHERS</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Status</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Status</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Competence</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posts of Responsibility</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjects</td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reaction to being Confronted</td>
<td>283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. ATTITUDE OF TEACHER UNION</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of Involvement</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Reaction</td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. THE PRINCIPALS' ATTITUDES</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resignation</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theories / Beliefs / Attitudes</td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. THE PRINCIPALS' REACTIONS</td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnosis</td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice</td>
<td>291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tackling</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. SUPPORT AND REMEDIATION</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timetabling</td>
<td>294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remedy</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male/Female Lay/Religious</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1 Research Questions related to the eight themes .................................................................. 60
Figure 3.2 Eventual definition used .................................................................................................. 62
Figure 4.1 Path through th questionnaire ......................................................................................... 105
Figure 4.2 Personalised cover letter ................................................................................................. 114
Figure 4.3 Explanation regarding anonymity system ........................................................................ 115
Figure 4.4 Definition of incompetent teacher ................................................................................... 116
Figure 4.5 back view of postcard .................................................................................................... 117
Figure 4.6 Front view of postcard ................................................................................................... 117
Figure 4.7 First follow-up letter ...................................................................................................... 119
Figure 4.8 Second follow-up letter .................................................................................................. 121
Figure 5.1 Number of incompetent teachers per school .................................................................... 131
Figure 5.2 Percentage of Incompetent Teachers in each school ....................................................... 131
Figure 5.3 Age breakdown of incompetent teachers (Bar Chart) ..................................................... 138
Figure 5.4 Posts of Responsibility of Incompetent Teachers ........................................................... 142
Figure 5.5 Discipline Quality ......................................................................................................... 149
Figure 5.6 Discipline Type ............................................................................................................. 150
Figure 5.7 Student Feelings ............................................................................................................ 150
Figure 5.8 Attitude to students ....................................................................................................... 151
Figure 5.9 Classroom Climate ....................................................................................................... 152
Figure 5.10 Subject Knowledge ..................................................................................................... 152
Figure 5.11 Timekeeping ................................................................................................................ 152
Figure 5.12 Attendance .................................................................................................................. 152
Figure 5.13 Curriculum Following .................................................................................................. 153
Figure 5.14 Students’ examination performance ............................................................................. 154
Figure 5.15 Co-operation Level ..................................................................................................... 154
Figure 5.16 Relationship with colleagues ....................................................................................... 155
| Figure 5.17 | Emotional Stability ................................................................................................... 155 |
| Figure 5.18 | Bar chart of age breakdown of incompetent teachers who left ..................................... 235 |
| Figure 5.19 | Bar chart of experience of incompetent teacher ........................................................................... 237 |
| Figure 5.20 | Discipline Quality .................................................................................................... 246 |
| Figure 5.21 | Discipline Type ........................................................................................................... 247 |
| Figure 5.22 | Student feelings .......................................................................................................... 247 |
| Figure 5.23 | Attitude to students .................................................................................................... 248 |
| Figure 5.24 | Classroom Climate ....................................................................................................... 248 |
| Figure 5.25 | Subject knowledge ....................................................................................................... 249 |
| Figure 5.26 | Timekeeping ................................................................................................................ 249 |
| Figure 5.27 | Attendance ..................................................................................................................... 250 |
| Figure 5.28 | Curriculum Following .................................................................................................. 250 |
| Figure 5.29 | Students’ Exam performance .......................................................................................... 251 |
| Figure 5.30 | Co-operation Level ...................................................................................................... 251 |
| Figure 5.31 | Relationship with colleagues .......................................................................................... 252 |
| Figure 5.32 | Emotional stability ....................................................................................................... 252 |
| Figure 5.33 | Incompetent teachers are major sources of stress for principals ............................................. 255 |
| Figure 5.34 | Incompetent teachers mean extra work for their teachers .................................................. 255 |
| Figure 5.35 | In Ireland it is impossible to dismiss a teacher on the specific grounds of incompetence ............. 256 |
| Figure 5.36 | The Problem of incompetent teachers can never be dealt with because unions defend the indefensible .................................................................................................................. 256 |
| Figure 5.37 | University Education Departments give teaching diplomas to people who do not deserve them ................................................................................................................................... 257 |
| Figure 5.38 | Principals haven't time to tackle the problem ......................................................................... 257 |
| Figure 5.39 | Incompetent teachers should be required to have counselling or retraining ................................. 258 |
| Figure 5.40 | People should be screened more carefully before being accepted for teacher training .............. 258 |
| Figure 5.41 | The type of incompetent teacher defined here can never become competent ................................. 259 |
| Figure 5.42 | Principals in general don't know how to tackle the problem of teaching incompetence ............... 259 |
Figure 5.43  No matter what *should* be done, in actual fact nothing is going to be done about incompetent teachers................................................................. 260

Figure 5.44  More assertive and demanding parents will make toleration and protection of incompetent teachers more and more difficult................................................................. 260

Figure 6.1  Breakdown of gender of teachers reported by responding principals.................................279
LIST OF TABLES

Table 5-1  Response Rate ................................................................................................................ 125
Table 5-2  Age of principals (N=323) ........................................................................................... 126
Table 5-3  Extra Qualifications of Principals ................................................................................... 127
Table 5-4  Total Length of Experience as a Principal ....................................................................... 127
Table 5-5  Number of Incompetent Teachers per school ................................................................. 130
Table 5-6  Comparison of rural and urban schools ......................................................................... 132
Table 5-7  Comparison of fee-paying and Non fee-paying Schools ............................................... 133
Table 5-8  Comparison of school types (Day / Boarding) ............................................................... 133
Table 5-9  Comparison of school types (Single Sex / Coeducational) ............................................. 134
Table 5-10 Scheffe Test – Multiple Comparisons .......................................................................... 134
Table 5-11 Comparison of schools by size ....................................................................................... 135
Table 5-12 Gender breakdown of incompetent teaching staff ......................................................... 136
Table 5-13 Gender breakdown of teachers generally (including incompetents) ............................. 136
Table 5-14 Comparative percentages of teachers by gender only .................................................... 137
Table 5-15 Age breakdown of incompetent teachers ..................................................................... 137
Table 5-16 Gender and Age of Incompetent Teachers ................................................................. 138
Table 5-17 Permanent or Temporary status of Incompetent Teachers .......................................... 139
Table 5-18 Experience of incompetent teachers ............................................................................. 140
Table 5-19 Religious or lay status of incompetent teachers ............................................................ 140
Table 5-20 Qualifications of Incompetent Teachers ...................................................................... 141
Table 5-21 Teacher competence in the past .................................................................................... 141
Table 5-22 Posts of Responsibility .................................................................................................. 142
Table 5-23 Subjects theoretically qualified to teach ......................................................................... 143
Table 5-24 Subjects actually taught .............................................................................................. 144
Table 5-25 Main teaching subject matching main subject qualification ......................................... 146
Table 5-26 Main teaching subject matching main or second subject qualification ......................... 147
<p>| Table 5- 27 | Methods principals use to identify incompetent teachers | 156 |
| Table 5- 28 | Principals’ ranking of the three most important factors. | 160 |
| Table 5- 29 | Comparing principals’ ranking of factors by gender | 160 |
| Table 5- 30 | Comparing principals’ ranking of factors by Religious status | 161 |
| Table 5- 31 | Department of education advice. | 162 |
| Table 5- 32 | Secretariat for Secondary School’s advice | 163 |
| Table 5- 33 | Another principal’s advice | 163 |
| Table 5- 34 | Legal Advice | 164 |
| Table 5- 35 | Management literature | 164 |
| Table 5- 36 | Chairperson of the Board of Management | 165 |
| Table 5- 37 | Why principals avoid tackling teacher incompetence | 171 |
| Table 5- 38 | Principals’ ranking of the three most important reasons for not tackling teacher incompetence | 172 |
| Table 5- 39 | Comparing the top reason by gender | 173 |
| Table 5- 40 | Main reason for avoiding tackling teacher incompetence compared by Religious status of principal | 174 |
| Table 5- 41 | Why principals tackle teacher incompetence | 177 |
| Table 5- 42 | Reasons for tackling by male and female principals compared | 179 |
| Table 5- 43 | Reasons for tackling by Religious and lay principals compared | 179 |
| Table 5- 44 | Principals' ranking of the three most important reasons for tackling teacher incompetence | 180 |
| Table 5- 45 | Comparing the top reason by gender | 181 |
| Table 5- 46 | Comparing the top reason by Religious status | 182 |
| Table 5- 47 | Management strategies employed | 183 |
| Table 5- 48 | Strategies of Male and female principals compared | 186 |
| Table 5- 49 | Strategies of Religious and lay principals compared | 187 |
| Table 5- 50 | Principals' ranking of the top three most used management strategies | 188 |
| Table 5- 51 | Comparing the most used strategy by gender | 189 |
| Table 5- 52 | Comparing the most used strategy by Religious status | 190 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5-53</td>
<td>Methods of applying pressure</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-54</td>
<td>Male and female methods of applying pressure compared</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-55</td>
<td>Religious and lay methods of applying pressure compared</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-56</td>
<td>Principals' ranking of the top three most used strategies used to apply pressure</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-57</td>
<td>Comparing by gender the most used strategy for applying pressure</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-58</td>
<td>Comparing by Religious Status the most used strategy for applying pressure</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-59</td>
<td>Request for parental complaints to be put in writing</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-60</td>
<td>Reaction of incompetent teacher</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-61</td>
<td>Reaction of Male incompetent teachers</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-62</td>
<td>Reaction of female incompetent teachers</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-63</td>
<td>Principals' ranking of the top three most prevalent reactions</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-64</td>
<td>Frequencies of different reactions of the Teacher Union</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-65</td>
<td>Principals' ranking of the top three most prevalent union reactions</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-66</td>
<td>Timetabling strategies</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-67</td>
<td>Top two timetabling strategies of male and female principals compared</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-68</td>
<td>Timetabling strategies of Religious and lay principals compared</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-69</td>
<td>Principals' ranking of the three most used timetabling strategies</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-70</td>
<td>Comparing Timetabling Strategies by gender</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-71</td>
<td>Comparing Timetabling Strategies by Religious Status</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-72</td>
<td>Inservice courses</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-73</td>
<td>Principals sitting in on classes</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-74</td>
<td>Regular Advice Sessions</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-75</td>
<td>Colleague as mentor</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-76</td>
<td>Pedagogy books</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-77</td>
<td>Invoking the support of the Department Inspectorate</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-78</td>
<td>Comparison of remediation strategies</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-79</td>
<td>Form of Incompetent Teacher's exit</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-80</td>
<td>Age Breakdown of incompetent teachers who left</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5- 81  Employment status of incompetent teachers who left ...................................................... 236
Table 5- 82  Length of experience of incompetent teachers who left ...................................................... 236
Table 5- 83  Incompetent teacher competent in the past ...................................................................... 237
Table 5- 84  Main Qualifications ....................................................................................................... 238
Table 5- 85  Posts of Responsibility of incompetent teachers who left ................................................ 238
Table 5- 86  Subjects that incompetent teachers who left were theoretically qualified to teach ............ 240
Table 5- 87  Subjects actually taught .................................................................................................. 241
Table 5- 88  Main teaching subject matching main qualification ......................................................... 242
Table 5- 89  Main teaching subject matching main or second subject qualification ............................. 243
Table 5- 90  Subject taught other than the main subject qualification .................................................. 244
Table 5- 91  Subject taught other than main or second subject ............................................................ 245
Table 5- 92  Opinionnaire Summary .................................................................................................. 254
INTRODUCTION

This study attempts to identify, describe and quantify the problem of allegedly incompetent teachers in Irish voluntary secondary schools through the perceptions of their principals.

Despite an extensive academic literature on teacher incompetence internationally, there is only media speculation and anecdotal evidence in Ireland. This study therefore represents a beginning in rectifying that lack of academically rigorous research on teacher incompetence in the Irish context. 'Research is justified by what it allows us to understand' (Van-Wagenen, 1990, p.144) so the primary aim of this study is to increase understanding of teacher incompetence. The resulting improved understanding advances knowledge and points the way to further research. It also informs the debate and offers some practical insights to improve the situation.

Its central thesis is that:

The nature, extent and effects of teacher incompetence in Irish voluntary secondary schools are similar to those in the international experience.

An attempt is made to demonstrate this by estimating the number of incompetent teachers, by describing them and noting their effects as well as by examining the attitudes and reactions of principals and the outcomes of interventions. The thesis is argued by developing eight inter-related themes that emerged from informal focus-group type discussion with convenience samples of voluntary secondary school principals and from consideration of the academic literature. The themes were:

1. The nature of incompetence;
2. The existence and extent of the problem;
3. Incompetent teachers;
4. Attitude of the teacher union;
5. The principals' attitudes;
6. The principals' reactions;
7. Support and remediation;
8. Dismissal and induced exits.

This is a logical arrangement because it begins with what is meant by teaching incompetence. Only then can the existence and extent of the phenomenon be estimated. This leads to consideration of the teachers who embody that incompetence. They are members of a professional union which holds certain attitudes. All of the preceding items colour the attitudes of the principals. These attitudes inform their reactions. Their reactions initially tend to be supportive and lead to remediation but dismissal or induced exits may ultimately result.
Assumptions

Definition of Incompetent Teacher
The data are meaningless unless there is clarity about the meaning of incompetence. The most important assumption, therefore, is that, even though the judgement is necessarily subjective, it is possible to define an incompetent teacher in an objective manner.

After an examination of various approaches in the literature a working definition was produced based on a critical amount of chronic failure in five areas:

Personal failure;
Ethical failure;
Technical failure;
Administrative failure;
Productive failure;

Principals were presented with the definition in the following form:

An incompetent teacher displays persistent failure in some or all of the following areas:

Technical: the teacher is deficient in discipline, teaching method, subject-knowledge, organisation, and planning.

Administrative: the teacher fails to comply with school rules and procedures (e.g. chronic absenteeism and tardiness) and possibly does not follow the curriculum in a sound manner.

Ethical: the teacher violates standards expected of the teaching profession – e.g. having a negative attitude to students, which could range from indifference all the way to physical abuse.

Productive: the teacher fails to produce desirable results in the classroom – e.g. there is little academic progress, students are not interested, they lack respect, and there is a poor climate in the classroom.

Personal: the teacher is deficient in judgement, emotional stability, self-control and strength of character; the teacher is ‘difficult’ and uncooperative with management and colleagues.

Clearly, most of us could be guilty of some of these failures at some point. I am interested in the cases where there is a sufficient and chronic amount of failure – a critical mass such that there is a persistent pattern of mistakes and failure.

The correspondence between these criteria and the types of incompetence displayed by actual teachers as shown in the results suggests that the definition is a good one.
Acceptance of definition
The second assumption is that principals accepted and used the given definition of teacher incompetence. The responses of principals and the comments they made suggest that they did accept the definition, approved of it, and applied it carefully in their estimates.

Truthfulness
Finally it is assumed that the principals answered questions truthfully. Procedures guaranteeing anonymity were put in place to give principals confidence that they could truthfully respond to all questions. The type and tone of responses give the impression of great candour - for example principals often admitted to personal weakness, frustration, helplessness and ineffectiveness in the face of the problem.

Procedures
For practical, ethical and logistical reasons explained in the method chapter, the chosen method was a postal questionnaire administered to every voluntary secondary school principal in the Republic of Ireland on the database of the Secretariat for Secondary Schools. The response rate was 75% (i.e. 325 principals).

Principals were first asked to accept the given definition of an incompetent teacher and then to estimate the number of teachers on their staffs fitting the description. They then completed a type of ‘census form’ on behalf of each incompetent teacher and went on to describe and assess the effectiveness of managerial strategies to confront or accommodate the incompetence. Principals who witnessed the departure of an incompetent teacher recounted how it occurred and, finally, principals were asked to give their level of agreement with a series of assertions concerning teacher incompetence using a Likert-type scale. The data were used to answer twenty research questions and their related sub-questions listed in chapter three.

Key Variables
The key variables are the number of teachers in each school and the number of teachers satisfying the definition of incompetent teacher in the opinion of principals. Teachers are further subdivided by school type and size, by gender, age, experience, qualification, subject, Religious status and employment status, permitting an estimation of the numbers and percentage of incompetent teachers under different headings and allowing multiple comparisons, for example, between the rates of teacher incompetence in different types and sizes of school.

The questionnaire generated 257 variables, each with many subdivisions - for example teacher qualifications and subjects taught. Data were collected to explore each of the eight themes listed above. Demographic data were also collected on the principals themselves allowing testing of the hypotheses that male and female principals respond differently and that Religious and lay principals respond differently.
Delimitations

The questionnaire was administered only to voluntary secondary school principals since principals are in a key position to observe teaching incompetence and also because the attitudes and responses of principals themselves are also being sought. As the focus was maintained on the principals the following groups that interact with incompetent teachers and whose opinions would be valuable were not directly surveyed.

Other kinds of Secondary Schools

Principals of Vocational Schools and of Community and Comprehensive Schools were not surveyed because different philosophies, management structures and traditions would have made cross comparison non-viable.

Primary Schools

There is no investigation of the situation in the primary sector because the differences are even greater than between secondary schools - for example the teacher training for primary teachers is totally different to that for secondary teachers.

Teachers

The focus of the study was on principals and their perceptions of teacher incompetence so neither the allegedly incompetent teachers nor their colleagues were involved personally in the study. Teachers would be valid subjects but would require an approach and methodology not feasible for a lone researcher.

Unions

The teachers' professional union could be legitimately asked for their views in the context of a wider treatment of the issue but the focus is on the existence of incompetent teachers and principals' response. There is a certain amount of reference to the union response but only through the eyes of the principal.

Students


Parents

Ethical and practical constraints prohibit parental involvement in this study. Although their perceptions of incompetent teachers would presumably be mostly hearsay (through their children) their views are important and would merit further investigation with an appropriate research method.

Boards of Management

The views of Board of Management members are of interest and relevance but would represent considerable broadening of the topic.
Department of Education and Science
The views of the Department officials such as the Inspectorate are valid and important but it was not practical to involve them in this particular study. Their position is established from documentary sources and from the comments of the principals.

Managerial Bodies
The staff of the Secretariat of the AMCSS (Association of Management of Catholic Secondary Schools) frequently advises principals experiencing difficulties but involving them was considered too delicate a proposition because of confidentiality and industrial relations implications.

Trustees
Trustees have a legitimate interest concerned with the preservation and continuation of the ethos of their particular Religious Order. The trustees concern for the disadvantaged would extend to teachers in difficulty as well as to students presumably. However, trustees were felt to be too distant from the actual teaching in schools to be fully aware of the extent and nature of incompetence.

University Education Departments
Apart from asking for principals' opinions on their own training as principals and on the training of teachers there is no investigation of the activities of the University Education Departments. The whole issue of teacher training would form an excellent but entirely different research topic.

Investigations of the attitudes and responses of the above 'stakeholders' in incompetent teachers represent valid extensions to the research as indicated in the final list of recommendations.

Timeliness
This study is a timely addition to the field for the following reasons.

Accountability
As in many other countries, there is a movement in the Republic of Ireland towards a more responsive and accountable education system. This manifests itself in a concern for standards and a demand for more partnership with the various stakeholders. Parents are more aware and demanding than in the past. It is a time of consultation and partnership.

Education Act
The passing of the 1998 Education Act puts a spotlight on the educational process in Ireland. In particular the Act states that one of the functions of an Inspector is to ' [...] evaluate the organisation and operation of those schools and centres and the quality and effectiveness of the education provided in those schools or centres, including the quality of teaching and effectiveness of individual teachers;' (Government of Ireland, 1998, p.16)
The publication in England of the ‘Teaching Competence Project’ discussed in the literature review will concentrate minds in Ireland on the topic of incompetent teachers and there will be inevitable media attention. The results presented in this thesis will provide an Irish counterpart.
Wider Implications

Apart from the advancement of knowledge and the improvement of understanding of teacher incompetence the study has three non-academic implications:

1. It informs the debate
2. It aids the search for a solution
3. It offers practical management strategies

It informs the debate

Although teachers have traditionally been held in very high regard in Ireland, there has always been an acknowledgement that all are not equally effective. There are plenty of examples of literary evidence, anecdotal evidence, journalistic articles, letters to newspapers and calls to radio ‘phone in’ programmes concerning incompetent teachers. However the debate needs to be a better-informed one as much of the treatment of the issue is anecdotal with no firm factual foundation. There is neither a common understanding of what is meant by ‘teaching incompetence’ nor is there any solid academic evidence that incompetent teachers exist, let alone how many of them there are, what they teach, how incompetent they are or what is done about them.

If the issue is to be faced then the debate needs to be an informed one. This study offers a definition of teaching incompetence, presents firm evidence concerning the existence and scale of the problem (contradicting speculation that the teaching profession abounds with incompetents for example) and provides data for alternative analyses and interpretations.

It aids the search for a solution

Despite the pessimism of principals’ comments the results do offer some hope of a solution because it demands recognition of the problem and recognising a problem is the first step to solving it. The results present alternative ways of looking at teacher incompetence. For example knowing the number and ages of incompetent teachers permits financial experts to estimate the cost of early retirement packages and knowing the nature of teaching incompetence helps teacher training institutions develop entrance criteria to select candidates who are more likely to be successful.

It offers practical management strategies

Improved understanding is the ultimate aim of all research but practical management strategies suggest themselves as a consequence of that improved understanding. Thus the study is not just an academic exercise but it is grounded in the belief that educational research needs to be rooted in practice and can have a direct bearing on improving that practice. It adds to the store of ideas and array of techniques available to policy makers and practitioners to help them operate more efficiently and more effectively. It has meaning and relevance for management, for the teaching profession, for teachers’ professional unions, for University Education Departments, and for the Department of Education and Science. The implications for each of these are discussed in the final chapter.
Summary

The study argues the thesis that the nature, extent and effects of teacher incompetence in Irish voluntary secondary schools are similar to those in the international experience. It does this by analysing data generated by a postal questionnaire administered to every voluntary secondary school principal in the Republic of Ireland.

This study is timely in the light of the 1998 Education Act, more assertive parents and a more responsive and accountable education system, imminent whole school inspection, a growing ‘appraisal’ culture and pressure on teaching standards. The primary aim is to increase understanding of teacher incompetence in Irish voluntary secondary schools but the research has wider implications: informing the debate, aiding the search for a solution, and suggesting practical management strategies.

The study is concerned with the core activities of a school - teaching and learning. Students deserve good teaching and principals have a duty to do all that they can to make sure that students have good teachers. At the same time we are dealing with teachers’ lives and careers. A balance has to be struck. As Mac Naughton et al (1982, p.34) put it: ‘The stakes are high: a teacher’s career versus a student’s right to a good teacher’
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW
Overview of Chapter

The purpose of this literature review is to set the scene for the investigation of teacher incompetence in Irish voluntary secondary schools.

As explained in the introduction, the framework upon which the literature review is built consists of eight central themes:

1. The nature of incompetence
2. The existence and extent of the problem
3. Incompetent teachers
4. Attitude of the teacher union
5. The Principals’ attitudes
6. The principals’ reactions
7. Support and remediation
8. Dismissal and induced exits

The relevant literature relating to each theme is examined below. This is not merely an expounding of the current situation however. The purpose of the review is to lead to the research questions. At the end of each section therefore, is presented the research question implied.

These questions are further developed in chapter three where they are numbered and expanded into associated sub questions in preparation for the method chapter and the result chapter. These same themes are then revisited in chapter six where the discussion, conclusions and recommendations are offered.

Most of the literature of teacher incompetence originates in the United States where there is a long history of investigating teacher incompetence and marginal teachers. For example, ‘The Incompetent Teacher; Managerial Responses’ (Bridges, 1992) is a comprehensive and provocative highly successful book based on three original research studies. ‘Staff Dismissal; Problems and Solutions’ Neil and Custis (1978) is another very significant publication frequently referred to by others. Each of these and many other miscellaneous journal articles and doctoral theses appear in the review below under the different thematic headings.

Until recently, there was very little research of consequence concerning teacher incompetence in Britain.

There is no British research of any standing that has investigated the issue of teachers alleged to be ‘incompetent’ teachers. Consequently little is known about how they are identified, what criteria are used, what they do, or what happens to them.

There is a certain amount concerned with OFSTED and appraisal but it does not directly address incompetence. Of most relevance has been the ‘Teaching Competence Project’ under the direction of Professor Ted Wragg - a large-scale investigation into teaching incompetence. Although the full report will not be published until September 1999, the team produced nine ‘occasional papers’ during the course of the research and these have been referred to when appropriate. These papers give an adequate picture of the project and its findings.

In Ireland there has been practically nothing done in the field. There is some little research done on the activities school principals - Diggins (1979), Canniffe, (1993) and Leader and Boldt (1994). Of these, the Leader and Boldt report is the most extensive but they merely mention that principals cite poor teachers as one of the sources of stress they experience.

The eight themes and their associated sub themes are now considered individually.
II. The Nature of Incompetence

A workable definition of incompetence has to be developed or the research undertaken would have little validity or reliability and could be dismissed as meaningless.

One of the major difficulties in the literature of incompetence is the use of differing definitions. Incompetence is very difficult to define. There are varying degrees and varying emphases. Indeed some authors don't define it at all. They rely rather on the idea that incompetence can be taken to mean whatever administrators judge to be the case. For example Lavely et al (1992) in their review of the literature state:

One approach in the professional literature bearing on the incidence of incompetent public school teachers is the professional judgement of educators. (Lavely et al, 1992, p.11)

They were performing an empirical assessment of the extent of the problem by examining previous research papers (Neil and Custis (1978), Elam (1979), Scholl (1988), Buellesfield (1915), Good & Grouws (1977), Gudridge (1980), Johnston (1984), Bridges (1986), Haney, Madaus and Kreitzer (1987) - all of whom used differing definitions or none.

But this is not satisfactory because, when one accepts the professional judgement of educators one is also accepting their particular definition of incompetence - and one does not know what that definition is. At the same time principals are professional educators with wide experience and they are in a very good position to observe teaching incompetence; hence it is legitimate to use them as a valid source.

For the purposes of this investigation it was decided therefore to have the best of both worlds by using the opinions of professional educators (in this case principals) but at the same time providing them with a strict definition of teaching incompetence.

There now follows a range of approaches to a definition of incompetence and a justification for the selection of the one eventually used.
The struggle for a definition

Articles and books concerned with teacher incompetence frequently involve a struggle with defining the term:

One of the main problems in trying to deal with incompetence is simply that it’s hard to define. (Neill and Custis, 1978, p.10); 

Incompetence is a concept without precise technical meaning. (Bridges, 1992 p.4); 

The term ‘incompetence to teach’, for example, has been held by various courts to mean anything from failure to maintain discipline, to failure of a teacher’s class to make normal progress, to the teacher’s slothful appearance in the classroom. (McDaniel and McDaniel, 1980 p.34); 

Most of the principals recognized borderline incompetence as a very real problem meaning many different things. To one, it meant sitting at a desk all day. To another, it meant that the teacher was a loner and had not close colleagues. To still another, it meant lack of classroom control. (Briesche, 1987 p.346)

Marginal teachers

If there is a continuum of increasing competence from totally incompetent up to outstanding then a ‘marginal teacher’ straddles the boundary between the incompetent and the competent. There have been several attempts at defining a marginal teacher.

One who appears to have sufficient command of subject matter, but whose lack of classroom management skills gets in the way of student learning (Sweeney and Manatt 1984, p.25); 

[...] being incapable, lacking adequate power, capacities or ability to carry out the duties and responsibilities of the position. This may apply to physical, mental, education, emotional or other personal conditions. (Arnold 1986, p.8); 

[...] a concept which encompasses the notion of a zone of tolerance within which some unsatisfactory teachers perform. (Riehl 1992, p.13)

Marginal teachers are not as hopeless as incompetent teachers are. The performance of a marginal teacher borders on incompetence but is not actual incompetence. A marginal teacher may not be totally beyond redemption. Fuhr (1990) asks the question

What can you do - as the principal and supervisor - to bring marginal teachers up to an acceptable daily level of competence and keep them on the job? (Fuhr, 1990, p.3)

Some of the strategies offered by Fuhr and by others are discussed below in the section concerned with advice to principals on remediation plans.
Bridges (1992) has a different attitude to marginality. He prefers it to incompetence because it is much easier to establish. He defines a marginal teacher as one whose performance ‘[...] falls just short of fulfilling one or more of the professional duties of a teacher’ (Bridges, 1992 p.176). Bridges goes on to give Scriven’s (1988) list of professional duties:

1. Know the subject matter;
2. Design instruction;
3. Select and create materials;
4. Construct tests;
5. Grade or mark students’ performance;
6. Provide information to students about their achievements;
7. Provide information to administrators;
8. Provide information to parents, guardians and authorities;
9. Use resources;
10. Communicate effectively;
11. Manage the classroom;
12. Engage in self-evaluation and development;
13. Render service to the profession; and
14. Acquire and use knowledge of the school and community. (Bridges 1992, p.176)

The marginal teacher, according to Bridges, therefore, fails in some of the above duties. But Bridges’s interest in marginality is not one of sympathy for the teacher. He takes a hard-hearted approach and argues that the concept of marginal performance rather than outright incompetence should be used as the standard for revoking tenure and for dismissal. He prefers to use marginal performance as the yardstick because it is easier to establish whereas incompetence has to be total. Having established it, he wants to use that marginality as a basis for dismissal.
Incompetent teachers

Legal Definition

McDaniel and McDaniel (1980), refer to the South Carolina 1974 Employment and Dismissals Act which specifies two major grounds in law upon which local school boards may base the discharge of a teacher. First, ‘failure or incompetence to teach as directed by the superintendent’ and second, ‘evident unfitness for teaching’ as shown by any of the following:

1) persistent neglect of duty;
2) wilful violation of rules and regulations of the district board;
3) drunkenness;
4) violation of South Carolina or United States law;
5) gross immorality;
6) moral turpitude;
7) dishonesty;
8) illegal use, sale, or possession of drugs or narcotics.

(McDaniel and McDaniel, 1980 p34)

The above numbered list in my view applies to ‘evident unfitness for teaching’, not to ‘failure or incompetence to teach as directed by the superintendent’. Thus while the ‘unfitness’ guidelines are reasonably clear, the phrase ‘incompetence to teach’ is not.

In fact most American States in their tenure/dismissal statutes do not define incompetence. The statutes merely list incompetence as one of several reasons for dismissal. For example, ‘incompetence’ is specifically listed in the statutes of 25 States, while ‘inefficiency’ is listed in 10. (Munnelly, R.J. 1979, p.223)

Some make an effort - Alaska for example:

Alaska defines incompetency (sic) as ‘The inability or the unintentional or intentional failure to perform the teacher’s customary teaching duties in a satisfactory manner
(Bridges, 1990 p.3)’

Legislators in Tennessee go into even greater detail:

[…] Tennessee defines incompetency as being incapable; lacking adequate power, capacity or ability to carry out the duties and responsibilities of the position. This may apply to physical, mental, educational, emotional or other personal conditions. It may include lack of training or experience. Evident unfitness for service; physical, mental or emotional condition unfitting a teacher to instruct or associate with children; or inability to command respect for (sic) subordinates or
to secure co-operation of those with whom he (sic) must work. (Bridges, 1990 p.3)

This is a bit better but it is not a satisfactory definition for the purposes of this research and was rejected because it speaks of the disease but not of the symptoms. How do you diagnose the incompetence? What is the touchstone? 'Evident unfitness for service...'; (What makes it evident?) ' [...] inability to command respect' (How do you know they are unable to command respect?).

Case Law

Since the legal definitions themselves are not great, a better approach to defining incompetence is to consider the actual results and judgements of court cases. These arise where school boards have dismissed a teacher and the teacher then takes legal action and appeals the decision.

Legally, incompetence means what the courts have said it means in specific situations (Neil and Custis, 1978 p.10)

Bridges (1985b) makes the point that Judges generally accept the definition of incompetence presented by the administrator.

Judges are inclined to accept the administrator's definition of incompetence without question as long as the criteria embodied in this definition have been communicated to teachers and teachers have received information about the specific ways in which their performance has failed to satisfy the criteria. (Bridges, 1985b p.58)

It might appear that we are back to Lewis Carroll's 'Alice Through the Looking Glass' and Humpty Dumpty for whom a word meant what he chose it to mean. This is not so however. This is progress if one considers how administrators come to their decision - how they diagnose incompetent behaviour. Analysing cases where the courts upheld the decision of the board gives one an idea of the teachers' behaviours that the courts have considered as constituting incompetence.

An analytical review of U.S. cases by Neill and Custis (1978) categorised the 'reasons' as follows:

*Teaching methods*, including failure to maintain classroom control, failure to adapt to current teaching techniques, physical mistreatment of pupils, and poor lesson organization.

*Effects on pupils*. Courts have upheld the dismissal of teachers who couldn’t get along with pupils in their classes, who failed to keep self-control, who caused low morale or fear among pupils and who related personal, financial or sexual matters in class. In addition, several courts have upheld firings based on such charges of
low pupil achievement as 'his testing results were poor' 'her pupils did not learn very much' and 'pupils have not progressed in your class in accordance with their abilities.'

*Teacher's personal attitude*, including tardiness, refusal to teach, refusal to accept supervision and lack of concern or courtesy. A teacher who brought her record player to class so she could doze while children listened to music was dismissed. So were others who refused to allow supervisory personnel to enter the classroom, who failed to co-operate with other teachers and who showed lack of self restraint and tact in dealing with co-workers, pupils and parents.

*Knowledge of subject matter.* Teachers have been dismissed for specific errors of fact in history and geography and for lack of knowledge of English grammar, spelling and punctuation.

(Neill and Custis 1978, p.11)

This is a much more promising definition but an even better one, based on persistent failure, is offered by Bridges (1990) later in this review.

**England and Wales**

In England there is no agreed definition of an incompetent teacher. As Ted Wragg of Exeter University put it; 'One person's 'lazy incompetent' is another person's 'unsupported victim' [...]’ (Smithers, 1999)

The general secretary of the national Association of Headteachers in England was quoted as saying that

Most people would define incompetence as being incapable of standing in front of the class and beyond redemption, [...]. Incompetent teachers should not be there in the first place, but those whose performance falls short of expectations need help to improve. (Carvel, 1998, *The Guardian* [online] p.2).

This is a somewhat circular definition since, if someone is incapable of standing in front of a class then he or she is incompetent, and if someone is incompetent then he or she is incapable of standing in front of a class. It doesn't progress the search for a definition very far since it doesn't say how one would know that someone was incapable of standing in front of a class.

The idea of being 'beyond redemption' is interesting however. It suggests that incompetence is not simply a temporary condition such as might be precipitated by illness or personal problems such as marital disharmony. It suggests that incompetence is a condition arising out of some intractable series of problems or personality factors.
A similar haziness surrounds the academic literature. Despite the culture of accountability, appraisal and evaluation, despite the huge inspection industry, despite the enormous media and public interest, there is precious little academic research in England to back up the popular notion of teacher incompetence.

There has been virtually no significant systematic research in this country into what constitutes 'incompetence' in the classroom, what steps are reached, whether those alleged to be incompetent improve or deteriorate, and what impact the process has on the whole school community. (Wragg, 1997, TES p.20)

The office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) was set up in England in 1992. It is independent from the Department of Education and headed by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of schools - Chris Woodhead. All maintained schools in England and Wales are inspected by teams of independent inspectors initially on a four-year but now on a six-year cycle.

OFSTED does not provide an actual definition of an incompetent teacher but, as is clear from his remarks reported later in this review, Mr Woodhead has left people in no doubt as to his belief in their existence - once famously estimating that there were 15,000 '[…]' who, ideally, should be removed.' (Pyke, TES February 2nd 1996).

On July 15th 1997 OFSTED released a statement concerning a profile of teaching quality to be given to Headteachers:

Using a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (excellent) to 7 (very poor), Inspectors will continue to assess and record the teaching quality of individual lessons observed. This information will be presented to Headteachers by putting the seven grades into three groups. The first will cover grades 1 and 2 (excellent / very good), the second grades 3 and 4 (good / satisfactory) and the third grades 5, 6 and 7 (unsatisfactory / poor / very poor) (OFSTED 1997)

It is not very clear how each of these grades is awarded. If it is on the basis of the inspectors' reports then it would appear to be based mostly on the quality of the lessons observed. That is a very narrow and inadequate focus.

A good attempt at an operational definition was arrived at by Wragg et al (1998d) when they asked head teachers who had experience of allegedly incompetent teachers to tick off factors in which a teacher's performance was unsatisfactory. This produced the following:
Factors in which a teacher's performance was unsatisfactory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Percentage of cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Expectation of pupils</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Pupils' progress</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Planning and preparation</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Classroom discipline</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Inability to respond to change</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Differentiating work according to pupils' abilities</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Monitoring and assessment of pupils</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Relationship with pupils</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Managing classroom resources</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Adhering to school policies</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Relationship with teacher colleagues</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Commitment to job</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Areas in which a teacher's performance [was] regarded as unsatisfactory (684 cases)

Wragg et al noted that 'There is a particularly strong focus on pupils' learning, and it is noticeable that the two highest categories are low expectations and poor progress.'

(Wragg et al 1998d, p.6)
Ireland

In 1997 the Irish Department of Education introduced a scheme allowing early retirement for primary and post-primary teachers. It had three ‘strands’. The first strand was designed for teachers ‘[...] who are consistently experiencing professional difficulties in their teaching duties [...]’ (Dept. of Ed. 1997, p.2).

‘Consistently experiencing professional difficulties’ can be taken as a ‘code’ for ‘incompetent’ - particularly when the guidelines in the appendix are considered.

In identifying the ‘professional difficulties’ under which certain teachers may take early retirement the Irish Department of Education offer the following guidelines.

1. Professional Difficulties should be identified under the following headings:
   - Expertise
   - Commitment
   - On-going Professional Development

2. Relevant negative indicators of performance under these headings include the following:

   **Expertise**
   - difficulties in maintaining a minimum degree of teaching competence
   - difficulties in maintaining discipline and control in class

   **Commitment**
   - difficulties in relation to co-operation and communication with pupils, colleagues, parents and management

   **On-going Professional Development**
   - difficulties in keeping up to date with developments in subject/s area
   - failure to benefit from in-service courses

Supporting evidence of these indicators could include records of complaints and inspectors’ and welfare officers’ reports.
(Dept. of Ed 1997, appendix)

The element of diagnosis - of ‘negative indicators’ has some merit.


Under-performance can be defined as a persistent failure to achieve acceptable teaching and learning standards in the classroom. (Dept. of Ed., 1995 p.134)

This is true but too general to be of use as an acceptable definition.
Definition based on failure

Bridges's (1990) approach is similar to that of Neil and Custis (1978) but he organises it differently. Bridges considers incompetence as involving different types of persistent failure for which tenured teachers had been dismissed. He describes:

1. **Technical failure.** The teacher's expertise falls short of what the task requires. Technical failure is indicated by deficiencies in one or more of the following: discipline, teaching methods, knowledge of subject matter, explanation of concepts, evaluation of pupil performance, organization, planning, lesson plans, and homework assignments.

2. **Bureaucratic failure.** The teacher fails to comply with school/district rules and regulations or directives of superiors. Bureaucratic failure is indicated by the teacher's failure to follow suggestions for improving his or her performance, to adhere to the content of the district's curriculum or to allow supervisors in the classroom for purposes of observing the teacher's performance.

3. **Ethical failure.** The teacher fails to conform to standards of conduct presumably applicable to members of the teaching profession. Violations of these standards commonly take the form of physical or psychological abuse of students, negative attitudes towards students, and indifferent performance of one's teaching duties.

4. **Productive failure.** The teacher fails to obtain certain desirable results in the classroom. Productive failure is indicated by the academic progress of students, the interest of students in what is being taught, the attitudes of students toward school, the respect of students for the teacher, and the climate of the classroom.

5. **Personal failure.** The teacher lacks certain cognitive, affective, or physical attributes deemed instrumental in teaching. Indicators of personal deficiencies include poor judgement, emotional instability, lack of self-control, and insufficient strength of character to withstand the rigors of teaching.

(Bridges, 1990 p.6)

This is more useful. It has the merit of containing reasonably clear indicators of incompetence. One needs to ask how many of the above criteria are necessary to constitute actual incompetence. Clearly, a 'critical mass' needs to be reached. As Bridges rightly says:

Dis dismissal rarely stems from a single unforgivable, egregious error; rather, termination is based upon a pattern of mistakes and failure that persists over periods ranging from several months to several years. (Bridges, 1990 p.7)

An adaptation of this definition is presented in chapter three. It involves slight changes in terminology and adds the idea of a 'critical mass' of incompetence.

**Implied Research Question:**

- What is the nature of the incompetence?
2. Existence and Extent of the Problem

Ubiquity

Although, as shown above, there is no universally agreed precise definition of teacher incompetence, there is little doubt that it is a worldwide phenomenon.

Chinese officials view teacher incompetence as a serious problem and estimate that there are three million such teachers in their country.

(Bridges, 1992, p.viii)

Lavelly et al (1992) concluded that approximately 10% of public school teachers in the United States were incompetent. In England, all of the Headteachers interviewed by Grace (1984) had experience of incompetent teachers. In Ireland, although there has been no research done in this area, Leader and Boldt (1994, p.121) report that, of the Irish voluntary secondary school principals to whom they spoke, 48% ranked the problem of ‘incompetent teachers’ as the most difficult item with which they had to deal.

History

The problem is far from new. In 1894 for example, Balliet, a Massachusetts school superintendent, declared that only two types of teacher existed: the efficient and the inefficient. He said that the only way schools could be reformed was to

[...] secure a competent superintendent; second, to let him ‘reform’ all the teachers who are incompetent and can be ‘reformed’; thirdly, to bury the dead.

(Glanz, 1993, p.65)

Nor is teacher incompetence particularly new in the academic literature. It has been discussed over a long period - for example - Littler (1914), Buellesfield (1915), National Education Association (1924), Madsen (1927), Scott (1934), Simon (1934) Jones (1946), McCall and Krause (1959).
**Media Interest**

The media frequently express an interest in education because it concerns both the welfare of a nation as a whole and the welfare of individual children. Parents are naturally anxious that their children get the best possible education. Talk of 'standards' and 'incompetent teachers' makes good 'copy'.

Sample newspaper headlines include:

- Poor teachers put on notice  
  (The Sydney Morning Herald, April 26th 1997)

- Quarter of pupils have bad teachers  
  (The Sunday Times, 28th January 1996)

- Proposals would allow teachers deemed unfit to be struck off  
  (Irish Times, 20th September 1994)

- New bid to deal with complaints against teachers  
  (Irish Independent, 1st September 1997)

- Inept teachers to go in £65m retirement package  
  (The Cork Examiner, 21st February, 1996)

There are numerous other examples in the same vein - for example those which report the views of controversial OFSTED chief inspector Chris Woodhead discussed below.

Similar views are to be found in telephone-in radio programmes, panel discussions and chat shows. A particularly interesting example occurred on the *Matins* radio programme - short 'thought for the day' slot on RTE (Radio Telefis Éireann) on September 8th 1995. The broadcaster - Bill Long - recounted two anecdotes from his own personal experience that illustrated a lack of interest and enthusiasm of some teachers and their cynical attitude to parents' complaints. He finished with a prayer.

*Lord, help the many good teachers to see that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. Help them to admit that such weak links exist in their profession and give them the moral strength to take some drastic remedial action. Help them appreciate that they are here dealing with children's lives. If a 'weak' worker on a production line produces a faulty product it doesn't get past quality control, and is instantly put right. With young lives it is different; the damage is always irreversible and irreparable. (Long, B., RTE Radio Sept 8th 1995)*

This broadcast elicited such a furious reaction from teachers and their unions that a repeat of the broadcast scheduled for later the same morning was cancelled.
Academic estimates

In the literature there have been several attempts at estimating the extent of the problem. Lavely et al (1992) 'Actual Incidence Of Incompetent Teachers' Education Research Quarterly Vol.15, No.2, April 1992 is a survey of the professional literature concerned with investigating the actual incidence of ' [...] incompetent, ineffective, inadequate teachers in the public schools.' (p.11) Lavely et al noted two types of evidence for making the estimation:

- professional judgement; e.g. Neill and Custis (1978) and Scholl (1988)

Both approaches lead to the conclusion that approximately 10% of public school teachers are incompetent.

The above conclusion suffers from the problem of differing definitions of incompetence and different measuring techniques. For example, Bullesfield counted actual dismissal whereas Good and Grouw used residual gain scores and Gudridge used interviews and informal observation. These are wildly different yardsticks and cannot be legitimately compared. They look at the same thing but from different angles.

Neill and Custis (1978) contains a chapter entitled 'Dismissals: Who, How, How Many?' They surveyed an 11% sampling of US school districts. One half of the respondents said they had dismissed staff for reasons of 'incompetence' over a three-year period. This comprised people actually fired and people resigning after charges were filed. They were not all teachers. Administrators and other staff were also dismissed. The calculation for teachers came to one-half of one percent.

The above figures refer to actual termination of teachers. Neil and Custis furthermore note that 'Superintendents and personnel directors estimated that from 5 to 15 percent of the teachers in their districts do not give adequate job performance.' (p.8) They also refer to an 'evaluation expert', George Redfern, an experienced administrator and consultant who puts the figure at 5 to 10 percent.

Over 50% of the 722 Pennsylvanian elementary and secondary principals who returned surveys to Mock and Melnick (1991) indicated that, if they could, they would replace between 3 and 10 % of their staff.

In summary then, according to the literature, approximately 10% of teachers are deemed to be ineffective in one way or another.
The above estimates suffer from several shortcomings:

- different definitions of 'incompetence' or ineffectiveness;
- different recording systems;
- sometimes, without an official statement of incompetence, people are eased out. (Bridges 1992) calls them 'induced exits';
- some administrators may have been reluctant to admit that they continued to employ incompetent teachers;
- there is sometimes an unwillingness to acknowledge the existence of the problem because of a fear of the stress which results when it is tackled;
- likely expensive litigation can also put administrators off the confrontation path
- ineffective teachers are sometimes tolerated and protected.

England and Wales

The existence of incompetent teachers in England has been an issue frequently raised by Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Schools Chris Woodhead. He has conducted a high profile campaign and has been often quoted. On one occasion he estimated there were 15,000 incompetent teachers in the State system. This would represent 4.3 per cent of the profession.

OFSTED has recently concluded that there are some 15,000 staff in the State system who, ideally, should be removed. This is an extrapolation from the number of unsatisfactory lessons seen so far (Pyke, TES February 2nd 1996)

Despite this estimate, in that same year it emerged that, in accordance with a seven point scale' […] out of 2,862 inspections, only 88 teachers had been given the bottom two grades - casting doubt on the Chief Inspector’s famous assertion that there are 15,000 bad teachers.’ (Gardiner, TES July 18th 1997)

By 1998 the estimate had dropped. Although a precise definition of an incompetent teacher was still not forthcoming, and although the measurement system appeared to be based upon the quality of lessons delivered, ‘[…] OFSTED estimates that the number of ‘incompetent’ teachers fell last year from 4.3 per cent to 3.5 per cent of the profession.’ (Carvel, 1998, The Guardian [online] p.2)
Ireland

There is nothing in the Irish literature that deals with incompetent teachers specifically - apart from a mention by Leader and Boldt (1994) who say that incompetent teachers are a source of stress to Irish voluntary secondary school principals. They report that 47.6% of the principals they surveyed said that the problem of 'incompetent teachers' was the most difficult thing they faced (Leader and Boldt 1994, p. 121).

From the point of view of this research it was of particular interest to investigate if Lavely's estimate of 10% incompetence is the experience in the Irish context.

Implied Research Questions

- What is the extent of the problem of incompetent teachers in Irish voluntary secondary schools?
- Are incompetent teachers distributed equally throughout the voluntary secondary sector? (Does a school's location, size, boarding or non-boarding status, its gender type, or whether or not it is fee-paying make a difference?)
3. Incompetent Teachers

Characteristics

There is very little research on the demographics, characteristics and subject qualifications of incompetent teachers themselves. Seltzer (1992, p.85) describes the characteristics of teachers who had been placed on remediation by 61 Illinois principals who had responded to her ‘opinionaire’. She gives the ages, the number of years of experience and the gender and compares them to the general teacher population. Her study does not deal with teaching subjects because some teachers were elementary and some were secondary.

Some examples of the American, English and Irish literature relating to the incompetent teachers themselves is now considered in more detail.

United States

A study of marginal teachers - nearly, but not quite, incompetent - was undertaken by Ehrcott et al (1993). They sent a survey to 518 administrators in California. One of the aims of the study was to identify and categorise different kinds of marginal teacher. The major factors identified by the administrators were, in descending order:

- Persistent classroom control problems;
- Lack of motivation;
- Burnout;
- Personal Crisis.

Other less important factors included:

- Changing student demographics;
- Not being suited to subject or grade level;
- Teacher perceives lack of parental support;
- Philosophical differences between teacher and evaluator;
- Teacher perceives lack of administrative support;
- Inadequate inservice training.

Research into principals' perceptions of remediation of unsatisfactory teachers carried out by Seltzer (1992) found that teachers on remediation ‘[...] failed to demonstrate effective behavior management skills and had difficulty conveying appropriate expectations to the students. ‘Out of class’ (sic) behaviors of most concern were student and parent complaints, failure to follow directions and low student achievement.’ (Seltzer, 1992 p.ii)
There are myriad ‘reasons’ incompetent teachers can offer for the lack of progress in their classes. An ironic, humorous and cynical analysis of this phenomenon is presented by Griffin (1993). In his article ‘How to Stay in a Rut as a Teacher’ he presents a whole range of excuses - for example the ‘bad time’ excuse.

Here’s how it works: You note with great force and sincerity that while your students might get something done some other time, right now is a bad time for them to learn - and therefore, a bad time for you to try to teach them anything. (Griffin, 1993, p.293)

If you teach first thing in the morning you can say that students have probably been up all night watching videos and have just crawled out of bed so are in no condition to learn. Before lunchtime they’re hungry and can’t concentrate. After lunch they can’t study because they are sleepy after having eaten. Last class they are thinking of going home. He also offers some other excuses that have the ring of truth about them.

Look, if my classloads were smaller I could get something done.

If I didn’t have a couple of ‘bad apples’ in my third period I could go to town.

This (whatever it is) should have started in the earlier grades. By the time they get to me, it’s too late to do anything.

Teaching low-level classes, you wind up just baby-sitting.

You can’t make a change in one classroom. It’s bigger than that. The whole system (society, etc.) has to change before anything can happen.

(Griffin, 1993, p.294)

**England and Wales**

In England a large research project into ‘incompetent teachers’ has recently been completed by Ted Wragg of Exeter University and his team.

1. A large (c.1,000) national sample of primary and secondary head teachers on how they define ‘incompetence’, what experiences they have had of dealing with incompetent teachers, what steps were taken, what the outcomes were, whether the process seemed successful or unsuccessful

2. Intensive case studies, including classroom observation, of a sample of teachers alleged to be incompetent

3. Interviews with chairmen of school governing bodies

4. Interviews with LEA and teacher union officers

5. Interviews with several hundred pupils of different ages

(University of Exeter 1999 [online])
The full results are expected to be published in September 1999.

