



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Report on the implementation of aspects of anti-bullying measures in schools

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1. Introduction

This report focuses on the implementation of anti-bullying measures in primary and post-primary schools.¹ It is based on information gathered by the Department of Education Inspectorate during incidental inspections of primary, post-primary and special schools during September to November 2021.

In January 2013, an [Action Plan on Bullying](#) was published by the Department. This plan set out twelve actions to help prevent and address bullying in schools. In September 2013, the Department issued the [Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools](#).² Those procedures were developed to give direction and guidance to school authorities and school personnel in relation to preventing and responding to school-based bullying behaviour. In addition, the procedures outlined approaches for dealing with any negative impact within the school of bullying behaviour that occurred elsewhere. The *Anti-Bullying Procedures* and an associated Department Circular [0045/2013](#) apply to all recognised primary and post-primary schools in Ireland. In August 2021, the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science published its report on [School Bullying and the Impact on Mental Health](#). This report included a range of recommendations on bullying prevention and intervention. The recommendations and the suggested actions applied to schools and the education system generally.

With bullying as a clearly identified priority for the Department, the Inspectorate has renewed its focus on the implementation of anti-bullying measures in schools. In September 2021, a short webinar was developed by the Inspectorate on its work in monitoring the implementation of anti-bullying measures in schools.³ In addition, Circulars [0032/2021](#) (Primary) and [0033/2021](#) (Post-primary and centres for education) provided information on the Inspectorate's approach to supporting the implementation of anti-bullying measures in schools. These circulars, together with the [Information Note on Incidental Inspections](#) advised schools that from the 2021/2022 school year, inspectors would, during incidental inspections, gather information about the implementation of anti-bullying measures in schools.

During the course of each incidental inspection carried out between September and November 2021, time was allocated for discussion between the inspector and school principal on issues relating to anti-bullying and the school's identified priorities for the creation of a positive school culture and climate. Following the incidental inspection, the school principal and chairperson of the board of management received a short note

¹ Throughout this report, the term 'school' is used to denote both schools and centres for education.

² Abbreviated form of *Anti-Bullying Procedures* is used in subsequent references.

³ This webinar can be accessed [here](#).

summarising this discussion. The purpose of this note was to support the school's work in building and nurturing a positive culture and addressing bullying behaviour.

As stated in the *Anti-Bullying Procedures*, bullying is unwanted negative behaviour, verbal, psychological or physical, conducted by an individual or group against another person (or persons) and which is repeated over time. The *Anti-Bullying Procedures* make clear that this definition also includes cyber-bullying and identity-based bullying, such as homophobic, transphobic and racist bullying. Since the publication of these procedures in 2013, awareness of other forms of bullying such as gender identity or sexist bullying has increased. In addition, there has been a growing appreciation of the complexity of bullying. For example, intersectional bullying can occur where someone is victimised across multiple layers or attributes as in the case of a person being bullied because of their race and sexual orientation or gender. Recent research findings also highlight the disproportionate impact which bullying has on children and young people with disabilities at all ages and in all learning settings.⁴

The *Anti-Bullying Procedures* outline the potential impact of all forms of bullying - on those who are bullied, on those who witness bullying and on those who engage in bullying behaviour. This is supported by decades of research which establish that the impact of bullying on individuals can be severe, ongoing, and life-changing.⁵ The *Anti-Bullying Procedures* also emphasise that bullying behaviour, by its very nature, undermines and dilutes the quality of education. Furthermore, the procedures describe how bullying can have short-term and long-term effects on the physical and psychological wellbeing of pupils/students, on their engagement with school, on their self-esteem, and on their ability to pursue ambitions and interests. It is therefore vitally important that schools have effective measures in place to reduce the likelihood of bullying and to respond to bullying behaviour when it occurs.

The *Anti-Bullying Procedures* recognise that a cornerstone of the prevention of bullying is a positive school culture and climate that is welcoming of difference and diversity and is based on inclusivity and respect. Similarly, *Culture and Environment* is one of the four key areas in wellbeing promotion identified in the Department's *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice*.

There is a substantial body of published research which examines a wide range of aspects of school-based bullying. For example, there are some earlier reviews on prevalence rates of bullying in Irish society generally (e.g. Mc Guckin, 2013; O'Moore, 2013). More recent research has noted the prevalence of bullying in primary and post-

⁴ Bullying rates higher for children with disabilities, available from <https://en.unesco.org/news/bullying-rates-higher-children-disabilities>.

⁵ Norman, J. O., & Sullivan, K. (2018). Reducing school bullying: A whole-school approach. In H. Cowie & C.A. Myers (Eds.), *School bullying and mental health: Risks, intervention and prevention* (pp. 180–191). Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

primary schools. One particular finding from this research gives cause for significant concern: At primary level, just over a fifth (22.4%) of sampled pupils and at post-primary level, just over a tenth (11.8%) of sampled students reported that they had experience of online and/or off-line bullying behaviour.⁶ Bullying research continues to focus on the serious and pervasive implications for child and adolescent development. In this regard, a very useful database of research theses on bullying from all academic institutions in the UK and Ireland is available from DCU.⁷ The aim of this database is to assist those who are interested in the field of bullying and wish to review existing research. The DCU website is also a very valuable resource for schools seeking to develop their approaches in the area of anti-bullying.

One form of bullying behaviour that has become more prevalent in recent times is that of cyber-bullying although face-to-face bullying remains as a very prevalent issue. In August 2021, the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science published its report on [School Bullying and the Impact on Mental Health](#). The Committee acknowledged that cyber-bullying behaviour had increased significantly as a direct consequence of recent rapid advances in digital technologies, social networking sites and mobile phone usage. These findings were informed by recent research undertaken by DCU's National Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre (ABC)⁸ which highlighted the extent to which the COVID-19 pandemic had been transformative from a digital perspective. Significantly, this research found that 28% of children and young people in the sample were reported to have experienced cyber-bullying during the period of COVID-19 national 'lockdown', while a further 50% were reported to have observed others being cyber-bullied.⁹ These concerning findings, together with increased societal reliance on smartphones and associated escalating app-based socialisation means that it is now timely to revisit some of the risks that children and young people can encounter online. Although outside the scope of this report, it is also worth noting, for balance, that the lockdown and the rapid transition to remote learning also provided valuable opportunities for the development of digital skills.

⁶ Foody M, Samara M, O'Higgins Norman J. (2017) 'Bullying and cyberbullying studies in the school-aged population on the island of Ireland: A meta-analysis'. In *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 87(4):535-557. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/bjep.12163> .

