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Evaluating the Impact of Ireland's Instructional Leadership Programme:

*Post-Primary Teachers' Practice
and Student Engagement*

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Evaluating the Impact of Ireland's Instructional Leadership Programme: *Post-Primary Teachers' Practice and Student Engagement*

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Executive Summary

This report provides the first independent evaluation of Ireland's *Instructional Leadership Programme* (ILP) since it was established in 2008. The ILP, which falls under the auspices of Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI), aims to enhance student outcomes by widening post-primary teachers' instructional repertoires and building collaborative professional capacity. The evaluation was guided by the *Evaluation Framework for Teachers' Professional Learning in Ireland* (Gilleece et al., 2023) and examined the programme's impact on individual and collective teaching practice, design/delivery characteristics, school-level implementation factors, student engagement and achievement.

Methodology

The study employed a two-phase explanatory sequential mixed-methods design:

- **Phase 1 (Quantitative):** An online survey distributed to the registry of ILP graduates (n=1,451 accessible sample), yielding n=343 valid responses (24% response rate; $\pm 4.67\%$ margin of error at a 95% confidence level)
- **Phase 2 (Qualitative):** Four semi-structured interviews with ILP Steering Committee members and five post-primary multi-site case studies across diverse patronages, incorporating focus groups with school leaders/teachers (n=24) and students (n=28)

Key Findings

The following are amongst the key findings emerging from the research:

- *Impact on Individual Teacher Practice:* The ILP successfully supports teachers / school leaders in developing student-centred, active and social-constructivist approaches to teaching and learning. Teachers reported increased agency and confidence to take pedagogical risks and an enhanced ability to articulate the explicit pedagogical rationale behind their choice of instructional approaches
- *Impact on Collective Practice & Inclusive Efficacy:* Participation fosters a shared instructional language that helps de-privatise teaching. Survey findings using the Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practice (TEIP) scale demonstrated high self-efficacy in supporting student behaviour, adapting instruction and creating emotionally safe classrooms
- *Programme Design & Facilitation:* The off-site residential retreat model of professional learning, combined with the two-year modular structure, provided vital time and space for reflection, experimentation and cross-school networking. The requirement to attend in triads (uniting formal senior school leaders with classroom teachers) was identified as a critical structural enabler for sustained school-wide implementation
- *Student Engagement & Achievement:* Students reported higher motivation, retention and participation when exposed to ILP approaches. Skills such as extended wait time reduced academic anxiety and promoted psychological safety. While no direct attainment measures were collected, tracking data in case schools suggested that students consistently surpassed expected terminal examination (Leaving Certificate) outcomes

Future Considerations

At the school level, timetabling constraints remain a barrier, as scheduled time for ILP teams to meet regularly recorded the lowest quantitative baseline in the study, while deprivatisation practices like peer classroom observation face similar scheduling issues. Beyond structural time limits, the points race of the Senior Cycle terminal examinations create ongoing pressure, occasionally causing both teachers and students to revert to traditional, lecture-style delivery simply to cover syllabus content. A high dependence on a very small pool of facilitators underscore a necessity for a more distributed facilitation model. Furthermore, the current lack of formal post-programme graduate networks leaves ongoing, long-term collaboration almost entirely dependent on individual school initiative. This risks a loss of momentum once the initial two-year training concludes.

Recommendations

On foot of these considerations, the following recommendations are made:

- A clear, progressive definition of instructional leadership as a collaborative, distributed practice across teachers and school leaders must be established to enhance course coherence
- Renewed efforts should be made to expand the ILP Steering Committee beyond ETBI representation to include diverse school patronages and operational perspectives
- An associate facilitator pathway for ILP graduates should be created to reduce the dependency on a small pool of facilitators and build local leadership capacity
- The ILP must incorporate specific content on leading systemic change and managing resistance to better equip participants to drive broader school-wide cultural improvements beyond individual classroom practice
- The ILP should explore county and/or regional support structures for alumni to foster local capacity and sustain cross-school collaboration after formal training ends
- Notwithstanding individual schools' autonomy, guidelines for school leaders on strategic cohort building to align participation with school improvement priorities and diffuse learning throughout the wider staff should be provided
- Notwithstanding individual schools' autonomy, the ILP should produce guidance for schools on creating internal conditions that maximise impact, such as protecting collaborative time, facilitating developmental peer observation and systematically incorporating student voice

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Chapter 1:

Introduction

The Instructional Leadership Programme (ILP) is a professional learning programme in Ireland designed to promote a collaborative approach to nurturing excellence in teaching and learning. While it comes under the auspices of Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI), the programme supports teachers from all post-primary school sectors. Central to the ILP's philosophy is a commitment to enhancing student learning outcomes through the continuous development of teachers' knowledge, skills and pedagogical language. It aims to expand teachers' instructional repertoires and support structured, reflective professional dialogue to strengthen classroom practice and build sustainable professional capacity across all sectors of post-primary education in Ireland. The programme was established in 2008 and this research study, which employed a multi-phase, mixed-methods approach, is the first independent evaluation of its impact. The research directly captured the voices of key stakeholders, including ILP graduates and the students in their classrooms, and so offers a holistic view of how the programme is experienced. In this first chapter of the report, an overview of the purpose of the research is provided, and the background to the ILP is explained to provide context for subsequent sections of this report.

Research Purpose

The primary aim of this study was to explore how participation in the ILP impacts post-primary teachers' individual and collective practice, as well as student engagement and achievement. To optimise alignment with the Irish teacher professional learning context, the research was guided by the *Evaluation Framework for Teachers' Professional Learning (TPL) in Ireland* (Gilleece et al., 2023). Developed by the Educational Research Centre (ERC) on behalf of the Department of Education, this national framework provides a multidimensional lens for evaluating how professional learning translates into sustained changes in teacher practice, school cultures and student experiences. There were six research questions, designed to capture the ILP's impact from the individual teacher to the wider school community:

1. To what extent and in what ways does the ILP impact post-primary teachers' professional practice?
2. To what extent and in what ways does the ILP impact post-primary teachers' collective professional practice?
3. What characteristics of the ILP's design and delivery support post-primary teachers' learning?
4. What school-level factors support or hinder the implementation of the learning from the ILP?
5. To what extent and in what ways does the ILP impact student engagement?
6. To what extent and in what ways does the ILP impact student achievement?

Before substantively addressing these research questions, an examination of what instructional leadership is and how the ILP has evolved over time is warranted.

Conceptualising Instructional Leadership

While the ILP Steering Committee has not adopted a working definition of instructional leadership, its programme documentation includes implicit operational indicators that frame it as a collaborative process rooted in shared pedagogical practice across all roles from formal senior and middle leaders to teachers. This team dimension to the concept aligns with emerging understandings of instructional leadership as distributed (Halverson & Clifford, 2013; Hussein Amzat et al., 2026; Özdemir et al., 2023) and incorporating both tacit and symbolic practices in its manifestation (Shaked, 2026). In this way, the ILP challenges ‘the myth’ of instructional leadership being a principal-only activity (Hallinger, 2026, p.3). At a foundational level, as a leadership model that is enacted by both formal leaders and teachers, it prioritises actions and activities that enhance classroom teaching, curriculum design, assessment and student learning (Spillane et al., 2003; Bush, 2015; Day et al., 2016). Ostensibly, the main objective of instructional leadership (and the ILP, specifically) is to improve student experiences and outcomes. Moving forward, formalising an explicit working definition of instructional leadership on which the ILP can be rooted is pivotal to provide the necessary conceptual foundation from which the programme’s design can dynamically spring. It is also important for providing a clear strategic direction for the programme’s ongoing evolution.

Evolution of the ILP

The ILP was first introduced in Ireland through a partnership between ETBI and Professor Barrie Bennett, of the *Ontario Institute for Studies in Education* at the University of Toronto. Between 2008 and 2024, Professor Bennett facilitated 15 cohorts, comprising approximately 1,500 teachers, to programme completion. Bennett was critical of the notion that a teacher’s deep knowledge and passion for their subject area is all that is required to foster effective learning. Instead, he argued that instructional leadership relied on the conscious, informed integration of skills, tactics, strategies, concepts and organisers. This was the *raison d’être* for the programme’s foundation. The ILP aimed to transition teachers from being tacitly skilled in a limited number of instructional methods to being explicitly skilled in a wider, more sophisticated repertoire. This explicit mastery was intended to enable teachers to articulate their decisions and dynamically differentiate their instruction to meet the diverse needs of modern classrooms. A detailed overview of the timeline for the ILP’s rollout in the Irish context is provided in Chapter 2.

Programme Governance, Administration and Funding

While the ILP is open to all school categories, it is managed through the ETBI and strategically guided by a national steering committee. This committee consists of eight members and oversees strategic planning, policy alignment with national priorities and the ongoing embedding of instructional leadership within the Irish education system. The committee is chaired by Joan Russell (Education Research Officer, ETBI), who has coordinated the ILP and its associated educational programmes since its inception in 2008. Members of the committee include active school and system leaders and graduate principals. This mix of members is intended to ensure the programme’s strategic direction remains connected to the daily realities of Irish schools. The committee remains open to representation from other school sectors and has invited participation in the

past; however, its current active membership consists of representatives from the ETBI and current and former academic staff of Mary Immaculate College. Centralised administrative support, event management and platform oversight are managed by a dedicated administrator based within ETBI. This operational hub coordinates the logistics of national training events, maintains the central registry of graduates and manages the programme's communication channels. At the macro level, ETBI provides the national framework, coordination and pedagogical leadership for the programme. At the local level, participating schools are responsible for the costs associated with registration and travel to the training sessions (traditionally hosted in Carlow). This shared investment model reflects a partnership approach in which national leadership provides strategic direction, while individual schools commit resources to support local implementation and capacity building. As a result, participation depends not only on schools' interest in the programme but also on their willingness and capacity to prioritise professional learning within existing budgets.

Programme Structure

The ILP provides a collaborative framework where teachers actively investigate how their classroom actions impact factors affecting student learning, such as motivation, novelty, authenticity, safety and accountability. The programme categorises a teacher's instructional toolkit into five distinct, interacting dimensions:

1. *Instructional Skills*: These are the fundamental, everyday actions a teacher uses to enhance learning. While not inherently complex or research-based on their own, they serve as the foundation for more complex processes. For example, rather than selecting a respondent only from students who raise their hands, which might only confirm that one student knows the answer, an explicit instructional skill is to ask students to think about a question and discuss it with a partner first. This think-pair-share dynamic involves every student and heightens accountability, while also increasing emotional safety through rehearsal with peers. Other skills include managing appropriate wait-time, explicitly sharing lesson objectives and linking new material to students' past experiences. There is significant overlap with assessment for learning approaches within this dimension
2. *Instructional Tactics*: Tactics are more powerful interventions used to enrich and strengthen classroom strategies. A key tactical intervention is the deployment of graphic or visual organisers to move students beyond text-based resources. Tactics aim to deepen conceptual understanding across any subject area. At a basic conceptual level, however, the idea of a tactic is not unproblematic because, pedagogically, it implies teacher-centricity. It suggests something done to the class rather than with the class, although this is not how it is interpreted or enacted in the programme itself
3. *Instructional Strategies*: Strategies represent the most complex, teacher-led interventions in the classroom. They involve a series of related, structured steps, such as cooperative learning or concept attainment. The ILP emphasises that popular approaches like group work can actually become counter-productive if applied incorrectly
4. *Instructional Concepts*: While skills, tactics and strategies constitute what teachers actively do in the classroom, concepts serve as the lenses that help teachers understand how, when and where to integrate those actions. For instance, when a teacher effectively frames a question and utilises a partner-sharing tactic, they are deliberately bringing the instructional concepts of student accountability and psychological safety to life

5. *Instructional Organisers*: Organisers are the overarching frameworks and bodies of research that allow teachers to organise their vast array of skills, tactics and strategies into a coherent philosophy of instruction. These organisers include fields of study such as multiple intelligences, brain research, diverse learning preferences, ethnicity, gender and the dynamics of at-risk educational environments. By filtering lesson design through these lenses, teachers increase their instructional wisdom and shape their classrooms around the diversity of the learners. Notably, however, the ILP's instructional organisers also include a focus on Learning Styles theory which, in and of itself, is contested (Willingham et al., 2015; Newton and Miah, 2017).

Table 1 provides examples of each of these five instructional dimensions. In interpreting the table, it should be noted that the distinctions between some of the dimensions here are arbitrary and that other literature interprets skills, tactics, strategies, concepts and organisers differently or use other terms - see, for example, *Danielson's Framework for Teaching* (Morris-Mathews et al, 2021).

Table 1: Instructional Dimensions

Instructional Skills	Instructional Tactics	Instructional Strategies	Instructional Concepts	Instructional Organisers
- Framing questions - Responding to students - Sharing lesson objectives - Teaching to the objective - Checking for understanding - Probing for clarification	- Think-Pair-Share - Placemat - Snowball - Take a Position - Brainstorming - Consider All Factors - Positive Minus Interesting - Examine Both Sides - Ranking Ladders - Venn Diagrams - Fishbones	- Teams Games Tournament - Jigsaw - Team Analysis - Academic Controversy - Concept Attainment - Concept Formation - Picture Word Inductive Model	- Safety - Inclusion / belonging - Individual accountability - Active Participation - Respect - Meaningful - Interest - Novelty / Variety	- Multiple Intelligence - Emotional Intelligence - Learning Styles - The Human Brain - Children at risk - Gender - Culture/ ethnicity - Learning disabilities - Child development

Modular Progression

To operationalise these five core dimensions and ensure progression, the ILP is structured across distinct modules delivered over the two-year cycle. The foundational stages introduce the *Basic Principles of Instructional Leadership* (Module 1) and the core *Concepts of the ILP* (Module 2), which lay the groundwork for understanding *Instructional Concepts and Skills* (Module 3). The core repertoire of teaching is then expanded through focused modules on *Instructional Tactics* (Module 4), *Instructional Organisers* (Module 5) and structured *Lesson Design* (Module 6). Specific collaborative and inquiry-based methodologies are mastered through *Cooperative Learning* (Module 7), *Concept Attainment* (Module 8), *Concept Formation* (Module 9), *Mind Mapping and Concept Mapping* (Module 10) and *Academic Controversy and Team Analysis* (Module 11). The progression framework connects individual classroom practice to broader systemic outcomes including assessment, professional and collaborative reflection and leading whole-school improvement in teaching and learning. While the modular framework provides good scaffolding for daily classroom execution, planning within the ILP is conceptualised primarily at the micro-level, while giving comparatively less explicit attention to macro-level unit sequencing or long-term scheme design. This is an area with scope for development. Furthermore, there is no dedicated module on change leadership / management to

enable teachers to diffuse their key learning more broadly within school and support them with overcoming resistance. This is crucial for system change

Programme Enactment Framework

The ILP utilises the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) to support leadership of change within schools. CBAM is strongly associated with Gene Hall and Shirley Hord (2011, 2014) and is generally used to understand, facilitate and measure the complex process of change in educational settings. A central tenet of CBAM is that systemic educational change is a highly personal process, not a singular event. It recognises that individual teachers do not adopt new instructional practices overnight; instead, they experience a predictable progression of personal concerns and developmental stages as they adjust to an innovation. Specifically, the ILP aims to look at the Levels of Use (LoU) (Table 2) to track and support how a teacher transitions from initially learning about a teaching method to mastering and integrating it seamlessly into their daily practice.

Table 2: Concerns-Based Adoption Model

Level	Stage of Use	Description of Teacher Practice within the ILP
0	Non-Use	The teacher is not currently using any ILP methods or tools in their classroom.
I	Orientation	The teacher actively attends an ILP workshop to understand and practice the innovation.
II	Preparation	The teacher is actively planning how to transfer the newly learned ILP method to their specific classroom.
III	Mechanical	The teacher starts using the method with students, though implementation may feel rigid, clunky or less than highly effective.
IV	Routine	The teacher has stabilised their practice and is now a smooth, regular user of the ILP method.
V	Refined	The teacher has become a sophisticated, highly adaptive user, altering the method to maximise student learning.
VI	Integration	The teacher is actively merging multiple ILP skills, tactics, and strategies together.
VII	Refocusing	The teacher is searching for and designing new, innovative ideas to build upon their established practice.

Ultimately, incorporating CBAM is intended to support teachers through the natural challenges of adopting new methods by meeting them at their individual developmental level as they progress through these levels of use.

Conclusion

Chapter 1 has established the context and operational landscape of the ILP in Ireland. The remainder of this report is organised into five chapters. Chapter 2 presents a document review to delineate the ILP's historical trajectory in Ireland and establish a baseline for the programme's intended rationale. Chapter 3 overviews the research methodology, which incorporated a two-phase, mixed-methods design. It outlines the data collection instruments, participant selection criteria for both school leaders and students, ethical considerations and data analysis procedures. Chapter 4 provides the results of Phase 1 of the research, which was quantitative in nature and consisted of a questionnaire distributed to all ILP graduates. Chapter 5 provides the results for Phase 2 of the research, which was qualitative in nature and consisted of a case study with five schools under different patronages. Chapter 6 synthesises the findings in relation to the research question. Finally, Chapter 7 evaluates the systemic implementation opportunities / barriers and offers strategic recommendations for how the ILP could evolve over time.