As well as surveying head teachers, governors, union officials, education officers, parents and pupils, the researchers sought out allegedly incompetent teachers. They ran advertisements in the educational press. For example:

If you are a teacher about whom there have been allegations of incompetence, the Exeter team would like to send you a questionnaire to complete. If you know of a teacher in this position, ask him or her to contact the project. No teacher will be identified in project reports. Please write in confidence to Gill Haynes, Teaching Competence Project, School of Education, Exeter University, Exeter EX1 2LU (Wragg, 1997, TES p.20)

This eventually yielded 70 'incompetent' teachers.

Detailed demographic and other information is not yet available for this sample of allegedly incompetent teachers. Newspaper reports say that a common theme was the emotional trauma experienced by these teachers when confronted.

After 20 years of teaching and having been valued by parents, pupils, colleagues, governors and previous heads, I feel completely demoralised because of a head who had been in the school for eight weeks, one teacher said. (Smithers, 1999)

This last quote is from an individual teacher and reflects his or her perception of having been valued by all before the new principal arrived. This may be true: alternatively, some element of transference of blame could be occurring.

Occasional Paper No. 5 (Wragg et al 1998d) was a preliminary report on a questionnaire survey of a stratified random sample of 3,017 Headteachers which elicited 1,966 responses which Wragg et al remark is an extremely high return rate given the length of the questionnaire and the pressure under which head teachers work. Of these, 654 gave details of at least one case of alleged incompetence in their experience.
Concerning the response of allegedly incompetent teachers on being confronted, Wragg et al divide the teachers into two camps - those who later improved and those who did not. There were interesting differences between them:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>non-improvers</th>
<th>improvers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addressed issues raised/took on board advice/went on courses</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did nothing/not a lot</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went on sick leave for a period, then worked to improve</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refused to accept there was a problem</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted union</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Emotional’ response</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not at first accept there was a problem, later worked to improve</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Percentage of 327 heads mentioning various reactions of non-improvers (76% of total sample) and improvers (24% of sample)**

(Wragg et al 1998d, p.8)

Head teachers felt that self-awareness was an important ingredient. Its absence was a serious obstacle to any hope of improvement.

I don’t think he understands it. (Wragg et al 1997 p.9)

It seems that many incompetent teachers do not see the problem. As part of the Teaching Competence Project Wragg et al received completed questionnaire surveys from 70 allegedly incompetent teachers 77% of whom ‘[…] had not previously considered that they had a problem with their performance, [...]’ (Wragg et al. 1998b, p.8). Given that the 70 allegedly incompetent teachers were self-selecting volunteers many of whom ‘[…] felt strongly that they had been unjustly accused of unsatisfactory performance, [...]’ (Wragg et al. 1998b, p.8) the researchers felt that the high rejection rate was not surprising.
Ireland
Apart from the brief mention by Leader and Boldt (1994) discussed above, there is absolutely nothing about incompetence or marginality or teacher ineffectiveness research done in Ireland.

The implications for this research are that the perceptions of Irish 'incompetent teachers' - for example their reactions to being confronted - are worth investigating. These were incorporated into the questionnaire - even though they were being reported by the principals rather than the allegedly incompetent teachers themselves.

Implied Research Questions
- What are the characteristics of incompetent teachers in Irish voluntary secondary schools?
- What is the relationship between teaching qualifications and the subjects being taught?
- What was the reaction of the incompetent teacher if confronted?
4. Attitudes of Teacher Union

Protection

The teachers' professional union is an important player in the drama of teacher incompetence as it is frequently called upon by the teachers concerned. The allegedly incompetent teachers naturally expect their union to defend them.

The literature's reference to union involvement comes at the issue of teacher incompetence from two main angles and these two angles constitute a dilemma for the unions.

First there is the protection of their members from unfair dismissal and harassment - as explained in Leveillee (1983, p.2) in relation to the introduction of tenure laws for example. Similarly, Brieschke (1987) remarks that most teachers identified as borderline ‘[…] used the support of their strong teacher union, an organization that supported them regardless of their alleged state of incompetence, immorality, ineptness, and so on.’ (Brieschke, 1987, p.244)

This policy position is made more pressing on unions by the insistence of their members that the unions have a duty to protect them. Unions have to defend their members because their members could sue them if they didn't.

Bridges refers to several rulings of the United States Supreme Court:
- Charles Bowen v. United States Postal Service et al., 103 S.Ct. 588 (1983);
- Vaca v. Sipes, 386 U.S. 171 (1967);
  (Bridges, 1992, p.99)

According to these rulings, ‘[…] unions owe their members the duty of fair representation. Moreover, any member of the bargaining unit, whether (s)he belongs to the union or not, has the right to sue and recover punitive damages if the union fails to fulfil its duty of fair representation.’ (Bridges, 1992, p.90)

Professionalism

On the other hand, unions wish to be professional bodies believing in maintaining proper standards and having no desire to defend incompetence. What sometimes happens is that the union defends the teacher publicly but privately counsels the teacher to resign or take early retirement or take sick leave. For example Bridges (1992) reports that, although some administrators complained of the protective posture of the unions most acknowledged that the unions had been supportive and had advised or persuaded the teacher to quit. As one administrator put it:

The union’s role is critical in counseling a teacher out. Of the 5 per cent that get counseled out, 75 per cent are with the help of the union.
  (Bridges, 1992, p.91)
United States

As well as the issues mentioned above, the idea of peer review has arisen recently in the United States as an idea that the unions can embrace. The AFT (American Federation of Teachers) is the second largest teacher union in the United States. It never formally opposed peer review. The largest union the NEA (National Education Union) did oppose peer review initially but in 1998 it voted to end its opposition. However some educational specialists are suspicious. They believe that the change of heart ‘[...] may have more to do with protecting incompetent teachers than raising standards.’ (National Center for Policy Analysis, 1998, p.1)

The most famous peer review system in the United States began in Toledo, Ohio in 1981. McCormick (1985) describes how the teacher union (the AFT) and school system leaders in Toledo were working together in a programme of ‘[...] rigorous evaluation, training for new teachers, remediation for veteran teachers, and peer review in an effort to sweep the faculty clean of incompetents.’ (McCormick, 1985a, p.19). In a related article in the same issue, McCormick goes on to describe how other districts were examining the so-called ‘Toledo Plan’. (McCormick, 1985b, p.23).

Eleven years later, in 1996 these union-agreed peer review programmes had not quite taken hold. They were only operating in five urban districts - three of which were in Ohio. Nevertheless, they were held up as ‘[...] a model for raising national teaching standards.’ (Cornwell, 1996, p.1). Cornwell reports that in Cincinnati all newly hired teachers (even those with considerable experience) must enter the PAEP (Peer Assistance and Evaluation Programme) and in Seattle there is a similar programme called STAR (Staff Training and Review). Union officials were of the view that, instead of just protecting teachers in trouble they should ‘[...] get in at the front end and try to help them.’ (Cornwell, 1996, p.2).
England and Wales

Union officers were interviewed as part of the 'Teaching Competence Project' - a two year research project investigating competence and incompetence in the teaching profession. The preliminary results of these interview were presented in 'Occasional Paper 2: Interviews with Teacher Association Officers'. (Wragg et al, 1998a). Some officers felt it was not part of their role to even define incompetence, and some who did so wished to speak of the causes and contexts rather than the symptoms. Management was blamed for inappropriate appointments - square pegs in round holes. Some alleged incompetence was said to be due to a clash of values and beliefs. External factors were also identified - e.g. ill health, bereavement, relationships and home problems. The many changes in education over the past ten years and the ' [...] unreasonable nature of the workload that's being placed upon teachers' were felt to make demands which some teachers simply could not meet.' (Wragg et al 1998a, p.4)

Some officers had the perception that there were more cases of alleged incompetence in primary schools than in secondary because the larger institutions could offer more support.

The impact of a new head was also seen as an important factor. 'A new head, without tribal loyalties to the existing staff, was more able to come into the school and address problems where they existed.' (Wragg et al, 1998a, p.8)

When asked about the frequency of alleged incompetence the union officers felt that the number was rising - because of, they believed, perceived rather than real levels of incompetence increasing.

The most common outcome of cases were early retirement or retirement on the grounds of ill health, ' [...] a route actively encouraged by unions.' (Wragg et al 1998a, p.10).
Ireland

Representing approximately 16,000 teachers in schools attended by 80% of second-level pupils, the ASTI (Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland) is the main second-level teachers’ union in the Republic of Ireland. As exemplified by the scrolling banner on their website ‘Serving Teachers, Promoting Education’ (ASTI, 1999), the union has to maintain the balance between defending its members and being a professional body.

Evidence of its professional position has been its long-standing demand for the establishment of a professional regulatory body for teachers along the lines of the medical council. As well as advising on the induction of newly qualified teachers and the provision of in-service training the teaching council would draw up codes of practice and ‘[…] where appropriate, apply sanctions in relation to the professional misconduct or fitness to practise of any member. (Department of Education and Science, 1998, p.14)

The union was also heavily involved in negotiations leading to a voluntary early retirement package for teachers mentioned above in section 1 - The Nature of incompetence - the Irish definition.

Implied Research Questions

- To what extent does the teacher union get involved?
5. The Principals’ Attitudes

In particular - what exactly are the attitudes of principals towards teacher incompetence?

In the literature relating to the attitudes of principals to teacher incompetence there are several recurring themes:

- Incompetent teachers are a source of stress - e.g. Leader and Boldt, (1994, p.121)
- Principals lack the time the problem demands - e.g. Seltzer, (1992 p.143).
- There is a perception that ‘you can’t win’ - e.g. Munnely (1979 p.221)
- Tackling the issue is an enormously draining undertaking - e.g. Fuhr (1990, p.3)
- There is role conflict for principals - e.g. Tucker (1997, p.117)
- The dismissal process is particularly arduous - e.g. Bridges (1992, p.116).

**United States**

The principals’ attitude to incompetent teachers can be found in the American literature in two main forms. First there is the form where principals are directly asked their opinion - usually in the context of evaluation and remediation plans. An examples of this genre is Mock and Melnick (1991) which is itself a survey of principals' attitudes to the marginal teacher. Then there are the articles from which the principals’ attitudes can be deduced from their actions. An example of this form is Guthrie and Willower (1973) analysing principals’ classroom teaching observation reports which Guthrie and Willower revealingly refer to as ‘the ceremonial congratulation’ (Guthrie and Willower, 1973, p.289).

The general feeling from the American literature is that principals are well aware of the existence of a percentage (3% - 10%) of incompetent and marginal teachers not performing at an acceptable level, but time management is a problem, support from their districts could be better, and their training for the instructional supervision of unsatisfactory teachers leaves a lot to be desired. They do their best but it is frustrating when there are so many other things to be doing at the same time:

With all the additional job expectations that are piled on to an existing full load, principals are forced into a situation of wearing too many hats at one time. The resultant effect is that administrators are not sure which hat to wear at what time and grow extremely over-extended in their jobs. Their role as mentor and evaluator to the teaching staff becomes curtailed.

(Mock and Melnick, 1991, p.9)
England and Wales

The Teaching Competence Project under the direction Wragg is again the most useful source for the attitude of principals in England and Wales since Occasional Paper No. 1. (Wragg et al 1997) was a preliminary report on the results of interviews with 60 head teachers.

There follows some of the points of interest.

- Head teachers found dealing with allegedly incompetent teachers very stressful.

  "I went to hell and back";
  "It took a year, a very painful, traumatic, long drawn out year.";
  "You’re totally on your own. I was always frightened I was going to go off on long term sick."

  (Wragg et al 1997, p.1)

- When asked for their own definition of teaching incompetence, head teachers mentioned certain characteristics:

  Poor classroom discipline;
  Poor relationships with pupils;
  Lack of commitment to the job;
  Personality deficiencies;
  Inability to deliver the curriculum;
  Lack of planning.

- Not all discipline problems were of the over-permissive variety. Head teachers felt some teachers were too rigid and authoritarian.

  They see children as the enemy and set up an attitude of confrontation;

  They may be authoritarian ... but they create resentment by trying to impose their will without making lessons interesting.

  (Wragg et al 1997, p.7)
Ireland

The most extensive research undertaken in Ireland concerning Irish principals was that of Leader and Boldt (1994).

They describe voluntary secondary school principals as committed to their school. Their workload is enormous as they are exposed to the demands of others. Furthermore there are constant ‘interruptions’ to the tasks they undertake so their day is very fragmented. ‘The daily round of principalship involves interactions with a wide range of people on a continuing basis, and is often determined by problems requiring immediate resolution.’ (Leader and Boldt 1994, p.94).

Incompetent teachers weren’t at the focus of the Leader and Boldt research but ‘[...] ‘incompetent’ teachers were seen by principals to be the item of most difficulty for them.’ (Leader and Boldt 1994, p.88).

As well as pointing out that principals generally did not like to confront teachers, they add ‘Female Religious, in particular, found dealing with ‘incompetent’ teachers to be difficult or distasteful.’ (Leader and Boldt 1994, p.27).

**Implied Research Questions**

- What are the opinions of principals concerning incompetent teachers generally?
6. The Principals’ Reactions

Although there is a vast literature on the work of principals, ‘[…] it tends to be normative and prescriptive rather than descriptive’ (Morris et al., 1984, p.19)

The interest for this research was in the actuality of real principals.

The actual response of principals and administrators when faced with the problem of under-performing, ineffective, marginal or incompetent teachers is of vital importance. What actually happens?

How they diagnose

Before principals react to incompetent teachers they first have to know that they exist. Principals must evaluate their teaching staff in some way. The form of evaluation that the principal undertakes affects the process of diagnosis.

There are two kinds of teacher evaluation possible - formative and summative. The formative kind endeavours to help the teacher develop professionally. It is collaborative and non-threatening. Summative evaluation on the other hand collects information which is evidence for a performance judgement of the teacher that may affect his or her career prospects. Under these circumstances the teacher may not co-operate with the evaluative process.

In the United States there is a history of formal performance evaluation of teachers by principals. Such summative performance evaluations need criteria and standards. Illinois for example has at least five criteria:

1. the teacher’s attendance
2. planning
3. instructional methods
4. classroom management
5. competency in the subject matter taught
(Hazard, 1993 p.4)

Hazard (1993) also makes the point that summative evaluation requires a formal relationship between the principal and the teacher. In the United States it would be normal for administrators to have some training in this. ‘Most State evaluation plans require some kind of training for the evaluators’ (Hazard, 1993, p4)
Advice sources

Management literature is an obvious source from which principals might seek advice about dealing with teacher incompetence. There are many such articles - e.g. McDaniel and McDaniel (1980), Munnelly (1979), Essex (1986), Mac Naughton and Ross (1982) These assume that the desired outcome is the dismissal of the teacher concerned. They recommend the keeping of extensive written files on teachers who have obvious shortcomings. There must be documentation of the deficiencies and evidence that the teacher was advised and helped and given every opportunity to improve. There must also be documentary evidence of any improvement. In particular they caution that the written evaluation by the principal is often crucial. 'Too often, a teacher’s written evaluation turns out to be the best defense during the termination hearing.' (Mac Naughton and Ross, 1982, p.34)

The general idea is to establish a case that the incompetence is not just a one-off aberration but chronic and irremediable.

The files must also include records of not just one observation and follow-up conference, but of several, so that a pattern of deficiency or incompetence is established. (McDaniel and McDaniel (1980 p.35)

In the Irish context there is no such procedure in place apart from the standard industrial disciplinary procedures of verbal warnings followed by written warnings - applicable more to misconduct rather than incompetence.

Why the issue is avoided

As discussed above in section 5 - The Principals’ Attitudes - the literature cites many reasons to avoid the issues:

- the stress;
- apparent hopelessness;
- lack of time;
- the conflict between instructional leadership and pastoral concern for staff;
- the desire for good relationships;
- fear of legal consequences.

Some or all of these points come up in Leader and Boldt (1994), Seltzer (1992), Fuhr (1990), Munnely (1979 ), Tucker (1997) and especially Bridges (1992).

On the one hand principals are supposed to be supportive of their staff but on the other hand they see the need to confront the incompetents:

The requirements of the law cast the principal in the two conflicting roles of evaluator and consultant. Principals who have trouble reconciling or balancing
these two roles (possibly the majority of them) often opt for the more positive role of consultant rather than the negative role of evaluator. Some principals may abrogate their responsibilities in this area entirely and busy themselves with their other duties. (McDaniel and McDaniel, 1980, p35)

**Circling the wagons**

In all professions there are incompetents and the most common response from colleagues is to ‘[...] tolerate and protect the inept.’ (Goode, 1967). For example, in big companies, incompetent people are transferred to different duties (Stoeberl and Schniederjans, 1981); in medicine, doctors are loathe to testify against each other (Vogel and Delgado, 1980); and in the legal profession, self-regulation mostly penalises only gross misconduct - not low standards (Marks and Cathcart, 1974).

The reasons put forward by Bridges (1992, p.20) for the inclination to tolerate incompetent teachers are threefold: legal employment rights, difficulties in evaluating incompetence and the desire to avoid conflict:

- **Legal employment rights**: Most teachers have permanent posts with great protection against dismissal. There is also the matter of ‘due process’ discussed above and the attendant, often huge, legal expense;

- **Difficulties in evaluating incompetence**: As shown also above there is great difficulty and ambiguity in even defining incompetence. Even if that is established there is the problem of collecting the correct amount of the correct kind of evidence. Case law is complex and it is hard to know what is sufficient evidence;

- **Desire to avoid conflict and unpleasantness**: Most people prefer to avoid the trauma of confrontation. Administrators are inclined to suffer in silence until things become absolutely intolerable.

**Hideouts**

According to Bridges (1992, p.31) three types of methods are commonly used to shield the teacher from parental criticism -

- transfer within or between schools;
- placement in a ‘kennel’;
- reassignment in non-teaching positions.

Nearly 70 per cent of the 141 California school districts surveyed by Bridges used the ‘transfer to a different school’ strategy. ‘In school circles, administrators refer to this practice as ‘the turkey trot’ or ‘the dance of the lemons’. ‘Frequent transfer’ as one interviewee observed, ‘is a strong indicator of incompetence’.’ (Bridges, 1992, p.31). Transfer also occurs within the school. This is more applicable to the Irish scene where
the teacher may be moved away from examination classes for example. This tactic too is investigated.

Dismissal isn't always the strategy employed. Many principals attempt remediation of the weak teacher. There are several things that can be done to try to improve the performance of marginal teachers. What can be done depends upon the nature of the problem. Fuhr (1990) suggests there are three main reasons for marginal performance:

- poor training;
- personal problems;
- an attitude problem.

Fuhr sees some hope of success with the first two but somewhat less with the last.

Basically all plans involve meeting the teacher and bringing the problem out in the open. There follows a plan for improvement with targets followed by constructive and supportive supervision.

A wider range of strategies is offered by Ehrgott et al (1993). They used a descriptive research method with a questionnaire to collect the experience and opinions of Californian administrators concerning:

- number of marginal teachers on staff;
- perceived competencies and attitudes;
- factors contributing to behaviour/condition of marginal teachers;
- identification of strategies that work effectively with these teachers.

The first three points above have a direct Irish counterpart but the third is more problematic. Ehrgott produced a ‘bank’ of ten strategies and asked administrators to evaluate them. The strategies were:

- peer coaching;
- staff development;
- college classes;
- counselling;
- self analysis;
- change of environment;
- materials;
- observations;
- observe another teacher;
- joint planning.
The three highest strategies were

1. systematic observation
2. peer coaching
3. special materials

The three lowest strategies were

1. self analysis
2. counselling
3. college classes

The same ‘bank’ of remediation strategies is offered by Bridges (1990) with slightly different terminology. He lists:

- goal setting, instructional input, modelling, practice, feedback, coaching, reinforcement, therapy, counselling and environmental change.

Different combinations of these strategies are appropriate to different forms of shortcoming in the teacher.

**Why the issue is tackled**

**Policy decision**

The adoption of a systematic approach to teacher evaluation by the education district is one reason why action is taken (Bridges and Groves 1990). There is discussion in Ireland about the introduction of whole school inspection and a move towards teacher appraisal. The White Paper on Education - Charting our Educational Future (1995 p. 134) contains a chapter on ‘unsatisfactory teaching’ which recommends an appraisal scheme and ‘[…] procedures for the identification, remediation and, if necessary, removal of under-performing teachers and principals […].’ (Dept. of Ed, 1995, p135)

**Complaints**

Parental complaints are often instrumental in initiating action. The number of complaints, how they are made, who is making them, their persistence, to whom they are directed, and their nature and timing are all important factors. (Bridges, 1992, pp.40, 41).

**Declining Enrolments**

Declining enrolment exerts pressure to act because it means layoffs of over-quota teachers on the basis of seniority (i.e. lack of seniority) who may not be the incompetent ones.

**Fiscal Health**

If money is in short supply then ‘passengers’ are harder to carry.

**Size**

Small school and small districts have less room to manoeuvre.
England and Wales

Diagnosis

Most heads told Wragg et al (1997) that they detected the problem through their own informal monitoring of the school - the most usual symptom being an unacceptable level of noise from a particular teacher’s room. As one head put it:

Any head teacher walking around the school is aware of problems in a classroom. There is no virtue in silence for silence sake, but noise levels are unacceptable.  
(Wragg et al, 1997, p. 8)

Over a third of the cases in the above teaching Competence Project’ involved complaints from parents as another indicator, staff complained in a quarter of the cases and pupil complaints accounted for less than a fifth.

In general informal identification was more likely than formal and information came from a multiplicity of sources. ‘I got feedback in hundreds of ways.’ (Wragg et al, 1997, p. 8)

Advice

Over one third of the heads called in the LEA (Local Education Authority) advisor.

Within the school the senior management team was also commonly involved, as was the chair of the governing body. In a third of the cases other governors, LEA personnel/legal departments and the teacher unions had been contacted. Ofsted was also involved on occasions as were other members of staff. Occasionally the area education office, the NAHT (National Association of Head Teachers), or occupational health was informed and consulted.  
(Wragg et al, 1997, p. 9)

Reaction

Wragg et al (1997) goes on to describe how the vast majority of heads attempted to remedy the problem through various internal support structures. (These are described in section 7 below). The same strategies that worked with some teachers didn’t with others. The main difference seemed to be the level of self-awareness and acceptance of the existence of a problem by the teacher concerned.

In the study there were 60 teachers deemed incompetent. Of the 60 teachers in difficulty, only 7 became acceptably competent and 13 cases were still ongoing. That leaves 40 teachers. The outcome of each of these cases case is presented in section 8 (dismissal and induced exits).
Ireland

Again, nothing corresponding to this has ever been investigated in the Irish context, making this research all the more important. There is anecdotal evidence that incompetent teachers exist and that principals take (largely ineffective) remedial action but nothing in the academic literature.

It is worth noting that, because of the lack of a culture of appraisal or evaluation, and because of the lack (until recently) of a highly developed internal management structure within schools, many of the strategies are not even available. For example the whole idea of secondary teachers being required to teach in front of a Department of Education Inspector let alone a principal is a concept foreign to most. (see section 7 below).

Implied Questions

- How do principals diagnose the existence of incompetent teachers?
- Where do principals seek advice?
- Why do principals intentionally avoid tackling teacher incompetence?
- Why do principals tackle teacher incompetence?
- How do principals apply pressure?
7. Support and Remediation

Whether the motive is genuine concern, or merely a desire to give the impression that the teacher had been given every opportunity to improve before dismissal proceedings are initiated, the general advice in the literature has been to attempt to remedy the incompetence.

Essex (1986) cautions principals: 'Do not allow incompetent or unprepared teachers to practice in the classroom without making an effort to improve their performance.' (Essex, 1986, p.22)

Principals and administrators generally attempt some form of remediation and support.

United States

In Illinois, principals' perceptions relating to remediation of unsatisfactory teachers was described by Seltzer (1992). Her particular focus was the impact of article 24a of the School Code of Illinois (1985) on the operation of the remediation process. The main purpose of article 24a was to ' [...] improve the educational services of the elementary and secondary public schools of Illinois by requiring that all certified school district employees be evaluated on a periodic basis and that the evaluations result in remedial action being taken when deemed necessary.' (School Code of Illinois, 1985 p.206).

One of the things the principals reported was that they had found the training they had received in both evaluation and remedial action helpful. However, they also reported that concern over the legal ramifications was inhibiting implementation and that ' [...] less than 25% of Illinois school districts were doing acceptably well in identifying or assisting unsatisfactory teachers.' (Seltzer 1992, p. iv).

Douglas (1993) makes the point that, if plans of assistance are to work, they cannot rely solely on the principal or on the teacher concerned; they need to involve concerted efforts by everyone - teachers, principals, teacher unions, education associations and the department of education.

England and Wales

Heads interviewed for the 'Teaching Competence Project' in England (Wragg et al 1998d) described how they and their colleagues had tried to support under-performing teachers. Often other senior members of staff - especially the deputy head - became involved too, observing classes and providing regular feedback. Other strategies included removal of some pupils, alleviation of duties, being given smaller or easier classes, time off to go on courses or attend the doctor or to observe good practice, target setting and the provision of a specially-selected mentor. When asked what approach seemed to have worked well and led to most improvement, Heads pointed to '[...] the advice and support provided by other school staff to the teacher concerned, particularly professional support, but in some cases emotional support too.' (Wragg, 1997, p. 9)
'However, since three quarters of the teachers in the sample were thought not to have improved, many of these attempts were said to have failed.' (Wragg et al 1998d, p.11)

Broken down into those teachers who improved and those who did not improve, the main strategies employed by head teachers surveyed by Wragg et al (1998d) were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Non-Improver</th>
<th>Improver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. In-house support and advice</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Target setting</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Observation of teacher’s lessons</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sent on in-service training course</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Given opportunity to observe good practice</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Offered regular meetings</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Involvement of senior staff with support/advice</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Support from LEA advisers</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Main strategies used to support teachers (327 heads). (Wragg et al 1998d, p.10)

Ireland

Since their existence is hardly acknowledged, there is very little in the Irish literature concerned with the support and remediation of under-performing teachers. The teachers’ professional union, the ASTI (Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland) runs courses on classroom management and discipline towards which principals sometimes direct teachers who are struggling. The ASTI member’s handbook also has a section on probationary teachers. This recognises the possibility of problems and the need to offer corrective advice: ‘The probationary teacher should be informed of ‘faults’ and apparent ‘problem areas’ in his/her work; such corrective advice could be given orally on the first occasion; where this needs to be repeated, it should be given in writing.’ (Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland 1995, p.72)

The Department of Education Inspectorate has a role in the evaluation of teaching. In this context, the 1998 Education Act states that one of the functions of an Inspector is to ‘[... ] evaluate the organisation and operation of these schools and centres and the quality and effectiveness of the education provided in those schools or centres, including the quality of teaching and effectiveness of individual teachers;’ (Government of Ireland, 1998, p.17) Inspectors could then offer advice and support to a teacher in difficulty.

Traditionally however, secondary teachers, with the backing of their professional union the ASTI, were reluctant to teach in front of an Inspector. The Inspector was seen as an advisor, not an evaluator. The Inspector could take the class and examine pupils but, generally, was not expected to observe the teacher teaching.
This has changed with the Education Act of 1998 which seems to imply that teachers will have to teach in front of an Inspector if the Inspector thinks it necessary:

An Inspector shall have all such powers as are necessary or expedient for the purpose of performing his or her functions and shall be accorded every reasonable facility and co-operation by the board and the staff of a school or centre for education. (Government of Ireland, 1998, p.18)

The Department of Education does recognise that some teachers have difficulties of various kinds both within and also outside school. In 1998 the Minister for Education Micheál Martin launched a pilot ‘Employee Assistance Scheme’.

The work of the Employment Assistance Officer will involve the provision of a confidential support and referral service to teachers in primary and second level schools on a wide variety of problems and difficulties arising both within and outside the workplace. (Department of Education & Science, 1998, p.1)

This scheme helps teachers who are under stress. The teachers themselves must contact the service and ask for help. However, as is shown above, often the most intractable cases are the ones where the teacher refuses to even accept that there is a problem.

**Implied Research Questions**

- What are the strategies employed by principals in managing incompetent teachers?
- How do principals apply pressure?
- How do principals timetable incompetent teachers?
- How do principals attempt to remedy incompetence?
8. Dismissal and Induced Exits

Of these two courses of action, the second is by far the most popular. The legal conflict inevitable in a dismissal case is never an attractive proposition:

Under any circumstances, discharging an employee is an action involving interpersonal conflict. That conflict is intensified when it is embodied in a formal hearing process, which establishes an adversarial relationship between principal and teacher. Many people understandably prefer to avoid such conflict if at all possible. (McDaniel and McDaniel, 1980, p.35)

Also:

The persistent observation and record-keeping required by the law, some fear, could be interpreted as malicious harassment by the teacher and, perhaps, even by the courts. (McDaniel and McDaniel, 1980, p.36)

Dismissal

'The Dismissal of Incompetent Teachers: an Historical Analysis of School Law' (Leveillee, 1983) is a doctoral dissertation which examined the development of the legal reaction to teacher dismissal in the United States from 1856 to 1980.

Apart from a small number of unusual cases - for example, those involving suspected communists during the 'red scare' of the McCarthy era - the general trend was of a gradual 'education' of school boards by the judiciary. The 'education' was the learning by school boards of the importance of due process in the preparation of their case.

Those boards which had provided their teachers with written notice of charges, had adhered to proper statutory grounds for discharge, had granted hearings upon request, and who had produced ample evidence to support their charges, found their efforts supported in the courts. (Leveillee, 1983 p.139)

Procedural error is by far the most frequent cause of the decisions of school boards being overturned by the courts. This leads to the literature on advice to principals on how to deal with incompetent teachers in the legally correct manner - i.e. respecting 'due process' which is discussed next.
Due Process

Another thread of the legal literature - and a very significant one - is that which purports to give advice to principals and administrators on how to conduct themselves so that an eventual court case will be successful. This includes advice concerning due process and the need for proper documentation when building a case:

The major focus in almost all cases concerning the termination of staff is due process. The facts of the cases relating to instructional effectiveness are downplayed, while the facts about due process procedures or their lack are the key elements in judicial rulings. (Munnelly, 1979, p.221)

This type of literature is exemplified by articles with revealing titles like:

- How to weed out Incompetent Teachers without Getting Hauled into Court (McDaniel and McDaniel, 1980);
- With preparation you can clear the teacher termination hurdle (Macnaughton et al, 1982);
- The Principal and Educational Malpractice: Is there a Lawsuit in your Future? (Essex, 1986);
- It’s Time to get Tough with the Turkeys (Bridges, 1985a).

These all stress the importance of legal knowledge on the part of the principal. In particular they point to the importance of following due process which can be summarised as follows:

- the right to notice (including a statement of reasons) so the teacher can be informed of the impending subject of review and can choose what action to take with reference to it;

- the right to a hearing;

- the right to personal presence at the hearing;

- the right to counsel, including the privilege of raising issues and setting up a defence, and the right to confront and cross-examine witnesses;

- the right to introduce evidence;
the right to protection against arbitrary rulings and the right to fairness and impartiality;

• the right to proof of damage;

• the right to a review by an appeal tribunal.

There are two kinds of approach in the advice category. One type is dispassionate and factual, outlining the actual legal situation - e.g. (Leveillee, 1983). Another type is quasi-conspiratorial in tone e.g. (Macnaughton et al, 1982) which offers specific advice to principals on the type of documentation they should be building up, the procedures that should be followed and the kinds of interviews they should be having with the offending teacher.

On the surface the ostensible purpose of many of the interviews is to help the teacher to improve by pointing out weaknesses, suggesting remedies and setting targets. The reality however, seems to be based on the idea of making the eventual charges `stick'. They even include specific examples of the right way to word things to make them legally watertight. One title - ‘How to weed out incompetent teachers without getting hauled into court’ (McDaniel and McDaniel, 1980) clearly describes the thrust of these kinds of article outlining the legal hoops through which principals must jump in order to dismiss an incompetent teacher.

In general it appears that the strategies for dealing with marginal and incompetent teachers are practically identical but in the case of marginal teachers they are genuine attempts at remediation whereas in the case of incompetent teachers the remediation attempts are more cosmetic and designed show that every attempt was made to help the teacher to improve.

Regardless of whether or not the principal is sincere about the process it certainly involves a huge extra workload.

As the law stands, principals in any State who wish to recommend the discharge of incompetent or unfit teachers should keep substantial written files on all teachers who have obvious deficiencies or shortcomings. These files must include documentation of the deficiencies, evidence that help has been provided, and evidence of teacher improvement or lack thereof. The files must also include records of not just one observation and follow-up conference, but of several, so that a pattern of deficiency or incompetence is established.

This requirement means the principal must become a critic (in the most negative sense) rather than an instructional leader. It means the conscientious principal has to spend many hours observing in classrooms, holding follow-up conferences, and providing teachers with whatever instructional assistance they need. But there are always other, equally pressing demands on a principal's time. (McDaniel and McDaniel, 1980, p.335)
A big flaw in much of the above literature is that it is assumed that dismissal is the road to go down and furthermore, that the legal route is a likely and a fruitful route. This might be the case in the United States from where the majority of such literature emanates. However it needs to be remembered that the Irish context is different and furthermore, what is possible in law may not be possible in practice because of industrial relations.

Induced Exits

If salvage attempts are a failure the administrator may consider either attempting to dismiss the teacher involved (see the above discussion concerning legal matters and due process) or instead may attempt to induce the teacher to resign or request early retirement. (Bridges, 1992, p.75)

There are four interrelated aspects according to Bridges; pressure, negotiations, unions and inducements.

Pressure:
The pressure could be indirect - by making life difficult - e.g. by transferring the teacher to an undesirable teaching assignment. Direct pressure is more usual however. This runs a spectrum of increasing severity encompassing:

Using the power of gentle persuasion;
Sharing the problem and pressing for action;
Increasing the flow of negative communication;
Using threat and intimidation;
Giving an unsatisfactory evaluation;
Placing the teacher on formal remediation;
Issuing a notice of deficiency;
Issuing a notice of intent to dismiss.

(Bridges, 1992, pp. 76 - 84)

Negotiations:
Usually negotiation runs parallel to the pressure, with the administrator often adopting the rôle of rescuer, counsellor, parent or intimidator: 'The rescuer presents her/himself as a Good Samaritan who will provide the embattled teacher with a way out of a potentially disastrous situation' (Bridges, 1992, p.85)

Unions:
Unions have a dilemma. On the one hand they have a duty to defend their members. On the other hand they do not wish to be seen as protecting and condoning incompetence; many of their members do not want their union to tolerate incompetent teachers (Johnson, 1984); and legal action is expensive.
Although some complained of the unreasonable protective posture of unions, most spoke positively of the union’s role in ‘[...] advising or persuading the teacher to quit’ (Bridges 1992, p.91).

Inducements:
Inducements include things like administrative actions, fringe benefits, cash settlements, future employment and counselling. (Bridges, 1992, p. 93).

England and Wales

Because of the rate of change arising from the national curriculum and the emphasis on teaching standards by both government and media, Wragg et al (1998a) report that teacher association officers believe that there is an increase in the number of cases of alleged incompetence - triggered, they say, by OFSTED inspections and the appointment of new school Heads. Particular concern was expressed that with ‘[...] the closing down of the traditional early routes of exit for teachers, more dismissals will occur and severe personal hardship will result.’ (Wragg et al 1998a, p. 25)

Under a ‘fast track’ approach introduced in September 1998, ‘[...] teachers who are putting children’s education at risk can be sacked in four weeks.’ (Hackett, TES, 1999, p.1). Since then only 30 teachers have been sacked under this particular system although, after a more protracted process, 600 had been ‘[...] sacked, retired or redeployed.’ (Hackett, TES, 1999, p.1).

In section 6 above was described the cases of 60 allegedly incompetent teachers. There were 40 who had not improved. The outcomes of their cases were as follows:

9 teachers resigned and left teaching altogether;
7 took early retirement;
5 retired on grounds of ill health;
5 managed to get another teaching post;
4 were still looking for another teaching job;
3 were found another job by the LEA;
2 were given different duties in the same school to try and alleviate the problems;
2 were made redundant;
2 were still in post as the problem was never resolved;
1 case was still unresolved when the head interviewed moved to a new headship.

(Wragg et al 1997, p. 10)
Ireland

Mention of teacher dismissal is very rare in the Irish literature. The nearest that the literature gets to dismissal is The White Paper on Education (1995) which contains the statement:

*Where unsatisfactory teaching performance is established as irremediable, it is necessary to remove the teachers concerned from the service. There is a necessity to ensure that teachers are dealt with fairly and that their rights are protected in accordance with agreed procedures, while ensuring that the detrimental effect of inadequate teaching on children is remedied.* (Dept of Ed., 1995 p.135)

The cases cited by Leveillee above are interesting and enlightening but not very relevant in the context of this particular research since matters very rarely get as far as the courts in Ireland. Usually, as shown in the Results Chapter, other routes are followed. Only two teacher dismissal cases in the Irish context that got as far as the courts could be found.

Flynn v Power (1985) went as far as the High Court. The teacher concerned had been living with a married man by whom she had become pregnant. Her employers, the Sisters of the Holy Faith, dismissed her. The teacher claimed that her private life was her own affair but her appeal was dismissed on the grounds that the conduct of an employee outside the place of employment may justify dismissal if it can be shown that it can be damaging to the employer’s business. The teacher’s lifestyle was held to be damaging to the norms, ethos and religious tenets that the particular school represented.

The other case (the details of which must remain confidential) never went beyond the Employment Appeals Tribunal which is very low down the hierarchy of the Irish legal system. It involved a teacher of several years standing who was dismissed because of defective control and supervision. Following negotiations between management and unions a compromise was arrived at and the teacher was relocated to another school where he appears to be working successfully (in 1999).

Since teacher dismissal cases are such a rarity in the Irish educational scene the reasons why this is so forms part of this investigation. As clearly shown by Leveillee, dismissal for reasons of incompetence is quite possible. However it is a common misconception that teachers cannot be dismissed for incompetence.

Many teachers and members of the public know teachers can be dismissed for reasons of immorality or for conviction on a serious criminal charge, but they honestly believe that teachers cannot be dismissed for incompetence or ineffectiveness. (Munnelly, 1979 p.221)

Because of that belief, and because there are so few court cases, it is of greater relevance in the Irish context to investigate the principals’ perception and their response rather than that of the courts.
Implied Research Questions

- What is the situation concerning incompetent teachers who left the school permanently?
- What are the characteristics of the incompetent teachers who left school permanently?
- What is the relationship between the teaching qualifications of the incompetent teacher who left and the subjects taught?
- What was the nature of the incompetence of the teachers who had left?

Having reached the end of this review, the 'implied research questions' at the end of each of the above sections can be seen in the context of the related literature. These questions are, of course, only very brief statements of what needed to be asked.

In chapter three which now follows these questions are developed into a series of more detailed sub-questions in preparation for the method chapter and the questionnaire.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
Overview of Chapter

The purpose of this chapter is to present a more detailed set of research questions amenable to investigation in an empirical way.

To maintain coherence and a common thread to the argument, the chapter follows the same sequence as the literature review with its eight central themes:

1. The nature of incompetence;
2. The existence and extent of the problem;
3. The incompetent teachers;
4. Attitude of the teacher union;
5. The principals' attitudes;
6. The principals' reactions;
7. Support and remediation;
8. Dismissal and induced exits.

Having been examined in the literature review, these themes naturally suggest research questions. Some of these questions were briefly listed at the end of each section of the literature review but were not elaborated upon.

The following two pages contain first, twenty individual research questions.

This is followed by figure 3.1, which shows the relationship between the questions and the themes. The numbering of the research questions does not match the themes precisely because the research questions are in the order in which they were presented on the questionnaire. Also it is obvious that some research questions address more than one theme. Questions are placed where they are most relevant.

This is followed by an individual examination of each of the eight themes enumerated above and the research questions which relate to them - each question being further broken down into smaller sub-questions.
1. What is the extent of the problem of incompetent teachers in Irish voluntary secondary schools?

2. Are incompetent teachers distributed equally throughout the voluntary secondary sector?

3. What are the characteristics of incompetent teachers in Irish voluntary secondary schools?

4. What is the relationship between teaching qualifications and the subjects being taught?

5. What is the nature of the incompetence?

6. How do principals diagnose the existence of incompetent teachers?

7. Where do principals seek advice?

8. Why do principals intentionally avoid tackling teacher incompetence?

9. Why do principals tackle teacher incompetence?

10. What are the strategies employed by principals in managing incompetent teachers?

11. How do principals apply pressure?

12. What was the reaction of the incompetent teacher if confronted?

13. To what extent does the teacher union get involved?

14. How do principals timetable incompetent teachers?

15. How do principals attempt to remedy incompetence?

16. What is the situation concerning incompetent teachers who left the school permanently?

17. What are the characteristics of the incompetent teachers who left school permanently?

18. What is the relationship between the teaching qualifications of the incompetent teacher who left and the subjects being taught?

19. What was the nature of the incompetence of the teachers who had left?

20. What are the opinions of principals concerning incompetent teachers generally?
Figure 3.1 Research Questions related to the eight themes.
1. The Nature of Incompetence

Having examined the various approaches to a definition of teacher incompetence discussed in Chapter Two above, a working definition was produced.

The definition was based on Bridges (1990, p.6) as reproduced above in Chapter Two p.12.

It was adapted in the following ways:

- It was felt that Bridges’s criteria were too verbose and detailed. These were shortened.
- Naturally, Bridges’s examples were American - for example the ‘bureaucratic failure’ he describes includes reference to not adhering to the content of the district’s curriculum and to not allowing supervisors in the classroom for observation purposes. This would not apply in Ireland. Examples within criteria were adapted therefore to reflect the Irish context.
- In a similar vein, Bridges’s terminology is somewhat foreign to Irish principals and so was adapted for the Irish version. The word ‘administrative’ replaced ‘bureaucratic’ for example, because ‘bureaucratic’ has a slightly different nuance in Ireland to that which Bridges intended judging by the examples he gives.
- The idea of a critical mass of criteria was appended since it was felt that many teachers would fall down in some areas occasionally and would be better at some things than at others. However, with an incompetent teacher there is a persistent pattern of ongoing failure in most of the five described.

The resulting working definition with which principals were presented is shown below in figure 3.2.
Figure 3.2 Eventual definition used.

Working definition of an incompetent teacher

An incompetent teacher displays persistent failure in some or all of the following areas:

**Technical:** the teacher is deficient in discipline, teaching method, subject-knowledge, organisation, and planning.

**Administrative:** the teacher fails to comply with school rules and procedures (e.g. chronic absenteeism and tardiness) and possibly does not follow the curriculum in a sound manner.

**Ethical:** the teacher violates standards expected of the teaching profession – e.g. having a negative attitude to students, which could range from indifference all the way to physical abuse.

**Productive:** the teacher fails to produce desirable results in the classroom – e.g. there is little academic progress, students are not interested, they lack respect, and there is a poor climate in the classroom.

**Personal:** the teacher is deficient in judgement, emotional stability, self-control and strength of character; the teacher is ‘difficult’ and uncooperative with management and colleagues.

Clearly, most of us could be guilty of some of these failures at some point. I am interested in the cases where there is a sufficient and chronic amount of failure – a critical mass such that there is a persistent pattern of mistakes and failure.

Having produced a working definition above, it was of interest therefore to see to what extent the definition related to the reality.

This was addressed in research question Number Five and its 13 sub-questions.
Nature

QUESTION 5

What is the nature of the incompetence?

5.1 What is the discipline quality?
5.2 What is the discipline type?
5.3 What are the feelings of students?
5.4 What is the teacher's attitude to students?
5.5 What is the classroom climate?
5.6 What is the teacher's subject knowledge?
5.7 How good a timekeeper is the teacher?
5.8 What is the teacher's attendance?
5.9 How well does the teacher follow the curriculum?
5.10 How well do students perform in examinations?
5.11 How co-operative is the teacher?
5.12 What is the teacher's relationship with colleagues?
5.13 How stable is the teacher emotionally?
2. Existence and Extent of Problem

In the review of the literature discussed in chapter two, Lavely et al (1992) came to the conclusion that, on the basis of both empirically derived estimates and professional judgements, approximately 10% of American public school teachers were incompetent.

Similarly, Neil and Custis (1978) reported that superintendents and personnel directors estimated that from 5 to 15 percent of the teachers in their districts ' [...] do not give adequate job performance.' (Neil and Custis, 1978, p.8).

In England and Wales ' [...] Ofsted estimates that the number of 'incompetent' teachers fell last year from 4.3 per cent to 3.5 per cent of the profession.' (Carvel, 1998, The Guardian [online] p.2)

Bearing in mind the varying definitions of incompetent teacher, and therefore using the reasonably strict definition discussed above, it is clearly important to find out if the same situation exists in Irish voluntary secondary schools. The first and most important research question was obvious.

Extent

QUESTION 1

What is the extent of the problem of incompetent teachers in Irish voluntary secondary schools?

1.1 What is the total number of incompetent teachers in Irish voluntary secondary schools?

1.2 What is the percentage of incompetent teachers overall?

1.3 What is the gender breakdown of the incompetent teachers?

1.4 What is the number of incompetent teachers on individual staffs?

1.5 What is the percentage of incompetent teachers in each school?

Demographic questions were also asked concerning the numbers, genders and employment status of teachers as a whole in each school and incompetent teachers in particular.
Distribution

Irish voluntary secondary schools can be of differing types:

- urban and rural,
- fee-paying and non fee-paying,
- ‘day only’, ‘boarding only’ day and boarding’
- ‘all girls’, ‘all boys’ and ‘co-educational’

It was important to see if there was a difference in the distribution of incompetent teachers in the different types of schools. This lead to the research question 2 and associated sub-questions.

**QUESTION 2**

**Are incompetent teachers distributed equally throughout the voluntary secondary sector?**

2.1 Is the mean percentage of incompetent teachers in schools located in urban areas the same as the mean percentage of incompetent teachers in schools located in rural areas?

2.2 Is the mean percentage of incompetent teachers in fee-paying schools the same as the mean percentage of incompetent teachers in non fee-paying schools?

2.3 Is there a difference in the mean percentage of incompetent teachers in ‘day only’, ‘boarding only’ and ‘day and boarding’ schools?

2.4 Is there a difference in the mean percentage of incompetent teachers in ‘All boys’, ‘All girls’ and ‘Co-educational’ schools?

2.5 Is there a difference in the mean percentage of incompetent teachers in schools of different sizes?
3. Incompetent Teachers

Characteristics
Just as in Seltzer (1992) discussed in Chapter two above, it is of interest to investigate the characteristics of incompetent teachers. Although Seltzer (1992) gives only the ages, the number of years of experience and the gender, and compares them to the general teacher population, the sub-questions of question 3 also consider the employment status, Religious/lay status, the qualifications and the possession of a post of responsibility (a middle management post). Question 3.10 (asking if the incompetent teacher had been competent in the past) was an attempt to find out if the incompetence had developed over time or if the teacher was unsuited to teaching in the first place.

QUESTION 3

What are the characteristics of incompetent teachers in Irish voluntary secondary schools?

3.1 What is the gender breakdown of incompetent teachers in Irish voluntary secondary schools?
3.2 Is the gender breakdown of incompetent teachers the same as the gender breakdown generally?
3.3 What is the age profile of incompetent teachers?
3.4 Is there a difference in the age profile of male and female incompetent teachers?
3.5 What is the breakdown between permanent and temporary status for incompetent teachers?
3.6 Is the breakdown of incompetent teachers into permanent and temporary status the same as the breakdown of general teaching staff into permanent and temporary status?
3.7 What is the experience profile of incompetent teachers?
3.8 What is the Religious-lay breakdown of incompetent teachers?
3.9 What are the main qualifications of incompetent teachers?
3.10 Was the incompetent teacher ever competent in the past?
3.11 Has the incompetent teacher a post of responsibility?
Qualifications

First of all it is of interest to find out the subject specialities of the incompetent teachers (and if the number of incompetents with a particular subject is proportional or not to the popularity of that subject since it is obvious that there will be more incompetent teachers of English, for example, than teachers of a less popular subject like Greek).

Secondly it is of interest to find out if teachers of practical subjects such as art, woodwork, metalwork and home economics, who receive a different, more practical teaching training, are any more or less competent than those of the traditional ‘chalk and talk’ subjects.

Thirdly, it is important to discover the relationship between qualifications and subjects taught. Are there French specialists teaching only PE for example? In particular, it is of great interest to find out if people are being under-utilised or hidden and in what subject areas does that occur? For example, the vast majority of voluntary secondary schools are Catholic. Who is teaching Religion? - and what does it say about the Religious ethos and emphasis? All of these issues are dealt with in question 4 and its sub-questions.

QUESTION 4

What is the relationship between teaching qualifications and the subjects being taught?

4.1 What subjects are incompetent teachers qualified to teach?
4.2 What subjects do incompetent teachers actually teach?
4.3 What is the match between subject taught and subject qualification for individual teachers?
4.4 What is the mismatch between subject taught and subject qualification for individual teachers?
Reaction to being confronted
The reactions of teachers when confronted is discussed by Wragg et al (1998d, p.8) who describe a variety of reactions and come to the conclusion that self-awareness is an important ingredient in any hope of remediation - witness the quote from a principal in the literature review above; 'I don't think he understands it.' (Wragg et al 1997 p.9). Obviously it would be better to get the views of the teacher personally but in the methodology of this study the principal had to be relied on to report his or her impression of the reaction.

QUESTION 12

What was the reaction of the incompetent teacher if confronted?

12.1 What was the reaction of the incompetent teacher when confronted?
12.2 Was there a difference in the reaction of male and female incompetent teachers when confronted?
12.3 What do principals think are the top three reactions of incompetent teachers when confronted?
4. Attitude of Teacher Unions

The professional union is expected to defend its members but, at the same time, has a professional attitude and a deep interest in educational values. There is an anecdotal perception that unions defend the indefensible but this is unsubstantiated fact. Question 13 investigates this.

Unions

QUESTION 13

To what extent does the teacher union get involved?

13.1 In simple numerical terms how common is union involvement?
13.2 When it is involved, what is the reaction of the Teacher Union?
13.3 What do principals think are the top three reactions of the teacher unions?
5. The Principals' Attitudes

As the subjects of the study, the principals themselves needed to be considered - e.g. demographic details, experience and type of school. Also, since one of the points made by principals in the United States in Seltzer (1992) was that training in evaluation and remediation had been of benefit, it was important to ask principals how well they felt they had been trained to deal with teacher incompetence. In this regard also, it is worth investigating the beliefs of Irish Secondary school principals concerning the possibility of dismissing a teacher on the grounds of incompetence.

To obtain principals attitudes to miscellaneous items such as stress, extra work for teaching colleagues, the ‘impossibility’ of dismissal, unions, teacher training, time constraints, counselling for teachers, the irremediable nature of incompetence, ignorance of procedures, hopelessness and assertive parents an ‘opinionnaire’ was produced using a Likert-type scale.

