



**An Roinn Oideachais**  
Department of Education

# **Report on Focus Group Consultations with Children and Young People**

**Review of the Action Plan on Bullying and of  
the Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and  
Post-Primary Schools (2013)**

Department of Education October 2022

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- The schools and centres of learning providing summer programmes that facilitated various organisational arrangements for the four additional focus group consultations with children and young people throughout July

## Introduction and Background

Promoting the wellbeing of our children and young people is a shared community responsibility and is everybody's business.<sup>1</sup>

The wellbeing of children and young people is central to life in all schools. It has always been so. This is to enable learners achieve their full potential and to flourish. Wellbeing is central to all curricula, policies, and procedures. So central is it that the Department of Education (DE) has named it and explained it in the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice (2019) so that promoting and sustaining the wellbeing of all learners remains a top priority for the whole education community. An important aspect of that priority is the prevention of bullying in schools and tackling it without delay when it occurs, in a planned, structured, learner-centred way. Bullying undermines, threatens and destroys the wellbeing of children and young people. As one young person put it: *"It makes me feel invisible"*. Bullying can gnaw away in a most debilitating way at a young person's capacity to learn and grow, to feel good and enjoy a sense of belonging to a school; a school that truly cares, listens to children and young people and protects them from harm.



Students taking in part in the *World Café* exercise on 12<sup>th</sup> May

The DE recognises the importance of a robust consultation process which encompasses meaningful engagement with children and young people, parents, other stakeholders and other relevant organisations. Age-appropriate consultation with children and young people forms an important and central strand of that consultative process. It is also a recognition of their rights to express their views and have their voices heard in decisions that directly affect them. This is in line with the United Nations (UN)

<sup>1</sup> Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice, 2018–2023, Revised October 2019. Department of Education and Skills, p. 12.

Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 12 in particular) and with the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

With this in mind, the Department of Education worked collaboratively with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) to develop a child-centred methodology to collect data on the views of a broad range of children and young people on the Action Plan on Bullying (2013) and the *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* (2013). The methodology reflected a strong DE commitment to the rights of children and young people to learn and flourish in safe schools and to have their voices heard on matters that directly affect them. This report provides a narrative on the two full day consultations with primary school children and post-primary students which were facilitated by the Youth Reform Strategy and Participation Unit (National Participation Office), DCEDIY, in collaboration with the DE on 11 and 12 May 2022, at the DCEDIY Offices, Dublin. Primary pupils attended on Day one, and post-primary students attended on Day two. The report also includes findings from four additional focus group consultations held with children and young people on summer programmes in special classes, special schools, and centres of learning throughout July 2022 in various locations around the country. These additional consultations facilitated by the Inspectorate were held to ensure that the voices of ethnic minorities, refugee children and children with special educational needs across primary and post-primary were heard.

Consultations were also held in August 2022 with a small number of young people registered with iScoil. They completed a short online survey to gather their views on the 2013 Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools and their experiences of bullying in school.<sup>2</sup> Prior to registration with iScoil, approximately half the young people had attended mainstream primary and half had attended mainstream post-primary. Most had started iScoil in 2021. The inclusion of young people in iScoil in the consultation process was considered important in the context of capturing as many varied voices of children and young people as possible including those engaging with learning services outside mainstream education. Given the small number of iScoil participants and low response rates to some questions and the fact that most participants had only started iScoil in 2021, the findings should be interpreted with caution and no generalisations are possible.

The consultation process used throughout all the consultations reflected the essence of the National Participation Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making (2021), namely participation-with-purpose, where learners' voices were sought in a meaningful way, listened to, and taken seriously in reviewing the Action Plan on Bullying and the Anti-Bullying Procedures. The expectation is that the views expressed and experiences

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<sup>2</sup> iScoil is a recognised, non-profit, blended learning service designed for young people (13-16 years of age) who for various reasons have disengaged from mainstream education. iScoil offers an alternative learning pathway for these young people leading to QQI accreditation with opportunities to access further education, training and employment. iScoil partners with various local agencies and youth organisations to provide a range of learning opportunities; some learning is online, some is face-to-face and others a blend of online and face-to-face learning. All referrals to iScoil are made by Educational Welfare Officers in the Tusla Education Support Service (TESS).

shared will influence and improve a holistic whole community approach around anti-bullying. A further expectation is that the children and young people who participated will be informed on how their voices have influenced national policy and procedures in relation to anti-bullying and wellbeing, in a “full, friendly, fast, followed-up” manner.<sup>3</sup>



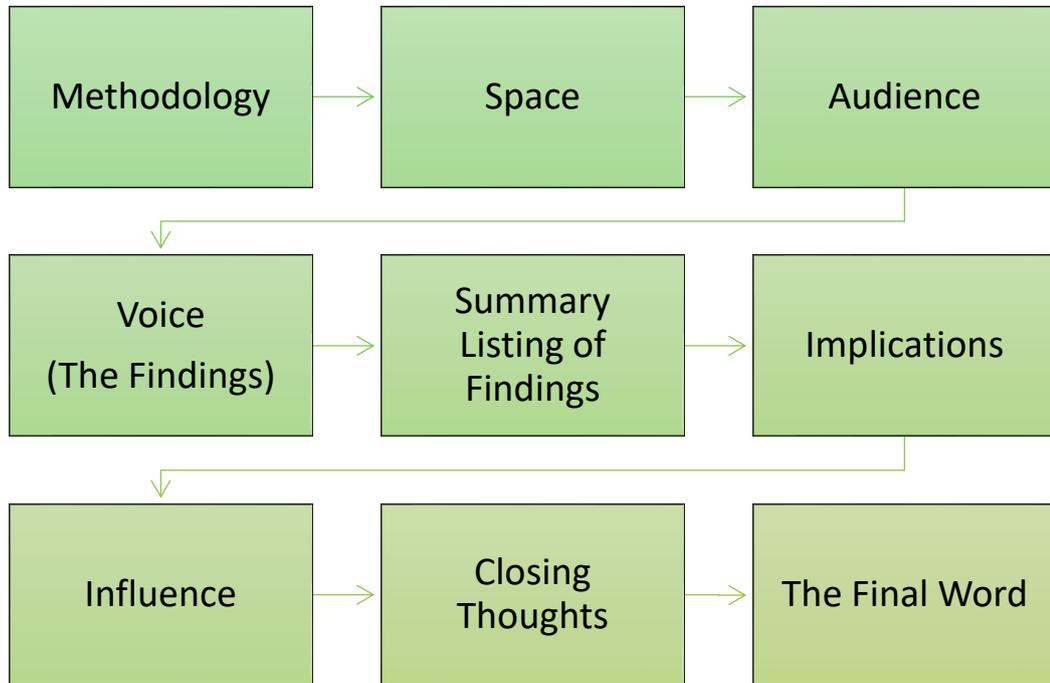
Students taking in part in the *Bodymap* exercise on 12<sup>th</sup> May

The report outlines an overview of the methodology adopted. The four-pronged approach to the participation framework (the Lundy model) of space, voice, audience, and influence, provides the overall guiding framework for this report, both conceptually and practically. How the views of the children and young people at the consultations were sought are explored in the domain of ‘space’. The domain of ‘audience’ maps out how the

participants were made aware of the decision-makers to whom they were providing their views and with whom their views would be shared. The key findings are presented under ‘Voice’ in line with the four key areas of wellbeing promotion outlined in the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice, Culture & Environment, Relationships & Partnership, Curriculum (Teaching & Learning), Policy & Planning; and it is this domain of ‘Voice’ that forms the substantive part of the report. A comment is offered in relation to the implications of the findings. The domain of ‘Influence’ is explored in the context of expected impact and feedback. The report concludes with some closing thoughts grounded within the report. The final word is left to the children and young people who assented so generously to tell their stories throughout their engagement at the various focus group consultations in May and July and the iScoil students via the online survey in August. Sometimes they told their stories in a piece of text or a visual, sometimes in a spoken word, and sometimes not at all. This report lets those stories speak.

<sup>3</sup> Participation Framework: National Framework for Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-Making, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2021, p. 11.

The structure of the remainder of the report is as follows:



## Methodology

The report draws on an appropriately sensitive methodological approach to elicit ‘voice’ in an age-appropriate way within the DE *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice*. The national participation framework (the Lundy model) provides the overarching guiding framework for the report; space, audience, influence, voice. Findings (Voice) will be presented under the four wellbeing key areas of Culture and Environment, Relationships and Partnerships, Curriculum (Teaching & Learning), Policy and Planning; these key areas are set out in the Wellbeing Policy to support schools and to nurture a whole school approach to the promotion of wellbeing.<sup>4</sup> In adopting this methodological approach, it is hoped that the report will read as a strong, coherent, integrated narrative connecting the areas of bullying, anti-bullying and wellbeing, and reflecting the voices of children and young people who participated in the consultations.



Students taking a break from the *Bodymap* exercise at the 12<sup>th</sup> May consultation

The primary data sources for this report are the focus group discussions and the artefacts (posters, place mats, lifelines, body maps, jigsaw pieces, and notelets) created by the children and young people. The artefacts captured their responses to key questions set for the particular session during the consultations. An overview of each session is set out in the next section under ‘Space’ and further explained in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

Thematic analysis was selected as the most appropriate analytical approach and

all data sources were rigorously interrogated using the 6-phase analytical approach of Braun and Clarke (2006). The process allowed the emergence of key themes across all the data. These themes were then drawn together in an organic way to form an overall narrative of what the children and young people voiced with great clarity and what they wanted to convey.

DE photographers attended on some of the consultation days to generate visual records of the various artefacts created by the participants. Ideally, this report should be read alongside those photographic records to provide a robust evidential base to the report and more importantly to provide further depth and breadth to the report. Some visual images of those records are interspersed throughout this report. All artefacts created by the children and young people were maintained by the DE in line with its GDPR data protection and retention

<sup>4</sup> Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice, 2018–2023, Revised October 2019. Department of Education and Skills, p. 16.

policy. End-of-day evaluations completed by the children and young people at the full-day consultations in May were maintained appropriately with the DCEDIY facilitators.

The Lundy participation framework methodology used throughout the consultation days ensured that the voices of the children and the young people were enabled and respected throughout. Participatory engagement across the focus groups was also enabled and enriched by the 10 Comhairle na nÓg young people who had special roles on Day 2 e.g. in some instances co-facilitating (with the DCEDIY team), performing masters of ceremonies functions on the day, and time-keeping. A very pleasant atmosphere and safe environment was created for the children and young people to express their views and opinions.



The children and young people spoke candidly about bullying and how it affects their sense of wellbeing, belonging, and feeling safe in school. They spoke about their experiences of school policies, practices and procedures and how these could be improved upon in order to feel safer, to learn with greater ease and to enjoy being in school. They want to feel safe and learn in safe places. The children and young people

want to feel that they belong. They spelled out clearly what a school that's really good at tackling and preventing bullying looks like. They presented their views also in visuals or in writing or in a few simple words, such as "be kind". There is great clarity in their views - spoken, written, drawn.

The integrity of the report lies in the manner in which it reflects in a transparent, accessible manner all voices expressed throughout the consultations. Quotations in the report are those written by the children and young people and no attempt is made to correct spellings or grammar or alter the text or visual presented by the child or young person. Cross-references to research evidence elsewhere are therefore purposefully avoided in this report in order to illuminate in full strength the clarity of the young voices throughout the consultation days.

This report might therefore be understood as a standalone narrative of the voices of children and young people at a moment in time about bullying, anti-bullying, and school policies. However, the findings are invariably limited by convenience sampling and by the small number of schools represented in the sample size relative to the number of the schools in the country. Cautious interpretation of the findings is therefore advised notwithstanding the intrinsic integrity of all voices.

The report recognises in full the multi-faceted complexities around bullying and anti-bullying and the further complexities and interconnectedness between life in school and life at home and more broadly in society. It is a hugely complex area. As one child put it, "it is *not* easy, *this thing*".

## Space

It is important to highlight the careful attention that was given by the DCEDIY facilitators to ensuring that the children and young people were able to express their views freely without undue adult influence. Participants had good 'space' to do so. For example, all the methodologies for consultation days were piloted and approved by the Youth Advisory Group (YAG) some months in advance. They were piloted twice in schools (28 April 2022, 4 May 2022) and further amended by the YAG. Careful attention was given to the language of prompt questions to suit age and context. On Day 2 (Post-Primary), the inclusion of YAG members (of similar age to the participants) to undertake special roles e.g. Master of Ceremonies on the day, timekeeping and co-facilitating with the DCEDIY team, deepened the appeal of the day for students.

On both full-day consultation days (11 and 12 May 2022), children and young people organised themselves (following introductory icebreakers), with some support, around the tables (groups of 8) to maximise discussion and to allow all to get to know their new friends in a relaxed, happy atmosphere. The various activities, the language within, and the variety of participative methodologies were inclusive and very much orientated towards blue-sky thinking of the children and the young people, starting from their world, their experiences, their strengths. The methodologies were therefore very real and relevant to their lives. They were also very accessible in terms of language; questions were suitably adjusted to suit primary children on Day 1 and varied again to suit the post-primary context on Day 2.

Each activity session had a small number of prompt questions, more prompt-like than question-like, to ensure spontaneity of responses and to guard any sense of adults prescribing the responses or unduly influencing what the children and young people wanted to say. Participants could say it in words (the round table discussions) or write or draw about it on the various graphically-designed poster frames and jigsaw pieces. The various poster templates were carefully designed to engage the children and young people. Some activities were completed individually and others completed as a group/whole table activity. As mentioned earlier, the children and young people could choose not to speak on the topic and simply observe the discussion. Some scribing was done by the facilitators where required. The same overall methodology was used by the DE Inspectorate facilitators throughout the July consultations with the children and young people on the various summer programmes.

Voluntary participation in the various activities was a very important part of the consultative processes and this was explained to all gathered at the start of each day and in the invitational emails circulated some months earlier. The sampling approach is explained in the domain of 'Audience'. Assent to participation from each child and young person and the consent of their parents/guardians was collated in advance of the consultations. This approach is in line with the ethical principles of the national participatory framework and with

the values of respect for voice and appropriate to the developmental stages of children and young people.

Given the sensitivities and vulnerabilities around the area of bullying and impact, the DE and DCEDIY minimised risks to the participants through the presence of NEPS psychologists on all consultation days in the event of disclosures or any sign of participant distress. The consultation space was therefore safe for the children and young people to offer their views and they were supported well to do so; space and voice were therefore connected. Debriefings by the DCEDIY team meant that any concerns about the wellbeing of the children and young people were followed up on without delay and with due sensitivity. DCEDIY child safeguarding procedures in place and were followed for both consultation



Children attending the Primary School Focus Group on 11<sup>th</sup> May

days. Any concerns raised during the July consultations (facilitated by the DE Inspectorate) were dealt with in accordance with DE child-safeguarding procedures.

It is important to point out also in this domain of 'space' that the consultation days in May involving relatively large numbers of children and young people were held in a large, bright, airy room in the offices of the DCEDIY with access to fresh bathrooms and walking areas. Careful attention was therefore given to ensuring the physical space was attractive, safe and comfortable for the children and young people. Regular refreshments and nutritious food were served to all on consultation days. The facilities provided and the organisational arrangements reflected a great sense of

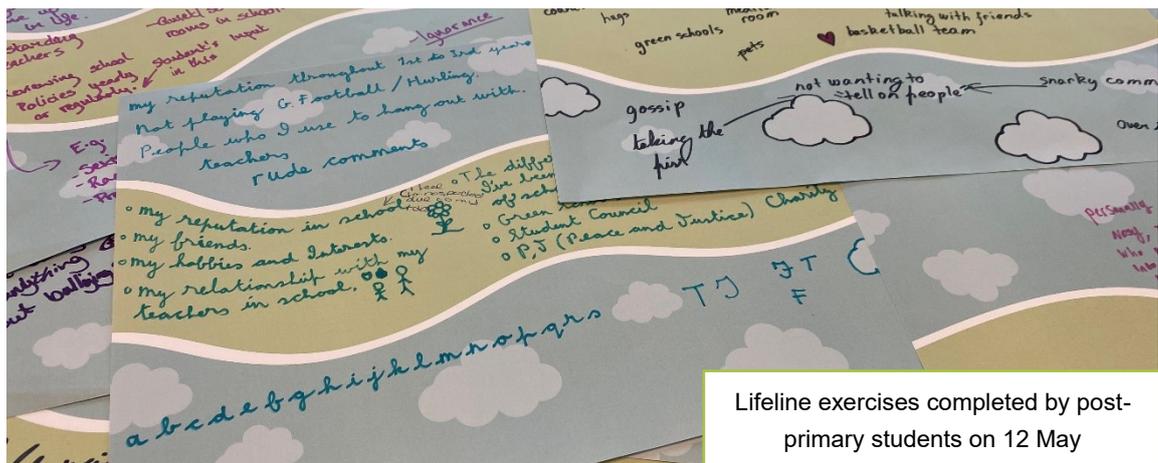
respect for the children and young people and for their views and work throughout the consultations. In turn, participants responded enthusiastically and wholeheartedly. For some children, attending the consultations had the added bonus of travelling by train for the first time in their lives and enjoying the excitement that a first train journey brings. The range of participants over both full-day consultations in May represented diversity in social, cultural and educational backgrounds and home geographical locations.

The following provides a flavour of the exercises and questions (Figures 1, 2, 3) throughout the various consultation sessions that got to the heart of issues around bullying, anti-bullying, policies and procedures:

## Lifeline Exercise

- What helps children and young people feel safe in school?
- What stops you feeling safe from bullying in school? (Post-Primary: What are the barriers to feeling safe in school?)

Figure 1: Lifeline Exercise



Lifeline exercises completed by post-primary students on 12 May

**World Café Exercise exploring 'spaces' where bullying happens** e.g. in school, outside of school (including transport), online. This was further augmented for Post-Primary by including spaces such as bathrooms/dressing rooms, and people in power.

What are the problems?  
(Post-Primary: What are the issues with this topic?)

What happens to a person as a result of these problems? (Post-Primary: What are the consequences of these issues?)

What would help fix these problems? (Post-Primary: What supports need to be in place to help?)

Figure 2: World Café Exercise



Figure 3: Body Map Exercise

A detailed outline of the various sessions on days 1 and 2 is presented in Appendices 1 and 2.

Whilst it is generally understood that the domain of 'Audience' in the participatory framework represents the decision-makers to whom the children and young people are providing their views, the domain also encapsulates 'audience' present on both consultation days. The Minister for Education, Norma Foley TD, attended one of the consultation days and the DE was represented by members of its Parents and Learners Unit, NEPS psychologists and the Inspectorate who attended all the consultations (May and July).

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## Audience

On consultation Day 1, a total of 47 primary school children (aged 8-12 years from 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> classes) from 12 primary schools across the country participated in the consultations. Each school sent 4 children with the exception of one school that sent 3 children. Schools were selected by the National Participation Office following expressions of interest to an email invitation to all schools nationwide. The schools selected included representation from

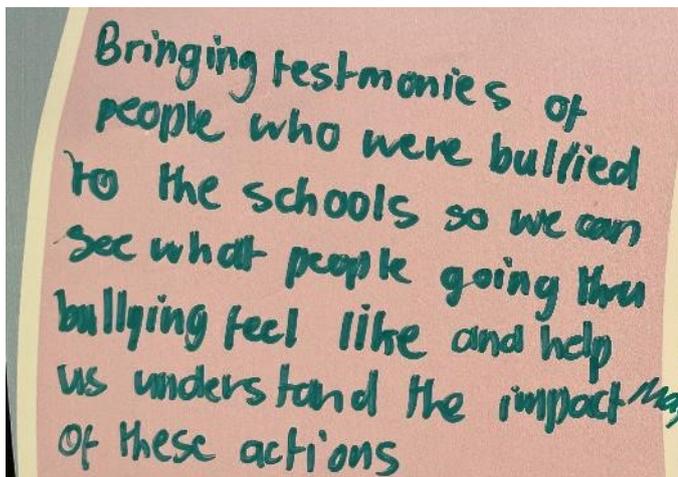


Primary school children working on the Bodymap exercise during the focus group on 11 May

a variety of school types: mainstream, special, urban, rural, and schools with DEIS status. All were day schools. Schools were informed of the purpose of the consultations (i.e. The review of the Action Plan on Bullying and the Anti-Bullying procedures) and asked to select children in the 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> class range and include a balanced representation from different social backgrounds and gender (where schools were mixed). Primary children selected by their schools were clear on the purpose of the consultation and knew that they would be engaging in age-appropriate methodologies during the consultations.