⁷ <https://antibullyingcentre.ie/publications/thesis-database/>

⁸ The National Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre (ABC) is a university designated research centre in Dublin City University (DCU).

⁹ Milosevic, T., Laffan, D., O'Higgins Norman, J. (2021) *Kids' Digital Lives in Covid-19 Times, A Study of Digital Practice, Safety and Wellbeing: Key Findings from Ireland*. Available at: <https://antibullyingcentre.ie/kidicoti-kids-digital-lives-in-covid-19-times-a-comparative-mixed-methods-study-on-digital-practices-safety-and-wellbeing/b>

2. Methodology

2.1 Overview

During the incidental inspections which provide the basis of this report, inspectors reviewed the extent to which schools were engaging with the *Anti-Bullying Procedures*. In particular, they considered the school's implementation of five key aspects of the procedures. Inspectors also collected information about the priorities of the school in relation to the creation of a school culture that prevents and addresses bullying. Arising from this, inspectors identified examples of good practice. Some additional visits or calls to a small sample of individual schools provided further insights into the effective practices of schools in preventing and addressing bullying. These are presented in a series of brief case studies below.

During the inspections, inspectors checked how schools were implementing the following five requirements of the *Anti-Bullying Procedures*:

1. The school has an anti-bullying policy that has been ratified by the Board of Management and uses the template provided in the *Anti-Bullying Procedures*
2. The school records incidents of bullying behaviour using the form provided in the *Anti-Bullying Procedures*
3. The Board of Management minutes show that, at least once in every school term, the principal provides a report to the board which sets out the overall number of bullying cases reported to the Principal or Deputy Principal since the previous report to the Board, and confirmation that all of these cases have been, or are being, dealt with in accordance with the school's anti-bullying policy and the *Anti-Bullying Procedures*
4. The school's anti-bullying policy has been published on the school's website or where none exists, is otherwise readily accessible to board of management members, teachers, parents and pupils/students
5. The school's Board of Management undertakes an annual review of the school's anti-bullying policy in accordance with the checklist provided in the *Anti-Bullying Procedures* and it is signed and dated.

In addition, inspectors discussed with the school principal the school's approach to creating and maintaining a positive school culture – with an emphasis on the actions taken by the school to prevent and address bullying. Analysis of the findings from these discussions forms the basis of this report.

2.2 Number and type of participating schools

This report is based on the outcomes of 518 incidental inspections completed in the first term of the 2021/2022 school year, as presented in the table below:

| Table 1: Number and type of schools in which incidental inspections were undertaken | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Sector | Number of schools |
| Primary and special schools | 309 |
| Post-primary schools | 209 |
| Total | 518 |

Of the 518 primary, special and post-primary schools in which inspections were carried out, 125 schools (24%)¹⁰ were participating in *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools* (DEIS), the action plan of the Department of Education for educational inclusion. Seventy-two of the primary and special schools (23%) and fifty-three of the post-primary schools (25%) surveyed had designated DEIS status.¹¹

¹⁰ Percentages have been rounded up to the nearest whole number in the body of this report.

¹¹ The quantitative data arising from inspections in schools with designated DEIS status was broadly similar to that from non-DEIS schools.

2.3 Guide to quantitative terms

The following quantitative terms are used throughout this report.

| Table 2: Guide to quantitative terminology used in the report | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Percentage range | Quantitative term |
| More than 90% | Almost all |
| 75%-90% | Most |
| 51%-74% | Majority/more than half |
| 50% | Half |
| 25%-49% | Less than half/a significant minority |
| 16%-24% | A small number/less than a quarter |
| Less than 15% | A few |

3. Findings

3.1 Extent to which schools have an anti-bullying policy in place

Under the [Education \(Welfare\) Act 2000](#), all schools are required to have a code of behaviour in place. The Act also requires that this code of behaviour includes an anti-bullying policy.

Boards of management are required to formally adopt and implement an anti-bullying policy that fully complies with the requirements of the *Anti-Bullying Procedures*. The template for the formulation of the anti-bullying policy which must be used by all schools is provided in [Appendix 1](#) of the Procedures.

During the course of the incidental inspections, inspectors checked if the schools visited had an anti-bullying policy in place in accordance with the *Anti-Bullying Procedures*. They ascertained if the policy had been reviewed and ratified by the board of management, if it was appropriately signed, and if it was formatted in line with the requirements.

As indicated in Table 3, most schools (almost 90%) met the requirements pertaining to this area; over one-tenth of schools did not.

Table 3: The school has an anti-bullying policy that has been ratified by the Board of Management and uses the template provided in the *Anti-Bullying Procedures*

| | Primary schools and special schools n=309 | Post-primary schools n=209 | Total n=518 |
|-------|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|
| Yes | 91.6% (283) | 86.6% (181) | 89.6% (464) |
| No | 8.4% (26) | 13.4% (28) | 10.4% (54) |
| Total | 100% (309) | 100% (209) | 100% (518) |

3.2 Recording of incidents of bullying behaviour

Schools are required to investigate and seek to resolve all reports of bullying. There are also specific requirements in relation to the recording of bullying incidents:

- (i) While all reports, including anonymous reports of bullying must be investigated and dealt with by the relevant teacher, the relevant teacher will use their professional judgement in relation to the records to be kept of these reports, the actions taken and any discussions with those involved regarding same
- (ii) If it is established by the relevant teacher that bullying has occurred, the relevant teacher must keep appropriate written records which will assist his/her efforts to resolve the issues and restore, as far as is practicable, the relationships of the parties involved.
- (iii) The relevant teacher must use the recording template at [Appendix 3](#) of the *Anti-Bullying Procedures* to record the bullying behaviour in the following circumstances: a) in cases where they consider that the bullying behaviour has not been adequately and appropriately addressed within 20 school days after they have determined that bullying behaviour occurred; and b) where the school has decided as part of its anti-bullying policy that in certain circumstances bullying behaviour must be recorded and reported immediately to the principal or deputy principal as applicable.

In each of the circumstances at (iii) (a) and (b), the recording template at *Appendix 3* must be completed in full and retained by the teacher and a copy provided to the principal or deputy principal. The timeline for recording bullying behaviour in the recording template at *Appendix 3* does not in any way preclude the relevant teacher from consulting the principal or deputy principal at an earlier stage in relation to a case.

As indicated in Table 4, most schools (92%) recorded incidents of bullying as required (as outlined in (iii) above). Just a few schools (8%) did not.