Opinions

QUESTION 20

What are the opinions of principals concerning incompetent teachers generally?

20.1 Incompetent teachers are major sources of stress for principals.
20.2 Incompetent teachers mean extra work for their colleagues.
20.3 In Ireland it is impossible to dismiss a teacher on the grounds of incompetence alone.
20.4 The problem of incompetent teachers can never be dealt with because unions defend the indefensible.
20.5 University Education Departments give teaching diplomas to people who do not deserve them.
20.6 Principals do not have time to tackle the problem.
20.7 Incompetent teachers should be required to have counselling or retraining.
20.8 People should be screened more carefully before being accepted for teacher training.
20.9 The type of incompetent teacher defined here can never become competent.
20.10 Principals in general don’t know how to tackle the problem of teaching incompetence.
20.11 No matter what should be done, in actual fact nothing is going to be done about incompetent teachers.
20.12 More assertive and demanding parents will make toleration of incompetent teachers more and more difficult.
6. The Principals' Reactions

Typical reactions of principals were culled partly from the literature - e.g. (Seltzer, 1992), partly from the suggestions of retired principals who took part in the pilot phase and partly from informal 'focus group' type discussion with convenience samples of existing principals. These formed the basis for questions 6.7, 8 and 9 which follow.

**Diagnosis**

In Ireland there is no history of secondary school principals formally evaluating their teaching staff. It is therefore of interest to establish to what extent Irish principals evaluate their staff either informally - by accidental classroom visits for example - or formally, by some form of observation, evaluation or appraisal. A bank of possible strategies for diagnosis was offered in question 6.1 and the remainder of the sub-questions look for differences between different categories of principal.

**QUESTION 6**

How do principals diagnose the existence of incompetent teachers?

6.1 What are the methods used by principals?
6.2 Is there a difference between male and female principals in the methods they use to identify incompetent teachers?
6.3 Is there a difference between lay and Religious principals in the methods they use to identify incompetent teachers?
6.4 What do principals think are the most important factors for diagnosing teacher incompetence?
6.5 Is there a difference between male and female principals in the methods they rank as the top three for identifying incompetent teachers?
6.6 Is there a difference between lay and Religious principals in the methods they rank as the top three for identifying incompetent teachers?
Advice

Principals are in a very isolated position in their schools - particularly Irish voluntary secondary school principals because of the absence, until quite recently, of a real management team. Witness for example the findings of Leader and Boldt (1994) who asked principals to indicate on a five Point Likert-type scale how supportive they found different individuals or groups. In descending order the rankings eventually came out as follows:

- Spouse/Family;
- Secretary;
- B.O.M. [Board of Management];
- Friend(s);
- Caretaker;
- Secretariat for Secondary Schools;
- Religious Community;
- Trustees;
- Non-post holders;
- Vice-principal;
- Pupils;
- B-post holders;
- A-post holders.

(based on figure 21: index of support by category)
(Leader and Boldt 1994, p. 87)

Note how non-post holders were more supportive than post holders were.

Faced with an allegedly incompetent teacher, the pilot groups often spoke of looking for advice outside the school. The list of options produced question 7.

QUESTION 7

Where do principals seek advice?

7.1 How many sought advice from the Department of Education?
7.2 How many sought advice from the Secretariat for Secondary schools?
7.3 How many consulted another principal?
7.4 How many sought legal advice?
7.5 How many consulted management literature?
7.6 How many consulted the chairperson of the Board of Management?
7.7 What were the other sources of advice used?
Avoidance

The literature claims that principals have a certain amount of rôle conflict because they are cast in a dual rôle as instructional leader, which has a certain hard edge to it when it comes to evaluating and challenging teachers, and pastoral leader which has a softer, more nurturing feel. On top of this is cited the stress, hassle and apparent hopelessness of the tasks of remediation or dismissal. All of this tends to the belief that given this choice principals might be inclined to avoid confrontation. This led to question 8 and its sub-questions to investigate if this position is reflected in Ireland.

QUESTION 8

Why do principals intentionally avoid tackling teacher incompetence?

8.1 What are the reasons why principals intentionally avoid tackling teacher incompetence?
8.2 Is there a difference between male and female principals in their reasons for avoiding tackling teacher incompetence?
8.3 Is there a difference between Religious and lay principals in their reasons for avoiding tackling teacher incompetence?
8.4 What do principals think are the most important reasons why they avoid tackling teacher incompetence?
8.5 Is there a difference between male and female principals in the reasons they give for not tackling teacher incompetence?
8.6 Is there a difference between Religious and lay principals in the reasons they give for not tackling teacher incompetence?
Why tackled

The reasons for taking action given in the literature - implicit philosophical moral reason, general policy decision, complaints from parents, students and colleagues, declining enrolments, fiscal health and school size - all had counterparts in Ireland and, suitably rephrased, formed part of the bank of reasons offered for selection in question 9.1 to see to what extent the reasons for Irish principals taking action were similar. Other questions compared different categories of principal.

QUESTION 9

Why do principals tackle teacher incompetence?

9.1 What are the reasons why principals tackle teacher incompetence?
9.2 Is there a difference between male and female principals in their reasons for tackling teacher incompetence?
9.3 Is there a difference between Religious and lay principals in their reasons for tackling teacher incompetence?
9.4 What do principals think are the three most important reasons for tackling teacher incompetence?
9.5 Is there a difference between male and female principals in the importance they assign to the reasons for not tackling teacher incompetence?
9.6 Is there a difference between Religious and lay principals in the importance they assign to reasons for not tackling teacher incompetence?
7. Support and Remediation

The literature review shows that principals generally attempt some form of support and remediation. Also, since the perception in Ireland was that there was not a great deal of confrontational approach, the methods of support and remediation merited attention.

Strategies

In the United States and England these often involve observing classes and providing regular feedback. This process needed to be investigated in Ireland - especially since there is a tradition of secondary teachers not being observed as a matter of course.

QUESTION 10

What are the strategies employed by principals in managing incompetent teachers?

10.1 What are the strategies employed by principals in managing incompetent teachers?

10.2 Is there a difference between male and female principals in the strategies they employ?

10.3 Is there a difference between Religious and lay principals in the strategies they employ?

10.4 What do principals think are the three most used strategies?

10.5 Is there a difference between male and female principals in the importance they assign to strategies for managing incompetent teachers?

10.6 Is there a difference between Religious and lay principals in the importance they assign to strategies for managing incompetent teachers?
Pressure
Although it was expected that a positive approach would be more prevalent, the more negative methods of putting pressure on a teacher deserved to be investigated also.

QUESTION 11

How do principals apply pressure?

11.1 What are the strategies employed by principals in applying pressure to incompetent teachers?
11.2 Is there a difference in the methods used by male and female principals to apply pressure?
11.3 Is there a difference in the methods used by Religious and lay principals to apply pressure?
11.4 What do principals think are the three most used strategies?
11.5 Is there a difference between male and female principals in the importance they assign to the strategies for applying pressure?
11.6 Is there a difference between Religious and lay principals in the importance they assign to the strategies for applying pressure?
11.7 What was the reaction of parents to a request to have them put complaints in writing?
**Timetabling**

If remediation is not working and if dismissal is out of the question then ‘putting them where they will do no harm’ would appear to be an attractive option.

When an incompetent teacher begins to experience problems which can no longer be ignored, administrators may use three types of escape hatches to skirt these problems and to shield the teacher from parental criticism: (a) transfer within or between schools, (b) placement in a ‘kennel’, and (c) reassignment to non-teaching positions.

(Bridges 1992, p. 31)

In California, the (focus of Bridges’s study) ‘kennels’ are places such as home-teaching staffs or roving substitute pools. Irish ‘kennels’ are things like remedial classes of small groups extracted from regular classes or Physical Education supervision or supervision of study library periods. These and other ‘kennels’ used by Irish secondary school principals are investigated in this study.

**QUESTION 14**

**How do principals timetable incompetent teachers?**

14.1 What are the strategies employed by principals in timetabling incompetent teachers?

14.2 Is there a difference in the timetabling strategies of male and female principals?

14.3 Is there a difference in the timetabling strategies of Religious and lay principals?

14.4 What do principals think are the most used timetabling strategies?

14.5 Is there a difference between male and female principals in the way they timetable incompetent teachers?

14.6 Is there a difference between Religious and lay principals in the way they timetable incompetent teachers?
Remediation

As Douglas (1993) discussed, plans of assistance need a concerted effort from teachers, management, unions and the Department of Education so the use of other sources of support - such as the Department Inspectorate needed to be examined also. Question 15 therefore attempted to establish the frequency and efficacy of various tactics employed by principals.

QUESTION 15

How do principals attempt to remedy incompetence?

15.1 How many principals attempt to remedy teacher incompetence?
15.2 How many sent incompetent teachers on inservice courses?
15.3 How many sat in on the teacher's classes?
15.4 How many held regular advice sessions with the teacher?
15.5 How many got a colleague to act as mentor to the teacher?
15.6 How many gave the teacher pedagogy books to read?
15.7 How many invoked the support of the Department of Education Inspectorate?
15.8 How do the different strategies for remedying incompetence compare with each other in terms of popularity and effectiveness?
8. Dismissal and Induced Exits

Every year teachers resign, or take sick leave or retire early on grounds of ill health. There is a perception that some of these teachers have been 'eased out'. Although it is a sensitive area in which confidentiality is often important, how frequently this is the case, how it is done, the mechanisms and negotiations involved is another piece of the jigsaw of this research.

Stories

Since every case is unique, question 16 sought to obtain each 'story' in as simple a form as possible so that each could be categorised.

QUESTION 16

What is the situation concerning incompetent teachers who left the school permanently?

16.1 How many principals witnessed an incompetent teacher leaving the school permanently?
16.2 What form did the incompetent teacher's exit take?
16.3 How many of the exits were means of avoiding disciplinary action or dismissal?
Characteristics

Since the characteristics of existing incompetent teachers still in situ was already being sought in question 3 above, it was felt that finding the same details for an incompetent teacher who actually left would permit a comparison.

QUESTION 17

What are the characteristics of the incompetent teachers who left school permanently?

17.1 What is the gender breakdown of incompetent teachers who permanently left an Irish voluntary secondary school?
17.2 What was the Religious (i.e. Religious or lay) status of the incompetent teachers who left?
17.3 What was the age profile of incompetent teachers who left?
17.4 What was the employment status of the incompetent teachers who left?
17.5 What was the length of experience of the incompetent teacher who left?
17.6 Had the teacher been competent at some time in the past?
17.7 What was the main qualification of the incompetent teacher who left?
17.8 Did the incompetent teacher who left have a post of responsibility?
Qualifications

Again, as in the case with question 4 above, the relationship between qualifications and teaching subjects was of interest in itself and in relation to the existing incompetent teachers discussed earlier.

QUESTION 18

What is the relationship between the teaching qualifications of the incompetent teacher who left and the subjects being taught?

18.1 What subject(s) was the incompetent teacher who left qualified to teach?
18.2 What subject(s) was the incompetent teacher who left actually teaching?
18.3 What is the match between subject taught and subject qualification for individual teachers?
18.4 What is the mismatch between subject taught and subject qualification for individual teachers?
Nature of incompetence
This again was to compare the nature of the incompetence first of all with the given
definition to which it relates and secondly to compare it with the nature of the
incompetence of the currently existing incompetent teachers investigated in question 5.

QUESTION 19

What was the nature of the incompetence of the teachers who had left?

19.1 What was the discipline quality?
19.2 What was the discipline type?
19.3 What had been the feelings of students?
19.4 What had been the teacher’s attitude to students?
19.5 What had been the classroom climate?
19.6 What was the teacher’s subject knowledge?
19.7 How good a timekeeper was the incompetent teacher?
19.8 How good was the attendance of the incompetent teacher?
19.9 How well (closely) used the teacher follow the curriculum?
19.10 How well had their students performed in examinations?
19.11 How co-operative had the teacher been?
19.12 What was the teacher’s relationship with colleagues?
19.13 What was the teacher’s emotional stability?

Having produced the research questions thematically - and therefore out of sequence, the
following pages present in numerical order for convenience.
Research Questions

QUESTION 1

What is the extent of the problem of incompetent teachers in Irish voluntary secondary schools?

1.1 What is the total number of incompetent teachers in Irish voluntary secondary schools?
1.2 What is the percentage of incompetent teachers overall?
1.3 What is the gender breakdown of the incompetent teachers?
1.4 What is the number of incompetent teachers on individual staffs?
1.5 What is the percentage of incompetent teachers in each school?

QUESTION 2

Are incompetent teachers distributed equally throughout the voluntary secondary sector?

2.1 Is the mean percentage of incompetent teachers in schools located in urban areas the same as the mean percentage of incompetent teachers in schools located in rural areas?
2.2 Is the mean percentage of incompetent teachers in fee-paying schools the same as the mean percentage of incompetent teachers in non fee-paying schools?
2.3 Is there a difference in the mean percentage of incompetent teachers in ‘day only’, ‘boarding only’ and ‘day and boarding’ schools?
2.4 Is there a difference in the mean percentage of incompetent teachers in ‘All boys’, ‘All girls’ and ‘Co-educational’ schools?
2.5 Is there a difference in the mean percentage of incompetent teachers in schools of different sizes?
QUESTION 3

What are the characteristics of incompetent teachers in Irish voluntary secondary schools?

3.1 What is the gender breakdown of incompetent teachers in Irish voluntary secondary schools?
3.2 Is the gender breakdown of incompetent teachers the same as the gender breakdown generally?
3.3 What is the age profile of incompetent teachers?
3.4 Is there a difference in the age profile of male and female incompetent teachers?
3.5 What is the breakdown between permanent and temporary status for incompetent teachers?
3.6 Is the breakdown of incompetent teachers into permanent and temporary status the same as the breakdown of general teaching staff into permanent and temporary status?
3.7 What is the experience profile of incompetent teachers?
3.8 What is the Religious-lay breakdown of incompetent teachers?
3.9 What are the main qualifications of incompetent teachers?
3.10 Was the incompetent teacher ever competent in the past?
3.11 Has the incompetent teacher a post of responsibility?

QUESTION 4

What is the relationship between teaching qualifications and the subjects being taught?

4.1 What subjects are incompetent teachers qualified to teach?
4.2 What subjects do incompetent teachers actually teach?
4.3 What is the match between subject taught and subject qualification for individual teachers?
4.4 What is the mismatch between subject taught and subject qualification for individual teachers?
QUESTION 5

What is the nature of the incompetence?

5.1 What is the discipline quality?
5.2 What is the discipline type?
5.3 What are the feelings of students? What is the teacher's attitude to students?
5.4 What is the classroom climate?
5.5 What is the teacher's subject knowledge?
5.6 How good a timekeeper is the teacher?
5.7 What is the teacher's attendance?
5.8 How well does the teacher follow the curriculum?
5.9 How well do students perform in examinations?
5.10 How co-operative is the teacher?
5.11 What is the teacher's relationship with colleagues?
5.12 How stable is the teacher emotionally?

QUESTION 6

How do principals diagnose the existence of incompetent teachers?

6.1 What are the methods used by principals?
6.2 Is there a difference between male and female principals in the methods they use to identify incompetent teachers?
6.3 Is there a difference between lay and Religious principals in the methods they use to identify incompetent teachers?
6.4 What do principals think are the most important factors for diagnosing teacher incompetence?
6.5 Is there a difference between male and female principals in the methods they rank as the top three for identifying incompetent teachers?
6.6 Is there a difference between lay and Religious principals in the methods they rank as the top three for identifying incompetent teachers?
QUESTION 7

Where do principals seek advice?

7.1 How many sought advice from the Department of Education?
7.2 How many sought advice from the Secretariat for Secondary Schools?
7.3 How many consulted another principal?
7.4 How many sought legal advice?
7.5 How many consulted management literature?
7.6 How many consulted the chairperson of the Board of Management?
7.7 What were the other sources of advice used?

QUESTION 8

Why do principals intentionally avoid tackling teacher incompetence?

8.1 What are the reasons why principals intentionally avoid tackling teacher incompetence?
8.2 Is there a difference between male and female principals in their reasons for avoiding tackling teacher incompetence?
8.3 Is there a difference between Religious and lay principals in their reasons for avoiding tackling teacher incompetence?
8.4 What do principals think are the most important reasons why they avoid tackling teacher incompetence?
8.5 Is there a difference between male and female principals in the reasons they give for not tackling teacher incompetence?
8.6 Is there a difference between Religious and lay principals in the reasons they give for not tackling teacher incompetence?

QUESTION 9

Why do principals tackle teacher incompetence?

9.1 What are the reasons why principals tackle teacher incompetence?
9.2 Is there a difference between male and female principals in their reasons for tackling teacher incompetence?
9.3 Is there a difference between Religious and lay principals in their reasons for tackling teacher incompetence?
9.4 What do principals think are the three most important reasons for tackling teacher incompetence?
9.5 Is there a difference between male and female principals in the importance they assign to the reasons for tackling teacher incompetence?
9.6 Is there a difference between Religious and lay principals in the importance they assign to reasons for tackling teacher incompetence?
QUESTION 10

What are the strategies employed by principals in managing incompetent teachers?

10.1 What are the strategies employed by principals in managing incompetent teachers?
10.2 Is there a difference between male and female principals in the strategies they employ?
10.3 Is there a difference between Religious and lay principals in the strategies they employ?
10.4 What do principals think are the three most used strategies?
10.5 Is there a difference between male and female principals in the importance they assign to strategies for managing incompetent teachers?
10.6 Is there a difference between Religious and lay principals in the importance they assign to strategies for managing incompetent teachers?

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11.1 What are the strategies employed by principals in applying pressure to incompetent teachers?
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11.4 What do principals think are the three most used strategies?
11.5 Is there a difference between male and female principals in the importance they assign to the strategies for applying pressure?
11.6 Is there a difference between Religious and lay principals in the importance they assign to the strategies for applying pressure?
11.7 What was the reaction of parents to a request to have them put complaints in writing?

QUESTION 12

What was the reaction of the incompetent teacher if confronted?

12.1 What was the reaction of the incompetent teacher when confronted?
12.2 Was there a difference in the reaction of male and female incompetent teachers when confronted?
12.3 What do principals think are the top three reactions of incompetent teachers when confronted?

**QUESTION 13**

To what extent does the teacher union get involved?

13.1 In simple numerical terms how common is union involvement?
13.2 When it is involved, what is the reaction of the Teacher Union?
13.3 What do principals think are the top three reactions of the teacher unions?

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14.4 What do principals think are the most used timetabling strategies?
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14.6 Is there a difference between Religious and lay principals in the way they timetable incompetent teachers?

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19.8 How good was the attendance of the incompetent teacher?
19.9 How well (closely) used the teacher follow the curriculum?
19.10 How well had their students performed in examinations?
19.11 How co-operative had the teacher been?
19.12 What was the teacher’s relationship with colleagues?
19.13 What was the teacher’s emotional stability?

QUESTION 20

What are the opinions of principals concerning incompetent teachers generally?

20.1 Incompetent teachers are major sources of stress for principals.
20.2 Incompetent teachers mean extra work for their colleagues.
20.3 In Ireland it is impossible to dismiss a teacher on the grounds of incompetence alone.
20.4 The problem of incompetent teachers can never be dealt with because unions defend the indefensible.
20.5 University Education Departments give teaching diplomas to people who do not deserve them.
20.6 Principals do not have time to tackle the problem.
20.7 Incompetent teachers should be required to have counselling or retraining.
20.8 People should be screened more carefully before being accepted for teacher training.
20.9 The type of incompetent teacher defined here can never become competent.
20.10 Principals in general don’t know how to tackle the problem of teaching incompetence.
20.11 No matter what should be done, in actual fact nothing is going to be done about incompetent teachers.
20.12 More assertive and demanding parents will make toleration of incompetent teachers more and more difficult.
CHAPTER 4

METHOD
METHOD

The method chosen was a postal questionnaire administered to every voluntary secondary School principal in the Republic of Ireland on the database of the Secretariat for Secondary Schools.

This chapter is divided into three sections:

I  Participants

This first presents the rationale for selecting principals as survey respondents and explains why they are suitable for the task. It also explains the source of the list of names and addresses. The argument is then presented for surveying the complete population and not just a sample. It then justifies the delimitation to voluntary secondary Schools - why principals of other types of voluntary secondary Level schools were not surveyed. Finally it justifies why other possible subjects - teachers themselves, unions and students - were not suitable.

II  Instruments

This first presents the rationale for using a survey method and explains why it had to be an unsubsidised independent one despite the attendant expense (which is briefly outlined). It further justifies the use of a survey by explaining why it is suited to the particular participants. Validity and reliability are then discussed. There follows a detailed explanation of the instrument itself - the questionnaire - beginning with the preparatory work and then going through the questions section by section. Finally it justifies why other possible methods - documentary and personal interviews - were not suitable.

III  Procedure

This first details the pilot stage - explaining why and how the participants were selected and describes the source of their names and addresses. It then explains what was learned from the piloting and presents the changes that were made to improve the actual questionnaire.
I Participants

Rationale for selecting principals

Suitability of Principals

The research is interested in Incompetent Teachers - their prevalence and their effect on the principal, the pupils and the school generally. The principal is central to every event that takes place in a school. While pupils are in the front line of experiencing incompetent teaching, principals are in the front line when it comes to doing something about it.

Principals have the experience of Pedagogy and can be expected to have some concept of teaching competence. They have a deep interest in what goes on in their schools. They are the ones who have an overview of the whole school. They are entitled to judge teachers since they are responsible for everything that goes on in the schools and teaching and learning are the main activities and raison d'être of schools. Principals are officially responsible for the day to day running of the school.

From a practical point of view principals are excellent subjects for this research since there is a clear connection between the investigation and the principals' day to day existence. There is a possibility that some benefit might accrue to them from the research. It is in their interest to be supportive and helpful, thus making good response more likely.

Finally it must be remembered that principals have a certain amount of power. While this study is an academic one it cannot be divorced totally from practice. The power of principals can be used for good if this research indicates a good path to follow.

Educational research, if it is to mean anything, must have an effect on practice. Teaching incompetence is a real problem and if it is to be addressed then principals are central.

Source

The list of principals was obtained from the Secretariat for Secondary Schools. Based in Dublin, this is the office which acts through its General Secretary and staff on behalf of the JMB - the Joint Managerial Body. The JMB represents 60% of all secondary schools. It is a committee of mostly elected people from AMCSS - the Association of Management of Catholic Secondary Schools and ISA - the Irish Schoolmasters Association - its Protestant counterpart. The Secretariat serves 432 voluntary secondary schools acting as an administrative, negotiating and advice centre. It also specifically mentions that it is a source of statistics. When asked for a database of secondary school principals, the Secretariat provided a set of mailing labels but, as explained in the procedure section below, addressing the envelopes by hand was preferred. This was done for two reasons - firstly to make the letters more personal, and secondly, there was a danger that principals would be familiar with the mailing labels used by the Secretariat and might have thought that there was some connection. It would not have been right to have the questionnaire associated with the Secretariat in case principals thought there was some agenda at play.
Sample Size

The nature of the research is so sensitive that it was important not to lay the results open to criticism on the grounds of sampling bias or sampling error. Therefore, all voluntary secondary school principals on the database of the Secretariat for Secondary schools were surveyed.

Also an accurate estimate of the scale of the problem needs to take into account the possibility that the problem is very small - so small that it might have been missed in a random sample. This is as true in the positive sense as it is in the negative. Results obtained from a complete survey are more trustworthy. They merely require the respondents to answer the questions truthfully. The elaborate confidentiality procedure described below in the procedures section ensures that principals had nothing to fear in telling the truth about their own staffs since nothing would be traceable back to the particular school. Principals would have no reason to inflate the estimate of incompetent teachers.

They might have had a reason to either refuse to return the questionnaire or deny the existence of incompetent teachers on their staffs - either to protect themselves from a backlash from the staff or to hide their own incompetence in their inability to handle the problem. However, absolute confidentiality eliminated both of these dangers.

Why Voluntary Secondary Schools

Voluntary secondary schools educate 60 per cent of voluntary secondary Level students in the Republic of Ireland. They thus comprise the largest single type of secondary school.

They come from a common, usually religious, tradition and form a reasonably homogenous unit within which cross comparisons are legitimate.

Their management structures are very similar with a Board of Management set up by the Trustees. The principal, formerly always a Religious but increasingly now a lay person, bears the major portion of managerial responsibility for the day to day running of the school. The middle management structure - much less well developed than in the other forms of second-level schools mentioned below - is currently under reform.

Voluntary secondary schools are privately owned and managed but the entire cost of the teachers’ salaries is met by the State. Most of the running cost is also met by the State in the form of allowances and capitation grants.
Why not other types of schools

As well as secondary voluntary schools the second-level sector in the Republic of Ireland includes vocational schools which educate 26 per cent of all second level students and community and comprehensive schools which educate 14 per cent. Community and comprehensive schools have different management structures. The boards of management are constituted differently. They have different histories and traditions and their internal management structures are more participative and collegial.

Vocational schools are under an education committee and teachers are employed by the committee and appointed to a scheme. Their terms of employment, for example, provide for the option of transfer of a teacher to a different school. It also provides for the teacher teaching adult classes at night. These provide options, not usually available in the voluntary secondary sector, for managing incompetent teachers.

The nature of teacher incompetence in all sectors is probably the same but, because of the above differences, the managerial responses may differ. The other secondary school types are so different that the research would have to take too many variances into account and cross comparison would not be possible in all areas.

Unsuitability of other possible subjects

Teachers themselves

There are two categories of teacher to be considered:

a) the incompetents themselves

Clearly the incompetent teachers themselves are difficult to pinpoint in advance. Even if a valid and reliable mechanism of identification were designed, the practical problems associated with obtaining responses from the incompetent teachers would be enormous. Under the direction of Ted C Wragg of Exeter University, the Teaching Competence Project has recently been completed in the UK. As well as almost 2000 primary and secondary Heads, it involved seventy allegedly incompetent teachers themselves. However these incompetent teachers were self-selecting and volunteered the information. Three quarters of whom denied they were incompetent and spoke of ‘[...] conspiracy theories, bullying and victimisation, racial discrimination, incompetence by the head, unjustified complaints by parents, clashes of philosophy, and resource issues.’ (Wragg, 1999, p25)

In the UK there are actual procedures which identify teachers in need of help. There is no such thing in Ireland and it is doubtful if the response from allegedly incompetent teachers would be great. Physically seeking them out would be difficult, as it would not be acceptable to simply accost allegedly incompetent teachers and ask them to grant an interview describing their actions and discussing their incompetence. If sensitively handled, such interviews could form a valuable future extension to the study.
b) their colleagues

Individual teachers are so busy and concerned with their own classes that they cannot possibly be fully aware of everything going on in the school. Even if they were aware of every incompetent colleague they would have difficulty in reporting them. The tradition in Ireland is that secondary teachers are professionals with a contract between them and their clients. It is almost a private relationship. The tradition is that teachers teach and managers manage and 'never the twain shall meet'.

From a practical point of view every teacher in the school would need to be surveyed. There is no way that it would work. Their professional union would not be too happy about it and would not permit it. Even if all of these difficulties were overcome there would be a question mark over the validity of the measure. What would be being measured? It would merely be one teacher's opinion of another and would not be as valid as the opinion of a principal whose responsibility it is to be aware of the activities of the teachers.

Unions

Unions have a position to defend. They exist to defend teachers as well as to improve the educational welfare of the children. A teacher who is performing well and is in the right has no need of his or her union. It is when a teacher is patently in the wrong that he or she badly needs the support and defence of the union.

Unions definitely have an interest in teaching competence and incompetence. They do deal with individual cases of disciplinary action for example but, understandably, their files on such matters are confidential. The teacher unions could be legitimately asked for their views and policies in general. That would be in the context of a wider treatment of the issue and would be a possible extension to the research as discussed in the list of recommendations.

Students

It would be highly unlikely that a principal would permit an outsider to go into a classroom and give out questionnaires asking pupils to rate their teachers. The morale problems created would be enormous. Teachers are sensitive about their performance being rated by Inspectors from the Department of Education and Science so they are hardly likely to accept students so doing.

Besides, pupils' rating might depend on criteria that might not altogether be the correct ones pedagogically. A teacher's personality or looks or generosity of marking, for example, might sway them. They could also be influenced by their reaction to the subject which the teacher teaches.

Even if pupils' ratings were accepted as valid, the method of interviewing or of administering a questionnaire would be extremely problematic.
II Instruments

Rationale for using a survey method
The required information covers a wide range of issues - a questionnaire can efficiently deal with questions both of fact and of opinion.

The geographical spread of the schools makes post the most suitable and economical way of contacting principals. 'Questionnaires can be sent through the mail; interviewers cannot.' (Sellitz et al 1959)

The questionnaire can be answered more or less simultaneously by all principals. A solo researcher could never get around to interviewing personally all principals in a reasonable amount of time.

The postal questionnaire permits the principals to study the questions and reflect on them without being influenced or rushed by an interviewer. It allows the principals time to study and to understand the definition of 'incompetent teacher' presented in the attachment to the questionnaire.

It also allows respondents time to look up information if necessary - e.g. principals would probably not know the ages of teachers but could look them up in their files.

Again the principals' fragmented day makes a questionnaire suitable for picking up and putting down at odd moments.

Importance of independence
Because of the sensitive nature of the research, it was important that no suggestion of bias be possible. Also it was important that the principals be assured that there was no 'hidden agenda' at work. Money might have been forthcoming from the Department of Education to support the study for example but it would not have encouraged a good response from principals for fear that the intention was to show the necessity for teacher appraisal or other quality control and inspection initiatives.

Similarly, while the Secretariat for Secondary Schools provided names and addresses of principals, it was spared any embarrassment that might be caused by association with research on incompetent teachers. (One of the respondents commented "Do you realise that this survey will make you a 'marked man!'")

The research was a purely personal endeavour personally financed. The aim was academic - i.e. to increase the sum total of knowledge. That knowledge could lead to policy change or action but there was no preconceived 'agenda' other than to bring the issue 'into the light'. 
Expense

Being thus totally self-financing, the cost of the survey was not inconsiderable since there were 432 principals to be written to in the first mailing. For each principal, as well as the expense of the printing, the paper, the envelopes and the postcards, there was a stamped addressed envelope, a stamped addressed postcard (see note on anonymity) and the mailing itself. Thus each questionnaire represented a cost of approximately £2.00 each - stamps alone cost 95p per mailing (two stamped addressed inserts @ 30p and mailing of entire package @ 35p) For printing, each questionnaire had 12 pages - six leaves printed back and front. There was also the cover letter, which was also printed back and front. The stamped addressed envelope and the postcard had to be printed and a stamp affixed to each. This is not to mention the time involved in printing, collating, stapling, folding, inserting, affixing stamps and handwriting the main envelope. Then after 10 days there was a follow up reminder to non-respondents followed after another week by a repeat mailing of the entire first package to the remaining non-respondents. This was followed by phone calls to the remaining non-respondents. Then there was the ‘thank you’ and promised summary of results to each principal who had responded. (A password-protected web page offering a summary of results was considered but rejected, as the page might not be secure and its purpose could be misinterpreted).

Why suited to Participants

School principals are highly literate. They are well used to written communication. A questionnaire would not be as likely to be a source of errors to them because of misreading or misunderstanding as it might be to the average subject.

Principals have an interest in the competence of their staffs so would be likely to produce a high response rate.

‘[..] people who have a particular interest in the subject matter of the research itself are more likely to return mail questionnaires than those who are less interested’

(Fowler 1993, p41)
Validity of questionnaire

Validity means that the instrument actually measures what it is supposed to be measuring. The questionnaire was valid to the extent that the questions asked actually did lead to answers which addressed the research questions. The research questions were based on principals’ judgements. The principals’ estimation of the prevalence of teacher incompetence and the principals’ response to that incompetence was being measured. If principals were truthful (and procedures encouraged them to be so) then the instrument was valid.

As mentioned earlier, principals are highly literate and well educated. Therefore they would have no difficulty in understanding the questions. The validity of the questionnaire could thus not be said to be threatened by the complexity or language level of the questions themselves.

It could be argued that some of the questions referred to the response of the teacher unions and also to the effect an incompetent teacher was having on other teachers. The answers to these could not be said to be valid measures of these items per se but they were valid measures of the principals’ estimation of them. The survey is one of the principals’ estimation of and response to teacher incompetence.

Validity of response

For validity to hold then the requirement or assumption that needs to be made is that the principals answered the questions truthfully. This might have been compromised if the questionnaire were not anonymous. Great care was taken to ensure anonymity and to explain the system to the principals. The system involved totally untraceable questionnaire and corresponding postcards which respondents posted separately at about the same time. The postcards were used to identify not-respondents to follow up with a further request.

It is reasonable to assume that those who did respond trusted the system and so gave truthful answers. Those who did not trust the system were unlikely to go to the trouble of filling in the questionnaire with lies. They would be far more likely not to respond at all. Therefore the responses received were likely to be true and valid.

A big threat to the validity of the survey would be posed by different principals’ personal definitions of an incompetent teacher. For the purposes of this study therefore, it was vital that a clear definition of an incompetent teacher be provided. Principals were asked to accept the given definition ‘so that we are all talking about the same thing’ (cover letter). The definition emerges mainly from Bridges (1985) and is reproduced below in the procedure subsection.

The survey would also be invalid if it ‘put words’ in the mouth of principals. The questionnaire may have informed some principals of the strategies used by others. (Various options were presented and respondents were asked to tick off those strategies
which they themselves had employed) so they may have answered some questions in a way that they might not have, had the questions been absolutely ‘open’. However if the questions had been ‘open’ the questionnaire would have been very difficult to fill in, and response rates may have suffered.

Reliability

Reliability means that other researchers undertaking the same survey would have obtained the same result. A different response might have been obtained by others - particularly if they were not voluntary secondary school principals since, as a voluntary secondary school principal myself, I feel I had the trust of my colleagues. A different researcher might be suspected of having ulterior motives. Principals might fear that the results would end up in the wrong hands (such as the media) and might be misinterpreted or misused.

Thus in the strict terms of the definition of reliability it might be considered to be not reliable. However the results are reliable in the sense that another principal who had the trust of colleagues would indeed obtain the same results.

High reliability is made more likely because all subjects were presented with a standardised stimulus - identical questionnaires, cover letters, anonymity guarantees, definitions of incompetent teachers and postcard. Interviewer subjectivity is eliminated.

It was possible to test for internal reliability within the questionnaire itself because different sections referred to similar situations and computer cross checking and ‘data cleaning’ would have exposed internal contradictions.

The question of reliability over time is not so clear. One assumes that as educational management progresses in Ireland the problem of teacher incompetence will be better handled. One never steps into the same river twice. Reliability therefore is not so directly applicable to this survey as it would need to be for something like an IQ test for example. Maybe the results of this research when appropriately digested and disseminated among school principals might lead to an improvement in the situation.
The Questionnaire itself

Preparatory Work

The questionnaire was developed partly on the basis of a review of the literature already discussed but to an even greater extent was based on discussions with principals at conferences and at regional meetings. I am a voluntary secondary school principal myself and my colleagues were very open to discussing the issue of teacher incompetence. In fact they were very eager to talk. They seemed to find it cathartic. These discussions detailed in an anecdotal manner the experiences of principals, their estimate of the extent of the problem and the strategies they employed. This yielded a wealth of ideas. It led to questions offering a selection of strategies from which principals were asked to select the ones they themselves used, and also which ones they found to be effective. It also led to refinement and improvement in the definition of an incompetent teacher. For example temporary incompetence on the grounds of inexperience, ill health, personal or family problems and alcoholism was excluded. Although anecdotal evidence suggests that alcoholism is a serious problem for some teachers, it was not included in this study because the focus of interest was teaching incompetence. Alcoholism is likely to make someone incompetent in any profession.

Design of questions

The purpose was to find out:

1. How many incompetent teachers are in the voluntary secondary schools?
2. What are the characteristics of the incompetent teachers? -(a sort of Incompetent Teacher Census)
3. What do principals actually do about incompetent teachers?
4. Have incompetent teachers been removed? - and if they have, how?
5. What effect does the existence of incompetent teachers have on the school?
6. What do principals think about teacher incompetence?

There were thus several sections to be incorporated into the questionnaire.

Background information on the Principal and School Statistics

This was necessary first of all to give a detailed profile of the participants and their schools. Secondly it was necessary so that cross tabulation would be possible with other variables.

It would permit answers to questions such as:

What percentage do incompetent teachers represent of the total teaching force?
Is there a difference in the response of male and female principals to an incompetent teacher?
Is there a difference in the response of experienced and inexperienced principals?
Is there a difference in the opinions of male and female principals?
Is the size and type of school significant? - urban/ rural, single sex/ co-ed., boarding/day, etc.?
Awareness of the existence of incompetent teachers at present or in the past

This was the pivotal point in the questionnaire. It was important to remind respondents to read again my definition of an incompetent teacher so that the number of incompetent teachers eventually arrived at would be defensible.

This led to the first major branch. If a principal had never ever experienced an incompetent teacher then he or she was directed to the last section which was an opinionnaire asking for agreement or otherwise with a series of opinions using a Likert-type scale.

If principals had one or more incompetent teachers currently on staff then, having detailed the number of incompetent teachers, they were directed to fill in a sort of 'census form' for each.

If principals only had experience in the past - say in a previous school or if the teacher had subsequently left - then they were directed to skip the census section. Questions about previous experience of an incompetent teacher were confined to the case in which the incompetent teacher had been removed or had left.

Otherwise confusion would be created because:

a) The incompetent teacher would still be in the system and would be also referred to by another principal in the survey and would be counted twice.
b) An incompetent teacher who continues in a school has been experienced by the principal in the past already and is now being experienced still. Thus again confusion would be created by reference to past and present experience of an incompetent teacher.

Incompetent Teacher Census

If the proportion of incompetents is about 5% as the literature would predict then an average voluntary secondary School would have one or two incompetent teachers. The questionnaire therefore had provision for two individual census forms for Incompetent Teachers - called IT1 and IT2. Since practically all schools have a photocopier nowadays, most principals have easy access to one so they were asked to photocopy more 'census forms' if necessary. Because of the easy availability of photocopying, it was unlikely to lead to under-reporting.

The census form first of all asked for obvious information like gender, age, qualification, experience, employment status, and if the teacher had a post of responsibility.

Then it went on to ask more searching questions.

It asked if the incompetent teacher had ever been incompetent in the past. The idea here was to establish if:
a) the teacher had been competent at one time and the 'slings and arrows' of life had taken its toll, or
b) the teacher was ever thus and should never have become a teacher in the first place

It asked for the subjects theoretically qualified to teach and the subject actually taught by the incompetent teacher. The idea was to test the hypothesis that incompetent teachers are 'protected' by having them teach subjects which are not necessarily their main subjects e.g. are they taking a lot of PE or games classes, or Civics or Religion when their qualifications are in the languages area. Or are they teaching only Junior Science when their speciality is Physics which is a Senior subject? The idea was to see therefore if the incompetent teacher was being under-utilised with other teachers therefore forced to 'take up the slack'.

There was also a question, which sought to describe the particular nature of the incompetence. Respondents were asked to rate the teacher on thirteen different qualities in accordance with a semantic difference type seven-point scale.

Response to the incompetence
The focus of the survey is more on the principal than it is on the incompetent teacher. This section was to be filled in by a principal who either had experience of an incompetent teacher on staff in the past or who has one at present.

The areas covered here were the diagnosis, the advice sought and the resulting strategy which might include special timetabling hinted at in the 'census' above or an attempt to remedy the incompetence. The involvement, if any, of the teacher union is also briefly dealt with. The Union position is a whole other research topic worthy of another thesis.

An Incompetent Teacher in the Past Who Left
There is anecdotal evidence among principals that certain incompetent teachers leave the profession in various ways - what Bridges (1995) calls 'induced exits'. Inducements cannot be offered in the Irish context but teachers take sick leave or early retirement or simply resign. This section asked if an incompetent teacher had left through one of these routes or through dismissal or redeployment or career change or employment in a different school.

In particular, if early retirement or sick leave or resignation was the exit route, the question was asked if it was done in order to avoid disciplinary action - i.e. did they jump before they were pushed? Since there are many different and individual 'stories' possible this was one section of the questionnaire which offered principals space to outline what happened in their own words.
Census form for teacher who left
A census form was then filled in for the teacher who had left. The census was basically identical to the one described above but with the tense of some of the questions appropriately adjusted.

Opinionnaire
A series of twelve statements were then presented to which the principal was asked to respond with varying degrees of agreement or disagreement in accordance with a five point Likert-type scale.

Request for Comment
Finally respondents were thanked and asked to comment if they so wished.

Path Through Questionnaire
Clearly, not all questions were suited to every situation. The following flow diagram (figure 4.1 on page 105) shows the differing possible paths through the questionnaire depending upon the particular circumstances
Figure 4.1  
Path through the questionnaire

1. Principal  
   Himself / Herself  
   (Q.1 - Q.10)

2. School Statistics  
   School, students, teachers  
   (Q.11 - Q.17)

3. Are you aware of teaching incompetence in your school?  
   (Q.18)

   In the past

   Number of current

   Census Forms  
   Detailed information about each Incompetent Teacher  
   (Q.19)

4. Response  
   Diagnosis, advice sought,  
   (Q.20 - Q.33)

   No

   Was the teacher union  
   Yes  
   Union Reaction  
   (Q.34 - Q.36)

   Timetabling Strategies  
   (Q.37 - Q.38)

   No

   Did you attempt to remedy the incompetence?  
   Yes  
   Remediation Strategies  
   (Q.39 - Q.40)

   No

   Did an incompetent teacher ever leave?  
   Yes  
   Story of exit and Census  
   (Q.41 - Q.42)

   No

   General Opinions and Comment  
   (Q.43 - Q.46)
Unsuitability of other methods

**Documentary**

Documents give the official positions and official policies of managerial bodies, the Department of Education and the teacher Unions. They do not answer the specific research questions of this study - i.e. how many 'incompetent' teachers are there in voluntary secondary schools in Ireland, what is the response of principals, and what is the effect on the schools? What this study seeks to obtain is a snapshot of the reality on the ground. Official documents are by their nature theoretical and idealised. Documents give the rhetoric. This study sought the reality.

A documentary approach was used only as background for the real study - e.g. to provide examples of official policies of the Department of Education and of the teacher union. Also there were Media references to the general public perception of teacher incompetence. These documents are referred to mostly in the introduction and in the literature review. There is very little official information written down and accessible in relation to teacher incompetence *per se* for obvious ethical, practical and legal reasons. Clearly also, there is no book or database which lists all the incompetent teachers in Ireland.

**Personal interviews**

An interview would have been an excellent method of studying a small number of sample case studies. In a semi-structured interview it would have been possible to follow up leads that arose and to perform an in-depth analysis. This would have been more suited to a qualitative study examining the individual reactions of a certain number of principals to teaching incompetence on their staffs.

It was not suitable for a complete survey such as this. Establishing the extent of the problem of teacher incompetence is better served by asking *all* principals to estimate the extent of the problem in their individual schools. Provided an agreed definition of incompetent teacher is used then a valid estimate can be arrived at.

Thus the interview might be a follow up study. For example it could study cases where a teacher has actually been dismissed. But there would be large ethical, legal and practical difficulties attendant upon such a course of action.

In order for principals to talk openly about the problem they would need to be talking to me personally - a fellow principal. They might be shy about discussing it with an interviewer appointed by me. Also such interviewers would need extensive training and piloting practice to ensure uniformity. For my particular interest therefore interviewing would have meant personally interviewing *every* voluntary secondary principal in the country and that would have been prohibitively expensive and practically impossible in a reasonable period of time.

Also, as shown by Leader and Boldt (1995), Irish Catholic school principals are exceedingly busy and their tasks change frequently in an unpredictable manner. Having
travelled a long distance there would be no guarantee that the researcher would even get to speak to the principal concerned.

Since most average size towns have only one or two voluntary secondary schools, principals are distributed very widely. Because of the difficulties created by this geographical spread and by the time required, interviewing would have meant the selection of a stratified random sample with all the attendant complications and dangers of error.

III Procedure

Pilot stage

The reason for the Pilot stage was to test:

a) The questionnaire itself:
   - Were there any ambiguous or irrelevant questions?
   - Were there any questions or areas that should be added?
   - How long did it take to fill in?
   - What was the reaction of the retired principals to it?
   - Did the participants make useful suggestions?

b) The Procedures:
   - Size of envelope, folding of questionnaire, stuffing, and weight for postage.
   - Did the cover letter, postcard etc. all fulfil their purpose adequately?
   - Were any of the respondents confused by the instructions?
   - What was the response rate?

c) The data processing:
   - Was the coding adequate?
   - Were the data obtained in suitable form for analysis?

Participants

Suitability

For the piloting stage of the questionnaire a group similar to the actual target was essential.

A subgroup within the target population would have been inappropriate because the idea was to survey the entire population and a subgroup thus selected couldn’t be asked the same questions twice.
Principals from the other voluntary secondary Level sectors - Vocational Schools, Comprehensive and Community Schools would have been inappropriate because, as explained earlier, there are significant differences in the management systems pertaining in these schools.

Primary school principals are even more different from voluntary secondary principals than the above so they are even less suitable.

The solution was to use recently retired voluntary secondary school principals. There is no database of such people in the Department of Education as the retirement and pension forms do not ask the person retiring if they have a post of responsibility. Nor does the Secretariat for Secondary Schools have such a list. Acquiring the information was a three-step process.

Sample Size
The size was not critical because the purpose was to test the questions, the procedure and the analysis - not to obtain actually valid data. Thus a convenience sample of the most recently retired principals was chosen (those who retired in the previous three years). This yielded thirty usable names and addresses. See below for the source of these data and for the procedure followed.

Source
1. The Secretariat for Secondary Schools run training courses for newly appointed principals. They provided a list of the newly appointed principals for the three most recent years - 1995, 1996 and 1997.
2. Reasoning that where there is a new principal there is a predecessor, each of the schools in question was telephoned and the current incumbent asked what had happened to the previous principal.
3. From those data were extracted the names and addresses of those previous principals who were still living, still in Ireland, and who had not gone on to a principalship in a different school (in which case they would be in my actual target population)
Procedure for the Pilot

A database of the thirty retired principals was set up in Microsoft Works™. Then, by running a 'mailmerge' with the retired principals' database, each letter was printed so that it was personalised for each.

Photocopied onto the reverse of each letter were two text boxes - one explaining how the anonymity system operated and the other giving a clear definition of an incompetent teacher for the purposes of the survey. Both of these are reproduced in their final form below in the section describing the actual survey.

The mailing comprised:

1. The personalised cover letter which included the explanation of the anonymity system and incompetent teacher definition described above
2. The questionnaire itself
3. A special page containing three questions about the questionnaire:
   - How long did it take to fill in approximately?
   - What is your reaction to the questionnaire generally?
   - Have you any suggestions?
4. A stamped addressed postcard to be sent separately identifying the respondent.
5. A stamped addressed envelope for returning the completed questionnaire.

Result of Pilot

The mailing of the Pilot questionnaire took place on May 15th 1998 and respondents were asked to reply by May 22nd.

Questionnaires arrived back as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friday May 22nd</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday May 25th</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday May 26th</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday May 27th</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday May 28th</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday May 29th</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday June 2nd</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday June 9th</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were thus fourteen respondents. Since, as pointed out above, the purpose was to test the questions, the procedure and the analysis - and not to obtain actually valid data,
there was no effort made to follow up and increase the response rate. An initial response of 47% was encouraging, as appropriate follow-up contacts would be expected to increase this in the actual survey.

Postcards:

Note that fourteen postcards also arrived so there was no one so dishonest as to send back a postcard claiming to have posted a questionnaire without having actually done so.

Analysis and Changes Because of the Pilot Stage

Because of the practical experience of carrying out the survey, because of the responses obtained and the comments of respondents and because of the analysis of the data using SPSS™ (Statistics Package for the Social Sciences), the piloting led to improvements in three areas:

1. the questions
2. the computer analysis
3. technicalities

Improvements in the questions

Four of the questions (which were closed except for 'other' as a last written option) were improved by the addition of the extra options generated by 'other': e.g.

'Don't know' was added as an option to the previous 'Yes' and 'No' for the question which asked if the incompetent teacher had ever been competent at some time in the past.

'Chronic absence and late arrival' was added as diagnostic symptom of teaching incompetence.

'Chairperson of B.O.M.' (Board of Management) was added as one of the sources from which the principal might have sought advice.

'Invoking support of Department Inspectorate' was added as one of the remediation strategies attempted.

The wording of some questions was changed: e.g.

OLD  'Please rank the three most effective ticked items [...]'
NEW  'Please rank the three most important ticked items [...]'

OLD  'It is impossible to dismiss a teacher for incompetence in Ireland'
NEW  'In Ireland it is impossible to dismiss a teacher on the grounds of incompetence alone'
OLD ‘The type of incompetent teacher I have defined can never become competent’
NEW ‘The type of incompetent teacher defined here can never become competent’

OLD ‘Principals in general don’t know how to tackle the problem of teaching incompetence so they avoid it’
NEW ‘Principals in general don’t know how to tackle the problem of teaching incompetence’

The Computer Analysis

The coding of the variables in SPSS™ revealed that the answers in the questionnaire needed to be coded in greater detail.

The codes were added to the questionnaire itself rather than using a codebook. This made data entry simpler, more efficient and less prone to error.

The census forms in particular needed to be called IT1 and IT2 and each subsection needed individual coding. Also each strategy or option offered in individual questions required a code of its own.

In actual fact there were 257 variables created by the questionnaire.

These were presented as 46 questions. Although subsections were now coded individually on the questionnaire the questions were not renumbered as that would have ‘put off’ respondents.

Technical improvements

One of the ‘skip’ directions (‘now please proceed to question 18’), if taken seriously, would have led to a continuous and eternal ‘loop’. Fortunately, people are not computers and this did not happen with the pilot but it was corrected for the actual questionnaire.

My name and address was added to the final page of the questionnaire itself in case the stamped addressed envelope was mislaid.

The two census forms for current incompetent teachers were adequate so there seemed no need to increase their number.

The postcard was improved by including on it a repeated explanation of its function – see Figure 4.5 below.

The overall weight of the mailing meant that the outside stamp had to be increased from 30p to 35p

The photocopying of the back of each page resulted in creasing of the pages so a different photocopier was employed for the actual questionnaire.
Actual Survey

Procedure

The entire population of 432 voluntary secondary school principals was surveyed with the self-administered postal questionnaire.

Source of Mailing List

1. The Secretariat for Secondary Schools provided a set of mailing labels for the principals of the 432 voluntary secondary schools whom they served.
2. From that data a computer database of the names and addresses of principals was set up in Microsoft Works™.

A cover letter was written (Figure 4.2 below) and, by running a ‘mailmerge’ with the principals’ database, each letter was printed so that it was personalised for each principal.

As in the pilot, photocopied onto the reverse of each letter were two text boxes - one explaining how the anonymity system operated and the other giving a clear definition of an incompetent teacher for the purposes of the survey - see Figure 4.3 and Figure 4.4 below.