Chapter 2:

ILP Document Review

Introduction

This chapter of the report provides a document review of the *Instructional Leadership Programme* (ILP), using material publicly available on the ILP website and an interview with the ILP's initial designer. The objective of the chapter is two-fold:

- To map the programme's historical trajectory
- To establish a baseline for the programme's intended rationale

Addressing these objectives provides a good context for the subsequent evaluative phase and grounds the operational reality of the ILP within its original purpose. The document mapping approach was executed in two phases to align with the objectives.

Mapping Approach

Initially, a narrative trajectory of the programme was established by synthesising data from documents, the ILP website and the interview with the programme's designer and initial facilitator. The trajectory is presented in Part A below. Following this synthesis, the Gilleece et al. (2023) evaluation framework was applied as a thematic lens to systematically categorise the programme's rationale. Relevant data were extracted and reported under the framework's four pillars (illustrated in Figure 2 on p.11). This analysis provides a structured evaluation of the rationale and focus underpinning the ILP, and is presented in Part B below. The two-part approach adopted here enables the ILP to be understood both in its historical development and in its alignment with some of the key dimensions of teacher professional learning outlined in the *Cosán* framework (The Teaching Council, 2016).

The materials reviewed included annual reports, strategic plans, and the official course syllabus, alongside peer-reviewed journal articles, conference presentations and teacher-focused reflections that formed part of the book, *Celebrating Ten Years of the ILP: 2008-2018*. These materials were supplemented by an on-the-record semi-structured interview with the programme's initial designer, Professor Barrie Bennett, to provide further illumination on the programme's introduction in Ireland. Because the core principles of the ILP are consistent across these diverse materials, individual points are presented as a synthesis of the collective documentation rather than being mapped to individual publications. However, where direct quotations are used in this chapter to provide specific insight into the programme's rationale these are sourced exclusively from the interview data - save for where it has been specified otherwise. Table 3 provides a summary of the source categories, with a non-exhaustive list of category examples and the general rationale for including each category in the review. All documents reviewed for this part of the project are freely available on the ILP website (<https://www.instructionalleadership.ie/>).

Table 3: Items for Document Review

Source Category	Examples	Purpose
Official ILP Documentation	• Annual reports • Strategic plans • Course syllabus	To establish the formal ILP structure, timeline and goals.
Academic Literature on the ILP	• Journal articles (e.g. Ó Murchú, Russell, & Bennett, 2017) • Research Theses (e.g. Coffey, 2021)	To provide theoretical grounding and context for the ILP.
Instructional Resources	• Workshop presentations • Rubrics • General teaching resources • ILP books (e.g. <i>Beyond Monet, Classroom Management or Cooperative Learning</i>)	To illuminate how the ILP is delivered to / received by practitioners.
Other Literature	• Conference / Teachmeet presentations (e.g. Broderick, 2022) • Articles from practitioners (see <i>Celebrating Ten Years of the ILP: 2008-2018</i>)	To elaborate on specific instructional methods and how they are enacted by practitioners.
Digital Resources	• ILP general website content • ILP website news section	To ensure up-to-date information on current ILP developments.
Programme Designer Interview Data	• Semi-structured interview with Professor Barrie Bennett	To provide deeper insight into the ILP rationale and development.

Part A: The ILP Trajectory

The ILP was heavily influenced by North American perspectives on instructional intelligence. Two Canadian teacher professional learning programmes, in particular, were germane to its inception: *Edmonton Public Schools' Teacher Effectiveness Programme* and the *University of Toronto Learning Consortium*. Their success resulted in international attention, which ultimately resulted in a desire for similar programmes in several different jurisdictions, including Ireland. Barrie Bennett was involved in both programmes and key learning taken from these programmes was embedded into the structural fabric of the ILP. The evolution of the ILP, against this background is illustrated in the timeline outlined in Figure 1, and discussed in detail below.

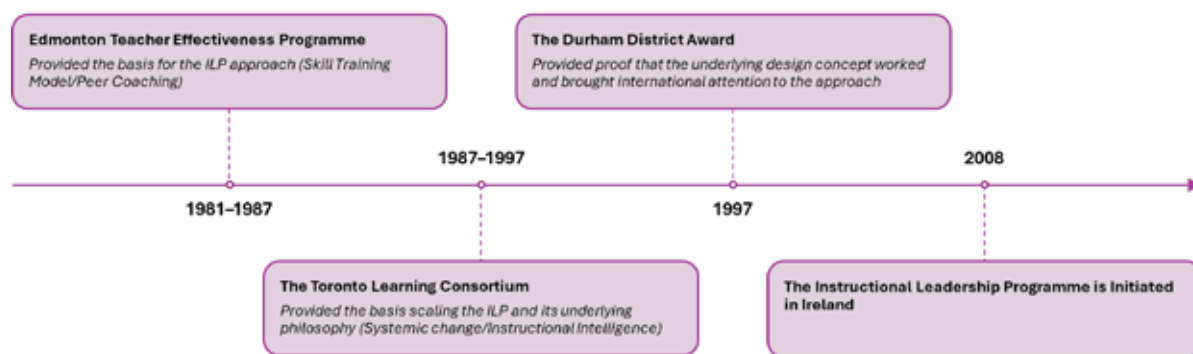


Figure 1: Timeline of Key Events in the ILP's Development

The Teacher Effectiveness Programme (c.1981-1987)

The *Edmonton Public Schools' Teacher Effectiveness Programme* (TEP) was a seminal professional learning initiative started in 1981 by Edmonton Public Schools in Alberta, Canada. Designed by Peter Smilanich and Bill Maynes, its primary rationale was to improve the life and learning chances of students, while valuing teachers as lifelong learners. The programme was built on a foundation of emerging research, specifically the *Skill Training Model* (also known as peer coaching) which was developed by Beverly Showers and Bruce Joyce (see, for example, Showers and Joyce [1996] and Joyce and Showers [2002])). This model involved a cycle of theory, modelling, practice and feedback. Structurally, the TEP required participants to attend in principal/teacher teams, initially meeting every week before shifting to sessions every two weeks over six months. A key feature of the programme was its funding model - it was voluntary and paid for by school budgets rather than central grants, which fostered internal capacity. This also ensured that only schools committed enough to invest financially in the programme, participated in it, increasing the likelihood of success. TEP was highly successful, eventually expanding to involve 154 schools and 17 consultants, and it served as the original architectural blueprint for the triad structure adopted by the Irish ILP.

The Learning Consortium (c.1987-1997)

The Learning Consortium (LC) was a systemic school improvement project established in 1987 at the University of Toronto. It was formed as a strategic partnership between the Faculty of Education at the University of Toronto, the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), and four large school districts. It was initiated by Michael Fullan, then the Dean of the Faculty of Education and later the Dean of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT), who sought to design a programme based on the success of TEP. The LC focused on Level 3 research, which aims to change the architecture of entire systems rather than just individual schools/classrooms. Its focus was on building internal capacity within the four participating districts, so they could eventually sustain the work without relying on outside consultants. The content of the LC was built on the instructional intelligence framework, which explores the complex intersection between skills, tactics and strategies. A major success story of the consortium was the Durham Board of Education's achievements.

The Durham Board of Education Success (c.1987-1997)

As one of the four districts of the LC, the Durham Board of Education (Ontario) underwent a decade-long evolution from 1987 to 1997 that served as the ultimate proof of concept for the LC's systemic potential. At the outset in 1987, the context was challenging. The Ontario Ministry of Education had identified Durham as the lowest-performing school district of its size in Ontario. Over the ensuing ten-year journey, the district committed to a deep implementation of the instructional intelligence framework across all its schools. The implementation was highly successful and transformed the district, which culminated in global recognition in 1997, when Durham won the prestigious Bertelsmann Award as an exemplar 'for creating forward-looking services for the educational institutions'¹ under its remit. This dramatic shift from the bottom of provincial rankings to the top within a decade provided the empirical evidence that the intersection of change theory and instructional complexity could fundamentally transform an education system. Increased international interest followed.

International Expansion of Instructional Intelligence Framework (1997-2004)

Taking inspiration from the Canadian success, several education systems in Australia, including Tasmania and Western Australia, undertook systemic change projects based on their models. These initiatives were significant in demonstrating that the instructional intelligence model was transferable across different international contexts. In Western Australia, the project achieved remarkable longevity, lasting 22 years, because it was built into the teacher union's collective agreement. This shielded the project from the effects of state elections and political shifts, that could result in projects being derailed by political or administrative turnover. These lessons in 'change wisdom' directly informed the implementation strategy in Ireland, and emphasised that internal capacity and stable leadership were essential for sustainable success.

ILP in Ireland (2004- present)

As the success of the Durham District reached an international audience, key system players in the Irish context recognised the potential for the model to address local educational needs. By 2004, a professional dialogue had started with Barrie Bennett and commitment to the initiative was formalised through the involvement of key system actors within the ETBI (or Vocational Education Committees (VEC), as they were known at the time). These actors provided the institutional framework and strategic leadership necessary for a national rollout in post-primary schools. The final mandate for the programme was secured after a series of consultative workshops held across Ireland in 2008 - three workshops to introduce it to VEC schools; a fourth workshop to introduce it to the CEOs and Education Officers of VECs and the then Chief Inspector with the Department of Education. These workshops engaged key educators to explore the feasibility of a systemic change project involving all thirty-three VECs. The overwhelming interest resulted in the formation of the first official cohort of ILP participants, comprising of approximately 155 teachers and principals who graduated from the programme in 2010. This original cohort committed to six, three-day training sessions over a three-year period before certification as ILP graduates. The programme structure subsequently evolved

¹ <https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/about-us/what-weve-achieved/1996>

to two 2.5 day sessions per year for two years, which made the programme more accessible and sustainable for participants.

Part B: The ILP Rationale

Fundamentally, the ILP is a teacher professional learning programme. Therefore, applying Gilleece et al.'s (2023) four TPL components (Figure 2), as a structural lens to map the programme's rationale, facilitates a cohesive comparison later in this report, where the empirical results will be reported and analysed through the same evaluative criteria. This alignment ensures that the theoretical underpinnings of the ILP are foregrounded in the evaluation of its practical realities within the Irish educational landscape.

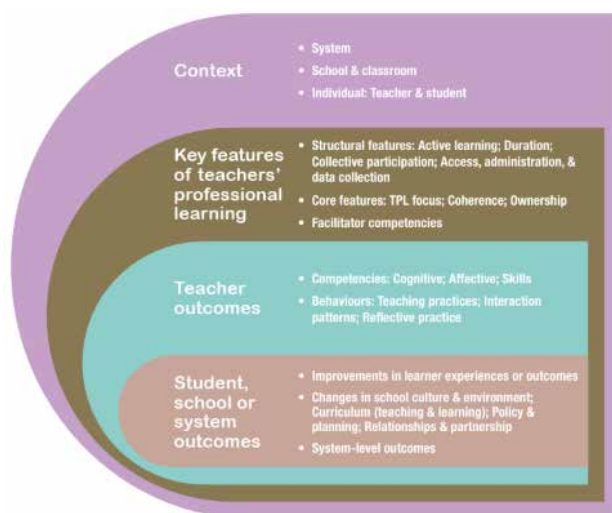


Figure 2: A Framework for TPL Evaluation in Ireland (Gilleece et al., 2023, p.11)

ILP Context

The documentation reviewed frames the ILP as a Level 3 systemic change initiative. Unlike Level 1 changes, which alter administrative structures, or Level 2 changes, which target isolated classroom practices, Level 3 systemic change aims to transform the system itself through the upskilling of a critical mass of teachers on instructional competence. Philosophically, this competence is heavily informed by a social constructivist model of learning. It emphasises active engagement, cooperative structures, and scaffolded dialogue and places comparatively less explicit emphasis on culturally responsive pedagogy. At the system level, the programme aligns with national policy initiatives (e.g. Junior Cycle Reform, School Self-Evaluation, the Teaching Council's *Cosán* framework etc.) to promote a collaborative learning culture that sustains change over time. Essential to its intended systemic success is meso-level administrative and organisational support through the ETBI and a move away from a grant-reliant funding model, towards schools paying for enrolment in the programme from their own budgets. The ETBI runs the ILP as a residential-based programme designed to facilitate immersion rather than exposure, formation rather than information and community rather than attendance, thereby supporting long-term professional growth, leadership capacity, and cultural change. At the school level, the programme responds to a context where school culture can often act as a barrier; it seeks to replace siloed teaching with collaborative norms, co-teaching and a common instructional language to ensure the culture supports rather than rejects new practices. At the individual level, the context is defined by a move toward inclusive education. For the teacher, this means shifting from being 'accidentally adequate' to 'consciously competent' through

reflection and evidence-based methods. For the student, particularly those at risk of not learning, the ILP context is one of empowerment. Through the development of teachers' instructional repertoires, the programme seeks to create classroom environments that are both safe and intellectually engaging.

ILP Key Features

The documentation reviewed indicates clearly that the design and structural features of the ILP are intended to move beyond traditional, one-off professional development models toward sustained systemic change. Structurally (and conceptually), the programme regards one-off, keynote-style workshops as insufficient and orients strongly towards an immersive, active learning approach. ILP participants engage in a cycle of theory, demonstration and practice, and utilise rubrics to refine and evaluate their learning. The duration of the programme is intended to reflect the reality that systemic change is a multi-year process. The ILP now spans two years and features residential workshops held twice annually to promote deep, sustained engagement. Collective participation is central to the design and this is buttressed by what the programme designer refers to as the 'Principal Principle'. While each school sends a team of three teachers, a structural requirement of enrolment is that either the school's principal or deputy principal must be included in this triad. The rationale for this requirement is purported to be that leadership involvement is essential to navigate the cultural and structural 'cogs' of the school. In other words, without a senior, formal leader's active participation, new instructional initiatives risk being stifled by existing school norms. From an administration standpoint, the ILP is self-financing and voluntary - this is widely recognised internationally as a key ingredient of successful professional learning. The programme utilises the *Concerns-Based Adoption Model* (CBAM) to track progress and evaluate impact.

The core features of the programme focus heavily on instructional complexity, which the founder defines as the 'intersection between skills, tactics and strategies'. The ILP is underpinned by the idea that key foundational instructional skills must be mastered before high-level instructional strategies can be executed. While this staged progression provides a structured entry point for participants, presenting skill acquisition as a strict, linear prerequisite may risk oversimplifying the dynamic reality of teaching. In practice (and as recognised within the ILP), classroom environments are inherently complex and non-linear and often require teachers to engage with sophisticated instructional strategies simultaneously alongside foundational management and design skills. Notwithstanding this linear framing, the programme reinforces its approach through a common instructional language, which ensures coherence and allows for meaningful professional dialogue between ILP team members and colleagues. To ensure ownership, participants are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning and develop what is termed as 'conceptual flexibility'. Rather than being restricted to a rigid application of one or two instructional methods, this flexibility enables teachers to fluently weave between different strategies and tactics, and adapt their repertoire in real-time to meet the specific needs of their classroom context. This adaptive capacity is central to the ILP's goal of moving beyond 'accidentally adequate' instruction toward a more intentional, sophisticated level of practice. The entire process is driven by key facilitator competencies. Facilitators must not only demonstrate mastery of instructional methods but also possess the 'change wisdom' necessary to model best practices and create a supportive, dynamic environment that sustains long-term professional growth.

Teacher Outcomes

The documentation reviewed provides a clear rationale for the ILP in relation to teacher outcomes, underpinned by a strong intention to positively impact teachers' pedagogical practice and, consequently, student learning. At its core, the programme aims to deepen a teacher's mastery of the craft and provide them with a sophisticated instructional repertoire to maximise student impact. The structure of the ILP supports this aim by clearly focusing on fostering a culture of continuous improvement and evidence-based practice. There is a strong emphasis on collaboration to support teachers in moving from the isolation of their individual classrooms to a collaborative professional community. To enhance teacher learning, the ILP encourages a shift from routine habits to greater intentionality and self-reflection through evaluative tools such as CBAM and the use of a professional reflection journal. The opportunity for teachers to engage in purposeful self-evaluation is viewed as central to refining their instructional intelligence and driving continuous improvement. Ultimately, the ILP's potential to impact teacher outcomes is evident in its purported ability to empower teachers to be more conscious of their actions, to grow their professional agency and to create more engaging and equitable learning environments. This impact is reflected, in particular, in the experiences of ILP graduates captured in the book *Instructional Leadership Programme Celebrating 10 Years 2008-2018*:

[The ILP]...forced me to consciously question my own practice and pedagogical approaches, to untwist my thinking about teaching and learning, to identify the negatives and the positives, to extend my instructional repertoire and to modify my instruction actions in order to maximise student learning in my classroom (p. 135)

My style of teaching has dramatically changed with a focus on creating an environment of active student learning. I have developed 'a language' around instruction and learning that I had not previously anticipated (p. 131)

The development of a shared language for instruction among ILP participants is seen as paramount to supporting teachers' individual learning. However, it goes even further in enabling them to disseminate their learning across the school setting, for example, through professional conversations on pedagogy with colleagues, co-teaching, peer observation and peer coaching. The ILP represents a clear commitment to the teacher as a lifelong learner. By equipping teachers with a deep understanding of instructional methods, inclusive practices and change processes, the ILP aims to develop empowered teachers who are not only focused on mastering instruction within their own classrooms but who ultimately become examples within their own school communities.