Table 4: The school records incidents of bullying behaviour using the form (Appendix 3) provided in the *Anti-Bullying Procedures*

| | Primary and special schools n=309 | Post-primary schools n=209 | Total n=518 |
|-------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|
| Yes | 94.8% (293) | 87.6% (183) | 91.9% (476) |
| No | 5.2% (16) | 12.4% (26) | 8.1% (42) |
| Total | 100% (309) | 100% (209) | 100% (518) |

3.3 Reporting of incidents of bullying to the board of management

Under the *Anti-Bullying Procedures*, the principal is required to provide to the board, at least once a term, a report which includes:

- (i) the overall number of bullying cases reported (by means of the bullying recording template provided in the *Procedures*) since the previous report to the Board and
- (ii) confirmation that all cases referred to at (i) above had been or were being, dealt with in accordance with the school's anti-bullying policy and the *Anti-Bullying Procedures*.

In the course of each incidental inspection, the minutes of board meetings were reviewed to confirm if the school was fulfilling the requirements of the *Anti-Bullying Procedures* in respect of reporting to the board of management.

The overall findings indicate that this was an aspect of practice in which deficiencies were evident in a considerable number of schools (Table 5). Almost one-quarter (23%) of post-primary schools were not fully observing the requirements for reporting to the board of management on bullying incidents in the school. Fourteen per cent of primary schools were not fully observing these requirements. Overall, while most schools (82%) were fully observing the requirements about reporting to the board of management, just under one-fifth (18%) required further guidance on this aspect.

Table 5: Board of Management minutes show that, at least once in every school term, the principal provides a report to the board which sets out the overall number of bullying cases reported to the Principal or Deputy Principal since the previous report to the Board, and confirmation that all of these cases have been, or are being, dealt with in accordance with the school’s anti-bullying policy and the *Anti-Bullying Procedures*

| | Primary and special schools n=309 | Post-primary schools n=209 | Total n=518 |
|-------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|
| Yes | 85.8% (265) | 77% (161) | 82.2% (426) |
| No | 14.2% (44) | 23% (48) | 17.8% (92) |
| Total | 100% (309) | 100% (209) | 100% (518) |

3.4 Communication of anti-bullying policies

As part of the evaluations, inspectors looked at how successful schools were in disseminating their anti-bullying policies among the school community. A range of approaches may be used by schools to communicate their policies. The most typical way is through the school website or, where a school does not have a website, it is obliged to ensure that it has in place other ways of ensuring that the policy is shared or readily accessible to the board, to teachers, to parents and to students.

Table 6: The school's anti-bullying policy has been published on the school's website or where none exists, is otherwise readily accessible to board of management members, teachers, parents and pupils/students

| | Primary and special schools n=309 | Post-primary schools n=209 | Total n=518 |
|-------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|
| Yes | 95.1% (294) | 97.1% (203) | 95.9% (497) |
| No | 4.9% (15) | 2.9% (6) | 4.1% (21) |
| Total | 100% (309) | 100% (209) | 100% (518) |

Almost all schools (96%) were fully observing the requirements for communication of their anti-bullying policy to the school community. A few schools (4%) required additional support on this aspect.

3.5 Annual review of anti-bullying policies

The final aspect that inspectors looked at was whether or not the board of management in each school had undertaken an annual review of the anti-bullying policy. As part of this review, schools were required to use the checklist provided in the *Anti-Bullying Procedures* and also to ensure that the review was signed and dated by the chairperson of the board.

This was the aspect of practice reviewed by inspectors in which the highest numbers of schools needed further support and guidance. While nearly three-quarters of schools (74%) fulfilled their responsibilities in respect of the annual review of the anti-bullying policy, more than a quarter (26%) did not (Table 7). Almost twice as many post-primary schools (36%) as primary schools (19%) were not fully observing the requirements of this aspect.

Table 7: The school's Board of Management has undertaken an annual review of the school's anti-bullying policy in accordance with the checklist provided in the *Anti-Bullying Procedures* and it is signed and dated

| | Primary and special schools n=309 | Post-primary schools n=209 | Total n=518 |
|-------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|
| Yes | 80.9% (250) | 64.1% (134) | 74.1% (384) |
| No | 19.1% (59) | 35.9% (75) | 25.9% (134) |
| Total | 100% (309) | 100% (209) | 100% (518) |

4. School priorities and strategies for the creation of a positive school culture and climate

4.1 Overview

During each incidental inspection, the principal was invited to outline the priorities and/or strategies of the school in relation to the promotion of a positive school culture and climate. The key points which emerged from these discussions were collated into overarching themes. These themes were subsequently categorised based on the frequency of reference. The identified themes related to whole-school approaches to the implementation of specific initiatives and interventions. Analysis of the themes of these discussions, in addition to follow-up visits to a sample of schools, were used to identify schools where very effective practice was evident. Practice from a selection of these schools is set out below. Schools reported the following among the range of positive actions to ensure that environments were positive and supportive of an anti-bullying culture:

- adoption of a whole-school approach to anti-bullying
- effective supervision
- involvement of parents
- promotion of respect for diversity
- the inclusion of the experiences and insights of children and young people
- the use of encouragement and awards
- enhancement of the physical environment
- whole-school implementation of Social, Personal and Health Education
- engagement of teachers in continuing professional learning.

4.2 Adoption of a whole-school approach to anti-bullying

The *Anti-Bullying Procedures* highlight the importance of a whole-school approach to bullying prevention and intervention. The success of such a whole-school approach is dependent on the active involvement of the school community, the consistent implementation of the anti-bullying policy and the priority afforded to ensuring the wellbeing of pupils/students and staff. Many schools talked about how they achieved this through the implementation of a range of carefully selected anti-bullying programmes, initiatives and interventions.