On consultation day two, post-primary students self-nominated to attend following an email invitation from the participation coordinator to all Comhairle na nÓg groups across the country and to a range of youth organisations. The post-primary students were not selected by their schools (unlike primary pupils). The purpose of the consultations was explained in the email invitation so all post-primary students were clear on what they were volunteering for. A total of 50 post-primary students attended: 40 from Comhairle na nÓg, BelongTo, Youth Work Ireland, Foróige, Scouts among other groups across the country and ten members from the YAG who had special roles on the day e.g. acting as master of ceremonies for the day, leading the introductory ice-breakers, co-facilitating with DCEDIY team at the tables, and time-keeping duties.

The DCEDIY confirmed that the ethnic identity and/or disability status of participants, across primary and post-primary, who attended the consultation days in May, were not identified during the course of the consultation process. The DE is very aware of its commitment to ensure that voices from all communities are included in the consultation process. To ensure delivery of this commitment, the DE organised and facilitated four additional focus group consultations in July involving children and young people attending summer programmes in special classes, special schools, and in a STAR<sup>5</sup> programme centre providing for Traveller and Roma children and young people.



*'Bringing testimonies of people who were bullied to the schools so that we can see what people going through bullying feel like and help us understand the impact of these actions'*

and Roma children and young people. The voices of refugee children and young people from Ukraine (fleeing the war) were also heard in the July consultations. A total of 73 children (primary and post-primary) were involved across these four additional focus group consultations and represented children from different parts of the country.

It is important to highlight that the children and young people who attended the consultations in both May and July were not representing their schools or settings or their local youth organisation.

They were representing themselves and their own unique viewpoints and perspectives on the themes and topics discussed. To represent their schools or communities would have placed an unnecessary responsibility on their shoulders that potentially could have coloured their views and impacted how they thought and what they chose to talk about, share and draw at the various consultation sessions. The potential for undue adult influence was therefore greatly reduced in the approach adopted and in remaining true to the child-centred voice-centred, participatory framework for the consultations.

Also, part of the 'audience' for both full-day consultations days in May were members of the Inspectorate and the Parents and Learners Unit of the DE. The Inspectorate's role was to observe regarding student voice and anti-bullying inspection work to ensure consistency in

<sup>5</sup> The STAR (Supporting Travellers and Roma) approach is embedded within the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021 and is funded and supported by a range of government departments (including the DE) and agencies. STAR programmes in education in various locations throughout the country aim to assist the children of Traveller and Roma families to maximise their potential and their learning in school.

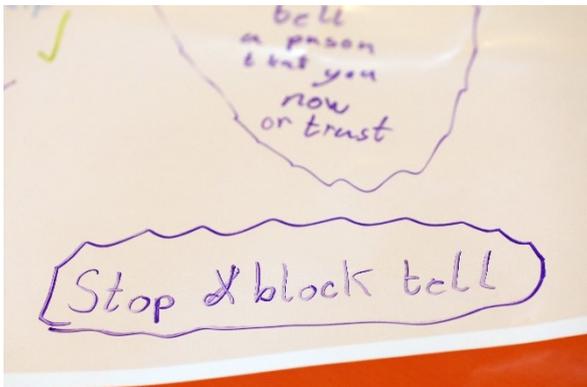
practice. On both days, a member of the Parents and Learners Unit spoke to the children and young people about the importance of hearing their views on whether the anti-bullying procedures in schools were working, what could be changed to improve them, and what they would like the Minister to do. The children and young people were thanked for their engagement and work and assured that bullying was not acceptable and that their suggestions for improvements to the anti-bullying procedures would help to prevent and stop bullying in schools. PLU staff



Students with jigsaw pieces of an *ideal school* that they created at a focus group

spoke to the children and young people and gave reassurance to them that their voices would be heard and that their views would be used to improve the *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* and to inform the Action Plan on Bullying.

The Minister for Education, Norma Foley, TD, attended the consultation day with primary pupils (consultation day one) and spent a substantial amount of time engaging with the children on the topic of anti-bullying and what helps to prevent and stop bullying in schools. The children responded enthusiastically. A number of the children highlighted the importance of buddy benches in the school playground and strategies that they had learned at school to report cyberbullying such as stop, block, tell. Two children shared their experiences of being bullied and how it made them feel - invisible. This provided an important stimulus for an engaging discussion between the Minister and the children around types of bullying and



Stop X block tell

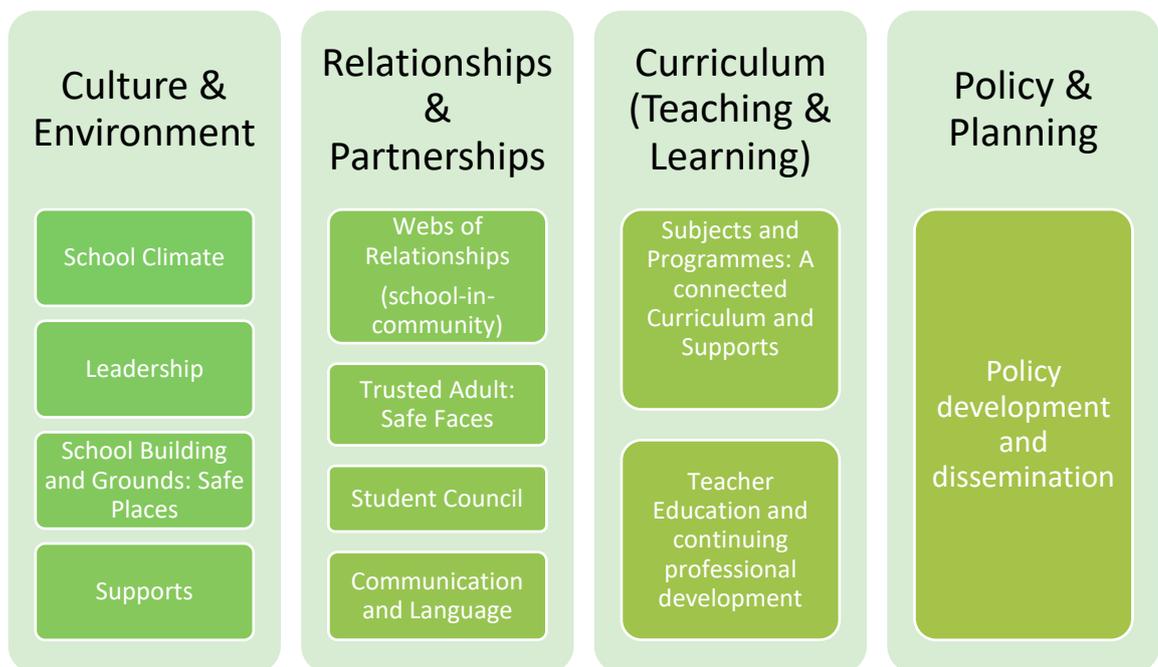
exclusion that they knew of, about the importance of telling someone when bullying happens, and ways that the children thought they could be a friend to others at school. The children learned of the Minister's work to make sure all schools were safe, happy places of learning and how the children (and post-primary students on consultation day two) were helping the Minister to do that. They were thanked by the Minister for sharing their stories and their views. The time spent with the Minister was very much valued by the children and they were delighted to

meet her; these sentiments were expressed by the children throughout the day. The children were very aware that the Minister for Education has the power to make important decisions.

We move now to hearing the voice of the children and the young people over the course of the various focus group consultations in May and July and the findings that emerged. It is important to reiterate that during the course of the consultations, the children and young people knew that their participation was voluntary and they had a range of options to express themselves (they could draw, write, scribe) thus enabling them to identify issues that they wanted to discuss and to have their voices heard on those issues. As outlined earlier, the facilitators used appropriate prompt questions throughout.

## Voice (The Findings)

Eleven key themes (Figure 4) emerged from an analysis of all data collated from the consultations and represent the voice of children and young people who attended. The themes are set within the four key areas of the DE *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018–2023* i.e. culture and environment, relationships and partnerships, curriculum (teaching and learning), policy and planning.



**Figure 4: Overview of Themes: Findings**

In doing so, it connects the topics of bullying, anti-bullying and school policies in a holistic way with learner wellbeing. Furthermore, it connects the very reason for the consultation with a school's primary duty of care to children and young people, namely, the protection from harm in the services provided by the school. More broadly, it connects various structures and systems beyond the school that support schools in discharging their duty of care. Child safeguarding and wellbeing is indeed everybody's business, as outlined at the outset of this report.

Whilst the eleven individual themes are located within the relevant key area of wellbeing, the findings are all inter-related and inter-dependent and could easily fit within any of the four wellbeing key areas. The totality of the findings however, is greater than the sum of the

individual findings. The gestalt<sup>6</sup> i.e. - a sense of the overall findings, confirms the urgency and timeliness of the current review of the Action Plan on Bullying and Anti-Bullying Procedures.

Each theme will now be explained and the findings within each clarified.

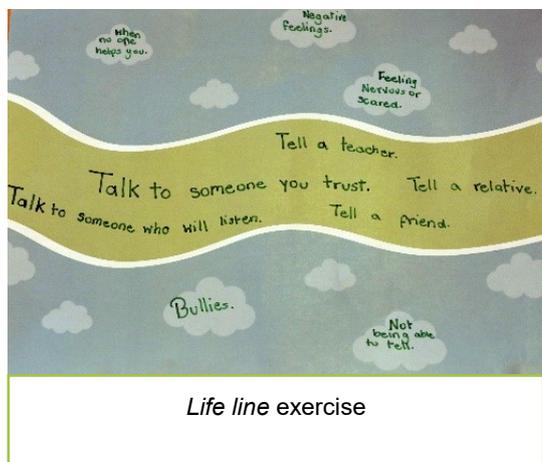
## Key Area: Culture and Environment

There are 4 key themes that relate to the wellbeing areas of school culture and environment: Findings within these themes relate specifically to school climate, school buildings and grounds (Safe Places), supports, and leadership.

### SCHOOL CLIMATE

#### Finding 1: When children and young people felt listened to and valued by their teachers, it helped to prevent feelings of exclusion and isolation.

A resounding finding across both primary and post-primary participants was that when children and young people felt listened to and valued by their teachers, it helped to prevent

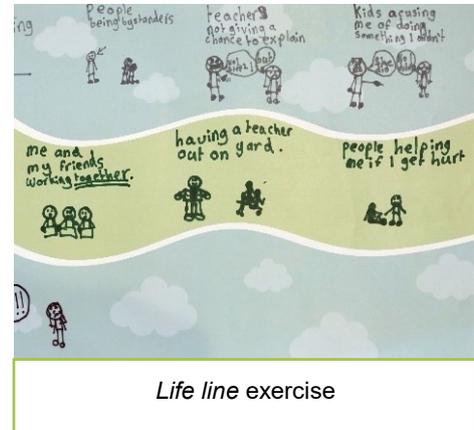


feelings of exclusion and isolation. It is clear that teachers are very important role models for children and young people and in many cases particularly at primary level, the teacher was the person most mentioned as the trusted adult: “The teachers help me feel safe because I know if I go through any problems I know they’re there” and “I ask teacher to keep an eye out”. There were many references to a caring school atmosphere created by teachers; they spoke about teachers who show on a daily basis that they truly care about their students, such teachers who keep “an eye out”. There were many

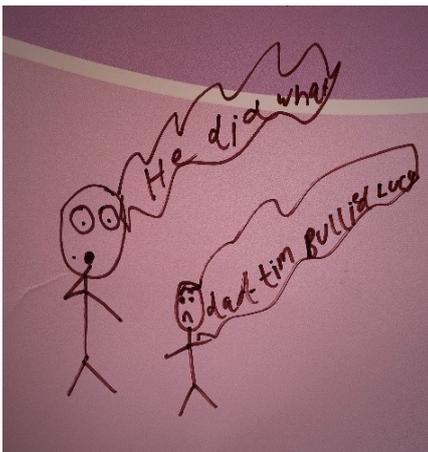
references to teachers who as part of keeping an eye out also ensure that rules are fairly enforced and applied equitably. Fair, equitable application of rules and sanctions was mentioned numerous times by the children and young people.

<sup>6</sup> The word ‘gestalt’ is used here to convey a sense of the totality or the overall findings.

Equity and fairness are part of school culture. Fairness in school life builds a special kind of confidence that helps children and young people feel safe from bullying and from harm. It also helps them feel that teachers are concerned about overall learner wellbeing and not just the particular subject/curriculum area. One child confidently spoke about this: “No bullying in my school. Not that much worrying things in our school” and “It’s ok. I feel safe”. Similarly, young people in iScoil indicated that no bullying was taking place. These positive sentiments were particularly strong from children who had transferred from mainstream to special schools;



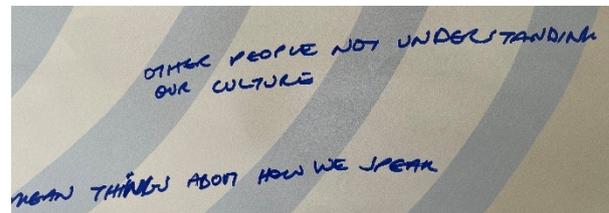
Life line exercise



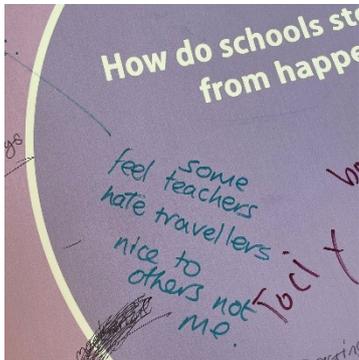
‘dad tim bullied Luca’  
‘He did what?’

they felt safe (“I feel more safe here”) and they indicated that bullying was not a significant issue in their new school. These same children spoke positively about a lot of supervision by teachers and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) right throughout the day that helped the children to feel safe and happy in school. Getting the balance right between an emphasis on academic progress and student wellbeing is therefore critical. A ‘keeping an eye out’ approach has that dual gaze, evidently. Children and young people throughout the consultations highlighted the critical role that the individual teacher plays in getting that balance right and making an inclusive, welcoming school climate real for students especially for those that are most vulnerable. Most of all, a school climate of respect for all is what children and young people value.

The importance of a welcoming, inclusive, whole school environment was highlighted by many primary and post-primary students and in particular by Traveller and Roma children and young people. Many post-primary students believed that a school’s climate could be further improved if the school valued student voice more, listened to students, and respected their views. Whilst this was clearly happening in some schools, it



‘Other people not understanding our culture’  
‘Mean things about how we speak’  
Traveller & Roma Focus Group 14 July

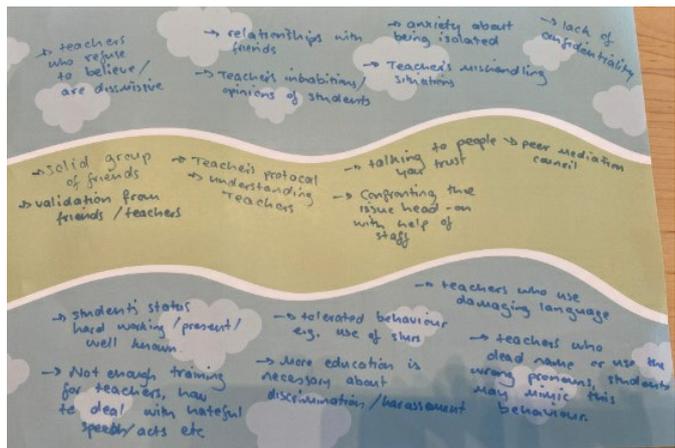


'some feel teachers hate Travellers'  
'nice to others not to me'  
Traveller & Roma Focus Group 14 July

would seem that a valuing of student voice in all schools is not felt by all students. A small number of post-primary students spoke about feelings of “not belonging”, of being “excluded” by “how things were done in the school” e.g. selection of sports teams, rigid adherence to strict uniform codes, and by the way they felt spoken to by some teachers “like you didn’t matter”. In particular, primary and post-primary Traveller children and young people felt excluded; most especially, they felt that their culture was not well-understood or well-regarded by other pupils or by teachers or school management. However, these same children and young people gave high praise to their mentor teachers that had been assigned to them at one point. They expressed disappointment when these mentors were subsequently withdrawn for reasons unknown to them. They felt there was no one who truly understood them at school. It is worth noting

also that young people attending iScoil reported that being excluded or made to feel unwelcome were the dominant forms of bullying in their previous school; the bullies were mostly other students in the same year group or older and not so much anyone outside school.

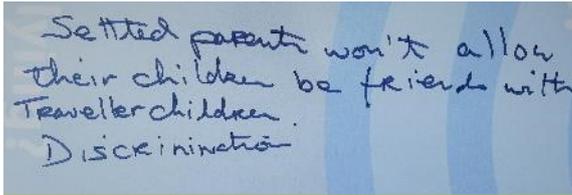
Across primary and post-primary, the children and young people spoke about wanting to see “respect” highlighted more (mission, ethos, policies, actions) as the most fundamental expectation of all (staff, students, parents, sports coaches). They referred to the need to feel respected more in the language some teachers use in classrooms so that every student could feel included and valued. A number of students spoke about a small number of teachers who acted in a manner that was in contrast to the many excellent teachers that had taught them at various points: “Teachers who use damaging language – teachers who deadname<sup>7</sup> or use the wrong pronouns, students may mimic this behaviour”; some “Teachers not understanding ‘big personalities different to bad manners’ mistaking personality” of the student; some “Teachers prioritising ‘education’ over mental health”; some “teachers pushing kids to speak in front of everyone – points out personal things in front of class” and “not picking new people”.



'teachers who use damaging language'  
'tolerated behaviour e.g. use of slurs'  
'teachers who dead name or use wrong pronouns, students may mimic this behaviour'

<sup>7</sup> Called by their birth name and not by the name they now use in light of their gender transition.

They also spoke in a very constructive and positive way about how to prevent this happening, for example, at the start of every school year at school assembly and in classrooms (teacher-class introductions) by talking about respect, anti-bullying, school rules and sanctions, and for students to be given the chance to state and use their preferred pronouns. This would help to ensure that their school is “a kind place”; “a place where



‘Settled parents won’t allow their children to be friends with Traveller children’  
‘Discrimination’

everyone respects pronouns and does not dead name. Teachers and students have an open honest discourse about important issues. Mutual respect.” Traveller and Roma children spoke about the value of having an increased emphasis on cultural awareness programmes in schools (for students, staff, boards of management) and for all parents/guardians. They believed this would help to build and sustain a strong

inclusive school environment for learning.

Young people attending iScoil indicated that they felt that students in their previous schools and in iScoil treated each other respectfully and were particularly positive about the emphasis in iScoil on learning about discrimination.

A small number of post-primary students felt welcoming policies and induction days were not sufficiently effective if you were “different” or new to the school. This reference was made in respect of how some post-primary students felt treated by other students. A number of primary and post-primary children in special classes in mainstream and in special schools indicated that bullying by children of other children with significant learning difficulties including Down syndrome was less likely than of children whose special educational needs were less obvious at first glance. It would seem that being a “little bit different” places a child at greater risk of being bullied by others in the school. It is worth noting also that young people surveyed in iScoil indicated that they were targeted by bullies in school because they had a learning disability or a physical disability or required additional support or were considered exceptionally able and therefore were seen as ‘different’. However, it should also be pointed out that bullying was either not the reason or only part of the reason for why these young people left mainstream education.



