

## **Meeting 7 of the Steering Committee to Review the Action Plan on Bullying 2013 Minutes**

**Tuesday 14th June 2022, 10.30 am**

**WebEx**

### **Attendees:**

Aileen Hickie, CEO, Parentline  
Bridget Wilson, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth  
Charney Weitzman, Children First Information and Advice Officer for TUSLA  
Claire Tanner, Parents and Learners Unit, Department of Education  
Deirdre McHugh, Regional Director, National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)  
Deirdre Shanley, Assistant Secretary, Schools Division, Department of Education  
Emer Neville, President, Irish Second-Level Students' Union  
Prof James O'Higgins Norman, Director, UNESCO Chair on Tackling Bullying and Cyberbullying, Director, DCU Anti-Bullying Centre  
Iain Bundred Head of Public Policy, UK and Ireland at YouTube  
Jane McGarrigle, Project Officer, Webwise  
Jean Rafter, Tusla Education Support Services (TESS)  
Judith Lyons, Parents and Learners Unit, Department of Education  
Dr Maeve Dupont, Anti-bullying Centre DCU  
Majella O'Dea, Teacher Education Section, Department of Education  
Maria Bracken, Digital, Teacher Supply, Teaching Council Section, Department of Education  
Maria Joyce, Co-ordinator National Traveller Women's Forum  
Maureen Crowley, Children First Information and Advice Officer for TUSLA  
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  
Paul Rolston, National Parents Council Post-Primary  
Rebecca Galligan, Post-Primary Senior Inspector, Inspectorate, Department of Education  
Ronan Kielt, Teacher Education Section, Department of Education  
Sharon Eustace, Regional Director, National Educational Psychological Service, Department of Education  
Yvonne Keating, Deputy Chief Inspector, Inspectorate, Department of Education

### **Apologies:**

Áine Doyle, Advisor to Minister Foley  
Áine Lynch, CEO, National Parents Council Primary  
Emer O'Neill, Anti-Racism Activist, Teacher, Presenter  
Sarah Benson, CEO, Women's Aid.  
Seónaid Ó'Murchadha, Board member, Independent Living Movement Ireland.  
Zak Moradi, Anti-racism Activist

### **Purpose of the Meeting:**

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

## **1. Welcome, overview of agenda, minutes of meeting of 10th May and 24th May, update on consultations**

Dr Noel Purdy welcomed members of the Steering Committee to the meeting. He noted the apologies for the meeting, which have been included above. He introduced Niamh Molloy who would be providing an update on the consultation process.

Niamh Molloy updated the steering committee on the consultation process.

- Niamh gave an overview of the 10 strands of the consultation process.
- Consultation with children and young people took place in collaboration with DCEDIY on 11th and 12th May.
- Consultation with school staff took place online via two online meetings on the 1st and 8th June. This involved participant-led discussions based on prompts provided in advance of the meetings.
- Reports on both of these consultations are currently being drafted.
- A stakeholder consultation took place where the steering committee participated in round table discussions with children and young people, parents, and school staff in the Clock Tower – 24th May
- A public consultation involving a survey and a request for written submissions is open on the Department website until 21 June.

Niamh Molloy thanked Maria Joyce for facilitating a meeting with Traveller and Roma organisations the previous week, where the Department were invited to provide information to support their participation in the survey. She also reminded members to use their networks to encourage as many voices as possible to have their say using the online survey.

Maria Joyce thanked Niamh for her input at the meeting with the Traveller and Roma organisations and reminded the committee of the importance of gathering the voices of Traveller and Roma children as part of the consultation. Maria referenced a conversation that she had had during the meeting in the Clock tower with a student participant. The student had commented that bullying of Traveller children in her school was the worst that she had seen, and that teachers were involved in the bullying also. Maria also suggested that a round table stakeholder discussion with NGOs would be very useful before the consultation process is over similar to the consultations that were carried out previously regarding Traveller accommodation.