The *Anti-Bullying Procedures* also emphasise the key role which all members of the school community play in supporting the school in addressing bullying behaviour and in dealing with any negative impact within the school of bullying behaviour that occurs

elsewhere. Recent national research into bullying also recognises the importance of this interconnectedness of the school with the wider community.¹²

A significant number of principals identified whole-school implementation of their anti-bullying policy as a key priority for their work in this area. Some of the ways in which principals ensured the successful implementation of the policy included:

- following the steps in the anti-bullying policy to the point of resolving bullying matters
- all members of the school community recognising the importance of whole-school procedures and commitment to their implementation
- meaningfully involving parents and pupils/students in the review of the anti-bullying policy
- ensuring that all individuals within the school had a thorough understanding of their own roles and responsibilities in relation to the implementation of the anti-bullying policy
- encouraging and facilitating high levels of open communication between pupils/students and their families
- fostering positive and authentic home-school links to ensure that parents were consistently informed and in a position to approach the school at any time with concerns.
- consistent implementation of the code of behaviour in helping the school community to encourage good behaviour and prevent bullying
- involvement of the guidance team in post-primary schools in supporting the school's work on anti-bullying

The *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* supports schools in making the culture, ethos and commitment to wellbeing visible and in clearly defining the characteristics of a school which demonstrates best practice in this area. Attention to the reduction of bullying behaviour is a recognised approach to supporting and promoting positive mental health and wellbeing. A significant number of principals at both primary and post-primary levels referenced wellbeing promotion as a means through which their school's work on anti-bullying was supported. It is worth noting that while many principals spoke very positively about how anti-bullying was an integral part of their work on wellbeing, surprisingly few references were made to the necessity to have systems in place to monitor the impact of this work on outcomes for pupils/students, particularly in relation to the prevention of bullying behaviour.

¹² Norman, J. O., & Sullivan, K. (2018). 'Reducing school bullying: A whole-school approach'. In H. Cowie & C.-A. Myers (Eds.), *School bullying and mental health: Risks, intervention and prevention* (pp. 180–191). Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

The *Action Plan on Bullying* highlights the importance of schools working to identify and consistently implement established and research-based intervention strategies for dealing with cases of bullying behaviour and preventing its continuation. The *Anti-Bullying Procedures* emphasise that the complexity of bullying behaviour is such that there is no single intervention which can be expected to be effective in all situations. Each school must therefore decide on the intervention method(s) best suited to its own circumstances. The *Anti-Bullying Procedures* also note that, in identifying the most suitable intervention method(s), it is important for a school to research and understand the selected intervention.

Many principals emphasised the importance of anti-bullying programmes, initiatives and interventions in creating a school culture and climate that prevent and address bullying. Many principals referred to programmes, initiatives and interventions that are produced and facilitated by statutory agencies such as the National Education Psychological Service, the HSE Health Promotion for Schools and DCU's Anti-Bullying Centre. In this regard, many schools reported very positive outcomes from the FUSE anti-bullying and online safety training programme. This programme, which has been developed and is run by the ABC, empowers school communities to directly engage with and respond to the experiences and concerns of children and young people.¹³ Other relevant programmes and interventions mentioned by principals include *FRIENDS Resilience Programmes*¹⁴, *Zippy's Friends*¹⁵, and *The Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management Programme*.¹⁶

Principals also detailed a range of other programmes which are commercially produced. It is important to note that these are independent programmes which have not been quality assured by the Department. The *Anti-Bullying Procedures* reference the importance of a school researching and understanding both the techniques of the programme or intervention involved, and the assumptions and rationale of particular methods. As schools seek to identify a specific anti-bullying programme to use when

¹³ Dublin City University (2020) *2019 Impact Report: FUSE Anti-Bullying Online Safety Programme for Post-Primary Schools*. Available at: https://tacklebullying.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/FUSE_2019_Impact_Report.pdf

¹⁴ The FRIENDS Resilience programmes which include *Fun Friends*, *Friends for Life*, *FRIENDS Youth* and an *Adult Resilience Programme* help students to develop resilience by teaching them effective strategies to cope with, problem solve and manage all kinds of emotional distress, including worry, stress, change and anxiety.

¹⁵ *Zippy's Friends* is a programme for teaching social and emotional skills designed for 5-7 year olds. The training for this programme is provided by the HSE Health Promotion for Schools.

¹⁶ The *Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management Programme* (TCM) is a classroom-based prevention and early-intervention programme designed to reduce conduct problems and promote children's pro-social behaviour. *Zippy's Friends* has been evaluated and found to improve children's coping skills, social skills, emotional literacy, improve the class climate and reduce bullying. More information about the evaluation studies of *Zippy's Friends* is available at: <https://www.partnershipforchildren.org.uk/research.html>

dealing with bullying in their schools, they should ensure that their selected programme is closely linked to the Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum and also to the *Wellbeing Framework for Practice*. Moreover, it should be informed by an established research-based approach. It is also very important that schools undertake regular evaluations of the effectiveness of their selected programmes to ensure that these remain current, both in terms of their evidence base and in terms of reflecting and responding to the needs of their school community.

Overall, the inspections show that there is an awareness in schools of the prevalence of cyber-bullying amongst children and young people. Many principals at both primary and post-primary levels expressed concern about the potential for such bullying and indicated that they were proactively addressing the matter. They indicated that they used specific programmes for pupils/students such as the Department of Education-approved *FRIENDS for Life* and *Zippy's Friends*, and held information sessions for all members of the school community.

4.3 Effective supervision

In their discussions with inspectors, many schools highlighted the importance of effective supervision of pupils/students in preventing and dealing with bullying behaviour. Actions taken by schools to ensure effective supervision and monitoring included:

- whole-staff implementation of the school's supervision rota, particularly during recreation periods
- emphasis on members of the school leadership team being visible throughout the school day
- identification of 'hot-spots' and 'hot-times' where bullying was more likely to occur and ensuring that staff were vigilant in this regard
- ensuring that pupils/students were aware of their roles and responsibilities in helping the school to prevent and address school-based bullying behaviour. For example, in one primary school, a buddy system was implemented in senior classes whereby pupils were encouraged to support their friend if they were unable to deal with a bullying situation themselves.
- a range of classroom-based and school-based initiatives through which pupils/students could share concerns discreetly. For example, one post-primary school described their use of suggestion boxes in classrooms; these provided students with an opportunity to share their concerns, comments or suggestions.

4.4 Active involvement of parents

The inspectors' engagement with schools highlighted the important role that parents can play in supporting schools in their work on anti-bullying. Principals reported that parental support was a key factor in facilitating the successful investigation and resolution of issues in their school relating to bullying. Reported actions taken by schools to facilitate parental support in the area of anti-bullying included:

- meaningful involvement of parents in the development and review of the school's anti-bullying policy
- ensuring that parents were well informed about the school's actions to prevent and address bullying, and their roles and responsibilities in this regard
- ongoing effective two-way communication with parents so that parents were aware that they could bring any concerns to the attention of staff.

4.5 Promotion of respect for diversity

The *Anti-Bullying Procedures* note that a significant proportion of bullying arises from a lack of respect for diversity. The *Anti-Bullying Procedures* emphasise that respectful relationships across the school community are necessary for the development of a positive culture.