Student, School or System Outcomes

The documentation reviewed illustrates a clear and consistent account of outcomes at student, school and system levels, even though these are not always explicitly labelled as such. What is notable is how closely these levels are connected. The programme does not treat them as separate domains, but as part of a single, practice-led approach to improvement. Student-level outcomes take a holistic approach to learning, moving beyond the focus on measurement or achievement. The learning of the student is consciously connected to various conditions such as motivation, novelty, authenticity, accountability and safety. This highlights the programme's emphasis on the importance of pedagogy and the classroom environment in shaping student learning. This broader, holistic pedagogical approach

is particularly valuable in a climate and system that prioritises terminal assessment outcomes (Lehane et al., 2025). The ILP stresses the importance of authenticity and safety, which include supportive classroom relationships and responsive teaching practices. It intends for teachers to create classroom environments that are vibrant and positive spaces for learning - and several vignettes available from teachers demonstrate a significant degree of success in that regard.

School-level outcomes can be clearly discerned from the ILP. The programme intends for schools to be centres of adaptive expertise, where teachers are encouraged to consciously modify their instructional actions and deliberately utilise skills, tactics and strategies to suit the context. Additionally, the programme advocates for schools to be environments of reflective practice, acknowledging that this endeavour is often complex. This is evident in the programme's content, which places emphasis on reflection *on*, *for* and *in* practice. Teachers are pushed to explore new approaches while thoughtfully considering their effectiveness and the reasons behind them. The process of reflection is strongly encouraged through collaborative and dialogic processes, supported by a suite of linked resources that facilitate reflective practice at various levels: individual, subject department, year/class, and school-wide. This focus is also highlighted in the ILP Research Plan, which dedicates significant attention to professional reflection & collaborative practice and explores how these elements influence classroom work. Each annual report also discusses the programme's emphasis on both individual and collaborative professional learning (see, for example, 2023 annual report). Vignettes provided by teachers illustrate how teachers engage in this collaboration through sharing ideas, visiting each other's classrooms, and applying practical strategies in their daily teaching (e.g. see the account by Maria O'Sullivan, Coláiste Choilm, pp. 89-90).

Outcomes aimed at system improvement can also be discerned - although it is much less explicit in the documentation. At the heart of the programme is the intention for individual schools to improve not just in isolation but collectively through shared learning, collaboration and capacity building, both from experiences within the school and from other schools at the professional learning days, over the two years. There is a strong emphasis on connections within the documentation reviewed: connections between schools, between practice and policy, and between teachers and researchers. The programme aligns with current policy frameworks, such as *Looking at Our Schools 2022* (Department of Education, 2022) and *Cosán: Framework for Teachers' Learning* (The Teaching Council, 2016). It is intended to support teachers in responding meaningfully to these policies, particularly through shared professional learning, participatory and active teaching and learning, and reflective practice both within and across schools.

Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated the evolution and foundational rationale of the ILP in Ireland, and subsequently situated it within the four key components of teacher professional learning in the Irish context (Gilleece et al., 2023). The analysis has demonstrated how the programme's systemic context and structural design align with the contemporary vision for teacher professional growth articulated in the *Cosán* framework (The Teaching Council, 2016). The documents reviewed reveals a conscious move away from isolated, keynote-style workshops toward a model that prioritises collective participation, instructional complexity and sustained 'change wisdom'. However, while these documents and interview data articulate the intended architecture of the ILP, they provide only the theoretical and systemic baseline for the initiative. The chapters that follow move beyond this documented rationale to present the empirical findings of this study and explore how these foundational principles are translated into the practical, lived realities of teachers, school leaders and students within the Irish educational landscape.

Chapter 3:

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter of the report provides an overview of the methodological approach used to evaluate the ILP. There were six research questions set by the ETBI, as contractors, and the methodology was devised to address these directly and holistically. The questions were:

1. To what extent and in what ways does ILP impact on post-primary teachers' professional practice?
2. To what extent and in what ways does ILP impact on post-primary teachers' collective professional practice?
3. What characteristics of ILP design and delivery support post-primary teachers' learning?
4. What school-level factors support or hinder the implementation of the learning from the ILP?
5. To what extent and in what ways does ILP impact student engagement?
6. To what extent and in what ways does ILP impact student achievement?

Overall Approach

The evaluation, rooted in a pragmatic approach to research, employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design over two phases. This involved prioritising the collection and analysis of quantitative (questionnaire) data first (Phase 1), followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative (interview/focus group) data (Phase 2). The evaluation structure and reporting were informed by the *Evaluation Framework for Teachers' Professional Learning in Ireland* (Gilleece et al., 2023). While the core thematic headings of the framework were maintained for consistency, the specific interview and focus group instruments were extensively adapted, with questions tailored or omitted to directly align with the unique context of the ILP and the approach sought by the contractors.

Ethical Considerations

This evaluation received full ethical approval from the DCU *Institute of Education Faculty Research Ethics Committee*. Strict ethical protocols were maintained throughout the study. All participants were provided with comprehensive plain-language information sheets in advance, outlining the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. Given that the data collection involved minors, who are legally categorised as a vulnerable population, a dual-layered consent process was enforced; formal informed consent was obtained from parents or legal guardians, while the students themselves explicitly provided informed assent. Finally, robust data protection measures were implemented to guarantee institutional anonymity and participant confidentiality across all datasets. Data gathered were available only to the researchers and no other data, beyond what is published in this report, was shared with the ETBI.

Research Phase 1 - Quantitative

Phase 1 of the evaluation involved distributing an online survey (via Qualtrics XM) to the complete registry of contactable ILP graduates (n=1,611). While collectively, at the point of survey distribution, there were n=1,667 ILP graduates, there were n=56 graduates for whom the ILP administrators did not have email addresses. The contactable registry was divided into the following seven categories to correspond with the school affiliation of each respondent:

- Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS)
- Joint Managerial Board (JMB)
- Educate Together (ET)
- Education and Training Boards (ETBs)
- Youthreach (YR)
- Further Education Colleges (FEC)
- Others

Out of the initial mailing list, n=160 undeliverable bouncebacks were recorded, which resulted in a final eligible sample of n=1,451. The granular detail of the number of respondents mapped to the seven categories of school affiliation is outlined in Table 4. The questionnaire was distributed via the chairperson of the ILP Steering Committee, who acted as gatekeeper. Respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire in full, which was estimated to take approximately 10-15 minutes.

Table 4: Overview of Quantitative Sample

Category	No. of Schools	No. of Participants	No. of Bouncebacks	Accessible Sample
ACCS	27	168	13	155
ETB	167	865	66	799
ET	1	5	0	5
FEC	14	65	16	49
JMB	77	391	43	348
YR	22	80	15	65
Others (programme graduates who now have policy roles)	16	37	7	30

Questionnaire Structure

There were four sections to the questionnaire. The first section sought demographic details for respondents. This was needed to establish a profile of the participant cohort. The second section focused on questions related to the context and features of the ILP, to align with the first two components of the *Evaluation Framework for Teachers' Professional Learning in Ireland* (Gilleece et al., 2023). The third section focused on the outcomes of the ILP to align with the final two components of the *Evaluation Framework for Teachers' Professional Learning in Ireland* (Gilleece et al., 2023). The fourth section was composed of six of the nine items of the short-form *Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practice* scale (Sahli Lozano et al, 2023). These items were included given that a key aim of the programme is to support teacher learning to meet diverse learning needs. The fifth section probed the extent to which the programme impacted general instructional leadership behaviours and was selectively adapted from Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) *Principal's Instructional Management Rating Scale* (PIMRS), which has been widely used in instructional leadership research. The items within sections 2 to 5 were formatted as rating scale questions. Participants evaluated each statement using a five-point agreement scale: (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree, (4) Agree and (5) Strongly Agree. The questionnaire was anonymous at the point of collection and participants could withdraw at any time before clicking 'Submit', by closing their browser window.

Quality and Reliability

To ensure the instrument's face validity and structural flow, a pilot was conducted with a convenience sample of five teachers. These participants had completed a comparable professional learning programme managed by the ETBI. To test the functionality of the questionnaire, these teachers completed the questionnaire items by mapping them onto their experiences of their respective programme. Following the completion of the questionnaire, a focus group was conducted with the pilot participants to critique the questionnaire design and language clarity. Minor structural and phrasing modifications were subsequently implemented based on this feedback to optimise the instrument prior to its distribution. The finalised questionnaire yielded n=343 valid responses. Based on a population size of n=1,451, this sample equates to a 24% response rate and equates to a 95% confidence level with a margin of error of approximately $\pm 4.67\%$. This indicates that the actual sample size provides a highly reliable and statistically precise representation of the broader ILP graduate population.

Quantitative Analytical Procedure

The data collected via the *Qualtrics XM* platform were exported into *Microsoft Excel* for statistical analysis. Given the evaluative nature of the survey, the data analysis procedure relied primarily on descriptive statistics to summarise and organise the dataset.² Frequencies, percentages and mean scores were calculated across the five-point Likert scale items to identify central tendencies, patterns and variances in participant responses. To enhance the clarity and interpretability of the findings, these statistical distributions were visually represented using bar charts and frequency

² Inferential statistical analyses were performed on the survey dataset to examine inter-variable relationships and subgroup effects. However, to maintain high accessibility for a broad policy and practitioner readership, this report focuses on descriptive presentations only. The inferential datasets have been retained to inform subsequent theoretical conceptualisations and further academic work.

tables. Crucially, this descriptive baseline was analysed not only to map broad trends across the graduate population but also to inform and contextualise the subsequent case study phase. This allowed the identification of key areas of interest for deeper qualitative exploration.

Research Phase 2 - Qualitative

Phase 2 incorporated two components. First, interviews were held with members of the ILP Steering Committee (n=4). The purpose of this was to identify the strategic intent and vision for the programme from an institutional perspective and to provide a baseline of intended implementation. It was also essential in unearthing contextual information regarding the history and operational nuances of running the ILP. Purposive sampling (maximum variation) was used to identify ILP steering committee participants; interviews with these participants lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour. Data from these key informants is reported using the identifiers KI.1, KI.2, KI.3 and KI.4 in subsequent chapters. Second, a multi-site embedded case study was undertaken with five (n=5) post-primary schools. Candidate case schools were selected using a decoupled expression of interest form at the end of the Phase 1 questionnaire. The *Thank You* page of the questionnaire contained a separate, independent link to a secondary, brief form where participants could nominate their school for Phase 2. Because it was a separate form, the contact information was stored in complete isolation from the questionnaire responses. Fifteen nominations (n=15) were received from the three categories of school outlined on Table 5. Five case schools were selected from this list and invited to participate in Phase 2. The schools were selected to ensure maximum variation in school type and geographic location from the candidate schools nominated.

Table 5: Phase 2 Nominations

Category	No. of Schools Nominated in Phase 1	No. of Schools Selected for Phase 2
ACCS	3	2
ETB	9	2
JMB	3	1

Case Study Structure

Data were gathered from two broad groups within each case school:

1. *Focus Groups with School Leaders and Teachers*: These targeted the collective and collaborative dimensions of the ILP, bringing together the three key personnel (principal/deputy and two teachers) involved in the ILP, from selected schools. Where there were more than n=3 key personnel who had completed the ILP (i.e. the school was offered the training for a second time or a member of staff trained in another school joined the staff), they were also invited to participate, subject to a maximum of n=6. Each focus group facilitated collective professional reflection and lasted approximately 90 minutes.
2. *In-School Focus Groups with Students*: A selection of students taught by participants of the ILP were recruited from the small, purposive sample of schools already selected for Phase 2. Each student had been taught by at least one teacher who had completed the ILP and the students knew who the teachers were. Students were asked to describe their teacher's instructional methods and how the classroom environment

motivates them and encourages learning. Each focus group lasted between 30 and 40 minutes.

A thick description of each case can be found in Table 6. However, identifying environmental and contextual details have been limited to safeguard institutional anonymity. This measure was taken to ensure the schools remain unidentifiable within the final report.

Table 6: Case Schools

Case School	School Category	Participant Gender	School Role	Participant Identifier
School 1	ETB	Male	Principal	T1.1
		Female	Teacher	T1.2
		Female	Teacher	T1.3
		Male	Teacher	T1.4
		Female	Teacher	T1.5
		Male	Student	S1.1
		Male	Student	S1.2
		Female	Student	S1.3
		Female	Student	S1.4
School 2	ACCS	Female	Teacher	T2.1
		Male	Deputy Principal	T2.2
		Male	Teacher	T2.3
		Male	Principal	T2.4
		Female	Teacher	T2.5
		Female	Teacher	T2.6
		Male	Student	S2.1
		Female	Student	S2.2
		Female	Student	S2.3
		Male	Student	S2.4
		Female	Student	S2.5
		Female	Student	S2.6
School 3	JMB	Female	Teacher	T3.1
		Female	Teacher	T3.2
		Male	Deputy Principal	T3.3
		Female	Student	S3.1
		Female	Student	S3.2
		Female	Student	S3.3
		Female	Student	S3.4

School 4	ETB	Female	Principal	T4.1
		Female	Teacher	T4.2
		Female	Teacher	T4.3
		Male	Student	S4.1
		Male	Student	S4.2
		Male	Student	S4.3
		Female	Student	S4.4
		Female	Student	S4.5
		Female	Student	S4.6
School 5	ETB	Female	Teacher	T5.1
		Female	Teacher	T5.2
		Female	Teacher	T5.3
		Female	Teacher	T5.4
		Male	Teacher	T5.5
		Male	Student	S5.1
		Male	Student	S5.2
		Male	Student	S5.3
		Male	Student	S5.4
		Male	Student	S5.5
		Female	Student	S5.6
		Female	Student	S5.7
		Female	Student	S5.8

Qualitative Analytical Procedure

For the qualitative phase of the study, deductive content analysis was employed to systematically analyse the case study data. The coding process was structured around the four core components of the *Evaluation Framework for Teachers' Professional Learning in Ireland* (Gilleece et al., 2023). Utilising this specific framework as a constrained matrix served a dual purpose. First, it fulfilled the explicit reporting mandates of the project's funders to ensure that the review was aligned with and guided by Gilleece et al.'s (2023) research, given its contextualisation to Ireland. Second, because the Gilleece et al. (2023) framework was developed to evaluate professional learning within the Irish context, this analytical approach ensured that the study's qualitative insights were aligned with the overarching ethos of *Cosán* - the Teaching Council's national framework for teachers' learning.

Rigour and Trustworthiness

The rigour of the qualitative phase was guided by Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework for trustworthiness, which encompasses the dimensions of credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability. To ensure the qualitative findings accurately reflected the participants' perspectives, several procedural safeguards were implemented. With the explicit agreement of all participants, all interviews and focus groups were digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim to ensure an accurate record of dialogues. To enhance

credibility, member checking was conducted with the key informant interviewees, who were invited to review their transcripts to verify the accuracy of the record. Furthermore, to minimise individual researcher bias and facilitate confirmability, the data analysis process utilised investigator triangulation. Coding took place in pairs, and all subsequent data abstractions were cross-verified by at least two researchers on the study team to establish analytical consensus. Ethical rigour, which is central to the dependability of the data, was systematically managed through a strict informed consent protocol. Prior to any fieldwork, formal informed consent was secured from all ILP participants. For the student focus groups, informed consent was obtained from the students' parents / legal guardians, while the students themselves explicitly provided informed assent. Finally, while these qualitative data were not intended to be statistically generalised, transferability was maximised through the provision of thick descriptions of each case school.

Management of Vulnerability

While this research involved minors, whose age can render them vulnerable - or at least not fully mature - the risk was still categorised as low. The study was situated entirely within the framework of normal educational practice and focused on collecting students' views/perspectives on instructional leadership and pedagogical strategies, rather than sensitive personal or psychological interventions or measuring their academic performance. Students engage in this kind of feedback all of the time as part of school's ordinary engagement with the school self-evaluation process. No invasive procedures or collection of sensitive data regarding students' lives were involved; the focus remained strictly on the evaluation of the ILP that their teachers participated in. To mitigate any perceived risk, the research adhered to a no-harm principle by ensuring all data were anonymised and stored securely. Furthermore, the voluntary nature of participation was upheld through a robust process of parental informed consent and student assent, to ensure that no student felt pressured into participation and that opting out carried no academic consequence. Given that the researchers' engagement with the students occurred within a highly regulated, professional school environment, the actual probability of any harm / discomfort was not greater in and of itself than those ordinarily encountered during the performance of routine educational activities in school (e.g. SSE or focus groups during Whole School Evaluations). Any risk was further mitigated by the fact that student participants were limited to those aged 15 and older, which ensured that they could fully comprehend the nature of the research and provide informed assent. The researchers were also highly experienced practitioners with years of expertise working with children and adolescents.