Judith Lyons presented an overview of the process for the review of the action plan. The overview shows the progress of the various sections of the consultation and the meetings for the review of the action plan.

## **2. Presentation by Charney Weitzman and Maureen Crowley, Children First Information and Advice Officers for TUSLA, Distinguishing between Bullying and Child Protection Concerns**

Dr Noel Purdy introduced Charney Weitzman and Maureen Crowley, Children First Information and Advice Officers for TUSLA.

Charney Weitzman provided a presentation outlining the definition of bullying as provided in the Children First National Guidance document that was published in 2017. He noted that a key difference between bullying and once off incidents of behaviour was that bullying is repeated, deliberate acts, versus a non-intentional act. The 2017 Children First National Guidance document is the national, overarching guidance with regard to child safeguarding and distinguishes between child

safeguarding concerns and bullying. It advises that in some instances it may be necessary to make a referral to Tusla or the Gardaí.

He discussed various issues that should be considered concerning bullying including, peer abuse, cyberbullying, intimate partner violence, sharing of intimate images and additional vulnerabilities of certain cohorts of students. There are various factors at play when behaviour crosses a threshold to bullying and bullying to abuse, including impact, support from parents and levels of intervention. He noted the difference between peer abuse including peer sexual abuse that was developmentally appropriate and sexually harmful behaviour and advised that schools need to consider the distinction between what behaviour is age/developmentally appropriate and what is harmful. He noted that research indicates that there is a high level of intimate partner violence in teen relationships, that inappropriate sharing of intimate images can cause high levels of distress, and that schools should also consider the criminal aspects related to the sharing of intimate images (including as they relate to 'child pornography'). In relation to cyberbullying, he explained that there was an addendum published to Children First, which specifically relates to on-line safety; this addendum was a response to recognition of children's increased vulnerability in the online world. He noted that additional vulnerabilities to bullying might be due to an individual's ethnicity, race, and membership of the LGBTQ+ community or the child or young person having a disability.

He explained the thresholds that are in place for reporting concerns to Tusla, including reasonable grounds for concern (Children First National Guidance), and 'harm' (the threshold for mandated reports under the Children First Act 2015) and the threshold for acceptance into the social work department through the 'front door'. He discussed Tusla's national approach to practice, Signs of Safety, which focuses on assessing current harm and risk of harm, and focuses on working towards creating safety for the child. He outlined the Tusla response pathways and the various directions that a report can move following screening

Charney discussed some factors that may be useful for the steering group to consider when looking at revising the anti-bullying procedures:

- The impact of the behaviour on the child as this can be a measure of the 'harm' the child is experiencing
- Actions by parents – how does the school engage with the parent(s)? Are the parents working to safeguard the child (both children involved)?
- Protective / appropriate actions by the school – how is the school addressing support required by the target of the bullying, and the perpetrator of the bullying behaviour.
- Reporting, – how is information conveyed to the Board of Management, how behaviours are tracked, and is consultation required with other bodies like Tusla and An Garda Síochána?
- Are there additional supports, which can be accessed or provided, by NEPS and other services such as HSE CAMHS and other supports for non-abusive experiences?

He noted the importance of utilising 'informal consultation', as referenced in the Department of Education's Child Safeguarding Procedures, where a person is unsure whether to report an incident to Tusla's child protection and welfare social work departments.

Dr Noel Purdy thanked Charney for his presentation and introduced the next presenter Jean Rafter who works with Tusla Education Support Services (TESS).

### **3. Presentation by Jean Rafter, TUSLA Education Support Service (TESS)**

Jean Rafter provided information on her experience as a Regional Manager in the Education and Welfare service within TESS for 15 years. She now works in policy, practice and service development with TESS.