The range of practices described by principals included:

- engagement by staff members in diversity and equality awareness training
- teachers' modelling and promoting respect for diversity
- pupils/students shown how to support others who were experiencing difficulties in forming and maintaining friendships
- modelling courteous behaviours and interactions throughout the school
- ensuring that respect was central to the school ethos and culture
- working consistently to create and sustain positive relationships among all members of the school community
- the organisation of regular school events to reflect and celebrate diversity
- the establishment of a working group to develop approaches to interculturalism, racism and identity-based bullying with representation from interested groups within the school community

4.6 Acknowledging the experiences and insights of children and young people

The *Anti-Bullying Procedures* recognise that children and young people have a unique and important perspective on bullying prevention in their schools. In their discussions with inspectors, many principals described how their schools were working to ensure that pupils/students had a genuine say and involvement in the implementation of their school's work on anti-bullying. Asking children and young people for their thoughts and ideas and ensuring their meaningful and active participation was described as being significant in ensuring that bullying prevention approaches were truly pupil/student-focused and effective. As the *National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making* makes clear, where practice is effective, pupil/student

involvement is collaborative, current and responsive.¹⁷ Pupils/students need to have regular opportunities to reflect, discuss and actively contribute. Their active involvement in all aspects of school life is an essential element underpinning the success of the school's approach. The inspections show that the range of effective approaches in place in schools to incorporate the pupil/student perspective included:

- supporting and empowering the pupil/student council to find solutions and to respond appropriately to bullying behaviours. Examples provided included the active involvement of the pupil/student council in the school's action plan for anti-bullying
- engagement with the FUSE anti-bullying and online safety training programme
- use of assemblies, the *Green Schools* programme, the *Amber Flag* initiative, the *Active School Flag* initiative and/or a variety of other committees in which pupil/student involvement was central
- examples of student-led participation, for example in their LGBTQI+ support group.

As highlighted by a number of principals, a school's approach to anti-bullying should support children and young people in developing a sense of purpose, connection and belonging to their school community. One of the most studied aspects of school climate has been the quality of the relationships between pupils/students and the extent of their feeling of belonging to the school. A few principals described how the importance of ensuring a sense of belonging and connectedness had been brought into sharp relief by the COVID-19 pandemic. In their discussions with inspectors, principals described the practical steps their schools were taking to enable children and young people to experience a sense of belonging while also feeling safe, connected and supported:

- prioritising a sense of connectedness, belonging and inclusion in light of the increased risk of isolation as a result of the pandemic
- promoting qualities of resilience and belonging
- making a conscious effort to cultivate positive relationships between students through a programme of wellbeing, transition and teambuilding activities
- implementing a mentor system to help foster an atmosphere of trust and belonging
- creating regular opportunities such as weekly assemblies to promote a sense of belonging and community
- encouraging pupils/students to participate in various projects and initiatives organised by the school
- creating a sense of connection between the school and the community through the use of social media

¹⁷ Government of Ireland *National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making*. Available at: https://hubnanog.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/5587-Child-Participation-Framework_report_LR_FINAL_Rev.pdf

- ensuring that pupils'/students' voice is respected and listened to and impacts meaningfully on school life.

4.7 Encouragement and incentives

The *Anti-Bullying Procedures* suggest a range of practical ideas which schools can use to support them in creating and maintaining a positive school culture and climate. One such approach is the use of encouragement and reward to promote desired behaviour and adherence to school rules and routines. In their discussions with inspectors, principals provided details of the range of practices in place to incentivise and reward good behaviour. These included:

- systems of awards and affirmation to ensure that desired behaviour was acknowledged such as the use of positive behaviour charts and merit systems
- teachers working to affirm pupils/students
- acknowledging and praising pupils/students whose behaviour reflects the school culture of courtesy and respect.

4.8 Whole-school implementation of Social, Personal and Health Education

Many principals referenced the high priority placed on addressing anti-bullying through the full implementation of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum in their schools. SPHE includes a focus on key life skills for children and young people. These skills can impact significantly on one's ability to contribute positively to and manage day-to-day situations which prove challenging. As children and young people progress through the school system, their learning in SPHE can help them to respond appropriately to bullying behaviour.

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a mandatory component of the primary and post-primary curricula, and is also an aspect of SPHE. In the context of anti-bullying, RSE encompasses areas such as the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of relationships and sexuality.¹⁸ At primary level, the *Stay Safe* programme – a personal safety skills programme which seeks to enhance children's self-protection skills including their ability to recognise and cope with bullying – is taught as part of SPHE. At post-primary level, aspects of the RSE programme relevant to anti-bullying provide additional opportunities to explore and discuss areas such as sexuality and relationships, which have a particular relevance for identity-based bullying.

¹⁸ General Information about Relationships and Sexuality Education across Primary and Post-Primary Schools (NCCA) is available [here](#). The NCCA are currently working to develop a draft updated RSE/SPHE curriculum. Additional information can be accessed [here](#).

Many principals described the range of ways in which the SPHE curriculum facilitated the exploration of areas related to bullying:

- supporting children to understand bullying, the type of behaviour that constitutes bullying, and the various roles individuals can play in bullying situations
- the importance of the *Stay Safe* programme in the context of anti-bullying
- the implementation of a number of curricular aspects and co-curricular programmes which were considered important for the promotion of a positive school culture. The programmes mentioned by principals included the school-based anxiety prevention and resilience building programme *FRIENDS for Life* and The *Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management Programme*.

4.9 Enhanced physical environment

Many principals reported that they were working to develop the physical surroundings of their schools to create a more positive, a safer and a more inclusive environment for the school community. Some of the steps taken by principals in this regard included:

- installation of outdoor furniture such as friendship benches and adaptations to the existing physical environment, such as soft-play surfaces in yards and additional safety enhancements
- provision of displays and murals promoting wellbeing and anti-bullying
- creation of safe and quiet spaces including sensory rooms for pupils/students to self-regulate.

4.10 Engagement of teachers in continuing professional learning

The *Anti-Bullying Procedures* emphasise the importance of prevention and awareness-raising measures for the whole-school community. The importance of this is also highlighted in research findings which note the critical role of education and understanding in addressing bullying in the school environment.

In their discussions with inspectors, many principals described how their schools provided regular inputs to staff, ensuring that staff had a consistent understanding of the school's practice in its approach to anti-bullying. Some principals also referred to the contribution of external speakers and agencies in developing staff efficacy in the area of anti-bullying. While these principals were very positive about the involvement of such external parties, it is necessary for schools to be mindful of the benefits and challenges associated with inviting guest speakers into their school to deliver aspects of their SPHE/RSE programme. It is important that schools are aware of the Department's guidance in this regard including that provided in [Circular 0042/2018](#) (Primary) and in [Circular 0043/2018](#) (Post-primary).

