Meeting 2 of the Steering Committee to review the Action Plan on Bullying 2013 Minutes

Tuesday 22nd March 2022, Time 10.30 am

WebEx

Attendees:

Adam Lambe, Deputy President, Irish Second-Level Students' Union
Aileen Hickie, CEO, Parentline
Bridget Wilson, Representative from Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, and Youth.
Deirdre Shanley, Assistant Secretary, Schools Division, Department of Education.
Prof. James O'Higgins Norman, Director, UNESCO Chair on Tackling Bullying and Cyberbullying Director, DCU Anti-Bullying Centre.
Jane McGarrigle, Project Officer, Webwise.
Judith Lyons, Parents and Learners Unit, Department of Education.
Mai Fanning, President, National Parents Council Post-Primary.
Majella O'Dea, Teacher Education Section, Department of Education.
Moninne Griffith, CEO, Belong To.
Niamh Molloy, Parents and Learners Unit, Department of Education.
Dr Noel Purdy, Director Centre for Research in Educational Underachievement (CREU) Stranmillis University College, Chair of Committee.
Rebecca Galligan, Inspectorate, Department of Education.
Sarah Benson, CEO, Women's Aid.
Seònaid Ó'Murchadha, Board member, Independent Living Movement Ireland
Sharon Eustace, Regional Director, National Educational Psychological Service NEPS, Department of Education.
Tony Shine, Digital, Teacher Supply, Teaching Council Unit, Department of Education.
Yvonne Keating, Deputy Chief Inspector, Inspectorate, Department of Education.

Apologies:

Áine Lynch, CEO, National Parents Council Primary.
Emer Neville, President, Irish Second-Level Students' Union
Susan Mulhall, Digital, Teacher Supply, Teaching Council Unit, Department of Education.
Zak Moradi, Anti-racism Activist.

Purpose of Meeting:

The second meeting of the Steering Committee to review the Action Plan on Bullying 2013

1. Welcome and Housekeeping etiquette

Dr Noel Purdy (chair) welcomed members of the committee to the meeting and thanked members for their contributions and participation at the previous meeting in the Clock Tower.

Committee members who did not have an opportunity to introduce themselves at the first meeting introduced themselves to the steering committee: Judith Lyons (Principal Officer in the Parents and Learners Unit, DoE), Becky Galligan (DoE Inspector currently working with the Parents and Learners Unit), Bridget Wilson Department of Disability Integration and Youth), Áine Doyle (Minister's advisor), Adam Lambe (ISSU).

Áine Doyle thanked the committee members for their time and their work on behalf of Minister Foley.

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed by the committee.

The chair gave an overview of the agenda and advised the relevant steering committee members that they may send their submissions to Ms. Niamh Molloy before the end of April if they wished to expand on their five-minute presentation.

2. Parents and Learners Unit (PLU) Update

Judith Lyons made a presentation to the committee on behalf of PLU outlining:

- The current status of 2013 Action Plan Actions and Recommendations
- Recommendations contained in the Joint Committee Report on School Bullying and the Impact on Mental Health
- An overview of the working Group to review the anti-bullying procedures for Primary and Post-Primary schools.
- The roles of Chair, Steering Committee and PLU for the review of the Action Plan
- An overview of the consultation process which is cognisant of the need to particularly gather the views of young people. She stressed the importance of the steering committee giving consideration to the reports from the different consultation strands in order to inform their work.
- A draft plan for future meetings of the steering committee.

It is hoped that the steering committee will have an opportunity to hold a round table event to meet with young people, parents and teachers on 24 May in the Clock Tower.

Judith Lyons confirmed that slides from the PLU presentation will be shared with the committee members following the meeting.

The chair thanked Judith for her presentation and in particular the overview of the extensive and ambitious consultation plan.

Moninne Griffith asked via the Chatbox facility if the committee will hear from the Inspectorate what they learned from their research and evaluation.

Yvonne Keating confirmed that a draft report from the inspectorate is underway, and it is hoped that it will be ready for publication by end of March.