Methodological Limitations

The findings of this study into the ILP should be interpreted in the context of at least five limitations. The main limitation arises from the fact that the overall methodology generally relied on self-reported data. Both the quantitative and qualitative elements relied on participants' subjective perceptions of their practices and their efficacy in terms of student learning. This means that social desirability bias may have played a role, where respondents overreport positive engagement with the ILP to align with perceived expectations of its impact. A second limitation arises in the self-selection approach adopted for Phase 1. Although the questionnaire produced a very good response rate for this type of survey, teachers who were highly enthusiastic about the

ILP (or those who were deeply frustrated by it) are far more likely to have completed it. The middle ground of indifferent teachers might be underrepresented and this needs to be considered in how the findings are interpreted. A third limitation arises in that Phase 2 of the evaluation only reports on three categories of schools that can enrol on the ILP - no Phase 2 vignettes are available for the other categories of eligible schools. Fourth, as a non-experimental evaluation, the study did not incorporate a control or comparison group of non-participating teachers. While the findings reflect meaningful changes in classroom practice, these should be viewed alongside the natural influences of ongoing professional growth over time. Fifth, the survey cohort exhibited notably high levels of existing postgraduate qualifications (as Figure 7, later in this report, illustrates). This high baseline of formal academic attainment is a confounding variable, as it is difficult to disentangle whether observed instructional efficacy and reflective capacity stem solely from the ILP or are mediated by participants' prior advanced academic studies. Notwithstanding these limitations, the overall rigour of the study was not diminished. The methodological decisions made represented necessary strategic trade-offs, without which the depth of insight achieved on participants' experiences of the ILP, and its impact on students, would not have been possible. Rather, the deployment of a sequential mixed-methods design allowed for robust methodological triangulation. In other words, the quantitative breadth of the national survey successfully counterbalanced the localised limitations of the case studies and resulted in a balanced, comprehensive evaluation of the programme.

Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the sequential mixed-methods research design deployed to evaluate the impact and implementation of the ILP. Grounded in a pragmatic paradigm, the study utilised a two-phased approach. Phase 1 utilised a quantitative questionnaire to identify macro-level trends and tendencies across the ILP graduate population, which established the baseline for the qualitative case studies in Phase 2. This qualitative phase employed deductive content analysis framed around the four core components of the *Evaluation Framework for Teachers' Professional Learning in Ireland* (Gilleece et al., 2023) to ensure robust policy alignment with the Irish context. Throughout both phases, strict ethical protocols were maintained, with safeguards implemented to protect students as a legally vulnerable population through rigorous consent and assent procedures. While inherent methodological trade-offs were acknowledged regarding self-reporting, the sequential integration of quantitative breadth and qualitative thick description went some way towards counterbalancing these limitations. The next chapter will present the results of the implementation of these research instruments.

Chapter 4:

Phase 1 Findings

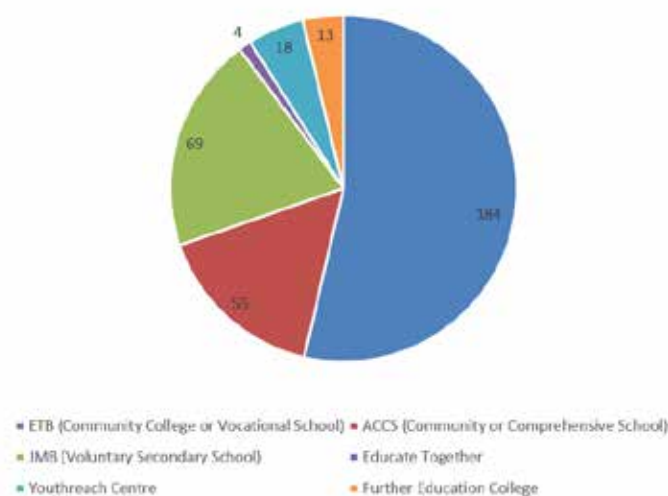
Introduction

This chapter presents the empirical quantitative findings generated from the first phase of the sequential mixed-methods evaluation of the ILP. Derived from the national ILP questionnaire, these results utilise descriptive statistics, graphs and charts to map macro-level trends and impacts across the respondent cohort. To ensure clarity in data presentation, all percentages used in this reportage have been rounded to the nearest whole number. By establishing these baseline trends, the chapter provides a robust, multi-dimensional evaluation of the ILP's initial implementation metrics and broad systemic efficacy, which will subsequently serve as the analytical foundation for the qualitative insights explored in the following chapter.

Characteristics of Survey Sample

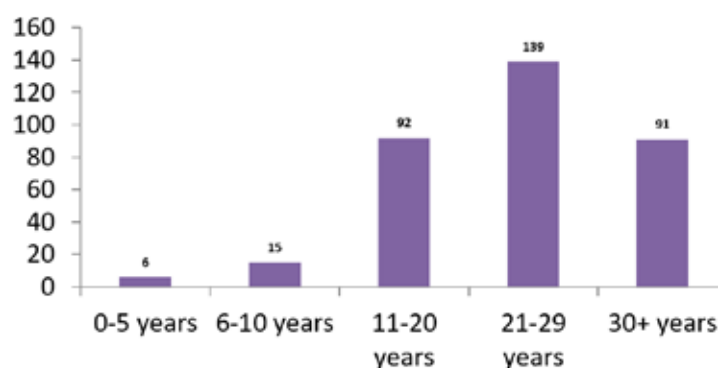
Before analysing the core evaluative metrics of the ILP, an exploration of the baseline characteristics of the survey respondents (n=343) is warranted. The gender composition of the sample was predominantly female and closely reflected the broader demographics of the Irish post-primary teaching population. Of the total respondents, n=253 identified as female (74%), n=88 as male (26%), while n=2 respondents preferred not to state their gender.

Figure 3: Spread of Schools



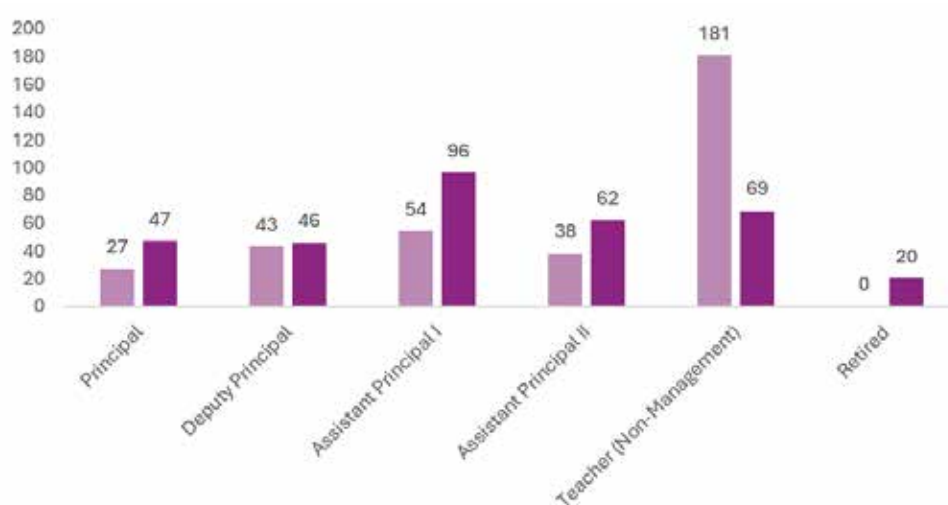
As Figure 3 illustrates, more than half of the respondents were from ETB schools (n=184), over one-fifth were from JMB schools (n=69), while just under one-sixth were from ACCS schools (n=55). The remaining respondents were from the Educate Together, Youthreach and Further Education sectors. The sample was highly experienced with the majority of respondents having more than twenty years' experience, as reflected in Figure 4. The majority of respondents (83%, n = 283) remained in the school in which they had completed the ILP, while 17% (n = 60) reported having changed schools since completing the programme

Figure 4: Overview of Years of Experience



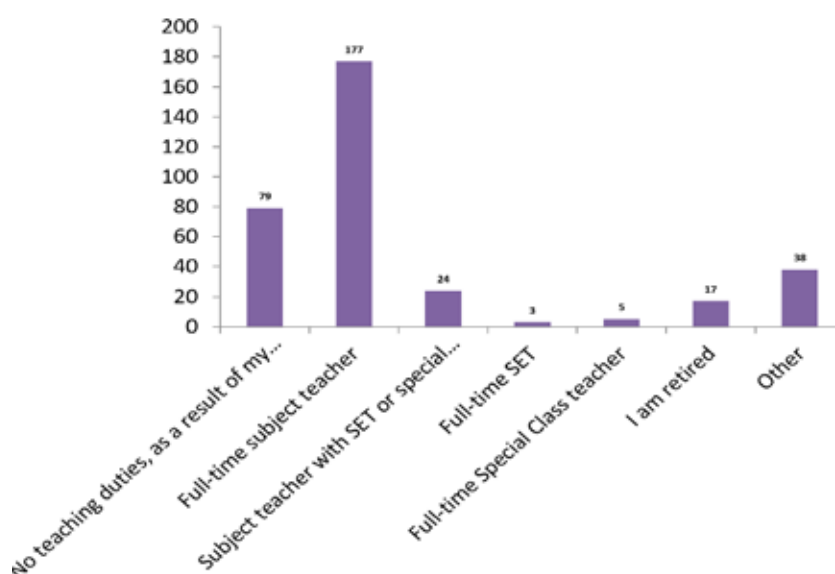
In terms of programme completion, the largest cohort of respondents graduated between 6 and 10 years ago (n=134), while the remaining sample was evenly distributed between those who completed the course within the last 5 years (n=98) and those who graduated more than 10 years ago (n=96). The data also reveal an upward trajectory in career progression and promotional mobility across the cohort, as Figure 5 demonstrates. When enrolled on the ILP, the majority of respondents occupied unpromoted roles (53%); by the time of the survey, this figure had declined to 20%. This suggests that many participants had progressed into positions of leadership following completion of the programme (some may also have retired). Notable growth is evident within the middle leadership tiers. Those in Assistant Principal I (AP1) roles rose from 16% to 28% of the total sample (n=54 to n=96), while Assistant Principal II (AP2) roles expanded from 11% to 18% (n=38 to n=62), representing a 78% and 63% growth, respectively.

Figure 5: Spread of Management Roles



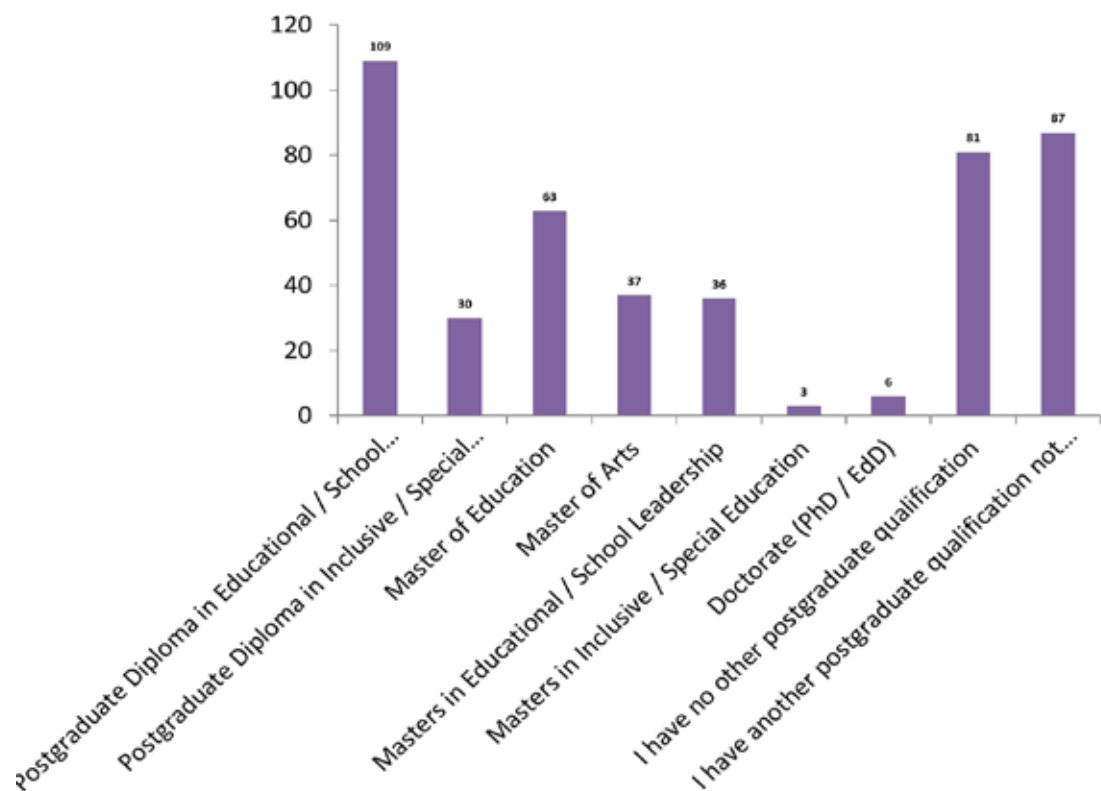
The upward mobility also extends to senior leadership roles, although the increase is more modest. Those in Deputy Principal (DP) roles rose from 13% to 14% of the total sample (n=43 to n=46), while Principal roles among the cohort expanded from 8% to 14% (n=27 to n=47). Collectively, these distributions indicate that a significant proportion of ILP graduates have successfully transitioned into formal leadership roles across the post-primary sector.

Figure 6: Spread of Teaching Roles



Current teaching roles varied, although a slight majority of the respondents held full-time subject-teaching positions (n=177), as reflected in Figure 6 above. Almost one-quarter of respondents (n=79) did not have teaching duties because of their formal leadership position, while one-tenth of the respondents (n=38) indicated that they had an ‘other’ teaching position. When coded, these ‘other’ positions broadly comprised respondents who had specified their explicit subject areas rather than selecting the provided options, individuals on secondment to state agencies or career breaks, and those occupying Home-School-Community Liaison (HSCL) positions. The proportion of respondents explicitly identifying as having special education duties appears comparatively small relative to national post-primary system averages; this may reflect school-level autonomy in determining who participates in the ILP or simply a higher propensity among subject teachers to complete the survey. Almost 30% of respondents (n=102) had undergraduate ITE qualifications (Level 8), while 65% (n=223) had postgraduate ITE qualifications (Level 9). The remaining 5% of respondents (n = 18) who selected ‘Other’ for their teaching qualification were primarily from the further education sector, where a teaching qualification is not a mandatory requirement. This category also included respondents who chose to bypass the predefined response options and instead manually entered details of their specific teaching qualifications. As overviewed on Figure 7, a wide array of general postgraduate qualifications were also evident in the respondents with 42% (n=145) having completed a Level 9 qualification in educational leadership / management and 41% (n=139) having completed some form of master’s degree. 24% (n=81) of respondents had no other postgraduate qualification.

Figure 7: Spread of Postgraduate Qualifications



ILP Participant Motivations

Participants ranked their primary motivations for undertaking the ILP as illustrated by the aggregate result of these rankings in Table 7. The main motivation was instructional / pedagogical development, followed closely by a practical need for role-specific support and desire for a shared instructional language across the school. Conversely, career-centric motivations failed to emerge as primary drivers, with the fulfilment of institutional mandates and management requirements ranked lowest by the cohort. The ‘other’ category was consistently relegated to the lowest priority tier - validating the structural construct of the questionnaire itself. Open-text coding of these ‘other’ responses revealed that several senior leaders undertook the programme out of structural necessity, because school-wide teacher enrolment was strictly contingent upon members of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) completing the training first. When reflecting on their primary motivation for undertaking the programme, the overwhelming majority of respondents reported that the ILP successfully delivered on their expectations. Over three-quarters of the cohort felt their number one motivation was addressed to a very good (n=141) or excellent (n=111) extent, while a smaller segment noted a moderate (n=51) impact. Crucially, a negligible minority indicated that their primary motivation was met only to a slight (n=19) extent or not at all (n=4), which underscores the high level of institutional alignment between participant needs and programme delivery.

Table 7: Spread of Motivations

Motivation	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Variance (σ^2)
<i>To improve my classroom practice</i>	1.99	1.68	2.82
<i>To support me in my role</i>	3.12	1.52	2.31
<i>To help implement a shared teaching language across the school</i>	3.77	1.95	3.79
<i>To gain another professional learning credential</i>	4.53	1.78	3.16
<i>To advance my leadership skills</i>	4.90	1.96	3.83
<i>To prepare for a future leadership role</i>	5.32	1.99	3.97
<i>To enhance career opportunities</i>	6.15	1.51	2.29
<i>To fulfil a requirement from school management</i>	6.52	2.08	4.33
<i>Other</i>	8.69	1.35	1.81

ILP Structural Features

This evaluation explored the structural design, workshop format and leadership dynamics of the ILP, by requesting participants to indicate their level of agreement with key statements (Table 8). Overall, the feedback regarding programme delivery and structural efficacy was overwhelmingly positive and highlighted that the high quality of the professional learning environment served as the critical launching pad for subsequent school impact (or perception of impact). Respondents commended the active, supportive nature of delivery, as outlined in Table 8. The highest score across this entire domain was awarded to the opportunities for active participation within workshops ($M=4.49$), closely paired with a strong consensus that facilitators created a safe, supportive professional environment for risk-taking and learning ($M=4.44$). This intentional design ensured that the format effectively supported learning ($M=4.30$), with clear outcomes ($M=4.31$) and an agile approach where facilitators dynamically adapted delivery to address real-world classroom challenges ($M=4.14$). This high-quality facilitation translated into a perception of immediate, actionable changes in schools. A very strong consensus emerged that participants changed at least one aspect of their instructional practice as a direct result of the ILP ($M=4.46$). Crucially, from an inclusive education perspective, the programme successfully equipped teachers with specific methods to differentiate instruction for diverse student needs ($M=4.29$). Participants also felt well-positioned to step into broader roles and indicated that they felt prepared to support whole-school change in teaching and learning ($M=3.96$).