The range of practical approaches in place in schools included:

- systematic induction of new staff members into the strategies and approaches used to address bullying

- ensuring that all staff members are aware of the pastoral dimension of their role
- training and implementation on restorative practice as part of a whole-school approach to anti-bullying.¹⁹

¹⁹ For additional information, see [Restorative Practice](#) (Professional Development Service for Teachers).

5. Case studies of effective practice

5.1 Case study 1

School context

This is an urban DEIS all-boys senior primary school on the east coast.

The school's approach to anti-bullying

Our approach and philosophy is that prevention is better than cure and to have a positive, holistic, energetic approach where the voice of the pupil is central. Our work is led by the pupils. Our objective is to empower them so that they have a sense of ownership. Based on this approach, we conducted research and then engaged with programmes that we felt would meet the needs and interests of our pupils and would further enhance and develop our positive school culture.

The key elements that make our school good at addressing anti-bullying

A key element is our use of programmes that we have researched and introduced to our pupils. These programmes were chosen as we felt that they would support us in addressing the specific needs, challenges and interests of our community. They have been adapted to ensure that they complement our ethos and culture. These programmes are successful because after the staff had engaged and completed the required professional learning, a plan of implementation was devised based on a shared collaborative approach between pupils, teachers and special needs assistants (SNAs). The key point is that these programmes were pupil-led and teachers and SNAs were simply the facilitators.

The second key element to our approach is the 'voice of the pupil body' and ensuring that it plays a pivotal role in the promotion and development of our school culture. An example of this is the development of our Code of Behaviour. The boys discussed and chose our four school values which are community, hard work, fairness and respect. At our weekly online assemblies, a value is discussed and celebrated. The boys now understand the importance of living these values and have further enhanced the value by associating a colour with each value and they have explained the rationale to their peers. These colours and values have become an intrinsic part of our school life.

- *Community: Purple reflective of one of our school colours*
- *Hard work: Yellow reflects another school colour and reminds us that everyone has the potential to work hard, try their best and achieve every day (it is also a bright and optimistic colour)*
- *Fairness: Pink; reminds us of love and togetherness and that is how we feel when everything is fair*

- *Respect: Red; a very strong colour, it is the colour that is most associated with the heart and you can show your heart to others by being very respectful*

Another key element is how we provide opportunities for the boys to talk things through, to listen to each other so that they can grow in understanding and empathy. When a person is not offered this chance to explain their feelings and resulting behaviours, this can lead to misunderstanding, ill feeling and poor decision making. We ensure that they have the opportunity to talk through their feelings and to explain how the other person has felt. This adds to the strong culture of the boys having a voice, using their voice and their voice being heard.

The motivation underpinning this work

There is nothing more satisfying than walking the corridors of our school, listening and chatting to the boys and enjoying the positive vibe that comes from a strong collaborative school and community. The door of my office is always open and the boys regularly visit to tell me about different things that are taking place. They know that their school is a safe and happy place. However, over the past number of years our boys have faced, like all children, different challenges and hardships in their lives. I aim to continue to make our school a happy, safe energetic environment so that when they come to school, they have the opportunity to realise their potential, be encouraged to be their best version of themselves and enjoy success in their school life. Working to continue to create this atmosphere in our school lends itself well to supporting and addressing anti-bullying.

The positive outcomes for the school

The key elements I mentioned earlier have had a wonderful impact on our school life. There is a consistency of approach and anticipation regarding the different programmes we have engaged in our school. Teachers and SNAs are now enjoying the rewards of their hard work which are reflected in the teaching and learning that takes place, the development and growth of qualities such as tolerance, empathy, respect and understanding and the continued use of the skills of discussion and listening to resolve disagreements and hurt feelings. Throughout our school, the positive outcomes for our boys are how their voice has grown and been strengthened and in turn how they have developed their sense of ownership of their school. This is also evident when parents can tell me about the different projects that their children are engaging in in school and this has grown since the introduction of these projects.

Surprises along the way

Throughout the whole process, what both surprised me and is essential to this type of approach is finding the right fit for your school in finding the right programmes, approaches and philosophies that best suit your own context. As school leaders, we are all too familiar with the variety of programmes that are available. On the cover, they all look wonderful; however, you need to dig deeper to ensure that they are a good fit for your school. What surprised me was that when you find such a programme the buy-in and investment that staff and pupils make because they too see that it is a good fit for

our school. Once you get that right, the rewards that are reaped for the school can be transformational.

Consultation with the school community

The consultation process took place in a number of different ways. As emphasised, the key voice in the prevention of bullying and the creation of a positive school atmosphere is the voice of the boys in our school. Significant work was done throughout all classes based on different behaviours, emotions and reactions. Through this process, a clear understanding emerged of what is bullying behaviour and what is not. This understanding grew from the children and is relevant to each class age. This is now embedded in our approach to behaviour and the prevention of bullying. Further to this, the findings based on class discussions were then shared with the wider parent body explaining that the findings were a result of the input of their sons. This was hugely beneficial as it offered the parents clarity when discussing or being made aware of any concerns their son may have.

The pupils' perspective on how you address anti-bullying

The boys know that their voice in our school is intrinsic to the creation of a happy school. If they have any worries or concerns they tell, they talk to their teacher or SNA, they talk to their parents and often their parents will bring that concern to us to make us aware of it as they know that we will take immediate steps to address that concern or worry. One of the key elements is to talk and to listen to each other. This is a cornerstone of our approach and it is common practice among all class teams. Through consistency of approach across all classes, the boys know they will be given the opportunity to talk about their concerns and the support necessary to resolve them.

Ensuring authentic pupil voice and involvement

I know that the boys' voice is authentic because they have been set challenges, targets and tasks to engage in different projects that will embed this philosophy further into our school culture. Every class in our school is involved in one project from music to poetry to drama, all with the same objective of helping our school community to grow and develop. Meeting these targets, completing these tasks and producing genuine pieces of work reflecting our school culture is evidence of the authenticity of the pupil voice in our school.

Identifying and overcoming challenges

What I thought would be the greatest challenge didn't transpire to be at all. I was concerned that another approach, another programme would pass across our desks without full buy-in and commitment. At times, it can become jading. However, it is about finding the right fit for your school in terms of reflecting your school culture and developing that positive atmosphere that lends itself to supporting an anti-bullying environment. The programmes we have implemented are more than that as they have offered us an opportunity to reflect on our philosophy to behaviour, our approach to addressing the needs of the children in this area and they are slowly but surely becoming an embedded part in our school culture. These programmes are not

transactional in nature but rather transformational in what they help the school community to achieve.