Deirdre Shanley suggested that the inspectorate may present to the committee on the findings from the anti-bullying focused school inspection visits at a subsequent meeting.

3. Outcome from this work (Department)

Deirdre Shanley gave a brief input on the Department of Education's vision for the outcome of the Action Plan on Bullying. She referenced the Department of Education's Statement of Strategy in which *the vision is an education system where every child and young person feels valued and is actively supported*. She referred to the work of the Department including its Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2019, the implementation of the Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020 and the implementation of the new Digital Strategy which is under development, the development of CPD for school staff to ensure that they feel supported and equipped to work together collectively as a team to implement the updated anti-bullying procedures for schools, and the work of the inspectorate to support schools in the implementation of the relevant anti-bullying procedures with a particular focus on how schools establish and maintain a culture that prevents and tackles bullying.

4. Member presentations*[1] (5 mins per member) "What is missing or needs strengthening in the Action plan and how can we address this?"

- Moninne Griffith presented on behalf of BeLonG To: Moninne spoke about her work with **BeLonG To** [BeLonG To](#) who have been working with LGBTQ+ people aged 14-23 for over 19 years. They have been running an anti-bullying campaign in post primary schools for 13 years called 'Stand Up' [Stand Up Awareness Week - BeLonG To](#) . She spoke about the range of research work undertaken, for example, the LGBTIreland Report, 2016, [LGBTIreland_Report_Key_Findings.pdf (belongto.org)](#) conducted by Trinity College, Dublin, which will be repeated this year. The report showed the causal link between bullying and the increased rates of suicidal ideation/self-harm/depression/anxiety amongst LGBTI+ young people. The School Climate Report, 2019 [BeLonG To School Climate Report 2019.docx](#) (running again in collaboration with Colombia University this year) documented the high percentage (73%) of LGBTQ+ students in Ireland who don't feel safe in school due to the bullying and exclusion they experience because of their gender orientation or gender expression. Students shared their experiences in relation to homophobic remarks, exclusion, assault, sexual/physical harassment. She will include the report in BeLonG To submission. BeLonG To have developed and piloted the *Safe and Supportive Schools Programme* [Coláiste Chill Mhantáin step-ups to create a safe space for Wicklow LGBTI+ Students in Ireland's first LGBTI+ Safe & Supportive Schools Project - BeLonG To](#) a whole-school community approach. She welcomed the ten key recommendations from Joint Oireachtas Committee – particularly in relation to identity-based bullying. Areas that Moninne considers that need to be addressed in the current Action Plan include running safe and supportive schools programmes, with a focus on policy, practice and people (initial teacher training as well as whole staff training and CPD). Policy needs to be put in practice for it to have the intended outcome. Tackling bullying goes beyond policy and a whole education approach is needed. LGBT bullying is widespread and a mandatory module in this area needs to be taught to all teachers. A move from individual supports to whole school/whole education sector approach is needed – Values such as Inclusion, diversity, and an awareness and understanding of unconscious bias need to be embedded in the school culture and climate. Not all 2013 Actions put into practice since 2013. Policy without practice doesn't have much of an impact. Leaders are needed in schools to drive change management. These leaders need extra resources, time and money to deliver this sustained change.

- Adam Lambe (Deputy-President of ISSU) presented on behalf of ISSU: Current action plan is out-of-date and recommended a bi-annual review of the Action Plan. Areas that need to be addressed in the current Action Plan include cyberbullying, and updates in CPD materials. From Joint Oireachtas Committee report, Adam recommended that the DoE send out a circular requiring schools to nominate a Student Council Wellbeing Officer to attend management and board meetings. Adam referred to the role of staff in schools with regard to Identity bullying - school management also need to respect students' identity, e.g. use students' preferred names/pronouns – policy is important in this regard, and better relationships in sex education – essential for LGBTQ+ students to feel accepted in the school environment. There is also a need to educate students' peers about the fluidity of sexual identity. He noted a disconnection between the anti-bullying procedures and policies, and that teachers need CPD to ensure that they up-hold and respect confidentiality with regard to bullying disclosures. There needs to be a whole school community approach to implementing procedures and not a top-down approach. ISSU gets requests when schools aren't dealing with bullying matters in an effective and inclusive way, and to provide next steps (clear escalation) in dealing with bullying matters in an inclusive/effective way. ISSU called for the Action plan to be reviewed more often, possibly on a biannual basis to keep up with an ever-evolving school environment.

