Meeting 3 of the Steering Committee to Review the Action Plan on Bullying 2013 Minutes

Wednesday 6th April 2022, 11.00 am

WebEx

Attendees:

Áine Lynch, CEO, National Parents Council Primary
Dr Amalee Meehan, Researcher, Identity based bullying, Anti-bullying
Bridget Wilson, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
Catherine King, Primary Inspector, Inspectorate, Department of Education
Ciara Delaney, Team Leader for Primary Health and Wellbeing PDST
Deirdre Shanley, Assistant Secretary, Schools Division, Department of Education
Emer Neville, President, Irish Second-Level Students' Union
Professor 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
Maria Joyce, National Traveller Women's Forum
Michelle Kelly, Parents and Learners Unit, Department of Education
Molly Brady-Martin, National Coordinator, Yellow Flag Programme
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
Pádraig Mac Fhlannchadha, Assistant Chief Inspector, Inspectorate, Department of Education
Paul Stevens, Primary Inspector, Inspectorate, Department of Education
Rebecca Galligan, Post-Primary Inspector, Inspectorate, Department of Education
Ronan Kielt, Teacher Education Section, 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, Department of Education
Susan Mulhall, Digital, Teacher Supply, Teaching Council Unit, Department of Education
Yvonne Keating, Deputy Chief Inspector, Inspectorate, Department of Education

Apologies:

Aileen Hickie, CEO, Parentline
Zak Moradi, Anti-racism Activist

Purpose of the meeting:

The third meeting of the Steering Committee to review the Action plan on Bullying.

1. **Welcome, apologies, overview of agenda and minutes of meeting of 22nd March 2022, minutes of 16th February, update re Working Group.**

Dr Noel Purdy (chair) welcomed Michelle Kelly and Ciara Delaney. Michelle works in Parents and Learners Unit and will be assisting Niamh Molloy with the secretariat work for the Steering Committee. Ciara Delaney joined the meeting today as an observer on behalf of PDST. Dr Purdy reiterated the meeting etiquette and gave an overview of the agenda.
He introduced committee members Áine Lynch and Maria Joyce who will make 5 minute presentations. Both were invited to provide further written submissions following the meeting to expand on their 5 minutes presentation if they wish.

Minutes of the previous meeting: Sarah Benson flagged some adjustments to the minutes 22nd March from her presentation. She has sent these through to Niamh Molloy for amendment. The committee agreed the minutes for the meeting following Sarah's corrections.

Niamh Molloy flagged a technical amendment to the minutes of 16th February meeting, regarding a question that was asked by Sarah Benson and not Aileen Hickie.

Maria Joyce sent apologies for missing the meeting 22nd March – there had been confusion regarding the email that the invitation was sent to. This has now been resolved. Maria thanked Niamh Molloy for her assistance with this.

Judith Lyons gave an update on the first meeting of the Working Group to review the Anti-Bullying Procedures for Schools. The Working Group is made up of representatives from the school management bodies, unions, Parents' Councils, ISSU, and Darran Heaney from the Anti-Bullying Centre. Their first meeting which took place on Tuesday 29th March included a presentation from Professor James O'Higgins Norman on the UNESCO Whole of Education Approach to tackle bullying in schools and an Overview of the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice from Sharon Eustace, NEPS.

Parents and Learners Unit presented the Working Group with an overview of the recommendations from the Oireachtas Joint Committee's report 'School Bullying and the impact on mental health', the steering committee's terms of reference, proposed consultation framework and a detailed presentation on the 2013 Anti-Bullying Procedures for Schools. Darran Heaney then presented on the research on the implementation of the Anti-Bullying Procedures that the anti-bullying centre had undertaken.

The Working Group took part in break-out room discussions to discuss what is working well with the anti-bullying procedures for schools, what isn't working well and what needs strengthening. Judith advised that similar themes emerged to those emerging from the Steering Committee, such as the need to take a whole education approach, respect, involvement of all members of the school community. In terms of what is working well, the group felt that the fact that there were procedures and not just guidelines was positive, that there is reporting to the board of management, that there was comprehensive training provided at the time, the use of templates provide consistency and a national approach. Matters that were identified as needing improvement includes the reporting and analysis of data, more student input needed, and the need for ongoing updated training.