Any advice to support another school with their work on anti-bullying?

To take their time in researching what best suits their school and to believe that they know their school, their children and their families best. And if it is something new or a little bit unusual to have strength of conviction to take that leap of faith.

Your school's most significant achievement in its work in anti-bullying?

I'm most proud of the commitment and enthusiasm that is shown by the children and my colleagues in these new approaches. They have shown faith in them and are committed to them. The collaborative approach shown has renewed our energy and provided us with great momentum as we begin again to enjoy the full resumption of school life as it should be, in light of the challenging two years that schools have had to overcome.

5.2 Case study 2

School context

Founded in 2007, this is a primary co-educational school in an urban setting. It has a strong reputation as a welcoming, child-centred school. It currently has over 850 pupils.

The school's approach to anti-bullying

Anti-bullying and anti-racism are embedded in our school. We are very accepting of all faiths and beliefs. We operate zero tolerance of bullying and racism. We tackle both head-on. Being unkind to any member of the school community is never acceptable. We have a whole-school approach to tackling bullying and racism — we tackle it as a team. We are pro-active. We teach the children about it and we prioritise kindness, respect and manners.

The key elements that make your school good at addressing anti-bullying

- *Having a whole-school approach – need to have all stakeholders involved*
- *Being proactive*
- *Enforcing the Code of Behaviour – having good structures in place for reporting*

The motivation underpinning your work in anti-bullying

Our particular cohort of pupils makes us unique. We have pupils from fifty-two different nationalities, backgrounds and ethnicities. It is very important that we promote and encourage respect for everyone. We have to be proactive and have a robust policy on anti-bullying and on racism.

What have been the positive outcomes for the school? (Impact on whole-school; teachers; students/pupils; parents)

We practice what we preach. The school is very welcoming for staff, pupils and parents. People comment on this. It is a very inclusive place. The values are evident from the time you walk in the door. Everyone feels welcome and respected. The school has a good reputation within the local community.

Any surprises along the way

The frequency with which we have had to challenge various viewpoints that the children hear outside in the community. Children willingly bring these things to our attention. They are very forthcoming. They are aware of racist language.

Consultation with the school community in terms of bullying

The school's expectation may be different from the community's expectations. Recently, the Russian children have been experiencing some backlash because of the recent conflict as we also have Ukrainian families in the school. Messages are coming from home and from the community. We have been tackling this and trying to manage it.

The pupils' perspective on how you address anti-bullying

The children are very aware that there is zero tolerance of bullying and racism and aggression. The pupil council plays a big part in the messaging. Children understand and recognise the rules. The children are equipped with the language of racism and bullying.

What would you identify as the greatest challenge and how have you overcome it?

Incidental bullying – homophobic or racist verbal bullying in the form of name-calling or slurs.

Advice to support another school in this area

Have good robust policies. Follow the templates. Record all bullying incidents and how they were dealt with. Be aware of what's going on in the school. Liaise with parents. Point out the inappropriateness of the behaviours. Look at the updated definition of bullying – the behaviour does not have to be repeated to be defined as bullying. Follow your policy carefully. Keep a log of what's happening and of how you are dealing with it.

Your school's most significant achievement in the area of anti-bullying

The culture that we have fostered regarding anti-bullying and anti-racism. Zero tolerance. Children can come to school in a safe environment where there is no bullying and where there are no racist comments and where there is a respect for diversity.

5.3 Case study 3

School context

This post-primary operates under the auspices of an ETB. It recently moved into a new school building. It currently has 800 students and this number is likely to grow to 1,000 in September 2022. It is a co-educational school.

The school's approach to anti-bullying

One of the school's responses to anti-bullying has been to develop a positive behaviour initiative. This is referred to in the school as the 3R's of BE READY, BE RESPECTFUL, BE RESPONSIBLE. This initiative is being developed as the school mantra and is the first step of the process. The process links in with other student-centred aspects of school life such as student affirmation, student welfare and wellbeing. A committee to oversee the design and implementation of the positive behaviour initiative has been established and provides a formal structure through which student opinion and student voice is central to the decision making process.

Identifying and overcoming challenges

One of the challenges with introducing a new initiative in a school is getting buy-in from all the stakeholders and bringing the idea into action in a meaningful way that impacts positively on school life. The school found an approach that worked well in this regard was to make small changes initially, gain momentum, celebrate success, and to ensure students and staff were involved in each stage of the process.

Ensuring authentic student participation and voice

An idea that arose from the consultation process with staff and students was to create a visual that represented the 3R's and that translated through a matrix into what the school community wanted these three letters to represent. The visual, which is just being finalised, is to be displayed in the main entrance hall at the heart of the school and in all classrooms. The positive behaviour matrix resource is designed to enable the teaching and learning of the classroom rules, which have been refined and reviewed to ensure they are transparent, fair, consistently implemented and accessible to all students. The matrix is revisited in the first class of each school term, to remind both staff and students of the expectations in relation to fostering a positive learning environment. The design used in the visual originated from a student competition, which is another example of using student voice to manage and support change. This resulted in a greater sense of ownership and buy-in.

One of the teachers leading this initiative, who is the behaviour anchor in the school, spoke of the 'importance of promoting student voice and getting students to 'own' the initiative' as being key to tackle the problem of anti-bullying. The initiative also highlights the need for students to be responsible for their own actions and to be aware of the impact, both positively and negatively, that their actions have on others.

The involvement of the wider school community in terms of bullying

The role of senior management has been crucial to the success of the project to date. The principal and other school leaders have fully supported the initiative and they understand the value of student voice and staff involvement when introducing new ideas and systems into the school. Senior management have also empowered staff to take up leadership roles and to use their initiative to work in teams which ensures that initiatives such as this one can be successful.