- Aileen Hickie presented on behalf of Parentline: She identified the voice of students as a priority, but stressed that the parent voice is also extremely important, and is often not heard at an early enough stage or sometimes not at all. Parents who call Parentline are often very distressed regarding their child being bullied in school. They worry about the short and serious (sometimes tragic) long term effects of bullying, and need to be reassured that schools are taking all possible measures. They feel that this often doesn't happen. 20% of calls Parentline receives relate to students refusing to go to school. The majority of these relate to bullying and its long term effects (damage to self-esteem and mental health). The current action plan encourages schools to develop anti-bullying policies and strategies, but needs to be strengthened. Not all policies and procedures are being put into practice and not all procedures are implemented. Parents that call the helpline often refer to the fact that teachers/form teachers/year heads refer bullying issues to the school principal, who returns the issue back to the staff member. This signals a lack of communication/effective referral process or clear referral pathway. There also appears to be a lack of will or knowledge to deal with bullying effectively and bring about behavioural change. Many of the suggestions from the Parentline volunteers to tackle bullying are in the Joint Oireachtas committee report. Parentline suggests teacher/student forums/committees specifically set up to meet regularly and address bullying in confidence, further training/support for teachers, monitoring and assessment, anonymous student feedback surveys for students to report bullying, a dedicated bullying support officer along with a wellbeing officer, emotional support counselling available in schools, and early intervention and climate that doesn't tolerate bullying. All children have a right to education and to feel safe, respected and differences appreciated.

- Bridget Wilson presented on the development of the next national policy framework for children and young people, the successor to Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (BOBF). The framework will build on the successes of BOBF, and keep the indicator set developed for that framework to ensure continuity and facilitate measurement of progress. The framework will cover the age range 0-24, and retain the Five National Outcomes under

BOBF. It will align with Ireland's implementation of the EU Child Guarantee and the UNCRC reporting cycle. The vision is to concentrate on fewer actions than BOBF but to ensure each has higher impact. It is not intended to duplicate actions currently being progressed but to act as an enabling framework to strengthen the focus on children and young people and facilitate cross government actions. A public consultation was launched on 27 January and closed on 28 February. The analysis of the responses is underway. Bullying has come up in responses, mainly in respect of particular cohorts who may be more vulnerable. DCEDIY will also use the wealth of information from recent consultations carried out with children and young people, particularly the consultation on Children's Rights in light of the State Report to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, as that consultation was specifically designed to be relevant to the next national policy framework. DCEDIY is planning to do more targeted consultations with particular cohorts of children and young people who have been identified as not having been consulted specifically in previous consultations. DCEDIY will engage cross government and hope to have a skeleton framework mid-year.

- Prof. James O'Higgins Norman presented on behalf of DCU Anti-Bullying Centre: He has taken a practical approach to looking at the action plan – what is strong and what needs to be enhanced, and looking at recommendations from the Joint Oireachtas Committee report. Action plan was fit for purpose in 2013. We now need to root a rationale for the new plan that focuses on bullying as a public health and human rights issue. Schools exist because of human right to education. Needs to be informed by up-to-date research, as was done back in 2013. More research available now. DoE has invested in ABC in DCU. From research we have learned things about homophobic, identity, cyber bullying that we didn't know in 2013. Needs to be framed in UNESCO's whole education approach. Moving from whole-school to whole system and society approach. Too much focus previously on school responsibilities. Need for the wider education system to better support schools. There are 9 different components in UNESCO report. It would be good to frame action plan on this. We need to move away from definition of bullying and to describe harm done rather than behaviour. Student teachers not prepared to deal with bullying as they get very little training on this. Standards don't reference bullying. Need to help schools more by providing a programme. Need to be measuring bullying across all schools to see if the action plan is having an impact.