‘Racist’

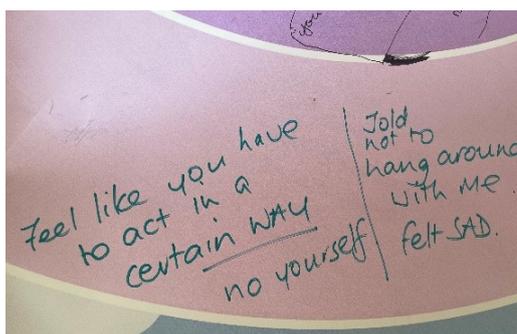
To help improve matters, post-primary students felt that “Not getting a chance because you are new” or because of your “hair colour or skin colour or clothes (not wearing expensive clothes)” or “Shoes, what you wear, being called ‘poor’ -your identity” or because you were not “country people”<sup>8</sup> could be dealt with in the schools welcoming policy and in a range of

other policies. Disparaging remarks made by some students about other students exacerbated further when “Not knowing anyone-being new-not being able to talk to anyone e.g. too shy, don’t know how to talk” left young people feeling very vulnerable, excluded and more likely to be bullied. Some reported that they were bullied. The welcoming policy should, in the views of the post-primary students, be very encouraging of all students to report bullying of any kind and spell out clearly that bullying of any kind would not be tolerated in the school including racism, sexism, homophobic comments and behaviours, and



‘Tell parents their child is bullying’

cyberbullying. Anonymous reporting is singularly the most preferred way of reporting bullying for post-primary students. Telling the teacher, or your friends, or the SNA or “Tell yer mam R da” are the most recommended ways from the primary school children. It is important to highlight that the children and young people from Ukraine who participated in the consultations felt very welcome in their schools and reported no bullying; they smiled a lot when asked about their new school in Ireland.



‘Feel like you have to act in a certain way – no yourself’  
‘Told not to hang around with me felt sad’

Post-primary students recommended that various school policies including the welcoming policy should highlight a variety of ways for reporting bullying including anonymous forms. Most especially, they wanted to be given an assurance that all reporting of bullying would be taken very seriously by the school. They wanted to see this spelled out in school policies. They spoke about how this would help build student confidence in themselves in knowing that they would be listened to and taken seriously. It would create good feelings like feeling safe and happy in school. It would also create the kind of conditions in the school that

<sup>8</sup> An expression used in the vernacular by Travellers to describe people from non-Traveller backgrounds.

would help a young person to report bullying; these conditions permeate school culture and ethos.

In discussions on anti-bullying strategies, Traveller children and young people in particular drew attention to the importance of teachers having high expectations of them particularly from an academic perspective on par with other students in the school. All post-primary

A photograph of a piece of paper with handwritten text in blue ink. The text reads: "TRAVELLER GIRLS NOT ALLOWED TO GO TO THE TOILET BUT COUNTRY GIRLS ARE ALLOWED". The paper is slightly crumpled and has a white background.

*'Traveller girls not allowed to go to the toilet but country girls are allowed'*

Traveller students referred to schools having low expectations of them to succeed academically. One group of post-primary Traveller girls referred to being in a prefab (for 4 students) by themselves "watching Netflix and videos" every day, and not having the choice between taking the established Leaving Certificate programme or the Leaving Certificate Applied programme. They spoke about wanting to do the Leaving

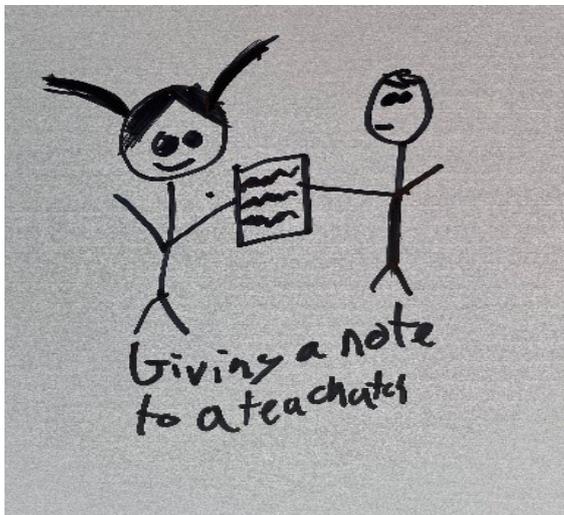
Certificate programme and wanting teachers to have high expectations of them to do well in school academically. Their parents wanted the same for them. Critically, these same students referred to other Travellers in the school who were living in 'normal' houses and for whom the school had articulated higher expectations and who were pursuing the Leaving Certificate programme. Regrettably, Traveller students that felt isolated by a school structure and a non-inclusive school climate had lost interest in school and were looking for the first opportunity to leave education. Many of them disliked homework because they had no one to help them at home and it was in this context that they spoke about the value of setting up an after-school homework club for Traveller and Roma children and young people only. Whilst this overall discussion transcends the bullying/anti-bullying context, it took place during the consultations on the anti-bullying procedures in schools and on the anti-bullying action plan.

Post-primary students throughout the various consultations also spoke about the need to make a big deal about Stand Up Awareness Week in schools not just for LGBTQ+ students but as a way of building an inclusive school environment and educating people (students, staff) about respect for difference, respect for all. Students also said that giving strong visibility to Stand Up week would help to build student confidence and send a strong message out to all (students, parents, and staff) that the school is serious about respect for equality. Across primary and post-primary, school leadership was very important to the children and young people.

## LEADERSHIP

### Finding 2: School leadership has power to make things better and more equal for all students.

For children and young people, one of the most important roles for school leadership was around how seriously bullying was taken and ensuring that anti-bullying rules and sanctions were enforced fairly and fully across the school. There was a job to be done in making sure that sanctions were meaningful for bullies and they believed a zero-tolerance approach should be adopted for breaches of rules around cyberbullying, gender-based bullying, racism



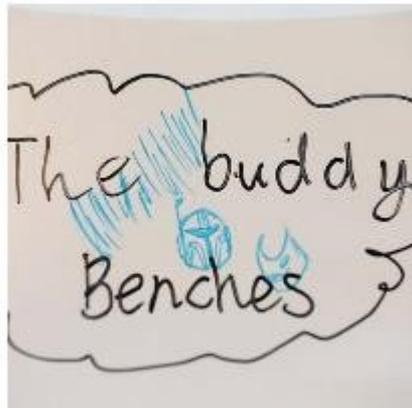
Giving a note to the teacher

and identity-based bullying. There were references to *“Pride flags destroyed in schools with no consequences”*, the need to *“make students more aware of non-binary genders”*, *“educate teachers around bullying + minorities. Know the signs of bullying”*, have *“Diversity committees in schools (welcoming others in school)”* *“cultural awareness programmes”* and *“students voice must be taken seriously”*. These were all matters that post-primary students in particular wanted school leadership to know about and to take seriously. Children and young people did not seem to be aware that every school is legally obliged to have a Child Safeguarding Statement that includes an assessment of any potential for harm to any

child/young person in the school.<sup>9</sup> This legal obligation is mandatory for every school and compliance is monitored by the DE through its Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections system that is informed by the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017. The children and young people were not aware of the Child Safeguarding Statement (that must be displayed in a prominent position near the main entrance of their school) and its link with keeping them safe from harm while they are in school.

Children and young people believed they could help the leadership of their school by giving their views on what would help in bullying situations, explaining how bullying impacts the person, and ways to prevent bullying. However, they need to have a school structure to give their views e.g. Student Council. They believed it would also help if school leadership would *“Put anti-bullying policy in school homework journal”*, *“actively take part in Stand Up week”* and provide *“more access to safe spaces in schools”*. It was also important for school

<sup>9</sup> The legal obligation to have a Child Safeguarding Statement arises from the Children First Act 2015.



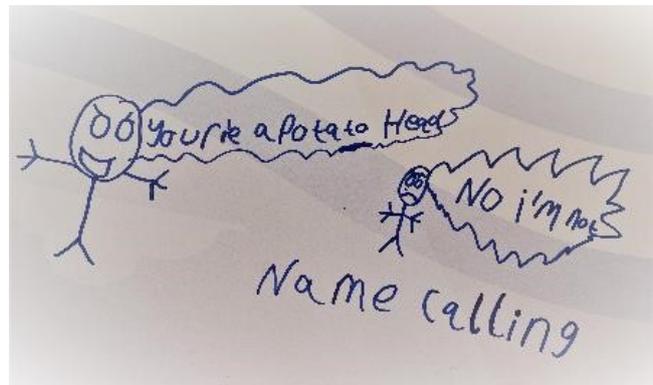
'The Buddy Benches'

leadership to know of the many "good teachers" in the school, "kind teachers", "understanding teachers" and "The teacher is always asking people if they are okay and is very supportive". There were many references to good teachers.

Most of all, children and young people wanted to feel that their views would be respected for example when they reported bullying or concerns and that there would be fair and consistent application of all policies and rules. Some post-primary students indicated that they had witnessed and, in some cases, experienced: "No consequences - no action taken by teachers when they notice bullying – teachers say to avoid the bully even though this is

impossible - regard bullying as rough play/messing about and do not take it seriously and take no firm action".

There will be always a certain amount of messing, joking and nick-naming or name-calling in schools but when the joking and nick-naming is consistently experienced by the same young person every time, it has the potential to hurt and to harm.



"You're a Potato Head" 'No I'm not'  
Name calling

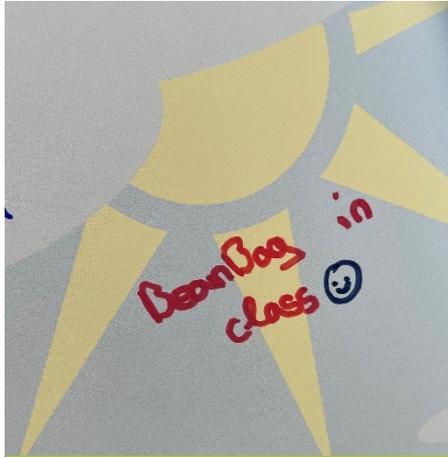
Bullying behaviours might be further understood within the wellbeing key area of 'relationships and partnerships'. Findings within this key area relate to the following themes:

webs of relationships (school-in-community), trusted adult: safe face, communication and language.

### SCHOOL BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS: SAFE PLACES

**Finding 3: All children and young people want to have access to safe, quiet places in school.**

A further resounding finding (across primary and post-primary) relates to the need for quiet calm, safe spaces in schools (building or grounds) for children and young people especially for those who feel "uncomfortable" or "sad" or so "anxious, scared, lonely, unimportant, afraid, depressed, confused, insecure" to the point of feeling "invisible". These feelings were



BeanBag in class

cited by the children and young people arising from bullying experiences or from observing “mean behaviours”. Many primary school children spoke about much they valued the “buddy bench” in the school playground, “safe places to go at lunch”, “areas with nature” or a “quiet room” or a “Zen Den” or “fairy garden zen den” in school to simply chill out and get away from things for a while. A number of children in special classes commencing post-primary in September were less positive about the value of the buddy bench in the school yard. They spoke about how the buddy bench had an intended negative consequence in their experience; it tended to ‘spotlight’ those who were feeling alone or had no friends and at times this gave

rise to unkind if not nasty comments and name-calling by others in the yard. They believed it made the situation even worse for a child who was bullied; “It’s embarrassing, no one uses it”. To counteract this happening, the children emphasised the need to ensure that everyone in the school knew and accepted the importance of friendship (“real friends not fake friends”) and showing kindness when it was not so easy to do so and how the buddy bench helped in that regard. “Looking out for others” could be taught, they felt, through Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) lessons in particular and included in the anti-bullying policy and in the Code of Behaviour specifically as a way of developing responsibility in pupils for others in their class and in their school. There were calls for a “Room for children with disabilities with someone who can talk and chat with them”. This was an important matter for the children and young people. Some post-primary students spoke about “No safe spaces (lack of supervision at break times)” in their school. All they wanted was a small quiet space in the school to which they go if they felt overwhelmed or just not themselves.

The primary school children described a quiet safe space: It would be a space for “squish mellow teddies - chill out tents”, “fish tanks to help keep calm”, “Have stress toy in plane site”, “slimy things”, “beanbags -rocking chairs”, a “time out room - calm down room - reading room-comfy chairs”, “a relax room - a happy room”. Quite simply, a “nothingness room” and a recommendation from the children that “every school should have a ‘zen den’ multisensory room” but were mindful also that this would cost money. So, a quiet room could be an empty room and an equally effective zen den, in their view. A quiet empty room has made all the difference to some post-primary students. For example, one student spoke about: “my school has a room available at lunch called ‘The Den’ which is a lgbtqi support group + an amazing safe space at lunch”. It is important to highlight also that there were many references by the post-primary students to the need for quiet spaces simply because they felt overwhelmed by “stress of class tests, exams, homework” and other concerns such as “parents pressure”. The need to get away from things was therefore not always related to bullying.

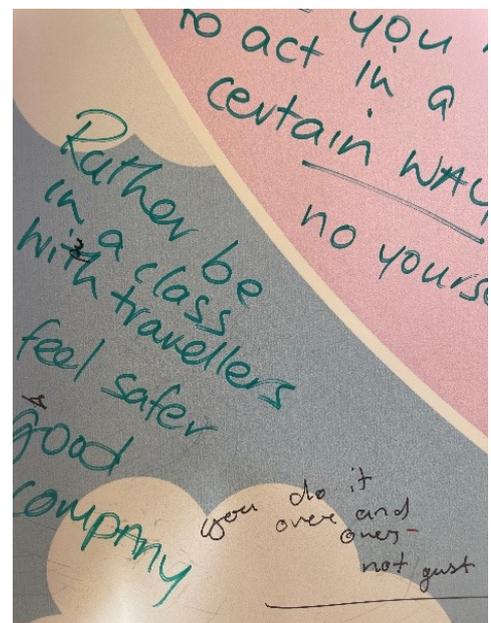
Quiet spaces are clearly valued by children and young people and whether or not an increasing need for support for wellbeing is linked to the aftermath of the inevitable isolation that occurred around COVID-19 restrictions or whether it has to do with the severity of the



*It would have a buddy bench, safe place, gardening lessons for people who feel worried because gardening is calming. Teachers who understand if a kid is worried or scared. This would be a lovely school*

impact of bullying or other adverse experiences such as the war in Ukraine, was difficult to discern. What was not difficult to discern was the call from children and young people in the consultations for supports in school and having at least one trusted adult in school who would listen to them and take their views seriously. There were also calls for supports for the bully including “a bullying room – being bad room” to help the bully to learn to “Be kind to one and each other. No hitting people”. Primary pupils felt that by asking the bully questions would help the bully to think about what they done so that they would stop bullying: “Say to bully how would you like it if they dunnit to you”.

It is important to point out also that children and young people referred to the supportive nature of having organised games and sports during playtimes and perhaps “a climbing frame”. They asked that “every school should have a football pitch” and *Finding what you enjoy, having a good hobby or clubs in school, chess club, basketball team, Green schools*” were also suggested as ways to prevent bullying. These kinds of activities helped them to build friendships and have fun together. Friends and friendships were mentioned very often throughout the consultations as being very important for the children and young people. Playtime and chill-out time were also hugely important. Traveller girls in particular felt very safe with other Traveller girls and found it very supportive to be in the same class with other Traveller girls who were “good fun, good company, the same culture”. However, across primary and post-primary, there were many



*‘Rather be in class with Travellers feel safer – good company’*

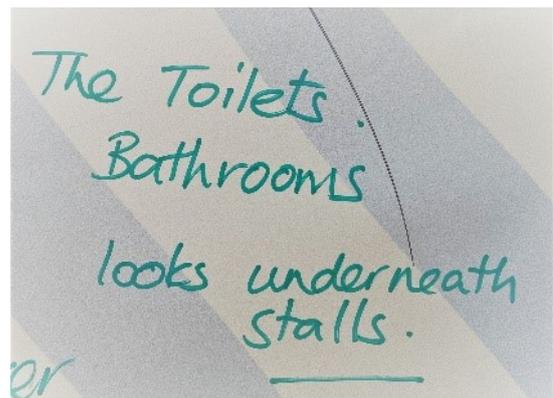
children and young people who referred to the need for adequate supervision during break-times because *“Teachers are not always out in the yard to stop it”* and *“without supervision-racism-playtime-around some people-yard – going out altogether with people you don’t know in yard can make you feel unsafe-being mean – when no one is watching”*. They emphasised how good teacher observation skills helped them: *“Teachers looking out for bullying – addressing the issues”* because bullies *“do it in secret”*, the *“bully can twist the tale”*, and *“Two faced bullies who bullies when there’s no teacher but is a pet when there is a teacher”*. So important is teacher vigilance for children and their feelings of being safe in school, that one child urged *“Thechers to be more obserbative”*.



*‘School not safe’*

For many children, *“teachers make me feel safe”* and the role of the teacher seemed to be even more significant at lunchtimes for post-primary students. For example, they spoke of *“cliques and ganging up”* leading one young person to have feelings of *“exclusion where as you normally have friends that you’re friends with just because you’re in the same class, not because of personality, so they don’t transfer to lunch - groups and cliques”*. It was the case also that the going-down-town-for-lunch policy resulted in some students being left behind in a way that did not occur when lunch was eaten in the school. Being left behind led to feelings of isolation and not belonging. For some students, these were everyday feelings.

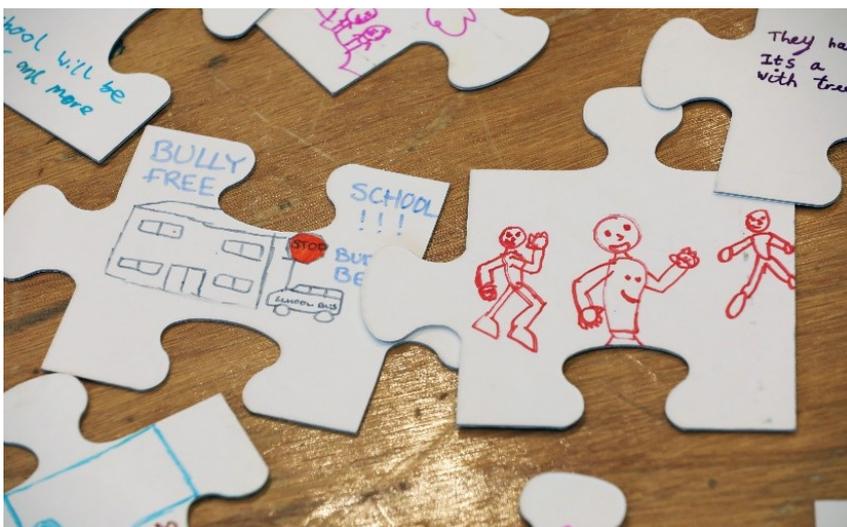
Bathrooms, toilets, changing rooms and changing areas were frequently cited as places where bullying occurred and there were many references to insufficient time and supervision and the need for cameras and individual, gender-neutral single toilets: *“cameras outside bathrooms for safety”*; *“people looking under the stalls – bullying”*; *“bullying, cant go to the toilet, not enough time”*. There was also a recognition that the balance had to be struck between privacy rights and rights around personal safety and bodily integrity. Across primary and post-primary in all settings, bathrooms and toilets were seen as places where considerable if not most bullying took place. Children and young



*‘The Toilets’  
‘Bathrooms’  
‘looks underneath stalls’*

people believed this occurred because supervision was less visible in these areas (*“teachers can’t see you, can’t hear you”*) and toilets were largely communal. However, children and young people in special schools were somewhat less worried about bullying in these places citing supervision of teachers and SNAs, having access to individual toilets and supervised routines for going to/coming from the bathrooms/toilets. All children and young people wanted strong supervision in these areas and in their view *“unsupervised areas are not safe”*. They also recommended: *“don’t let a load of girls into the toilets all together”* if the area is not going to be supervised and having individual toilets in schools as an available option.