A summary of the main points included in her presentation are included below:

- There are three strands of TESS: Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) and School Completion Programme (SCP) in DEIS schools, and Statutory Education Welfare Service (EWS) in line with Education Welfare Act.
- The HSCL supports parents through in-school awareness sessions around bullying and cyberbullying; running campaigns in schools for student councils and parents to raise awareness of the issue of bullying throughout the school community; providing one-to-one advice for parents who are concerned about their child experiencing bullying; liaison between home and schools in relation to issues that arise regarding bullying; close collaboration with guidance counsellors and year heads to prevent and tackle bullying; working with parents to identify early signs in their children of bullying of or by their child.
- The SCP offers preventative engagement to address bullying through online safety workshops, digital intelligence workshops, working with Barnardos on initiatives, working with children to manage gender-based bullying, initiatives around empowerment and diversity, championing of difference particularly LGBTQ+, targeted support for children who may be perpetrators of bullying, such as anger management, impulse control and building empathy.
- Through the EWS, the Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) regularly identify bullying as a factor for disengaging in school. They engage with children and young people to find alternative education for children and young people who are out of school due to bullying. This is particularly challenging when children are already out of school due to bullying, as they may be unwilling to go back. This is often entrenched when it comes to the attention of the EWO, particularly in non-DEIS schools where there is no SCP or HSCL available. They also deal with children who have been suspended or expelled from school due to retaliation to bullying. If the retaliation is an extreme incidence of violence, the school has to follow their code of behaviour leading to expulsion.
- Four National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS) STAR pilots are taking place across the country led by Traveller and Roma education workers, EWO and HSCL to support the attendance, participation and retention of Traveller and Roma students. Their work focuses on building inclusion and putting initiatives in place that build connectivity, for example using storytelling to build an understanding of Traveller culture. The STAR ambassador programme has a teacher in the school who focuses on building inclusion for Traveller and Roma children in schools.
- The EWS see children with anxiety, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), or additional needs in particular disengaging from school due to bullying, seeking places in Youthreach, or alternative education settings and iScoil. There are 100 Children aged 13-16 currently on iScoil homebased education provision, who have been out of school for at least 6 months. Bullying is frequently a contributing factor for these young people being out of school.
- Jean encouraged the Steering Committee to engage with children in Youthreach and alternative school settings to hear their experience of bullying as a factor in leaving school.

However, Jean advised that bullying is usually not the only factor in the decision to leave school.

#### **4. Question and Answer Session**

Moninne Griffith thanked all presenters and commented on the high number of LGBT young people attending Youthreach and identifying bullying as a reason why they are there. She advised that BelongTo's School Climate report has data on young LGBT people in Youthreach.

Professor James O'Higgins Norman asked if SNAs are mandated persons.

Charney advised that SNAs are not identified as mandated persons in the legislation, but all staff in schools operate under the Department of Education Child Protection Procedures for Schools and Children First, and whether they are mandated or not, they still have a responsibility to report a child protection concern.

In relation to HSCL, Professor James O'Higgins Norman pointed out that the HSCL works with a wider range of people than those identified in the presentation including SNAs and Chaplains.

Maria Joyce commented on the high number of Traveller children in Youthreach. Maria asked Jean about data collection and the lack of disaggregated data, and how data collection within TUSLA could be gathered more effectively, and if she has any experience of how Traveller parents navigate the education system when they are having an issue.

Jean Rafter responded that currently the data collection relates to suspensions and expulsions and children who are under 16 are looking to alternative education settings. As part of the collaboration between TESS and iScoil they are planning to look at data where bullying is named as a factor in children's disengagement with school. There are usually other factors, such as anxiety so it is difficult to capture the bullying piece. In the baseline study that was carried out leading to the STAR project, a lack of belongingness and bullying were two key factors for young people from the Travelling and Roma communities not engaging in education. It is also challenging for Traveller parents to navigate the education system and the SCP and HSCL aim to support that process. Engagement with TESS TUSLA services can be confused with Child Protection. Sometimes it is very late when parents come looking for support.

Judith Lyons asked Moninne Griffith when the school climate report would be available.

Moninne Griffith responded that it would be available in October. She added that she hopes that some of the preliminary findings will be available to inform the review of the Action Plan.