5. **Tea Break**

6. **Member presentations (5 mins per member) "What is missing or needs strengthening in the Action plan and how can we address this?"**

- Jane McGarrigle presented on behalf of Webwise. Recommendations come from working with young people, parents, and PDST. Support recommendations from Joint committee report and UNESCO whole school community approach. Common question from teachers is how to deal with cyberbullying as they don't feel confident in the steps they should take, and are unsure of school's role when dealing with cyber-bullying issues particularly when happening outside school hours. Schools need more training and face-to-face support to gain a clear understanding of their role, how to deal with an incident, how to prevent and tackle bullying and awareness of available resources and supports. Webwise believes training should take place at pre-service stage as teachers don't feel prepared to deal with this. Specific training is also needed for school leaders (not suggesting a top down approach

but have an important role in creating positive school climate). Young people want to be more involved in programmes and initiatives. One student commented that they didn't expect all teachers to be aware of how to deal with issues, but should know the next steps to help and support student. Areas that students would like to see targeted include gender-based, homophobic, transphobic and sexualised bullying. Students believe social media companies have a role in tackling bullying. Parents have a role and need resources and training. Need to look at ways to engage hard to reach parents. Schools have commented that they would like to be doing more work to address bullying, but don't have time as curriculum overload is a barrier for teachers. They tend to respond to incidents rather that implement prevention measures. Webwise agrees that the whole burden shouldn't be on schools but should look at the whole school community. They welcome the recommendation around data collection. There need to be opportunities for sharing and highlighting best practice. The data collected by the inspectorate will be useful. Promoting a positive school culture is important but schools need time and support. Targeted awareness-raising needed for parents. Social media companies could play a key role.

- Mai Fanning presented on behalf of NPCPP: Agrees with everything that Webwise and Parentline have presented. Very little change in issues that parents have had regarding bullying over the last ten years. The same problems remain in terms of approaching schools, knowing where to go and identifying if their child has been bullied. Parents may be aware of bullying but may not approach school because they are not confident, are not sure of the school's procedures, and may not have a relationship or know who to approach. Often the child doesn't want the parent to intervene and try to deal with it themselves. When bullying happens outside school premises e.g. cyber, schools often don't deal with it because it's not considered an issue within the school. This was particularly an issue during pandemic. It has increased and has become toxic. If schools don't have training or understanding they are unable to deal with it, or don't have staff to deal with it. Policies are on paper but not enacted. One main solution that parents have is to remove the child from school, which reinforces to the child that they are a victim and the bully remains in school without any action taken. There often seems to be a lack of action towards the child who bullies. Investigation needs to happen to identify, and find out why a child feels the need/ is empowered enough to bully others. It can be dealt with as part of the RSE SPHE programme, by strengthening how a child feels about themselves. Bullying is difficult to identify because it depends on how child reacts to situation. We need to look at the impact. Restorative practices can help. Terminology in the current plan is 'should'. We need to use 'shall' in the new action plan.

- Sarah Benson presented on behalf of Women's Aid: Women's Aid sees this review as an opportunity for convergence of this review and the draft third national domestic, sexual and gender-based violence (DSGBV) strategy. One example in the new strategy is that it is explicitly stated in the draft third National DSGBV strategy. that the availability and use of pornography in young boys is of particular concern. There are number of key named actions that need to be signposted in the revised action plan: 1.3.4: Develop and deliver specific age appropriate interventions for boys to address male violence (NCCA). 1.3.7: Develop specific age appropriate campaigns highlighting how pornography fuels misogyny and gender inequality, 1.4.5: consider specific issues of gender, gender identity, bullying, and sexual harassment in the review of the DoE Action Plan on Bullying/Anti-Bullying