What was most concerning for many post-primary students were incidents of sexist bullying behaviours: *“gender-based double standards”* for example boys being allowed to change for PE in open areas whereas the girls were not permitted to do, a *“boys being boys”* mentality in the school *“messing incessantly, teachers saying its fine”*, *“boys can mess with teachers but girls can’t, gendered rules don’t go both ways, girls get in trouble for wearing shorts, boys don’t”*. What was even more concerning for the post-primary students was very often there was no follow-up on sanctions or fair application of the anti-bullying rules which made them feel that reporting bullying was pointless. A small number of students seemed to have lost hope that something would be done about bullying behaviours if they reported it. This was particularly the case for Traveller and Roma children and young people. These students referred also to not being believed by some teachers and principals when they tried to report bullying. They felt that not being believed was related to who they were as Travellers and how their culture was perceived by the school. For example, they felt that not living in ‘normal’ houses was seen by many students and many staff as not being acceptable in the school. Children and young people in special classes and special schools also referred to a person’s identity as being the main reason a person gets bullied – what you look like and who you are matters.

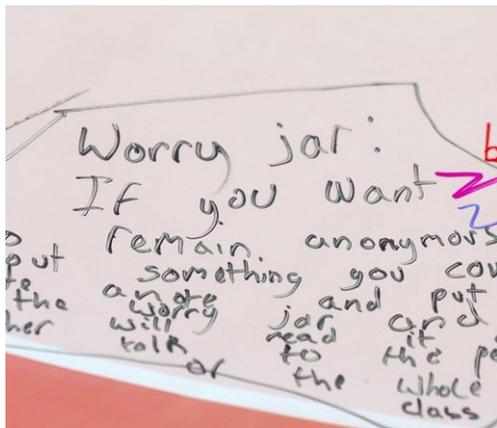


It is to be noted that Ukrainian children and young people felt that Ireland is much safer than Ukraine. It is not clear if their observation is related to the current war time context in Ukraine or to schools specifically. What is clear is that all the Ukrainian

participants in the July consultations were very positive about their teachers, their schools and the new communities in which they were living.

## SUPPORTS

### Finding 4: All children and young people need a variety of supports to help them deal with bullying.



'Worry jar: If you want to remain anonymous put something you can't say in a note and put it in the worry jar and the teacher will read it and talk to the person or the whole class'

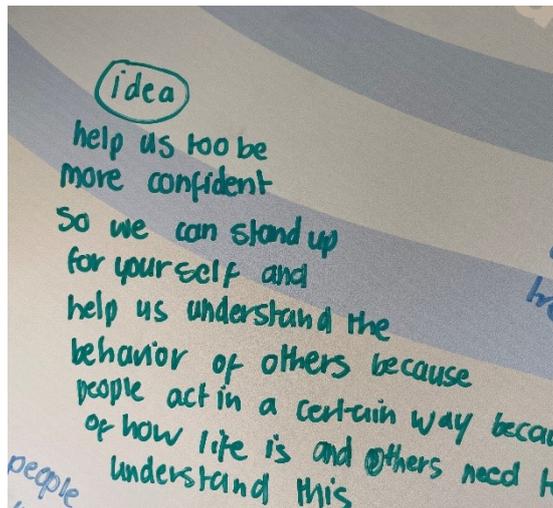
Primary pupils found the "worry jar" or "worry box" helpful or "add a box in each room and in that box you leave a note if someone was mean" and "the teacher punishes the bully fairly and if you tell, make it anonymous". Or "if you want to remain anonymous about something, you could write a note about it and put it in the worry jar and the teacher will read and talk to the person or the whole class".

However, many children and young people were fearful of reprisals if they reported bullying and this was particularly so for the post-primary students. The fear around being called a "snitch" or a "rat" was very real for these students. Primary pupils referred to the importance of pets especially dogs that brought them comfort and calmness, "therapy dogs" to help them when they are being bullied and for

the bullies too. For one child, it was a case of "I love dogs. We need dogs. Please dogs" and the significance of their own dog in the child's life was very clear: "I tell my dog everything". The comfort that children draw from their pets is evident from what another child spoke about when he described how he dealt with bullying: "I like hugging an animal or tell them what's happening even though they don't understand".

Many post-primary students commented on the importance of counselling, therapeutic services and learning calming strategies ("meditation", "deep breaths", "counting in your head", "counting 1-10", "brain calm breaks") that might be provided by a designated teacher to whom they could talk about bullying or related concerns. The students did not indicate whether these services might be provided in the context of the guidance counsellor role or whether they saw it as additional to that role or indeed outside of school. Student perceptions of the blurring of some roles for example, the role of the chaplain, career guidance/counsellor, year head, form teacher seemed to create ambiguities and confusion for some students. These students did not seem to know clearly who to go to if they are being bullied or have witnessed bullying. They felt also that teachers/counsellors were not fully aware of the importance for students of setting clear boundaries with students. What

post-primary students want is "safe and responsible<sup>10</sup> teachers to go to with problems – having teachers you trust – guidance counsellors having people/teacher to talk to – people who watch out for others -mental health supports”.

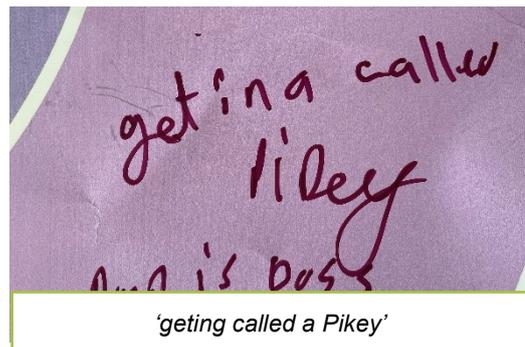


*'(idea) help us too be more confident so we can stand up for yourself and help us understand the behaviour of others because people act in a certain way because of how life is and others need to understand this'*

Essentially, a “private way to talk to someone”, “a safe spot to say anything” but to “make sure they listen” and are fully “trained”. Many referred to the school principal as being “very helpful and caring” and was seen as an important person in preventing and tackling bullying. Many Traveller and Roma children and young people referred to the important role of school leadership in promoting cultural awareness in the school for students and their parents/guardians, and for all school staff including boards of management. It was especially important for them to know that school leadership would have undertaken cultural awareness programmes in order to promote respect for all cultures, all languages, all faiths and none. Traveller children and young people referred to a lot of discussion and lessons around different cultures in the world but they felt that

insufficient attention was given to Traveller culture. There was a genuine recognition also that the principal needed the whole staff on board and all students, all parents/guardians, and all who had links with the school in order to stamp out bullying.

We look now at some of the findings that deal with the key wellbeing area of relationships and partnerships.



*'geting called a Pikey'*

<sup>10</sup> Underline as inserted by the young person.

## Key Area: Relationships and Partnerships

### WEBS OF RELATIONSHIPS (SCHOOL-IN-COMMUNITY)

**Finding 5: Children and young people want to see and experience visible expressions of respect, and trust and be treated fairly in school. They value school-community relationships.**

There are webs of relationships that are very important to children and young people. In school, these webs are primarily intertwined in how people relate and communicate in teacher-student-teacher, student-support staff-student, and student-student relationships. Respect and trust are sought by all children and young people and this is particularly the

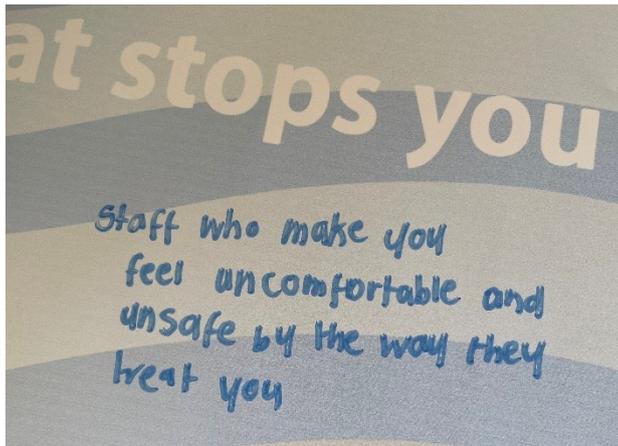


'A perfect school' jigsaw pieces  
'Can you see the signs of bullying'  
'No favouritism'  
'Teachers having respect for students'  
'Disability awareness classes'  
'Aware teachers'  
'Silent/quiet rooms'

case in relationships for post-primary students. Respect from teachers was the value most mentioned and most cherished by the children and young people throughout the consultations. They measured respect by how they were spoken to in class, the type of language that was used (reflecting “*open-mindedness, not closed*”), and the degree to which they felt listened to when they expressed viewpoints that might have been different from those of the teacher. Some spoke about “*teachers who believe in stereotyping and prejudice: closed-minded teachers and expressions, teachers assuming things that are not right: gender sexualities versus ‘open-minded teachers’—friendly teachers, hard-working teachers, respectful people - people not understanding people have different interests*”.

Where respect was felt and particularly respect for difference, it was very easy for the young person to reciprocate and it provided the basis for the building up of trust between student and teacher. It generated a warmth in the classroom and good feelings in students and helped them to feel that they belonged, were valued and were all equal. Most importantly, they felt an openness in attitude and approach in student-teacher-student interactions. This was the case and experience of many students. There were good relational boundaries in these classes that were protected by the teacher and modelled by the teacher. Post-primary students spoke about how they valued boundaries in relationships and how it provided a strong sense of safety and protection for them. They felt safe and “*comfortable*” in class when boundaries were in place and respected by students and teachers.

However, a number of students spoke about their feelings: “*teachers making students feel uncomfortable*” for example “*when teachers comment on students clothing (distraction) makes students uncomfortable*”. There were some references by post-primary students to their perceptions of “*male teachers being inappropriate to female students*” and how this



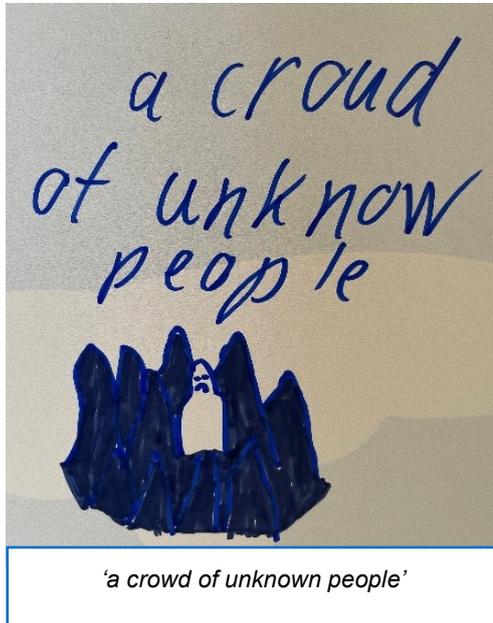
*‘Staff who make you feel uncomfortable and unsafe by the way they treat you’*

made students feel uncomfortable. A number of post-primary students at different tables spoke about their experiences of observing what they perceived as “*pervy*” behaviours in class, of boundaries being crossed, and feeling that there were somehow being judged by some teachers who may not have been aware of the way their behaviour was perceived. Students spoke very strongly at some tables about inappropriate behaviours of some teachers that made students feel very uncomfortable and that disturbed some students greatly. However, students felt that this area could be addressed through professional

courses for teachers. A small number of post-primary students spoke about the need for a “*call or text line to anon report teachers*”. They also wanted to see and hear about consequences for teacher behaviours that are reported by students. They were strong on this point.

“*Favouritism*” in class was also frequently mentioned as a behaviour that affects how post-primary students feel about themselves when they perceive preferential treatment being given to the same students, day in, day out: “*teachers allowing students (particularly those who thrive socially) to select themes(teams) in sports*”; “*favouritism over bullies*”, “*Favoritism – students’ status, hard working/present, well known*”. One post-primary student went as far as saying: “*Teachers dont always stop problems due to favouritism*”. Post-primary students spoke about how they believed that teacher favoritism teaches (albeit it indirectly) the bullies to keep bullying. As one student put it: “*it is as if bullies get rewarded*”.

It was clear from the consultations across primary and post-primary, that children and young people value highly when teachers show respect for the private lives of children and young people. They found it upsetting to have “*teachers who are noseys*”, “*nosey people*” in school, “*feeling down - people not respecting you need space - noseys teachers who pry into students personal lives- people who don’t mind their own business*”. Protected boundaries around teacher-student relationships and around privacy are therefore very important to learners especially those who may be experiencing something that is deeply private to them. This is also about respect.



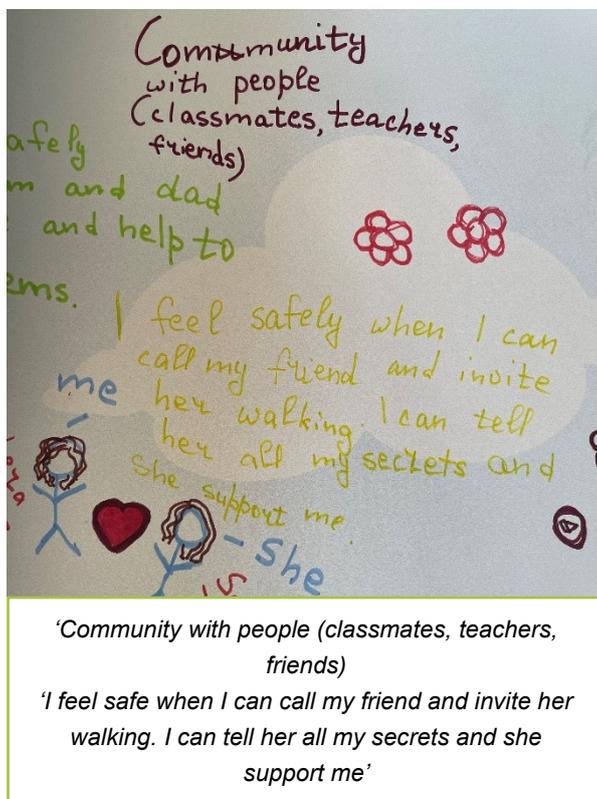
Many children and young people across primary and post-primary spoke about the need to teach all in the school about bullying, how to recognise the signs, how to intervene and how to report bullying. *"Some students segregating into groups, never socialising outside those groups and judging those in other groups"* needed to be tackled also to help prevent cliques that bully. Similarly, *"Being able to forgive and stay friends (girls can be judgy) – no grudges"* could be taught to students. It could be dealt with in a comprehensive information programme, they felt, or regularly through *"kindness workshops"*. There were references also to the need to be mindful of the specific school type and gender, for example *"People in single gender schools taught to be respectful to other gender especially as they would not*

*encounter as many people of a different gender"*. References to being *"sexualised in mixed gender schools"* could also, they believed, inform the school anti-bullying policy and in teaching about bullying. There were also references during the consultations to student-to-student sexual harassment and the dehumanising effects on young people.

Children and young people also felt that learning about bullying would be invaluable for bus drivers and gardaí to build up their knowledge about bullying, what to look out for, and how to deal with it. Primary pupils spoke about a lot of bullying on the bus: *"The bus because no one is there to see it"*; *"School bus - saying things that are mine"*; *"School bus driver didn't know what to do neither did teacher"*. They spoke about how people in school and outside (including parents) may not have the knowledge, language (the words) or understanding of cyberbullying, identity-bullying, sexual harassment or bullying in the context of race or ethnicity. In particular, they felt that teaching anti-bullying strategies to students in the school and implementing sanctions as outlined in the school policy would help to build good student-student relationships and stamp out bullying.

The importance of good school-parent relationships was also mentioned across primary and post-primary. There were calls for *"parent and students conferences"*, school-home-community conferences to share up to date information, case studies and research on bullying in schools and ways to stop it happening. There were many calls for education for parents around bullying and around why sanctions for bullying were important. There were numerous references to *"parents defending their children"*, being *"too soft"* on bullies in their family and the school giving too much discretion to parents to follow through on requests from the school to deal with the bullying behaviour of their child. In some cases, students felt that bullies got away too lightly at home in terms of sanctions that were set out in the

school anti-bullying policy. This resulted in students who were bullied feeling unfairly treated by a structure (anti-bullying policy and its implementation) designed to protect them from harm and further compounded by an ineffective reprimand system. For many primary children, the school should “only tell parents if it’s a big thing”. Whether this is related to fear of escalation or reprisal was not clear. Perhaps it is a case that children believe that things are best sorted ‘locally’ and quietly at school level. Furthermore, not all parents may deal lightly with a child in their own family who is allegedly bullying another child in school or in the area more generally.



Children and young people spoke also of the importance of sports and sporting organisations in their lives. In-school relationships with coaches and team selection panels were particularly important. Students spoke about how sport boosted their self-esteem and sense of belonging to the school. It helped them feel safe and secure. However, for some post-primary students, student favouritism meant that some students rarely if ever got selected for teams. This happened at lunchtime for many students when students were selecting players for the kick about. It happened also during school selection times for inter-school championships. This gave rise to some students feeling excluded, of not being good enough ever, and of not being valued by other students or by the school. They did not like the constant feeling

of being judged negatively, as they put it. There were some references at post-primary level to “GAA students put forward for everything, nothing will be done if they bully, you feel alone”, “GAA families prioritise from the area” and “sexism in the GAA”. However, students felt this could be dealt with very well through the school’s anti-bullying policy and through good school-GAA relationships and especially through honest discussions by schools with all sports organisations around the impact of sexism and selection processes on students’ wellbeing. Many post-primary students were not hopeful that things would change. However, one primary school child did make a suggestion to improve matters: “Maybe a system where no one is left out of games”. Finding a creative, manageable way to do that as a whole school community is therefore the task that lies ahead.

Some students were less hopeful that things would improve and referred to the power and status of the GAA in schools and in the school community. There were lots of calls for more opportunities for inter-school gatherings, positive links with other schools and clubs:



Better training for Gardaí  
Teachers support outside of school

*“fitness/sports events for all schools to promote togetherness”, “fun things”, “after-school activities”, “a homework club for Traveller and Roma only”, “build friendship bonds”, “tackle inter-school rivalry”* and build healthier, happier whole school community overall. Students also felt that this would help curb persistent *“cat-calling, being followed, harassed”, “bullying blackmail”* outside school but that ultimately only *“tough legislation”* could deal effectively with sexual harassment in school and outside school. In the meantime, *“Being allowed to carry pepper spray to protect yourself/self defence weapons”* or *“give every student tazer”* and *“Allow self*

*defence, learning how to tackle”* were ways suggested to deal with the gravity of these behaviours. Having someone to talk to was the recurring constant. *“Tell Leo (tainiste) email or letter”* was recommended by one child if you had no one in school to talk to. There was a further suggestion around *“A designated youth worker for outside of school, therapist to talk to free of charge, ‘bounce back’ texting option for therapy”*. This would also provide a trusted adult, a ‘safe face’ for the young person.