Advice to support another school with their work on anti-bullying

In offering advice about anti-bullying and creating a positive learning environment, the three elements of this initiative that worked well were:

- *keeping the messages around anti-bullying and positive behaviour simple and clear*
- *involving all stakeholders in a meaningful way*
- *celebrating success to gain momentum.*

5. Conclusions

- Overall, the findings of this report are broadly positive. The report confirms the extensive work being undertaken by many principals, teachers, other staff, parents, pupils and students to raise awareness of and prevent school bullying. The report illustrates how schools, in the main, are both mindful of and alert to the breadth of their responsibilities for the social, emotional and behavioural support of children and young people.
- The findings of the Inspectorate's monitoring of anti-bullying measures in schools in the September-November 2021 period indicate that many schools are working proactively and conscientiously to fulfill the requirements of *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.
- Most primary schools and the majority of post-primary schools were meeting the requirements of the five aspects of the *Anti-Bullying Procedures* that were reviewed by inspectors during incidental inspection visits. These aspects related to the provision of an anti-bullying policy, recording of incidences of bullying, reporting to the board of management, communication of the anti-bullying policy and annual review of the policy.
- It is concerning that the requirement to report termly to the board of management and that the requirement to carry out an annual review of the school *Anti-bullying Policy* were not met in a significant proportion of the schools visited during the evaluation. It is also of concern that the proportion of post-primary schools not meeting the requirements greatly exceeded the proportion of primary schools not fulfilling the requirements. Fourteen per cent of primary schools and almost one-quarter of post-primary schools (23%) were not fully meeting the requirements for reporting to the board of management on bullying incidents in the school. Nineteen per cent of primary schools and almost twice as many post-primary schools (36%) were not fully meeting the requirements in relation to an annual review of their anti-bullying policy.
- Responses from principals indicate that Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) play a central role in many schools in the development of a positive school culture and in bullying prevention. The high priority afforded to these is unsurprising given that these are curricular requirements at both primary and post-primary levels. SPHE/RSE are key to the education of children and young people, and schools provide a safe and secure context within which they can learn about themselves and the wider world. It is therefore important that schools maintain this focus on SPHE/RSE.

- It is also evident from the discussion of principals with inspectors that schools have adopted a range of strategies to reduce bullying and to work towards addressing it effectively when it does occur. However, some shortcomings were also noted in the implementation of the procedures.
- Where effective practice was evident, the strategies reported by principals reflected the key principles of best practice outlined in the *Anti-Bullying Procedures*. In their discussions with inspectors, many principals described how their school communities had worked to take ownership of these principles and to adapt and refine them to their own contexts. As reported by principals, key features of an effective approach to anti-bullying included:
 - The creation of a safe, calm and ordered school environment where
 - norms of good behaviour were established
 - children and young people treated all members of the school community with respect because they understood that this was an appropriate way to behave
 - respect for diversity was promoted
 - there was effective supervision of pupils/students
 - encouragement and rewards were used to promote desired behaviour and adherence to school rules and routines
 - the physical surroundings of the school was developed to create a more positive, a safer and a more inclusive environment for the school community
 - The implementation of a whole-school approach to anti-bullying where expectations for behaviour were communicated consistently and where all staff, parents and pupils/students were fully aware of their individual roles and responsibilities in relation to bullying prevention and intervention. Clear communication of the anti-bullying policy ensured that all members of the school community remain aware of the school's principles and purposes in this area.
 - Involvement of parents in the work of the school in preventing and tackling bullying, notably in supporting the successful investigation and resolution of issues relating to bullying in the schools
 - Ensuring that pupils/students had a genuine say and involvement in the implementation of their school's work on anti-bullying that included providing them with meaningful opportunities to be involved in the development of policy and practice in this area

- A commitment to ensuring that staff had regular access to advice, training and development opportunities.
- Regular review of the anti-bullying policy by the board of management to assess its effectiveness in the light of incidents of bullying behaviour encountered and the success of the interventions in place. This process served to re-focus the attention of the school community on the area of bullying prevention while also refreshing commitment and interest.
- A key priority for many principals of the schools visited during incidental visits was to embed the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* as part of their school's over-arching approach to the prevention and tackling of bullying behaviour. Many examples of effective practice were provided where it was evident that schools were working successfully to raise awareness and provide a range of supports to promote and foster wellbeing within the school environment.
- It is evident from the information provided by principals during the incidental inspection visits that schools have embraced a range of programmes and interventions to support them in their work on anti-bullying. However, it is notable that very few principals talked about the importance of tracking the impact of these initiatives. It is important therefore that schools should make provision for periodic reflection and review of their school culture and climate and of the range of prevention and intervention strategies in place. It is also important that they ensure that the specific anti-bullying programme they use is up-to-date, evidence-based and appropriately linked to the SPHE curriculum and to the *Wellbeing Framework*.
- The engagement with principals during incidental visits indicates that some schools have been proactive in addressing homophobia/transphobia and in educating around gender and sexuality. This is consistent with the *Anti-bullying Procedures* which require schools to include homophobia and transphobia in their anti-bullying policies and to document and implement prevention and education strategies. However, although not specifically highlighted in the data to any great extent, it is important to note that uncertainties relating to a school's ethos may mean that issues relating to homophobia and transphobia are not always addressed. This is a key finding from recent national research.²⁰

²⁰ Neary, A., Irwin-Gowran S. and McEvoy E. (2016) *Exploring Homophobia and Transphobia in Primary Schools in Ireland*. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/320625557_Exploring_Homophobia_and_Transphobia_in_Primary_Schools_in_Ireland.

6. Actions

- The Inspectorate's evaluation was focussed on the implementation of the *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* that were published in 2013. The Department of Education has commenced a review of these procedures. However, many aspects of these procedures remain highly relevant and schools should continue to be vigilant in ensuring that their policy and practice are fully aligned with the Procedures.
- Schools should ensure that the anti-bullying prevention and intervention strategies in place are regularly reviewed and monitored for effectiveness and impact. Any selected anti-bullying programme or intervention should be current, in line with the needs of the school community, evidence-based and appropriately linked to the SPHE curriculum and to the *Wellbeing Framework*.
- As outlined in the *Anti-Bullying Procedures*, all schools are required to include identity-based bullying relating to sexual orientation and gender identity in their anti-bullying policies and to document and implement relevant prevention and education strategies. Schools should ensure that their anti-bullying policy fulfills this requirement and should also be vigilant in ensuring that their efforts to prevent and address this form of bullying are targeted and effective.
- In line with effective practices identified in this report, all schools should work to ensure that they have processes in place that facilitate the meaningful involvement of parents and students in the work of the school in preventing and tackling bullying, including their input into anti-bullying policy and programmes.
- Given the complex and evolving nature of bullying behaviour, appropriate professional learning opportunities, supports and resources should continue to be provided to teachers to ensure that they can successfully promote and maintain inclusive classroom and school environments in which the requirements of the *Anti-Bullying Procedures* are fully implemented. Such training should also be included in Initial Teacher Education for new teachers.