procedures. High Stakes, as Women's Aid has commissioned two national surveys (2020/21) in young people aged 18-25 in conjunction with red sea. 1/5 women subjected to intimate partner abuse by age 25. Of these ¾ were sexually coerced; ½ sexually assaulted; 27% raped. Of this 51% were under the age of 18. Issue for girls of school going age. 100% of women identified male partners as perpetrators. 1/5 young women compared with 1/11 young men were subjected to intimate partner abuse. In the male cohort the average age was older (over 18) and ¼ perpetrators were male partners. Sexist bullying not mentioned in current plan. Rape crisis network storm and stress report found that with regard to sexual harassment girls were more likely than boys to report unwanted sexual comments; more likely to have experienced unwanted sexual touch than boys, and more likely to experience online sexual harassment. Sexuality is another factor – LGBTQ+ young people were three times more likely to experience unwanted sexual comments compared to straight peers. There is a blind spot on gender inequality and it needs to be more explicit regarding sexist bullying in the new Action Plan. Lack of coherence and consistency regarding the established equality legislation. 2013 plan replaces gender with gender identity. Gender, gender identity and sexuality all need to be explicitly named as three distinct terms. Simply by virtue of their sex at birth, due to our persistently gender unequal society, girls can be targeted specifically because they are girls - particularly with sexual harassment and sexualized bullying. Additional intersecting factors include race, ethnicity, ability, sexuality and/or gender identity and can be targeted in overlapping ways. Measurement and assessment of form and content of bullying is important (racist, homophobic etc.). We need to look at comparative analysis between schools that use restorative practice and those that don't.

- Seònaid Ó Murchadha presented on behalf of Independent Living Movement Ireland: Children with disabilities are much more likely than their non-disabled peers to suffer violence and abuse. Children with 'Special Educational Needs' are separated from their peers in the education system, which encourages exclusion within schools. Disabuse.eu is run in conjunction with DCU ABC. Disablist bullying and the issues are available on www.disabuse.eu. with 6 modules for teacher training to eliminate disablist bullying. If we're not intentionally including we are unintentionally excluding. We can look at it from a human rights basis, it is more difficult for disabled children to get into the education system and learners with disabilities are disproportionally affected by bullying in all learning setting. UNESCO report – 16 pages regarding violence and bullying in educational settings and children with educational needs and disabilities. Seònaid shared the links in the chat: www.disabuse.eu ; https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/tools-information/all-about-bullying/at-risk-groups/sen-disability/do-children-send-experience-more

7. Breakout rooms discussion

Participants were assigned into breakout rooms.

8. Brief plenary session following breakout room session

- Discussion of the need for teacher support and CPD, evolution and expansion of online tools; student engagement is critical; single aligned model is needed; Schools as part of broader social system – whole community approach; a need to be clear on roles and expectations to ensure gaps don't expand; empowerment and support of parents whose children bully or are being bullied; intersectional experiences of students; Student wellbeing officer; Definition of bullying; and a cautious approach.
- Identity and use of specific language on human rights basis – get rid of isms; procedures not accessible and lack of ownership and follow-up of bullying incidents – parents not aware of outcomes; Need to include disabled parents; an easy read version of action plan and procedures; need to empower people to engage with procedures – universal design approach; Empower preventative measures for whole community – how we treat each other.
- The group appreciated the context provided by PLU; Reinvigoration of action plan – now need to concentrate on getting policy into practice; Needs to link with other policies from other departments; Online field – concerning radicalisation of men; National policy framework mooted in last action plan; Would we do same again? Talked about sustained change and current focus on wellbeing in school; Parents who get involved may not be the parents that need to be involved - How do we reach community outside school gates? Takes resources and time.
- Importance of having clear referral pathway for parents and teachers. Classroom teacher can be the gatekeeper – should direct pathway. Need for teacher training to give confidence to deal with issues decisively. School environment that is happy and safe is key to preventing bullying. Anti-bullying coordinator. Similar approach to whole-school guidance. Bullying often left to SPHE lessons. School leadership is very important.

9. Summary and close

The meeting then closed with Dr Purdy thanking all members for their engagement and participation in the meeting.