Judith confirmed that the Steering Committee will be provided with a brief update on the Working Group's work at each meeting of the Steering Committee and vice-versa.

2. **Member presentations "What is missing or needs strengthening in the Action plan and how can we address this?"**

Áine Lynch gave a presentation on behalf of the National Parents' Council, Primary. She outlined the areas that need strengthening in the current action plan: preventative measures and school culture could be strengthened. Current procedures can be seen in some schools as a set of procedures for dealing with issues when a bullying incident occurs, with the school culture and preventative measures aspect of the action plan not receiving as much attention. There needs to be more consistency and attention given across the education system to prevention and school culture. When procedures first arrived in schools companies flooded the schools with resources and posters were seen in nearly every school on Ireland however, it is clear that posters alone don't make a positive school culture – more is needed.

Things that are missing include mental health supports. Bullying behaviour demonstrates deeper issues, so it is not sufficient to address the behaviour alone. NPC believes specialist in-school mental health support is needed to support the child who has experienced bullying behaviour directed to them but also to address the underlying issues associated with the child who is exhibiting the bullying behaviour. Teachers know children best, but bullying can go beyond the speciality of a teacher depending on the underlying issues.

The chair thanked Áine for her presentation.

Maria Joyce gave a presentation on behalf of the National Traveller Women's Forum. Maria outlined the priorities regarding the stark inequalities for Traveller children in terms of access to, participation in, and outcomes from education. Maria referenced two recent publications: Out of the shadows Traveller and Roma Education, Voices from the Community. Current four pilots for additional education supports. Initiated in 2019. Research into the lived experience of Traveller and Roma families and members of the school community. The research gathered information regarding school engagement, participation, attendance and retention. Reflects clearly on experience of Traveller children and their parents in the school environment. DE commissioned research on the bullying procedures for primary and post-primary schools and Traveller and Roma pupils. Recommendations in this report are relevant. She welcomed the recommendations in last year's Joint Oireachtas Committee that looked at Traveller inclusion in education, and referenced the report of the 2019 Joint Oireachtas Committee that looked at issues around the Traveller community.

Tackling bullying of the Traveller community needs to start with a creative, positive and welcoming environment. Racist bullying should play no part in the school environment – prevention better than cure. Inclusive curriculum that reflects Traveller culture, positive and diverse images, diversity among school staff. To deal with anti-Traveller bullying, need to recognise that the school community not a safe or welcoming environment for Traveller children.

Maria welcomes the work already underway including the NCCA developing a Traveller History & Culture paper. Explicit reference needs to be made to racist bullying including Traveller, and other

types of bullying such as LGBT, disability and other minorities. An explainer should be included on terms such as ethnic group and racism. Teacher training should include modules on racism and inclusion – initial and CPD. It needs to be acknowledged that bullying from teachers happens, and has series effect on Traveller pupils and others. Respondents in the DCU report highlighted teacher bullying including name-calling and feelings of being unwanted. Low expectations of Traveller children from teachers is also an issue. They need to feel that they are part of the school community. Supports: Not clear to what extent Traveller parents access supports – need to understand why. Intersectionality: Important priority and needs to take account of diverse groups including Traveller community. Level playing field is needed for all. Issues that affect Traveller lives need to be taken into account, such as absence due to nomadic element to their lives shouldn't mean that education isn't a priority when they are present, the impact of oppression on their lives needs to be recognised.

3. **Presentation by Professor Peter K. Smith, Emeritus Professor, Unit for School and Family Studies, Department of Psychology Goldsmiths, University of London**

Professor Smith advised that he had reviewed the action plan. He was generally impressed, and doesn't disagree with anything in the 2013 action plan. However, some things could be given greater focus: Assertiveness training; Co-operative group-work – helps integrate potential victims; give positive status roles to bullies; authoritative school climate; role of class teachers is important. How teachers respond has a significant impact; teacher-pupil bullying and teacher-teacher bullying; Role of non-teaching staff; playground policy and training of supervising teachers, Going to and from school, Role of family – parents and siblings; Sibling bullying; parent role in cyber bullying; Therapeutic work for families. Red balloon learner centres – sheltered learning environment, importance of giving young people a voice – quality circles: classroom based problem solving groups. Use young people as researchers with adults advising.