Encouraging a high response

A high response rate was vital. It is important in all surveys but is particularly so in a sensitive and controversial area such as teacher incompetence.

[...] anything that makes a mail questionnaire look more professional, more personalized (sic), or more attractive will have some positive effect on response rates. (Fowler 1993, p45)

High response was encouraged in several ways.

1) An appeal to the principals as colleagues. The researcher is a principal and exploited his status as a colleague.
2) Personalised letters. The computerised database of the principals’ names, schools and addresses was incorporated in a ‘mailmerge’ letter - using Microsoft Publisher™ - so that every principal received a personal letter which was more personal and vastly superior to ‘Dear Principal’ or ‘Dear .............’ with the name hand-written.
3) Personal notes. One of the fields in the principal Database was used for incorporating a postscript on some letters. This took the form of a special appeal to that particular principal to respond on the basis of some connection with myself. All principals of schools under the Trusteeship of the Sisters of Mercy were reminded that my school
was also a Mercy School and that I hoped they would respond. Similarly, principals in Region Three (my region) of the AMCSS (Association of Management of Catholic Secondary schools) were reminded that I was a colleague. Many principals were known personally and they had particular personal postscripts appended to the standard letter.

4) **Hand-written envelopes.** Principals receive a great deal of post most of it addressed to ‘The Principal’ or else in the form of an address label affixed to the envelope. A personally hand-written envelope stands out in such company.

5) **Stamped return addressed envelope and postcard.** It was felt that real stamps might instil more of a sense of obligation to post the items back than a licensed envelope. Principals receive many licensed envelopes from companies sending promotional literature and could be blasé about them. Also, a pre-printed licensed envelope where the post office charges *only for the letters actually posted* is more suited to the case of sending out a very large number of questionnaires and expecting the response to be only a small proportion. Real stamps in such a scenario would be very expensive. Since the entire target population was being surveying, and since a high response rate was expected, the licensed envelopes would not have been economical and would have seemed impersonal.

6) **Judicious Timing.** Apart from the examination superintendents, Irish voluntary secondary school principals are often the only school representatives in school for the duration of the examination period. They must be on site. Their day is not as fragmented and frenetic as normal school time however. They would therefore have the peace and the time to look at the survey and fill it in. The survey questionnaire was therefore posted so as to arrive in the school during the examination period. The last paragraph of the cover letter said

> ‘I am sending the questionnaire at this time of year in the hope that, with most of the students and teachers out of the way you may get a quarter of an hour of peace to fill it in.’

7) **Appeal to a sense of professionalism.** An appeal was made to the principals’ sense of professionalism by stating that the results would be of benefit to everyone. It would settle the balance between media hysteria and complacency.

8) **Promise of sharing the results.** In the accompanying postcard respondents were invited to tick a box which indicated that they would like a summary of the results.

**Mailing**

The mailing comprised:

1. The personalised cover letter which included the explanation of the anonymity system and incompetent teacher definition described above
2. The improved final version of the questionnaire - see appendix.
3. A stamped addressed postcard identifying the respondent to be returned separately.
4. A stamped addressed envelope for returning the completed questionnaire.
Mailing Contents

Figure 4.2 Personalised cover letter

‘Amadeus’
Duntahane Park
Fermoy
Co. Cork
June 12th 1998

{{First Name}} {{Second Name}}
{{School}}
{{Address Line 1}}
{{Address Line 2}}
{{Address Line 3}}

Dear {{First Name}}

I am Principal of Saint Anne's Post Primary school in Cappoquin County Waterford. When I meet other principals we sometimes ruefully compare notes on the 'lost sheep' in our staffs but we don't really know the actual extent of the problem - if indeed it is a problem.

In my spare (!) time I am doing a PhD. If, like me, you too are interested in the experience of other principals and are willing to contribute your own experience then please fill out the enclosed anonymous questionnaire and return it to me in the prepaid envelope. It is mostly only a matter of ticking boxes.

In return, I promise to send you a summary of the aggregated results. (It may take some time to collate it. As you know the 'day job' takes a certain amount of time and energy).

Your response will be absolutely anonymous. See overleaf for my ingenious system for making sure that you can be confident that neither I nor anyone else can know who you are. Overleaf also you will find an explanation of what I mean by an incompetent teacher so that we are all talking about the same thing.

I am sending the questionnaire at this time of year in the hope that with most of the students and teachers out of the way you may get a quarter of an hour of peace to fill it in. I would really appreciate your response by Friday June 19th.

Thank you in advance.

Yours sincerely,

Orison Carlile
Anonymity Safeguard

The following was printed on the back of the above letter.

**Figure 4.3** Explanation regarding anonymity system

---

**ANONYMITY**

The success of this survey depends upon anonymity. Neither your name nor that of your school appears on the questionnaire. Your responses cannot be traced back to you.

There is a post card for you to fill in saying that you have filled in and posted the questionnaire.

If you post the questionnaire and the postcard separately I will end up with a collection of completed anonymous questionnaires and a collection of corresponding postcard *but I won't know which corresponds to which.*

The reason for the postcard is that I can follow up non-respondents with a reminder.

The reporting will take the form of descriptive statistics which will involve reports *by group* and will also involve cross-tabulations of various pairs of variables.

The results of this survey taken as a whole will be of great interest in providing the reality of the situation. It will hopefully settle the balance between media hysteria of rampant incompetence and the dangers of head-in-the-sand complacency on the other.

Your co-operation will benefit everyone.

Orison Carlile
Incompetent Teacher Definition

This box was beside the above box on the back of the cover letter.

Figure 4.4 Definition of incompetent teacher

An incompetent teacher displays *persistent failure* in some or all of the following five areas:

**Technical:** the teacher is deficient in discipline, teaching method, subject-knowledge, organisation and planning.

**Administrative:** the teacher fails to comply with school rules and procedures (e.g. chronic absenteeism and tardiness) and possibly does not follow the curriculum in a sound manner.

**Ethical:** the teacher violates standards expected of the teaching profession - e.g. having a negative attitude to students which could range from indifference all the way to physical or psychological abuse.

**Productive:** the teacher fails to produce desirable results in the classroom - e.g. there is little academic progress, students are not interested, they lack respect, and there is a poor climate in the classroom.

**Personal:** the teacher is deficient in judgement, emotional stability, self-control and strength of character; the teacher is 'difficult' and uncooperative with management and colleagues.

Clearly, most of us could be guilty of some of these failures at some point. I am interested in the cases where there is a sufficient and chronic amount of failure - a critical mass such that there is a persistent pattern of mistakes and failure.
In Chapter Four, the Method section discusses the importance of anonymity in research, particularly in the context of postal questionnaires. Anonymity is more secure than confidentiality, and this is emphasized in the postcard illustrated in Figure 4.5.

The postcard (Figure 4.6) serves as an additional identifier to help distinguish respondents who need follow-up. It states:

"Dear Orison,

I am sending this postcard at the same time that I am putting my completed questionnaire in the post. Since my questionnaire is completely anonymous, this postcard will tell you that you need not send me a further reminder.

Name: ________________________

County: _______________________

Please tick this box if you would like a summary of the results [ ]

This was to provide an incentive for the principals to return their questionnaires."

Anonymity is a safeguard that further ensures the confidentiality of the respondents' data.
Timing and Follow-up

The consensus in research methodology texts generally supports the view that follow-up is essential in a postal survey. After a review of the relevant literature, Bailey (1994) states:

> It seems safe to assume that follow-ups (at least one) will receive a response rate approximately 20 percent higher than no follow-up at all, with each succeeding follow-up generally having less effect. (Bailey, 1994 p.163)

The survey was therefore carried out with follow-up procedures as an essential part of the sequence, which was in three stages.

**Sequence**

**Stage 1**

All 432 questionnaires were mailed on June 12th 1998. The cover letter requested a response by June 19th. This was a short time but it coincided with the timing of the State examinations when principals were the only official presence in the schools apart from the Invigilator.

According as completed questionnaires were returned they were numbered in the order of their arrival. This, while not identifying the respondent, made it possible to mark comments with the number of the questionnaire concerned and thus associate them with that particular respondent.

The corresponding postcards were filed in alphabetical order and compared with the database to identify non-respondents.

**Stage 2**

By June 19th the number of questionnaires that had been returned was 173.

On June 23rd the non-respondents remaining were then sent a reminder note encouraging them to send in their questionnaire.

That letter is reproduced in Figure 4.7 below.
Figure 4.7 First follow-up letter

‘Amadeus’
Duntahane Park
Fermoy
Co. Cork
June 23rd 1998

{ {First Name} } { {Second Name} }  
{ {School} }  
{ {Address Line 1} }  
{ {Address Line 2} }  
{ {Address Line 3} }  

Dear { {First Name} }  

I don’t seem to have received your postcard (and presumably therefore I haven’t your questionnaire either)  
There could be several reasons.  

It is past June 19th and you think it is too late now.  
The closing date, like those of Departmental returns, is purely aspirational. I’ll take questionnaires any time!  

You have no incompetent teachers on staff and think it doesn’t apply to you.  
If only the principals with incompetents replied my survey would be totally biased. Zero is a perfectly good number. Your opinions are still important. Having no incompetent teachers just makes the questionnaire all the easier and quicker to fill in.  

You’re not sure who I am or what my ‘agenda’ is.  
I am doing this purely for academic reasons (a PhD is part of my ‘escape plan’). I am receiving no funding from anyone. I have to be totally independent if the results are to be taken seriously. I am not trying to ‘solve’ anything. My aim is simply to bring the issue into the light. If you like you can ring me at school (058) 54271 or at home (025) 33206.  

The questionnaire is buried somewhere under a mountain of British College Brochures and Viking Direct catalogues so you can’t find it. Or you never received a questionnaire in the first place.  
Just do nothing. In a few weeks I will send out the complete mailing again (Questionnaire, Postcard S.A.E.) to the remaining non-respondents on the assumption that the questionnaire is lost either in the post or in the bin.  

I have received back 170 questionnaires so far out of 432 sent out. Please do your best to improve that figure.  

Thank you in advance.  

Yours sincerely,  

Orison Carlile
Stage 3

The school summer holidays then intervened during which questionnaires arrived and were numbered sequentially as already described.

This yielded a further 104 completed questionnaires - a total of 277 which represented a return rate of 64% at this stage.

School recommences in September. It is a very busy time for principals as they get the school up and running - removing any 'wrinkles' from the timetable and getting school routines going again.

The senior State examination results come in August and the junior ones come in September. The reminder was therefore sent on September 15th when all this would have been 'out of the way'.

A complete mailing (cover letter, questionnaire, postcard and stamped addressed envelope) was then sent to the remaining 155 non-respondents on the assumption that the original questionnaire had been lost in the post, discarded or mislaid.

On the reverse of the cover letter were the explanation concerning anonymity (Figure 4.3) and the definition of incompetent teacher (Figure 4.4).

The cover letter is reproduced in Figure 4.8 below.

This yielded a further 48 completed questionnaires. The final one arriving on November 18th. This brought the total to 325 and represented a return rate of 75%.
By now the dust has settled a little - Leaving and Junior Cert. Results are fabulous as always and teachers all agree that the timetable is fair (i.e. everyone feels equally victimised) You may therefore be able to find fifteen minutes or so to fill in the enclosed questionnaire. Completing the questionnaire is mostly only a matter of ticking boxes. You may remember I sent you the original last June and a reminder during the summer when I promised to send the complete package again in case the original was lost.

This is an academic study. It will not solve the problem but it will bring the issue into the light. I am a principal myself so you can trust me as a colleague. If you have any questions you can ring me at school (058) 54271 or at home (025) 33206.

Your response will be absolutely anonymous. See overleaf for my system for ensuring that neither I nor anyone else will know who you are.

Overleaf also you will find an explanation of what I mean by an incompetent teacher so that we are all talking about the same thing.

In return, I promise to send you a summary of the aggregated results. (This will be in January next at the earliest as I hope to have some time to work on the data analysis during the Christmas holidays).

So far I have received 277 completed questionnaires. This is a response rate of 64% - fairly good for a postal survey but the importance of the issue would be better reflected in a higher return rate. Please do your best. Bringing the issue out in the open will help everyone - not least the incompetent teachers themselves.

Yours sincerely,

Orison Carlile
Data Analysis

The returned questionnaires were filed in ascending numerical order (having been numbered sequentially in order of arrival). This number became the code number of the particular principal concerned and formed the first variable in the data set.

Although there were only 46 questions they led to 257 variables entered into the SPSS™ (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) program on a personal computer.

Error checking

The data were first ‘cleaned’ by checking that fields contained only legal values. When errors were found the original source was consulted in accordance with the code number and the errors rectified.

Checks were also made that the data ‘made sense’ and that there was internal consistency between related questions.

Splitting into separate files

The data were then split into three separate files.

1. The entire set of data - each principal being a separate ‘case’
2. A set containing the census of current incompetent teachers - each teacher being a separate ‘case’
3. A set containing the census of ‘gone’ incompetent teachers- each teacher being a separate ‘case’

This was necessary because many principals had more than one incompetent teacher on staff. Thus there were more ‘cases’ of incompetent teachers than there were ‘cases’ of principals who were faced with the problem.

Principals’ Comments

Many questions on the questionnaire had spaces for optional comment. Every comment was entered into a database and was given a superscript code number associating it with the ‘case’ number of the principal (the number given as the completed questionnaires arrived).

The comments were then grouped into categories that suggested themselves. They are presented along with the corresponding data tables and figures in the ‘results’ chapter.
Statistical treatment

The data were then analysed using the SPSS in-built procedures. The statistical treatment included:

Simple frequencies: to report the number of responses falling into particular categories (e.g. the number of incompetent teachers)

Descriptive statistics: Means, Modes, Medians, Percentages (e.g. describing the ages of incompetent teachers)

Cross-Tabulations and chi-squares: to look at association between categorical variables (e.g. to ask ‘Do male and female principals respond similarly in terms of their attempts to remedy incompetence?’)

T-tests to compare pairs of means (e.g. to ask ‘Do rural and urban schools have similar mean percentages of incompetent teachers?’)

ANOVA (Analysis of variance): to compare several means (e.g. to ask ‘Do schools of three different types - All Boys, Co-educational, and All Girls - have similar percentages of incompetent teacher?’)

The results are presented in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 5

RESULTS
Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the survey. It begins with the pattern of response. Then, since validity of the information is dependent upon the experience and qualifications of the principals, background information on the participants is presented.

This is followed by consideration of each of the research questions individually. Each research question has sub-questions and hypotheses addressed by data presented as statements, tables and figures, and the comments of principals.

Response Rate

The initial mailing consisted of 432 sets of cover letters, instructions, and questionnaires, stamped addressed postcards and stamped addressed envelopes. The completed questionnaires were returned as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>By end of Returned</th>
<th>June</th>
<th>July</th>
<th>August</th>
<th>September</th>
<th>October</th>
<th>November</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial Mailing</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Reminder</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Reminder</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumulative Return</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This 325 represents a response rate of 75%. It is also worth noting that this corresponded precisely with the number of postcards. So nobody tried to abuse the anonymity system by pretending to have returned a questionnaire without having actually done so.
Note Concerning Non-response
Non-responses to a question have not been included as categories in tables and charts as they are usually not a meaningful substantive measure and are best considered as missing data. They are important however – particularly if they constitute a large portion of respondents or if the decision not to respond was because a principal could not agree with any of the options offered rather than because a question wasn’t relevant. The number of those who responded to a particular question is given in brackets at the top of each table where appropriate, and the number of ‘missing values’ is also provided. Percentages given are the valid percentages.

Characteristics of Participants

Gender
Of the 324 principals who answered the question on gender, there were 193 males and 131 females. This means that approximately 60% were males and 40% were females.

Age
The age breakdown is presented in Table 5-2.

Table 5-2: Age of principals (N=323)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25-35</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>54.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56-65</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>19.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 2)

As can be seen from the above table, 239 (74%) of the principals are over 45. The Median age was 49 and, taking mid-interval values of the grouped frequency distribution, the mean age was 49.73 with a standard deviation of 7.07.

Religious Status
The question on Religious status was answered by 322 principals 115 (36%) of whom were Religious or Clerics and 207 (64%) were lay. Certain differences between these two groups in terms of age and gender balance are discussed later.

Qualifications
As well as their Primary Degree and Higher Diploma in Education, 294 (over 70%) cited some extra academic qualification.
Table 5-3 Extra Qualifications of Principals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>29.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>87.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>90.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>323</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 2)

87 (27%) had a Diploma, 100 (31%) had a Master's Degree and 12 (almost 4%) had a Doctorate. There were 30 (9%) with miscellaneous other qualifications – in Primary Teaching for example.

The nature of the qualifications, how they related to Principalship and how well trained principals believed they were for the task are issues that are addressed later in the chapter when dealing with the research questions.

**Experience as a Principal**

Two kinds of experience were investigated – the experience as principal in their current school and the total amount of experience as a principal. The following table shows their total experience.

Table 5-4 Total Length of Experience as a Principal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Years</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-3</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-9</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-12</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>76.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-15</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>84.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>89.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-21</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>94.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 or more</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>321</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 4)

With less than 4 years experience, 72 principals (22%) were relatively new. 138 (43%) had less than 6 years experience. 74 (23%) had more than 12 years experience.
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Preamble to questions

Two things need to be clear.
1. These data are based on the specific given definition of incompetent teacher.
2. These data are the assessments of the principals.

In other words, each of the research questions has an unwritten opening phrase:
"In accordance with the given definition, in the opinion of the principals who responded..."
To repeat the phrase would be tedious. It is to be assumed as part of every question.

Definition of incompetent teacher

Principals were given a definition of 'incompetent teacher' and were asked to reread it when they came to the critical section of the questionnaire concerned with enumerating incompetence. The given definition was as follows.

An incompetent teacher displays persistent failure in some or all of the following areas:

Technical: the teacher is deficient in discipline, teaching method, subject-knowledge, organisation, and planning.

Administrative: the teacher fails to comply with school rules and procedures (e.g. chronic absenteeism and tardiness) and possibly does not follow the curriculum in a sound manner.

Ethical: the teacher violates standards expected of the teaching profession – e.g. having a negative attitude to students, which could range from indifference all the way to physical abuse.

Productive: the teacher fails to produce desirable results in the classroom – e.g. there is little academic progress, students are not interested, they lack respect, and there is a poor climate in the classroom.

Personal: the teacher is deficient in judgement, emotional stability, self-control and strength of character; the teacher is 'difficult' and uncooperative with management and colleagues.

Clearly, most of us could be guilty of some of these failures at some point. I am interested in the cases where there is a sufficient and chronic amount of failure – a critical mass such that there is a persistent pattern of mistakes and failure.
QUESTION 1:

What is the extent of the problem of incompetent teachers in Irish voluntary secondary schools?

Principals were asked to provide the number of full-time and part-time teachers – male and female – in their school. They were also asked “In accordance with the given definition how many do you consider to be incompetent at present?” Again they were required to subdivide them into male or female and full-time or part-time.

The question can be divided into a number of smaller questions.

**Question 1.1** What is the total number of incompetent teachers in Irish voluntary secondary schools?

**Total Number of Incompetent Teachers**

According to the principals who responded there were 652 incompetent teachers in their schools. In the discussion chapter, assuming the 75% responding are representative of all principals, I estimate the actual total number of incompetent teachers in all voluntary secondary schools.

**Question 1.2** What is the percentage of incompetent teachers overall?

**Total Percentage of Incompetent teachers**

The total number of teachers in the schools of the responding principals was 10666. Of these, 652 were considered incompetent. Thus the overall percentage of incompetent teachers was 6.1%.

**Question 1.3** What is the gender breakdown of the incompetent teachers?

**Gender breakdown of Incompetent Teachers**

There were 354 male incompetent teachers – 333 full-time and 21 part-time. There were 298 female incompetent teachers – 273 full-time and 25 part-time.
Question 1.4 What is the number of incompetent teachers on individual staffs?

School breakdown of incompetent teachers

Table 5-5 below shows the number of schools having a particular number of incompetent teachers (including zero).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incompetent Teachers</th>
<th>Number of Schools</th>
<th>Percentage Of schools</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>43.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>71.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>83.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>90.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>95.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>96.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>97.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>98.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>99.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>99.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 6)

Approximately 78% of schools (242) had at least one incompetent teacher. Both the mode and the median had a value of 2. The mean number of teachers per school was 2.04 with a standard deviation of 2.06.
Figure 5.1 Number of incompetent teachers per school

Figure 5.1 is a graphical representation of Table 5-5. The Median is 2 and the Mode is also 2. The Mean is 2.04 with a standard distribution of 2.06.

Question 1.5 What is the percentage of incompetent teachers in each school?

Percentage of Incompetent Teachers in each School

Table 5.2 presents, as a histogram, the number of schools having a particular percentage of incompetent teachers on staff.

Figure 5.2 Percentage of Incompetent Teachers in each school

The histogram displays an approximately normal distribution about a mean of 6 with a standard deviation of 5.83.
QUESTION 2:
Are Incompetent teachers distributed equally throughout the voluntary secondary sector?

The data were examined by performing *t-tests* and *one-way analyses of variance* to detect statistically significant differences in the mean percentage of incompetent teachers in the various subsets outlined in the following subsidiary research questions.

When there was one independent variable (e.g. school type) which has several factors affecting the dependent variable (e.g. percentage of incompetent teachers) a *one-way analysis of variance* was employed. The *Scheffé* test was used as a conservative post-hoc comparison. Homogeneity of variance was also investigated since it is an assumption of the ANOVA procedure.

**Question 2.1** Is the mean percentage of incompetent teachers in schools located in urban areas the same as the mean percentage of teachers in schools located in rural areas?

**Urban-Rural Breakdown**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Urban</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Schools</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Percentage of</td>
<td>6.04</td>
<td>6.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incompetent Teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>5.23</td>
<td>6.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 15)

As can be seen from Table 5-6, the means of 6.05 and 6.06 are so close that a *t-test* is hardly necessary to confirm that there was no significant difference.
Question 2.2  
Is the mean percentage of incompetent teachers in fee-paying schools the same as the mean percentage of incompetent teachers in non fee-paying schools?

**Fee-paying - Non Fee-paying**

**Table 5-7**  
Comparison of fee-paying and Non fee-paying Schools  
(N=310)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fee-paying</th>
<th>Non Fee-paying</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of schools</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Percentage of Incompetent teachers</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>6.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>4.95</td>
<td>5.96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 15)

The mean percentage of incompetent teachers in fee-paying schools (4.88%) is less than the mean percentage of incompetent teachers in non fee-paying schools. The t-test does not consider it to be statistically significant.

T-test:  
\[ t (308) = -1.353 \quad p=0.177 \]

Question 2.3  
Is there a difference in the mean percentage of incompetent teachers in 'day only', 'boarding only' and 'day and boarding' schools?

**Day - Boarding School Comparison**

**Table 5-8**  
Comparison of school types (Day / Boarding)  
(N=311)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Day only</th>
<th>Boarding only</th>
<th>Day and Boarding</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Schools</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Percentage of Incompetent teachers</td>
<td>6.13</td>
<td>6.97</td>
<td>5.12</td>
<td>6.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>5.94</td>
<td>7.85</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>5.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 14)

The mean percentage of incompetent teachers in 'Day and Boarding' schools (5.12%) was lower than the other two but not statistically significantly so according to the analysis of variance.

ANOVA:  
\[ F (2,308) = 0.546, \quad p = 0.58 \]
Question 2.4 Is there a difference in the mean percentage of incompetent teachers in 'All Boys', 'All Girls' and 'Coeducational' schools?

Single-Sex – Coed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Boys</th>
<th>All Girls</th>
<th>Coed.</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Schools</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Percentage of Incompetent teachers</td>
<td>7.51</td>
<td>5.25</td>
<td>5.64</td>
<td>6.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>6.98</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>5.58</td>
<td>5.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(N = 311)

(Missing = 14)

The Analysis of variance shows that there is a statistically significant difference in the means of the three groups.

ANOVA: F (2,308) = 4.247, p = 0.015

As can be seen from Table 5-9, the difference is clearly due to the high mean percentage of incompetent teachers in 'all boys' schools. This is confirmed by the post hoc Scheffe test (Table 5-10) which shows that there is a statistically significant difference between 'all boys' and 'all girls' schools.

Table 5-10 Scheffe Test – Multiple Comparisons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Between</th>
<th>'All Boys' and</th>
<th>'All Girls' and</th>
<th>Coeducational and</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All Girls</td>
<td>Coed.</td>
<td>All Boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Difference</td>
<td>-2.25*</td>
<td>-1.86</td>
<td>2.25*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Error</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.
Question 2.5 Is there a difference in the mean percentage of incompetent teachers in schools of different sizes?

School Size

Table 5-11 Comparison of schools by size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Size</th>
<th>Less than 250</th>
<th>250 - 499</th>
<th>500 - 699</th>
<th>More Than 700</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of schools</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Percentage of Incompetent teachers</td>
<td>6.96</td>
<td>6.65</td>
<td>5.46</td>
<td>5.36</td>
<td>6.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>6.98</td>
<td>6.76</td>
<td>4.90</td>
<td>4.61</td>
<td>5.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 14)

As school size increased, the mean percentage of incompetent teachers dropped but not at a statistically significant level according to the analysis of variance.

ANOVA: \( F (3,307) = 0.546, \quad p = 0.270 \)

Incompetent Teacher 'Census'

Question 3 is concerned with the characteristics of incompetent teachers. Questions 3.1 and 3.2 inclusive are based on data obtained from questions 16 to 19 on the questionnaire, which concerned the numbers of various categories of teacher in each school.

There followed a type of 'census form' which the principal was asked to complete concerning each incompetent teacher. Although there were 652 incompetent teachers enumerated, 'census forms' were completed for only 426 of them. A separate SPSS ® data file was created for the 'census forms' and formed the basis for the results for questions 3.5 to 3.10.
QUESTION 3:

What are the characteristics of incompetent teachers in Irish voluntary secondary schools?

Question 3.1 What is the gender breakdown of incompetent teachers in Irish voluntary secondary schools?

Gender Breakdown

Table 5-12 Gender breakdown of incompetent teaching staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>51.07</td>
<td>3.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 6)

There were 354 male incompetent teachers – 333 full-time and 21 part-time.
There were 298 female incompetent teachers – 273 full-time and 25 part-time.

Expressing these data in percentage form - of the 625 incompetent teachers, (54%) were male (354) and 46% were female (298).

Question 3.2 Is the gender breakdown of incompetent teachers the same as the gender breakdown of teachers generally?

Gender breakdown compared to teachers generally

Table 5-13 Gender breakdown of teachers generally (including incompetents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number</td>
<td>3812</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>35.74</td>
<td>2.62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 6)
In the 319 schools represented by table 5-13 there were a total of 10666 teachers. The gender breakdown of teachers generally was as follows. There were 4092 male teachers – 3812 full-time and 280 part-time. There were 6574 female teachers - 5736 full-time and 838 part-time.

To compare the gender breakdown of incompetent teachers to teachers generally it is necessary to compare table 5-12 and table 5-13. The difference in the gender breakdown becomes even more obvious when considered in percentages in Table 5-14.

### Table 5-14: Comparative percentages of teachers by gender only

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Teachers Generally</th>
<th>Incompetent Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although males formed 38% of the total teaching force they formed a disproportionately high 54% of incompetent teachers. Conversely, females formed 62% of the total teaching force and formed only 46% of incompetent teachers.

### Note Concerning Numbers
Data for questions 3.3 to 3.10 are based upon the 'census forms' completed for 426 incompetent teachers.

The maximum N is therefore 426. The actual number (N) referred to in a table is given in brackets at the top corner. Attention is also drawn to the missing values at the bottom right hand corner. In all cases the percentages used are the 'valid' percentages - i.e. the percentages of those for whom data are provided in the table.

### Question 3.3 What is the age profile of incompetent teachers?

#### Age Profile of Incompetent Teachers
Almost 65% (260) were over 45 years of age and 18% (73) were over 55. This has implications for early retirement and other 'induced exits' that are discussed in chapter 5.

### Table 5-15: Age breakdown of incompetent teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Cumulative Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25-35</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>35.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>46.6</td>
<td>81.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56-65</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The modal age group, containing 47% of the incompetent teachers, is 46 - 55 years. Taking mid-interval values, the mean age is 46.6 years with a standard deviation of 8.83.

**Figure 5.3** Age breakdown of incompetent teachers (Bar Chart)

**Table 5-16** Gender and Age of Incompetent Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25 - 35</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 - 45</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46 - 55</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56 - 65</td>
<td>68.5</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Question 3.4** Is there a difference in the age profile of male and female incompetent teachers?
Although the age distributions show percentages of older males to be greater than percentages of older females, when the data were examined by Chi-square analysis, the contrast did not attain the 0.05 level of statistical significance.

\[ \chi^2 = 6.82, \text{ df} = 3, \text{ p} = 0.078 \]

**Question 3.5** What is the breakdown between permanent and temporary status for incompetent teachers?

### Permanent / Temporary

**Table 5-17** Permanent or Temporary status of Incompetent Teachers (N = 416)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Cumulative Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>388</td>
<td>93.3</td>
<td>93.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary Whole Time</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>95.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary part Time</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>99.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligible Part time (EPT)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>416</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 10)

Of the 416 incompetent teachers for whom 'census' forms were completed, 388 (93%) had permanent status.

**Question 3.6** Is the breakdown of incompetent teachers into permanent and temporary status the same as the breakdown of general teaching staff into permanent and temporary status?

### Permanent - Temporary Breakdown compared to Total Staff

Of the 10666 teachers represented by the responding principals, 9548 were permanent and 1118 were temporary. Thus of the general body of teachers 90% were permanent and 10% were temporary. For incompetent teachers the percentages were 93% permanent and 7% temporary. Permanent teachers were thus over-represented among incompetent teachers.
Question 3.7 What is the experience profile of incompetent teachers?

Experience Profile of Incompetent Teachers

Table 5-18 Experience of incompetent teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Cumulative Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 - 3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 - 6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 - 9</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 - 12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 - 15</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 - 18</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>32.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 - 21</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>45.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 or more</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>54.1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 12)

Table 5-18 shows that 54% of incompetent teachers had 22 or more years of experience and 67.4% had more than 18 years of experience.

Question 3.8 What is the Religious-lay breakdown of incompetent teachers?

Religious - Lay Breakdown

Table 5-19 Religious or lay status of incompetent teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Cumulative Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religious/Cleric</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lay</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>97.1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 9)
Question 3.9  What are the main qualifications of incompetent teachers?

Qualifications of Incompetent Teachers

Table 5-20  Qualifications of Incompetent Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Qualifications</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BA H.Dip. in Ed.</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>67.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Sc. H.Dip in Ed.</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Comm. H.Dip in Ed.</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA H.Dip. in Ed.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Ec. Dip.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Ed. Woodwork / Metalwork</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.T.C. / Art Dip.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Mus.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA Phys. Ed.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA Theology / Catechetics Dip.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 18)

A Primary Arts degree was the most common at 67% followed by a Science degree at 13% and reducing numbers of less common qualifications.

Question 3.10  Was the incompetent teacher ever competent in the past?

Competence in the Past

Table 5-21  Teacher competence in the past

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Cumulative Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>61.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't Know</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>395</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 31)

There were 31 non-responses and 151 in the 'Don't know' category. In the opinion of the respondents 36% of their incompetent teachers had never been competent and 26% had been competent once and had become incompetent.
Question 3.11  Has the incompetent teacher a Post of Responsibility?

Post of Responsibility

Table 5-22  Posts of Responsibility  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Cumulative Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vice Principal</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Post</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>40.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Post</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>72.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Post</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 2)

A position in school middle management was held by 73% of the teachers deemed incompetent by their school principal.

Figure 5.4  Posts of Responsibility of Incompetent Teachers
QUESTION 4:

What is the relationship between teaching qualifications and the subjects being taught?

Principals were asked to list, in descending order of importance, the four main subjects that the incompetent teachers were theoretically qualified to teach.

They were then asked to list the four main teaching subjects of the teacher in descending order of actual teaching time. The idea was that these two lists could be compared.

Question 4.1 What subjects are incompetent teachers qualified to teach?

Subjects incompetent teachers are qualified to teach

Table 5-23 Subjects theoretically qualified to teach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Subject 1</th>
<th>Subject 2</th>
<th>Subject 3</th>
<th>Subject 4</th>
<th>Teachers with Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Studies</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Organisation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin or Greek</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Economics</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tech Graphics</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>Subject 1</td>
<td>Subject 2</td>
<td>Subject 3</td>
<td>Subject 4</td>
<td>Teachers with Subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodwork</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choir</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction Studies</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Drawing</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ag. Science</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metalwork</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSPE</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied Maths</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remedial</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPHE</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civics</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LCVP</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typing / WP</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>412</td>
<td>372</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>1028</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In table 5-23 Subject 1, Subject 2, etc. are the four subjects ranked by the principal as the subjects that the teacher was qualified to teach in descending order.

The fourth column ranks the subjects by stating the number of incompetent teachers who are theoretically qualified to teach them.

**Question 4.2 What subjects do incompetent teachers actually teach?**

**Subjects that incompetent teachers actually teach**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Subject 1</th>
<th>Subject 2</th>
<th>Subject 3</th>
<th>Subject 4</th>
<th>Teachers Teaching Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>13</td>
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Page 144
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Subject 1</th>
<th>Subject 2</th>
<th>Subject 3</th>
<th>Subject 4</th>
<th>Teachers Teaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
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<td>Physics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Woodwork</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>Guidance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Construction Studies</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metalwork</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Choir</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>Technical Drawing</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Latin or Greek</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>Technology</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ag. Science</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>SPHE</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Ed / RSE</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civics</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rolls</td>
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<td>-</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typing / WP</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>361</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>960</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question 4.3 What is the match between subject taught and subject qualification for individual teachers?

Main subject taught = Main subject qualification

Of the 426 incompetent teachers for whom 'census' forms were completed, 311 (73%) were spending the greatest amount of their time teaching the subject in which they were best qualified.

Table 5-25 Main teaching subject matching main subject qualification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>37</td>
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<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>32</td>
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<td>History</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
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<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Business Studies</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Home Economics</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>PE</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Organisation</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodwork</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Metalwork</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computers</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
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<td>Technology</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choir</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction Studies</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typing / WP</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>311</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Main Subject = Main or Second subject qualification

Of the 426 incompetent teachers for whom 'census' forms were completed, 365 (86%) spent the greatest amount of their time teaching their main subject or their second subject.

Table 5-26  Main teaching subject matching main or second subject qualification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>45</td>
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<td>Mathematics</td>
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<tr>
<td>History</td>
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<td>Geography</td>
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<td>Science</td>
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<tr>
<td>Business Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>Biology</td>
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<td>Home Economics</td>
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<td>PE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Art</td>
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<td>German</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>Business Organisation</td>
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<td>Woodwork</td>
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<td>Chemistry</td>
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<td>Metalwork</td>
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<td>Accounting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Music</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guidance</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choir</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin or Greek</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computers</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction Studies</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPHE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typing / WP</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question 4.4 What is the mismatch between subject taught and subject qualification for individual teachers?

Of the 426 incompetent teachers for whom 'census' forms were completed:

99 (23.24%) spent the greatest amount of time teaching a subject other than the one in which they were theoretically best qualified.

41 (9.6%) spent the greatest amount of time teaching a subject which is not in the top two of the list of subjects that they are qualified to teach. The subjects were; Computers (4), Science (4), Maths (4), Religion (3), Art (3), History (3), Business studies (3), Remedial (2), Biology (2), Music (2), Irish (2), CSPE (2), Woodwork (1), Choir (1), German (1), Guidance (1), English (1), Business Organisation (1), PE (1).

13 (3.05%) spent the greatest amount of time teaching a subject which is not in the top three of the list of subjects that they are qualified to teach.

3 (0.7%) spent the greatest amount of time teaching a subject which is not mentioned at all in the list of subjects that they are qualified to teach. The subjects were; Computers (3), Religion (2), CSPE (2), Maths (2), Business Studies (1), Irish (1), Art (1), and Remedial (1).
QUESTION 5:

What is the nature of the incompetence?

Based on the definition of incompetent teacher, a type of 'semantic difference' table was constructed. Thirteen characteristics that might possibly be associated with incompetence (e.g. excellent discipline / dreadful discipline) were presented as opposite poles with a seven point scale between. Principals were asked to circle the point where they would place the teacher along the continuum.

The results are presented as a series of bar charts showing the percentage selecting each position. The Mean and Standard deviation is also presented as an indication of central tendency. The number of responses for each (N) is also presented. Since the total number of 'census' forms was 426, clearly (426 - N) is the number missing.

Question 5.1 What is the discipline quality?

The options presented were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excellent Discipline</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dreadful Discipline</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 5.5 Discipline Quality**

Discipline Quality

- Mode = 2
- Mean = 2.86
- Standard Deviation = 1.56

N = 416
Question 5.2  What is the discipline type?

No control whatsoever

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Overly strict

Figure 5.6  Discipline Type

Mode = 3  
Mean = 3.40  
Standard Deviation = 1.82

Question 5.3  What are the feelings of students?

Hated by students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Loved by students

Figure 5.7  Student Feelings

Mode = 3  
Mean = 3.08  
Standard Deviation = 1.41
Chapter Five

Question 5.4

What is the teacher's attitude to students?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Totally negative attitude</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Attitude to Students

Mode = 3
Mean = 3.13
Standard Deviation = 1.43

Question 5.5

What is the classroom climate?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dreadful classroom climate</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Classroom Climate

Mode = 3
Mean = 2.57
Standard Deviation = 1.11
Question 5.6  What is the teacher's subject knowledge?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dreadful subject knowledge</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Excellent subject knowledge

Subject Knowledge
Mode = 5
Mean = 4.79
Standard Deviation = 1.62

Figure 5.10  Subject Knowledge

N = 413

Question 5.7  How good a timekeeper is the teacher?

Very frequently late

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excellent timekeeper</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Timekeeping
Mode = 7
Mean = 4.79
Standard Deviation = 1.62

Figure 5.11  Timekeeping

N = 416
Question 5.8
What is the teacher's attendance?

**Chronic absenteeism**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Perfect attendance**

*Figure 5.12 Attendance*

- **Mode** = 6
- **Mean** = 4.76
- **Standard Deviation** = 1.93

**Attendance**

- **Mode** = 6
- **Mean** = 4.76
- **Standard Deviation** = 1.93

Question 5.9
How well does the teacher follow the curriculum?

**Does 'Own thing'**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Follows Curriculum perfectly**

*Figure 5.13 Curriculum Following*

- **Mode** = 4
- **Mean** = 3.93
- **Standard Deviation** = 1.77
Question 5.10
How well do students perform in examinations?

Students underperform 1

Students do

Extremely well 7

Exam Performance
Mode = 2
Mean = 2.81
Standard Deviation = 1.32

Question 5.11
How co-operative is the teacher?

Completely uncooperative 1

Co-operative 7

Co-operation Level
Mode = 4
Mean = 4.13
Standard Deviation = 1.76
Question 5.12
What is the teacher's relationship with colleagues?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extremely difficult with colleagues</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On great terms with colleagues</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Relationship with Colleagues
- Mode = 4
- Mean = 4.09
- Standard Deviation = 1.71

Question 5.13
How stable is the teacher emotionally?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Totally erratic</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Totally emotionally stable</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Emotional Stability
- Mode = 4
- Mean = 3.71
- Standard Deviation = 1.64
QUESTION 6:

How do principals diagnose the existence of incompetent teachers?

The principals were offered eleven possible diagnostic methods (plus a twelfth ‘other’ category) and were asked to tick all the items of ‘evidence’ that they themselves had used.

Question 6.1 What are the methods used by principals?

Diagnostic Methods

In descending order the methods used were as shown in Table 5-27.

Table 5-27 Methods principals use to identify incompetent teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage of cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complaints from parents</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>91.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaints from pupils</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>88.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline problems</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>78.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal classroom observation by yourself</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>69.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaints from other teachers</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>63.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor exam results from otherwise ‘good’ students</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>62.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large proportion of their students getting ‘grinds’</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>56.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation of out of class behaviour and personality</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>48.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Briefing by previous principal</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronic absence and late arrival</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal classroom observation by yourself</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 32)

Complaints from parents (91.5%) and pupils (88%) were the main sources of evidence of teacher incompetence followed closely by discipline problems (78.5%). Although informal observation by the principal figures highly (70%), formal observation (9%) came a long way down the list. According to this the three most important methods are complaints from parents, complaints from pupils and discipline problems.
Other Methods of diagnosis

Principals were offered space to write down any other method of diagnosis. These can be categorised into:

- Personality Factors
- Discipline Problems
- Unpopularity with students and parents
- Punctuality and attendance
- Technical weaknesses

These are presented below. Each comment is identified by a superscript.

Note on superscripts

Questionnaires were numbered sequentially in the order in which they were received. The questionnaires were still anonymous but in this way each principal was assigned a code number. This code number is written as a superscript at the end of each comment. This serves three functions.

1. Quotes can be verified from the original questionnaires kept on file.
2. The reference number on a comment makes it possible to check the gender, school size etc. of the principal concerned. This might throw some light on the genesis of the opinion.
3. It makes it possible (albeit tedious) to note the common train of thought in different comments made by the same principal concerning different matters.

Personality Factors

Failure to take advice (incapable) or to follow procedures that would help them. In a rut. 50

General avoidance of all social contact with students and staff/parents. 50

Inappropriate responses when students are being discussed – they are always wrong. 65

Laziness and poor communication skills. 68

Blatant disregard for procedures; very rude and aggressive at staff meetings. 95

Bad attitude towards authority – always right. 108

Drunkenness. 129
Very negative attitude to school and pupils. 159

'Off the wall' behaviour - i.e. bizarre behaviour. 160

General lack of ability to cope with life. 163

Discussion with teacher concerned and observing attitude and behaviour. 236

Behaviour at staff meetings 236

Too laid back - unaware of incompetence 260

**Discipline Problems**

Having trouble with students whom other teachers can manage well. 27

The level of noise in classroom
The numbers of students sent for correction. 83

While teaching in a nearby classroom. 101

Level of noise unbearable at times! 116

Noise and lack of work being done in classroom 278

Complaints about behaviour of otherwise good pupils (who were not troublesome elsewhere) 316

**Unpopularity with students and parents**

Lack of uptake of subject at Senior Cycle. 90

Students and parents pleading not to go into her class. Poor co-operation when matter discussed. 182

Serious distress among the pupils 210

People avoiding his class 425
Punctuality and attendance

No attempt to rectify poor punctuality. Very defensive when asked about following curriculum. 26

Many absences - 'though not 'chronic' 262

Technical Weaknesses

Uncorrected homework. 99

Work not prepared and no order to they work or system of working through a lesson. 238

No exam classes 157

Question 6.2 Is there a difference between male and female principals in the methods they use to identify incompetent teachers?

Male and female principals' diagnostic methods compared

There was no significant difference between the diagnostic factors taken into account by male and female principals. Complaints from parents and pupils were the two most commonly used diagnostic factors by both male and female principals and both had formal observation near the bottom of the list.

Question 6.3 Is there a difference between lay and Religious principals in the methods they use to identify incompetent teachers?

Religious and lay principals' diagnostic methods compared

There was no significant difference in the diagnostic factors taken into account by lay and Religious principals.
Question 6.4 What do principals think are the three most important factors for diagnosing teacher incompetence?

Top Three Methods

The principals themselves were asked to rank the three most important items of those they had selected. The results of this are in Table 5-28 below. The principals ranked complaints from parents as the most important factor followed by 'discipline problems'. Complaints from pupils was ranked third.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5-28</th>
<th>Principals' ranking of the three most important factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(N = 291)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1st Most important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaints from parents</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline problems</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaints from pupils</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 34) (Missing = 34) (Missing = 36)

Question 6.5 Is there a difference between male and female principals in the methods they rank as the top three for identifying incompetent teachers?

Male and female principals' most important diagnostic methods compared

The breakdown by principal gender of the first column (the most important factor) of Table 5-29 is shown in Table 5-29 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5-29</th>
<th>Comparing principals' ranking of factors by gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender of Principal</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaints from parents</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline problems</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaints from pupils</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both agree on complaints from parents as the main factor. Male principals rank discipline more highly than female principals but the difference is not statistically significant.
Question 6.6  Is there a difference between lay and Religious principals in the methods they rank as the top three for identifying incompetent teachers?

Religious & lay principals' most important diagnostic methods compared
As Table 5-30 shows, there is no significant difference.

Table 5-30  Comparing principals' ranking of factors by Religious status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Religious or Lay</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Religious / Cleric</td>
<td>Lay</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaints from parents</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaints from pupils</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline problems</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
QUESTION 7:
Where do principals seek advice?

Principals had the opportunity to acknowledge seven sources of advice - the Department of Education, the Secretariat for Secondary Schools, another principal, legal advice, management literature, the Chairperson of the Board of Management, and an 'other' category. As well as ticking their sources of advice, they also had the option of indicating whether they found the sources very helpful, of some help, or of no help.

Note concerning Numbers
If no sources of advice at all were ticked then the whole question was treated as missing and each subsection was also missing. If some sources were selected then it was assumed that the other (unselected) sources of advice were not. Thus, although there were 325 principals responding to the survey as a whole, only 282 had selected one or more sources of advice - meaning there were 34 principals for whom this question was irrelevant. The popularity of a particular source of advice was therefore calculated as a percentage of 282 rather than 325.

The breakdown into degrees of helpfulness was as a percentage, not of 282, but of the number who selected a particular source of advice. The number selecting a particular source of advice (N) is reported at the top of each table.

Question 7.1 How many sought advice from the Department of Education?

Department of Education

Only 79 (28%) of the 288 principals who sought advice consulted the Department of Education.

Table 5-31 Department of education advice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very helpful</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11.39</td>
<td>11.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of some help</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>40.51</td>
<td>51.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of no help</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>45.57</td>
<td>97.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approached but not rated</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 79 who sought advice from the Department of Education, only 9 (11%) found it very helpful. 32 (41%) found it of some help and 36 (46%) found it of no help.
Question 7.2 How many sought advice from the Secretariat for Secondary Schools?

Secretariat for Secondary Schools

136 (48%) of the 288 principals who sought advice consulted the Secretariat for secondary schools.

Table 5-32 Secretariat for Secondary School's advice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very helpful</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>44.85</td>
<td>44.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of some help</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>44.85</td>
<td>89.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of no help</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7.35</td>
<td>97.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approached but not rated</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 136 who sought its advice 122 (90%) found it either very helpful or of some help. Only 10 (7%) found it of no help.

Question 7.3 How many consulted another principal?

Another Principal

Another principal was the most popular source of advice. 212 (74%) of the 288 principals who sought advice consulted a colleague.

Table 5-33 Another principal's advice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very helpful</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>58.97</td>
<td>58.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of some help</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>31.60</td>
<td>90.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of no help</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>94.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approached but not rated</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5.66</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 212 who sought a colleague's advice, 125 (59%) found it very helpful and a further 67 (32%) found the advice of some help. Only 8 (4%) found it of no help.
Question 7.4 How many sought legal advice?

**Legal Advice**

Only 56 (20%) of the 288 sought legal advice.

**Table 5-34 Legal Advice**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Very helpful</strong></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>44.64</td>
<td>44.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Of some help</strong></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23.21</td>
<td>67.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Of no help</strong></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>26.79</td>
<td>94.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Approached but not rated</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.36</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>56</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

25 (45%) found the legal advice very helpful and 13 (23%) found it of some help. It was of no help to 15 (27%).

Question 7.5 How many consulted management literature?

**Management Literature**

135 (48%) consulted management literature.

**Table 5-35 Management literature**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Very helpful</strong></td>
<td>35</td>
<td>25.92</td>
<td>25.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Of some help</strong></td>
<td>84</td>
<td>62.22</td>
<td>88.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Of no help</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6.67</td>
<td>94.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Approached but not rated</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.19</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>135</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

35 (26%) of the 135 found the literature very helpful *4 (62%) found it of some help and 7(5%) found it of no help.
Question 7.6  How many consulted the chairperson of the Board of Management?

Chairperson of the Board of Management

157 (56%) of those who sought advice consulted the chairperson.

Table 5-36  Chairperson of the Board of Management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very helpful</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>49.68</td>
<td>49.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of some help</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>34.39</td>
<td>84.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of no help</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10.83</td>
<td>94.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approached but not rated</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

78 (50%) of the 157 found the chairperson's advice very helpful and 54 (34%) found the advice of some help.

Question 7.7  What were the other sources of advice used?

Other Sources of advice

Principals were free to specify other sources from which they sought advice.

These other sources of advice in descending order comprised:

- The ASTI - teachers' union - (13)
- Teaching Colleagues (11)
- Vice-Principal (5)
- Trustees / Religious Superiors (4)
- Management Consultant (1)
- IBEC - employers' body - (1)
- Friend in University Ed. Dept. (1)
- Marino Institute of Ed. (1)
- Relatives of person (1)
Comments

Principals were offered space for comment. They can be categorised into:

- Helplessness (29)
- Pastoral approach (9)
- No advice (8)
- Miscellaneous exits (7)
- Need for policy (6)
- Tough approach (5)
- Inexperience (4)
- Fear of teachers' union (2)

These comments are reproduce below and have each been marked with an identifying superscript as explained for research question 6 above.