## TRUSTED ADULT: SAFE FACES

**Finding 6: Having at least one trusted adult in school is a must for all children and all young people in school. The class teacher is especially important for primary school children and the career guidance counsellor for post-primary students. Privacy and confidentiality are very important to all children and all young people.**

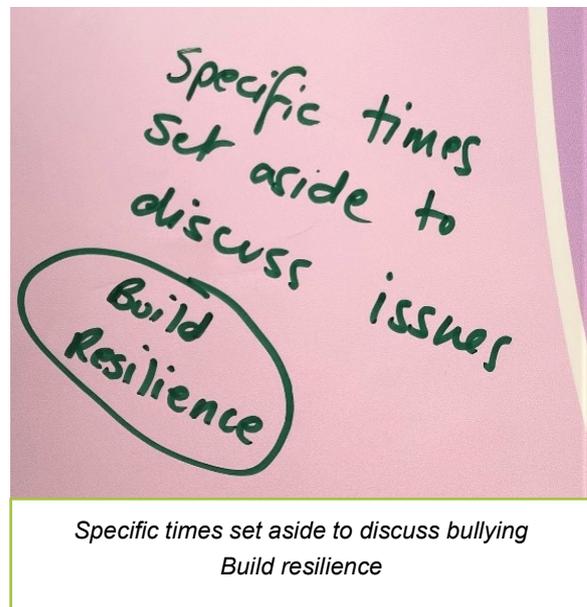
As mentioned earlier, children and young people referred to the importance of a teacher as the person to whom they can go to talk about bullying, feel listened to and know that the matter will be dealt with promptly and in accordance with the school policy. The rationale was clearly articulated by one child: *“If someone is bullying you and you don’t tell someone, it will get bigger and bigger and eventually you will feel unsafe in school”*. The class teacher at primary level and *“guidance counsellor teachers that care”* at post-primary are clearly very important trusted adults. The primary class teacher is the person to whom most children go to when they are being bullied or feel unsafe or sad. The SNA was also mentioned as the person to *“keep an eye out”*. Traveller children indicated that they do not tell their teacher if they are being bullied. They tell someone in their family. Across primary and post-primary, it



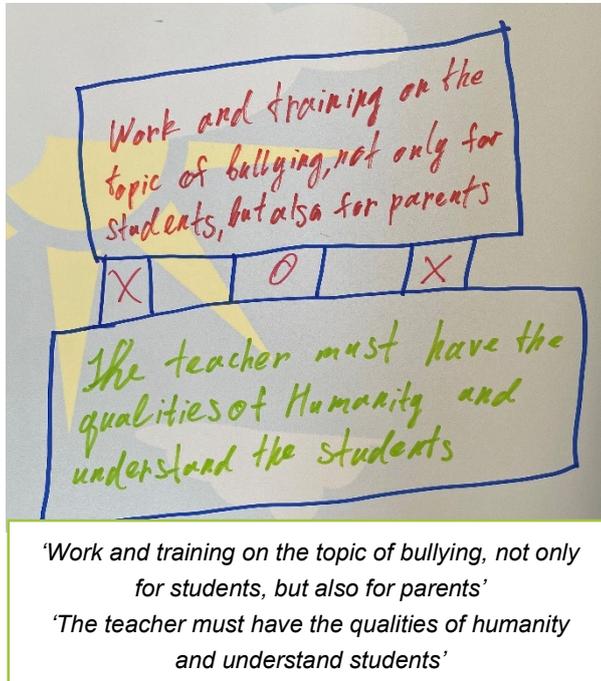
would seem that Traveller children do not confide in any teacher if they are being bullied. As mentioned earlier, the mentor teacher assigned to Travellers in the past was the one person that many Travellers confided in and with whom they built a positive relationship.

At post-primary level, notwithstanding the blurring of roles (chaplain, form teacher/year head, career guidance), a “fully trained” career guidance teacher is the person most

mentioned by young people as the person who listens to them, takes them seriously and in most cases these “*Teachers do something straight away*”. Given the investment of confidence by the children and young people in their trusted adults, the importance of privacy and confidentiality were highlighted by the young people particularly in relation to bystander reporting and gender-based bullying. For example, there were some young people who reiterated what one student had said: “*I want to be able to report transphobia/homophobia without being outed to teacher and parents. Confidentiality.*” Some young people did not feel however, that every teacher was approachable but there was good recognition also of the pressures on teachers to get their subject areas taught so “*teachers are busy*”. Genuine acknowledgement of time pressures on teachers to teach their curriculum/ subject area content was strongly articulated by Traveller and Roma children as a key reason why many teachers had no time to enquire about how the children were feeling and getting on generally in school and beyond.



There were also calls for all staff to have access to continuing professional development to help them understand bullying more fully and its impact on mental health in order to help young people. Some spoke of the need to “*Train SNAs properly to support people with disabilities + learning difficulties*”. Others emphasised the importance of “*education round bullying + minorities. Know the signs of bullying*” and “*to be more inclusive on topic of LGBT and not enforce biased opinions on*

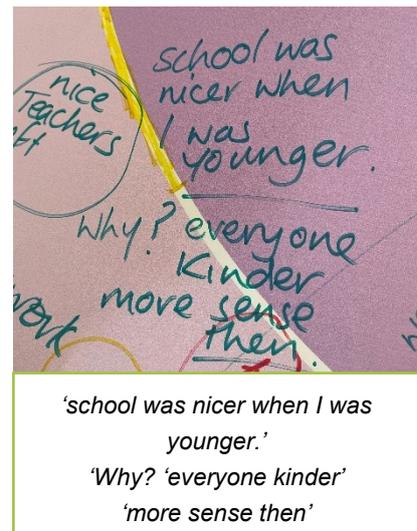


students”, “respect of minorities + females/women”, and intercultural lessons to tackle “disrespect for religion”. There was discussion also on how bullying is closely linked to discrimination in all its forms and the debilitating nature of discriminatory comments, behaviours and attitudes.

Across primary and post-primary, Traveller, Roma and children and young people in special classes and in special schools spoke about a strong link, in their view, between getting older and an increased risk of being bullied. They stated that “school is better when you’re younger”; “school was nicer when I was younger”; “it felt easier to keep safe when you were younger

because it feels like you can be hurt less when you are younger”; “you are minded more when you are younger”. For Traveller girls, things seem to change around 4th class: “when you grow up and you realise what your culture is and they (country people/non-Travellers) don’t understand”. Traveller girls also believed that the risk of being bullied was part and parcel of growing up, knowing your culture was different to others in the class but not wanting to not belong simply because of your Traveller culture. There was also a very strong sense of fidelity to Traveller culture and a great pride in it as an important part of who they were and how they felt about themselves.

It should be pointed out that the trusted adult for children and young people in boarding schools might be different from what has been recorded in this report and the issues arising for those attending boarding school might also be different. As mentioned earlier, children and young people involved in the consultations were all attending day schools or iScoil.

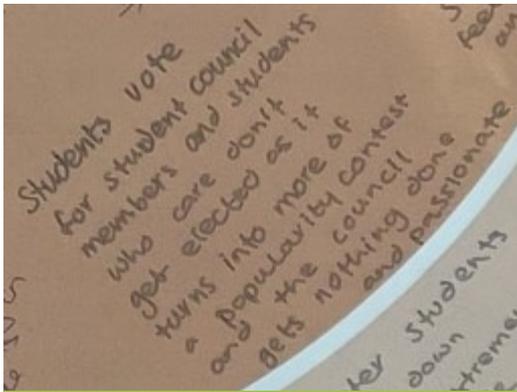


During the consultations, post-primary students in particular, spoke about the importance of the Student Council as a forum for expressing their views and making an important

contribution to policy development. They viewed working on school policies as meaningful work and important work.

## STUDENT COUNCIL

**Finding 7: Children and young people want meaningful work to do on the Student Council that is representative of all students. They view the Student Council as an important forum for working on school policies and for expressing their views on matters that directly affect them in school. It is a good space for listening.**



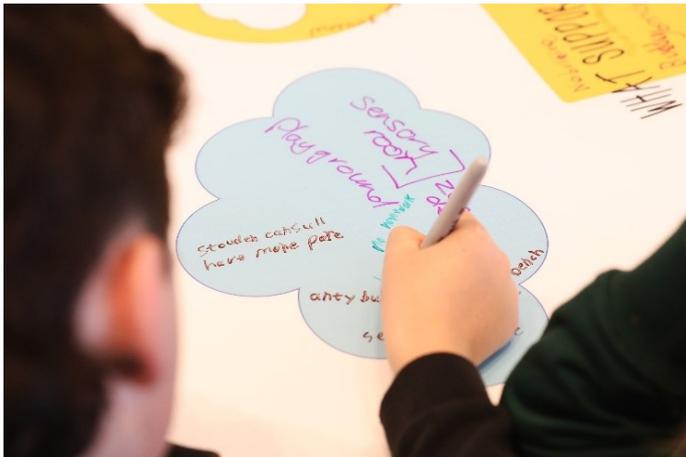
*'Students vote for student council members and students who care don't get elected as it turns into more of a popularity contest and the council gets nothing done'*

Over the course of the consultation days, it was mostly post-primary students who were excited to talk about the Student Council in their school. Few primary pupils seemed to be aware of the Student Council and whether one existed or not in the school. Post-primary students who spoke about the Student Council saw it as an important forum for them to express their views and do good work on the various policies in the school. They valued the Student Council forum. They viewed it as a good space for collaborative consultation and work on school policies: *"Student council + principal+ teachers working together BOM (Board of Management)"; "Active involvement between teachers and students"*.

They saw the Student Council also as a space

for teachers to listen to them about important things happening in the school that affected students. Most importantly, they saw it as a forum to do meaningful work that would have practical impact and a space *"to give more responsibility to students"*. Work on school policies was seen as meaningful work and they believed it would make a difference to students and to staff in the school: *"Reviewing school policies yearly or regularly = students input in this"*: *"Student Councils, give them meaningful work -could look at policy- make change -create a project/sub group to work on it"*. However, very few primary pupils or post-primary students at the consultations indicated that their Student Council had any role in policy development in their school. In some cases, they were not sure what the Student Council did. Some post-primary students spoke about how their Student Council was not representative of the full range of diverse views among the students in the school and they were disappointed that this was the case. It should be noted also that Traveller and Roma children and children in special classes and special schools indicated that they were not aware of school policies or why they were important or how they were designed and developed. Within this cohort, Roma children (primary and post-primary) in particular indicated that they wanted to be involved in school policy development and to learn about

why school policies existed and how they could contribute to them. They indicated that they had ideas about anti-bullying strategies but they wanted to be asked for their views and encouraged to talk. As one child put it: *“it’s not easy to talk about being bullied”*. An



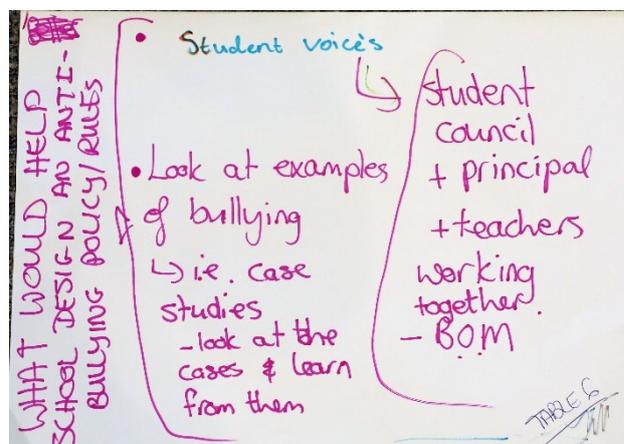
*‘Studen councill will have more pouer’*

opportunity for the voices of children from ethnic minorities to be heard on Student Councils across the country exists and it might encourage Roma voices also.

There was concern around how students were selected for the Student Council and some perceived it to be more of a popularity contest. The overall sense of post-primary students at the consultations was that Student Council members were not representing important and diverse views

across the student population. They were also critical of the effectiveness of the Student Council: *“student council members who are not willing to advocate for changes”* and a *“lack of students wanting to change the school community”* on the Council. They saw a non-representative Student Council as a missed opportunity to make a real difference to life in the school. The overall sense was that the Student Council was a tokenistic nod to student voice and that the *“school doesn’t take us seriously”*. Nothing much changed in the school therefore and the status quo prevailed. Student Councils overall were perceived to have little power or influence leading one child to recommend that Student Council in his school should have more power: *“Studen councill have more pouer”*.

However, to improve matters, children and young people suggested that the role of the Student Council should be explained more to all in the school and that the selection process should be more transparent and overseen to ensure fairness, equity and democratic election processes. They recommended that Student Council members should receive meaningful training before they take up roles and receive ongoing support at different points to ensure that they deliver effectively on their role. It is very clear that children and young



WHAT WOULD HELP SCHOOL DESIGN AN ANTI-BULLYING POLICY/RULES

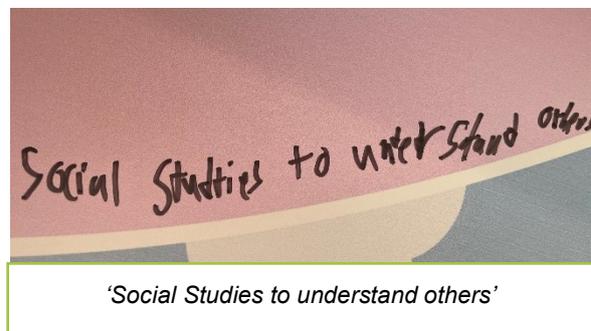
people want to be involved in policy development, decision-making and change. There is a ready-made structure available for schools to do that through the Student Council. The board of management is a further structure, suggested by one young person.

## COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE

**Finding 8: Children and young people (for whom English is an additional language) do not want the responsibility to be the sole language translators and communication medium for curriculum teaching in schools. Nor do they feel it is just or equitable to have such expectations of them.**

The importance of using professional language free from bias and prejudice has been highlighted earlier and illuminated by the children and young people in their experiences of classroom life. A further important issue, although not directly related to bullying, was raised by some children and some young people who were fluent in languages that exceeded the language competence of teachers in the school.

A small number of post-primary students with fluency in European languages were being asked to translate and teach others in the school like *“go through the books and the lessons and explain things”*. Those asked to do so felt that this was an onerous expectation especially as they themselves were only coming to terms with grasping the English language and also had their own classwork and homework to do. They had to catch up themselves afterwards. However, there was very little they could do when they were asked. They felt they could not say ‘No’. The teacher had the power and they did not. Students supporting peers to learn is unquestionably a good way to build collaborative learning communities. However, care must be taken to ensure that those already struggling with learning or getting to grips with the workings of a new language are not inadvertently hampered by virtue of their abilities. Mediating power differentials therefore is a particularly important aspect of professional competence and teacher knowledge to ensure equal treatment of all learners in school. Learners observing a modelling of that competence is instructive for them.



Clearly, many of the findings thus far are inter-related and relevant to matters relating to curriculum (the taught curriculum and the ‘hidden’ curriculum) and therefore to teaching and learning.

We move now to hearing the voices of children and young people in relation to bullying, anti-bullying and the links they made with curriculum, teaching and learning.

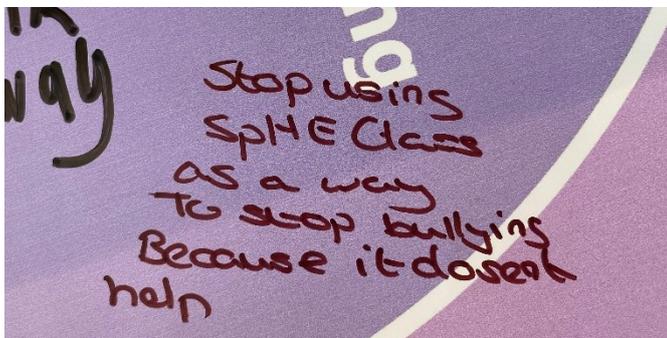
## Key Area: Curriculum (Teaching and Learning)

Two key themes are explored under the wellbeing key area of 'Curriculum' and the findings within each theme are set out. Firstly, we listen to the children and young people in relation to what they say about subjects, programmes and supports (the notion of a connected curriculum) that might help prevent bullying and tackle it when it occurs. Secondly, their voices are heard in relation to how teacher education (both initial and continuing professional development) might address the issues.

### SUBJECTS AND PROGRAMMES: A CONNECTED CURRICULUM WITH SUPPORTS

**Finding 9: Teaching and curriculum need to be up-to-date with the real life of students and to ensure that students are taught about bullying in relation to sexual harassment, identity-bullying cyberbullying, and racism.**

There was a very strong sense from all the children and all the young people of the value of raising awareness about different forms of bullying and teaching primary and post-primary



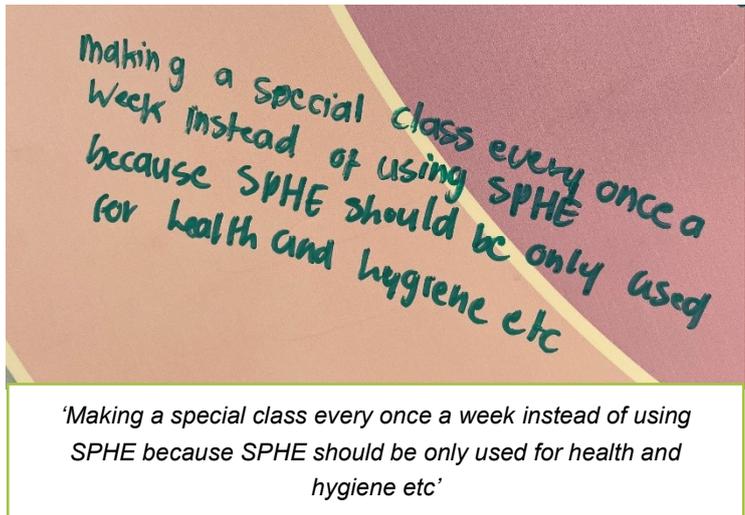
*'Stop using SPHE Class as a way to stop bullying  
Because it dosent help'*

students and parents about strategies to prevent and deal with bullying effectively when it occurs. They referred to the importance of the Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curricula but these areas were meaningless for a large number because of a hesitancy and in some case total avoidance by some teachers in "Discussing sensitive topics-SPHE classes

*downplaying bullying-not fitting in/being normal*". In particular, there were many references to topics such as sexual harassment, sexual identity, homophobic behaviours, sexism, cyberbullying not being taught for reasons students felt were more to the do with teachers lacking confidence in their knowledge to teach those areas or simply uncomfortable themselves with the topics. For one student, this was perceived as "Homophobic/racist teachers skipping subjects that they don't agree with". So, there were clear calls among post-primary students for "Teachers who are comfortable trained in these topics teaching them" and secondly, the need for a complete revamp of the content in the RSE/SPHE programmes (now underway). Current content was seen as "out of date, out of touch, out of date mindset". Teachers and content had to be up-to-date for young people to feel that the very topics that needed to be discussed would be discussed openly and taught effectively so

that everyone would feel equal, enjoy a sense of belonging to the class and above all feel safe: *“De-stigmatise talking about harassment”, “Boys or everyone should be taught not to do sexual harassment rather than victims avoiding it”*. Young people suggested *“Redesign curriculum (sex ed in general) – not science – add social issues (communication – how sex is in society)”* and *“Videos used in sex ed to be more real life scenarios than exaggerated stories”*. They suggested also to *“Use previous instances of bullying/testimonies from those affected as a guideline of identifying bullying. Have this written into the policy”*. Many post primary students also spoke of the need for a comprehensive anti-bullying programme at primary level to prepare pupils for issues that they might face when they transfer to post-primary, for example, the issue of consent and healthy boundaries.

It was clear from some primary school pupils that their teachers are drawing on additional resources to enrich their teaching approaches to anti-bullying. For example, the KiVa programme (developed in the University of Turku, Finland with funding from the Ministry of Education and Culture), a whole school community anti-bullying programme, was mentioned on numerous occasions by a small number of children from the same school. The KiVa resources include activities for parents, teachers and children around prevention, intervention and monitoring of bullying. Surveys to monitor bullying and effectiveness of anti-bullying measures in place are an integral part of the programme.



It was also interesting to note that two children cited a KiVA school as their ideal school in the jigsaw piece activity at the very end of consultation day one: *“KIVA educated in more schools. Bullies are punished. Note to parents”* and every school should have a *“KIVA bully monitor”*.

The outcomes of monitoring undoubtedly provide information that could be used to keep policies updated and relevant; they help to keep the anti-bullying policy, the code of behaviour, the wellbeing policy and the school’s child safeguarding statement connected well to the RSE/SPHE curriculum areas This is an example of connecting policies, connecting curricula, and connecting community.

It is important to point out that a small number of children in special classes spoke about having too many lessons about anti-bullying in their class and school: *“Teachers talk about it every day”* and *“I get tired”*. However, this observation may be related to the additional

safeguards in place in special classes and in special schools in light of the increased vulnerabilities of learners in these settings.