The data also strongly validates the fundamental structural mechanics of the ILP. Having a member of the SLT (Principal or Deputy Principal) participate was seen to directly support school-wide implementation ($M=4.29$), and attending the ILP as a cohort team of three was seen to significantly enhance the programme's implementation back at the school ($M=4.21$). While the transparency of selecting non-SLT members yielded a slightly more moderate consensus ($M=3.71$) and a higher variance ($\sigma^2=1.23$), this minor dispersion may simply be indicative of slight differences in how individual local schools managed their internal recruitment. It does, however, highlight an opportunity for ILP providers to further optimise the selection process through the provision of a standardised recruitment guide, or set of guiding principles, to support consistency and clarity across participating institutions. Given that the success of the programme at school level is influenced by the suitability of those selected to participate, greater consistency in recruitment practices may help maximise programme impact.

Table 8: Impact of ILP Structural Features

Structural Features	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Variance (σ^2)
<i>The ILP workshops provided me with opportunities for active participation</i>	4.49	0.81	0.65
<i>As a result of the ILP, I changed at least one aspect of my instructional practice</i>	4.46	0.80	0.65
<i>The ILP facilitators create a safe and supportive professional environment for risk-taking and learning</i>	4.44	0.77	0.60
<i>ILP facilitators made the intended learning outcomes of the workshops clear to participants</i>	4.31	0.90	0.82
<i>The structure and format of the ILP supported my effective learning and engagement</i>	4.30	0.87	0.75
<i>Having a member of the senior leadership team (principal / DP) participate in the ILP team supports the school-wide implementation of the programme learning</i>	4.29	1.02	1.05
<i>The ILP provided me with specific methods to differentiate instruction for diverse student needs</i>	4.29	0.87	0.75
<i>Attending the ILP as a team of three enhanced the implementation of the programme in my school</i>	4.21	1.01	1.01
<i>The ILP facilitators adapted their delivery to address specific questions, related to classroom/instructional challenges, raised by participants</i>	4.14	0.93	0.86
<i>The ILP prepared me to support whole-school change in teaching and learning</i>	3.96	0.95	0.90
<i>The selection of non-senior leadership ILP team members in my school was transparent</i>	3.71	1.11	1.23

ILP Outcomes

To evaluate the operational efficacy of the ILP, respondents indicated their level of agreement across eleven variables measuring pedagogical practice, classroom environments and institutional collaboration, utilising a five-point Likert scale (where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree). As Table 9 illustrates, the data demonstrate an overwhelmingly positive consensus regarding the localised, direct impact of the ILP on individual teaching and learning environments. Respondents expressed high levels of professional agency and strongly agreed that they can clearly identify specific ILP practices in their teaching and articulate the pedagogical rationale behind selecting them (M=4.21). Furthermore, participants reported high capability in executing complex ILP methodologies (M=3.93). This enhanced professional competence translated directly into perceptions of improved classroom environments and student outcomes. The highest overall agreement across the matrix concerned the ILP's capacity to drive active student engagement (M=4.22) and to foster inclusive learning environments (M=4.23). This was reinforced by a strong collective confidence in meeting diverse learner needs (M=4.18), enhancing emotional safety within the classroom (M=3.90), and directly observing enhanced student learning outcomes following implementation (M=4.12).

Table 9: Perceptions on ILP Outcomes

Impact	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Variance (σ^2)
<i>I feel more capable of creating an inclusive learning environment as a result of the ILP.</i>	4.23	0.82	0.68
<i>Applying ILP methods has enhanced active engagement in my classroom.</i>	4.22	0.76	0.58
<i>I can now clearly identify specific ILP instructional methods I am using in my practice and explain why I selected them.</i>	4.21	0.76	0.58
<i>The ILP has increased my confidence in meeting the needs of our learners.</i>	4.18	0.81	0.66
<i>I have observed enhanced student learning following ILP implementation.</i>	4.12	0.81	0.65
<i>I can now effectively implement complex ILP methods.</i>	3.93	0.84	0.71
<i>Applying ILP methods has enhanced emotional safety in my classroom.</i>	3.90	0.95	0.89
<i>The ILP has contributed to a culture of sharing practices in my school.</i>	3.77	0.99	0.99
<i>Colleagues who have not completed the ILP have begun to use some of the ILP methods in their classrooms.</i>	3.59	1.02	1.05
<i>The ILP has increased alignment of teaching approaches within my subject department.</i>	3.51	0.97	0.93
<i>ILP team members use a shared language in professional discussions.</i>	3.38	1.09	1.18
<i>I have visited ILP colleagues' classrooms to learn from their practice.</i>	3.01	1.29	1.68
<i>As an ILP team, we meet regularly to discuss our experiences of implementation.</i>	2.64	1.21	1.47

Building on these positive classroom-level outcomes, variables examining the wider institutional context provide a clear picture of the ILP's broader footprint. There is promising evidence that participant learning from the programme has filtered into their wider school community, and has contributed positively to a culture of shared practice ($M=3.77$) and has supported organic peer adoption of ILP methods among non-ILP trained staff ($M=3.59$). While deeply collaborative structures within subject departments yielded a slightly lower consensus ($M=3.51$), this initial trend toward institutional diffusion is positive. Digging deeper into how the ILP interacts with existing school structures, the adoption of a unified, shared language during professional discussions was moderate ($M=3.38$), while variables exploring the deprivatisation of practice highlighted areas for more targeted institutional support. For example, engagement with peer observation sat just above a neutral midpoint, with a lower mean for visiting colleagues' classrooms ($M=3.01$). Similarly, scheduled time for ILP teams to meet regularly recorded the lowest baseline in the matrix ($M=2.64$). Importantly, these two areas also generated the highest variance in the dataset ($\sigma^2=1.68$ and $\sigma^2=1.47$, respectively). This high dispersion suggests that collaborative implementation is highly context-dependent. While some institutions

may have successfully carved out and protected time for team meetings and peer observations, others may have encountered the familiar scheduling constraints common to the wider sector. This provides an important signpost for an area that the ILP should provide more support in going forward.

Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practice

The ILP questionnaire also included six (of nine) items from the validated *Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practice* (TEIP) short-form scale (Table 10). Three items from the scale were excluded, as they did not align with the ILP aims. Across all six items, respondents indicated exceptionally high levels of self-efficacy, with remarkably low variance scores ($\sigma^2=0.41$ to $\sigma^2=0.59$), which can be taken as an indication of collective confidence among ILP graduates in enacting inclusive practice. The highest levels of certainty were recorded in relation to classroom environment and behaviour. Teachers believed that they were well-able to promote positive, well-regulated student behaviour (M=4.43) and that they had a very good capacity to get students to follow classroom rules (M=4.41). Importantly, this confidence was backed by a strong capability to manage more complex emotional dynamics in the classroom; respondents reported high levels of efficacy in providing calming support and creating emotional safety for students experiencing signs of dysregulated behaviour (M=4.23). Beyond behaviour management, this professional efficacy translated directly into responsive instructional delivery. Teachers felt highly capable of adapting their teaching in real-time and reported a strong ability to provide alternative explanations or examples when students are confused (M=4.29). Furthermore, teacher confidence extended into more technical inclusive practices, with respondents agreeing on their capacity to utilise a variety of inclusive assessment methods, such as portfolios, modified tests and performance-based tasks (M=4.16). While the item concerning a teacher’s confidence in designing learning tasks to accommodate the specific individual needs of students with SEN recorded the lowest mean score in this particular matrix, it still represents a highly secure, positive baseline (M=4.10).

Table 10: TEIP Scale

Efficacy Statement	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Variance (σ^2)
<i>I am confident in my ability to promote positive student behaviour (i.e. well-regulated behaviour) in the classroom</i>	4.43	0.66	0.43
<i>I am able to get students to follow classroom rules</i>	4.41	0.64	0.41
<i>I am able to provide an alternate explanation or examples when students are confused</i>	4.29	0.67	0.45
<i>I am able to provide calming support to students (e.g. emotional safety) who experience signs of dysregulated behaviour in the classroom</i>	4.23	0.75	0.56
<i>I can use a variety of assessment methods (e.g. portfolio assessment, modified tests and performance-based assessment)</i>	4.16	0.77	0.59
<i>I am confident in designing learning tasks so that the individual needs of students with SEN/disabilities are accommodated</i>	4.10	0.74	0.55

Instructional Leadership Behaviours

The evaluation explored how the ILP may have supported teachers in developing instructional leadership behaviours (Table 11). The results point to the programme having an impact on teachers' reflective leadership over their own practice and immediate collaborations, while also establishing a positive foundation for broader institutional leadership. Respondents indicated a strong collective agreement that the ILP has led them to think more carefully about how they select teaching methods (M=4.23) and how they select teaching resources (M=4.13). Notably, this internal reflection translated into interaction with others, with teachers reporting a significant boost to their leadership capacity for collaboration to improve teaching and learning within the school (M=4.16). This collaborative mindset is further reflected in their ability to align their daily practice with overarching school priorities (M=4.03) and support the implementation of whole-school practices (M=4.04). Moving into departmental dynamics, the ILP has supported teachers in embedding data-informed practices. Participants noted an increased frequency in reviewing student work when evaluating classroom instruction (M=3.71), alongside enhanced capacities to identify students needing additional educational support (M=3.82). Within subject departments, the programme has established solid baselines for developing student support targets (M=3.63) and tracking student progress (M=3.59). Furthermore, graduates are beginning to leverage their leadership peer-to-peer by actively informing colleagues of professional learning opportunities (M=3.63) and celebrating teaching excellence in staff meetings and other school communications (M=3.70).

Table 11: Spread of Instructional Leadership Behaviours

Behaviour	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Variance (σ^2)
<i>As a result of the ILP I think more carefully about how I select teaching methods</i>	4.23	0.77	0.60
<i>The ILP has enhanced my leadership capacity for collaboration with others to improve teaching and learning within the school</i>	4.16	0.86	0.75
<i>As a result of the ILP I think more carefully about how I select teaching resources</i>	4.13	0.76	0.58
<i>The ILP has supported me with the implementation of whole-school practices related to teaching and learning</i>	4.04	0.92	0.84
<i>The ILP methods have supported me to align my practice to school priorities</i>	4.03	0.84	0.71
<i>The ILP has supported me in identifying students that may need additional educational support</i>	3.82	0.87	0.75
<i>The ILP has increased how often I review student work when evaluating my classroom instruction</i>	3.71	0.95	0.91
<i>The ILP has led me to acknowledge teaching excellence in staff meetings or school communications</i>	3.70	1.13	1.28
<i>The ILP has supported me in developing student support targets within my subject department</i>	3.63	0.91	0.83

<i>The ILP has led me to more actively inform colleagues of opportunities for professional learning</i>	3.63	1.11	1.24
<i>The ILP has supported me in tracking student progress within my subject department</i>	3.59	0.97	0.94
<i>The ILP has led me to promote policies and daily practices that safeguard instructional time from unnecessary administrative interruptions</i>	3.48	1.03	1.06
<i>The ILP has led me to more frequently visit classrooms to discuss teaching and learning issues with teachers and students</i>	3.24	1.23	1.51

Variables associated with wider institutional changes yielded more moderate baselines. For instance, promoting practices to safeguard instructional time from administrative interruptions sat at a lower mean ($M=3.48$), while visiting other classrooms to discuss teaching issues recorded the lowest baseline ($M=3.24$) and the highest variance ($\sigma^2=1.51$). This higher variance may be attributable to the fact that while some institutions possess the structural flexibility to facilitate peer observation, others face systemic scheduling barriers. Consequently, future iterations of the ILP may need to explore with leadership teams creative ways to unblock scheduling pathways to enable more systematic peer observation.

Conclusion

The quantitative data presented across this chapter provide clear, empirical evidence of the ILP's impact across its graduate population and their schools. First, the evaluation validates the structural integrity and delivery model of the ILP. Participants overwhelmingly commended the quality of the workshops, the safe environment for professional risk-taking, and the active engagement facilitated by programme staff. Crucially, the data strongly confirm that the core structural design choices, specifically the deployment of teams of three and the direct involvement of SLT members, act as vital enablers for successful school-wide implementation. Second, this structure seemed to directly translate into transformative classroom practices and enhanced teacher efficacy. Respondents reported collective confidence in their ability to regulate student behaviour, promote positive learning environments and differentiate instruction to meet diverse student needs. This resulted, according to respondents, in tangible improvements in student engagement, emotional safety and direct learning outcomes. Finally, the data offer an honest, sophisticated look at the dynamics of institutional change. While personal reflective practice, immediate peer collaboration and organic diffusion among non-trained ILP staff scored highly, macro-level systemic shifts, such as structural departmental tracking, rigid meeting schedules and cross-classroom peer observations, yielded more moderate baselines and higher variances. These constraints do not overshadow the immense successes of the ILP; instead, they provide a data-driven roadmap on where it should go next. Ultimately, this chapter indicates that the ILP has successfully achieved its primary mandate of transforming teaching and learning environments, while clearly identifying the precise collaborative pathways to target in future iterations. To fully understand how the statistical trends reported here materialised in school contexts and classroom practice the next chapter moves beyond the metrics to explore qualitative data on the lived experiences and authentic voices of ILP participating teachers and their students

Chapter 5:

Phase 2 Findings

Building on the quantitative trends presented in Chapter Five, this chapter presents Phase Two of the evaluation and the qualitative insights gathered from interviews with four members of the ILP Steering Committee and the staff / student focus groups in the five case schools. To ensure alignment with the Irish policy context and the funders' evaluation priorities, these qualitative data are synthesised through the four core components of the *Evaluation Framework for Teachers' Professional Learning in Ireland* (Gilleece et al., 2023): (a) context, (b) key features of the ILP, (c) teacher outcomes, (d) student, school, and system outcomes. Where applicable, key data themes are developed under each component. This approach captures how the programme operates at every level, from initial leadership structures to the daily, lived realities of teachers and students in the classroom.

1. Context for the ILP

The successful embedding of the ILP within a school relies heavily on specific organisational, structural and cultural conditions. Analysis of the qualitative data across the stakeholder groups reveals that while formal senior leadership support and policy alignment act as primary catalysts for implementation, logistical constraints, particularly surrounding timetabling and teacher release, can prove challenging.

Senior Leadership Support

A central finding across all participants is that senior leadership team (SLT) participation is 'critical' (T1.1) for sustainable ILP 'rollout throughout the whole school' (K12). Participants consistently highlighted that SLT support determines whether the programme translates into classroom practice or becomes sidelined by other competing operational school demands. The requirement for principals and/or DPs to attend the training alongside teaching staff was identified as a core structural strength because their awareness of what teachers were trying to do in relation to the ILP 'actually nearly enables your own ability to lead' (T3.1). As one principal observed, the presence of members of the SLT ensures they experience the practical benefits firsthand, which allows them to advocate effectively for the programme:

I questioned it myself... was it really necessary for the principal or the deputy principals to go prior to going... Given that the principal is the person that sets the agenda for the staff meetings [and] has a role in respect of the division of time... the principal's presence at this was highly important, so that they got to hear the benefits... And then came back and say, well, we need an innovative teacher practice committee, we need space for people to share what they've learned... (T2.4)

This capacity to set the institutional agenda was identified as a key differentiator. Without explicit SLT buy-in, school initiatives struggle to compete for the limited non-contact time that is available, such as mandatory non-contact time (also known as "Croke Park" hours):

I think it's essential, because if you don't have management support for something, it's not going to happen in the school. It's not going to be supported in terms of time, it's not going to be supported in terms of funding. It's not going to be supported in terms of collaboration and interaction (T4.1)

In addition to agenda-setting, SLT engagement directly influenced how resources, both financial and human, were allocated to maximise cross-departmental impact. School leaders made deliberate decisions regarding which staff members attended the training to prevent knowledge from becoming isolated within specific subject departments. Explaining the rationale behind strategic staff selection, one principal noted:

The management... we were looking at... well, who do we put together? You know, you don't put three French teachers together, because that's isolating the knowledge within one department. (T4.3)

This intentional diffusion was corroborated by teaching staff. Teachers noted that cohort selection was 'purposely done, so every department has someone that's trained [to] bring back ideas' (T5.5). In schools where members of the SLT had participated in early cohorts, a culture of sustained engagement developed, leading to whole-school momentum where the SLT aimed to train as many staff members as possible over time. The potential of this 'critical mass' being familiar with ILP methods 'to achieve a deep, systemic impact across the school' was also highlighted (T3.3).