Helplessness

There is a feeling of helplessness amongst principals that little or nothing can be done with the incompetent teacher.\(^7\)

You're on your own.\(^{32}\)

There are some things that I find impossible to change - one is people!\(^{34}\)

At this point in time little or nothing can be done.\(^{46}\)

In the case of the older person, I don't think advice would be useful.\(^{52}\)

All state [that it] requires years of record taking and recorded warnings. Process is too long and time consuming. Inspectorate weak on this aspect.\(^{70}\)

Without specific training in diagnosis and management assessment may be viewed as 'picking on X'\(^{74}\)

The help indicated nothing could be done. We have to lump it.\(^{83}\)

Didn't approach any of the above - what can anybody do? The Department don't care, or are afraid to take on unions.\(^{84}\)

Much had been tried by previous principals - no real improvement - sense of 'resignation' about the problem - 'Damage limitation' the main strategy suggested.\(^98\)
General feeling is 'Count yourself lucky you've so few' and 'Just work around them' - 'There's nothing you can do!'\textsuperscript{156}

At the time the principal of the time sought help from Religious experts and psychologist. This was 10 years ago.\textsuperscript{157}

Nobody wants to touch the situation. Secretariat approached twice.
(i) Advised disciplinary route - not practical
(ii) Advised sickness route - This was in train but when asked to get medical certificate of fitness GP provided it - in jig time, no questions asked and stymied any further action (i.e. teacher was asked to provide certificate of fitness)\textsuperscript{160}

Quite frankly, you are on your own. You are blamed if you do nothing and blamed if you too (sic)\textsuperscript{163}

There is no real help in such situations beyond discussion with the teacher\textsuperscript{182}

There are no agreed procedures for dealing with incompetency - one is left more or less on one's own.\textsuperscript{190}

People have simply thrown their hands in the air and stated he doesn't have long to go before he retires.\textsuperscript{205}

I contacted the woodwork inspector who visited the school once during the practical exams and told the teacher that he would return early in the school year but he never returned.\textsuperscript{216}

The system is such that barring financial, sexual irregularities, teachers in permanent positions are irremovable.\textsuperscript{242}

Not much can be done when one is permanent.\textsuperscript{251}

No point - entrenched by my time!! Did get some improvement by dialoguing with them and taking them out of key areas.\textsuperscript{253}

In case of Religious member of staff (came this year) Trustees provided no help - listened only.\textsuperscript{256}

No help available.\textsuperscript{257}

Legally unable to do anything positive.\textsuperscript{260}

Very very little can be done to remove the problem. Advice and inspection by self cause improvement for a few days.\textsuperscript{262}
I have defined helpful in terms of giving advice. Success is an entirely different matter - history is hard to change. 268

Easy to identify. Difficult to do anything about it. 271

Lack of any real support from any source make the job impossible. 278

Very helpful advice as above in dealing with an individual incident but no long term solution offered. 281

Help is unavailable. 306

Pastoral Approach

I believed the problem not sufficiently serious to warrant outside help. I try to work with the teacher concerned. 62

Timetabled teachers where they could do the least damage! 68

I have tried to deal as sensitively as possible with the individual. 72

I sought the advice of V.P. and we both tried to help in an informal way 88

One of the above teachers has agreed to attend ASTI 'Classroom Management' Inservice. I have tried to improve the situation of both teachers by talking to troublesome classes, by withdrawing negative students and by attempting to give the teacher some tips/advice. 101

We (+ VP) discuss this regularly. I approach teacher with various suggestions, for which he is very grateful! None seem to help for long!! 113

I did not seek advice from any of above sources. I try to affirm the teacher and stay positive with him and encourage him with positive backup - had worked somewhat! 191

Discussions with the teacher helped at times, advice from (sic) on a number of occasions by myself to the teacher. 299

I try to support and affirm this teacher - He does not like 'young people' - His overall approach is not correct - Brilliant himself but boring. 324

No advice sought

Not relevant in this situation. 89
I never sought advice. Spoke to teacher on several occasions and tried writing down incidents.\textsuperscript{116}

Didn't seek advice. \textsuperscript{141}

No advice sought. \textsuperscript{144}

I didn't seek advice. \textsuperscript{159}

Have not sought advice yet. Probably not at this stage chronically incompetent.\textsuperscript{207}

Did not seek outside help. Addressed the problem myself in the light of my own intuition.\textsuperscript{272}

None. \textsuperscript{320}

**Miscellaneous Exits**

This teacher had part time hours only. Employed for only one year.\textsuperscript{127}

Used my own 'limited' powers of persuasion to encourage part-time teacher to resign position after 8 weeks.\textsuperscript{131}

The person was redeployed to the school as a supernumery (\textit{sic}) and had 'been around' so to say for some years.\textsuperscript{145}

Teacher was able to retire due to disability.\textsuperscript{247}

This teacher was employed on a temporary whole time contract which was not renewed.\textsuperscript{291}

Awaiting results.\textsuperscript{303}

The problem was addressed and overcome through the school's own resources of support and expertise.\textsuperscript{316}

**Need for policy**

Requirement for principals' management bodies and 'union' to create avenue for policy and agreement re incompetent teachers\textsuperscript{6}

Felt need to assert the right of employer in both cases – employees have rights, so do employers. Felt need to ascertain, determine and use these rights.\textsuperscript{45}

Incompetent teachers create so many time consuming problems that you spend so much time dealing with those that you have little left for a consistent planned resolution of the source of the problem – the teacher.\textsuperscript{102}
The failure of individuals to put complaints in writing made things very difficult.\textsuperscript{108}

There are no proper structures or practices (after probation has been completed) for assessing and no structures for dealing with the problem. The ASTI refuse to admit that such people exist. There are no courses or Inservice etc. to help such people.\textsuperscript{188}

Advice dealt with damage limitation rather than elimination of incompetence.\textsuperscript{232}

The theoretical role of principal differs markedly from the real role. Administration and urgent takes over from the important.\textsuperscript{236}

**Tough approach**

After years of warning the teacher verbally and in writing eventually, I eventually invited him to B.O.M. – Programme was laid out – led to his early retirement.\textsuperscript{9}

I did not consult others. I assembled a large number of written complaints and gave formal warnings over two years, and advised a change of post and subject. This was successful.\textsuperscript{13}

Clever avoidance techniques used; buck passed to society, parents, school etc.\textsuperscript{50}

My own experience helped me deal with both situations.\textsuperscript{57}

I have challenged her on a frequent basis.\textsuperscript{91}

Action currently being taken after months of preparation.\textsuperscript{118}

**Inexperience**

I felt unable to tackle the problem due to inexperience. I have begun to advise and reprimand her. E.g. letting classes go before the bell rings etc.\textsuperscript{14}

None as yet as I am new to the job.\textsuperscript{314}

As I am new to school I am not in a position so far to do any of the above.\textsuperscript{317}

I wasn't on the job long enough to tackle the problem.\textsuperscript{254}

**Fear of Union**

Wary of union response to any action taken by me re teacher. \textsuperscript{67}

Union attitudes mean everybody approached advises you to do little or nothing.\textsuperscript{279}
QUESTION 8:

Why do principals intentionally avoid tackling teacher incompetence?

In the questionnaire (Q.23), the principals were offered twelve different possible reasons (plus a thirteenth 'other' category) and were asked: "If you tolerate incompetence, please tick off your reasons".

Question 8.1 What are the reasons why principals avoid the issue tackling teacher incompetence?

Reasons for Avoiding

In descending order, the reasons for avoiding tackling were as shown in Table 5-37.

Table 5-37 Why principals avoid tackling teacher incompetence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for Avoiding</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage of Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It would be pointless because you couldn’t win</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>61.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You already tried it and got nowhere</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>53.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others tried before you and got nowhere</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>48.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You wish to avoid conflict with the teacher unions</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>41.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You wish to avoid staff morale problems</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>35.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You don’t think the other teachers would support you</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>34.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You wish to avoid the hassle and stress</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>32.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You don’t know how to tackle it</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You wish to avoid the legal ramifications</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You think it would be unfair as they are doing their best</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You lack the confidence to tackle it</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It would take too much time</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 79)

Almost 62% were convinced that it would be pointless to tackle incompetent teachers because they couldn't win. 54% had already tried and got nowhere. 49% reported that others had tried before them and got nowhere. 20% felt tackling it would be unfair. Only 12% were concerned about time.

According to this, the three most important reasons for not tackling the issue of teacher incompetence are all connected with a sense of helplessness.
Question 8.2 Is there a difference between male and female principals in their reasons for avoiding tackling teacher incompetence?

Male and female principals compared
There were 150 men (43 missing) and 95 women (36 missing). There was no significant difference between the male and female principals in the reasons they gave for avoiding tackling teacher incompetence. Males' reasons were exactly as in Table 5-37; females had the first two reasons exchanged but the difference in popularity was only 1%.

Question 8.3 Is there a difference between Religious and lay principals in their reasons for avoiding tackling teacher incompetence?

Religious and lay principals compared
There were 90 Religious or Clerics (25 missing) and 153 lay persons (54 missing). As with males and females, there was a slight change in the order but again, there was no significant difference. The reasons were still as in Table 5-37 above.

Question 8.4 What do principals think are the most important reasons why they avoid tackling teacher incompetence?

Top Three Reasons
The principals were asked to rank the three most important reasons of those they had selected. Aggregating the top three reasons produces Table 5-39 below. They mirror the empirical results in Table 5-37 above. It is worth noting that "You wish to avoid conflict with the teacher unions" comes a close fourth having been selected by 10.9% as the most important reason, by 11.2% as the second most important reason and by 7.1% as the third most important reason.

Table 5-38 Principals' ranking of the three most important reasons for not tackling teacher incompetence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>(N = 239)</th>
<th>1st Most important</th>
<th>2nd Most important</th>
<th>3rd Most important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It would be pointless because you couldn't win</td>
<td>66% 27.6%</td>
<td>24% 10.3%</td>
<td>25% 11.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You already tried and got nowhere</td>
<td>55% 23%</td>
<td>35% 15.1%</td>
<td>21% 10%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others tried before you and got nowhere</td>
<td>17% 7.1%</td>
<td>37% 15.9%</td>
<td>40% 19%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 86) (Missing = 93) (Missing = 114)
Question 8.5 Is there a difference between male and female principals in the reasons they give for not tackling teacher incompetence?

Male and female ranking of the main reason for avoidance compared

Table 5-39 presents the frequencies of the top reasons why male and female reasons avoid tackling teacher incompetence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Gender of Principal Number</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It would be pointless because you couldn't win</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You already tried and got nowhere</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You wish to avoid conflict with teacher unions</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You don't know how to tackle it</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others tried before you and got nowhere</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You wish to avoid the hassle and stress</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You wish to avoid staff morale problems</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You think it would be unfair as they are doing their best</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It would take too much time</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You lack the confidence to tackle it</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You wish to avoid legal ramifications</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You don't think the other teachers would support you</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some other reason</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>146</strong></td>
<td><strong>93</strong></td>
<td><strong>239</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The wish to avoid conflict with teacher unions is ranked more highly than in Table 5-39. There are only slight differences between the male and female principals' most important reasons. They are not statistically significant. ($\chi^2 = 11.7$, df = 12, $p = 0.47$)
Question 8.6  Is there a difference between Religious and lay principals in the reasons they give for not tackling teacher incompetence?

Religious and lay ranking of the main reason for avoidance compared

Table 5-40  Main reason for avoiding tackling teacher incompetence compared by Religious status of principal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Religious or Lay</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Religious Cleric</td>
<td>Lay</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It would be pointless because you couldn't win</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You already tried and got nowhere</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You wish to avoid conflict with teacher unions</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You don't know how to tackle it</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others tried before you and got nowhere</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You wish to avoid the hassle and stress</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You wish to avoid staff morale problems</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You think it would be unfair as they are doing their best</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It would take too much time</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You lack the confidence to tackle it</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You wish to avoid legal ramifications</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You don't think the other teachers would support you</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some other reason</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are only very slight differences in their reasons and they are not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 11.4$, df = 12, $p = 0.495$)
Comments

Principals were offered space for comments. These can be categorised into:

- Pastoral Approach (7)
- Policy Matters (6)
- No Change Possible (5)
- Helplessness (4)
- Tough Approach (3)
- Miscellaneous (3)
- Success (2)

These comments are reproduced here along with reference superscripts as explained above.

Pastoral Approach

Both are good people and both have health or personal problems.\(^{27}\)
Deal with it myself and try to limit the harm by actively supporting the situation.\(^{33}\)
Personal circumstances have helped to make these what they have become.\(^{72}\)
There are mental health problems - no expertise.\(^{104}\)
To a certain extent because no help available to the teacher concerned.\(^{253}\)
This teacher is such a good staff person in so many ways.\(^{318}\)
Punctual attender and tries and prepares work. Insecure as a person.\(^{324}\)

Policy Matters

No strategy agreed. Unions and principals must agree form of assessment.\(^{6}\)
What does tackle mean?\(^{46}\)
Every route has led to a cul de sac. There is no support for one pursuing such a case.\(^{160}\)
You must at least open the topic but no further due to unions and legalities.\(^{182}\)
Not publicly.\(^{230}\)
Indirect methods sometimes work better than direct confrontation.\(^{236}\)
No Change Possible

They are not prepared to change. 68

It appears to be very difficult to deal with long-term teachers whose difficulties increase with years. 90

Some things cannot be changed i.e. there is no willingness to change. 159

Incompetence has gone on far too long - 20 years - Can't change another person. 260

Incompetent teachers not amenable to reason. 271

Helplessness

Having made initial steps and not succeeded, unsure of what to do next 26

The possibility of have (sic) 365 days on sick leave every 4 years means it would be pointless to tackle. The teaching profession (Dept of Ed) tolerates incompetence! 78

System doesn't support action. 270

What can be done even if you try? 278

Tough Approach

I do not tolerate incompetence but I would take note in dealing with the problem of: - (c) (g) and (j) 13

I do not tolerate incompetence! 158

I don't avoid it period. 302

Miscellaneous

Here 3 years. V. large schoolwide problems - Now hope to tackle incompetency next year - have tackled to some degree. 93

Conclusions mostly drawn, of necessity, from indirect contact, observation or 2nd hand information; hard; when can't observe teaching to build a good case. 95

Not 'chronic' case - very lucky in present staff - (last school 1/3 staff incompetent!!!). I tackle incompetence when and where necessary. Did not always work in other schools as principal. 191

Success

I tackled the problem with successful outcome to teacher and school 9

The man had given a commitment to changing careers. 254
QUESTION 9:

Why do principals tackle teacher incompetence?

In the questionnaire (Q.25), the principals were offered twelve different possible reasons (plus a thirteenth 'other' category) and were asked: "If you have tackled incompetence, please tick off your reasons".

Question 9.1 What are the reasons why principals tackle teacher incompetence?

Reasons for Tackling

In descending order, the reasons principals give for tackling teacher incompetence were as shown in Table 5-41.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for Tackling</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage of Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The school's reputation was being damaged</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>85.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You felt it morally necessary to act</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>84.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Pressure</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>78.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure from students</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>53.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor examination results</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>46.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was not possible to 'hide' the incompetent</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>39.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was impossible to compensate for the incompetent</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>33.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was causing numbers to drop</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>29.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure from other teachers</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>29.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You were angry at the incompetent teacher</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You felt the other teachers would support you</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Board of Management instructed you to act</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 50)

Almost 86% tackled teacher incompetence because the reputation of the school was being damaged. The moral obligation was felt by 84%. Pressure from parents and pupils also figured very strongly at 78.5% and 53.5% respectively.
Comments

Principals were offered space to add a comment or state other reasons why they tackled teacher incompetence. The comments are reproduced below (with reference superscripts).

The reasons can be categorised as:

- Tough Approach (5)
- Pastoral Approach (3)
- Miscellaneous (3)
- Safety reasons (2)

Tough Approach

I was not prepared to be bullied! 95

The situation warrants dealing with. 160

At least make the teacher aware of my monitoring. 182

Refusal to support teachers inappropriate handling of situation. 268

Saw it as my job/responsibility. 289

Pastoral

Felt teacher needed support and deserved help. 113

Health of teacher gravely at risk. 301

In this case affirmation and support helps - not totally incompetent. 324

Miscellaneous

Students giving up the subject. 78

Concern for welfare of pupils. 232

An opportunity - due to some specific incident. 236

Safety Reasons

Safety problems in practical rooms due to incompetence. 52

Health and Safety Act. 78
Question 9.2 Is there a difference between male and female principals in their reasons for tackling teacher incompetence?

Male and female principals compared

There were 169 men (24 missing) and 106 women (25 missing).

Table 5-42 Reasons for tackling by male and female principals compared

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for Tackling</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The school's reputation was being damaged</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You felt it morally necessary to act</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Pressure</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor examination results</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure from students</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was not possible to 'hide' the incompetent</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was impossible to compensate for the incompetent</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure from other teachers</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was causing numbers to drop</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You were angry at the incompetent teacher</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You felt the other teachers would support you</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Board of Management instructed you to act</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are only tiny, statistically insignificant differences.

Question 9.3 Is there a difference between Religious and lay principals in their reasons for tackling teacher incompetence?

Religious and lay principals compared

Table 5-43 Reasons for tackling by Religious and lay principals compared

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for Tackling</th>
<th>Religious</th>
<th>Lay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The school's reputation was being damaged</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You felt it morally necessary to act</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent pressure</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure from students</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor examination results</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was not possible to 'hide' the incompetent</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was causing numbers to drop</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was impossible to compensate for the incompetent</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure from other teachers</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You were angry at the incompetent teacher</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You felt the other teachers would support you</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Board of Management instructed you to act</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Religious and lay principals hold identical reasons for acting.
Question 9.4 What do principals think are the three most important reasons for tackling teacher incompetence?

**Top Three Reasons**

The principals were asked to rank the three most important reasons of those they had selected. Aggregating the top three reasons produces Table 5-44 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(N = 273)</th>
<th>(N = 269)</th>
<th>(N = 261)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You felt it morally necessary to act</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>137 50.2%</td>
<td>42 15.6%</td>
<td>15 5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Pressure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>69 25.3%</td>
<td>39 14.5%</td>
<td>46 17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school's reputation was being damaged</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30 11%</td>
<td>84 31.2%</td>
<td>48 18.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 52) (Missing = 56) (Missing = 64)

The moral imperative was felt to be the most important. 50% gave it as the most important reason while 16% put it in second place and a further 6% put it in third.
Question 9.5 Is there a difference between male and female principals in the importance they assign to the reasons for tackling teacher incompetence?

Male and female ranking of the main reason for tackling compared

Table 5-45 presents the reasons male and female principals gave as the most important.

Table 5-45 Comparing the top reason by gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male N</td>
<td>Male %</td>
<td>Female N</td>
<td>Female %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You felt it to be morally necessary to act</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>52.4</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>46.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent pressure</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>32.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school's reputation was being damaged</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Board of Management instructed you to act</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure from other teachers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was causing numbers to drop</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor examination results</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure from students</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was impossible to compensate for the incompetent</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You felt the other teachers would support you</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You were angry at the incompetent teacher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some other reason</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 52)

There is no significant difference between male and female principals in their ranking of their reasons for acting.

\[ \chi^2 = 15.83, \text{df} = 11, p = 0.15 \]

Neither males nor female principals selected 'It was not possible to 'hide' the incompetent'.
Is there a difference between Religious and lay principals in the importance they assign to the reasons for tackling teacher incompetence?

Table 5-46 presents the reasons Religious and lay principals gave as the most important.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Religious</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Lay</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You felt it to be morally necessary to act</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>50.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Pressure</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>25.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school's reputation was being damaged</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor examination results</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Board of Management instructed you to act</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure from other teachers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was impossible to compensate for the incompetent</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was causing numbers to drop</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You felt that other teachers would support you</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure from students</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You were angry at the incompetent teacher</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(N = 271) Religious and lay principals overwhelmingly agreed on moral necessity as the most important factor. It was placed in first place by 50% of Religious and 51% of lay principals. Parent Pressure was placed in first place by 32% of Religious and 21% of lay principals. They were also agreed on the school's reputation coming next. Differences in the minor choices (that with regard to the Board of management being the most notable) meant that the Chi square Test approached statistical significance. 

χ² = 18.882, df = 11, p = .063.
QUESTION 10:

What are the strategies employed by principals in managing incompetent teachers?

In the questionnaire (Q.27), the principals were offered six different possible strategies (plus a seventh 'other' category) and were asked, "Please tick the strategies you yourself have employed."

Question 10.1 What are the strategies employed by principals in managing incompetent teachers?

Management Strategies

In descending order, the strategies that principals say they employ are as presented in Table 5-47.

Table 5-47 Management strategies employed (N = 295)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confront the teacher gently and bring the problem out in the open</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>94.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timetable them where they will do least harm</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempt to salvage the situation and improve the teaching</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>58.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apply pressure</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>39.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amass documentation for possible legal action</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>37.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignore the problem</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

95% of the principals responding to this question said they confronted the teacher gently and brought the problem out in the open. 82% said they timetabled the incompetent teachers where they would do least harm and 58% attempted to salvage the situation and improve the teaching. More aggressive responses were 40% applying pressure and 37% preparing for legal action. Only 9.2% admitted to ignoring the problem.
Comments

Principals were offered a space to add other management strategies or comments. These are set out below - each with a reference superscript as described earlier.

The comments can be classified as:

- Pastoral Approach (7)
- Pressure (7)
- Help (5)
- Inservice (4)
- Move (4)
- Miscellaneous (1)

Pastoral Approach

Appreciation in relation to teacher's work to date coupled with encouragement in regard to future classroom approaches. 121

Offer support to teacher with discipline problems in classroom. 159

Affirmed / Encourage / Compliment where feasible positive back up in area of discipline of students. 191

Advise sick leave where necessary. 232

Praise where possible. 256

Act as mentor and advise on improving teaching skills. 316

Affirm and support teacher. 324

Pressure

Maintain pressure by getting colleagues to help. 50

Provide me with a daily record of work done in the class in which there are most difficulties. 160

Explain the damage being done. Send complaining parents to the teacher. 188

Request that each parental complaint be submitted in writing so that it can be dealt with formally and kept on file. 197

Refused to support teachers' inappropriate handling of situations. 268

Arranged regular meetings to discuss progress of classes. 279
Amass documentation - not necessarily for legal action. 13

Help

Seek help. 9

Have VP and Pr. Intervene, talk to class 15

Encourage parents to look for interviews with the teacher. 52

Help from colleagues. E.g. Team Teaching. 57

Get support from other teachers. Attempt to build teachers self-esteem. Send on inservice. 236

Inservice

Ask to take a course on classroom management. 14

Inservice in school. 164

Inservice Courses. 167

Encourage to attend courses and inservice. 256

Move

Move them from subject area which they appear to like or threaten to do so. 29

Invited teacher to meet board
Offered seminar on classroom management. 45

Change of job. E.g. special needs. 302

Suggest alternative activities if person has a gift for same. 145

Miscellaneous

Let go after a year. 267
Question 10.2  Is there a difference between male and female principals in the strategies they employ?

**Male and female principals compared**

In descending order, the strategies male and female principals claim they employ is presented in Table 5-48.

**Table 5-48 Strategies of Male and female principals compared**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confront the teacher gently and bring the problem out in the open</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timetable them where they will do least harm</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempt to salvage the situation</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apply Pressure</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amass documentation for possible legal action</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignore the problem</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>180</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(A = 295)

Apart from reversal of the 'pressure' and 'documentation' strategies, the ranking of the responses of male and female principals was identical.
Question 10.3  Is there a difference between Religious and lay principals in the strategies they employ?

**Religious and lay principals compared**

In descending order, the strategies male and female principals claim they employ is presented in Table 5-49.

Table 5-49  Strategies of Religious and lay principals compared

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>Lay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confront the teacher gently and bring the problem out in the open</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>96.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timetable them where they will do least harm</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>79.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempt to salvage the situation</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>51.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apply Pressure</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>44.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amass documentation for possible legal action</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>34.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignore the problem</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>104</td>
<td>35.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 32)

Apart from reversal of the 'pressure' and 'documentation' strategies, the distribution and ranking of the responses of Religious and lay principals was identical.
Question 10.4 What do principals think are the three most used strategies?

Top Three Reasons

The principals were asked to rank the three most used strategies. Aggregating the top three strategies produced Table 5-50 below.

Table 5-50 Principals' ranking of the top three most used management strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy Description</th>
<th>1st Most Used Strategy</th>
<th>2nd Most Used Strategy</th>
<th>3rd Most Used Strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confront teacher gently and bring problem out in the open</td>
<td>189 64.7</td>
<td>62 22.0</td>
<td>21 8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timetable them where they will do least harm</td>
<td>71 24.3</td>
<td>88 31.2</td>
<td>57 23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempt to salvage the situation and improve teaching</td>
<td>21 7.2</td>
<td>69 24.5</td>
<td>45 18.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

( missing = 33) ( missing = 43) ( missing = 86)  

Principals felt that 'confronting the teacher gently' was the most used strategy. 65% placed it in first place, 22% placed it in second and 9% placed it in third. 'Timetabling incompetent teachers such that they will do least harm' was placed first by 24.3%, second by 31.2% and third by 23.8%. 'Salvage attempts' were placed first by 7%, second by 31.2% and third by 18.8%.
Question 10.5 Is there a difference between male and female principals in the importance they assign to strategies for managing incompetent teachers?

**Male and female ranking of the most important strategies compared**

Table 5-51 presents the strategies male and female principals gave as the *most* frequently used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender of Principal</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confront teacher gently and bring problem out in open</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>60.7%</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timetable them where they will do least harm</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempt to salvage the situation and improve teaching</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some other strategy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apply pressure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.6%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amass documentation for possible legal action</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>178</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 33)

Male and female principals agree on the most used strategies. The *chi*-square test shows no statistically significant difference ($\chi^2 = 6.722$, df = 5, $p = 0.242$).
Question 10.6  Is there a difference between Religious and lay principals in the importance they assign to strategies for managing incompetent teachers?

Religious and lay ranking of the most important strategies compared

Table 5-52 presents the strategies Religious and lay principals gave as the most frequently used.

Table 5-52  Comparing the most used strategy by Religious status  
(N = 290)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious or Lay</th>
<th>Religious</th>
<th>Lay</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confront teacher gently and bring problem out in open</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>66.0%</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timetable them where they will do least harm</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempt to salvage the situation and improve teaching</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some other strategy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apply pressure</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amass documentation for possible legal action</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 35)

66% of Religious and 64% of lay principals considered 'confronting the teacher gently' the most used strategy. They were in agreement about the order of the remaining strategies also.

Clearly, Religious and lay principals agree on the most used strategies. The chi-square test shows no statistically significant difference ($\chi^2 = 9.47$, df = 5, $p = 0.092$)
QUESTION 11:

How do principals apply pressure?

In the questionnaire (Q.29), the principals were offered seven possible methods (plus an eighth 'other' category) by which principals have been known to apply pressure. They were asked, "Please tick any of strategies that you adopted".

Question 11.1 What are the strategies employed by principals in applying pressure to incompetent teachers?

Methods of applying pressure

In descending order, the strategies that principals said they employed are as presented in Table 5-53.

Table 5-53 Methods of applying pressure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passing on criticism from parents and students</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>85.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasion</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>72.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent meetings in the office</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>51.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent Observation</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>38.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issuing warnings</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>38.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpleasant Timetabling</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passing on criticism from colleagues</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 40)

85% of principals reported that they passed on criticism from parents and pupils. 72% attempted persuasion and 52% called the incompetent teacher to frequent meetings in the office. Frequent observation and issuing warnings were the options of 39% and 38%. Only 16% used unpleasant timetabling. 16% passed on criticism from colleagues
Comments

Although the question was supposedly about applying pressure, and ten of the comments were in that vein, the majority - seventeen of the written comments - were kindly and supportive of the teacher.

They can be categorised as:

- Pressure (10)
- Pastoral care (6)
- Miscellaneous (4)
- Support (4)
- Teacher development (3)

Pressure

Pointing out inevitable consequences of failing to make change. 50

Conversations re exam results. 57

Frequent visits to the classroom. 98

Letting him know I was keeping records. 108

Teachers are always made aware of criticism from parents but not from students. 113

Have spoken to her on many occasions. She just does not hear. Gets on the defensive. Offered her courses. 116

Point out poor results. Explain they are letting side down. 188

I have issued a teacher with a written request to attend a B.O.M. meeting to discuss their incompetency. 190

Exam results. 262

Withholding of support. 268
Pastoral
These are very negative and would I feel prove to be counterproductive.

Informal chats with the teacher.

Encouragement.

Encouragement - in relation to my belief that matters can be improved if approach of teacher is open to change. NOT to be confused with condescension.

Encouragement.

Talk to teacher about difficulties they are having - how to cope with these.

Miscellaneous

Job sharing. Teach mornings only in 1,2 yr three class (sic).

Careful timetabling - damage limitation. Inspection.

Working through methods / plans to help the situation.

Did not apply any of above methods a,b,c,d,e.,

Support

Visiting teacher's classroom, with teacher's permission to try to encourage better behaviour / co-operation / discipline from students - in their own interest.

Offered help in the classroom whilst teacher is teaching.

Visiting classroom when things were really out of control - trying to reason with students 'positively' - effective only in short term.

Class intervention.

Teacher Development


Suggest courses on classroom management.

Offering support by pointing towards inservice.
Question 11.2  
Is there a difference in the methods used by male and female principals to apply pressure?

**Male and female principals compared**

There were 285 responses to this question made up of 176 (61.8%) males and 109 (38.2%) females. In descending order, the methods by which male and female principals apply pressure are presented in Table 5-54.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5-54</th>
<th>Male and female methods of applying pressure compared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Method</strong></td>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passing on criticism from parents and students</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasion</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent meetings in the office</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent Observation</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issuing warnings</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpleasant Timetabling</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passing on criticism from colleagues</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 40)

There are only very slight differences. The methods used by male and female principals are essentially the same.
Question 11.3  Is there a difference in the methods used by Religious and lay principals to apply pressure?

Religious and lay principals Compared

There were 283 responses to this question made up of 97 (34.3%) Religious / Clerics and 186 (65.7%) lay people. In descending order, the methods by which Religious and lay principals apply pressure are presented in Table 5-55.

Table 5-55  Religious and lay methods of applying pressure compared

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Religious Status</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>Cleric</td>
<td>Lay</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passing on criticism from parents and students</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>90.7</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>82.8</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasion</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>72.2</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>72.0</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent meetings in the office</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>52.6</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent Observation</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issuing warnings</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpleasant Timetabling</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passing on criticism from colleagues</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 42)

The preferences of Religious and lay principals for different methods of applying pressure are essentially the same.
Question 11.4: What do principals think are the three most used strategies?

**Top Three Methods**

The principals were asked to rank the three most used strategies for applying pressure. Aggregating the top three strategies produced Table 5-56.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5-56</th>
<th>Principals' ranking of the top three most used strategies used to apply pressure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(N = 276)</td>
<td>(N = 258)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Most used strategy</td>
<td>2nd Most used strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Persuasion</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>107</td>
<td>38.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Passing on criticism from parents and students</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>32.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frequent meetings in the office</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 49) (Missing = 67) (Missing = 119)

'Persuasion' was thought to be the most used strategy; 39% placed it first, 18% second and 15% third. Next came 'Passing on criticism from parents and students' which was placed first by 33%, second by 30% and third by 24%. 'Frequent meetings in the office' was the first choice for 9.4%, the second for 25% and the third for 21%.
Question 11.5 Is there a difference between male and female principals in the importance they assign to the strategies for applying pressure?

Male and female ranking of the most important strategies for applying pressure compared

Table 5-57 presents the strategies male and female principals give as the most frequently used to apply pressure.

Table 5-57 Comparing by gender the most used strategy for applying pressure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Gender of Principal</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>N (%)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>N (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasion</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passing on criticism from parents and students</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>36.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent meetings in the office</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent observation</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpleasant timetabling</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issuing warnings</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passing on criticism from colleagues</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>172</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 49)

Female principals think that 'passing on criticism' is most effective while males put 'Persuasion' in first place but essentially they rank the strategies in the same way. The chi-square test shows no statistically significant difference.

\( \chi^2 = 7.924, \ df = 7, p = 0.339 \)
Question 11.6  Is there a difference between Religious and lay principals in the importance they assign to the strategies for applying pressure?

Religious and lay ranking of the most important strategies for applying pressure compared

Table 5-58 presents the strategies Religious and lay principals give as the most frequently used to apply pressure.

Table 5-58 Comparing by Religious Status the most used strategy for applying pressure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Religious Status</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Religious Cleric</td>
<td>Lay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasion</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passing on criticism from parents and students</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent meetings in the office</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent observation</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpleasant timetabling</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issuing warnings</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passing on criticism from colleagues</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>93</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 51)

Religious and lay agree on the strategies for applying pressure. The chi-square test shows there is no statistically significant difference. ($\chi^2 = 3.286, \text{ df} = 7, p = 0.857$)
Question 11.7 What was the reaction of parents to a request to have them put complaints in writing?

Complaints being put in writing

Table 5-59 Request for parental complaints to be put in writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. I did not request that complaints be put in writing</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>33.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes (but usually they would not put complaints in writing)</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>84.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes (and usually they would put complaints in writing)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>96.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not relevant since parents never complained</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 31)

In 151 cases (51%) the principal asked parents to put their complaints in writing but they refused. Only in 13% of cases were written complaints produced.
QUESTION 12:

What was the reaction of an incompetent teacher if confronted?

In the questionnaire (Q.32) the principals were asked, "If you did confront the incompetent teacher what was the response?" They were then offered eight possible reactions (plus a ninth 'other' category) of which they were asked to tick as many as they wished.

Question 12.1 What was the reaction of the incompetent teacher when confronted?

Reaction of Incompetent teacher when confronted

In descending order, the responses of the incompetent teachers are presented in Table 5-60

Table 5- 60 Reaction of incompetent teacher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reaction</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denial</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>60.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surprise</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>55.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance and attempt to improve</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>44.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counter aggression</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broke into tears</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calling in of the union</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accused you of harassment</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference to other teachers</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other response</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 51)

Denial was the most common reaction at 61% with surprise coming next at 56%. 45% accepted the criticism while 33% reacted with counter aggression.
Comments

Space was provided for principals to write in other response of the incompetent teacher on being confronted or to add comments of their own.

These are presented below along with reference superscripts. The responses described can be categorised into:

- Shifting Blame (12)
- Aggressive defensive (6)
- Miscellaneous (6)
- Partial Compliance (4)
- Excuses (2)

Shifting blame

Put the blame on poor pupil attendance and/or discipline - no interest. 29

Subtle shifting of blame to others. 50

Blame pupils. Blame lack of discipline. 67

Changed the subject and try to turn difficulties on to me. 108

Assured me they knew their subject. Prepared classwork. Blamed their students. 172

Seeing the students as the problem and not themselves. 211

Blaming pupils. 218

Complete inability to accept that the problem lay with him. 226

Blamed class. 228

Blamed me for inviting parental complaints. Threatened to commit suicide if I did not offer support. 270

Expressed frustration at pupils lack of motivation / unwillingness or inability to think or concentrate. 232

Blaming students. 263
Aggressive defensive

Asserted employment rights. 45

Called a meeting of staff to put pressure on me. 55

Anger at parents who complained and linked it to family history. 90

Some lack of co-operation afterwards. [after confronting]. 159

Temporary improvement. I would find myself harassed in very odd and seemingly unconnected ways - very difficult to connect harassment with this teacher. It is just the timing which seems to connect it. 160

Got very angry. 188

Miscellaneous

Ability to listen and ingratiate but to then ignore and continue. 6

Students and parents got it wrong. 260

His lack of communication skills was pathetic - lack of logic and inability (dismal) to hear the message. Result - got back at pupil. 182

Teacher was paranoid schizophrenic, hard worker, compliant but on another planet. 196

Total silence. 224

Produced a medical certificate and remained at home for 2 to 3 weeks. 248

Partial Compliance

Denial and attempt to improve. i.e. deny but get the message. 20

Acceptance of complaint on punctuality. Promised to improve. Did not. Denied other complaints. 32

If you have the paperwork, dates and times (a) [acceptance and attempt to improve] is generally the response. 102

Agreed and did nothing. 302

Excuses

Apologetic, blamed family problems, bereavement, depression. 13

Stated that this was his/her best. 107
Question 12.2 Was there a difference in the reactions of male and female incompetent teachers when confronted?

Reaction of male and female incompetent teachers

The data were filtered firstly to those principals who had experience of managing only female incompetent teachers. The responses of those principals thus provided the reaction of female incompetent teachers. Then the data were filtered to those principals who had experience of managing only male incompetent teachers. Principals who had had experience of managing incompetent teachers of both genders were excluded as it would not have been clear to whom they were referring (indeed some principals split their responses to describe the reactions of several different incompetent teachers).

Male teachers

The frequencies of the reactions of male incompetent teachers are presented in descending order in Table 5-61.

Table 5-61 Reaction of Male incompetent teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reaction</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denial</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>55.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surprise</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>48.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance and attempt to improve</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>45.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counter aggression</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calling in of the union</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accused you of harassment</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference to other teachers</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broke into tears</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other response</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 18)

Denial and surprise were the two most prevalent responses of male incompetent teachers at 55% and 49% respectively.
Female Teachers

Table 5-62  Reaction of female incompetent teachers

(\(N = 98\))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reaction</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denial</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>58.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surprise</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>58.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance and attempt to improve</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>41.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broke into tears</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counter aggression</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calling in of the union</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accused you of harassment</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference to other teachers</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other response</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 11)

The most obvious difference is the greater tendency of females to break into tears. 34% of females broke into tears while only 15% of men did.

Question 12.3 What do principals think are the top three reactions of incompetent teachers when confronted?

Top Three Reactions

The principals were asked to rank the three most prevalent reactions. Aggregating the top three choices produced Table 5-63

Table 5-63  Principals' ranking of the top three most prevalent reactions.

(\(N = 263\)) (\(N = 222\)) (\(N = 168\))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reaction</th>
<th>1st Most common reaction</th>
<th>2nd Most common reaction</th>
<th>3rd Most common reaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denial</td>
<td>N 87 %33.1</td>
<td>N 40 %18.0</td>
<td>N 20 %11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surprise</td>
<td>N 49 %18.6</td>
<td>N 59 %26.6</td>
<td>N 18 %10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance and attempt to improve</td>
<td>N 77 %29.3</td>
<td>N 16 %7.2</td>
<td>N 19 %11.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 62)  (Missing = 103)  (Missing = 157)

'Denial' was the most commonly reported reaction. 33% placed it in first place, 18% placed it in second and 12% placed it in third. 'Surprise' was placed first by 19%, second by 27% and third by 11%. 'Acceptance and attempt to improve' was placed first by 29%, second by 7% and third by 11%.
QUESTION 13:

To what extent does the teacher union get involved?

Question 13.1 In simple numerical terms how common is union involvement?

**Numerical**

Of the 325 responding to the survey, 296 principals (179 males and 117 females) had experience of incompetent teachers. In their particular experience 73 of these principals reported that the union was involved and 206 said the union was not involved (there were 17 missing values). Thus the union was involved in the cases of 25% of the principals.

Question 13.2 When it is involved, what is the reaction of the Teacher Union?

**Union Reaction**

The principals were presented with seven possible union reactions (plus an eighth 'other' category) and were asked to tick as many of the responses as they wished.

In descending order, the frequencies of the responses are presented in Table 5-64.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage of cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Defending the teacher but co-operative</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>65.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trying to convince the teacher to act wisely</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>50.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscious of the morality of the situation</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>35.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open to compromise of sick leave/early retirement</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>30.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totally defending the teacher and uncooperative</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive towards the principal</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indifferent to the morality of the situation</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 223)

In 66% of the cases 'Defending the teacher but co-operative' was the reaction of the teacher's union. The union tried to convince the teacher to act wisely in 51% of the cases. They displayed consciousness of the morality of the situation in 36% of the cases and were indifferent to it in 20%.
Question 13.3 What do principals think are the top three reactions of the teacher unions?

Top Three Reactions of the Union
The principals were asked to rank the three most prevalent union reactions. Aggregating the top three choices produced Table 5-65.

Table 5-65 Principals' ranking of the top three most prevalent union reactions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(N =72)</th>
<th></th>
<th>(N =54)</th>
<th></th>
<th>(N =38)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1st Most common reaction</td>
<td>2nd Most common reaction</td>
<td>3rd Most common reaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defending the teacher but co-operative</td>
<td>34 47.2</td>
<td>6 11.1</td>
<td>5 13.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trying to convince the teacher to act wisely</td>
<td>10 13.9</td>
<td>16 29.6</td>
<td>6 15.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open to compromise of sick leave / early retirement</td>
<td>3 4.2</td>
<td>8 14.8</td>
<td>9 23.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing =224) (Missing =242) (Missing =258)

The union reaction of 'defending the teacher but co-operative' was placed in first place by 47%, in second by 11% and in third by 13%. 'Trying to convince the teacher to act wisely' was placed in first place by 14%, in second by 30% and in third by 24%.
Comments

The written responses show the teacher union in a fairly positive light. For the most part the union did its best to protect the teacher while accepting the validity of the management position too. The comments can be categorised as:

- Mediation (5)
- A certain amount of incompetence must be accepted (3)
- Defensive (2)
- Co-operative (1)

Mediation

Acted as a mediator and sought to solve the problem through negotiation. 7

Union sought to protect employee rights but accepted that the employer had rights also. 45

Helpful / understanding but professionally acting for the teacher. They went as far as they could. 160

Varied according to incident - becoming more co-operative. 270

Suggestion of further 'probation'. 321

A certain amount of incompetence must be accepted

"Teachers worse than this one" No teachers left in Ireland. 6

Union not involved in present case - in earlier case (another school) union adopted attitude "Each school has to put up with some incompetent teacher" from industrial relations officer. 191

Minimalize the situation. 227

Defensive

Adopted a very legalistic stance. 316

We had a strong case - continued incompetency in spite of support and encouragement. Teacher was not mentally able. 322

Co-operative

At first positive and helpful. 210
QUESTION 14:

How do principals timetable incompetent teachers?

In the questionnaire (Q.37) the principals were offered twelve different possible timetabling strategies (plus a thirteenth 'other' category) and were asked, "Please tick the strategies you yourself have employed."

Question 14.1 What are the strategies employed by principals in timetabling incompetent teachers?

Timetabling Strategies

In descending order, the timetabling strategies that principals employed are as presented in Table 5-66.

Table 5-66 Timetabling strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ensure that they do not teach the same class for consecutive years</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>63.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give them non-examination classes</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>61.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give them small classes</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>57.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give them non-examination subjects</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>51.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give them only Junior classes</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>42.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give them study supervision / library periods</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give them low achieving, low expectation streams</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give them religion classes</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give them PE / Games classes</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give them foundation level classes</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give them Transition Year classes</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give them Remedial classes</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 48)

64% of the principals employed the tactic of not timetabling the incompetent teacher to teach the same class for consecutive years. 61% gave them non-examination classes and 51% gave them non-examination subjects. Remedial teaching was very little used - it was employed in only 8% of cases.
Comments

Principals were offered space to write in other ways of timetabling incompetent teachers. The comments are presented below along with their reference superscripts.

They can be categorised into:

- Motivated Classes (10)
- No Concession (7)
- Makes things easy (4)
- No room to manoeuvre (4)
- Miscellaneous (4)
- Spread the damage (2)
- Support structures (2)
- H. Dip. Students (2)
- Job sharing (2)
- Junior classes (1)

Motivated classes

Keep them out of honours classes for Leaving Cert. 26

Kept them with senior classes where 'form' was known. 50

Give them the best class. 58

With a mathematics teacher he has some success with the very able - Teaching hons. 83

Give them hons Leaving Cert classes - more motivated. 156

This is a very difficult situation - Senior classes - very able if possible - tolerant students - I am running out of ideas and means on this one. 160

Depends on type of incompetence - one of mine I gave Hons Maths, Chemistry Leaving cert, he does it very well; the other doesn't really try anyway. 215

Give them high expectation streams. 244

The teacher had few if any problems with honours students. 284

Give them P.L.C. classes. 289
No concession

Did not apply any of above in my one case. 131

Definitely not! (referring to Transition Year). 142

I do not do any of the above; they are given a mixture of bright and weak classes. 181

In this case none of the above - treated like other teachers - over all tolerable. 191

None used. 193

Have not done any of above yet with permanent teacher. 314

Timetabled as other teacher - no exceptions made. 324

Make things easy

Give them a once-off easy year - 27/28 classes. 104

Minimum hours. 130

Reduce no. of hours. 159

Give them their preferred subjects. i.e. their strengths. 256

No room to manoeuvre

Must give exam classes as only limited number of teachers in this area. 138

Not possible in a medium sized school to avoid classes - only subject taught. 182

Give him all classes - only woodwork teacher. 217

None of these options available - had no other teacher(s). 318

Miscellaneous

I took this to mean me rather than principals in general. 34

New areas of competence have been discovered. e.g. IT. [information technology] 109

Timetable - not early in a.m. 238

Keep teacher on premises as much as possible. 270

Spread the damage

Ensure that they do not have a second subject with the same class. 5
Try to ensure that she doesn't teach the same pupil for more than one subject. 90

**Support structure**

Give them 1st Years only and as I have a First Year class I can perform effective damage limitation. 7

Team teaching. 274

**H. Dip Students**

Get a H.Dip. Teacher. 92

Give them compensating admin duties and put H.Dips in. 146

**Job sharing**

Encourage job sharing. 15

Encourage job-sharing. 78

**Junior classes**

Give them Junior and not senior. 67
Question 14.2 Is there a difference in the timetabling strategies of male and female principals?

**Timetabling Strategies of male and female principals**
The question on timetabling strategies was answered by 174 men (19 missing) and 102 women (29 missing). The difference was only in the first two strategies as shown in Table 5-67 below.

**Table 5-67** Top two timetabling strategies of male and female principals compared

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Gender of Principal</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give them non-examination classes</td>
<td>116 66.7</td>
<td></td>
<td>54 52.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure that they do not teach the same class for consecutive years</td>
<td>98 56.3</td>
<td></td>
<td>78 76.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was no significant difference between male and female principals. Females' strategies were precisely as in Table 5-67; males had the first two strategies exchanged.

Question 14.3 Is there a difference in the timetabling strategies of Religious and lay principals?

**Timetabling Strategies of Religious and lay principals compared**
There were 93 Religious/Clerics (22 missing) and 181 lay principals (26 missing). The difference was only in the first two strategies as shown in Table 5-68 below.

**Table 5-68** Timetabling strategies of Religious and lay principals compared

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Religious Status of Principal</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Lay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give them non-examination classes</td>
<td>50 53.8</td>
<td></td>
<td>119 65.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure that they do not teach the same class for consecutive years</td>
<td>69 74.2</td>
<td></td>
<td>106 58.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was no significant difference between Religious and lay principals. Apart from disagreement about the first two items as shown in Table 5-68, their choices of timetabling strategies were in the same order as presented in Table 5-67.
Question 14.4 What do principals think are the most used timetabling strategies

**Top Three Strategies**

The principals were asked to rank the three most used strategies from those they had selected. Aggregating the top three strategies produced Table 5-69.

Table 5-69 Principals' ranking of the three most used timetabling strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(N =269)</th>
<th>(N =244)</th>
<th>(N =217)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1st Most used strategy</td>
<td>2nd Most used strategy</td>
<td>3rd Most used strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give them non-examination classes</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give them small classes</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure that they do not teach the same class for consecutive years</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing =56) (Missing =81) (Missing =108)

These results of principals' rankings reflect the empirical results of Table 5-67. Giving incompetent teachers non-examination classes was selected by 22% as the most used timetabling strategy, by 17% as the second most used and by 11% as the third most used.
Question 14.5 Is there a difference between male and female principals in the way they timetable incompetent teachers?

Male and female timetabling strategies compared

Table 5-70 presents the frequencies of the timetabling strategies of male and female principals.

Table 5-70 Comparing Timetabling Strategies by gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most used timetabling strategy</th>
<th>Gender of principal</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give them non-examination classes</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give them small classes</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They do not teach the same class for consecutive years</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give them low achieving, low expectation streams</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give them non-examination subjects</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give them foundation level classes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give them only Junior classes</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give them Religion classes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give them study supervision / library periods</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give them PE / games classes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 57)

Male and female principals' timetabling strategies are practically identical. The slight differences are not statistically significant. ($\chi^2 = 7.69$, df = 10, $p = 0.76$)
Question 14.6 Is there a difference between Religious and lay principals in the way they timetable incompetent teachers?

**Religious and Lay Timetabling Strategies compared**

Table 5-71 presents the frequencies of the timetabling strategies of Religious and lay principals.

**Table 5-71 Comparing Timetabling Strategies by Religious Status**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most used timetabling strategy</th>
<th>Religious or Lay</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Religious / Cleric</td>
<td>Lay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give them non-examination classes</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give them small classes</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They do not teach the same class for consecutive years</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give them low achieving, low expectation streams</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give them non-examination subjects</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give them only Junior classes</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give them study supervision / library periods</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give them Religion classes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give them PE / games classes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give them foundation level classes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 59)

The top five strategies are the same for both. There are minor variations in the lower choices - Religion classes are not used at all by Religious principals but, at 3%, it is an option for lay principals but not a popular one. The differences are not statistically significant. ($\chi^2 = 12.38$, df = 10, $p = 0.26$)
QUESTION 15:

How do principals attempt to remedy incompetence?

Question 15.1 How many principals attempt to remedy teacher incompetence?

Of the 285 principals responding to the relevant question 231 (71%) reported that they had attempted to remedy teacher incompetence on their staffs.

Note concerning Numbers

Popularity of a strategy

As can be seen from Question 15.1, there were 231 principals who attempted to remedy incompetence. The popularity of a strategy was as a percentage of 231 therefore, rather than of the total 325.

Effectiveness of a strategy

The number selecting a particular strategy (N) is reported at the top of each Table below where the degree of effectiveness of the strategy is further analysed. The effectiveness rating was calculated in terms of helpfulness reported as the number saying a strategy 'helped' a lot', 'helped a little', or was of 'no help whatever'. These numbers were also expressed as a percentage of 'N' - the number who tried that particular strategy.

Question 15.2 How many sent incompetent teachers on inservice courses?

Inservice Courses

112 principals (48.5%) recommended inservice courses to incompetent teachers.

Table 5-72 Inservice courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helped a lot</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped a little</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>44.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No help whatsoever</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>35.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tried but no rating</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only 8% of principals felt inservice courses helped a lot. 45% felt they helped a little. 36% felt inservice courses had been of no help whatsoever.
Question 15.3  How many sat in on the teacher's classes?

Principals Sitting in on classes

This was done by 46 (20%) of the 231 principals who attempted remediation.

Table 5-73  Principals sitting in on classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helped a lot</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21.74</td>
<td>21.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped a little</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>71.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No help whatsoever</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26.09</td>
<td>97.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tried but no rating</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

22% of the 46 found 'sitting in' helped a lot, 50% felt it helped a little and 26% felt it was of no help whatsoever.

Question 15.4  How many held regular advice sessions with the teacher?

Regular Advice Sessions

This was tried by 165 (71%) of the principals who attempted to remedy the incompetence.

Table 5-74  Regular Advice Sessions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helped a lot</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11.52</td>
<td>11.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped a little</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>59.39</td>
<td>70.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No help whatsoever</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>18.18</td>
<td>89.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tried but no rating</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10.91</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

59% felt regular advice sessions helped a little and 12% felt they helped a lot.
Question 15.5 How many got a colleague to act as mentor to the teacher?  
This strategy was tried by 54 (23%) of the principals who attempted to remedy incompetence.

**Colleague as Mentor**

Table 5-75  Colleague as mentor  
(N = 54)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helped a lot</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>24.07</td>
<td>24.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped a little</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>46.30</td>
<td>70.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No help whatsoever</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>24.07</td>
<td>94.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tried but no rating</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

24% felt this helped a lot, 46% felt it helped a little and 24% felt it was of no help whatsoever.

Question 15.6 How many gave the teacher pedagogy books to read?  
This was tried by 29 (13%) of the principals who attempted to remedy incompetence.

**Giving pedagogy books**

Table 5-76 Pedagogy books  
(N = 29)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helped a lot</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped a little</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>51.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No help whatsoever</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>89.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tried but no rating</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only 14% felt it helped a lot while 38% felt it helped a little. A further 38% felt it was of no help whatsoever.
Question 15.7  How many invoked the support of the Department of Education Inspectorate?

This was tried by 38 (16.5%) of the principals who attempted to remedy incompetence.