More broadly in the context of curriculum, there were many calls from children and young people across primary and post-primary for school to be a place where some fun would be enjoyed every day. They spoke in very moving terms about how fun lessons and interactive methodologies including group work helped them to enjoy school, to learn enthusiastically, and to feel happy in themselves. Critically, for Traveller and Roma children and young



*'Children understand the rules, teachers understand the rules, but they need to be implicated better'*

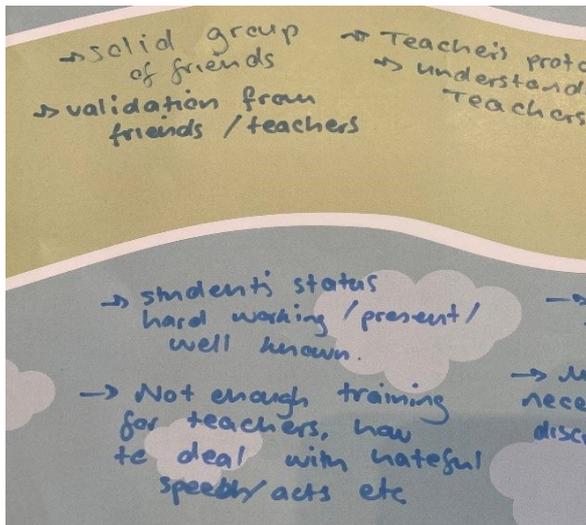
people, as mentioned earlier, an emphasis on high academic expectations of teachers of them was even more important for these children and young people than having fun at school. They suggested also that roles in student groups work should not be left entirely to students to decide; sometimes the same students were picked last for tasks.

A second theme relating to the key wellbeing area of curriculum (teaching & learning) that was highlighted by both primary and post-primary students relates to how teachers in the context of anti-bullying are prepared and supported throughout their careers through courses. Some findings will be presented now relating to teacher education (initial, and continuing professional development).

## TEACHER EDUCATION AND CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**Finding 10: Children and young people suggest that initial teacher education and continuing professional development for all teachers (primary and post-primary) and for SNAs should include modules on sexual harassment, cyberbullying, identity-bullying, homophobia, neurodivergence, mental health awareness and cultural awareness. The psychology of how young people learn should be included for all.**

Throughout the consultations there were references to the importance of teachers and SNAs being up to date with all matters relating to bullying and especially with the impact of such hidden forms of bullying e.g. sexual harassment, identity-bullying, homophobia, racism, cyberbullying and trolling, in order to be able to help children and young people even more.



'Not enough training for teachers, how to deal with hateful speech/acts etc.'

They suggested “*training for teachers, how to deal with hateful speech, acts, etc, use of slurs, discrimination/harassment*”. iScoil students indicated that SNAs and teachers are trained to deal with bullying and that that students had learned a lot about bullying and cyberbullying in iScoil and in their previous schools. Children and young people referred to rapid changes in technologies and how complex cyberbullying is. It is important to them that teachers and SNAs keep continuously learning about how to recognise cyberbullying, strategies to help children and young people tackle it and to keep monitoring the prevalence of cyberbullying through reports submitted within the school. One child commented how “We

*done Zoom meeting and a week talking about cyber-bullying which helped. In class we see videos of people getting bullied animated videos and we talk about preventing it. So if more of these lessons come it will help*”. Teaching anti-bullying using Dhar Mann videos was suggested by children and integrating real-life case studies was particularly helpful to young people. Sometimes it was a question of teacher discernment (a critical area of professional pedagogic practice) about the best way to approach a bullying incident in class or a reported incident and it is only the teacher in the particular context who will know the best way in that particular context drawing on professional experience, intuitive knowledge, and school policies and procedures. There is good practical advice in this primary school child’s recommendation for teacher learning and teacher professional development: “*I think if you tell the teacher and she calls the bully up I think that makes it worse so I think the teachers should just keep an eye out for you and maybe say no names and do it as a classroom and talk about bullying and the bully might think “Ok, Maybe I shouldn’t do that anymore”*”.

Developing teacher knowledge and teacher competence in anti-bullying approaches should therefore involve exploring a wide variety of research-informed approaches, resources and focus also on building teacher confidence and competence in teaching critically important areas such as RSE/SPHE. The centrality of teacher reflectiveness to help interrogate one’s own attitudes and beliefs in order to guard against inadvertent prejudice has been referred to

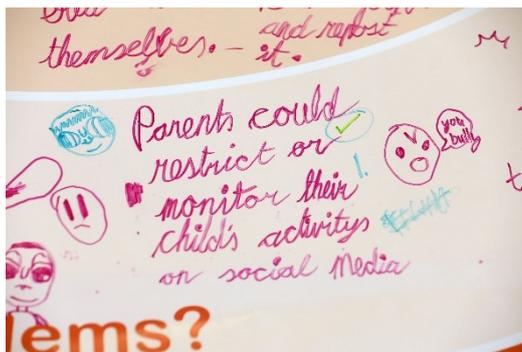
earlier. It has been articulated clearly by many post-primary students and the impact was referred to by some young people as: “not wanting to be in class or concentrate because of teacher attitudes”, “policies on teachers leaving their mood at the door”. Whilst reflective practice is integral to all aspects of teacher education, the children and the young people during the consultations drew attention to the need for all in schools to continuously think about things; this would ensure that any hidden biases or prejudices do not transfer to life in classrooms or to the language or communicative style used by staff (teaching and non-teaching) in schools. This might be explored through continuing professional development and customised for the specific role of the professional in the school e.g. SNA, teacher.



*'Bullying is a key affect of kids being hurt and not getting involved'*  
*'abuse of authority'*  
*'Sexism with all forms – low self esteem'*

Post-primary students recommended mandatory modules in all forms of bullying particularly around sexual harassment, identity-bullying, and cyberbullying. They recommended also that teachers should be familiar with various forms of image-based abuse and harassment that occurs through harmful online communications in order to prevent and stamp out online bullying. This requires teachers to be familiar with the most recent legislation dealing with

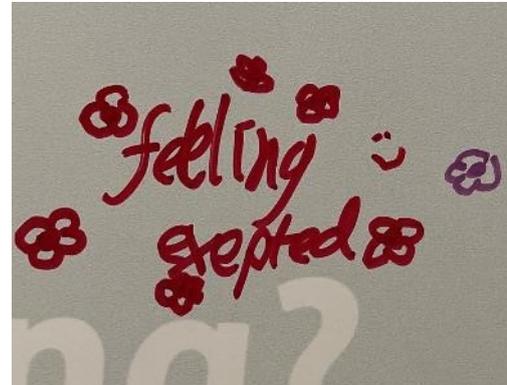
online abuse and specifically with Coco's Law that deals with offences arising from non-consensual distribution of intimate images.<sup>11</sup> Students recommended that a video be created for teachers that takes teachers through, step-by-step, what to do when a student comes to them for help and support when a student has been bullied. They recommended mandatory modules also for all teachers in psychology for example, learning how the young mind develops and grows. They believed this was particularly important for post-primary teachers in all subject areas. Furthermore, they suggested modules in



*'Parents could restrict or monitor their child's activities on social media'*

<sup>11</sup> Coco's Law refers to the Harassment, Harmful Communication and Related Offences Act 2020 named in memory of Nicole Fox (Coco) who (with her mother) raised awareness of the devastating effects of online abuse, harassment and harmful online communications. Webwise has created resources for schools on Coco's Law available at: <https://www.webwise.ie/lockers/cocos-law-lesson/>. The National Youth Council of Ireland have produced an infographic on Coco's Law available at: <https://www.youth.ie/documents/cocos-law/>

developing listening skills of all staff in schools so that there would be a school climate of “believing students when they say they’re being cyberbullied”. They also suggested modules around student voice and how to giving meaningful visible expression to valuing and promoting student voice and democratic decision-making in schools. All these suggestions were offered by the post-primary students in a very positive constructive way.



'feeling exepeted'

A further area that has emerged in the findings relates to the concept of power and how it is mediated, used and sometimes abused. It is a complex topic that is integral to teacher

professional learning and development given the obvious imbalances of power and status in educational settings. Some children and young people referred to “Unnecessary assertion of authority for example a teacher for unexplained/rational reasons” making erroneous assumptions about students or “esooming things” and making professional decisions based on those unchecked assumptions. It leaves students feeling unfairly treated and when this

occurs regularly and consistently for the same student/s, it impacts on student wellbeing, motivation for learning, and on how students perceive teaching and indeed the profession. It was in this context that Traveller and Roma children and young people suggested that all teachers, principals, and school boards of management should undertake cultural awareness programmes and to learn in particular about Traveller and Roma culture and identity.

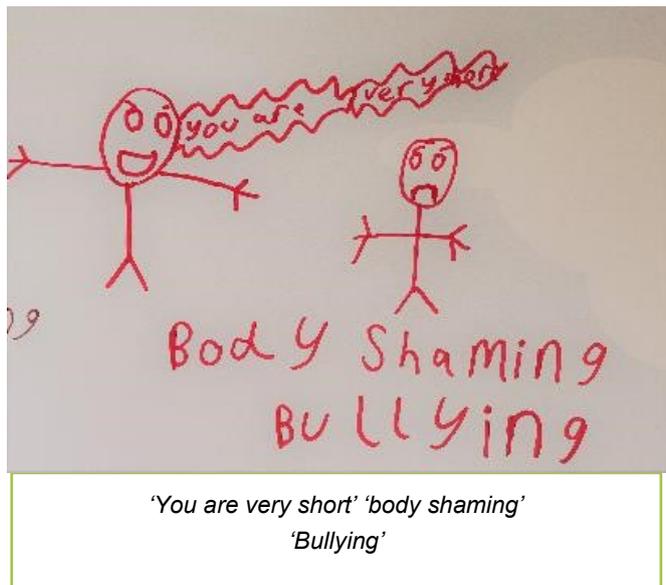


The perfect school – jigsaw exercise

Clearly, some of the matters raised by the children and young people have to do with teachers’ behaviours and attitudes. Teacher professional behaviours, attitudes, and competence are profoundly integrated with the core values in the Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers, namely, care, respect, trust, integrity. The supervision of children and young people is fundamental to their safety and protection from harm in school and to discharging both legal and professional obligations arising from a teacher’s duty of care. When a child says “Teachers must never leave the classroom unsupervised”, it is most likely because they might have observed bullying or experienced bullying or behaviours that cause them to be feel uncomfortable in some way or simply feel not safe. If we take that child’s

warning alongside any aspect of the descriptive narrative of children in this report as to how bullying has impacted them (as cited earlier): “uncomfortable”, “sad”, “anxious, scared, lonely, unimportant, afraid, depressed, confused, insecure”, “Wanting to be alone all the time – not feeling yourself”, “invisible”, “bullying blackmail” “mental health problems” “suicide” “Hurt-feelings hurt, painful (body hurt)”, “Ends up in hospital”, “Lose out on some activities”, “dr

op out of things after school”, “don’t want to go to school”, “Possible scars cuts and bruises”, “bad things to relieve their stress”, “Hiding from bullies-skips, trees” then the gravity of the child’s warning becomes even clearer, more urgent. It is further illuminated within the context of the very rationale for the existence of schools, namely, the development of the potential of each and every learner in a safe, caring, inclusive environment. It is important also to reiterate that throughout the consultation days, across primary and post-primary, there were many references to caring practices, to the professionalism of staff in schools, and to safe, inclusive school environments.



We move now to the policy, procedure space within which duty of care and inclusivity are located. Important findings emerged during the consultations and are presented under the wellbeing key area of Policy and Planning. Findings in this area connect seamlessly with findings already presented in other key areas, and should be read and understood as a connected narrative on what has preceded.

## Key Area: Policy and Planning

One theme is explored under the wellbeing key area of policy and planning, namely, Policy development and dissemination. Findings are set within this theme and should be read alongside other findings, for example the role of the Student Council as both a structural and a relational issue.

### POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND DISSEMINATION

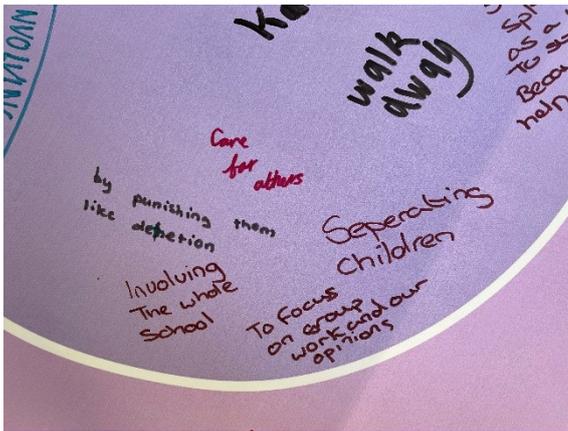
**Finding 11: Children and young people want a meaningful and recognised voice in school policy development. They want the school community to see the connections between the Anti-Bullying Policy and Procedures and other school policies that are directly related to anti-bullying (e.g. Code of Behaviour, Child Safeguarding Statement, Acceptable Use Policy (Digital Technologies), Wellbeing Policy, RSE/SPHE Policy) and with the school’s vision, mission and the Code of Professional Practice for Teachers. Make the policies plain and make them public.**

During the consultations, children and young people made a lot of connections between different policies and procedures in their schools e.g. school discipline (code of behaviour), anti-bullying, child protection, and the acceptable use policy (digital technologies and cyberbullying). Some commented on strong effective policies like the “*LGBTQ+ policy is strong in the school*”. However, overall, they felt that inter-policy connections were not made sufficiently clear to help students understand the link between anti-



bullying, mental health, and doing well overall in school. They also believed that many policies were not enforced and it should be “*mandatory to hear experiences*” of students who have been bullied to assist in design of policies and “*more responsibility for students*” in policy development. They made strong links between strategies for online safety, anti-bullying and the acceptable use (digital technologies) policy as a helpful way to deal with cyberbullying. However, many young people commented that most students saw the various school policies as just another set of rules to be followed and all separate and apart. They wanted to be involved in developing policies but they didn’t know how to go about it. They felt that they could help the principal and the staff in devising strong effective anti-bullying policies e.g. “*Student Discipline Committee*”, “*Social Justice Committee*”, “*Make a video for teachers-how to tackle bullying*”, “*Make a video for students-how it affects people-digital footprint*”, “*Use previous instances of bullying/testimonies from those affected as a*

guideline of identifying bullying. Have this written into the policy”; “An app for your phone to your mom/dad check it you are ok”.

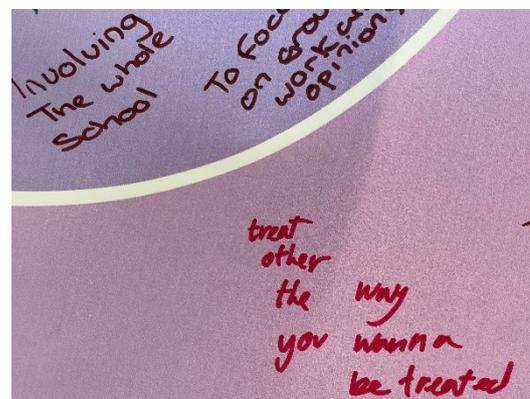


‘Walk away’ ‘Care for others’  
 ‘by punishing them like detention’  
 ‘involving The whole school’  
 ‘Seperating children’  
 ‘To focus on group work and our opinions’

However, children and young people asked for a strong effective structure in school by which to give their views and assistance, a structure that is meaningful and has status in the school. They did not want a tokenistic approach like a once-off survey or a Student Council that is not representative of student voice in its full diversity across the school. Many of the children and young people were not fully aware of the content of the anti-bullying policy or other policies in the school. As mentioned earlier, this was particularly the case with Traveller and Roma children and young people, and children and young people in special classes and special schools: “Policies not known, more awareness needed, start in primary”; “Clarify policy on sexual

harassment with examples big + small – teachers to student, student to student to make it obvious of all types of sexual harassment”. They suggested: “Educating more about slurs and their effects”. The children and young people asked to be taught the policies and pointed to the value of having reminders on display around the school, for example, anti-bullying rules on posters around the school or on desks or homework journals. However, there were others who felt that anti-bullying posters around the school would be of limited value in helping to stamp out bullying.

They mentioned the need for a greater spotlight on teaching the anti-bullying policy and procedures to all students, all parents, and all staff in the whole school community. They suggested the use of plain language. They emphasised the following aspects as the most important in the anti-bullying policy (1) explain what bullying is and how damaging it is (2) give examples of bullying (use up to date, believable case studies) (3) give examples of bullying language (4) explain what to do if you are bullied (by another student or an adult) and name the person/s who is



‘treat others the way you want a be treated’

available to talk to you and listen to you (5) explain what to do if you observe bullying or if you are concerned about another student (6) explain the procedure for reporting policy (to include “An online anonymous way to report bullying”) (7) set out the sanctions and how they will be applied and without favour (8) explain how students are involved in policy development (9) explain how parents are involved and how follow-through on sanctions will be done (10) explain how the policy will be kept up to date and how students will be involved in review processes.

They spoke about tackling bullying through making sure that all students, staff, parents and anyone connected to the school knew exactly what was in each policy and how all the policies were linked and inter-dependent and how they focused on keeping students safe and helping them to learn well in an inclusive learning space. The unintended consequences of a down-town-for-lunch policy were cited earlier. Having policies on the school website was not a guarantee that anyone read them or understood them. Some post-primary students stated that “policies are there but not enforced” and the fear around reporting of bullying was very real for most young people in particular: “Anonymous reporting methods for students-fear of escalation-you end being a ‘snitch’ or ‘rat’ that sticks with you. You’re a bystander then and that makes you feel bad but also afraid to report”.

The need for a variety of ways to report bullying was mentioned by both primary and post-primary students. The fear of reprisal was strongly emphasised by both sectors and hence the call for an anonymous reporting mechanism to be available in all schools, primary and post-primary. The children and young people felt that there was a lot work to be done on encouraging children and young people to be courageous and to report bullying if they are a bystander to any bullying behaviours: “Students ignore someone who they know is being bullied, should be taught to help students being bullied”. Friends and friendship as mentioned earlier are very important to children and young people, and having each other backs: “Ask teacher to keep an eye out – tell them if the kid doesn’t want to talk about it their friend should stand up for them”. However, the fear of contributing to an escalation of the bullying or being called a snitch or rat was very real for many children and many young people.

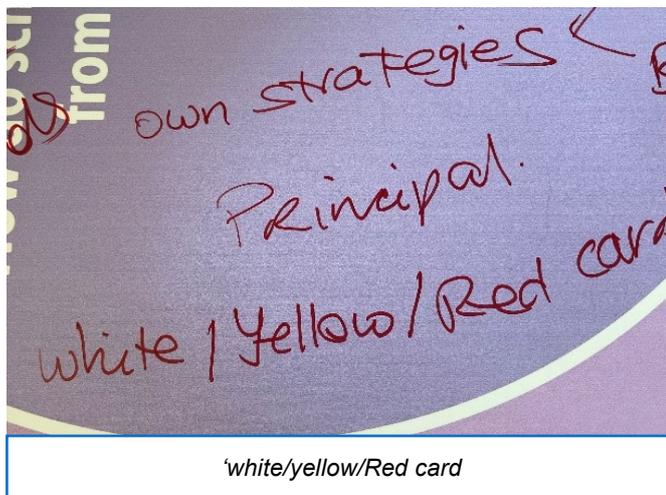
Some iScoil students felt that the main reasons for not telling someone in school about bullying was that it would make things worse or no one would believe them or for one iScoil student, it was a case of “I was too scared to tell anyone”.



“Proper punishment for bullies that make them genuinely regret and reflect on their actions”

In terms of sanctions, there were strong views that sanctions for bullying were not sufficiently harsh for bullying that was taking place: *“Teacher should do a much harsher punishment becuz bullies think it is ‘cool’ if they are in trouble”*. A young person in iScoil asked *“for punishment to go above a simple detention and for the punishment to be as severe as the bullying carried out.”*

The children and young people indicated that sanctions were not enforced in many cases. Leaving the mode of punishment to parents, in their view, was neither fair nor equal as



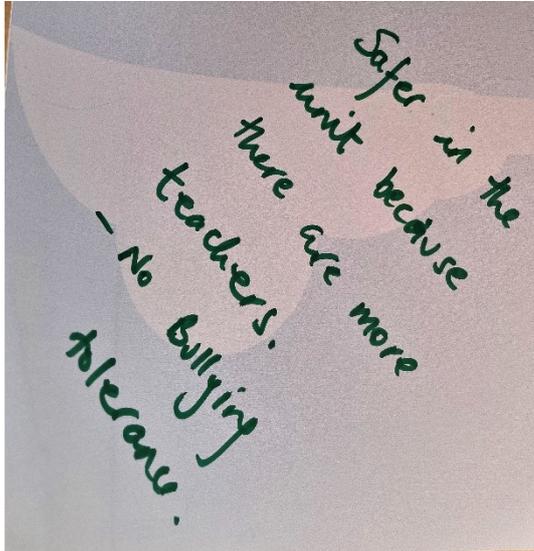
mentioned in an earlier point.