4. **Presentation by Pádraig Mac Fhlannchadha, Assistant Chief Inspector, Department of Education on the Report on the implementation of anti-bullying measures**

Pádraig Mac Fhlannchadha, Catherine King and Paul Stevens presenting.

Pádraig advised that the report on the Incidental Inspections carried out by the Inspectorate earlier this schools year is being finalised. The inspections focused on looking at particular aspects of the anti-bullying procedures and what schools are doing to create a positive school culture. It is intended that this work and the work on focus groups with students and young people will inform the work of the steering committee and working group. In addition to the questions asked during the incidental inspections the inspectorate followed up with schools to explore their anti-bullying measures in greater detail. The implementation of the five key aspects of the anti-bullying requirements were checked by inspectors. The inspectorate found that:
- Of the 125 DEIS schools visited, the quantitative data was similar to that of non-DEIS schools.
- Most schools had an anti-bullying policy in place, met the requirements to correctly record bullying incidents, and were compliant regarding accessibility of the anti-bullying policy to the school community in line with procedures.

- Two areas where schools required additional support were the requirements to report bullying incidents to the board, and the annual review of anti-bullying procedures in line with procedures. In these two areas there was a significant difference between Primary schools and Post-Primary schools.
- 86% of Primary schools and 76% of Post-Primary schools met the requirements to report bullying incidents to the board in line with procedures.
- 81% of primary schools and 63% of post-primary schools met the requirements regarding the annual review of their anti-bullying policy in line with procedures.

An additional report is being prepared regarding engagement with focus groups of students.

5. **Question and Answer Session**

Sarah Benson: Were students and/or parents consulted as a part of this research? Particularly with regard to the success of the 'effective practice' aspect of school's work to prevent and combat bullying.

Yvonne Keating response in chat: The Inspectorate study being undertaken through focus groups with students uses the Lundy model of participation and will be published next term.

Question for Professor Smith: Enabling and risk factors, unintended consequences of assertiveness training.

Sheffield projects – intended for whole class group. Being assertive without being aggressive, Sheffield project showed that students could learn methods that were effective. Need refreshers as time goes on but remains effective when embedded. Kidscape uses this approach.

Moninne Griffith: Q1.Targets of bullying? Anything around GSAs? Have you seen impact of assertiveness training?

Response from Professor Smith: Range of protective characteristics include gender orientation, disability and faith etc. Read report on non-binary – often feel not accepted in schools. Important to have support groups but Professor Smith is not specifically expert on this area

Q2 Inspectorate; The procedures *require that the prevention of bullying must be an integral part of a school's anti-bullying policy. The education and prevention strategies that the school will implement must be documented in the anti-bullying policy and must explicitly deal with the issue of cyber-bullying and identity-based bullying including in particular, homophobic and transphobic bullying.* (pg. 6 Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2013)

The inspections didn't look in targeted manner at strategies schools are using in relation to gender. Did look at diversity. Was a topic that came up in discussion with principals – principals identified it as an area of challenge – some principals had come up with strategies.

Maria Joyce asked about the follow up the Inspectorate might do where non-compliance has been found. Yvonne Keating advised that the Inspectorate will continue to engage with individual schools until they are compliant.

6. Break

Dr Noel Purdy convened the meeting for a tea break.

7. Presentation by Molly Brady-Martin, National Coordinator, Yellow Flag Programme

Joined by Bernard Joyce. Overview of challenges being seen in Ireland today and what they feel is needed. Ireland is a different place than in 2013. Next census will paint a very different picture from previous. Mismanagement of bullying incidents has the most impact. Looked at schools where Traveller students did well – these schools made students feel accepted and welcome. Eight steps modelled on the DE SSE.