**Invoking the support of Department Inspectorate**

Table 5-77  Invoking the support of the Department Inspectorate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helped a lot</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped a little</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>36.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No help whatsoever</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>86.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tried but no rating</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

50% felt the Department of education Inspectorate was of no help whatsoever and 37% felt it was of some help. Nobody thought that it helped a lot.
Question 15.8  How do the different strategies for remedying incompetence compare with each other in terms of popularity and effectiveness?

Comparison of remediation strategies

Table 5-78 summarises the above results and places them in descending order of popularity.

Table 5- 78  Comparison of remediation strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Attempted by</th>
<th>Helped a Lot</th>
<th>Helped a Little</th>
<th>No Help whatsoever</th>
<th>Tried but no rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular advice sessions</td>
<td>N 165</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>30 18.18</td>
<td>18.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 71.43</td>
<td>11.52</td>
<td>59.39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inservice Courses</td>
<td>N 112</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>40 13</td>
<td>11.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 48.48</td>
<td>8.04</td>
<td>46.46</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting a colleague to act as mentor</td>
<td>N 54</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>13 24.07</td>
<td>5.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 23.38</td>
<td>24.07</td>
<td>46.30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal sitting in on classes</td>
<td>N 46</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12 2.17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 19.91</td>
<td>21.74</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invoking support of Dept. Inspectorate</td>
<td>N 38</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19 5</td>
<td>13.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 16.45</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>36.84</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving teacher pedagogy books to read</td>
<td>N 29</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 12.55</td>
<td>13.79</td>
<td>37.93</td>
<td></td>
<td>10.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Having regular advice sessions was the most popular strategy having been tried by 71% and it was seen to help a little by 59% and a lot by 12%. While sending teachers on inservice courses was also very popular, it was not seen to be as helpful with 36% of principals who tried it saying that it had been of no help whatsoever. The Inspectorate was only invoked by 16% and was found to be of no help whatsoever by 50% of those. None found it helped a lot.
Comments

Principals were offered space in which to write comments and other remediation strategies. They are all presented below with reference superscripts. They can be categorised as:

- Miscellaneous (20)
- Pastoral Approach (13)
- Teacher Resistance (8)
- Tough Approach (7)
- Advice (6)
- Hopelessness (6)
- Discipline (5)
- Support (4)
- Progress (4)
- Punctuality (2)
- Policy (1)

Miscellaneous

No problem. 6

Job-sharing helped most. 15

Remedy not adequately specific. 20

Helped for a short time. 31

Underscoring school needs 50

Difficult to rely on one strategy - mixed approach - some minor improvement. 50

Monitoring student and teacher progress re a given class situation. 58

In one case, due to HS problems, I called inspector - Dept gave hours which I used to take teacher out of class - not me? (sic) - if it was the inspector's assistance - more inclined to believe due to direct appeal to authority. 93

Did not try in a structured way. 168

As mentioned not a 'chronic' case. 191

Teacher No1 was sent to train for the Dip. Remedial, compensatory ed. In UCC. Not having been selected or interview at her first attempt, she was offered a place the next year because of a shortage of candidates. She now takes L.C. Foundation level Maths and
withdrawal remedial tuition Junior Cycle for half her hours . . . instead of 22 hours of Maths! 197

The teacher in question is 'odd' and brings out the worst in students so (a-e) do not apply. 203

Helped only for a short period - But old habits returned. 205

Response (from me) totally different depending on nature of incompetence and personality of teacher. 256

Only one year as principal therefore it is all before me. 271

Too early to comment on success. 279

The situation is ongoing. 287

Conferred with close family members - one particular case only. 301

Above only applies to probationary teacher. 314

Pastoral Approach

I made a special effort to build up the self-confidence of the person concerned. By withdrawing them from all classes where the person was having difficulties I succeeded in breaking the negative cycle. The person is doing somewhat better in 1st Years. 7

Spoke and supported the teacher who reacted positively eventually. 16

Discussion. 19

Had a trained advisor to speak to teacher. 157

I tried to get them more involved in other aspects of school life. E.g. committees CSPE, Inservice, Inservice in their own subjects. 181

Gentle persuasion. 244

The teacher looked for help. I was, of course, glad to help where I could. 254

Spoke to person and implemented above. 289

Talking to teacher. 310

Meetings with pupils and teacher. Meetings together and apart. 316
Encouraged any success. 321

Support and affirmation - not a hopeless case but complaints from parents now and then. 324

**Teacher Resistance**

The teacher may not accept advice 14

The advice sessions were not very welcome and so not as regular as should have been. 26

If the teacher feels they are right there is nothing you can do. 34

Refused to go (to inservice course) 145

Teacher refused to acknowledge problem even existed! 95

Suggestions not accepted, Union threatened, reminders given each year. 182

Teacher was blind to the problems and most intransigent! 210

Teachers resist going on inservice courses. 294

**Tough**

Tore strips off him on occasion. Advised him to leave teaching or to apply for career break. 87

Most recently students complained about lack of progress in class - and repeatedly covering the same short essay so I asked for a record of work from each of these classes. Everything is tried to try to find a temporary reprieve in the situation. 160

Made teacher aware of complaint - urged teacher to move faster and complete course. 260

Observation by the principal and discovered the person was being covered by a colleague. 267

Informed teacher that I was keeping a file of incidences (sic). 270

Conveyed my expectation of improved examination results. 272

Pressure - I believe they can manage. 302

**Advice**

Advice and help through union 43
Informal after school sessions to discuss/review/support.  

Setting specific goals - e.g. re amount of course to be covered and following this up with regular meetings.  

The advice sessions which took place during the 1st term seemed to help. I also informally visited the most troublesome classes. I had not the opportunity thereafter and matters deteriorated.  

Prepared class plans but we would need to prepare every class in every subject!!  

Encouraged better teaching methods.  

Hopelessness  
No. Because of 'known' responses as given to other questions.  
Acceptance of advice but little or no improvement.  
Interview which was non-productive.  
unavailable b) unacceptable to teacher/union d) unwilling staff c) N/A f) N/A.  
There was no point, really, in trying anything.  
Hopeless.  

Discipline  
Advising teacher to seek support from discipline structures to help their discipline in the classroom.  
Advised on prep. For class / conduct of class - written work / correcting of work etc.  
Problem was harsh discipline, belittling students. Raised these issues at Staff Day, brought in speakers etc. Teacher has this year taken leave of absence.  
Talking with students - re discipline which was main problem; advising teacher.  
A good disciplinary support system within the school.  

Support  
Team Teaching.
Principal or Vice Principal being around when teacher in class. 126

Time tabled with another subject. 202

Involve Vice-Principal in an informal way, before making formal approach. 236

**Progress**

Got agreement that teacher would take Senior Cycle at the Pass level only. 72

With one teacher the problem was not following the syllabus - teaching 'manners' etc. I insisted he follow the course and leave pastoral care to those timetabled for it. 83

The threat of the inspector seemed to help a little. 217

Department meetings helped. 297

**Punctuality**

In both cases timekeeping is the major problem. Continuous attention to this (reminders) is required. 156

Undertaking from teacher that issue of punctuality (which was only one aspect of teacher’s incompetency) would be addressed. 190

**Policy**

There is very little available in the way of inservice. H. Dip. Training is inadequate to help deal with discipline. 62
Question 16:

What is the situation concerning incompetent teachers who left a school permanently?

Question 16.1 How many principals witnessed an incompetent teacher permanently leaving a school?

Incompetent teacher permanently leaving a school

Of the 325 principals responding, 112 (34.5%) reported that they had witnessed an incompetent teacher permanently leaving their school. Although there were 112 principals, there were 114 incompetent teachers who left permanently (two principals each had seen two incompetent teachers leave their schools).

Question 16.2 What form did the incompetent teacher's exit take?

Table 5-79 gives the breakdown of the form of exit of the incompetent teachers in descending order of frequency.

Table 5-79 Form of Incompetent Teacher's exit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form of Exit</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early retirement</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>42.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary and not re-appointed</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>61.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resignation</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sick leave</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>84.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>89.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching post in a different school</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>92.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retirement at age 65</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>95.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career change</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>97.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissal</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>99.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-deployed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 2)

17 (42%) left by the 'early retirement' route and 22 (19.6%) had been temporary and were not re-appointed. The 5 in the 'Other' category comprised 2 career breaks, 1 disability pension, and 1 non-union person asked to leave by parents (the fifth 'Other' was not elaborated upon).
Question 16.3 How many of the exits were means of avoiding disciplinary action or dismissal?

Following question 43, which elicited the form of the exit, question 44 asked, "Was it done in order to avoid possible disciplinary action or dismissal?" This was answered on behalf of 85 of the 114 leavers (29 did not respond to this question). 32 (38%) of the principals believed that the exit had taken place to avoid disciplinary action or dismissal.

Stories of Exits

Principals were asked to briefly outline what happened (without identifying detail). The comments are presented with reference superscripts as explained above.

Note on coding

Each comment is preceded by square brackets containing three entries - e.g. [4 - 8 - 2]. This code amplifies the story on the basis of answers to earlier questions concerning that particular teacher's exit. It can be understood as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Number</th>
<th>Age of incompetent teacher when leaving</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>under 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>24 - 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>36 - 45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>46 - 55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>56 - 65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Second Number</th>
<th>Form of exit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Teaching post in a different school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Redeployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Temporary and not re-appointed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Retirement at 65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Career change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Resignation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Early retirement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Sick leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Dismissal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Third Number</th>
<th>Exit to avoid disciplinary action or dismissal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus [4 - 8 - 2] before a comment means that the teacher concerned was aged between 46 and 55, took early retirement and did not do so to avoid disciplinary action or dismissal.
Stories Categorised

The stories can be categorised into eight as follows:

- Early retirement (34)
- Temporary and not re-appointed (9)
- Resignation (8)
- Miscellaneous (7)
- Disability Pension (6)
- Sick leave (6)
- Teaching post in a different school (3)
- Dismissal (2)

Early Retirement

[4 - 8 - 2] The teacher, realising that he had a problem, sought retirement under strand I of P.C.W. he was granted his retirement. 7

[4 - 7 - 2] Acknowledged his incompetence and applied for early retirement under Strand One. 194

[3 - 8 - 2] Called teacher to BOM, he was represented by ASTI. It was agreed that there was a problem, a programme was put in place for 1 year - view to improve. Review at Christmas - meeting again with ASTI. No improvement - Teacher directed to early retirement. 9

[2 - 8 - 2] Saw the light. Got alternative employment while on career break. 33

[5 - 7/8 - 2] On confrontation teacher opted to go after 38 yrs service. 39

[5 - 8 - 2] Teacher was finding the going too tough and realised, without too much pushing, that it was time to go. 106

[5 - 8 - 2] Teacher became seriously ill and was granted early retirement on grounds of ill health. 25

[4 - 8 - 2] Chaos in classroom on a regular basis. Difficult to timetable teacher. Fewer and fewer wanted to take subjects. Falling numbers in Senior Business classes - huge pressure on other subjects - Good teachers threatened with redeployment. Invited teacher to take early retirement and colleagues in union 'encouraged' same! 37

[4 - 8 - blank] Pastoral care approach. 41

[4 - 8 - 1] Kept detailed file on teacher. Put pressure on teacher to take early retirement. Teacher summoned to meeting of BOM. 53
I met the teacher on a few occasions with 2 witnesses - the union steward, I had a senior staff member. I gave her copies of letters from parents and asked her to help me respond to the various allegations as to that date I had only acknowledged receipt of same. She promised that she would do so in writing. She went on sick leave 2 days later and did not return - this was the end of a longer process.  

The teacher did not like being told to stick to the course. When early retirement became available he applied. He has left this year (1998).  

Teacher was given early retirement, supported by BOM. He believed that problem lay with students rather than himself.  

Teacher became ill - unable to cope - eventually opted for early retirement.  

Actually 3 staff have taken early retirement over the years. Each case took about 2 years of painstakingly documenting and applying gentle pressure. I found Dept. officials in Salary Section and ASTI senior officers very helpful - Otherwise I was on my own.  

Discussed matter with teacher (for umpteenth time) and explained dissatisfaction. Teacher went on sick leave. Sought early retirement on Strand 1. Granted.  

Teacher took career break (3 yrs) and then retired.  

Took early retirement.  

The teacher decided to take early retirement under relevant strand (teaching difficulties).  

Teacher agreed to retire.  

The teacher regarded teaching as part time and felt it was interfering with the much more lucrative business he was running. When his timetable was 'inconvenient' he gave notice.  

After considerable pressure the teacher retired. I had to negotiate with her, the Department, psychiatric specialist, the union in the school and the union in head office.  

Prefer not to mention details.  

Teacher was told he had classroom problem, no discipline. We gave number of warnings and a letter advising that he might be dismissed. He went to his union who got him early retirement on health grounds.
[4 - 8 - 2] After teacher had been on sick leave for considerable periods his union helped him to negotiate early retirement. 247

[5 - 8 - 2] The teacher applied for early retirement. I backed it and gave a full report of his problems which were mainly ones of stress. 250

[5 - 8 - 2] Department of Education offered scheme for early retirement with attractive financial remuneration package. Teacher accepted it. 272

[5 - 8 - 1] Teacher was put under a lot of pressure to take early retirement. Ultimatum of early retirement or dismissal. Board of Management was supportive. ASTI was also helpful. 282

[5 - 8 - 2] Out for a year on medical cert. Due to stress. Decided to opt for early retirement. 284

[3 - 8 - 2] Agreed to job share - to reduce T/T problem caused by inability to teach. Job sharing T/T v. favourable for 2 years then disimproved due to no job sharing. 292

[4 - 8 - 2] My prayers were answered! In the case of two teachers - I still can't believe my luck! One will be taking early retirement; one went to a rural school. 299

[4 - 8 - blank] Teacher herself recognised that she was under great stress and was in a financial position which enabled her to take early retirement. 308

[3 - 8 - 2] Teacher recognised the increasing difficulties and opted for early retirement. 321

[5 - 8 - 1] Struck a pupil – who complained – and procedures strictly followed. Resigned (with advice of ASTI). 325

Temporary and not re-appointed

[2 - 3 - 2] Teacher had health problems, stayed a few weeks and left - temporary only. 15


[2 - 3 - blank] Teacher was temporary part time. Hours were reduced and she left. 85

[3 - 11/3 - 1] Non union member. Was asked to leave. (Desired by parents) He tried to involve the union. 97

[1 - 3 - 2] The post for which teacher applied ceased. 127
Teacher did not apply for a permanent post which was coming up for those subjects. - Knew she would not get it in an interview situation.

Did not give a good reference when contacted by phone by another prospective employer.

After negotiation, and refusal to pursue inservice training BOM refused to renew contract.

The wholetime teacher, whose classes were taken, returned.

Resignation

Teacher redeployed from another school. Under pressure from day one. Spent two years teaching here. Absent for lengthy periods on stress related illness certs. Eventually resigned from teaching.

Teacher resigned the day before dismissal was to become effective. Under pressure from day one. Spent two years teaching here. Absent for lengthy periods on stress related illness certs. Eventually resigned from teaching.

Full time substitute teacher who had little class control and poor teaching delivery. Bored students quickly complained. A number of sessions by myself attempted to turn things around. Eventually persuaded teacher to leave rather than face into difficult disciplinary action and eventual dismissal.

Teacher in question had a serious alcohol problem - associated with psychiatric problems. Over 1o years of confrontation, promises, dealing with union (quite positive), steps towards dismissal were set in motion. Teacher resigned before dismissal.

Placed facts before teacher. Explained likely outcome. Resign with dignity .... Or else!

In chatting over long period of time the resignation was mutually agreed and teacher informed colleagues of decision before the redeployment forms for appointment reached the school.

School (I) worked with union (ASTI). They saw the light and encouraged teacher to resign. She had a very broken career due to mental instability.

Facing courts / Legal action.

Miscellaneous

Teacher was 'moved on' by administrator.

Both were Religious and the Provincial Superior gave them opportunity to train for another career and one went to a Third World country.
[2 - 11 - 1] Subjects not needed. 234

[5 - 5 - 2] retired at 65. 253

[5 - 7/11 - 1] Ended up in the High Court ...After 2 yrs ... a career break eventually followed. 3 yrs later retirement ensued! 266

[4 - 6/8 - 2] Close family member persuaded teacher to give up teaching. 301

[2 - 3 - 2] Probationary teacher redeployed in off supplementary panel. Procedures followed but whole process very difficult. 314

Disability pension

[4 - 11 - 1] Teacher applied for and received disability pension with help of ASTI. 58

[4 - 9 - 2] Extended sick leave leading to retirement on grounds of disability. 124

[4 - 9 - 2] 1. Teacher was spoken to on many occasions.
2. She agreed to listen to the students' side of the problem.
3. They explained that her behaviour caused students to leave and gave examples over a number of years.
4. This was harsh and not to be recommended. She had little support from the staff or steward and took sick leave. 136

[4 - 9,11 - 1] Board of Management had asked department for inspection. Teacher went out sick before this took place and eventually retired on disability. 141

[4 - 8/9 - 2] Teacher took sick leave, due to nervous stress. Was persuaded by doctor and principal to apply for disability retirement. This was eventually granted. 157

[3 - 7 - 1] Disability advocated by ASTI - Diabetic condition exacerbated poor teaching ability. 165

Sick Leave


[4 - 9 - 2] Teacher is chronic alcoholic, very poor teacher, very poor results, used his 'days' (10 days every 3 months) plus other medically certified absence. Invited to meet Board to satisfy the Board that he was properly treating his illness. Union accepted this distinction. Case was referred to the C.M.O. Teacher was offered early retirement on sick grounds. 45
[3 - 9 - 1] Many meetings with teacher to try to get her to accept the situation. Got some friends of hers who realized the situation, to advise her that it was best to go for disability. 75

[2 - 9 - 2] Remedial teacher unable to cope even with small classes - took sick leave leading to sabbatical and eventually resignation. 252

[4 - 9 - 2] Teacher went on sick leave and pursued an interest in computer programming which he has had for a long time. He hopes to make a career change. 254

[2 - 9 - 1] Teacher advised to take sick leave. Offered to speak to the teacher's siblings (to arrive at a decision to leave teaching) Offer of sick leave (certified by GP / other) was accepted. 276

**Teaching Post in a different school**

[4 - 1 - 1] He looked for teaching posts elsewhere and took on teaching different subjects from here, in another school. 13

[3 - 1 - 2] Teacher with panel rights transferred to permanent post. 135

[2 - 1 - 1] Afraid of dismissal. 306

**Dismissal**

[2 - 10 - blank] Teacher assaulted the principal in full view of other staff members. Was dismissed summarily following hearing. On appeal resignation was accepted and this fact recorded. 95

[2 - 10 - blank] Principal met with teacher over 2 yrs.
- Kept records of meetings and complaints
- Met with union Head Office rep. to work on it.
- Went before the Board.
- Legal rout taken by teacher, not industrial relations route.
- Dismissal

Employment Appeals Tribunal. 210
'CENSUS' OF INCOMPETENT TEACHERS WHO LEFT

Following Question 16, which dealt with the nature of the exit of an incompetent teacher who had permanently left the school, Question 17 was concerned with the characteristics of the teacher concerned. Principals were presented with a type of 'census form' which they were asked to complete in order to describe the teacher. This form was similar to the 'census form for the current incompetent teachers.

The presentation is slightly different to that for current incompetent teachers. Because they left at different times, the incompetent teachers who left do not form a coherent contemporaneous cohort so their demographic and other characteristics cannot be directly compared with those of current incompetent teachers or teachers in general.

QUESTION 17:

What are the characteristics of the incompetent teachers who left a school permanently?

Question 17.1 What is the gender breakdown of incompetent teachers who permanently left an Irish voluntary school?

Gender Breakdown

There were 114 incompetent teachers who left. The gender of 98 of these was reported. 46 (47%) were male and 52 (53%) were female.

Question 17.2 What was the Religious status of the incompetent teachers who left?

Religious Status

The Religious status of 102 of the 114 'gone' incompetent teachers was reported. There were 4 Religious/Clerics (4%) and 98 lay people (96%).
Question 17.3 What was the age profile of incompetent teachers who left?

**Age Breakdown**

71% were over 45 and 23% were over 55 while 26% were between 25 and 35.

**Table 5- 80 Age Breakdown of incompetent teachers who left**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25 - 35</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 - 45</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>42.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46 - 55</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>71.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56 - 65</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 17)

There is a noticeable drop in the age bracket from 36 to 45. Only 16.5% were in this category.

**Figure 5.18 Bar chart of age breakdown of incompetent teachers who left.**
Question 17.4 What was the employment status of the incompetent teachers who left?

**Employment Status**

Table 5-81 presents the employment status of the incompetent teacher who left cross-tabulated with gender.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary Whole Time</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary Part Time</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligible Part Time (EPT)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>46</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

77% had permanent incremental posts.

Question 17.5 What was the length of experience of the incompetent teachers who left?

**Experience**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 - 3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 - 6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 - 9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>31.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 - 12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>36.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 - 15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>40.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 - 18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>46.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 - 21</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>60.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 or more</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>98</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

52 (53%) had 19 year or more years of experience while 29 (45%) had between zero and six years of experience.
Figure 5.19 Bar chart of experience of incompetent teacher

Question 17.6 Had the teacher been competent at some time in the past?

Past Competence

Table 5-83 Incompetent teacher competent in the past

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>38.3%</td>
<td>38.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
<td>59.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>40.4%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 20)

36 (38.3%) believed that the teacher had been incompetent at some time in the past, 20 (21.3%) believed that the teacher had never been competent and 38 (40.4%) didn't know. This total of 94 responses means there were 20 missing from the 114 principals completing 'census' forms for incompetent teachers who had left.
Question 17.7 What was the main qualification of the incompetent teacher who left?

Main Qualification

Table 5-84 below presents, in decreasing frequency, the main qualification of the incompetent teachers who had left.

Table 5-84  Main Qualifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B.A. H.Dip. in Ed.</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>67.0</td>
<td>67.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.Sc. H.Dip. in Ed.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>78.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Comm H.Dip.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>88.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Ec. dip.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>90.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art Dip.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>92.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.A. H. Dip.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>94.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.Ed. Woodwork</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>96.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Mus. H. Dip.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>97.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.Sc. H. Dip in Ed.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>98.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.A. Phys. Ed.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>99.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 14)

Question 17.8 Did the incompetent teacher who left have a post of responsibility?

Post of Responsibility

Table 5-85  Posts of Responsibility of incompetent teachers who left

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Post</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>54.8</td>
<td>54.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice-Principal</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>58.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Post</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>79.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Post</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Missing = 10)

Of the 104 described, 48 (45%) had a post of responsibility of some sort.
QUESTION 18:

What is the relationship between the teaching qualifications of the incompetent teacher who left and the subjects being taught?

Just as in the incompetent teacher 'census' for current teachers, principals were asked to list the four main subjects in which the incompetent teacher who left was theoretically qualified to teach in descending order of importance. They were then asked to list the four main teaching subjects of that teacher in descending order of actual teaching time. The idea was that these two lists could be compared.

Question 18.1 What subjects was the incompetent teacher who left qualified to teach?

Subject 1, Subject 2, etc. are the four subjects ranked by the principal as the subjects that the teacher who left was qualified to teach in decreasing order of expertise. Table 5-86 presents these in descending order of frequency.

Question 18.2 What subjects was the incompetent teacher who left actually teaching?

This is followed by Table 5-87 which presents Subject 1, subject 2, etc. as the four subject ranked by the principal that the teacher who left had actually taught in descending order of teaching time.
### Subjects that incompetent teachers who left were qualified to teach

Table 5: 86 Subjects that incompetent teachers who left were theoretically qualified to teach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject 1</th>
<th>Subject 2</th>
<th>Subject 3</th>
<th>Subject 4</th>
<th>Teachers with Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Studies</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Organisation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin or Greek</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Woodwork</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>P.E.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guidance</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
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<td>Applied Maths</td>
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<tr>
<td>Philosophy</td>
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<td>Computers</td>
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<td>Technology</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction Studies</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SubjectsActually Taught by incompetent teachers who left

Table 5-87 Subjects actually taught

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Subject 1</th>
<th>Subject 2</th>
<th>Subject 3</th>
<th>Subject 4</th>
<th>Teachers with Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
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<td>Business Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Business Organisation</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accounting</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Classes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Economics</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civics</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remedial</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tech Graphics</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>CSPE</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin or Greek</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodwork</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Applied Maths</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction Studies</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.P.T. Business</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physics with Chemistry</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cricket</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Service</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chess</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question 18.3 What is the match between subject taught and subject qualification for individual teachers?

Match between subject qualification and subject taught

Main subject taught = Main subject qualification

Of the 114 incompetent teachers who left and for whom 'census' forms were completed, 72 (63%) had been spending the greatest amount of their time teaching the subject in which they were best qualified.

Table 5-88 Main teaching subject matching main qualification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Business studies</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Organisation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Economics</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodwork</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Main Subject = Main or Second subject qualification

Of the 114 incompetent teachers who left and for whom 'census' forms had been completed, 83 (73%) had been spending the greatest amount of time teaching a subject which had been their main or second subject qualification.

Table 5-89 Main teaching subject matching main or second subject qualification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
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<td>Mathematics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Studies</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Business Organisation</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Economics</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodwork</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tech Graphics</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>83</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question 18.4 What is the mismatch between subject taught and subject qualification for individual teachers?

Main subject taught not the main subject qualification

Of the 114 incompetent teachers who left and for whom 'census' forms had been completed, 24 (21%) had been teaching a subject other than the main subject in which they were qualified.

Table 5-90 Subject taught other than the main subject qualification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business studies</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Science</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE</td>
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<td>Remedial</td>
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<td>Guidance</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tech Graphics</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Classes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.P.T. Business</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>24</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Main subject taught neither the main nor the second subject qualification

Of the 114 incompetent teachers who left and for whom 'census' forms had been completed, 12 (11%) had been teaching a subject other than the main subject or the second in which they were qualified.

Table 5-91 Subject taught other than main or second subject

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Number</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business Studies</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remedial</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Classes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.P.T. Business</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Main subject taught not mentioned in the first three subject qualifications

Of the 114 incompetent teachers who left and for whom 'census' forms had been completed, 5 (4%) had been teaching a subject not mentioned in the first three subjects that they are theoretically qualified to teach. The subjects concerned were Mathematics (1), Business Studies (1), Religion (1), PE (1), and V.P.T. Business (1).

Main subject taught not mentioned at all in subject qualifications

Of the 114 incompetent teachers who left and for whom 'census' forms had been completed, 2 (2%) had been teaching a subject not mentioned at all in the subjects that they are theoretically qualified to teach. The subjects concerned were Business studies (1) and PE (1).
QUESTION 19:

What was the nature of the incompetence of the teachers who had left?

This question was treated in the same way as Question 5. Based on the definition of incompetent teacher, a type of 'semantic difference' table was constructed. Thirteen characteristics that might possibly be associated with incompetence (e.g. excellent discipline / dreadful discipline) were presented as opposite poles with a seven point scale between. Principals were asked to circle the point where they would place the teacher along the continuum.

The results are presented as a series of bar charts showing the percentage selecting each position. The mean and Standard deviation is also presented as an indication of central tendency. The number of responses for each (N) is also presented. Since the total number of 'census' forms was 114, clearly (114 - N) is the number missing.

**Question 19.1 What is the discipline quality?**

The options presented were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dreadful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 5.20 Discipline Quality**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Discipline Quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mode = 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean = 2.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median = 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 97
Question 19.2

What was the discipline type?

No control whatsoever 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline Type</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overly strict</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.21 Discipline Type

Question 19.3

What had been the feelings of students?

Hated by students 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Feelings</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loved by students</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.22 Student feelings

Student Feelings

Mode = 3
Mean = 3.11
Median = 3
Question 19.4  What had been the teacher's attitude to students?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Totally negative attitude</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totally positive with students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Attitude to students**

- Mode = 4
- Mean = 3.17
- Median = 3

![Figure 5.23 Attitude to students](image)

**Question 19.5**  What had been the classroom climate?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dreadful classroom climate</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent classroom climate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Classroom Climate**

- Mode = 4
- Mean = 2.54
- Median = 4

![Figure 5.24 Classroom Climate](image)
Question 19.6 What was the teacher's subject knowledge?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dreadful subject knowledge</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent subject knowledge</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.25 Subject knowledge

Mode = 6
Mean = 4.82
Median = 5

Question 19.7 How good a timekeeper was the incompetent teacher?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very frequently late</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent timekeeper</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.26 Timekeeping

Mode = 6
Mean = 4.38
Median = 4
Question 19.8
How good was the attendance of the incompetent teacher?

Attendance
Mode = 7
Mean = 4.49
Median = 5

Figure 5.27 Attendance

Question 19.9
How well used the teacher follow the curriculum?

Curriculum Following
Mode = 4
Mean = 3.95
Median = 4
Question 19.10 How well had their students performed in examinations?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>under-perform</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students do</td>
<td>Extremely well</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.29 Students' Exam performance

Students' exam performance

Mode = 1
Mean = 2.54
Median = 2

Question 19.11 How co-operative had the teacher been?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Completely uncooperative</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completely co-operative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.30 Co-operation Level

Co-operation Level

Mode = 5
Mean = 4.1
Median = 4
Question 19.12  What was the teacher's relationship with colleagues?

Extremely difficult with colleagues 1

Relationships
Mode = 4
Mean = 3.95
Median = 4

Question 19.13  What was the teacher's emotional stability?

Totally erratic 1

Emotional Stability
Mode = 1
Mean = 3.37
Median = 3

Figure 5.31  Relationship with colleagues

Figure 5.32  Emotional stability
Question 20:

What are the opinions of Principals concerning incompetent teachers in general?

Opinionnaire

The principals were offered twelve statements:

- Incompetent teachers are major sources of stress for principals.
- Incompetent teachers mean extra work for their colleagues.
- In Ireland it is impossible to dismiss a teacher on the grounds of incompetence alone.
- The problem of incompetent teachers can never be dealt with because unions defend the indefensible.
- University Education Departments give teaching diplomas to people who do not deserve them.
- Principals haven't the time to tackle the problem.
- Incompetent teachers should be required to have counselling or retraining.
- People should be screened more carefully before being accepted for teaching training.
- The type of incompetent teacher defined here can never become competent.
- Principals in general don't know how to tackle the problem of teaching incompetence.
- No matter what should be done, in actual fact nothing is going to be done about incompetent teachers.
- More assertive and demanding parents will make toleration of incompetent teachers more and more difficult.

With each of these statements they were presented with a five point Likert-type scale. They could select:

Agree strongly, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, or Disagree strongly.

5 4 3 2 1

Table 5-92 presents an overall summary of the results. This is followed by bar graphs illustrating the responses to each question.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Disagree strongly</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Agree strongly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incompetent teachers are major sources of stress for principals</td>
<td>N 315</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>65.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incompetent teachers mean extra work for their colleagues</td>
<td>N 315</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Ireland it is impossible to dismiss a teacher on the specific grounds of 'incompetence'</td>
<td>N 312</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>34.0</td>
<td>54.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The problem of incompetent teachers can never be dealt with because unions defend the indefensible</td>
<td>N 314</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>35.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Education departments give teaching diplomas to people who do not deserve them</td>
<td>N 314</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>34.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals haven't the time to tackle the problem</td>
<td>N 313</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incompetent teachers should be required to have counselling or retraining</td>
<td>N 314</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>57.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People should be screened more carefully before being accepted for teacher training</td>
<td>N 314</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The type of incompetent teacher defined here can never become competent</td>
<td>N 313</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals in general don't know how to tackle the problem of teaching incompetence</td>
<td>N 310</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No matter what should be done, in actual fact nothing is going to be done about incompetent teachers</td>
<td>N 313</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>23.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More assertive and demanding parents will make toleration and protection of incompetent teachers more and more difficult</td>
<td>N 316</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>49.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 5.33  Incompetent teachers are major sources of stress for principals

![Bar chart showing responses to the statement about incompetent teachers being major sources of stress for principals.]

- **Disagree**
- **Neither**
- **Agree**
- **Agree strongly**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Agree strongly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 315  
Mean = 4.61  
Median = 5  
Mode = 5

Figure 5.34  Incompetent teachers mean extra work for their teachers

![Bar chart showing responses to the statement about incompetent teachers meaning extra work for their teachers.]

- **Disagree**
- **Neither**
- **Agree**
- **Agree strongly**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Agree strongly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 315  
Mean = 4.32  
Median = 4  
Mode = 5
Figure 5.35  In Ireland it is impossible to dismiss a teacher on the specific grounds of incompetence

Figure 5.36  The Problem of incompetent teachers can never be dealt with because unions defend the indefensible
Figure 5.37  University Education Departments give teaching diplomas to people who do not deserve them

N = 314  
Mean = 3.99  
Median = 4  
Mode = 4

Figure 5.38  Principals haven't time to tackle the problem

N = 313  
Mean = 3.46  
Median = 4  
Mode = 4
Figure 5.39  Incompetent teachers should be required to have counselling or retraining

![Bar chart showing the percentages of people's responses to the statement.]

- Disagree strongly: 0.1
- Disagree: 0.2
- Neither: 0.3
- Agree: 0.35
- Agree strongly: 0.57

N = 314
Mean = 4.46
Median = 5
Mode = 5

Figure 5.40  People should be screened more carefully before being accepted for teacher training

![Bar chart showing the percentages of people's responses to the statement.]

- Disagree: 0.1
- Neither: 0.09
- Agree: 0.3
- Agree strongly: 0.59

N = 314
Mean = 4.46
Median = 5
Mode = 5
Figure 5.41  The type of incompetent teacher defined here can never become competent

![Bar chart showing the distribution of responses to the statement that incompetent teachers can never become competent. The chart indicates that most respondents disagree, with a few strong disagreements and strong agreements.](chart1)

- Disagree strongly: 11%
- Disagree: 24%
- Neither: 21%
- Agree: 32%
- Agree strongly: 26%

N = 313
Mean = 3.65
Median = 4
Mode = 4

Figure 5.42  Principals in general don’t know how to tackle the problem of teaching incompetence

![Bar chart showing the distribution of responses to the statement that principals don't know how to tackle teaching incompetence. The chart indicates that most respondents agree, with a few strong agreements and strong disagreements.](chart2)

- Disagree strongly: 0%
- Disagree: 11%
- Neither: 21%
- Agree: 48%
- Agree strongly: 18%

N = 310
Mean = 3.71
Median = 4
Mode = 4
Figure 5.43  No matter what *should* be done, in actual fact nothing is going to be done about incompetent teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agreement Level</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree strongly</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree strongly</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 313  
Mean = 3.58  
Median = 4  
Mode = 4

Figure 5.44  More assertive and demanding parents will make toleration and protection of incompetent teachers more and more difficult

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agreement Level</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree strongly</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 316  
Mean = 4.40  
Median = 4  
Mode = 5
Comments on Questionnaire

AT the end of the questionnaire principals had the option of writing comments, suggestions or reactions.

The comments can be categorised as follows:

- Theories (35)
- Encouragement (34)
- Miscellaneous (17)
- Degrees of incompetence (12)
- Please publish (10)
- Need for action (9)
- Probation (1)

Theories

All teachers should be licensed to teach, the license should be renewed every 7 years. Management must become more aware of the obligations to students as well as the rights of teachers. 45

Every situation has its own particular problems – 'Incompetence' in teaching is unlike incompetence in other spheres as classroom is shared with students who are themselves individuals. 50

We have a difficult, challenging, inner city school – very rewarding – fulfilling for some staff – but perhaps teachers who are unable to cope here would cope elsewhere? 93

'Failing' schools can be closed down in England. We do have teachers who 'fail' their students. There should be greater expectations from those who pay the teachers. 94

Principals must be empowered to observe classroom teaching and the work of teachers, pupils' homework etc. Without such being viewed as very unusual / abnormal. Some form of teacher appraisal must become the norm so that negative feedback can be seen in the light of previous positive feedback. 95

Incompetent teachers are more of a problem than undisciplined children. 116

Orison, a frisson of apprehension was my reaction to the questionnaire as it seemed to me (perhaps I have misread it) that a need to discipline, confront, dismiss IT's [incompetent teachers] underlies the line of enquiry. I can think of few other miseries in one's professional life to rival the experience of an IT. I feel that a teacher may remedy shortcomings through experience – up to c. 6 years at the task of teaching. If still an IT I hold little hope of improvement. I would by far prefer to see young IT's encouraged to pursue other careers while this is still possible rather than consider sanctions.
Yours in anonymity! 121

There is better screening for the Higher Diploma now that the places are more limited. 109

Very well thought out! Made me think more deeply about how we are handling our problem and realise how lucky I am that I have support of VP and Chairperson and co-operation of teacher himself. 113

Principals do try but as we are in a caring profession we cannot be too harsh. Counselling availability would help and would back up principals. Principals do tackle the more serious cases. 132

Sometimes people commence their teaching careers quite competently Life’s ‘slings and arrows’ may result in a deterioration of standards – accompanied frequently by sympathy of colleagues. These are most intractable. 156

Yes but they (more assertive parents) will make it difficult for the principal – not the teacher. The problem is that incompetence is virtually impossible to prove. I see little prospect of the Teachers’ Council improving the situation. 163

Perhaps a question of incompetent teachers who have been promoted to posts of responsibility. It would have been interesting to discover principals’ defence of such promotion. 171

Principals in general do know (how to tackle) but because of lack of back up from the Inspectorate of the Dept of Ed they are powerless in the face of Union and Legal constraints. 173

A number of teachers have trouble in some classes but they are hardworking and dedicated. 175

The possibility of taking early retirement due to incompetence is a major advance in tackling the problem. 179

I am a little sceptical of questionnaires. They can never be all inclusive or comprehensive. One element here I suspect is the type who can produce work as a student but once permanent settles down ‘forever’. Is to the interviews or references or Dep. supervisors part to see the weakness. 183

I agree that some teachers are excellent on all levels. There are some who are not very gifted re imparting information i.e. on a technical level, but thankfully all our teachers try to do their best. Very incompetent substitutes were not taken back to our school when his/her subjects were required. 185
Incompetent teachers should be required to have counselling or retraining. 188

I am lucky in this staff - the one so called incompetent teacher is 'tolerable' all round but would be better off retired - does not (admits it) like young people, introvert, no real communication with colleagues. As I said I affirm, encourage help (fairly) with discipline. Has a short few years to retirement. Overall I have not a major problem with this one individual. Good working relationship with him. In a former school about 1/3 of staff (about 10 in number) incompetent - it was hell. I could write a book on that situation. But the book, while true, would probably be on the index or I would be in jail. Best of luck with Ph.D. on incompetence among teachers - Needs to be highlighted even though overall not a major problem in most schools - more openness now about it and possible solutions. One problem is sometimes incompetent teachers are the last to retire!!!

There is an urgent need for a common method of assessing teachers and monitoring performance. 205

When an incompetent teacher is the only teacher in a Department, a principal has no come backs. Students never get a break. On the only (sick) hand, one doesn't have the students saying they don't want to be in Mr. X's class. The incompetent teacher in my school fails in the technical and productive area. 216

Parents are afraid to rock the boat. 230

Perhaps we could monitor H.Dip. students and temporary teachers more carefully. This is a record from a school which amalgamated in 1995! We are now a Community College. Thank you. 231

Every school has their quota of high fliers, middle of the road and struggling teachers. The strugglers and middle of the road often have other important qualities which are an asset to the school - generosity, willingness to help out, skills in non-teaching area, willingness to listen. The students often recognise these qualities and respect them. They just ask not to have the teacher for the Leaving Certificate. Principals speak to these teachers, often reach accommodation with them. Sometimes when made aware of parental/student criticism they are given the right of reply either in person or in writing - one finds an improvement for a while after these sessions. 237

Observation of teachers: I would like to do this. As a principal who has chosen to teach I have very strong views on effective teaching. However, I would bring on industrial relations problems were I to insist on observing teachers. Many would not mind but the vulnerable would and the legalists on the staff would ensure that there would be Union intervention. We must work for this as a legal requirement for principals which cannot be subverted or resisted by teacher unions. The good teacher, the hardworking teacher has nothing to fear. 237
Re the matter of training for principals; No amount of training will help as long as the present structures in voluntary secondary schools prevail.

a) No real delegation
b) Powerful Union intervention - no governmental effort to curb the teaching Unions who in my opinion are now in the role of prostitute 'All of the power and none of the responsibility'

Result: Principals of large schools, with alert parents, work draconian, Victorian workshop hours in order to 'deliver the goods'.

Suggestion: It might be worth your while to research numbers who actually apply for principalships especially for voluntary secondary schools in large urban areas.

May I refer to Competent teachers: many feel that their job is to lecture, deliver the goods re academic areas but feel that their job ends there. They could never be regarded as incompetent but their contribution to other aspects of school life can often be nil.

I reject the suggestion that schools tolerate / protect incompetent teachers. I regard incompetence as springing from a lack of balance within the teacher and/or in his/her approach/vision of education.

Early retirement is helping teachers in their 50's to get out earlier than they might before. Hopeful, things are improving.

Not an easy task - I am challenged to put more energy into this one! - an energy saver in the long run, perhaps if one could successfully i.e. 'get rid of' at least the extreme cases (I've got one).

A very difficult problem - Unions lack a professional approach - heads in the sand.

More assertive parents are probably the only hope of getting rid of incompetent teachers, in my opinion. Good luck with the studies.

One must balance compassion for teacher against the irreparable damage to students' lives.

Encouragement

Best of luck with your research.

Best of luck with your research.

Best of luck with the Ph.D.

Good luck.

Good luck with this.
Delighted to be able to assist you in your work and hope your research will help some ‘suffering’ principals in the future. 

Good luck with your Ph.D.

Congratulations on a very effective and thought-provoking questionnaire.

I must admit that I found the Questionnaire helpful personally and equally that lack of experience as principal may bias some of my results. Best of luck.

How do you find time to do all this work! Good luck.

Good luck Orison.

Interesting subject for all heads!

Good luck with the Ph.D.

Every success.

Best of luck!

Good luck with Ph.D.

Good luck!

Best wishes with research.
I hope this is understandable – Good luck with the Ph.D.

Good luck with the work.

Best of luck with the research!

Good luck.

Best of luck – Enjoy your summer!

Good luck.

A very interesting questionnaire – well crafted. Interesting item worth consideration.

Best wishes.

Good luck with your research.

Best wishes with Ph.D.
Good luck with your research. 216

I wish you luck. 257

Good luck with the Ph.D. Orison! 263

Best wishes with your research. 264

Good luck with the research - I marvel at your time management. 314

I assume that the author of this questionnaire displays the same level of expertise and persistence in all professional activities as in the administration of this questionnaire. Well done! 321

Sorry for delay. Good luck. 323

Best of luck with the work. 324

Miscellaneous

There was a teacher considered to be in the incompetent arena in the school before I became principal .... Have not dealt with that. 30

In the light of my relative inexperience in my present position. I cannot be very helpful re. History of incompetence since the degree of incompetence dealt with lack of knowledge of students and difficulties that arose with J.C. project. 89

The teacher I described left our school about 8 or 9 years ago. Presently and thankfully we are blessed — minor problems only. 157

The dilemma is that so many pupils are getting grinds (even for O.L. Junior cert.) that her results are always very respectable and so she can't see the problem! I was very disappointed that such skills as one would have expected a teacher to pick up when doing remedial inservice - structure, pre-teaching, repetition, have not transferred to the classroom. 197

The only way to get rid of incompetent teachers is to pay them to leave. I did that once in my former school which was fee-paying and I had the backing of a powerful board of governors. Otherwise they are dug in and won't budge. 199

We're in the middle of a 'case' at present. Huge workload for the principal in preparing the ground! Sorry this is late! 210

Sorry for the delay. 228
In the case of No. 2 of my incompetent teachers I have now discovered that after 5 years leave of absence she has been granted early retirement with my help. Deep down she recognized that she had a problem with the 'modern student'. She has retired with her dignity intact. 237

I have marked my three incompetent teachers 1, 2, 3 because in the case of 2 and 3 I can cope. In the case of 1 the problem is insoluble. No. 1 is at present on leave of absence. Parents, teachers, pupils, Board of management all are happy with this. The change of atmosphere in the subject area is indescribable. 237

Stress for principals - no incompetent teacher except for No. 1 has caused me major stress. The others had my sympathy. I would have found the power to dismiss a teacher an embarrassment except in the case of No. 1. If I had the power I would willingly have dismissed No. 1 - due to humiliation and neglect of students, unwillingness to co-operate with School authorities, etc. No. 1 was insubordinate openly, confrontational openly, gave false statements to the Union and others, had powerful contacts within the Union, reduced fellow teachers, parents and students to tears. In 15 years as principal I have had confrontational meetings with Union every year re this teacher, I have tried to take legal advice, I could not meet her alone on a one to one basis. When I requested meetings with this teacher and school steward she found ways of not being available for a meeting. I could go on and on. 237

I found some of the questions were too black and white for me to give full answers. 253

The incompetent teacher had left the school before I became principal so I do not have sufficient information to complete. 258

Q17 did not allow me to give an answer, as I do not know what would be the reaction of teachers to me formally observing them. It has never arisen. 265

I worry about confidentiality in relation to incompetent teachers who have left. 299

Because I'm new to this school I found it difficult to give you realistic answers. Many answers based on impressions and experience from the past. 317

One must not be defeatist. I managed to dismiss a teacher thanks to the god advice and excellent help from IBEC. 322

Degrees of incompetence

Perhaps degrees of incompetence might have been more clearly delineated - the teachers to which I refer would probably be regarded as 'mildly' incompetent - their difficulties
are more due to personality than to lack of willingness. You will find the 'mildly' incompetent in all careers and professions.\textsuperscript{5}

There are degrees of incompetency. This is my worst case. Early retirement is the most humane option. In our rural community where the teacher involved is from the local community and well known, any move to remove a teacher becomes well known locally. P.S. I have replied to this at once as it is a thorn in my side, a constant irritant.\textsuperscript{14}

I found your definitions of incompetence interesting.\textsuperscript{211}

I do not think I have had a teacher who fully satisfied your definition of incompetence. Vague accusations are often made against teachers. I would need specific details of classes neglected etc. before taking action.\textsuperscript{212}

Very difficult questionnaire - one deals with different types of incompetence differently.\textsuperscript{215}

Nature and extent of the incompetence does not seem to be reflected in the responses! Causes of incompetence are relevant: here they are health and personality related in both cases, leading to severe communication / relationship difficulties with pupils [MS and Manic Depression] \textsuperscript{232}

My experience in leadership (and preparation for same) in other areas of education and outside it has provided me with adequate resources for my present position. Whole school evaluation is, for me, the most appropriate context in which teacher incompetence can be assessed.\textsuperscript{234}

It is a sobering experience to look at this problem. Education is suffering - excellent students are underachieving - poor students are diminished further. The Department of Education has not taken responsibility for teaching standards to date.\textsuperscript{236}

I feel that the man in question suffered because the culture in our school does not lend itself to tolerance of diversity. He was not from the area, is quite gentle and introverted and was perceived as the 'weakest' among the staff by the pupils. The macho culture of the school did not allow a comprehensive discipline system which could have, I feel, have helped him. However he has admitted to me that he took the teaching job first day to get home from England and never intended to stay in the job for this length of time. He felt himself that he wasn't meant to be a teacher.\textsuperscript{254}

I have teachers who would be guilty of some of these failures, especially productive, sometimes/often judgement, occasionally tardiness but not what I would consider to be 'a sufficient and chronic amount of failure.'\textsuperscript{298}

Some incompetency due to 'outside' factors - alcohol drugs, gambling etc. may/ can be tackled and remedied when 'problem' faced. Other incompetency - loss of discipline and confidence etc. - I have never seen 'recaptured.'\textsuperscript{301}
As luck would have it this teacher with perhaps one or two others would be 'weak' teachers. Overall not a major problem for me. In one school (not this one) I found 1/3 of the staff really incompetent in a disadvantaged area - wow it was really a bad situation - if I could I would have shut that school. At present overall I'm lucky and happy with the staff. I think there is little if any chance of improving incompetent teachers.

Please Publish
The very best of luck, an interesting research topic. One that I hope yields some ideas on solving the issues.

Great Questionnaire Orison .... Good luck with the research! I look forward to reading your results.

Good luck with the research. Well worth organising some in-service for principals on this issue.

Look forward to hearing results. A very important topic. Good luck.

I am delighted that a 'principal' has decided to highlight this major problem in all schools – I admire your courage in so doing. I would love to write at length about this morally unacceptable situation. But would be ‘afraid’ to do so. Students have my fullest sympathy and for the sake of excellent lay principals, I do hope your results are well publicised.

I consider this to be a very important area – statement No. 1 above (major source of stress for principal) is absolutely true for me and anybody who can reduce the stress will be greatly treasured!!

If you find a magic solution please publish! For two years I have attempted to find one. The only things I am sure of are my own powerlessness and lack of competence in the area. However I am not throwing in the towel yet!

Good luck with the research. I hope you get some publicity from your research e.g. taken on board by ASTI, TUI, Dept of E and S, Management Bodies.

Your findings on the above will be interesting and I wish you the best of luck.

Keep this topic in the public eye!

Need for action
It was hard to generalise, but I have to say that while most teachers try hard, any can pass through a bad patch healthwise or emotionally or when affected by problems such as alcoholism, and this can create huge problems for the principal. Pupils do not deserve the
really incompetent teacher, and action should always be taken, however hard it may be. The current leave of absence scheme is a huge benefit to cope with the temporary problems that may arise. 13

Well done! This topic needs investigation and action. Regulations for entry to teaching need to be updated and a teaching council established. 29

It is a grave injustice to generations of young people who have incompetent teachers imposed on them. These people would not be tolerated in other employment. How much more should they be extracted from teaching. 33

Good luck with the Ph.D. This area needs to be tackled – not least for the stress it places on hardworking committed teaching. 136

It is not don't know how to tackle but do not have means to deal with this problem. All initiatives re early retirement / sick leave must come from the teacher. Where is the clause that allows me to initiate an early retirement – or send (not just request) teacher to counselling. 160

How I wish someone would do something for us, principals, who are so burdened with incompetent teachers. This must be quite an interesting survey216.

Principalship in my view is a very frustrating and unrewarding job because of the lack of support from any source and lack of authority. 278

Help! 281

Well done - a very important area that does need to be dealt with. 289

Probation

Probationary period of 3 years during which observation by school, Department and ASTI (if required) can occur – part of teaching qualification. 6
CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION
DISCUSSION

While the presence of incompetent teachers was always a reasonable assumption on the basis of anecdotal evidence and by analogy with other countries, this study provides supporting data. It recognises, estimates and articulates the problem of incompetent teachers in Irish voluntary secondary schools and establishes that, in the opinion of principals, incompetent teachers make up approximately 6.1% of the teaching staff in Irish voluntary secondary schools.

In the light of the research results, the current state of knowledge of the eight inter-related themes will now be considered. This will be followed by a summary and a list of resulting recommendations both for further research and for practice.