*“Parents should give better punishment”* was echoed many times by the participants. They felt the follow-through by parents was not monitored. Many felt also that suspensions were not deterring or dealing effectively with bullies who persisted in bullying irrespective of the suspensions they received. They also indicated that *“Good-bad’ behaviour charts DO NOT WORK!”*<sup>12</sup> Many children (particularly children in special classes and special schools)

referred to the white-yellow-red traffic card system as a reasonably effective way to teach children about acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. A white card is issued as a preliminary warning, a yellow card is a more severe warning and a red card involves the teacher, the child, the parent. However, some children felt that over-issuing of white cards was a regular occurrence for reasons not sufficiently clear to the children and only served to undermine the overall impact of the reprimand system. Some children emphasised the importance of rewards for good behaviour as a way of incentivising children to behave well for example fun things to do or having a pop-up McDonalds every so often (but to include healthy food also in its offerings). Whilst restorative approaches (e.g. the six questions)<sup>13</sup> are used in many schools in dealing with bullying, young people at the consultations advised: *“Tell schools not to use restorative questions as it makes students nervous”*; *“annoying questions that drive everyone mad”*.

<sup>12</sup> Underline and uppercase as presented by the child.

<sup>13</sup> (i) What happened? (ii) What were you thinking of at the time? (iii) What have you thought about since? (iv) Who has been affected by what you have done? (v) In what way have they been affected? (vi) What do you think you need to do to make things right?



'Safer in the unit because there are more teachers – No Bullying tolerance'

It is important to note that two children who had transferred from a mainstream school to a special school indicated at the consultations that they had done this through strategic misbehaving which led ultimately to their expulsion from the mainstream school. They spoke about being bullied and unhappy and that their expulsion was the pathway for them to find a route into a special school where they felt safer. Children and young people who had transferred from mainstream to special schools spoke about "a lot more bullying in mainstream school" and feeling happy in their new school.

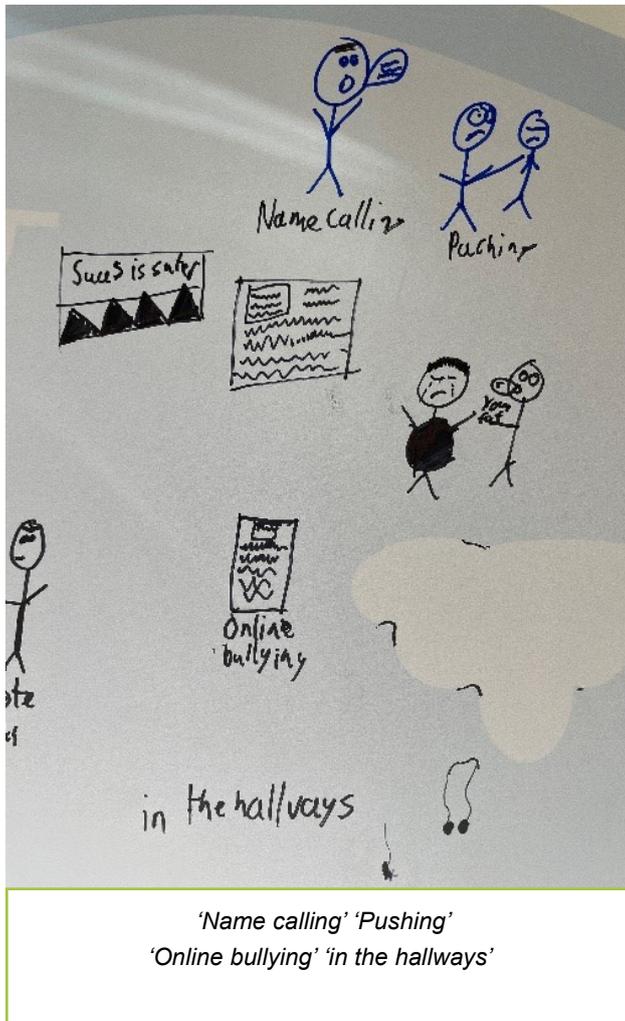
It is important to highlight also that children and young people felt a lot of anxiety when asked for 'proof' of bullying especially when it relates to cyberbullying: "hard to punish/prove

an act has been committed without help of professionals". They did recognise that without some evidence that it is difficult to deal with a bullying complaint. However, teacher vigilance can often assist a teacher to uncover sound evidence or 'proof' of bullying. Striking the balance between the requirements around 'proof' and having a professional intuitive 'hunch' about the matter and believing the child is not an easy task; it is however, critical not alone for the child being bullied but also for the child who is doing the bullying. Some children and young people consulted spoke earlier about sometimes not being listened to in school, not being believed: "Teachers who refuse to believe/are dismissive". The starting point must surely be mutual respect, slow, active, patient listening to all sides, and then a fair, full and prompt investigation where required with follow-through and feedback to those involved. Equity and fairness are what the children and young people are seeking throughout. They are also seeking reasonable feedback if there is reporting (through the specified channels) of unacceptable adult behaviours in school that make them feel uncomfortable; they spoke about wanting to know if there



'Make sure school policies and material is up to date'

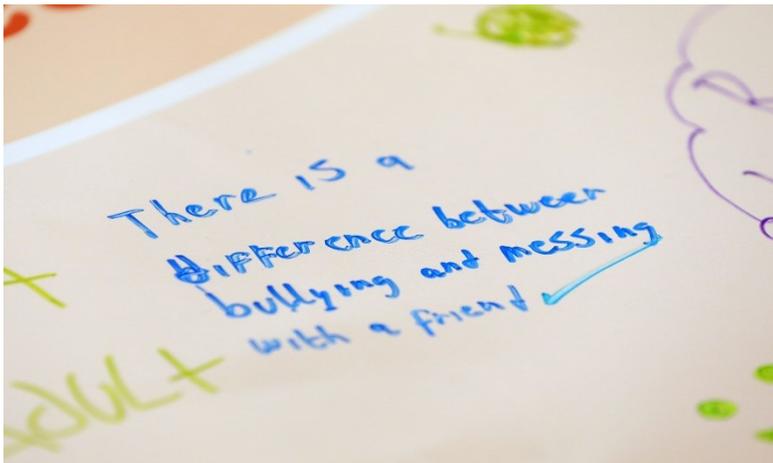
are consequences for adults who breach behavioural rules or codes of professional practice and the importance of consequences.



The children and young people strongly recommended a system to monitor schools to ensure that policies were being implemented fairly and fully and to ensure that students were involved in meaningful ways in policy development. They suggested a new inspection system around anti-bullying policies and procedures like the child protection and safeguarding inspection system. Inspectors would visit schools and talk to students, parents, and teachers. Schools would be required to provide evidence of consultation with students, parents, the types of bullying reported, how they dealt with it, the types of sanctions applied and “a register of all bullying incidents, sanctions, and how things work out after that”. They suggested that the register should also include testimonies of satisfaction (with how their bullying reports were dealt with) from students, and there should be provision also for reporting about teacher behaviours that made students feel uncomfortable or unsafe. The suggested new anti-bullying inspection system would also help the school to show how all their policies are connected and how it links with the school’s own mission statement, vision and school climate.

Throughout the consultations, there were suggestions from the children and young people in relation to policy development and inclusion of children with additional needs. Many asked that there would more effective sanctions for misbehaviours of children with additional needs so that everyone could feel treated fairly. The commented as follows: “*Special children getting away with things -hot chocolate – others not understanding and seeing it as an injustice*”; “*let’s go for a walk*”; “*People with additional needs should be treated the same e.g. consequences for actions but supported too*”. Some suggested also that modules on working with children who presented with challenging behaviours should be part of professional development for all teachers and SNAs: “*Teacher programmes/courses to better handle bullying-community violence-better able to understand and work with children with additional needs*”

Finally, it is important note to inform policy development that many post primary students commented on the recurring bullying that seems to be occurring and causing considerable upset and pain for young people e.g. persistent name-calling, slurs, threats, nasty comments behind your back, *“people poking fun at you thinking its not big enough to bring to teacher but still hurting you”*, spreading rumours, *“A group of people targeting you while you walk alone from school”*. In particular, many young people spoke about the trauma of having

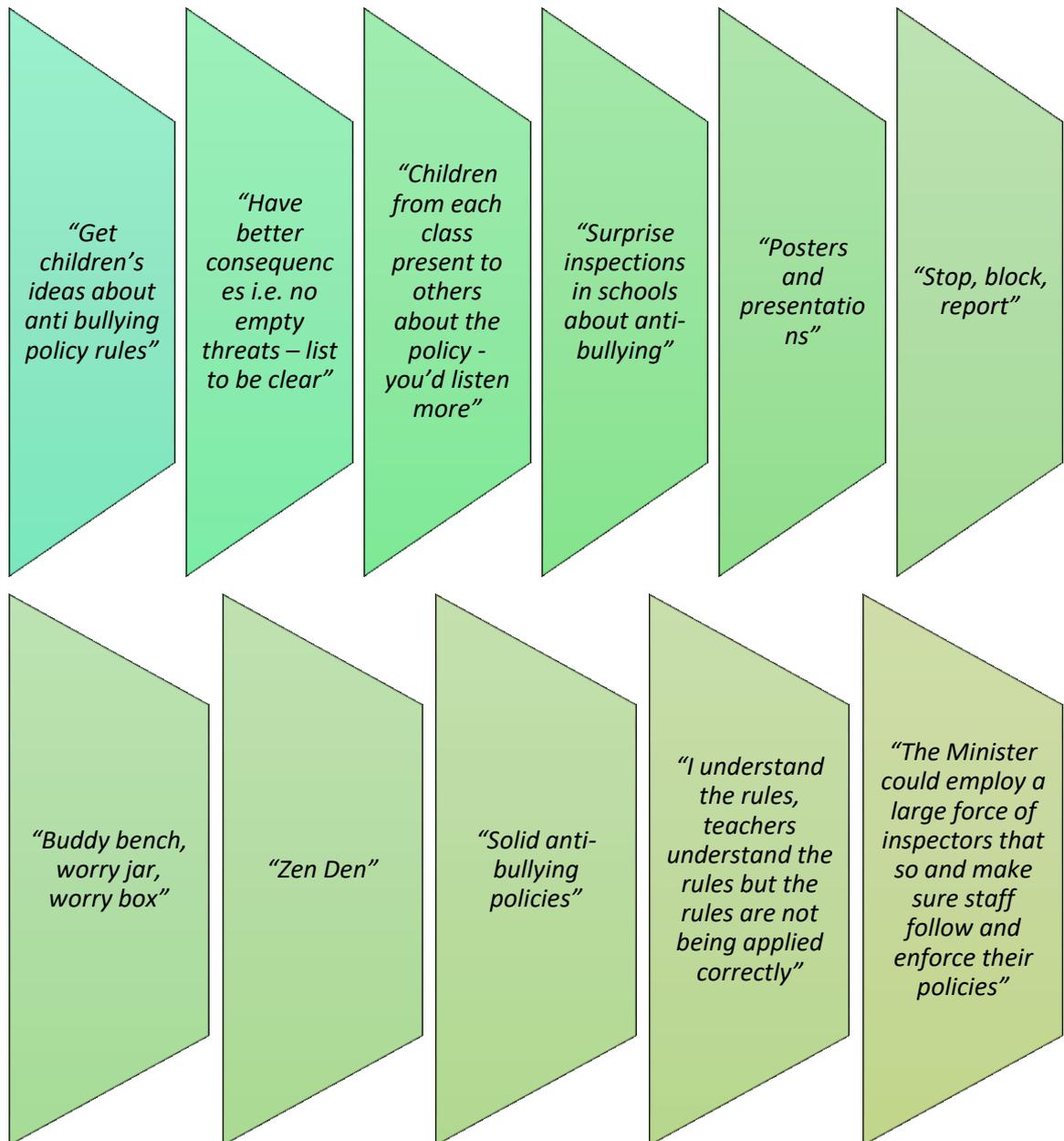


*‘There is a difference between bullying and messing with a friend’*

*“nude images being shared with people don’t know and might never know”, “offensive texts and photos” and “fear of knowing everyone has seen something you feel embarrassed of/not knowing what will happen next”*. Young people indicated that they had learned a lot about online safety like learning how to screen-shot, place screen filters, keep copies of texts, and *“not replying”*.

Children and young people seemed to have good knowledge of safe online behaviours but recognised also the dangers that were out of their control e.g. filtering platforms. Sexism and sexual harassment-related issues emerged as a very significant area of concern for a number of post-primary students in the consultations. They had experienced bullying in these areas.

So, in summary, to inform policy planning and implementation around anti-bullying, here are some reminders from the children and the young people:



To conclude this section on findings, a short summary is provided:

Eleven key findings emerged from the consultations with primary pupils on consultation day one and with post-primary students on consultation day two. The findings (all inter-related and inter-connected) were presented within eleven themes and set within an existing

framework in education, namely the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* comprising four key areas: Culture and Environment, Relationships and Partnerships, Curriculum (Teaching & Learning), and Policy and Planning. In linking anti-bullying to wellbeing therefore, it is hoped that understandings around anti-bullying are connected tightly to understandings around learner wellbeing and achievement of potential in school. It is also hoped that the approach adopted gives a strong overall coherence to the report and a sense of a fluent, integrated narrative on what the children and young people articulated and shared over the course of the consultation days.

### A Reminder of the Overall Conceptual Frame for the Presentation of Findings

#### The Wellbeing Policy – four overarching Key Areas and Findings within each Key Area

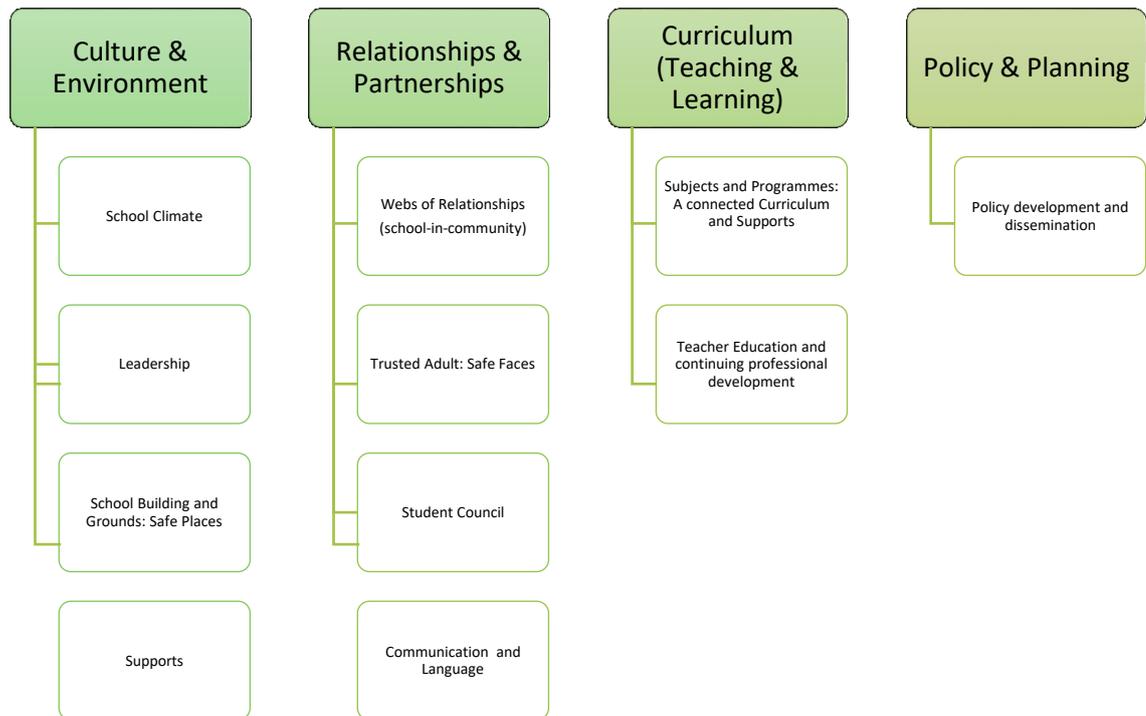


Figure 5: Reminder of Overall Conceptual Framework for Presentation of Findings

## Summary Listing of Findings

### Wellbeing Key Area: Culture and Environment

#### **Finding 1: School Climate**

When children and young people felt listened to and valued by their teachers, it helped to prevent feelings of exclusion and isolation.

#### **Finding 2: Leadership**

School leadership has power to make things better and more equal for all students.

#### **Finding 3: School Buildings and Grounds: Safe Places**

All children and all young people want to have access to safe, quiet places in school.

#### **Finding 4: Supports**

All children and young people need a variety of supports to help them deal with bullying.

### Wellbeing Key Area: Relationships and Partnerships

#### **Finding 5: Webs of Relationships (School-in-Community)**

Children and young people want to see and experience visible expressions of respect, and trust and be treated fairly in school. They value school-community relationships.

#### **Finding 6: Trusted Adult: Safe Faces**

Having at least one trusted adult in school is a must for all children and all young people in school. The class teacher is especially important for primary school children and the career guidance counsellor for post-primary students. Privacy and confidentiality are very important to all children and all young people.

#### **Finding 7: Student Council**

Children and young people want meaningful work to do on the Student Council that is representative of all students. They view the Student Council as an important forum for working on school policies and for expressing their views on matters that directly affect them in school. It is a good space for listening

#### **Finding 8: Communication and Language**

Children and young people (for whom English is an additional language) do not want the responsibility to be the sole language translators and communication medium for curriculum teaching in schools. Nor do they feel it is just or equitable to have such expectations of them.

### **Wellbeing Key Area: Curriculum (Teaching & Learning)**

#### **Finding 9: Subjects and Programmes: A connected Curriculum and Supports**

Teaching and curriculum need to be up-to-date with the real life of students and to ensure that students are taught about bullying in relation to sexual harassment, identity-bullying, cyberbullying, and racism.

#### **Finding 10: Teacher education and continuing professional development**

Children and young people suggest that initial teacher education and continuing professional development for all teachers (primary and post-primary) and for SNAs should include modules on sexual harassment, cyberbullying, identity-bullying, homophobia, mental health awareness and cultural awareness. The psychology of how young people learn should be included for all.

### **Wellbeing Key Area: Policy & Planning**

#### **Finding 11: Policy development and dissemination**

Children and young people want a meaningful and recognised voice in school policy development. They want the school community to see the connections between the Anti-Bullying Policy and Procedures and other school policies that are directly related to anti-bullying (e.g. Code of Behaviour, Child Safeguarding Statement, Acceptable Use Policy (Digital Technologies), Wellbeing Policy, RSE/SPHE Policy) with the school's vision, mission and the Code of Professional Practice for Teachers. Make the policies plain and make them public.

## Implications

A number of implications arise from the findings. They relate to a broad spectrum of areas directly relevant to schools and to education broadly including teacher education, the regulation of the profession, and curriculum development. As outlined at the outset of this report, anti-bullying is a whole education matter. It is also a whole society matter. There are clear messages for schools, families, communities, and many sectors of government, in what the children and young people have raised. Those messages and the implications within are intertwined throughout this report and in particular, they are set out clearly in the findings section.

This report has been framed by the overarching national participatory framework (the Lundy model) under the four domains of space, audience, voice, and influence, and the rights of the child to express views and to have them listened to in meaningful ways. The findings were presented under 'voice' and the consultative 'space' together with the 'audience' (present and intended) described. It is now timely to address briefly the final domain, 'influence', to ensure that the voices in the report are given due weight in the revisions to the Action Plan on Bullying and the Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools.