8. Presentation by Anti-bullying Centre DCU

Dr Amalee Meehan, Researcher, Identity based bullying, Anti-bullying Centre DCU: presented on Religious identity-based bullying. Christian practice decreasing in Ireland, and growing numbers of none/other religions. Study on religious identity, bullying and inclusion with second level teachers. Findings include:

- Teachers voiced concerns about religious students regarding bullying due to their beliefs being ridiculed and an anti-religion sentiment.
- Unexpected finding was that the group that teachers was most concerned about were practicing Catholics - seen as socially acceptable to insult and belittle Catholics/Catholicism
- Teachers most concerned about the negative stereotype of Catholics and least concerned about the negative stereotype of Atheist.
- Students who practice any type of religion are vulnerable to bullying
- Positive experience of religious community is a well-documented indicator of wellbeing (noted in 2018 Harvard study)
- Recommends for the review of the action plan: Including religion in understanding of identity-based bullying, recognise children who practice religion in the vulnerable group, recognise religious community as a source of wellbeing.

Darran Heaney, Project Manager, FUSE Anti-Bullying Programme: presented on the FUSE anti-bullying Programme.

- Fuse programme looks at the whole-education approach to tackle bullying. Suite of workshops to empower school communities to address bullying and online safety.
- Research tells us that when communities work together, supported by education system successful initiatives can be developed to tackle bullying.
- Classroom based workshops, led by nominated teacher who will train other teachers in the school. Access to portal with compulsory and optional workshops.
- Student and teacher post-programme survey to identify their confidence and ability to notice, respond and report bullying after participating in the workshops.
- Mapped to SPHE curriculum. Partnered with 'Fighting Words' for primary schools.
- Range of programmes for primary and post-primary schools. Roadmap provided for schools.

- Some stats: 641 schools registered for programme since 2019, 56% pp schools enlist over 3 year period, c.70,000 students have been registered to date, 1341 teachers trained to deliver programme. Students reporting quite high in ability to tackle bullying and online safety based on the programme. Piloting new primary content this year.

Presenters will provide the steering committee with the slides of their presentations following the meeting.

9. Question and Answer Session

Niamh Molloy asked a question regarding the yellow flag – does the level of engagement remain?

Molly Brady-Martin responded: Will be expected to renew to ensure ethos becomes embedded in the school. Renewal is one year. Framework still in place, but needs to be updated and reviewed and to ensure whole school community involved

Professor Smith asked a question to Dr Amalee Meehan: Surprised about Catholic bullying. Was data from children themselves?

Dr Amalee Meehan: Next step is to consider student voice. UK context – unearthed student voice. Atheist cool sweeps the school. Hard for those who were once the majority religion.

Question from Dr Noel Purdy to Dr Amalee Meehan: Are findings published?

Dr Amalee Meehan responded yes, and will send details.

Seònaid asked a question to all presenters: Are we reflecting all marginalised children (disabled children over represented amongst Traveller communities) to ensure voices are captured and is this something that is included in the programmes?

Molly Brady-Martin: Yellow flag encourages schools to take an intersectional approach. It is a specialised programme in race, ethnicity but does encourage schools to take a more intersectional approach including disability, LGBT etc.

Darran Heaney: We are trying to focus particularly on racism this year. It is an important topic – there is a need for CPD for teachers.

10. Breakout rooms

Participants were assigned into break out rooms.

11. Plenary session following breakout room session

Due to times constraints the chair suggested that the note-taker in each of the breakout room send notes of the discussion instead of plenary.

12. Summary and close

The chair thanked all of the presenters.

Next meeting on 26th April will start at 10:30 to allow more time from presentations and discussion. There will be an additional meeting on 10th May.

Maria Joyce, Professor James O' Higgins Norman and Sarah Benson informed the meeting that they will not be available on 10th May.

Note-takers were asked to send their notes from each group to Niamh Molloy following the meeting.

Sarah Benson asked if the Steering Committee could be provided with something, such as a flow chart, to show us how our work will intersect with the work of the working group.

Judith advised that the Working Group's terms of reference is to review the anti-bullying procedures for schools. The Working Group is solely focus on the procedures and is not considering any other elements of the action plan.

The chair referred to the Terms of Reference for the Working Group in response to Sarah's question.

Meeting ends.