Notes:

i. Exemplary quotes from principals are given an identifying superscript number as explained in Chapter 5.

ii. The general statistics quoted are from the 1996/97 statistical report of the Department of Education and Science (1998d)

1. Nature of incompetence

The definition of incompetence proved acceptable to the principals and was applied carefully. The title of 'incompetent teacher' was not conferred lightly: - consider comments such as:

I have teachers who would be guilty of some of these failures, especially productive, sometimes/often judgement, occasionally tardiness but not what I would consider to be a 'sufficient and chronic amount of failure.'

And another:

I do not think I have had a teacher who fully satisfied your definition of incompetence.

The five failures described by the definition - technical, administrative, ethical, productive and personal - formed the basis upon which the semantic difference type scale for research question five was designed. Although the definition which principals were asked to accept could lead to the nature of incompetence being a self-fulfilling prophecy, the criteria were well met.
Technical Failure

The most obvious failure here was in discipline with only one fifth of incompetent teachers placed above the midpoint of a seven-point scale and one quarter rated as 'dreadful'. The type of discipline was mostly that of weakness and lack of control although 25% were at the other extreme by being 'overly strict'.

Unlike most of the other 'symptoms' it has to be said that 'subject knowledge' was mostly good. The problem therefore does not appear to be a lack of knowledge. It is rather the inability to impart that knowledge to students.

Administrative Failure

This existed in the form of tardiness, absenteeism, not following the curriculum and disregarding school rules and procedures.

Not following the curriculum was the most obvious failure reported in this category. The relevant bar chart (fig. 5.13) shows a 'normal' type distribution but that is definitely not a good and 'normal' thing in this case since there is very little leeway when it comes to the curriculum set for State examinations. If the course is not followed then there is a very good chance that 'productive failure' will result. With 41% below the mid point and fully 11% doing their 'own thing' the situation here is very serious.

Timekeeping seems more reasonable showing a complete spread. Without data on the timekeeping of the general body of teachers with which to compare the figures, not much can be said except that 14% 'very poor' does not appear to be a sign of good administrative practice.

Attendance was mostly good although 28% were below the midpoint and 8% of the incompetent teachers were 'chronic absentees'.

Ethical Failure

There is ethical failure in evidence very strongly in the 63% of the teachers having negative feelings towards their students. Indeed one of the symptoms by which one principal diagnosed the incompetence in the first place was the teacher’s 'very negative attitude to school and pupils.' 159 This is very serious since; 'Liking children is fundamental to the job.' (Wragg et al 1997, p.6). This 'negative attitude' could be due to a sort of 'emotional autism' or 'social unawareness' which renders some incompetent teachers impervious to the subtle signals sent out by students concerning their reception of the material of a lesson. There is far more to teaching than the subject matter. Some incompetent teachers may be unaware of the social dynamic in a class. One principal reports that the teacher produces 'inappropriate responses when students are being discussed - they are always wrong.' 65
Productive Failure

It appears from question 5.3 that their students reciprocate the teachers’ negative attitude described above. These two negatives combine to produce a bad classroom climate - as shown by the 80% below the midpoint of fig 5.9. Such a bad atmosphere is not conducive to learning - as is clearly shown by the results for the question concerning students’ examination performance where the bar chart is skewed very much to the left with three quarters below the mid-point. This is a most serious failure since, for most students and parents, examination results are the bottom line.

Personal Failure

There is personal failure in evidence in the normal-type distribution of the responses to question 5.11 as shown in fig 5.15 with 38% below the midpoint. It is reasonable to expect that most teachers would co-operate with their principals so co-operation should not be ‘normally’ distributed. It should be very skewed to the positive side. Personal failure is also shown by a similar poor response concerning relationship with colleagues in question 5.12 with 40% below the midpoint. Finally emotional stability with a mean of 3.7 and 45% below the midpoint is not good either. This personal failure found expression in things like a ‘general avoidance of all social contact with students and staff/parents’ 50 and in “off the wall” behaviour - i.e. bizarre behaviour.’ 160

From the point of view of management the teacher’s personality problem often manifested itself as a ‘bad attitude towards authority – always right.’ 108

Summary

The five criteria for incompetence are well met.

Technical failure: Discipline was generally very poor but subject knowledge was satisfactory.

Administrative failure: Not following the curriculum was the biggest indicator of administrative failure. Timekeeping and attendance were reasonable although some were ‘chronic absentees’.

Ethical failure: Incompetent teachers have a very negative feeling towards students.

Productive failure: This is the most marked of all the symptoms. There is no doubt that students of incompetent teachers under-perform in examinations.

Personal failure: There is a weakness in the character of incompetent teachers that makes them uncooperative with management, difficult with colleagues and not totally emotionally stable.
A theory of incompetence

Although not specifically addressed by the evidence, on the basis of an overall impression of the data and the written comments of principals, the following is a reasonable hypothesis explaining the relationship between the five failures of the proposed definition of an incompetent teacher.

Incompetent teachers have a personality failure at the root of their teaching problems. They are constitutionally not suited to teaching. This personality flaw leads to an ethical failure where they have a negative or otherwise inappropriate attitude to students and to school. The ethical failure in both these areas leads to technical failure and administrative failure respectively. These failures result in decreased learning so the final manifestation is productive failure.

The above hypothesis is worthy of further exploration and could form the basis of more research.

If the above is true then it would cast doubt on the belief that an incompetent teacher was competent at one time and becomes incompetent over the course of time. If this were the case then retraining and/or inservice courses could repair the damage. However, knowledge and retraining does not change personality - and personality, I believe, is at the root of the problem.
2. Existence and extent of the Problem

According to this study there can be little doubt about the existence of ‘incompetent teachers’ (as defined for this study) in Irish voluntary secondary schools. Principals showed their concern by the level of their response (75%) and by the heartfelt nature of their written comments which show great frustration and stress as well as great care for the teachers concerned and for their students. Perceptions are real things. The actual existence of incompetent teachers may be denied but it cannot be denied that, given a definition of incompetence, principals believe that there are approximately 6 per cent of their teaching staffs fitting that definition. Principals have no reason to fabricate incompetent teachers on their staff. The questionnaire was anonymous so there was no advantage or disadvantage to the school. Also many principals display candour and vulnerability with many comments describing stress, isolation, ineffectiveness and helplessness. It would not be natural for principals to speak in these self-deprecatory tones unless there was an element of truth in what they are saying.

Delighted to be able to assist you in your work and hope your research will help some ‘suffering’ principals in the future. 37

How I wish someone would do something for us, principals, who are so burdened with incompetent teachers. 216.

Principalship in my view is a very frustrating and unrewarding job because of the lack of support from any source and lack of authority. 278

Help! 281

It is possible to argue about causes, effects and remedies but the existence of the problem cannot be denied.

Extrapolation

Given the figure of 6.1% incompetence, the figures can be extrapolated to estimate the total numbers of incompetent teachers.

Voluntary Secondary

Consider now the actual numbers. The responding voluntary secondary school principals estimated that the number of incompetent teachers in their schools was 652. This number can be extrapolated to the entire voluntary sector in two ways - by the percentage of principals or by the percentage of incompetent teachers.
a) Since responding principals comprised 75% of the total they are very representative. Therefore it is reasonable to assume that non-respondents are similar to the respondents. Since the results indicate that incompetent teachers are equally distributed one can assume that these 75% of principals account for 75% of the incompetent teachers. Thus 652 is 75% of the actual total which is 869 incompetent teachers in the secondary voluntary sector.

b) Alternatively one can consider that the teachers represented by the principals are representative of the totality of teachers in the voluntary sector. Thus incompetent voluntary secondary teachers comprise 6.1% of the total number as given by the 1996/97 statistical report of the Department of Education and Science (1998d) which gives 13,295 as the number of full-time equivalent teachers in voluntary secondary schools. If 6.1% of these are incompetent then there are 811 incompetent teachers in the entire voluntary sector. The vast majority of incompetent teachers according to the data are in full-time permanent posts so let us exclude the 601 part time teachers. That leaves 12,694 full-time teachers and 6.1% of these gives a new total estimate is 761 incompetent teachers.

In summary then, the most conservative estimate of the number of incompetent teachers in Irish voluntary secondary schools is 761. It is impossible to estimate the number of pupils that they effect. There can be no doubt that they do have an effect since the results of question 5.10 show that, even without considering the effects of a negative classroom climate and lack of discipline, students’ examination performance is seriously below what one would normally expect.

**All Second Level Schools**

It is a greater but not unreasonable assumption to consider that 6.1% is also the rate of incompetent teachers in the other second level (vocational, community and comprehensive) schools. The total number of teachers in the four types of secondary school was 23,238 for the 1996/97 school year. If 6.1% is the rate of incompetence then there are 1417 incompetent teachers.

**Primary Schools**

Primary teachers have a different form of training and the management structure is different so it is an even greater, but still not unreasonable, assumption to estimate that the rate of incompetence here is also about 6%. Also, the literature estimates reviewed in chapter two included elementary and primary teachers and the rates of incompetence was approximately 10% - e.g. Mock and Melnick (1991), Neill and Custis (1978) Lively et al (1992) Good and Grouws (1977), Bridges (1986), Haney, Madaus & Kreitzer (1987) and Gudridge (1980).

Excluding the 630 non-teaching principals, the total number of Primary teachers in 1996/97 was 18,730. An incompetence rate of 6.1% would mean 1142 incompetent teachers.
Distribution

There is no significant difference between urban and rural voluntary secondary schools in the rate of teacher incompetence. This is understandable, as, although there may be a difference in the primary school sector where there are many very small schools in rural areas, there is not a huge difference between urban and rural secondary schools either in size or in ethos.

Nor is there any significant difference between fee-paying and non fee-paying schools or between ‘day only’, ‘boarding only’ and ‘day and boarding’ schools in their rates of teacher incompetence. This is a little more interesting since one might think that the more ‘exclusive’ fee-paying and boarding schools would have more articulate, assertive and demanding students and parents who would be less tolerant of incompetence.

Although it did not technically reach statistical significance, there was a slight drop in the percentage of incompetent teachers as school size increased. In a very small school two incompetent teachers could be the entire Mathematics department but in a large school incompetent teachers are less of a problem as there is more leeway in the way staff are deployed and it is easier to ‘spread the damage’ or ‘hide’ them.

There was one statistically significant difference. The differences in the means of the percentage of incompetent teachers in ‘all boys’, ‘co-educational’ and ‘all girls’ schools were not statistically significant when the three were taken together but the post hoc Scheffé test did show a statistically significant difference between ‘all boys’ and ‘all girls’ schools. Since co-educational schools are in the middle in terms of incompetence they are not statistically significantly better or worse than all boys or all girls respectively. However the single-sex schools are far enough apart from each other to be significant. ‘All girls’ schools have statistically significantly less teacher incompetence than ‘all boys’ schools do. There are several possible mechanisms that work here. Firstly, male incompetent teachers are over-represented proportionally than female incompetent teachers and one would expect there to be more male teachers in an all boys school and more female teachers in an all girls school. Secondly, although it is a stereotypical view, there is often an ethos in ‘all boys’ schools, which has a certain ‘machismo’ feeling to it and a discipline style, which does not tolerate perceived ‘weakness’ in the teacher. For example, referring to Brophy and Good (1974) and Wilson (1991), Hannan et al (1996) point out that teachers ‘[…] initiate more behavioural, disciplining, procedural and academic interactions with boys than with girls, while boys are more likely to initiate communication with the teacher - by calling out answers without first being recognised’ (Hannan et al, 1996, p.32). Also boys are less mature for their age than the corresponding girls and demand more linguistic and physical space. (O’Mahony, 1985, p.28)
3. Incompetent Teachers

Gender

Although the gender of the general body of teachers in the survey breaks down at 62% female and 38% male, this order is reversed for incompetent teachers - 54% male and 46% female.

Figure 6. Breakdown of gender of teachers reported by responding principals.

This is a significant difference and several factors might account for it. Perhaps women are just naturally better teachers than men are and so there are less incompetent women proportionately. Alternatively, although there are less incompetent women than incompetent men, maybe there are less brilliant women than brilliant men - i.e. maybe women are clustered about the mean of the ability range while men contain more of the extremes. The data from this study do not address these hypotheses directly and so do not provide enough information to either support or undermine them. Although controversial, they merit further investigation, as they raise questions about the teaching styles of men and women and have an impact on what is meant by good teaching. Effects of gender difference among students is well known - e.g. Block, (1983), Bone, 1983), Canada and Pringle (1995), Carpenter (1985) - gender difference in relation to teacher incompetence could be a fruitful avenue for further research.

The proportion of men and women teachers in single sex schools may be important. For example, there are more men teachers in 'all boys' schools and the combination may lead to a regimented style of discipline that views difference as 'weakness'. On the other hand there are more women teachers in 'all girls' schools where the ethos may be more accommodating.
Age

The age of an incompetent teacher is very relevant to finding a solution and leads to questions for further investigation.

The 18% who are over 55 could be encouraged to retire early if they were given a suitable incentive. There is such a system designed for teachers ‘[...] who are consistently experiencing professional difficulties in their teaching duties [...]’ (Dept. of Ed 1997, p.2) but it would need to be more financially attractive (and possibly compulsory if remediation failed). The financial cost would be well counterbalanced by the educational gains provided that there are measures at the other end of the career path to prevent new incompetent teachers replacing them.

The 10% at the beginning of their careers have the way out of career change or retraining but the biggest difficulty is with the 72% between the ages of 36 and 55 if they are to be allowed retain their dignity. The questions raised are therefore:

- How remediable is the incompetence?
- How many can become acceptably competent?
- How expensive would an early retirement option be?
- How many can be given duties suitable to their talents?
- How many should be asked to resign?
- Should some be dismissed?

Employment Status

Incompetent teachers are very likely to be permanent members of staff. Table 5.17 shows that the general body of teachers is 90% permanent and 10% temporary whereas incompetent teachers are 93% permanent and 7% temporary. In other words permanent teachers are proportionally over represented among incompetent teachers. This could be because schools are not obliged to retain temporary and part-time teachers. In a similar manner to ‘the dance of the lemons’ or ‘the turkey trot’ (Bridges, 1992, p.31), temporary teachers are liable not to be retained for a second year or may only be in a school for the duration of an illness or maternity leave. The ‘exit stories’ show several cases of temporary teachers with the comment ‘temporary and not retained’. Also, temporary teachers, if they are only in the school for a short time, might be considered by the principal to be still ‘finding their feet’ and might be forgiven for under-performing. They would have the excuse that they do not know the ‘run of the place’ and the students might be ‘testing them out’. They would need to continue for a considerable time in that way for the principal to believe fully that, although the post is temporary the incompetence is not.

Religious Status

According to the statistics of the Department of Education and Science for 1996/97 there were 663 Religious out of a total of 12,694 full-time secondary teachers. Religious thus comprised 5% of the teaching staff. In the survey there were 12 incompetent Religious teachers out of 417 incompetent teachers for whom Religious status was reported.
Religious thus comprised less than 3% of incompetent teachers. This under-representation is understandable because Religious, not having families and financial responsibilities, are much more mobile than lay teachers and can more easily be transferred to alternative duties. In describing the departure of two incompetent teacher one principal wrote: 'Both were Religious and the Provincial Superior gave them opportunity to train for another career and one went to a Third World country.'

**Past Competence**

When asked if the incompetent teacher had been competent at some time in the past 36% replied 'no', 26% replied 'yes'. The 38% replying 'don’t know' shows how careful principals were in their judgements and lends weight to the figures for 'yes' and 'no'. If the 38% in the 'don’t know' category are assumed to be similar to the 62% of whom principals were able to make a judgement the percentages become: 58% 'Yes' and 42% 'No'. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that 42% of incompetent teachers developed their incompetence over the course of time. As one principal put it: 'Sometimes people commence their teaching careers quite competently. Life’s 'slings and arrows' may result in a deterioration of standards - accompanied frequently by sympathy of colleagues. These are most intractable'.

There remains 58% who, in the opinion of principals, had never been competent. This casts doubt upon the validity of the teaching diploma earned at the start of their career. If this is combined with the personality problems discussed earlier it means there is a need to consider:

- More careful screening of applicants for teacher training.
- Reconsideration of the way the 'craft of the classroom' is taught.
- Reconsideration of the modes of assessment in teacher training.
- Standards for admission into the teaching profession.
- Stricter and more rigorously monitored initial probation.

**Posts of Responsibility**

Because, until very recently in Irish voluntary secondary schools, people were appointed to middle management posts in order of seniority, it is understandable that, given their age and experience profile, 73% of the incompetent teachers described were holders of posts of responsibility. Incompetence in the classroom may not transfer to incompetence in a middle management post but, since most of the middle management duties involve dealing with students in some way - (year head or class tutor for example) - this is highly unlikely.

Principals were afforded the opportunity to suggest improvements to the questionnaire they had just completed; one principal suggested:

> Perhaps a question of incompetent teachers who have been promoted to posts of responsibility. It would have been interesting to discover principals' defence of such promotion.
Subjects

The subjects in which the teachers were qualified to teach, and the subjects they were teaching were in the order of popularity of subjects as shown in Tuarscáil Stáitstíúil 1996/97 (Department of Education and Science, 1998d, p.68 and p.73). Apart from the probability relating to its popularity, no subject is more likely to harbour incompetents than any other. Practical subjects such as Home Economics, Woodwork, Metalwork and Art have as many incompetent teachers as more traditional Arts and Science subjects. After their primary degree, Arts and Science teachers take a one-year Higher Diploma in Education course whereas the entire three or four-year practical subject courses are pedagogy-based from the outset. Because of this difference in training it might have been expected that practical teachers would be more competent but that does not appear to be the case.

The data concerning the subjects taught by incompetent teachers are interesting - for example (86%) of the incompetent teachers were teaching their main or second subject - but no particular comparative conclusion can be drawn until research is done on the proportion of teachers in general teaching their main or second subject. Similarly, the data concerning the mismatch between subject qualification and subjects taught are also interesting - 23% teaching a subject other than their best, 9.6% teaching a subject not in the top two, 3% teaching a subject not in the top three in which they are qualified and 0.7% teaching a subject not mentioned at all in the list of subjects in which they are qualified to teach. In combination with the comments of principals concerning their timetabling strategies discussed below, this gives some evidence that incompetent teachers are being placed where they will do least harm but again, data on the general body of teachers would be needed for comparison. Also the allocation of teachers to subjects is a complex task with varying amounts of flexibility open to the timetabler. For example if the incompetent teacher were the only teacher of a certain subject then he or she would have to be given the subject concerned.

The effect is nearly impossible to quantify and analyse properly, because it depends on a combination of the size of the school, the particular subject, the availability of alternative teachers, the nature of the students, the likelihood of parental pressure and the nature of the incompetence; all would be factored into the thinking of the principal at the timetabling stage.
Reaction to being Confronted

Confirming the findings of Wragg et al (1998b) in whose questionnaire survey 54 of 70 allegedly incompetent teachers completely rejected that allegation, the top two reactions of Irish voluntary secondary school incompetent teachers on being confronted were surprise (61%) and denial (56%). There was no significant difference between the reactions of female and male incompetent teachers apart from the stereotypical greater tendency of females to break into tears (34% of females cried as opposed to 15% of males).

Although 50% of those confronted accepted the criticism and attempted to improve, it seems that some of this was less than wholehearted as shown by principals’ comments - for example:

- Ability to listen and ingratiate but to then ignore and continue. 6
- Acceptance of complaint on punctuality. Promised to improve. Did not. Denied other complaints. 32
- Agreed and did nothing. 302
- Other significant reactions were counter aggression and accusation of harassment but most important was a ‘subtle shifting of blame to others’. 50 - usually pupils - reinforcing the point made above concerning ethical failure and a negative attitude to students.
- Put the blame on poor pupil attendance and/or discipline - no interest. 29
- Assured me they knew their subject. Prepared classwork. Blamed their students. 172
- Seeing the students as the problem and not themselves. 211
- Complete inability to accept that the problem lay with him. 226
- Expressed frustration at pupils’ lack of motivation / unwillingness or inability to think or concentrate. 232

This presents a real difficulty in tackling the issue since the incompetent teachers see the students as the problem. In a sense the students are part of the problem since the interaction between teacher and student is somehow dysfunctional. The combination of teacher and student is what makes a school what it is. If all students were bright, compliant, well motivated, well behaved and interested in the subject regardless of the skills of the teacher then teaching would be very easy indeed. But that is not the reality. The task of a teacher is to work within the constraints of a non-ideal world. Since it is clear that the same students can be well behaved and working for one teacher and not for another, it is reasonable to deduce that the teacher has a certain amount of responsibility for the outcomes.
Denial of personal responsibility is a large part of the problem of incompetent teachers. It confirms the views of English head teachers interviewed by Wragg *et al* (1997, p.9) who felt that self-awareness is an important ingredient if there is to be hope of improvement in an incompetent teacher.

It needs to be remembered that the empirical data and the comments provide only the principals' perspective. It is highly likely that the teachers concerned have a totally different view of their reaction to the confrontation. It is likely that they would echo the views of the allegedly incompetent teachers surveyed by Wragg *et al* (1998b) with comments describing:

1. Personal distress and trauma
2. Bullying and victimisation
3. ‘Surviving the ordeal’ and regaining self-confidence

(Wragg *et al*, 1998b, p.25)

There is a clear need to research the views of the teachers themselves to establish a more balanced view. The rules of natural justice have a requirement to hear the other side (*audi alteram partem*).
4. Attitude of Teacher Union

Before undertaking the research, random and unstructured casual focus-group type discussion with convenience samples of voluntary secondary school principals led to the tentative hypothesis:

_The teacher professional union defends its members totally, always denies the need for action and is belligerent and uncooperative with management in cases of alleged teaching incompetence._

The results do not support this hypothesis. While some principals reported bad experiences: (e.g. ‘A very difficult problem - Unions lack a professional approach - heads in the sand’ 306), generally the unions did take a professional approach. They defended the teacher but they were also willing to co-operate to find a mutually agreeable solution.

Frequency of Involvement

Since most principals took a more pastoral and non-confrontational approach and attempted to support and help the teacher to improve, the likelihood of union involvement was lessened. The union would normally only become involved if the teacher called upon it to defend him or her - in the case of being asked to come before the Board of Management in a disciplinary hearing for example. The response of the teacher to being confronted by the principal (Question 12.1) shows the teacher calling in the union in less than a quarter of the cases. In simple numerical terms, the union was involved in only 73 of 296 cases reported. Since some principals had more than one incompetent teacher - there were 652 incompetent teachers altogether for 426 of whom ‘census forms’ were completed - the actual rate of involvement of the union was actually even lower. The bad impression of the teacher union among principals that led to the critical hypothesis could have arisen because most principals do not have experience of the union’s reaction to a charge of incompetence and so have to rely on the stories they hear from colleagues. Those principals with bad experiences that drag on have longer to complain of their problems than colleagues whose problems are more quickly overcome. Principals may thus be getting an exaggerated image of union intransigence because they hear more ‘horror stories’. This is borne out by one of the responses to question twenty in which 69% agreed or agreed strongly with the statement that ‘unions defend the indefensible’. Since question twenty was answered by most principals (those with and without experience of union involvement) it is more of an ‘impression’ than a fact.
Union Reaction

In 66% of the cases the reaction of the union was to defend the teacher but to work in a co-operative and professional manner with school management.

Some sample comments:

Acted as a mediator and sought to solve the problem through negotiation. 7

At first positive and helpful. 210

Union sought to protect employee rights but accepted that the employer had rights also. 45

Helpful / understanding but professionally acting for the teacher. They went as far as they could. 160

One of the ways that co-operation manifested itself was that in 51% of the cases the union tried to reason with the teacher and advised him or her to act wisely. The union officers were conscious of the morality of the situation and were open to compromise. They worked on behalf of the teacher to get the best possible deal and to preserve dignity - sick leave and early retirement being popular compromises. The data on incompetent teachers who left teaching show the union helping teachers who were members of income continuance insurance plans to obtain their rights. Straightforward resignation was less popular but also occurred.

Not all experience was positive. There were 23% of the principals reporting that the union was totally defending the teacher and uncooperative. In 21% of cases principals felt that union officers behaved in an aggressive manner and 19% believed that the union was indifferent to the morality of the situation. One comment was that the union ‘adopted a very legalistic stance.’ 318 This legalistic stance is quite understandable. A teacher’s livelihood is at stake and the union has an obligation to protect its members.

Clearly, more research is needed. Although, overall it is a fairly positive view of the union involvement, it is the principals’ view only and is coloured by their experience and interpretation of the actions of the union officers. The union officers themselves need to provide their view. There is no doubt that they have a different perception of teacher incompetence to that of the principals surveyed. Just as the views of the teachers are of interest, more research is required to establish the attitude of the union. This is very important since the union will have to be intimately involved in any eventual solutions. Some sort of scheme along the lines of the ‘Toledo Plan’ discussed in the literature review is a distant possibility for example.
5. The Principals' Attitudes

Principals' attitudes are implied by their responses to many of the questions and can be deduced from their reactions (theme six) and from their attempts at support and remediation (theme seven). Question twenty, however, elicited principals' attitudes directly by asking for their level of agreement with twelve statements. All principals, even those who had no incompetent teachers currently on staff, and who had never encountered one in the past, could answer question twenty. This swelled the numbers with principals inexperienced in the field of incompetence and so could have the effect of eliciting the impression principals have of the problem rather than the reality. For example the opinion of all principals on whether or not principals have the time to tackle incompetence may not be as important as the opinion of principals who actually were faced with incompetence and had to decide whether they did or did not have time to deal with it. Principals' actual actions are more revealing than the opinions they express, so it is necessary to separate the reality from the rhetoric. Conflict between the opinions and the actions has another consequence however - that of stress, as principals feel torn between the moral imperative to act and the practical constraints which makes successful action difficult.

Importance

Principals think that the issue of incompetent teachers is very important. The 75% response to the survey indicates the importance they attach to it. A similar survey carried out in Virginia had a response of only 56% (Tucker 1997, p.108). Wragg et al (1998d) sent out 3017 questionnaires and received 1,996 back - a response of 65% with which they expressed great satisfaction saying that it represented '[..] an extremely high return rate for such a long and detailed questionnaire, especially given the severe pressures under which head teachers work.' (Wragg et al 1998d, p.1). The exact same comment could be made concerning the even higher response of 75% for this study - its Irish counterpart. Principals were very positive in their comments indicating that they liked the '[..] very effective and thought-provoking questionnaire.' Many remarked that they felt this research was important, that the results should be published. For example:

I am delighted that a 'principal' has decided to highlight this major problem in all schools – I admire your courage in so doing. I would love to write at length about this morally unacceptable situation. But would be 'afraid' to do so. Students have my fullest sympathy and for the sake of excellent lay principals, I do hope your results are well publicised.
Stress

There can be little doubt about the stress factor with 96% of the respondents agreeing or agreeing strongly with the assertion that incompetent teachers are major sources of stress for principals. Stress was also the only aspect of teacher incompetence supported by prior research - Leader and Boldt (1994) reporting that 47.6% of the principals they surveyed found the problem of 'incompetent teachers' the most difficult thing they faced (Leader and Boldt 1994, p. 121). The stress, natural in itself, is exacerbated by the feeling of isolation of the principals, lack of support, the ambiguous position of Irish voluntary secondary school principals as 'primus inter pares', the conflict between their desire to help the teacher and their duty to educate students, the absence of training for principals in this area, and an overall feeling that the situation is hopeless. The evidence of the responses of principals to questions 6 to 15 inclusive and to question 20 supports all the above assertions.

Particularly revealing also are comments such as:

Quite frankly, you are on your own. You are blamed if you do nothing and blamed if you too (sic) 163

There is no real help in such situations beyond discussion with the teacher 182

There are no agreed procedures for dealing with incompetency - one is left more or less on one’s own. 190

There is a feeling of helplessness amongst principals that little or nothing can be done with the incompetent teacher.

Judging from the reactions of the incompetent teachers when they were confronted (some even breaking into tears) it is likely that if the teachers were surveyed they would say that they find the experience stressful too. The whole business is undoubtedly very difficult and unpleasant for everyone.

Resignation

Principals seem to be resigned to the need to tolerate a certain amount of incompetence and are pessimistic about hopes of improvement as shown by the 59% who feel that no matter what should be done, in actual fact nothing is going to be done and by a similar percentage who believe that the incompetence defined for this study is irremediable. An even greater majority (89%) was of the opinion that it is impossible to dismiss a teacher for incompetence in Ireland. This belief can be interpreted in two ways. One way would be to say they are simply ignorant of the law since it is perfectly legally possible to dismiss someone for incompetence in any job. A more sophisticated view would be to say that principals know it is theoretically possible, but staff morale, industrial relations, and not least - moral considerations make dismissal impossible in practice. The latter view seems the more likely since it is supported by the answers and comments to questions 6
to 15 inclusive relating to principals' reactions and attempts at support and remediation. On the other hand 66% agreed or agreed strongly that principals do not know how to tackle teacher incompetence. Leaving aside the possible distortion due to principals with no personal experience this admission of ignorance is not necessarily something of which principals should feel ashamed. The literature shows that no one has the answer to teacher incompetence. There are just more or less successful attempts at accommodation, remediation, induced exits or dismissal.

When principals were afforded the opportunity to claim they did not have time to tackle teacher incompetence they were divided - with 56% agreeing or agreeing strongly but with 25% disagreeing or disagreeing strongly and the remainder undecided. Since there is great commitment shown by the responses to questions seven and eight (concerning principals tackling or avoiding the issue of teacher incompetence) it is possible that principals who have not actually had to deal with serious incompetence may have swelled the number who think principals have not enough time to tackle incompetence. When principals do have incompetent teachers then the response to question 9.1 suggests that they feel a pragmatic and moral imperative to act. However, although they feel that imperative, their actions are often ineffective and they feel frustrated and fatalistic - believing that unions defend the indefensible and thinking incompetence is irremediable.

**Theories / Beliefs / Attitudes**

Three quarters of the principals believing that undeserved teaching diplomas are awarded, and 90% of them thinking people should be screened more carefully before being accepted for training strongly suggests that the whole issue of selection of candidates for teacher training needs to be seriously examined. A longitudinal study over many years to compare initial psychological profile and entry criteria with eventual career success would be interesting.

Looking to the future, principals foresee greater difficulties as parents become more assertive and demanding. While principals liked the suggestion that incompetent teachers be required to have counselling or retraining this is contradicted by their assertion that incompetence is irremediable so there is considerable confusion and uncertainty.
6. The Principals’ Reactions

Diagnosis

Principals do not detect incompetent teaching. They are either told about it, or they deduce its existence. The main diagnostic methods by which principals are alerted to the existence of incompetent teachers are complaints from parents and pupils and discipline problems. Principals rarely directly observe teaching. Formal observation by the principal was placed last in the list of twelve diagnostic methods offered in the questionnaire. Contrast this with the corresponding results of Seltzer (1992, p.123) where classroom observation was at the top the list. The survey offers some reasons for this lack of observation of teaching by principals in Irish voluntary secondary schools.

Lack of training

When giving personal details at the early part of the questionnaire principals showed that, even though they were highly qualified academically, their training for principalship was inadequate. Little of the training was directly related to principalship and they received no training related to dealing with ineffective teaching. Irish principals are not trained in observing and evaluating teaching. In the United States it would be normal for administrators to have some training in this area. ‘Most state evaluation plans require some kind of training for the evaluators’ (Hazard, 1993, p4).

Lack of expectation

Principals reckoned that most teachers would either object strongly or would be uncomfortable. There is no expectation that Irish voluntary secondary school principals would observe teaching. Teachers see the principals as simply ‘primus inter pares’.

Lack of formal structures

Although whole school inspection and teacher appraisal are mentioned in the White Paper on Education - Charting our Educational Future (1995 p. 134), both are only at the stage of tentative pilot schemes and are a long way from total acceptance and implementation.
Advice

The responses and comments on their sources of advice graphically illustrate the principals' feeling of isolation. Principals turned to each other most often for support and found that support to be the most helpful. The support of the chairperson of the Board of management is understandable since she or he is 'closer' to the school metaphorically, than any of the other sources of advice. Two of the sources of advice - the Secretariat for Secondary Schools and the Department of Education and Science - would be expected to figure strongly, since one of their purposes is to support schools and principals. Almost half of the principals who sought advice contacted the Secretariat where members of staff appear to have been fairly helpful. In comparison, the lack of popularity of the Department of Education and Science is noteworthy. It appears that most principals did not think it worth their while to consult officials of the Department of Education and Science and the principals who did so do were less than impressed with the advice they received. Generally, the comments on the advice sought show principals feeling helpless.

You're on your own. 32

There are no agreed procedures for dealing with incompetency - one is left more or less on one's own. 190

General feeling is 'Count yourself lucky you've so few' and 'Just work around them' - 'There's nothing you can do!' 156

Avoidance

Principals deny 'avoiding' the issue:

I do not tolerate incompetence! 158

I don't avoid it, period. 302

but feel that they cannot win:

Every route has led to a cul de sac. 160

Their top reasons for not tackling incompetence - that it was pointless and they couldn't win, that either themselves or others before them had tried and got nowhere - all display a feeling that nothing can be done about an incompetent teacher.

Much had been tried by previous principals - no real improvement - sense of 'resignation' about the problem - 'Damage limitation' the main strategy suggested. 98

General feeling is 'Count yourself lucky you've so few' and 'Just work around them' - 'There's nothing you can do!' 156
Also important is the desire to avoid staff morale problems and conflict with the union. This is all part of the conflict that principals experience between their desire to promote harmony and happiness in their schools and the need to confront difficulties and to challenge under-performing staff.

**Tackling**

As well as the pragmatic need to protect the reputation of their school, the evidence shows that principals feel an equally strong moral imperative to take action in relation to incompetent teaching. After the above there comes pressure from parents and from pupils. Presumably these pressures confirm the internal pressures that principals already feel. There is little cynicism shown by principals.

They clearly want to do the right thing:

- The situation warrants dealing with. 160
- Saw it as my job/responsibility. 289

and are concerned about the students:

- Students giving up the subject. 78
- Concern for welfare of pupils. 232

but are concerned also about the incompetent teachers:

- Felt teacher needed support and deserved help. 113
- Health of teacher gravely at risk. 301

A balance is required between the two.

- One must balance compassion for teachers against the irreparable damage to students' lives. 325

The attitude is not always 'soft' however. Responses to different questions demonstrate frustration at the injustice of the situation and, when convinced that a teacher is intentionally continuing to behave in a cynical, unjust and dishonest fashion, even anger.

If I had the power I would willingly have dismissed No.1 (*This principal had three incompetent teachers and numbered them 1,2,3*) - due to humiliation and neglect of students, unwillingness to co-operate with School authorities, etc. No.1 was insubordinate openly, confrontational openly, gave false statements to the Union and others, had powerful contacts within the Union, reduced fellow teachers, parents and students to tears. [...] I could go on and on. 237
7. Support and Remediation

Strategies
It is clear from the responses to research question 10 that principals’ strategies deal very sensitively with the allegedly incompetent teachers. Principals’ approach is far from ‘heavy-handed’.

- They ‘confront’ the incompetent teacher gently (although the teacher may perceive the confrontation differently - further research is needed to ascertain the perspective of the incompetent teacher.)
- They timetable the teacher where he or she will do least harm (see below).
- They engage in ‘salvage’ attempts.

Only 9% chose to ignore the problem and some of them may have had little alternative if constrained by lack of resources.

Comments also indicate that principals supported the teacher particularly in the area of discipline.

Offer support to teacher with discipline problems in classroom. 159

Affirmed / Encourage / Compliment where feasible / Positive back up in area of discipline of students. 191

Pressure
Pressure was not applied in an aggressive manner. Principals didn’t think it would be right and, anyway, felt it wouldn’t work.

These are very negative and would I feel prove to be counterproductive! 7

What principals called pressure often consisted of attempts at persuading the teacher that there was a problem and the holding of frequent meetings generally involving expressions of pastoral concern for the teacher.

Informal chats with the teacher. 98

Encouragement - in relation to my belief that matters can be improved if approach of teacher is open to change. NOT to be confused with condescension. 121

Talk to teacher about difficulties they are having - how to cope with these. 159
Of course, these ‘chats’ could be interpreted differently by the teachers concerned. They may feel that the very fact that the talks are taking place (usually in the principal’s office) means that they are somehow ‘on the carpet’. There is a need to hear the teachers’ side of this in follow up research.

The most negative form of ‘pressure’ applied by principals is the passing on of criticism from parents and students. Ideally a principal would be able to supply first hand evidence of the incompetence (and recommendations for improvement) by having observed the teacher. Since that is usually not possible, pupils and parents are the only ‘witnesses to the crime’ in a manner of speaking. Since pupils and parents are the main sources of evidence, passing on their criticism becomes the main method of applying pressure. Principals also find it necessary to do this because, as shown above in section three, the response of the incompetent teacher is often surprise and denial. The principals have to supply evidence to convince the teacher that everything is not well.

**Timetabling**

Except in cases where there is little room to manoeuvre, principals’ comments generally indicate an exercise in ‘damage limitation’. This makes the students’ and the incompetent teacher’s life easier. Incompetent teachers are assigned to junior classes, small classes, non-examination classes or subjects (like library periods for example) but the most common strategy (the choice of 64% of principals) is that incompetent teachers are not assigned the same class for consecutive years. Principals do not generally ‘impose’ the incompetent teacher on remedial students, nor do they use religion teaching as a ‘kennel’ - although at 18%, Religion is a slightly more popular option than remedial teaching used by 9% of principals. The difference is reasonable since Religion is a more common subject than remedial teaching. It would be very cynical to ‘sacrifice’ weak students to allow more able students have the benefit of good teachers. Also, in a Catholic voluntary secondary school where the religious ethos is supposed to be essential, assigning incompetent teachers to religion classes would send out the message that religion doesn’t really matter. It is to the credit of principals that they do not take either of these unethical approaches.

However, the approach that is used is not beyond reproach. Ideally, every teacher would be excellent. But if they are not all equal, and if there is leeway in the possibilities, there is a dilemma presented to the timetabler. Should the ‘best’ teachers be assigned to the ‘best’ classes? Maybe the ‘best’ teachers should be assigned to the ‘worst’ classes since weak students are in dire need of good teaching. Also should the ‘best’ teachers be assigned to the senior classes? Should incompetent teachers be assigned to junior classes? Assigning incompetent teachers to religion classes would send out the message that religion doesn’t really matter. It is to the credit of principals that they do not take either of these unethical approaches.
back by their less gifted classmates. This drives down the overall standard and the remaining students may be inclined to live ‘down’ to expectations!

It would appear therefore, that if a teacher is incompetent, there is no good place to assign him or her. There might be a mitigating factor in the nature of the incompetence. If the incompetence is merely a lack of discipline and the teacher is otherwise a good teacher - knowledgeable in the subject and good at explaining it - a high achieving, high expectation, well-motivated senior class might suit. However, according to the data, poor discipline usually does not exist on its own. It emerges out of a negative attitude to students and a poor personality. Thus the factors that make for poor discipline are also the factors that make for poor teaching. It is unlikely therefore that good students can save poor teachers.

Remedy

Many principals (71%) attempted to remedy the incompetence but with minimal long-term success. The most popular method was the holding of regular advice sessions where the principal and the teacher would meet and talk but only 12% of principals felt this helped a lot. As in the case of ‘confronting gently’ discussed above, the attitude of the incompetent teachers to these ‘advice sessions’ would need to be investigated in further research. The teacher may be interpreting them at one extreme as ‘cosy chats’ or at the other extreme the teacher may view them as harassment or bullying.

Books and inservice courses met with equally moderate success and the Inspectorate received the worst rating of all - no principal thought the latter helped a lot, and half of those who asked for inspectors’ help found them of no help whatsoever. In fairness to the Inspectorate it may be that it is understaffed and over-stretched. Further research is needed on the work of the Inspectorate to establish where priorities lie as shown by the duties to which inspectors are assigned and their resulting use of time.

The strategies that seemed to work best - such as sitting in on classes or having a colleague as mentor - would have required the teacher’s co-operation and so are dependent upon the teacher accepting that there is a problem. The apparent relative success of the strategies in this study that implied co-operation and acceptance confirm the view that self-awareness is an important success factor as Heads expressed in Wragg et al (1997 p.9). That self-awareness may be more important than the actual strategies.
Male/Female Lay/Religious

There was no evidence of gender-stereotypical attitudes or behaviour on the part of principals - for example, a more feminine pastoral person-centred approach for females and a more masculine aggressive task-oriented approach from males.

Similarly there was no evidence in support of the hypothesis that there is a difference in the attitudes and reactions of lay and Religious principals. It might have been expected that lay principals might have a lesser regard for Religion as a subject, for example, and might therefore have been expected to be more likely to assign incompetent teachers to Religion classes. This was not so.

There was no statistically significant difference in attitudes, reactions, timetabling, or support and remediation strategies between male and female principals. There was therefore no evidence to support the hypothesis that male and female principals react differently.

There was no difference between the approaches of male and female principals nor was there any statistically significant difference between the reactions of Lay and Religious principals.
8. Dismissal and Induced exits

Mode of Departure

It appears from the data that incompetent teachers leave, or are induced to leave, at the two ends of the teaching career - the beginning when they are not yet in permanent posts and need not be re-appointed, or approaching the end when early retirement becomes an option. Although only a tiny fraction were actually dismissed, more than one third of those who left without having been dismissed did so in order to avoid disciplinary action or dismissal. Departure in mid-career was less common and took several forms - resignation or illness accounting for most.

The 'stories' presented in the results section serve as exemplary narrative to put 'flesh' on the empirical data. The stories of the exits are particular to each individual and it is difficult to generalise but two factors commonly involved were the co-operation of the union and the use of sick leave as a sort of 'safety valve'. In many of the cases of early retirement and of sick leave principals commended ASTI officials for their co-operation and professionalism. Sick leave was often the main avenue of escape or an intermediate stage before early retirement. Sick leave appears to have been used as a means of avoiding an unpleasant crisis and so providing time for other avenues to be explored. There are insufficient data to support this hypothesis totally but it is an interesting idea that would need to be confirmed by further research (with the teachers and with the union for example).

Characteristics

Because they left at different times, incompetent teachers who left do not form a cohort, as do the 'current' incompetent teachers described earlier, so the data need to be treated with caution. However, certain patterns emerge.

Age

The most important pattern is the mid-career 'dip' seen in the bar charts for age profile (figure 5.18) and for the obviously related experience profile (figure 5.19). The hypothesis to explain this is the lack of a viable escape route and career change for a middle-aged teacher with a mortgage and family commitments.

Gender

The data on 'current' incompetent teachers suggests that incompetence is more prevalent among males than females yet, of the incompetent teachers who left, there are more females than males. Even though it may grate on feminist sensibilities I offer the following very tentative hypothesis to account for this discrepancy. Perhaps females find it psychologically more acceptable to be not working outside the home than their male
counterparts do. Women may feel entitled to work as homemakers. Also just as in the case of the mid-career dip discussed above, there may be an economic factor: in a marriage, the wife’s job is more likely to be the ‘second’ lesser income. Economically therefore, for a married woman, becoming a fulltime homemaker may not be as great a financial blow. Thus it is easier for a woman to avail of the various exit routes from teaching if she is experiencing difficulties. Another hypothesis to explain the same phenomenon - or a contributory factor in the above hypothesis - could be that men are more ‘difficult’ and combative than women are and are less likely to yield to pressure to leave. Maybe women are more reasonable - more willing to see the light. Maybe women are more aware of the big picture and see their life in a broader perspective than men. Maybe women do not invest as much of their self-esteem in their career as do men. On that basis it could well be that the incompetent women who leave are not as incompetent as their male counterparts who remain. All of these hypotheses need proper investigation and further research.

Other factors
Excluding the ‘don’t know’ category, principals believed that of the departing incompetent teachers, almost twice as many had been competent in the past as had never been competent. This could be related to the age profile discussed above. It may be that the older teachers began their careers with a different calibre of pupil and have not been able to keep up with the changes in behavioural norms and in education. Thus they could have begun as competent teachers but became incompetent by standing still as the educational world moved on.
Qualifications / Subjects Taught

There was nothing remarkable about subjects and qualifications of incompetent teachers who left - both being in line with general frequencies. Similarly, the mismatches between subjects taught and qualifications were approximately the same as those for 'current' incompetent teachers. Since many of the incompetent teachers who left did so many years ago, this suggests that the timetabling strategies to accommodate incompetent teachers have remained broadly similar for many years.

Nature

The nature of the incompetence displayed by the incompetent teachers who left mirrored the figures for 'current' incompetent teachers and merits the same comments.

Briefly, the nature of the incompetence involved:

- Poor discipline (slightly worse than for 'current' incompetent teachers);
- Lack of control as the most common discipline fault;
- Students' negative feelings towards the teacher;
- The teachers' negative feelings towards students;
- A bad classroom climate;
- Good subject knowledge;
- A full spectrum of quality of timekeeping;
- Mostly good attendance by the teacher- (but 17% chronic absentees);
- An inappropriate spectrum of closeness of curriculum following - (with 15% 'doing own thing');
- Very poor examination performance of students;
- An inappropriate spread of quality of co-operation - (with 37% below midpoint);
- Mixed relationships with colleagues (11% extremely difficult but 7% extremely good);
- The bar chart displaying quality of emotional stability skewed to the instability side.

Since many of these teachers left a long time ago, the above suggests that the nature of teacher incompetence is reasonably constant over time.
CHAPTER 7

RECOMMENDATIONS
Recommendations

The recommendations that follow from the above discussion are presented under two separate headings - academic and practical, but, since each informs the other, it must be remembered that ‘there is nothing more practical than a good theory […]’ (Landers and Myers, 1977, p.365).

Academic Recommendations

A good measure of the value of a piece of academic research is not the questions answered but the ones raised, since new questions inspire further research and more questions in a never-ending spiral of improved understanding. The questions raised in the discussion chapter suggest the development of future research in two ways - a qualitative treatment of the same topic and a widening of the research to related issues.

Qualitative Treatment of the Same Topic

As discussed in the method chapter, practical constraints made a more qualitative approach non-viable so there is plenty of scope for such follow-up research. The most fruitful routes would be:

- Interviews with principals;
- Surveys of allegedly incompetent teachers - current and past;
- Interviews with allegedly incompetent teachers - current and past;
- Case studies.

Principals - interviews

Some principals - like the one who wrote ‘I found some of the questions were too black and white for me to give full answers’ - were prevented from offering more expansive answers by the constraints of the questionnaire format. A more in-depth research programme should be carried out involving interviews and focus-group sessions with willing principals. These would better capture the more qualitative nuances in this complex and sensitive area.

Currently allegedly incompetent teachers - surveys and interviews

In controversial research, as in legal contexts, ‘audi alteram partem’ is necessary. This study presents the personal views of principals but the views of the allegedly incompetent teachers are reported through the filtering perceptions of principals. Teachers need to be permitted to give their views personally as they may interpret events differently. For example, what a principal perceives as ‘sensitive broaching of the subject followed by support and remediation’ the teacher may perceive as ‘unfounded accusation followed by harassment and bullying’. The incompetent teachers’ ‘census’ and parts of this study concerning the feelings, reactions and responses of incompetent teachers need to be
confirmed by a process of triangulation using the first hand testimony of the allegedly incompetent teachers. Once the current findings are corroborated or denied, the research can broaden out using semi-structured interviews (or case studies as described below) to raise new issues of concern to the teachers.

*Past allegedly Incompetent Teachers - surveys and interviews*

For reasons similar to those just described, the views and experiences of allegedly incompetent teachers who have left the system would also be worth investigating. The parts of the current study concerning the departure of allegedly incompetent teachers could be confirmed or by a process of triangulation using the first hand testimony of those teachers who resigned, retired early or left in some other way. The research can be developed then into related areas. Arising from the discussion section of the current study, the following are just some of the research questions and associated hypotheses that may be worth investigating. A survey approach could be used initially with follow-up interviews with volunteers. Some possible research questions and related hypotheses follow.

*How is sick leave used?*

**Hypothesis**
Sick leave is used as a means of avoiding an unpleasant crisis and to provide time for other avenues to be explored.

*Why are there more exits from the teaching profession at the beginning and end of the career with less leaving in mid-career?*

**Hypothesis 1**
The drop in frequency of teachers leaving teaching in mid-career is caused by a lack of a financially and psychologically viable escape route.

**Hypothesis 2**
More temporary and part time teachers are removed for incompetence than would be expected by the proportion of the teaching force that they constitute because non-renewal of contracts is easy.

**Hypothesis 3**
The most common departure age for incompetent teachers is over 55 because, at that stage, early retirement is an option.

*Why do more allegedly incompetent women teachers exit the profession than do their male counterparts?*

**Hypothesis 1**
Women find it psychologically and economically more acceptable to be not working outside the home than their male counterparts do.

**Hypothesis 2**
Men are more 'difficult' and combative than women and are less likely to yield to pressure to leave.
Women are more reasonable – 'more willing to see the light'. Women are more aware of the big picture and see their life in a broader perspective than men do.

Hypothesis 4

Women do not invest as much of their self-esteem in their careers as men do.

Case Studies

Most of the data for the present study was empirical and in the form of simple frequencies under various categories. This empirical approach mostly examined only one or two variables at a time and aggregated all cases with respect to those variables. A case study would permit examination of all the variables in an individual case to see how they interact in a cumulative manner to produce a particular outcome. In the current study some of the principals’ brief extra written comments were very revealing. A narrative case study approach where every ‘story’ is unique would be even more revealing.

Widening of the Research to Related Issues

The research can be widened in two ways:

a) by investigating the perspectives of other stakeholders

b) by investigating theoretical concepts

Perspectives of other stakeholders

For valid evidence it is important to have first hand testimonies. Also looking at an issue from many different perspectives gives a more rounded image. Part of many human problems stem from misunderstandings and differences of perspective, so it could also help in the search for a practical solution as discussed below.

Other schools

With appropriate adaptation the study could be repeated for primary schools, other kinds of secondary schools and even third level institutions. Such empirical surveys could be expanded later with follow-up interviews for more qualitative data. Some obvious research questions and associated hypotheses would be:

How does the rate and nature of incompetence in other Irish education sectors compare with the voluntary secondary sector?

Hypothesis 1

The rate of teacher incompetence in primary schools is similar to the rate in voluntary secondary schools.

Hypothesis 2

The rate of teacher incompetence in other kinds of secondary schools is similar to the rate in voluntary secondary schools.
There is a perception that third level academics consider their research more important than their teaching. Therefore, it is possible there may be even more incompetence at third level than at lower levels.

\textit{Hypothesis 3}  
The rate of incompetence among lecturers in third level institutions is greater than the rate in voluntary secondary schools.

\textit{Other teachers}  
It is clear that incompetent teachers have an effect on their colleagues. If incompetent teachers are 'protected' - for example, giving them smaller classes and junior classes and non-examination subjects increase then the workload of colleagues. In the past teachers were happy to do this but this may be changing.