Logistical Constraints

Attending the ILP residential sessions proved a logistical challenge in many cases. Releasing three teachers simultaneously for multi-day blocks (typically 2.5 to 3 days across four blocks over two years) created operational strain within schools. These challenges manifested in three distinct ways:

- *Workload pressure on remaining staff:* The ILP 'puts pressure on the school' (T3.2) and strains daily school operations when the teachers are away at it. Course participants do not receive substitute cover and so the burden of supervision often falls to colleagues, which was initially seen as 'a kind of a negative' (T4.2) of programme participation. The increased workload for the staff remaining caused friction in some schools, according to some participants;
- *Loss of instructional time and exam demands:* Teachers voiced concerns regarding maintaining momentum with their core classes back in school because of the time they were 'missing' (T2.2) while attending the course. This pressure was particularly acute when managing state examination cohorts (Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate), where the reduced contact time created stress around getting 'content covered' (T2.5) from demanding syllabi. One teacher observed that the fact 'you've got to do three days four times' (T5.1) over the two years was the primary downside of the delivery model because it required extensive planning to ensure content was covered during their absence;
- *Parental concerns:* School leaders noted that extended teacher absences occasionally raised concerns among parents. As one deputy principal highlighted, parents' 'antennae go up' (T3.3) when teachers are absent for multi-day blocks, particularly in high-stakes exam subjects. The SLT actively had to manage this external perception and reassure the school community that short-term absence yielded long-term gains in classroom delivery when teachers were engaged in the ILP.

However, participants acknowledged a clear trade-off between the initial disruption and the long-term value derived from the programme. The depth of professional interaction with colleagues quickly outweighed the logistical difficulties once they engaged with the material off-site. The return was clear to see because the teachers who completed the course were then ‘seen as experts, and rightly so, in house...those people become leaders’ in their own right (T1.1).

Teacher Professionalism and Policy Alignment

A prominent thread emerging from the data was the perceived contrast between the ILP’s delivery model and traditional professional learning models in Ireland which was observed across all case study sites. Participants emphasised that hosting the programme in off-site professional venues, with dining and overnight accommodation, made them feel ‘respected as professionals’ (T1.4). From a policy perspective, teachers and leaders viewed the ILP as highly linked with the national educational reform ‘trajectory’ (T2.4), particularly the Junior Cycle implementation and School Self-Evaluation (SSE) processes. Participants noted that the ILP provided a practical classroom ‘toolkit’ (T1.4) for instruction, reflection, active learning and formative assessment before these concepts were formally pushed by JCT:

When I first was introduced [to IL]... it was before JCT came along... they were introducing a lot of strategies and tactics that I hadn’t seen before in my teacher training... but then as the JCT got established, they kind of were using similar techniques (T5.4)

Furthermore, participants pointed to a gap in ITE provision, noting that the ILP provided essential classroom management and instructional tactics that were absent from their university courses. Steering Committee members also emphasised this point and noted that system actors recognised the value of the ILP:

The inspectorate... they wrote about it in the reports. The Teaching Council bought into it...the National Induction Programme for Teachers, they were involved (KI.1)

Formal endorsement from Oide and the former Centre for School Leadership (CSL) further reflected the programme’s standing among system-level stakeholders. However, some key informants noted that additional practical supports, such as substitution cover for facilitators, could have further enhanced the programme’s reach and accessibility. Despite this, they viewed the programme as making a significant contribution to professional learning and leadership development.

2. Key Features of the ILP

The impact of the ILP is dependent on the structural and core features of the professional learning model that has been adopted. Analysis of qualitative data across stakeholder groups illustrates that the immersive residential format, active strategy modelling and facilitation drive reflective practice and classroom experimentation. However, the multi-day duration presents challenges for schools in terms of staff release, timetable disruption and sustaining participation over time.

Structural Features

Duration and Immersion

A defining characteristic of the ILP is its two-year, off-site residential structure (four blocks over two years). This ‘retreat’ model (KI3) stood in stark contrast to the short, one-day or evening workshops at local education centres that participants were accustomed to. The off-site ‘bubble’ (T3.3), in a hotel, often in another part of the country, created an immersive environment that allowed teachers to ‘ruminate’ (T1.4) on new concepts without immediate classroom distractions. As one participant reflected:

It wasn’t just finished when we went up the first time, you know. You were looking forward to it again. You were looking forward to the next couple of things you’re going to pick up in the next session of it (T2.6)

The programme’s distributed learning structure, with gaps between modules, provided intentional space for teachers to ‘play’ (T2.1) with what they have learned in their own classrooms and gave them ‘something to think about and something to reflect on when they come back the next time’ (KI1). This iterative cycle created a good rhythm of learning, trialling and refining practice. However, some participants offered nuanced feedback regarding the duration of individual modules. While the initial three-day block was viewed as necessary to establish the immersive environment and digest high volumes of foundational material, both teachers and management did question whether they ‘really need to be away for the three days’ (T4.2) for some of the subsequent sessions:

Yeah, I think I would agree... it could have been condensed a little bit more. I would think a better value for money, you know, you might have been able to do it in the two days...(T4.3)

Other principals made similar points, noting that a reduction to two days would reduce substitute cover burdens without compromising learning quality. Finally, participants emphasised that structural access alone is insufficient for whole-school success; institutional culture determines whether learning is sustained. In practice, this means that returning cohorts ‘need space for people to share what they’ve learned’ (T2.4) and systematically embed strategies across the wider staff; otherwise it is ‘a waste then being sent’ (T5.4)

Collective Participation and Networking Opportunities

The ILP’s structural requirement for three-person school triads emerged as a major catalyst for implementation. Management ‘purposely’ (T5.5) selected cross-departmental triads (e.g. avoiding grouping teachers from the same subject area) to prevent knowledge from becoming siloed within a single department and to maximise the permeation of practices across the school. Beyond internal school triads, the residential format facilitated organic cross-school networking, outside of formal course delivery, in teachers’ downtime:

...there’s a lot of networking that goes on at these events as well, outside of the actual structured lessons, so we started talking to a lot of other colleagues in different schools, and... heard about different ideas, and one teacher was talking about how they do these Teachmeets, so we decided to maybe start embedding that into our term... (T3.2)

...there’s a fierce richness to the conversations that go on at lunchtime...before dinner or whatnot. It’s nearly all school-based talk...talking about teaching and learning...people come back with different nuggets and tips based on those conversations as well...(T1.1)

Teachers worked directly with peers from diverse educational contexts across Ireland and consequently gained fresh perspectives on shared pedagogical challenges. As one teacher highlighted, this collaborative structure provided space to:

...actually sit and chat with others, to work through things, to be in group work with people from other schools, networking with them, hearing about what other people are doing (T4.1)

This collective dimension encouraged teachers to step outside familiar institutional ‘bad habits’ (T4.2), evaluate their own practice against national benchmarks, and rebuild pupil-centred instructional habits.

Core Features

Pedagogical Alignment and Reflection

The explicit alignment between how teachers were taught and how they were expected to teach emerged as a key strength. Unlike traditional lecture-based professional learning, the programme modelled active learning directly. One participant noted it was ‘the first programme I did that I found... incredibly interactive’ (T5.5). Rather than presenting instructional practices (e.g. group work, wait time, graphic organisers, or think-pair-share) as isolated tools, the ILP explicitly unpacked the underlying cognitive rationale behind each instructional decision:

They explained... the thinking behind each strategy, and how you can adapt and do different things, instead of, ‘Here’s graphic organisers, use it.’ It’s like, why would it work?... Who do you put in that group? Why are they there? How are they accountable? (T5.1)

This understanding of the *why* drove significant shifts in classroom practice. These structural insights transformed teachers’ approaches to group work from a ‘haphazard’ (T4.1) activity into a highly structured process with clear individual roles, specific targets and accountability mechanisms. Participants emphasised that the programme provided essential reflective space to examine their identity and practices as teachers - ‘reflection has been a cornerstone’ of the programme (K12). By placing teachers in the position of learners, the ILP made them re-examine traditional teacher-led instruction. One teacher noted that compared to evening in-services where facilitators are ‘throwing information at you’, the ILP ‘kind of did wipe the board with me and start again’ (T4.2). An outcome of this reflective process was an increase in teacher self-efficacy and a willingness to take pedagogical risks. Teachers reported feeling more confident in trying new practices in the classroom and adopting a growth mindset toward trial and error. As one participant expressed:

Definitely [I] feel more confident in trying something in the classroom, even if it doesn’t work. ‘Oh, that didn’t work’, whereas before you’d probably just stick to what you know (T5.2)

Programme Facilitation

The individual impact of the lead facilitator Barrie Bennett emerged as a primary driver of the programme’s success. Participants described Bennett’s ‘charismatic’ (K11), passionate, entertaining and highly engaging delivery style as central to maintaining energy and focus across intense multi-day modules. His voice was described by participants as a lasting presence that remained with them during daily classroom instruction:

I have Barrie Bennett in my ear every day of my life, when I’m teaching every single day, he’s

there in my head...okay, there's a bit of boredom creeping in, and I feel confident that I can do something now immediately... and he spoke about how group work can be heaven, or it can be hell, but again, we needed to feel that hell at times in order to understand this is how students feel, so there was method to the madness (T3.2)

Bennett's facilitation style was particularly effective due to its emphasis on a low-stakes, experimental culture. He actively modelled positive reinforcement and encouraged teachers to view mistakes as natural components of learning:

What I really liked about him was the fact that he put quite a lot of emphasis on [how] it's okay to get it wrong... and to apologise if you get it wrong (T4.2)

Similarly, Bennett's modelling of questioning techniques, particularly his insistence that every student response warranted positive reinforcement, was consistently cited as a powerful feature of the programme. Through repetitive scaffolding, intentional group mixing, and his encouragement to 'take something away and play with it' (T2.1), he fostered a learning environment that reduced professional anxiety and promoted experimentation. The concentration of influence in a single, highly skilled facilitator does suggest a degree of over-reliance on one individual, however. The repeated emphasis on Bennett's delivery indicates that participants frequently attributed the programme's impact to his personal expertise and approach. While the programme has continued in his absence, the strong association between Bennett and participants' positive experiences highlights the importance of making explicit the facilitation practices and pedagogical approaches that underpinned the programme's success, thereby supporting their transfer to other facilitators.

3. Teacher Outcomes

The value of the ILP is evidenced through its influence on teacher professional growth across cognitive, affective and behavioural domains. Qualitative analysis across participant groups indicates that engagement with the programme altered fundamental pedagogical beliefs, expanded instructional toolkits, fostered collaborative practices, increased teacher confidence, strengthened leadership capacity, while simultaneously serving as a key driver of teacher sustenance over long careers.

Shifts in Pedagogical Beliefs

A significant outcome of the ILP was a cognitive shift in how teachers and school leaders conceptualised accountability in the learning process. Across different roles and career stages, participants described stepping back from traditional, teacher-led routines to adopt a student-centered approach. For classroom practitioners, this required confronting long-standing instructional habits and developing a new 'repertoire of skills, tactics, strategies that they could employ in class' (K12). Time and curriculum constraints often push teachers into dominant roles which can bring about 'a tendency for the teacher to monopolise the class under those time constraints and pressures' (T4.1). The ILP provided the impetus to break these patterns:

...it broadened my mind a bit...trying new things and not being afraid to try new things. So it just gave you the tools...And I think even realising the importance of using these strategies, not just using them for the sake of it but knowing the reason is essential (T1.5)

Participants transitioned from viewing themselves as primary deliverers of information, in control of learning to being facilitators of student-led learning. School leaders noted a move toward critical self-evaluation:

Previously it would be, well, if I asked five questions and you got three wrong, what's wrong with you first? Now I'm going... what's wrong with me? Where's the 60% gap there? (T4.3)

Furthermore, participants reported that because the ILP operates as a pedagogical framework rather than something that is set-in-stone, it engendered professional autonomy to 'problem solve' and engage in 'critical thinking' (T2.2) about approaches that would work best for learners.

Structured Cooperative Learning, Practice Changes and Classroom Organisation

Linked to the foregoing, participants moved from inconsistent applications of group work toward structured, tactical cooperative learning. Instruction became more dynamic and less 'chalk and talk' (T1.3). As one participant reflected:

I'm more of a facilitator... I am behind the desk, and I'm at the board, and you're listening to me, like I'm wandering between the tables, and it's a safer space for them to call me over quietly... rather than put their hand up in front of the whole class... And they're also more accountable, with the tools or the tricks we learn with the ILP (T1.5).

Furthermore, teachers applied intentional role assignment, individual accountability mechanisms and strategic student grouping. This was deemed to bring about much more inclusive approaches to learning:

...when you're using group work... you're giving them roles, you know, you might have a student with certain needs that you know you can specify what role they have, so that they can achieve within that group... that was the biggest thing for me...it really brought those students along, even though they might never have thought they'd be able to be part of a group, they had a job and they had something to do, and it might have been something very simple, but... that was so meaningful to them (T2.6)

Pairing strategies were also used extensively by participants (e.g. Think-Pair-Share) as these allowed less confident students to engage in meaningful dialogue without the stress of public performance. Pair work, in general, seemed to be regarded as more effective for learning amongst the student cohort because 'you're more motivated to stay on topic with just one other person rather than like five other people' (S3.1).

Peer-Led Professional Learning

The ILP served as a strong catalyst for dismantling classroom isolation and establishing peer-led professional learning cultures within schools. To overcome the challenge of disseminating learning across entire departments, some participating triads created innovative peer-observation mechanisms:

The dissemination of the information was probably the most challenging thing... So what we decided to do, we called it an open door policy, and say, 'If Lucy [*pseudonym*] was doing concept attainment and I was maybe doing the teams games tournament, we would let other staff members know... pop along if you want to see how it happens.' And we did, and that worked really well (T4.1)

This approach was seen right across the case schools, with one school holding a ‘celebration of teaching and learning festival’ (T2.4) every year, another school doing ‘Teachmeets’ (T3.2) and another ensuring that in the ‘intimacy of the four walls’ (T1.1) of a staff meeting, space was made for discussing IL learning. Steering Committee members also pointed out that the ILP had been the impetus for ‘peer coaching’ (Kl.3) initiatives in some schools to drive teacher development. While schools were generally successful in ensuring that learning was shared, participants were also in no doubt that adoption could prove challenging and uneven:

...it’s really hard to infiltrate this throughout the school and throughout the departments, and some departments are on for it, and some aren’t (T3.2)

Nevertheless, organic sharing of practice was evident in one form or another in all schools, with teachers facilitating professional learning themselves, as distinct from getting ‘somebody external to come in’ (T1.1), seemingly the biggest change across different subject departments.

Leadership Capacity Development

Engagement with the ILP acted as an explicit pathway for developing teacher leadership capacity and sustaining long-term career motivation and progression:

...a lot of people who did this course got promoted. They became deputies, they became principals... So not only were they leaders in their classrooms when they were teachers, but then they were able to transfer those skills to being a leader in a school or wherever else (Kl.1)

In other words, the ILP was seen as contributing to a pool of leadership talent within schools and the broader system. Teachers without formal promotional posts reported that leading the rollout of ILP strategies built the confidence and platform required to step into middle and senior leadership roles, including year head and DP positions. As one school leader detailed:

This was very practical... I was a teacher without any promotional post at the time, where I most certainly gathered confidence from that, and probably a leadership role within my school, due to rolling this out... and now as Deputy Principal, I think it’s really important that leaders are educated in this role because our main crux of our job is to lead teaching and learning (T2.2)

Another year head remarked:

...at that stage, I was heading into interviews for posts, and it would definitely be part of my CV, and was a big part of growing my confidence, building up my capacity (T1.3)

From the perspective of teacher sustenance and motivation, the ILP provided a vital countermeasure to professional stagnation and burnout. Participants noted how it provided a mechanism to re-engage teachers, refresh their practice and restore energy, purpose and career longevity:

It gives me great enjoyment as a teacher, and that bit of energy that keeps me going every day... it’s that you’re changing what each classroom setting looks like for students and keeping school interesting, but the part that’s missing there is teachers possibly don’t realise this. It makes their job more meaningful and interesting over a long career, it could be a very dull environment if you’re teaching the same way... it sustains you (T3.3)

4. Student, School and System Outcomes

The ultimate value of the ILP extends beyond individual practice. Qualitative data show that while the programme boosts student engagement, fosters inclusion and drives school culture shifts, achieving sustained system-level impact depends on reaching a critical mass of trained staff and providing ongoing structural support.