## Influence

The understanding of all involved in the consultation is that the voices and viewpoints expressed throughout the consultations will influence revision processes and inform meaningful change. All children and young people were reassured of this in the email invitation that were sent to all primary schools and to youth organisations nationwide last April. They were further reassured throughout the consultation days. Article 12 of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, as mentioned earlier, encapsulates not only the right of the child to express views but also the right to have those views given due weight. The next step ahead is to ensure that those views are taken on board and used meaningfully to inform the planned revisions to the Action Plan on Bullying and Anti-Bullying Procedures.

Towards the end of the consultation days (Day 1: Primary, Day 2: Post-Primary), the children and young people set out their requests to the Minister for Education in the context of anti-bullying, the Action Plan on Bullying and the Anti-Bullying Procedures. Here are their voices verbatim:

### What do you want to tell the Minister?

<b>The Voices of Primary Pupils:</b>	
<i>Dogs in schools</i>	<i>An adult that can talk to you about anything</i>
<i>Cute puppy trust me</i>	<i>Fish tanks to help calm you</i>
<i>At the start of the year, bring your pet (especially dogs) to school</i>	<i>Playground – climbing frame – buddy bench – basketball court – yard activities</i>
<i>Therapists in schools (everyone)</i>	<i>Horse-riding – feel better</i>
<i>McDonalds (salads)</i>	<i>Anti-Bullying – a poster with the rules</i>
<i>A quiet room</i>	<i>A poem about manners and bullying</i>
<i>Room for children with disabilities with someone who can talk and chat with them</i>	<i>Room for children with disabilities with someone who can talk and chat with them</i>
<i>Have a dog that can go to difrent classes – for depression</i>	<i>Every school have a ‘zen den’ multisensory room</i>
<i>On your desk, rules about bullying + it’s not ok</i>	<i>Bearbags – rocking chairs</i>
<i>Squish mellow teddies – chill out tents</i>	<i>2 – 4 teachers on yard for break</i>
<i>All the childrens voices heard about bullying</i>	<i>Skipping, football, bench in yard</i>
<i>Seomra machra – bullying room – being bad room</i>	<i>Extra points for the yard at the end of the week</i>
<i>No homework</i>	<i>SNA</i>
<i>Relax room – a happy room – nothingness room</i>	<i>Scrap paper to colour and draw –free drawing copy</i>
<i>Bike rails, rewards, punishments</i>	<i>Fairy garden – zen den</i>
<i>Brain breaks – brain calm breaks</i>	<i>Baking – bakery every Friday</i>
<i>Meditation every day to help calm everyone down</i>	<i>Show anti-bullying programmes on TV to everyone</i>
<i>Give every student tazer</i>	<i>More teachers in the yard</i>

<i>Studen cansull have more pour</i>	<i>Cameras</i>
<i>Time out room – calm down room- reading room – comfy chairs – libary and maybe they like reading</i>	

### What do you want the Minister to do?

<b>The Voices of Post-Primary Students:</b>	
<i>Get response out to students if they contact the Minister's Office</i>	<i>Every primary school should have a student council</i>
<i>Surprise inspections in schools</i>	<i>It's a big issue should be its own subject</i>
<i>Insist on compliance</i>	<i>Reeducate teachers</i>
<i>Mandatory listing of child protection policy</i>	<i>More student involvement in BOM meetings especially those regarding school polices</i>
<i>They need to listen more (Teachers)</i>	<i>Videos used in sex ed to be more real life scenarios – than exaggerated stories</i>
<i>Tell schools not to use restorative questions as it makes students nervous</i>	<i>Homophobic/racist teachers skipping subjects that they don't agree with</i>
<i>Set up an education plan for teachers – a day's training to teach them to tackle all bullying</i>	<i>Have more educational workshops for students but also for adults – learn about each topic but also racism</i>
<i>Have more procedures to follow for bullying – e.g. parent and student conferences</i>	<i>It's not ok (safe) to tell- teachers should be vigilant</i>
<i>For the environment have white board tables</i>	<i>Teachers who are comfortable trained in these topics teaching them</i>
<i>Consequences should be standardised across schools regardless of the offenders backgrounds. Schools can slightly amend this depending on the situation</i>	<i>Redesign curriculum (sex ed in general)-not science-add social issues (communication-how sex is in society)</i>
<i>Training for teachers to help them identify bullying as sometimes someone who is being bullied isn't comfortable to come forward</i>	<i>Setting national guidelines for all schools for all types of bullying – schools cant opt out. Links between Dept of Health and Dept of Ed</i>
<i>Training for students for what to do if they or their friends are being bullied and who in the school they can go to</i>	<i>Boys or everyone should be taught not to do sexual harassment rather than victims avoiding it</i>
<i>Make a video for teachers – how to tackle bullying</i>	<i>Make a video for students- how it affects people – digital footprint</i>
<i>Young people should have lines of communication with the minister or her office - if they contact the office, they should get a response</i>	<i>Clarify policy on sexual harassment with examples big + small – teachers to student, student to student to make it obvious of all types of sexual harassment</i>
<i>Use previous instances of bullying/testimonies from those affected as a guideline of identifying bullying. Have this written into the policy</i>	

## What do you want the Minister to do?

### The Voices of Students attending iScoil:

*I think I would ask the minister to bring 'programmes' into schools about the effects bullying can have on people especially young people. I have seen anti bullying programmes but not any about the effects of bullying. Also for these to include that it is ok to talk to someone.*

*I would ask for all schools to have a zero tolerance policy and for punishment to go above a simple detention and for the punishment to be as severe as the bullying carried out.*

*I would ask for schools to be more understanding of a students mental health and to really take the students opinion in to concentration.*

*Programs on anit bullying, mindfulness classes, cultural differences explored personality differences etc. Teachers to be more approachable, team building in the class, help pupils identify what is bullying and how they can report it. Maybe a card in the class room a child can write on to inform the teacher incase they find it harder to talk.*

*We need more than just mainstream school, the thing is there are so many kids and yes most of them learn the same way but a lot of us don't. Making mainstream school the only thing that's considered "normal" for kids is discriminative towards the rest of us. I did a course on Discrimination in iScoil - it taught me so much. Anyway, I think the minister needs to give kids what they need. They need more iScoils and they need it to be an option when you start to struggle, not when you're at the end of the road in school and you feel like the only person will all these problems and like a total loser. iScoil was so amazing. I was lonely at times, but couldn't that be fixed with a blended learning option so kids freaking out like me can be with peers part time and continue learning online too? It just worked so well. I can still remember the stuff I learned in iscoil but i hardly remember anything I learned in mainstream school - i was too stressed out from not fitting in.*

An important commitment was made to the children and to the young people to listen to their voice as captured in this report and to provide feedback to them (that is full, fast, friendly, followed-up, in line with the four 'Fs' Lundy framework) on how their voice has influenced improvements to the Action Plan on Bullying and Anti-Bullying Procedures.

At times during the consultations, there were silent contributions from the children and young people. Undoubtedly, each focus group consultation was busy and intense and taking a rest was perfectly acceptable and indeed encouraged. 'Time out' was available to each child and each young person at any time and the right to withdraw in line with the ethical procedures of the consultations and respect for voice. Quiet moments and silent moments of contribution were made over the course of the two days. They were profoundly moving, illuminating moments: teachable moments for all present and all listening. The spoken, the written, the drawn, the gaps and the silences are all in this report to provide a full voice.

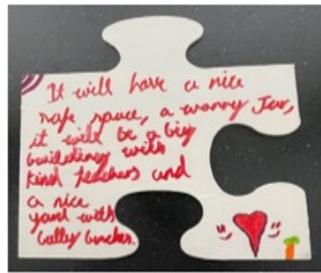
## Closing Thoughts

The consultation processes were designed to elicit the viewpoints and perspectives of children and young people in relation to anti-bullying and school policies and procedures. This report has set out those viewpoints and perspectives and allowed the direct quotations from the children and young people to do the talking. Clearly, there are many good things happening in schools that help prevent bullying and tackle it when it occurs. Those good practices and approaches need to be disseminated. However, our attention has also been drawn to a number of issues that require urgent and important attention. Why? Because they are affecting the wellbeing of children and young people in our schools. They are also affecting their capacities to feel included, to feel respected, and to feel safe from harm. The best chance is therefore not being given to all children and young people to achieve their full potential. These matters are matters of serious concern and are the business of all who care about education and human potential. Otherwise, as one child put it: *“bullying will go on and on”*. The blue-sky thinking of the children and young people during the consultation days, and their vitality, enthusiasm and desire to impact change and improvement was palpable throughout. You could see it. You could feel it. The final word is left, without any hesitation, to those children and young people.

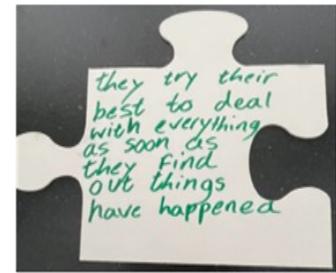
## The Final Word



a kind, small school



It will have a nice safe space, a worry jar, it will be a big building with kind teachers and a nice yard with lolly benches



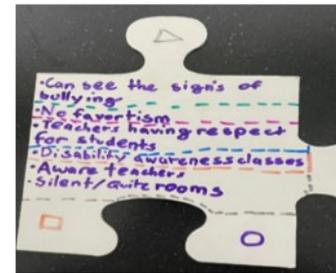
they try their best to deal with everything as soon as they find out things have happened



Good teachers Good friends



School dog



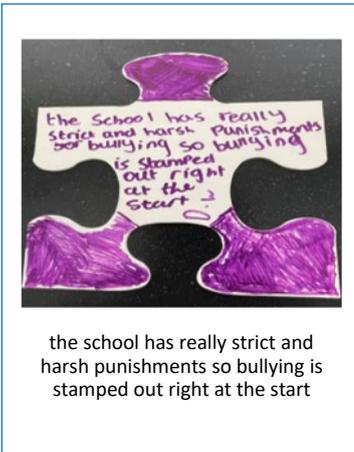
Can see the signs of bullying . No favoritism

Teachers having respect for students

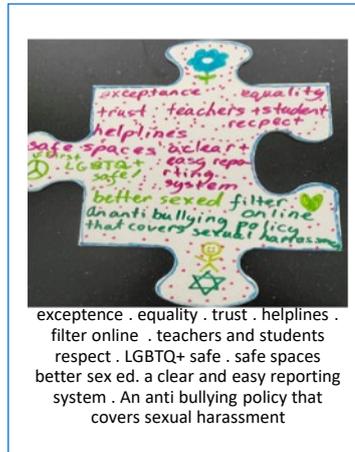
Disability awareness classes . Aware teachers

Silent/quiet rooms

How do children and young people envision their ideal school? [The Jigsaw Exercise]



the school has really strict and harsh punishments so bullying is stamped out right at the start



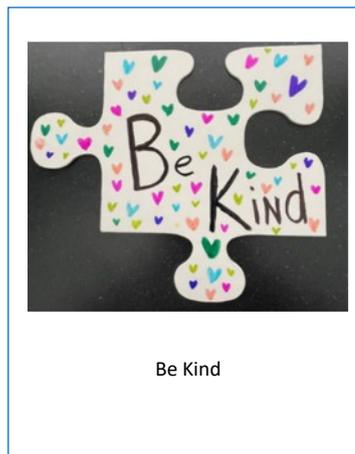
acceptance . equality . trust . helpline . respect . teachers and student . filter online . LGBTQ+ safe . safe spaces . clear + easy reporting system . better sex ed . an anti bullying policy that covers sexual harassment



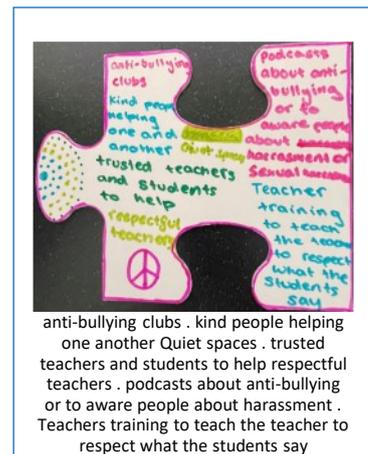
Better Bullying Policies . Social Sex ED . Fines for teachers who breach code of conduct



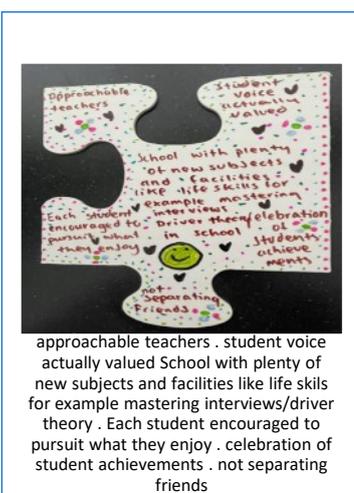
more Student voice



Be Kind



anti-bullying clubs . kind people helping one another . trusted teachers and students to help respectful teachers . podcasts about anti-bullying or to aware people about harassment . Teacher training to teach the teacher to respect what the students say



approachable teachers . student voice actually valued . School with plenty of new subjects and facilities like life skills for example mastering interviews/driver theory . Each student encouraged to pursue what they enjoy . celebration of student achievements . not separating friends



Business



Be Kind

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## References

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## Abbreviations

ADHD	Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
DCEDIY	Department of Children Equality Disability Integration and Youth
DE	Department of Education
LGBTQI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex
RSE	Relationships and Sexuality Education
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
SPHE	Social Personal and Health Education
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
YAG	Youth Advisory Group



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# Appendix 1: Programme for Children on Day 1 (Primary)

## **Name of Consultation: Involving Student Voice in Anti-Bullying Policy**

Methodology primary-level consultation, 11<sup>th</sup> May 2022 [Full-day Consultations]

The methodology was also used by the Inspectorate with the focus group (primary school children) in the July Summer Programme albeit with a reduced number of activities in light of shorter time.

### **Anti-bullying Consultations**

#### **Purpose**

The Department of Education want to consult with children and young people to get their views on the **anti-bullying action plan** 2013 and how to improve it.

The Department of Education want to consult with children and young people to get their views on **Anti-Bullying Procedures** for schools. It is intended that the anti-bullying procedures will be updated with user friendly sections for parents, students, and school staff. The review of the procedures will consider how best to ensure meaningful student input into a school's anti-bullying procedures.

#### **11:30 Welcome and introduction**

- Housekeeping (child safeguarding, ground rules, etc.)
- Short presentation from Department of Education
- Ice-breakers – jolly ranchers' game, hoola-hoop game, line ups

#### **11:50 Lifeline exercise**

**(20 min)**

The aim of this activity is to allow young people think individually about their journey in school and what has helped them to feel safe. Each young person/child receives an A3 graphically designed lifeline with an image of a river on it. Each participant completes their lifeline individually. Participants are welcome to share (but do not have to) their lifeline with the rest of the group.

- What helps children feel safe from bullying in school? (on the river)
- What stops you feeling safe from bullying in school? (on the clouds)

**12:10 World café examining “spaces” where bullying happens  
(50 min with lunch in middle)**

Each placemat (5ft x 5ft) will represent a different space, place or setting: 1) in school, 2) outside of school (including transport), 3) online

The aim of this activity is to go deeper into the issues and supports needed in each space/setting where bullying happens. In the world café format, every group gets the opportunity to add their views to each placemat.

Pick one space for discussion in pilot (prob in school will be most straightforward)

- Placemat Questions:
  - 1) What are the problems?
  - 2) What happens to a person as a result of these problems?
  - 3) What would help fix these problems?
  
- Moves:
  - Round one – 15 min
  - Round two – 10 min
  - Round three – 10 min
- Back to original table to stick dot Q3 only.

**13:00 LUNCH**

**13:30 Body Map Exercise (5ft x 5ft body maps) (40 min)**

This activity aims to gain insight into what policies and procedures or SCHOOL RULES are working in schools and what more could be introduced to help. The scenario for the primary school consultation is: “Imagine a new student is starting in your school and you’ve been put in charge of welcoming them and making them aware of all the school rules and what happens when they bully or are bullied”

- 1) Think about your bullying policy/your school in general – what kind of rules are in your school (just discussion)
- 2) What happens when someone is bullied in your school? (Inside the body)
- 3) What would you improve in this school to help with bullying? (Outside the body) (i.e., procedures)
- 4) What do you want to tell the Minister to do?
- 5) What would help your school design an anti-bullying policy/rules?

**14:10 Closing exercise**

**(15 min)**

“When you think of a school that’s really good at tackling and preventing bullying, what does it look like?”

- Ask for sample responses
- Allow time for children to answer and decorate their jigsaw pieces

**14:30 Evaluation and close of consultation**

- *Facilitator debrief – safeguarding check-in*

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## Appendix 2: Programme for Young People on Day 2 (Post-Primary)

**Name of Consultation: Involving Student Voice in Anti-Bullying Policy**

**Methodology Second-level consultation on Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> May [Full-day Consultation]**

The methodology was also used by the Inspectorate with the focus groups (post-primary students) in the July Summer Programme albeit with a reduced number of activities in light of shorter time.

**Anti-bullying Consultations:**

### **Purpose**

The Department of Education want to consult with children and young people to get their views on the **anti-bullying action plan** 2013 and how to improve it.

The Department of Education want to consult with children and young people to get their views on **Anti-Bullying Procedures** for schools. It is intended that the anti-bullying procedures will be updated with user friendly sections for parents, students, and school staff. The review of the procedures will consider how best to ensure meaningful student input into a school's anti-bullying procedures.

### **11:30 Welcome and introduction**

- Welcome and outline of purpose
- Housekeeping (child safeguarding, ground rules, etc.)
- Ice-breakers
- Input from DE
- Split young people into six groups and move to round tables

### **12:00 Lifeline exercise**

**(30 min)**

The aim of this activity is to allow young people think individually about their journey in school and what has helped them to feel safe. Each young person/child receives an A3 graphically designed lifeline with an image of a river on it. Each participant completes their lifeline individually. Participants are welcome to share (but do not have to) their lifeline with the rest of the group.

- What helps children and young people feel safe in school? (riverbanks)
- What are the barriers to feeling safe in school? (On the river)

**12:30 World café examining “spaces” where bullying happens  
(60 min with lunch in middle)**

Each placemat will represent a different space, place or setting: 1) in school (including bathrooms/dressing rooms and people in positions of power), 2) outside of school (including transport), 3) online.

The aim of this activity is to go deeper into the issues and supports needed in each space, place, setting where bullying happens. In the world café format, every group gets the opportunity to add their views to each placemat. Placemat Questions:

- 1) What are the issues with this topic?
  - 2) What are the consequences of these issues?
  - 3) What supports would help fix these issues?
- 3 rounds, timed as follows:
    - Round one - 20 min
    - Round two -15 min

**13:10 LUNCH**

**13:40 World Café – Part II**

- Round three -15 min
- Prioritization and voting (sticky dot) (10 min)

**14:05 Movement Break (15 min)**

**14:20 Body Map Exercise (40 min)**

This activity aims to gain insight into what policies and procedures are working in schools and what more could be introduced to help. We will develop different scenarios (potentially on the existing themes being examined in the updated action plan: identity-based bullying, cyber-bullying, sexual harassment, anti-racism) and ask the groups to discuss these and answer the following questions:

- 1) Think about your bullying policy/your school in general (just discussion)
- 2) What supports already exist for this young person in your school? (Inside the body)

3) What would you add in that's not happening in your school? (Outside the body) (i.e. procedures)

4) What could the Minister do to tackle and prevent bullying? (i.e., Improvements to action plan) < *record views on separate sheet*>

5) How can students help prevent and tackle bullying in their school? (i.e. student involvement in design and implementation) < *record views on separate sheet*>

**15:00 Movement/ comfort break**

**(10 min)**

**15:10 Closing exercise**

"When you think of a school that's really good at tackling and preventing bullying, what does it look like?"

- Each participant gets a jigsaw piece to answer the above question
- The pieces fit together in nice visual

**15:20 Close of Consultation**

- Closing comments
- Evaluation link
- Restate what will happen the views and ideas collected today

**15:40 Facilitator debrief – safeguarding check-in**