\textit{How do the members of the teaching profession feel about incompetent teachers?}  
\textit{Hypothesis 1}  
Teachers are aware of the incompetence of colleagues.  
\textit{Hypothesis 2}  
Teachers are aggrieved at the incompetence of some colleagues and are less prepared to 'cover' for it.  
\textit{Hypothesis 3}  
Teachers are prepared to allow a properly trained principal to observe teaching.

\textit{Parents}  
Parents are becoming more assertive and more likely to apply pressure to schools to remedy teacher incompetence that they believe is damaging children.

\textit{What is the attitude of parents to teacher incompetence?}  
\textit{Hypothesis 1}  
Parents are aware of teacher incompetence and are concerned about it.  
\textit{Hypothesis 2}  
Parents are becoming more assertive and insistent that action be taken in cases of incompetence.

\textit{Inspectorate}  
The contribution of the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science to helping allegedly incompetent teachers and their principals is not rated very highly in the current study. The reasons for this are worthy of investigation so research needs to be done on the work of the Inspectorate. What do inspectors consider to be their priorities? How does their use of time correspond with their priorities? What is the relationship between the rhetoric of what they are supposed to be doing and the reality of what they are required to do? A possible research question and associated hypotheses could be:
What are the constraints on the role of the Inspectorate of the Department of Education in dealing with allegedly incompetent teachers?

Hypothesis 1
Inspectors experience role conflict due to multiple demands and limited resources.

Hypothesis 2
Department of Education Inspectors do not have the training or expertise to deal with problems of teaching incompetence.

Hypothesis 3
The apparent lack of a solution to the problem of teacher incompetence leaves Department of Education Inspectors with similar feelings of resignation and pessimism as those described by principals.

Unions
Although overall the study presents union involvement in a fairly positive light, it is still only the principals' view. More research is required to establish the attitude of the union officers. First hand testimony of unions officers should be obtained so that the results for this study can be confirmed or corrected by a process of triangulation and other issues of concern to the unions could also be explored. If the problems of confidentiality could be overcome, case studies would be a valuable addition. A possible research question and associated hypotheses could be:

What is the role of the teachers' professional union in dealing with alleged teacher incompetence?

Hypothesis 1
The teachers' professional union has a professional attitude to the problem of teacher incompetence.

Hypothesis 2
The teachers' professional union displays great awareness of the moral implications of teacher incompetence.

Hypothesis 3
The teachers' professional union protects the rights of its members but in a co-operative manner.

Hypothesis 4
The teachers' professional union frequently advises the allegedly incompetent teacher to avail of dignified exits such as early retirement or sick leave.
Theoretical Concepts

Advancement in theoretical understanding is not just an academic exercise. Theory is vital for understanding and reacting to experience and so learning from it. In accordance with the constructivist perspective, experience is interpreted by means of adaptations and refinements to conceptual frameworks already present. The better the theoretical understanding therefore, the clearer the thinking and the wiser the decisions that are taken - assuming there are also good ethical values present.

Some theoretical concepts that merit further investigation are:

The nature of incompetence;
The remediability of incompetence;
Suitability for teacher training;
The influence of gender on incompetence

The nature of incompetence

This study asked principals to accept a particular definition of incompetence as a working definition for the purpose of estimating the scale of the problem. There are two things that need to be done to develop the definition: firstly, the given definition needs closer examination concerning how the 'failures' it describes make a person an incompetent teacher, secondly, alternative definitions or an improvement in the given one need to be investigated. Some possible research questions, related hypotheses and avenues of exploration follow.

What are the components of teacher incompetence and how are they related?

Hypothesis 1
Incompetent teachers have a personality failure making them ill suited to a teaching career.

Hypothesis 2
Personality failure in incompetent teachers leads to an ethical failure and an inappropriate attitude to students and to school.

Hypothesis 3
Inappropriate attitudes lead to technical failure manifesting itself mostly as poor discipline.

Hypothesis 4
These attitudes lead to administrative failure manifesting itself mostly as not following the curriculum.

Hypothesis 5
The most important indicator of incompetence is productive failure so that little learning takes place.
What is the nature of the hypothesised personality flaw at the root of teacher incompetence?

**Hypothesis 1**
Incompetent teachers suffer from a type of ‘emotional autism’ or ‘lack of social awareness’ that renders them impervious to the subtle signals sent out by students.

What are the alternative definitions of teacher incompetence?

This is an exploratory question so, rather than hypothesise, it might be more useful to ask principals, inspectors, union officials, parents, pupils, teachers and others for their understanding of what constitutes incompetence in a teacher. Several different definitions will arise and the differences and similarities between them may be interesting.

The remediability of incompetence

The extent to which incompetence is remediable is important from a practical as well as theoretical point of view, especially for teachers in mid-career when early retirement is not a financially attractive option. The possibility of remediation has implications for policies on the allocation of resources and the implementation of ‘rescue’ plans discussed below under ‘solutions’. Some suitable research questions (without hypotheses) follow.

What is an acceptable level of teaching competence?

To what extent is teacher incompetence remediable?

What conditions lead to remediation?

What percentage of the incompetent teachers can become competent again?

If teacher incompetence is remediable what resources are needed to remediate it?

If it is not remediable what avenues are open for the teachers concerned?

How expensive would an early retirement option be?

Suitability for teacher training

It is obvious that prevention is better than cure so the earlier incompetence is detected the better. If teaching incompetence could be detected even before it manifests itself in the classroom then a lot of grief could be avoided - not least for the teacher. A workable theory of suitability for teaching would produce criteria against which aspiring trainee teachers could be assessed. If found unsuitable they could be advised to pursue a different career and save themselves from an unwise decision. If the hypothesis is accepted that a
personality flaw is central to the problem then research needs to be carried out on the psychological profile of a good teacher.

*What are the psychological characteristics predictive of good teaching skill?*

**Hypothesis 1**
There are certain psychological characteristics common to all good teachers.

**Hypothesis 2**
These characteristics of a good teacher exist and are detectable before the person teaches.

A possible strategy to investigate the above might be a longitudinal study over many years. The trainee teachers could be put through a battery of psychometric tests and psychological and other profiles built up. They could then be followed through their career, their relative success (however assessed) monitored, and patterns sought.

*Gender Issues*

Even though this is a sensitive and controversial area, the difference in the rate of incompetence among male and female teachers uncovered by this study needs to be more closely examined. Some possible research questions and associated hypotheses might be:

*Given the proportions of men and women in the teaching profession why are there proportionally less incompetent women teachers than incompetent men teachers?*

**Hypothesis 1**
Women are better teachers than men are.

**Hypothesis 2**
Women are clustered about the mean of the ability range while men contain more of the extremes; as well as less incompetents, there are also less excellent women teachers than excellent men teachers.

**Hypothesis 3**
Schools as currently organised are more suited to females than to males.

**Hypothesis 4**
Teaching is a social activity and women, being more sensitive to the dynamic in a classroom, are better able to manage a class.

*How does the gender breakdown of students affect the rate of male and female incompetence in 'all boys' and 'all girls' schools?*

**Hypothesis**
There are more male teachers in 'all boys' schools and more female teachers in 'all girls' schools; the difference in ethos exacerbates incompetence in the former and ameliorates it in the latter.
Practical Recommendations

'Research is justified by what it allows us to understand. When we understand relations between variables, it may be possible to make practical applications.' (Van Wagenen, 1990, p.144) The improved understanding growing out of this research can contribute to the solution in two ways: firstly, it provides reasonably reliable information upon which to base decisions and secondly, it can help those concerned to understand and empathise with others. The various stakeholders in the problem of teacher incompetence can be considered as a widening circle with the students at its centre. Viewing it in this way then the major stakeholders are:

Students and parents;
Teachers;
Principals;
Management;
Unions;
Teacher training institutions;
Department of Education and Science.

Students and Parents

It is clear from this study that students suffer when an incompetent teacher teaches them. There is a damaging negative classroom atmosphere and poor examination results compared to students' performance in subjects taught by other (competent) teachers. The study also shows that parental and student complaints precipitate action by principals and that the evidence of those complaints is valued by principals - for example, parents are often asked to put their complaints in writing.

It is also clear that principals do their best to minimise the damage to students by various timetabling stratagems.

Parents are likely to become more assertive and demanding if something is not done about a situation where they see their children being badly taught. There was a case in 1997 in England in which a man then aged 23 presented evidence to the High Court that Hampshire education authority failed to identify and deal with his dyslexia. (Pyke 1997a, p.1) There had been many other cases involving 'special needs' but this case was different because it argued that LEAs have a common-law 'duty of care' towards pupils - including a duty to provide an acceptable education. 'This could allow families to sue for inadequate education in cases where it can be shown that teachers have not behaved like "reasonable professionals" and that children's academic progress has been hampered as a result.' (Pyke, 1997b, p.1)

Parents and pupils should assert their rights to a good education. There is no justification for knowingly subjecting students to damaging effects. Principals foresee greater
difficulties as parents become more difficult and demanding. One principal ruefully noted ‘Yes but they (parents) will make it difficult for the principal – not the teacher.’ This may not be necessarily so. The complaints will help the school to appeal for extra resources to help alleviate the problem. Also the threat to sue a school, for example, may act as a catalyst for action because threatened legal proceedings can give school management leverage and may help convince the teacher of the existence of the problem and the need for remedial action.

Resources should be allocated to minimise the damage to students. This means more money for schools, more teachers, more classroom assistants, more laboratory technicians, smaller classes, inservice courses, retraining, counselling and support for teachers, remedial help for under-achieving students, special arrangements for very disturbed students and home-school liaison schemes for dysfunctional families. Even though these measures are not likely to remedy the incompetence they will lessen the bad effect on students.

**Teachers**

The study tends to support the view that, because of personality and character factors, some incompetent teachers are not now, and never were, suited to being teachers. Principals believe that 58% of currently incompetent teachers are in that intractable category and 42% of incompetent teachers developed their incompetence over the course of time. Both of these types of incompetent teacher are currently accommodated by allocating more resources - particularly by judicious timetabling to minimise damage - they are given ‘easier’ classes and subjects for example. Yet their incompetence remains and attempts at remediation are not very effective.

Their competent colleagues must not be forgotten - the vast majority of the teaching force for whom the problem has implications for general morale.

‘Teacher incompetency colors (sic) the perception of all teachers. Although incompetent teachers comprise only about 5 percent of the teacher population, they cast a shadow over the remaining 95 percent who fulfil their responsibilities within acceptable standards of professionalism and competence.’

(Douglas 1993, p.2)

Although increased resources do not remedy incompetence they would benefit all teachers of all abilities - including many of the temporarily incompetent ones. Many of those whose incompetence developed over time could regain their competence if they were given more resources, greater support, and counselling, retraining and inservice courses. However, these measures may not make much difference to teachers whose incompetence has serious personality failure at its root. If an incompetent teacher is doing his or her best there should be attempts at some form of accommodation or reassignment or a dignified exit might be induced through sick leave or some enhanced severance gratuity. This would need the co-operation of the...
Department of Education and Science and the ASTI (Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland - the teachers' professional union).

If the incompetent teacher is knowingly and cynically abusing the system then the question of compulsory resignation or retirement or even dismissal cannot be ruled out. The teachers' professional union has an obligation to defend its members but that does not extend to defending dishonest and unprofessional behaviour that drags the teaching profession into disrepute.

**Principals**

The results show that dealing with an incompetent teacher is a stressful and lonely activity for principals. They do their best but feel demoralised and frustrated in their efforts to do anything about teacher incompetence. It also shows that principals feel that their training ill-prepared them for teacher evaluation, for helping teachers in difficulties, and for dealing with incompetence.

The likely introduction of whole school evaluation and a culture of accountability and appraisal will require inservice training for principals which may prepare them a little better for the process of evaluation.

A wise person learns from experience but an even wiser person also learns from the experience of others. So this research, when published and disseminated at least acknowledges the problem as real and should act as a slight morale boost. A related practical recommendation for principals therefore, would be to share their experience of incompetent teachers with each other. In this way principals would learn from one another, provide mutual moral support and share successful approaches.

Principals need to be trained to monitor and evaluate teaching. This is particularly important at the probationary stage when people obviously not suited to a teaching career can be saved from their wrong career choice. Principals need to consider the change in their relationship with teachers when monitoring, evaluating or challenging is indicated. Administration is relatively straightforward - dealing with people is much more difficult. Principals need more courses in human resource management and personnel. They should also be trained in effectively dealing with difficult situations such as monitoring and supporting a struggling or a 'difficult' teacher.

Principals must be empowered to observe classroom teaching and the work of teachers, pupils' homework etc. without such being viewed as very unusual / abnormal. Some form of teacher appraisal must become the norm so that negative feedback can be seen in the light of previous positive feedback.
Management Policy

Be it support or confrontation, a response from management is demanded by incompetent teachers. Should management seek solutions by changing or removing the incompetent teacher or try to accommodate the school and the educational system to the teacher? Knowledge of the nature of the incompetence from the results of this study indicates that both strategies are needed.

The problem would be greatly alleviated if only competent teachers were selected in the first place so selection of teachers needs to be carried out in a very professional manner and the probationary year should be more strictly monitored in order that wrong choices can be corrected.

Although whole school inspection and teacher appraisal are mentioned in the White Paper on Education - Charting our Educational Future (1995 p. 134), both are only at the stage of tentative pilot schemes and are a long way from total acceptance and implementation. Nevertheless formal structures will inevitably develop involving more accountability, appraisal and whole school inspection. This will raise consciousness of the quality of teaching and will be more likely to support more of a leading professional role for the principal.

The nature of the problem and the tasks it imposes on principals has particular implications for the selection of principals. Selection of principals needs to be carried out in a very careful manner - relying on a clear job description and driven by success criteria based on analysis of the tasks - not just on experience, personality and teaching excellence.

The study also shows that principals are not well trained for teacher evaluation. Inservice training is required for principals to prepare them for evaluating and monitoring the quality of teaching that goes on in a school.

Internal school management has a role too. Holders of internal management posts and rank and file teachers will need to share the responsibility for standards. Heads of subject departments may need to act as leading professionals in helping the teachers in their department - for example, an agreed curriculum could be followed by the teachers in a department and they could also engage in job sharing and team teaching to support each other.
Unions

The study shows that when called upon the teachers' professional union defended the teacher but acted in a co-operative and professional manner with school management to find a mutually agreeable solution. This did not occur in all cases - almost one quarter of the principals who dealt with the union reported that officials were uncooperative, adopted a very legalistic stance, and totally defended the teacher. Mostly, however, union officers counselled the teacher to act wisely and worked on behalf of the teacher to get the best possible deal to preserve professional integrity and personal dignity.

The existence of incompetent teachers in Irish voluntary secondary schools is strongly suggested by this research and needs to be admitted and faced. The study shows that 6.1% of teachers in Irish voluntary secondary schools are incompetent in the opinion of their principals. The union should accept that there is such a thing as teacher incompetence - some of it irremediable - and work to obtain the best possible resources for those who can be made competent again and the best possible deal for those who cannot become competent. The statistics in this study on numbers and ages of incompetent teachers can be used to estimate the cost of financial incentive for early retirement 'packages'.

The recommendation is that there be open acknowledgement of the problem, help for those who can be remedied, and dignified alternatives for those who can not.

Teacher training

The results of the study indicate that, in the opinion of their principals, more than half the teachers reckoned incompetent by their principals had never been competent. It follows that many teachers in possession of teaching diplomas should not have been awarded them in the first place. The incompetence is not confined to one age group so the problem cannot be attributed to a lax entry policy to teacher training course at certain times (of teacher shortage, for example). This question mark over their teacher training and the consideration of personality factors in teaching incompetence discussed above leads to a need to consider far more careful screening of applicants for teacher training.

The emphasis should be on 'prevention' by careful psychometric screening of new applicants for teacher training. Action research on the part of university education departments into the effectiveness of selection criteria for teacher training as described above in the academic recommendations would be very worthwhile.

Perhaps there should be reconsideration of the way the 'craft of the classroom' is taught - possibilities might be a longer training period, more teaching practice, and the introduction of an apprenticeship or mentoring system. Reconsideration of the modes of assessment in teacher training is also worthy of consideration - the assessment could take an entire probationary year or two for example.
As well as initial training there are implications for the provision of on-going inservice training for teachers. Inservice training is needed to help recover the teaching competence of those for whom it is possible. Such courses may help teachers experiencing problems to accept their problems and do something about them.

**Department of Education and Science**

The study has implications for the Department of Education and Science as the Minister for Education has overall responsibility for the education system and is involved in some way in all of the practical recommendations described above. There are recommendations for policy at three stages of a teaching career - entry, maintenance and exit.

**Entry**

The policies on entry to the teaching profession and on teacher training need to be seriously considered. There should be agreed standards and criteria for entry. These criteria should not just be academic achievement, nor should they be solely based on perceived economic needs (that science teachers are required, for example). The study shows that the most intractable incompetence is deeply rooted in personality so for some aspiring teachers it would be a charity to tell them at the beginning that their talents lay in other directions. Teacher training institutions need to be held accountable for the standard of teacher they produce. Incompetence should ideally only be of the remediable sort - the kind that develops over time due to tiredness, family trauma, illness, alcoholism and so on. Teacher training institutions should 'catch' the other more difficult type at the admission stage ideally, or if not, then definitely at the assessment stage.

A more rigorous, closely monitored probationary period - possibly two years- should be implemented. This would be another opportunity to 'counsel' someone out of a teaching career to which they were not suited.

Prevention of the appointment of incompetent principals too needs to be considered. Qualification requirements for management should be very high and appointment should be on a contract basis to permit a way out for everybody.

**Maintenance**

Inservice training as described above is also very important for principals and for the in-school management team

As professionals, teachers should be encouraged to maintain the standards of their profession. The proposed Teaching Council should be introduced and well supported. Its policies could incorporate some element of character reference or psychometric evaluation for teacher registration. Perhaps even some form of licensing system could be considered. There is also a disciplinary function proposed for the Council in cases of misconduct.
Although there is a counselling service available to teachers in some areas of the country at present, it should be extended to all areas and made available as a right to any teacher who feels under stress. This would help to remedy or prevent temporary incompetence and improve the morale and effectiveness of all teachers.

The role of the Inspectorate with respect to teaching standards needs to be clarified and agreed. Currently there is ongoing development of a scheme gradually to introduce whole school evaluation. This might present an opportunity to obtain agreement and understanding concerning teacher evaluation. Teachers may find internal self-evaluation preferable to strangers arriving at the school. The principal might be more acceptable in the classroom by being seen as the lesser of two evils. The educational sector needs to come to a different view of the relationship between principals and teachers. It has to become acceptable for a principal to act as a leading professional and instructional leader as well as simply an administrator.

Exit

Given the percentage of incompetent teachers and the percentage of them deemed irremediable as shown by the data from this study it should be possible for the salary section of the Department of Education to calculate the cost of appropriate early retirement packages. The 18% who are over 55 could be encouraged to retire early if they were given a suitable incentive. There is already such a system designed for teachers ‘[...] who are consistently experiencing professional difficulties in their teaching duties [...]’ (Dept. of Ed 1997, p.2) but it would need to be more financially attractive (and possibly compulsory if remediation failed). The financial cost would be well counterbalanced by the educational gain provided that there are measures at the other end of the career path to prevent new incompetent teachers replacing them. The Department of Education and Science officials should enter into negotiations with the teacher unions to agree some mechanism. If the incentive were enough it might overcome the embarrassment of being declared ‘incompetent’ (or whatever euphemism would eventually be agreed).
Implications for a Solution

Those at the beginning of their careers have the way out of career change or retraining and those at the other end have the option of early retirement. The possibility of finding a solution for the group in-between depends first of all on the judgement of whether teacher incompetence is temporary or permanent. Then it depends on how urgent the problem is considered, which in turn depends on whether it is believed that incompetent teachers are unacceptably harmful or if it is believed that there is an acceptable level of incompetence with good teachers compensating for bad.

Permanent versus temporary nature of incompetence

There are two conflicting hypotheses:

1. Teacher incompetence is temporary;
2. Teacher incompetence is permanent.

Teacher Incompetence is Temporary
This hypothesis says that incompetence is a temporary condition due mostly to stress caused by external factors such as social breakdown, lack of resources, rapid changes in education, and pressure to maintain or raise standards, and by internal factors such as illness, family difficulties or simply becoming tired or growing older and less energetic. If this hypothesis is accepted the solution is to be found in more resources for schools, more teachers, more classroom assistants, more laboratory technicians, smaller classes, inservice courses, retraining, counselling and support for teachers, remedial help for under-achieving students, special arrangements for very disturbed students and home-school liaison schemes for dysfunctional families.

Teacher Incompetence is Permanent
This hypothesis says that, because of personality and character factors, incompetent teachers are not, and never were, suited to being teachers. There are two branches to the solution in this case - the hard and the soft option. The hard option arises when it is felt that the teacher is fully aware of the incompetence and is immorally embezzling children’s futures and dragging the teaching profession into disrepute. This would demand dismissal or resignation. The soft option arises when it is felt that the teacher is doing his or her best and cannot help the ultimate inadequacy. This is much more difficult. Here there would be attempts at some form of accommodation or reassignment or a dignified exit might be induced through sick leave or some enhanced severance gratuity.

Judgement between the two hypotheses
The first hypothesis is supported by the age profile showing that incompetence increases with age and by the estimate that 42% of incompetent teachers developed their
incompetence over the course of time. The second hypothesis is supported by the 90% of principals thinking people should be screened more carefully before being accepted for training, by the 75% of principals believing that undeserved teaching diplomas are awarded, by the 58% of principals believing that the incompetence is irremediable, by their estimate that 58% of incompetent teachers had never been competent and by the lack of success of remediation attempts. Thus the research offers support to both hypotheses but tends to lean more in the direction of the second.

Extra resources alone will not solve the problem. The data show many currently incompetent teachers are already allocated many extra resources - by means of smaller numbers, ‘easier’ classes and subjects for example - yet their incompetence remains. These measures do not remedy incompetence - they simply hide it. It is not suggested that the increased resources aimed at solving the problem based on the first hypothesis should not be allocated. These measures are desirable and would benefit all teachers of all abilities - including some temporarily incompetent ones. However, most of the teachers possessed of the incompetence as defined for the purposes of this research are unlikely to be made competent by such external changes. They require a personal ‘metanoia’ and that is far more difficult.

**Harmfulness of Incompetent Teachers**

There are two conflicting hypotheses:

1. Incompetent teachers are harmful;
2. Incompetent teachers are relatively harmless.

**Incompetent teachers are harmful**

This hypothesis says that incompetent teachers are harmful to students, to other teachers, to the principal and to the school. If this is accepted then action is demanded - either of the ‘soft’ or ‘hard’ variety as described above.

**Incompetent teachers are relatively harmless**

This hypothesis says that there is no real damage done by incompetent teachers because other teachers compensate for them, school is a ‘package deal’ and overall, for most students, that deal is a good one. If this is accepted than nothing drastic needs to be done apart from limiting the damage by judicious timetabling, increasing resources and trying to accommodate the teachers in difficulty.

**Judgement between the two hypotheses**

The evidence from this study suggests that there is generally a very negative climate in the classroom of an incompetent teacher with teacher and students feeling almost equal antipathy to each other. As one principal said: ‘The teacher in question is ‘odd’ and brings out the worst in students. [...]’ 203 This cannot be good for students. Also, there is no denying that student examination performance is badly affected - as shown by the responses to question 5.1. This is a very serious effect since a student’s future hinges so
much on the terminal school examination. There is the possibility of students taking legal
action for damages against a school if it can be proven that the principal knowingly
assigned an incompetent teacher to them. There have already been cases where schools
have been sued for negligence because special needs or cases of bullying were not
recognised and addressed. If it is accepted that schools have a ‘duty of care’, then
principals may be sued if they knowingly assign an incompetent teacher to a class.

Incompetent teachers are harmful to other teachers as shown by the opinion of principals
89% of whom felt that incompetent teachers meant extra work for their colleagues. This
is also obvious from the timetabling strategies, since if incompetent teachers are given
easy options then their colleagues must be taking the difficult ones. The effect on
principals is also clearly negative - 96% said that it caused them stress.

The evidence in favour of the second hypothesis is the existence and continuation of the
current status quo. Incompetent teachers are being accommodated at present in various
ways. According to the data, the methods principals choose to tackle incompetence are
mostly non-aggressive, supportive and pastoral. The teachers' professional union is not
often called in because there is so little real confrontation involved. It could be argued
that the principals take this 'softly softly' approach because they do not feel a great moral
imperative to solve the problem. It could be argued that a certain level of teacher
incompetence is felt acceptable. On the other hand 93% of principals agree that more
assertive parents will make things more difficult which suggests that action is often taken
in response to parental pressure. The apparent acceptance of the current situation could be
ascribed more to inertia and lack of external force rather than a belief that a certain
amount of incompetence is acceptable. Also there is great fatalism in evidence from
principals and a sense that the problem is intractable - a majority of principals believing
that it is impossible to dismiss a teacher for incompetence, and that incompetence is
irremediable.

Comparing the two sets of evidence, the balance is in favour of the first hypothesis so it is
reasonable to conclude that incompetent teachers are indeed harmful. The question
follows: how harmful? Is the harm small enough to be tolerable? The actions of
principals suggest that it has to be tolerated but their opinions are vehemently of the
opinion that it should not - hence the stress they experience.
Conclusion

The central thesis of this dissertation was that:

The nature, extent and effects of teacher incompetence in Irish voluntary secondary schools are similar to those in the international experience.

Empirically the situation is similar in Ireland to the international experience. The figure of six percent is a little low (due probably to the strict definition) but tallies approximately with estimates in the United States.

Qualitatively, the evidence of this research supports the thesis that the nature and extent of incompetence in Irish voluntary secondary schools are similar to the experience in the United States and in England and Wales. The effects on principals (stress) and on students (poor learning) are similar but the Irish managerial response is more restrained and pastoral than its American counterpart - for example, there are no official remediation programmes and there is little or no dismissal for incompetence in Irish voluntary secondary schools. The Irish approach is more like that in England and Wales but is even more gentle as the Irish Inspectorate is much less involved than OFSTED and the principals are in a far less powerful position with teaching staff.

This study has shown that, in the opinion of principals, incompetent teachers exist in Irish voluntary secondary schools. While the impression that a large percentage of teachers is incompetent would be wrong, it would be equally wrong to claim that there are no incompetent teachers. The incompetence is addressed by ineffective remediation attempts and accommodated by judicious timetabling and tolerance. Principals feel that little can be done about incompetent teachers. The Department of Education and Science, Boards of Management, principals, students, parents and teachers and the teacher unions all seem to be aware of incompetent teachers but seem to tolerate and accommodate them. This suggests a belief in an acceptable level of teacher incompetence in schools. This may be because the long-term damage is not seen until ‘[... ] long after a teacher has become sufficiently distanced from the situation for repercussions to reach him or her’ (Brieschke 1987, p.334). ‘Teachers affect eternity; they can never tell where their influence stops.’ (Brighthouse and Woods, 1999, p.105).

By denying students the opportunity to develop fully, incompetent teachers, some knowingly and some unknowingly, are stealing children’s potential. It is not a once off robbery, rather is it [...] ‘like a slow embezzlement’ (Brieschke 1987, p.334). A certain level of corporal punishment was once thought to be acceptable in schools, but not any longer. Pressure will inevitably mount to address teacher incompetence.

It is possible that the expert advisory group currently considering the content, organisation and structure of second-level teacher education will come up with suggestions to improve the situation. Also, by means of the proposed Teaching Council,
the teaching profession itself may address incompetence by insisting on high standards at
the induction stage, by providing support for the maintenance of high standards, by
encouraging appropriate professional development and by taking disciplinary action
when necessary.

This study has identified the issue. If it is accepted that incompetence exists then there is
a moral imperative to act. The action need not necessarily be aggressive but the problem
cannot be ignored because of delicacy of feeling. The teaching profession needs to
address the problem and not simply close ranks and deny its existence. Most importantly,
a concerted effort is needed by all partners in education to help those incompetent
teachers who can be helped and to find a dignified way out for those who cannot.
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AND

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Path through the questionnaire

Principal
Himself / Herself

School Statistics
School, students, teachers

Are you aware of teaching incompetence in your school?

In the past

At present

Number of current

Census Forms
Detailed information about each Incompetent Teacher

Response
Diagnosis, advice sought.

Was the teacher union involved?

Yes

Union Reaction

Timetabling Strategies

Did you attempt to remedy the incompetence?

Yes

Remediation Strategies

Did an incompetent teacher ever leave?

Yes

Story of exit and Census

General Opinions and Comment
QUESTIONNAIRE

A copy of questionnaire is presented on the following twelve pages (numbered 1 to 12).

In reality they occupied six pages printed on both sides.
YOU AND YOUR SCHOOL

In order to analyse and report the findings by group I need responses to items about you and your school. Unless otherwise indicated please tick the appropriate boxes.

YOURSELF

1. Male □
   Female □

2. Age
   25 - 35 □
   36 - 45 □
   46 - 55 □
   56 - 65 □

3. What qualification do you hold (other than primary degree and H.Dip.)?
   None □
   Diploma □
   Master’s □
   Doctorate □
   Other □

4. What elements of your training were directly related to Principalship?
   None □
   Master’s □
   Doctorate □
   Other □
   Diploma □

5. Did you receive any training related to dealing with ineffective teaching?
   Yes □
   No □

6. Religious/Cleric □
   Lay □

7. How many years have you completed as principal of your present school?
   0 - 3 □
   4 - 6 □
   7 - 9 □
   10 - 12 □
   13 - 15 □
   16 - 18 □
   19 - 21 □
   22 or more □

8. How many years have you completed as a post-primary school Principal (including other previous positions as Principal)?
   0 - 3 □
   4 - 6 □
   7 - 9 □
   10 - 12 □
   13 - 15 □
   16 - 18 □
   19 - 21 □
   22 or more □

9. In your opinion, was your training for Principalship adequate?
   Yes □
   No □

10. Do you observe teachers actually teaching.
    Never or rarely □
    Occasionally □
    Accidentally, on classroom visits □
    On a regular basis formally □
    On a regular basis informally □
The information will be used to draw comparisons between the different types and sizes of school in a general way. There is no interest in identifying a particular school.

**YOUR SCHOOL**

11 Is the school located in
   an urban area (city/town) □ 1
   a rural area (under 5000) □ 2

12 Is the school fee-paying?
   Yes □ 1, No □ 2

13 Is the school
   day only □ 1, boarding only □ 2
   day and boarding □ 3

**YOUR STUDENTS**

14 Are your students
   all boys □ 1, all girls □ 2
   boys and girls □ 3

15 Is the number of students
   Less than 250 □ 1
   250 - 499 □ 2
   500 - 699 □ 3
   More than 700 □ 4

**YOUR TEACHERS**

16 Please write the number of teachers in the appropriate spaces.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Full-Time</th>
<th>Part-Time</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male ......</td>
<td>Male ......</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female.....</td>
<td>Female.....</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17 What would be the reaction of your teachers be to your formally observing them teach?
   Most would strongly object □ 1,
   Most would be happy to oblige □ 2,
   Most would be uncomfortable but would agree □ 3

Please read the definition of 'incompetent teacher' which I have offered

18 In accordance with my definition are you aware of teaching incompetence in your school?
   at present □ 1 go to question 19
   in the past only □ 2 go to question 20
   never □ 3 go to question 46

19 In accordance with the given definition how many do you consider to be incompetent at present?
   Please write 0 or 1 or 2 etc. in the appropriate spaces below

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Full-Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Male ......</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female.....</td>
<td>Female.....</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

On the next two pages please fill in details of the incompetent teacher (s)
INCOMPETENT TEACHER CENSUS

Have one particular incompetent teacher in mind but do not identify by name.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>□</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Religious/Cleric</th>
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<th>C</th>
<th>Approximately how many years of experience had the teacher completed?</th>
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<td>0 - 3</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4 - 6</td>
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<td>13 - 15</td>
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<td>16 - 18</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19 - 21</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22 or more</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>D</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25 - 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>36 - 45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>46 - 55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>56 - 65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>E</th>
<th>Had the teacher been competent at some time in the past?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>F</th>
<th>Main Qualifications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>G</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Permanent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Temporary</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Whole time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Temporary Part time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eligible Part time (EPT)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>H</th>
<th>Did the teacher have a post of special responsibility (VP / A / B)?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes (VP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes (B)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I</th>
<th>Subjects theoretically qualified to teach in decreasing order of expertise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>J</th>
<th>Subjects actually taught or duties performed in decreasing order of hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nature of incompetence

Please circle the point where you would place the teacher along each of the following.

| k | excellent discipline | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | dreadful discipline |
|   | overly strict | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | no control whatsoever |
| l | liked by students | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | hated by students |
| m | positive with students | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | negative attitude |
| n | good classroom climate | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | poor classroom climate |
| o | good subject knowledge | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | poor subject knowledge |
| p | excellent timekeeper | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | frequently late |
| q | perfect attendance | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | chronic absenteeism |
| r | follows curriculum well | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | does ‘own thing’ |
| s | students do well in exams | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | students underperform |
| t | cooperates with you | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | very uncooperative |
| u | gets on well with colleagues | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | difficult with colleagues |
| v | emotionally stable | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | erratic |

A census form for another incompetent teacher is on the next page (if you need more please photocopy!)
**INCOMPETENT TEACHER CENSUS**

Have one particular incompetent teacher in mind but do not identify by name.

### A. Gender
- Male □
- Female □

### B. Religious/Cleric
- Religious/Cleric □
- Lay □

### C. Age
- 25 - 35 □
- 36 - 45 □
- 46 - 55 □
- 56 - 65 □

### D. Competent at some time in the past?
- Yes □
- No □
- Don't know □

### E. Approximately how many years of experience had the teacher completed?
- 0 - 3 □
- 4 - 6 □
- 7 - 9 □
- 10 - 12 □
- 13 - 15 □
- 16 - 18 □
- 19 - 21 □
- 22 or more □

### F. Main Qualifications

### G. Status
- Permanent □
- Temporary Whole time □
- Temporary Part time □
- Eligible Part time (EPT) □

### H. Did the teacher have a post of special responsibility (VP / A / B)?
- No □
- Yes (VP) □
- Yes (A) □
- Yes (B) □

### I. Subjects theoretically qualified to teach in decreasing order of expertise

1. ............................................
2. ............................................
3. ............................................
4. ............................................

### J. Subjects actually taught or duties performed in decreasing order of hours

1. ............................................
2. ............................................
3. ............................................
4. ............................................

### Nature of incompetence

Please circle the point where you would place the teacher along each of the following.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excellent discipline</th>
<th>7 6 5 4 3 2 1</th>
<th>Dreadful discipline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overly strict</td>
<td>7 6 5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td>No control whatsoever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liked by students</td>
<td>7 6 5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td>Hated by students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive with students</td>
<td>7 6 5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td>Negative attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good classroom climate</td>
<td>7 6 5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td>Poor classroom climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good subject knowledge</td>
<td>7 6 5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td>Poor subject knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent timekeeper</td>
<td>7 6 5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td>Frequently late</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfect attendance</td>
<td>7 6 5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td>Chronic absenteeism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follows curriculum well</td>
<td>7 6 5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td>Does ‘own thing’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students do well in exams</td>
<td>7 6 5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td>Students underperform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperates with you</td>
<td>7 6 5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td>Very uncooperative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gets on well with colleagues</td>
<td>7 6 5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td>Difficult with colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotionally stable</td>
<td>7 6 5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td>Erratic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(If you need more please photocopy!* Now please proceed to question 20)
20 How did you diagnose existence of the incompetent teacher(s)?

( Please tick all of items of 'evidence' you used)

- Complaints from pupils
- Complaints from parents
- Complaints from other teachers
- Poor exam results (from otherwise 'good' students)
- Large proportion of their students getting 'grinds'
- Discipline problems
- Informal classroom observation by yourself
- Formal classroom observation by yourself
- Observation of out-of-class behaviour and personality
- Briefing by previous Principal
- Chronic absence and late arrival
- Other (please specify)

21 Please rank the three most important ticked items by writing their letters in the spaces below in descending order of importance.

First
Second
Third

22 Please tick the boxes of the sources from which you sought advice.

Then tick how helpful you found that advice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Approached for advice</th>
<th>Found very helpful</th>
<th>Found of some help</th>
<th>Found of no help</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Department of Education</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Secretariat</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another Principal</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal advice</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Literature</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chairperson of B. O. M.</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (specify)</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Feel free to comment
Consider the following list of reasons why principals intentionally avoid tackling the issue of teacher incompetence.

If you tolerate incompetence, please tick off your reasons

(Please tick as many of the following reasons as you wish)

a ___ It would take too much time
b ___ It would be pointless because you couldn’t win
c ___ You wish to avoid staff morale problems
d ___ You wish to avoid the hassle and stress
e ___ You don’t know how to tackle it
f ___ You lack the confidence to tackle it
g ___ You wish to avoid conflict with teacher unions
h ___ You already tried and got nowhere
i ___ Others tried before you and got nowhere
j ___ You wish to avoid legal ramifications
k ___ You think it would be unfair as they are doing their best
l ___ You don’t think the other teachers would support you
m ___ Other (please specify)

Consider the following list of reasons why principals tackle the issue of teacher incompetence.

If you have tackled incompetence, please tick off your reasons

(Please tick as many of the following reasons as you wish)

a ___ Parent pressure
b ___ The Board of Management instructed you to act
c ___ Pressure from other teachers
d ___ You felt it to be morally necessary to act
e ___ The school’s reputation was being damaged
f ___ It was causing numbers to drop
g ___ Pressure from students
h ___ Poor examination results
i ___ It was impossible to compensate for the incompetent
j ___ It was not possible to ‘hide’ the incompetent
k ___ You were angry at the incompetent teacher
l ___ You felt the other teachers would support you
m ___ Other (please specify)
27. Consider the following list of strategies sometimes employed by Principals in managing incompetent teachers.

(Please tick the strategies you yourself have employed.)

a. Confront the teacher gently and bring the problem out in the open.
b. Apply pressure
c. Attempt to salvage the situation and improve the teaching
d. Timetable them where they will do least harm
e. Ignore the problem
f. Amass documentation for possible legal action
g. Other (please specify)

28. Please rank the three most used by Principals in managing incompetent teachers. Please rank the three most used ticked items by Principals in managing incompetent teachers. Please rank the three most used ticked items by Principals in managing incompetent teachers. Please rank the three most used ticked items by Principals in managing incompetent teachers. Please rank the three most used ticked items by

writing their letters in the spaces below in descending order of importance.

First  
Second  
Third  

29. Consider the following methods by which Principals have been known to apply pressure

(Please tick any of the strategies that you adopted.)

a. Persuasion
b. Unpleasant timetabling
c. Frequent observation
d. Frequent meetings in the office
e. Issuing warnings
f. Passing on criticism from colleagues
g. Passing on criticism from parents and students
h. Other (please specify)

30. Please rank the three most effective ticked items by writing their letters in the spaces below in descending order of importance.

First  
Second  
Third  

31. Did you request that complaints from parents be put in writing?

No. I did not request that complaints be put in writing  
Yes (but usually they would not put complaints in writing)  
Yes (and usually they would put complaints in writing)  
Not relevant since parents never complained
If you did confront the incompetent teacher what was the response

(Please tick as many of the following responses as you wish)

a ___ acceptance and attempt to improve
b ___ denial
c ___ surprise
d ___ reference to other teachers
e ___ calling in of the union
f ___ counter aggression
g ___ accused you of harassment
h ___ broke into tears
i ___ Other (please specify)

Was the Teacher Union involved?

Yes ☐ 1, go to question 35
No ☐ 2, go to question 37

What was the reaction of the Teacher Union?

(Please tick as many of the following responses as you wish)

a ___ totally defending the teacher and uncooperative
b ___ defending the teacher but cooperative
c ___ indifferent to morality of the situation
d ___ conscious of morality of the situation
e ___ trying to convince the teacher to act wisely
f ___ open to compromise of sick leave/early retirement
g ___ aggressive toward the principal
h ___ Other (please specify)
37. Consider the following ways Principals timetable incompetent teachers to minimise the damage

*(Please tick the strategies you yourself have employed)*

a. Give them low achieving, low expectation streams
b. Give them non-examination classes
c. Give them small classes
d. Give them non examination-subjects
e. Ensure that they do not teach the same class for consecutive years
f. Give them Foundation level classes
g. Give them remedial classes
h. Give them only Junior classes
i. Give them Religion classes
j. Give them study supervision / library periods
k. Give them PE / games classes
l. Give them Transition Year classes
m. Other (please specify)

38. Please rank the three most used ticked items by writing their letters in the spaces below in descending order of importance.

First: 
Second: 
Third: 

39. Did you attempt to remedy the incompetence?  
   Yes: go to question 40  
   No: go to question 41

40. If you attempted to remedy the incompetence tick the boxes of the strategies you tried. Then tick how effective it was in remediating incompetence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tried this</th>
<th>Helped a lot</th>
<th>Helped a little</th>
<th>No help whatever</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Sending on inservice courses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Sitting in on classes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Regular advice sessions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Getting a colleague to act as mentor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Giving teacher pedagogy books to read</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Invoking support of Dept. Inspectorate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Other (specify)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Feel free to comment*
Have you ever been involved in a case where an incompetent teacher permanently left your school?

Yes □ 1 (go to question 42)  
No □ 2 (go to question 46)

What age was the incompetent teacher when leaving?

- Under 24 □ 1  36 - 45 □ 3  
- 24 - 35 □ 2  46 - 55 □ 4  
- 56 - 65 □ 3

What form did the incompetent teacher’s exit take?

- Dismissal □ 10  
- Resignation □ 7  
- Early retirement □ 3  
- Sick leave □ 9

- Teaching post in a different school □ 1  
- Redeployed □ 2  
- Temporary and not re-appointed □ 3  
- Death □ 4  
- Retirement at 65 □ 5  
- Career change □ 6

Was it done in order to avoid possible disciplinary action or dismissal?

- Yes □ 1  
- No □ 2

Please briefly outline what happened - without identifiably detail

Please fill in the 'census form' on the next page for the teacher concerned.
**INCOMPETENT TEACHER WHO LEFT SCHOOL**

*do not identify by name.*

**A.**
- Male □
- Religious/Cleric □
- Female □
- Lay □

**B.**
- Age
  - 25 - 35 □
  - 36 - 45 □
  - 46 - 55 □
  - 56 - 65 □

**C.**
- Approximately how many years of experience had the teacher completed?
  - 0 - 3 □
  - 4 - 6 □
  - 7 - 9 □
  - 10 - 12 □
  - 13 - 15 □
  - 16 - 18 □
  - 19 - 21 □
  - 22 or more □

**D.**
- Status
  - Permanent □
  - Temporary Whole time □
  - Temporary Part time □
  - Eligible Part time (EPT) □

**E.**
- Main Qualifications

**F.**
- Did the teacher have a post of special responsibility (VP / A / B)?
  - No □
  - Yes (VP) □
  - Yes (A) □
  - Yes (B) □

**G.**
- Subjects theoretically qualified to teach in decreasing order of expertise
  - □
  - □
  - □
  - □

**H.**
- Subjects actually taught or duties performed in decreasing order of hours
  - □
  - □
  - □
  - □

**I.**
- Nature of incompetence
  - Please circle the point where you would place the teacher along each of the following.
  - □
  - □
  - □
  - □

**J.**
- Subjects actually taught or duties performed in decreasing order of hours
  - □
  - □
  - □
  - □

*if more than one incompetent teacher left please photocopy- (IT 2 gone etc.) then proceed to question 46*
There follows a list of statements. Please circle the number which corresponds to your level of your agreement or disagreement with each statement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree strongly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>Incompetent teachers are major sources of stress for Principals.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>Incompetent teachers mean extra work for their colleagues.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>In Ireland it is impossible to dismiss a teacher on the grounds of incompetence alone.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d</td>
<td>The problem of incompetent teachers can never be dealt</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>University Education Departments give teaching diplomas to people who do not deserve them.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>Principals haven't the time to tackle the problem.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g</td>
<td>Incompetent teachers should be required to have counselling or retraining.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h</td>
<td>People should be screened more carefully before being accepted for teaching training.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i</td>
<td>The type of incompetent teacher defined here can never become competent.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j</td>
<td>Principals in general don't know how to tackle the problem of teaching incompetence.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k</td>
<td>No matter what should be done, in actual fact nothing is going to be done about incompetent teachers.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l</td>
<td>More assertive and demanding parents will make toleration and protection of incompetent teachers more and more difficult.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thank you most sincerely for answering my questions. If you have any comments, suggestions or reaction to this questionnaire please write them here.

Thank you again. Orison Carlile.
MAILING CONTENTS
I am Principal of Saint Anne’s Post Primary school in Cappoquin County Waterford. When I meet other Principals we sometimes ruefully compare notes on the ‘lost sheep’ in our staffs but we don’t really know the actual extent of the problem - if indeed it is a problem.

In my spare (!) time I am doing a PhD. If, like me, you too are interested in the experience of other Principals and are willing to contribute your own experience then please fill out the enclosed anonymous questionnaire and return it to me in the prepaid envelope. It is mostly only a matter of ticking boxes.

In return, I promise to send you a summary of the aggregated results. (It may take some time to collate it. As you know the ‘day job’ takes a certain amount of time and energy).

Your response will be absolutely anonymous. See overleaf for my ingenious system for making sure that you can be confident that neither I nor anyone else can know who you are. Overleaf also you will find an explanation of what I mean by an incompetent teacher so that we are all talking about the same thing.

I am sending the questionnaire at this time of year in the hope that with most of the students and teachers out of the way you may get a quarter of an hour of peace to fill it in. I would really appreciate your response by Friday June 19th.

Thank you in advance.

Yours sincerely,

Orison Carlile
Anonymity Safeguard

The success of this survey depends upon anonymity. Neither your name nor that of your school appears on the questionnaire. Your responses cannot be traced back to you.

There is a post card for you to fill in saying that you have filled in and posted the questionnaire.

If you post the questionnaire and the postcard separately I will end up with a collection of completed anonymous questionnaires and a collection of corresponding postcard but I won't know which corresponds to which.

The reason for the postcard is that I can follow up non-respondents with a reminder.

The reporting will take the form of descriptive statistics which will involve reports by group and will also involve cross-tabulations of various pairs of variables.

The results of this survey taken as a whole will be of great interest in providing the reality of the situation. It will hopefully settle the balance between media hysteria of rampant incompetence and the dangers of head-in-the-sand complacency on the other.

Your co-operation will benefit everyone.

Orison Carlile
### Incompetent Teacher Definition

An incompetent teacher displays *persistent failure* in some or all of the following five areas:

**Technical:** the teacher is deficient in discipline, teaching method, subject-knowledge, organisation and planning.

**Administrative:** the teacher fails to comply with school rules and procedures (e.g. chronic absenteeism and tardiness) and possibly does not follow the curriculum in a sound manner.

**Ethical:** the teacher violates standards expected of the teaching profession - e.g. having a negative attitude to students which could range from indifference all the way to physical or psychological abuse.

**Productive:** the teacher fails to produce desirable results in the classroom - e.g. there is little academic progress, students are not interested, they lack respect, and there is a poor climate in the classroom.

**Personal:** the teacher is deficient in judgement, emotional stability, self-control and strength of character; the teacher is 'difficult' and uncooperative with management and colleagues.

Clearly, most of us could be guilty of some of these failures at some point. I am interested in the cases where there is a sufficient and chronic amount of failure - a critical mass such that there is a persistent pattern of mistakes and failure.
Dear Orison,

I am sending this postcard at the same time that I am putting my completed questionnaire in the post. Since my questionnaire is completely anonymous, this postcard will tell you that you need not send me a further reminder.

Name: __________________________

County: __________________________

Please tick this box if you would like a summary of the results

This was to provide an incentive for the Principals to return their questionnaire.

Reminder of the procedure to be followed

Anonymity Safeguard

Please mail this postcard and the questionnaire

Anonymity is more secure than confidentiality

To identify respondents not in need of follow up

Reminder of the guarantee of anonymity

As an additional identifier in case of ambiguity

Postcard

POST CARD

Mr Orison Carlile
'Amadeus'
Duntahane park
Fermoy
Co. Cork
First follow-up letter

'Amadeus'
Duntahane Park
Fermoy
Co. Cork
June 23rd 1998

Dear {First Name}

I don't seem to have received your postcard (and presumably therefore I haven't your questionnaire either)
There could be several reasons.

It is past June 19th and you think it is too late now.
The closing date, like those of Departmental returns, is purely aspirational. I'll take questionnaires any time!

You have no incompetent teachers on staff and think it doesn't apply to you.
If only the Principals with incompetents replied my survey would be totally biased. Zero is a perfectly good number. Your opinions are still important. Having no incompetent teachers just makes the questionnaire all the easier and quicker to fill in.

You're not sure who I am or what my 'agenda' is.
I am doing this purely for academic reasons (a PhD is part of my 'escape plan'). I am receiving no funding from anyone. I have to be totally independent if the results are to be taken seriously. I am not trying to 'solve' anything. My aim is simply to bring the issue into the light. If you like you can ring me at school (058) 54271 or at home (025) 33206.

The questionnaire is buried somewhere under a mountain of British College Brochures and Viking Direct catalogues so you can't find it. Or you never received a questionnaire in the first place.
Just do nothing. In a few weeks I will send out the complete mailing again (Questionnaire, Postcard S.A.E.) to the remaining non-respondents on the assumption that the questionnaire is lost either in the post or in the bin.

I have received back 170 questionnaires so far out of 432 sent out. Please do your best to improve that figure.

Thank you in advance.

Yours sincerely,

Orison Carlile
Second follow-up letter

‘Amadeus’
Duntahane Park
Fermoy
Co. Cork
Sept 15th 1998

{{ First Name }} {{ Second Name }}
{{ School }}
{{ Address Line 1 }}
{{ Address Line 2 }}
{{ Address Line 3 }}

Dear {{ First Name }}

By now the dust has settled a little - Leaving and Junior Cert. Results are fabulous as always and teachers all agree that the timetable is fair (i.e. everyone feels equally victimised) You may therefore be able to find fifteen minutes or so to fill in the enclosed questionnaire. Completing the questionnaire is mostly only a matter of ticking boxes. You may remember I sent you the original last June and a reminder during the summer when I promised to send the complete package again in case the original was lost.

This is an academic study. It will not solve the problem but it will bring the issue into the light. I am a Principal myself so you can trust me as a colleague. If you have any questions you can ring me at school (058) 54271 or at home (025) 33206.

Your response will be absolutely anonymous. See overleaf for my system for ensuring that neither I nor anyone else will know who you are.

Overleaf also you will find an explanation of what I mean by an incompetent teacher so that we are all talking about the same thing.

In return, I promise to send you a summary of the aggregated results. (This will be in January next at the earliest as I hope to have some time to work on the data analysis during the Christmas holidays).

So far I have received 277 completed questionnaires. This is a response rate of 64% - fairly good for a postal survey but the importance of the issue would be better reflected in a higher return rate. Please do your best. Bringing the issue out in the open will help everyone - not least the incompetent teachers themselves.

Yours sincerely,

Orison Carlile