#### **5. Presentation by Dr Noel Purdy, Director, Centre for Research in Educational Underachievement (CREU), Stranmillis University College – Addressing Bullying in Schools in Northern Ireland**

Dr Purdy provided a summary of what would be discussed during his presentation including developments in the area of bullying policy in Northern Ireland, specifically concerning the introduction of new legislation to address bullying in schools. He discussed the review that the Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum carried out for the Education Minister in 2013. The Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum is a 20-member group funded by the Department of Education in Northern Ireland. The review did not necessarily call for legislation but for a tightening in policy and practice in this area to address inconsistencies in school policies and practice. The Minister decided to draft legislation outlining the responsibilities for schools and boards of governors and this

legislation was commenced on 1 September 2021. The legislation is brief (3 clauses) including a statutory definition, an explanation of the duty of the board of governors with regards to bullying in schools (including while travelling to and from school) explaining where responsibility lies; when the policy should be reviewed, and who should be consulted with and the responsibility with regard to record keeping.

He outlined the circumstances where schools have the power to deal with cyber bullying – i.e. when it occurs outside school where it is likely to have a detrimental effect on the education of that pupil.

He outlined the infrastructure and training available to schools in relation to reporting, procedures, including a breakdown of the assessment form used in Northern Ireland.

He outlined the advantages and disadvantages of the introduction of the legislation and the recording procedures. Legislation can be unwieldy and takes a long time to change; it is not as agile as guidance, especially considering how long it takes to be implemented; tensions occurred between stakeholders regarding the definition to be used for bullying; union opposition with regard to workload; and responsibilities with regard to bullying behaviour outside schools (the staff representative concerns were resolved between DE and unions in N.I.).

He discussed opinions he had gained from two principals, one primary and one post primary, about how they feel now that the legislation has been enacted.

Both were positive, and they had no difficulty convincing staff about the importance of using the forms but there were challenges in the use of the forms (which are quite lengthy) and technical issues with the online system (not all schools use SIMS routinely and one of schools had retained a paper-based approach for now at least). He advised that the schools liked the restorative approach, and the focus on the behaviour of the student rather than labelling them as a bully or victim.

#### **6. Presentation by Deirdre McHugh Regional Director, National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) on the Role of Student Support teams**

Deirdre Mc Hugh gave a presentation on the role of Student Support Teams (SST). She provided some background information on the history behind the development of SST, highlighting that the SST model is rooted in evidenced based research and best practice. In 2014, the first SST guidelines were published as a way of supporting schools to look at their students in a holistic way through a strong support system and a way of addressing the well-being of its staff and students. This current Wellbeing Policy and Framework for Practice was issued to schools in 2021. She indicated that an evaluation report demonstrated the effectiveness of SSTs in schools. This current Wellbeing Policy and Framework for Practice was developed following the projects that took place in schools and in consultation with education partners and sections in the Department of Education. This allowed the document to be aligned with other services and agencies.

She indicated that schools might choose to introduce, develop or review their SST structures as part of their wellbeing promotion process.

An SST is part of the student support system in a Post-Primary School. It is the overarching team concerned with providing for the welfare and wellbeing of all students, not just students with additional needs.

An SST works as a central team within a school bringing coherence to the system by co-ordinating the work of departments or teams such as the Junior Cycle wellbeing curriculum planning team, the special education needs (SEN) department, Guidance Counsellors and pastoral staff and the critical

incident management team (CIMT). She provided information on the membership of the Student Support team and the role of various members with additional information provided in the Wellbeing policy guidelines. The school may decide depending on their numbers and focus to set up two School Support Teams at Junior and Senior Cycle, but there must be consistency between both.

She explained Student Support Teams work through implementing a continuum of support. It can provide for the educational, social, emotional, behavioural and learning needs of All, Some and Few students to ensure their ongoing wellbeing. It is concerned with promoting a whole school approach to wellbeing including awareness weeks and peer mentoring. They may look to assess the needs of schools through getting the views of key stakeholders in a variety of ways, or by engagement with external support services.