Enhanced Student Engagement and Motivation

The implementation of the ILP is ‘all about student outcomes’ (K1.3) and observable benefits across diverse learning profiles were discerned from the data. Students reported that the move away from passive, lecture-based instruction, toward varied, active methodologies increased classroom engagement and information retention. Visual tools (e.g. mind maps and graphic organisers) and interactive tactics (e.g. think-pair-share, video integration, and role-based group work) provided multiple access points for learning. As some students observed:

It's never just one teaching method, like in some other classes it's just PowerPoints... but in this class... there's something for everyone... so like somebody who's a visual learner will benefit from seeing... and then an auditory learner will benefit from listening... even if you didn't really like the topic, that you'd retain a bit of it because it was so fun to learn (S3.4)

It's not just taking their notes the whole time, like it'd be like games and like group work and stuff (S2.1)

One student commented on how the enthusiasm of his teacher motivated him to learn and that the increase in interactive methods such as group work supported his learning:

When a teacher is sitting at the top of the room, real dry and boring, it's gonna be hard. I like more interactive stuff instead of just sitting there the whole time writing, yeah. if I'm engaged, I'm excited for it, then I'm definitely gonna learn better than just sitting there (S4.1)

Students also highlighted the emphasis on dialogic learning, which enabled their learning to extend beyond the textbook. Reflecting on their experience of learning with a History teacher who completed the ILP programme, one student described how opportunities to have peer discussion opened up new opportunities to learn about topics not covered in the textbook programme:

When we were doing World War Two back in third year, the teacher, sometimes you'd have the conversation ... they didn't mention the American campaign in the Pacific in the curriculum. So when I was discussing it with my friends, I was talking to them about that; they were telling me what they knew about it, and I was saying, oh, what I knew about it, because it wasn't mentioned in class at all. (S5.4)

From an academic perspective, the emphasis on exams was strong and school leaders noted that ILP methodologies directly contributed to measurable gains in state examination results. Utilising performance-tracking software (such as Athena), schools observed that students, particularly those who struggled academically, far surpassed their expected grades in the Leaving Certificate:

...when we look at their expected grades and what they actually get, they're far surpassing certainly at senior cycle in Leaving Cert, so I think that's a good indication that whatever is going on in the classroom is really lifting the boat at that level (T3.3)

Students themselves observed that teachers who had completed the ILP used instructional practices that supported them academically:

When you do like, a model of something, say in, like, sciency subjects... I think modelling helps understand it, because you're not like, learning off sentences of what it is. You're like, actually seeing what it does. And then, if you're in an exam... you can, like, think about what it would look like (S1.3)

So like, when we do more work, like pair work and like group work, it's easier to remember, (S4.4)

I think you can, like, remember it more as well, like, when you're doing, like, games and stuff, rather than just, like, writing down, yeah, you're like, learning it. And then you, like, remember when you go into testing (S4.5)

Students valued the dynamic and varied methods of assessment used by teachers, particularly choice, organisation and greater ownership of their learning. One student, for example, described the autonomy afforded with classroom-based assessments (CBAs):

In CBAs, you could get like a theme, and you have three themes, and you could like choose which theme you want to work on." (S5.4).

Students also highlighted practical strategies that supported them in organising and managing their learning. One student noted that "organised notes are really helpful and save you a lot time, and you can sort out mind maps, and you know all the topics". (S5.1). Similarly, another student described how the structured use of interim deadlines by their Art teacher helped to manage substantial assessment tasks:

Well, our art teacher set out like due dates, where it's like you have to like a deadline, where you have to like complete these tasks until the deadline, and then they really helped with like the junior cert booklet for art, because you, you managed your time well with all the things you had to draw, so it was helpful for Junior Cert. (S5.6)

Beyond academic metrics, the ILP's focus on psychological safety altered student risk-taking. Instructional practices employed by ILP graduates like wait time, safe feedback loops, and structured pair work eliminated the fear of public failure:

They're really nice, and they also make it feel comfortable, because they said they kind of talk about experiences they had when they feel stuck, and I don't know, they just kind of make it feel easy to ask a question, because they kind of promote that no question is a bad question, like someone else in the class will have the same question as you, okay... (S2.4)

...it's a very good atmosphere in that class, especially. Like, I never feel like scared to ask questions that they should be like, oh, why don't you know this? Like, I never feel like I can't ask a question (S3.4)

Because we do all the competitions and stuff. Everyone's kind of just more friendly, easier to talk and like, because we're everyone's doing it, everyone's kind of getting it wrong. So like, no one really cares whether you get it wrong either. (S4.3)

As one teacher noted, reframing expectations encouraged students to step out of their comfort zone without fear: 'You were to attempt all questions. You don't have to get them all right, but just give it a go' (T4.2). This

teacher's approach was also mentioned by one of her students who referred to the group work supporting her learning:

I feel like when we use our groups like she usually, like, if you're stuck, she'll be like, oh, like, do it in your group and come up, and then, like, you kind of are forced to make your own decision. But then, like, she'll tell you the right answer, okay, or something like that, which is good, because, like, you're not relying on her to, like, give you all the answers if you get me (S4.5)

By assigning specific, strength-based roles within small groups, teachers also ensured that vulnerable learners experienced meaningful success without being publicly singled out. One principal noted:

You can be strategic in your group making... spread out the learners in a more tactical way... having sometimes like a menu of what students are able for... they get to confer with their partners... they may not be the person presenting back if they're not confident in their answer (T5.1)

Students were very often aware that groups were being intentionally composed and how differing compositions produced different results. Many students did not like being in groups with their friends because they would 'just be talking to them the whole time' (S2.1); others felt this risk could be alleviated if teachers gave clearer instructions on how to 'distribute the work among people in the group' (S3.2).

Transformation in School Culture

The adoption of the ILP acted as a major catalyst for broader cultural and physical shifts across participating schools. The physical environment evolved to support active learning, with classrooms transitioning from traditional, forward-facing rows into 'pods and... round tables' (T1.5). Furthermore, schools redesigned administrative practices, such as moving away from generic 'drop-down' comments in student reports toward detailed, 'elaborate', growth-oriented qualitative feedback (T3.3). Internally, the programme established an important role for student voice in decisions about their learning:

...a big change for us as staff was really going towards encouraging student voice... and getting their feedback on the structured lessons, different methodologies, the way they wanted to study all these different things... we've really leaned into it massively in the last couple of years...and it's paid massive in terms of just the atmosphere within the classroom and their engagement (T1.4)

Students themselves recognised they had voice and agency and were not afraid to exercise it:

...we're not really uncomfortable saying anything, because we know everyone's in the same boat (S3.1)

...a very open environment, so you can freely ask questions or answer questions without being, I won't say, ridiculed, but you won't be kind of given out to (S1.2)

A 'common language about instruction' (KI2), developed during the ILP, dismantled traditional classroom isolation and transformed the wider staff environment. As one school leader reflected, creating a safe learning space in the classroom directly translated into a safer, more collaborative staffroom culture:

It has made our staff meetings and staff room a much safer space, also in terms of that safe space inside in our staff meetings, to present, to listen, to ask questions of colleagues and interact with one another... (T1.1)

This collaborative culture manifested in tangible, peer-led initiatives like ‘learning showcases’ (T2.4) and other initiatives for sharing innovative practices. Participants noted that this created a self-sustaining momentum, with one teacher highlighting that school culture and the ILP ‘complement each other really well... graduates of the ILP find that we have an open space to practice here, because the culture also supports us’ (T4.1).

Support for System Change

A significant finding is the capacity of the ILP to act as an engine for school reform. School leaders noted that embedding ILP practices built the pedagogical readiness required to introduce major structural shifts, such as moving to one-hour class periods in response to Junior Cycle reform. According to some anecdotes, where many Irish post-primary schools resisted one-hour class blocks due to fears of teacher-led fatigue, one principal argued that schools with strong ILP engagement transitioned seamlessly. Because teachers possessed a diverse repertoire of active modalities, the longer class format was embraced as an opportunity for deep, varied learning:

ILP gave the capacity to be more open towards... the diversification of the modalities of instruction... When we introduced the one-hour classes... I’ve yet to meet a teacher in the school who would wish to go back... I often wondered, was there enough investment done [*in other schools*] around an understanding of what does teaching and learning look like in a one-hour class setting? ILP certainly helped us in respect of the development of tips and strategies. (T2.4)

The ILP also provided schools with the pedagogical knowledge and understanding needed to execute meaningful SSE cycles and ‘fits in really well with *Looking at Our School*’ (K12). One participant highlighted how the programme’s deep focus on ‘effective feedback’ (T3.3) became the cornerstone of their school’s SSE strategy and generated long-lasting changes to how the school communicated student progress to parents. The ILP was seen to build institutional resilience and adaptability, and ease the implementation of broader national educational policies. The ETB structure was described as the ‘perfect vehicle’ for spreading the ILP across multiple schools (K11).

Sustainability Provisos

Despite the clear benefits, participant accounts also reveal at least five critical provisos necessary to achieve and sustain the systemic impact of the ILP into the future:

- *Dependence on ETBI for programme coordination:* While the programme has demonstrated resilience through the successful transition to a new lead facilitator, stakeholders noted that key administrative and governance functions remain heavily dependent on ETBI. The concentration of these responsibilities within ETBI presents a potential risk, as the continued operation of the programme relies on ETBI vesting one of its employees with the ‘responsibility of chairing and of coordinating’ it (K12). This concentration of responsibility may affect the programme’s long-term sustainability should organisational priorities or staffing arrangements change
- *Critical mass threshold:* Participants stressed that sending isolated pairs of teachers, with a senior leader, sometimes yields limited results. A critical mass of staff, estimated by some to be ‘probably...about a third of the staff having some exposure to it’ (T3.3) is needed to permanently shift a school’s culture away from traditional norms. This is challenging in circumstances where the course is seen by many as expensive

(although all agreed it is value for money) and where there are other demands on schools' financial resources

- *Diffusion and refresher support:* The assumption that learning will diffuse purely organically without structured support, after course completion, was challenged by school leaders, particularly. Some participants made the point that regular 'refreshing' (T4.2) was needed while others noted that structured graduate networks possibly 'based around your county' (T2.1) were needed to keep momentum going. While the initial goal of the ILP is self-sustainability, it was observed by most of the participants that schools need a system or a support structure for that
- *Student dynamics and course pressures:* Participants acknowledged that active methodologies face resistance when managing certain student dynamics, where some students may expect to be 'spoon-fed' (T4.2) content for exams, or extreme curriculum coverage pressures. The shadow of exams and the points race, hung over ILP implementation in all schools - and it should be noted that teachers argued that many ILP methodologies supported students with managing exam pressure

Conclusion

The findings presented in this chapter demonstrate that the ILP functions as a transformative catalyst across multiple levels of the Irish post-primary context. The data show that the programme's value lies in its integrated architecture which combines dynamic expert modelling, structured cooperative methodologies and a core focus on classroom safety; this combination equips teachers with practical tools that directly alter daily classroom dynamics. Students responded very well to ILP methodologies and especially enjoyed the active learning, visual tools and tactical group work, which enhanced their engagement and motivation. The sustainability and depth of its impact are heavily mediated by specific structural conditions. Senior leadership participation emerged as a decisive factor in moving ILP learning from individual teacher practice to whole-school culture. Where school leaders actively engaged in the programme and aligned institutional structures like the SSE process with ILP concepts, it became deeply embedded. Conversely, findings highlight some systemic vulnerabilities, including a heavy reliance on a single lead facilitator and the necessity of achieving a critical mass of staff graduates of the ILP to support sustained implementation.

Chapter 6:

Synthesis of Evidence:

Core Research Questions

This chapter addresses the six core research questions established at the outset of this evaluation of the ILP. Each question is examined individually and data insights from previous chapters are synthesised to provide a holistic analysis. This approach aligns with the funders' strategic goal to identify the strengths and aspects for improvement across the key programme areas.

1. To what extent and in what ways does the ILP impact post-primary teachers' professional practice?

The quantitative and qualitative data provide evidence of the ILP's impact on participants' practice across individual teaching and learning environments. ILP graduates reported embedding a range of ILP instructional tactics, strategies, and skills into their classroom practice. The post-primary teachers in this evaluation demonstrated shifts in pedagogical beliefs, moving from teacher-led dominant instruction to a student-centred approach that placed greater emphasis on meaningful student engagement. The ILP empowered teachers to implement structured cooperative learning approaches that fostered social-constructivist learning environments. This teacher-reported data was triangulated with student data, which reported that teachers who engaged in the ILP used a range of student-centred approaches in their classrooms that students enjoyed, including cooperative learning strategies and pair work. Importantly, the findings show that the ILP increased teachers' confidence to enact new practice, supporting them to take pedagogical risks. The ILP graduates reported feeling less fearful that new approaches would not go as planned; instead, they showed openness to learning from mistakes and implementation challenges. Furthermore, participants demonstrated increased professional agency, reporting strong alignment in their ability to explicitly identify ILP instructional methods in their practice and articulate the underlying pedagogical rationales for their selection. Additionally, respondents indicated high self-efficacy in enacting complex ILP methodologies. Overall, the ILP graduates reported enhanced professional competence to drive active student engagement in diverse classrooms, which was supported by the student data.

The ILP also served as a powerful tool for developing teacher leadership capacity while sustaining long-term career motivation and progression. Beyond transforming classroom practice, the programme established a vital pipeline for leadership talent within schools and the broader educational system. Graduates consistently translated their learning into career advancement, stepping into key middle and senior leadership roles. For teachers without formal leadership posts, leading the rollout of ILP strategies provided a platform

and confidence boost needed to pursue leadership opportunities, equipping them with essential skills to effectively guide teaching and learning across their schools. At the same time, the ILP served as a safeguard against professional stagnation and burnout. By encouraging teachers to continuously innovate and refresh their instructional approaches to meet diverse learning needs, the ILP rekindled energy, restored a sense of purpose, and enhanced job satisfaction. Participants emphasised that changing classroom dynamics not only created a more engaging environment for students but also made teaching far more meaningful over the course of a long career, providing the professional sustenance required for lasting career longevity.

2. To what extent and in what ways does the ILP impact post-primary teachers' collective professional practice?

The data show strong collective confidence in meeting diverse learner needs, enhanced emotional safety in the classroom, and improved student learning outcomes following implementation. Importantly, the quantitative and qualitative data indicate collective confidence among ILP graduates in enacting inclusive practice, highlighting the programme's value in empowering teachers to meet the needs of all learners within mainstream classrooms. Participation in the ILP prompted teachers to reflect deeply on their daily instruction, fostering more intentional selection of teaching methods and learning resources. This internal shift strengthened collaboration, as seen in teachers' leadership capacity to work alongside colleagues to drive school-wide instructional improvement. The evidence suggests that learning diffused from programme participants into the broader school environment, contributed to a collaborative professional culture and facilitated the adoption of ILP methodologies among some non-participating staff. At the departmental level, this collaboration translated into stronger data-informed routines: many teachers regularly analysed student work to refine instruction and to more effectively identify students in need of targeted support. Consequently, some subject departments established stronger baselines for setting intervention targets and monitoring student progress, although the $M = 3.63$ indicates that further scope remains to deepen this practice systematically across all departments. Ultimately, the ILP actively fostered a collaborative culture that sparked peer-led initiatives like learning showcases for sharing innovative practices. Many graduates took on active peer-leadership roles, using staff meetings and school communications to celebrate teaching excellence. Furthermore, the ILP contributed to the development of a shared instructional language that dismantled traditional teacher isolation within schools, which enhanced opportunities for shared dialogue and learning amongst colleagues.

3. What characteristics of the ILP's design and delivery support post-primary teachers' learning?

The findings demonstrate that the ILP has at least five key characteristics that enhance post-primary teachers' professional learning. First, the mixed-role triads emerged as a very powerful tool for bringing about tangible (and reasonably quick) change in schools, because they united the administrative (senior leaders) and pedagogical (classroom teachers) components into one unit working towards a shared purpose. For senior leaders, working in triads with teachers helped them appreciate the importance and complexity of instructional work and instructional change. When they saw teachers undertaking particular initiatives back in school, they had a baseline of knowledge for why they were doing them. For teachers, this senior leadership knowledge often translated into both explicit and tacit support which enhanced their potential for making change and,

ultimately, their general leadership capacities. Second, the residential format of the ILP emerged as highly potent and contrasted with the traditional delivery format for teacher professional learning in Ireland that participants had been accustomed to. The format facilitated an immersion in the language of instruction and created both spatial and temporal distance from the busyness of school life. This distance enabled space for reflection, cross-school peer learning and the establishment of professional networks that, in some cases, sustained after the ILP had concluded. Third, the two-year delivery format provided punctuated opportunities for theoretical learning and practical application. Learning about particular instructional approaches at the course, followed by the practical application and trialling of them for a few months in school, before then going back to the course and interrogating those experiences with peers, sharpened the teachers' instructional intelligence. Fourth, and linked to the third, the cohort structure facilitated networked peer-learning and fostered a non-evaluative, collaborative space across school boundaries. This allowed participants to share vulnerability, troubleshoot implementation hurdles and expand their professional network. Fifth, the facilitation and modelling approach taken by programme facilitators was highly commended. Participants experienced instructional strategies as active learners themselves, which gave them clear operational insight into how to implement them in the classroom. Finally, there are two design and delivery characteristics that need to be enhanced. Most notable of these is the current absence of a formalised post-ILP collaboration framework to sustain and extend learning between schools. Once the ILP concludes, the collaborative, formal cross-school engagement largely disbands, leaving collaboration between schools almost entirely dependent on individual teachers and local initiatives. Providing initial support for the establishment of post-ILP communities of practice would go some way to addressing this issue. Second, the programme relies heavily on a remarkably small pool of expert facilitators. While this promotes generally high delivery standards, it presents a single-point-of-failure risk. Sustaining and expanding the programme requires developing a distributive model of facilitation that transitions advanced participants into facilitators and regional mentors to expand system capacity without compromising quality.