She explained that while the various teams that focus on students with additional needs are important if they remain, the only structures of support without a focus on a whole school approach to prevention and early intervention certain issues can emerge. This can include some students with developing needs may be overlooked, a fire-fighting model would be used and opportunities for forward planning to increase and support the learning health and wellbeing of all students may be overlooked.

She clarified the role of a Student Support team as follows:

- It should not operate as a forum for issues that should be dealt with by a teacher separately or behaviour management system
- It should not focus solely on individual students but take a whole school approach to look at the needs of all students at a universal level
- It needs to be solution focused rather than a place to discuss issues only

She explained that Section 2 of the guidelines outlines instructions on how to establish and run a student support team and how it relates to other school systems, including relevant case studies to provide practical guidance for schools. She outlined the various ways in which the school can work to establish or review their SST in a number of ways including individually working with the allocated NEPS psychologist, through a cluster network with a number of schools and the local NEPS psychologist or on their own. NEPS recommend that the allocated NEPS psychologist be included in the process and she explained the role of NEPS in the process.

She discussed the resources available including the SST Rating scale to allow staff to self-evaluate the project before and after implementation, to allow them to identify where change has occurred. The overall findings indicated positive change in school structures and supports with the greatest change and an increased focus in the following areas:

- dealing with systemic issues;
- defining roles and responsibilities;
- understanding and implementation of referral procedures;
- improving communication systems with parents and outside agencies;
- reviewing actions and recording the nature of concerns; and,
- engaging with relevant staff training.

She highlighted four common themes evolving from data analysis of qualitative feedback NEPS have received including:

- Staff feel listened to and validated
- Staff value structure and the whole school approach to student support
- Support for all including staff
- Staff have the opportunity to network with other schools increasing learning

## **7. Question and Answer Session**

Judith Lyons asked if it is mandatory for schools to have SSTs.

Deirdre McHugh advised that they are not mandatory, but that schools may have a wider group of staff like a pastoral care team that work universally.

Paul Rolston (NPCPP) asked whether parents and students are represented on SSTs.

Deirdre McHugh advised that guidelines are issued to schools and parents and students can be consulted but it must be managed carefully as often there is very confidential information shared during SST meetings. Teachers would link in with the community including the likes of wellbeing week in terms of topic and agenda and possibly in terms of linking in with parents practically in terms of Child Protection, Welfare and bullying.

If issues are happening outside schools, schools have responsibility for issues that come into the school, e.g. a subgroup could meet with parent/student.

Deirdre Shanley referenced the Student and Parent Charter Bill and the whole school approach with regard to the development of policies and that would create positive change in the way schools engage with students. This is currently progressing through the Houses of the Oireachtas and Deirdre indicated that Parents and Learners Unit would circulate briefing information in this regard.

Deirdre Shanley asked Noel about data gathering in Northern Ireland under the new legislation.

Dr Noel Purdy indicated that there had been a lot of concern about this by schools and that there were reassurances given by the Department of Education in Northern Ireland that any data collected was for the purpose of identifying overall trends, rather than exposing individual schools. He indicated that he was not sure if the Department of Education in Northern Ireland had yet collated any data. He understood that the Department of Education in Northern Ireland were planning to issue a tender in the coming months to evaluate the implementation of the new legislation. Schools were concerned that if it were collated centrally that it would result in league tables and a negative outcome but also were concerned about requests through the Freedom of Information process. He indicated that he had not seen evidence of this.

Dr Noel Purdy thanked the presenters and convened the tea break.

## **8. Tea Break**

## **9. Presentation by Dr Maeve Dupont, Anti-bullying Centre DCU (*A study into the effectiveness of the Anti-Bullying Procedures on Traveller and Roma pupils' experiences in the school system*)**

Maeve Dupont provided a presentation on research that explored the views of the Traveller and Roma communities concerning the anti-bullying procedures. Her presentation included the focus



and purpose of the research, its methodology, sampling, participants, findings, implications, recommendations and limitations.