4. What school-level factors support or hinder the implementation of the learning from the ILP?

The findings from both the qualitative and quantitative elements of this research show that a range of conditions within the school shape the implementation of learning from the ILP. Across the data, senior leadership support was identified as one of the key factors affecting implementation. The participation of the principal or deputy principal was flagged as important in the survey, and participants in the focus group interviews discussed the critical role of senior leadership in the sustained implementation of the ILP. Participants discussed how, beyond their direct participation in the programme, actions taken at the school level by school leaders further supported implementation, including opportunities for staff to collaborate and share key learnings with colleagues, and opportunities for teachers to observe participants' practice. The development of a critical mass of ILP-trained staff within the school was also recognised as an enabling factor. Participants commented that the programme had much more influence where successive cohorts completed it, supporting the wider use of ILP practices within the schools. Examples within the qualitative data indicated that as more staff engaged in the programme, this led to a development of a common language around teaching and learning, and ILP approaches were reinforced through initiatives such as teaching and learning showcase events, TeachMeets, open-door classroom practices, and peer mentoring and collaboration. The

survey findings also provided evidence that the ILP contributed to a culture of sharing practice. In addition, the qualitative findings suggested that uptake of IL methods and approaches was strengthened in schools with a culture of openness to experimentation and collaboration.

That said, implementation was hindered in schools that lacked structures for collaborative professional learning. Within the survey data, the lowest-scoring item concerned regular meetings of the ILP team, while classroom observation was also relatively low. Participants in the qualitative data spoke about the challenges of disseminating their learning and, without dedicated time to share, model, and discuss the approaches to learning in the ILP, implementation would remain confined to teachers' individual classrooms. Implementation was deemed much more challenging in examination classes, particularly in Leaving Certificate classes where the 'points race' is a pressure point for both students and teachers. The pressure to cover curriculum and examination topics led teachers to revert to more traditional teacher-led approaches, despite recognising the benefits of ILP methodologies.

5. To what extent and in what ways does the ILP impact student engagement?

The findings demonstrate that the ILP exerts a very positive influence on student engagement. Students reported that the programme's explicit instructional strategies such as cooperative learning, instructional skills such as deliberate wait time and visual graphic organisers rendered them active co-constructors of their own learning in the classroom. Through the deliberate use of questioning, cooperative learning and tactics such as graphic organisers and placemats students are provided with clear opportunities and responsibilities for engaging with learning. These approaches promote participation, accountability and interaction, helping to ensure that students are active contributors to the learning process rather than passive recipients of information. Because students get a moment to talk through their answer with a partner first, the fear of getting something wrong in front of the whole class drops significantly. Quiet or less confident students participate far more often as a result. Extending wait time after asking a question gives students actual space to process ideas before responding. Teachers combine this wait time with graphic organisers and prompts, which guide students to break down complex topics, organise their thoughts, think about how those thoughts can be structured and, ultimately, deliver more considered, thoughtful answers. Within the ILP framework, psychological safety is conceptualised as an important condition for learning that is fostered through the effective use of instructional skills, tactics and strategies. The low-stakes opportunities for students to rehearse their thinking with peers before sharing with the wider class, significantly reduced academic anxiety, according to students in this research. This created a more inclusive classroom culture where risk-taking is normalised and diverse learners have a heightened sense of competence and agency. Combined, these engagement outcomes had the effect of strengthening relationships between students and teachers, where the classroom felt less transactional and more relational. Two friction points did emerge in relation to student outcomes, however. First, in schools where multiple teachers drew on the same repertoire of instructional tactics, a small number of students reported experiencing what might be termed 'tactic fatigue'. While cooperative learning as a strategy was generally viewed positively, some students noted that repeatedly encountering the same collaborative structures across several subjects in a single day reduced their novelty and impact. Second, implementation met subtle resistance towards the latter end of senior cycle where some students, conditioned by exam pressure, sometimes favoured direct, lecture-style delivery over collaborative processing. To address these frictions, schools need to coordinate tactical variety across

year groups, especially in the early stages of enactment before fluency, while also explicitly showing senior students how structured, active processing might directly sharpen their exam performance.

6. To what extent and in what ways does the ILP impact student achievement?

The findings suggest that the ILP had a positive impact on student achievement, although the nature and strength of that impact should be interpreted with caution. Within the qualitative and quantitative data, there is evidence that ILP participation influenced classroom practices that supported student engagement, inclusion, retention and confidence. However, as noted, this evidence is based on teacher and student perceptions, and no direct measures of attainment were utilised in this evaluation. Thus, the strongest conclusion is that ILP appears to influence students indirectly by improving the quality of teaching and learning, and there are qualitative indications that it may have contributed to students' examination performance. Quantitative findings indicate that teachers perceived ILP methodologies as improving student learning. For example, in the survey, there was strong agreement that ILP methods increased student engagement and that teachers observed enhanced student learning following the implementation of the ILP. In addition, teachers reported confidence in meeting learners' needs and that the ILP increased their capacity to create more inclusive learning environments. The qualitative findings illuminate how these reported improvements occurred in practice. One reported effect was a shift away from teacher-led instructional approaches towards more active, student-centred approaches such as think-pair-share, graphic organisers, modelling, and carefully designed group activities. Teachers reported that the ILP helped them understand not only which strategies and tactics to use but also why particular approaches might support learning.

Student data also supported these accounts. They frequently compared ILP approaches with more passive, didactic teaching methods, and described interactive lessons, games, and group work as more engaging. Students also explained that ILP approaches such as modelling helped them understand concepts, rather than just memorising, and group and paired work supported them in preparing for assessments and examinations. Emotional and psychological safety also emerged as an important factor supporting student achievement. Participants in the survey data agreed that ILP approaches enhanced emotional safety in classrooms, while student data indicated that ILP-influenced classrooms created spaces where they felt comfortable asking questions and making mistakes. The emphasis on questioning within the ILP, for example, allowed teachers to create opportunities for students to attempt questions without fear of giving an incorrect response, while pair and group work reduced the pressure to speak in front of the class.

Finally, school leaders reported using software to track predicted and actual Leaving Certificate grades. They observed that students, particularly those expected to perform less strongly, exceeded predicted outcomes. One participant suggested that ILP-informed teaching was 'lifting the boat'. While this is a potentially important finding in this evaluation, it should be interpreted with caution. Other factors may influence examination attainment; therefore, it cannot be concluded that the ILP had a direct impact. While recognising that the available quantitative and qualitative data do not justify attributing examination performance directly to the ILP, the convergence of the survey data and teacher, leader, and student accounts provides an appropriate basis for concluding that the ILP creates conditions supportive of student achievement.

Conclusion

The findings of this evaluation show that the ILP makes a genuine difference in post-primary classrooms. Teachers who complete the programme move away from passive, teacher-led instruction toward active, collaborative learning. They gain the confidence to adapt their practice and take instructional risks, while students report feeling safer, more engaged and better supported. At school level, the shared vocabulary and triad structure help open classroom doors and build leadership capacity from within staff teams. Accounts from students, teachers, school leaders and steering committee members clearly agree that the ILP creates the classroom conditions that allow students to perform at their best. Looking ahead, the programme is well-positioned to broaden its reach and deepen its systemic impact. Capitalising on this momentum will mean expanding the facilitation base by creating clear pathways for experienced graduates to step into leadership roles within the ILP and a commitment to the ongoing provision of resources for the coordination and administration of the programme. Equally, establishing vibrant post-ILP networks will keep cohort connections alive and sustain innovation over the long term. Supported by school leaders who protect time for peer observation and cross-departmental collaboration, the ILP can continue to strengthen the quality of teaching and learning for years to come.

Chapter 7:

Conclusion

Introduction

This commissioned evaluation provides a detailed account of the ILP and its impact on teachers, schools and students in Irish post-primary schools. As the first independent evaluation of the ILP since its inception in 2008, this research has explored how it has impacted teachers. This final chapter of the report translates the evaluation's empirical findings into strategic considerations and actionable recommendations for the future of the ILP. First, the chapter outlines the considerations / implications arising from the evaluation and examines how the ILP operationalises sustained professional learning, fosters distributed instructional leadership and diffuses practice across school contexts. Second, the chapter presents targeted recommendations categorised across Strategic & System Governance, Programme Design & Delivery and School-Level Conditions. Together, these considerations and recommendations provide a roadmap to safeguard the ILP's quality, enhance its core content, and sustain its impact as it continues to evolve. The limitations of the evaluation are also outlined at the end of this chapter.

Considerations / Implications

The strongest finding emanating from this study is the impact of the ILP on schools' professional practice. The programme introduces school leaders and teachers to a repertoire of approaches for their instructional practice, and participants are provided with a toolkit of evidence-informed teaching approaches, alongside support to develop their understanding of the research and theoretical principles underpinning their effectiveness. The programme provides opportunities for school leaders and teachers to critically reflect on their existing practice and supports them in moving away from traditional didactic teaching toward facilitating participatory, student-led learning. The emphasis on reflective practice enables them to make conscious and confident instructional choices to foster a participatory learning environment. While the ILP is not primarily positioned as a programme focused on inclusive teaching, much of the data in this report points to evidence of the ILP supporting inclusive practice. Tangible examples include adapting explanations and using modelling when students are confused by a particular concept, varied forms of assessment, mixed-ability grouping, and the capacity to adapt teaching in response to diverse student needs.

There are several implications arising from this evaluation. The first is that professional learning requires sustained time and support (King et al., 2023). The ILP is not built around single-workshop offerings. Rather, participants engage in programme learning, apply new approaches in practice, reflect on the outcomes, and return to the programme to share experiences, critically examine their learning, and build further knowledge. These experiences and

opportunities for reflection serve as catalysts for further learning. This sequential nature of the programme not only makes visible what a sustained model of PL looks like, but also showcases the impact and influence on teaching and learning. Moreover, the sustained nature of the ILP highlights the importance of a longer-term process in supporting teacher change, primarily in attitudes, beliefs, and practices (Brennan & King, 2021). Second, teachers reported in the evaluation that the ILP strengthened their opportunities to collaborate with colleagues and contribute to whole-school teaching and learning. Through their engagement with the ILP, teachers felt more confident in taking on formal and informal leadership roles, including leading workshops, mentoring colleagues and contributing to professional learning within their schools. Instructional leadership is not confined to principals or deputy principals (Hallinger, 2026). The ILP supports school leaders in enacting distributed instructional leadership by encouraging teachers to extend their practice beyond their own classrooms, collaborate with colleagues, and contribute to professional learning within schools. Finally, the evaluation shows that the influence of the ILP operates at several levels. It begins with teachers developing greater knowledge of teaching and learning, which in turn leads to changes in classroom teaching and students' learning experiences. In schools that emphasise shared and collaborative practice, these changes can naturally influence wider professional practice. The programme should not, however, be viewed as a cascade model of professional learning. Rather, the data indicate that, in schools with successive cohorts of ILP graduates, opportunities for professional collaboration, mentoring and the sharing of practice emerged organically. These interactions were characterised not by the transmission of programme content from one participant to another, but by collegial dialogue, mutual support and collaborative professional learning informed by participants' experiences of the programme. That said, such conditions do not emerge by default. Rather, there is an onus on the school and the system more broadly to create the structures and conditions that enable such learning to take place.

Recommendations

The following seven targeted recommendations are proposed here to enhance delivery of the ILP, strengthen its impact and safeguard its sustainability from system- and school-wide pressures. The recommendations, broadly speaking, can be categorised into three groups (Strategic & System Governance, Programme Design & Delivery and School-Level Conditions). Each of these recommendations is now explored in turn:

Strategic & System Governance

1. The programme must establish a clear working definition or a conceptual framework for instructional leadership that is embedded across programme content and documentation. This explicit definition should take account of the many effective IL practices that are evident across the ILP. Fundamentally, this research has established that the programme views IL as a collaborative, distributed and pedagogically focused form of leadership centred on improving teaching and learning - along the same broad parameters proposed by Spillane et al. (2003) and Halverson and Clifford (2013). As part of that, the ILP adopts a progressive view of who enacts IL, with both teachers and school leaders comprehended by the concept, in the same vein as Morrissey's (2025) expansive view of the key school-level enactors of micro-level curriculum leadership in Irish schools. Formalising the definition for IL would strengthen the course significantly and enhance coherence of the ILP's modules;
2. Further opportunities to broaden representation on the Steering Committee should be explored to ensure that it reflects the diversity of schools participating in the ILP. Notwithstanding the Committee's efforts to engage a range of stakeholders, greater representation across different patronages and school

contexts could bring additional perspectives and experiences to inform the ongoing development of the programme;

Programme Design and Delivery

3. Further opportunities to widen the pool of facilitators delivering content on the ILP should be explored. This could include the development of a facilitator pathway through which ILP graduates are recruited to contribute to programme delivery. Expanding the facilitation pool would help to mitigate dependency on a small core team, build sustainable capacity and provide experienced alumni with a progression route within the ILP. While efforts in this area are already being pursued through funding applications under the PEACEPLUS programme, consideration should also be given to addressing challenges relating to the availability of substitute cover for facilitators. Alongside developing facilitator capacity, a sustained commitment to providing dedicated resources for the ongoing coordination, administration and logistical management of the programme is essential to ensure its long-term operational sustainability
4. The content of the ILP should be further developed to include a greater focus on leading, implementing and sustaining instructional change. While the programme supports participants in reflecting on and enhancing their own leadership practice, its long-term impact is likely to be maximised when changes in individual practice contribute to broader improvements in school culture and systems. Incorporating content on leading systemic change and managing resistance to change could better equip participants to drive and sustain improvement within their schools (Aldridge and McLure, 2024);
5. Opportunities to further strengthen ILP networks and support structures for programme graduates should be further explored. County and regional networks could support the development of local capacity for continuing professional learning in instructional leadership. Building on existing networking opportunities within the ILP, such structures could help sustain collaboration and cross-school learning beyond participants' formal involvement in the programme;

School-level Conditions

6. Notwithstanding the autonomy of schools in determining participation, the ILP should provide guidance for school leaders on factors to consider when identifying participants for the programme in order to maximise school-level impact. Guidance should emphasise strategic cohort building, ensuring that participation is aligned with broader school improvement priorities and that learning is diffused throughout the school. Such an approach could support the development of internal capacity, strengthen instructional leadership and contribute to lasting improvements in school culture and practice;
7. Notwithstanding the autonomy of schools in determining their own organisational structures and professional learning priorities, the ILP should provide guidance on establishing the conditions necessary to maximise the impact of participation in the programme. This could include guidance on protecting time for collaboration and professional dialogue on instructional practice, facilitating peer observation in a developmental and non-evaluative manner, and systematically harnessing student voice to inform instructional improvement. Such supports could help schools embed learning from the ILP more effectively and strengthen their capacity for sustained instructional change.

Limitations

While this report provides a comprehensive overview of the ILP, the study is not without its limitations. First, the data are largely based on participant self-reports and did not include observations of practice within schools. While self-reported data offer valuable insights into perceived changes in practice, school culture, and learning experiences, they carry inherent risks of reporting bias and social desirability. Notably, however, the data included student voice, which is uncommon in evaluations of professional learning initiatives and in broader research. This data illuminated the changes in teachers' practice that students observed and illustrated how they experienced teaching and learning in their classrooms. While student data cannot establish a direct causal link between the ILP and changes in student learning outcomes, it added richness to the evaluation and supported triangulation and offered very interesting signposts for further examination. Second, the case study schools which elected to participate in the evaluation had a legacy of engaging with the ILP over many years; therefore, they were more likely to have a positive disposition towards the programme. Notwithstanding these constraints, the multi-informant design, combining perspectives from teachers, students and programme leadership, provided sufficient analytical depth and methodological triangulation to yield credible, balanced insights into the programme's impact.

Conclusion

The evidence gathered in this evaluation confirms that the ILP plays a critical role in post-primary education in Ireland. It successfully supports shifts in classroom culture away from traditional didactic delivery toward active, inclusive learning by establishing a shared instructional language and building instructional capacity within schools. The programme demonstrates that instructional leadership is not the exclusive domain of the senior leadership team, but a collective practice that flourishes when teachers are supported to lead pedagogical change from within their own classrooms. Sustaining and expanding this impact requires deliberate action. The strategic implications and recommendations outlined in this chapter highlight that meaningful professional learning cannot rely on short-term interventions or informal goodwill alone. Clarifying for all stakeholders what the ILP means by instructional leadership, opening up its governance, building a wider pool of facilitators and refreshing core content will strengthen the programme considerably. Equally, the extent to which ILP practices become embedded in classroom and school practice may be enhanced when senior school leaders are supported to make intentional decisions regarding participant selection and opportunities for structured collaboration. Taking these practical steps will ensure the ILP remains a relevant, high-quality programme that continues to improve teaching and learning across the sector and maintains its place as one of the marquee professional learning programmes for developing instructional leadership in the Irish post-primary landscape.

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