There was an online survey where researchers worked with local contacts. The key points from Dr Maeve Dupont's presentation were as follows:

- Most participants and their parents reported that they or their children liked school and had a few good friends at school
- 15% of children and 11% of parents reported that they or their children had been bullied in the past year
- Types of bullying: name calling, racist name calling, exclusion, and bullying by teachers were cited as the most frequent types of bullying
- Perpetrators: peers in their grade and teachers
- Location of bullying - areas of unstructured supervision (bullying by teachers took place in the classroom)
- Those who were bullied most frequently confided in an adult
- There was a reluctance to report being bullied by teachers
- Some of the parents reported bullying to school staff and were happy with the school's response but there was also a reluctance to report due to the possible consequences
- Pupils revealed the severe and negative impact of their experience of bullying on various aspects of confidence and health

She discussed the various findings and recommendations including the need for consistency in the implementation of the procedures, awareness-raising initiatives for parents, teacher training, removing the barriers to reporting, while also highlighting caution because of the small sample size. She highlighted that the proposed recommendations must be seen as just one component of a more comprehensive strategic approach that is needed so that access, participation and outcomes for Traveller and Roma children and young people in education are equal to those of others.

Dr Noel Purdy thanked Dr Maeve Dupont for her presentation and introduced Iain Bundred.

#### **10. Presentation by Iain Bundred Head of Public Policy, UK and Ireland at YouTube**

Iain Bundred discussed the products and apps available for under 18 year olds and outlined the protections available to them. He indicated that the default setting for their products like YouTube now assumes that a user is under the age of 18. He discussed the supervised experiences that are also available including that parents have the power to control content for children under 13 years of age.

He advised that there are 25 million active users on YouTube Kids. This would have content that would be family appropriate.

He indicated the steps that YouTube had gone to in terms of the removal of age inappropriate comments and the flagging of others. He indicated that 1.8 million videos were removed with 20,000 moderators now working to moderate content on YouTube.

He discussed an online series ran by YouTube called Reframe which hopes to improve media literacy for young people.

He advised that the content could be used in classrooms to encourage thinking through the consequences of negative and hurtful comments and to generate empathy between young people.

He highlighted the importance of having dedicated media literacy education in schools as this generation need to think about their responsibility and the impact of their online activity.

### **11. Question and Answer Session**

Yvonne Keating asked Dr Maeve Dupont where it was evident that the teachers lacked understanding on race and ethnicity.

Dr Maeve Dupont indicated that as part of the survey respondents used their culture to describe their ethnicity, this indicated that they had a lack of understanding as evidenced by their answer to that question.

Maria Joyce advised that a clear definition is required including ethnicity and identifying racist bullying in the Action Plan.

Maria Joyce highlighted that this was a small sample size in one area and could have been done differently, referencing evidence of schools indicating cases that had been dealt with when they were not.

Dr Maeve Dupont explained the scope of the survey in more detail and advised that it was across five counties and referenced procedures specifically for bullying of students by teachers.

Maria advised of the importance of including identity based bullying in the Action plan.

Iain Bundred highlighted the advances in machine learning and indicated that these methods would improve detection of hate and harassment.

Jane McGarrigle highlighted the need to reframe this and to use people with influence to promote tools and practical tips and asked are YouTube using Irish content creators in promotion?

Iain Bundred confirmed that there are Irish creators present with a good following. He indicated two areas, the school networks and creators themselves. He indicated that it would be good to think about who could be added to this network.

Professor James O'Higgins Norman noted the considerable work needed in this area and highlighted the role of the relevant teacher, where some schools do not have this assigned, and it is seen as a tick box exercise. He advised that it would be important to encourage principals to assign a person to this role.

### **12. Breakout rooms discussion**

There was no breakout room discussion at the meeting as presentations and discussion ran later than scheduled.

### **13. Summary and close**

Dr Noel Purdy thanked the presenters and attendees for participating in the meeting and ended the meeting.