Meeting 9 of the Steering Committee to Review the Action Plan on Bullying 2013 Minutes

Thursday 8th September 2022, 10.30 am

Conference Room G13/14 Department of Education, Marlborough Street

Attendees:

Aileen Hickie, CEO, Parentline
Aileen Walsh, Parents and Learners Unit, Department of Education
Dr Bernadette Ní Áingléis, Report writer Consultation with Children and Young People
Bridget Wilson, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
Deirdre Shanley, Assistant Secretary, Schools Division, Department of Education
Judith Lyons, Parents and Learners Unit, Department of Education
Kate O'Carroll Report writer for the Public Consultation Strand 1
Maria Joyce, Co-ordinator National Traveller Women's Forum
Mary Gilbride Report writer for the Public Consultation Strand 2
Dr Noel Purdy, Director Centre for Research in Educational Underachievement (CREU) Stranmillis
Ronan Kielt, Teacher Education Section, Department of Education
Ryan McKay, Parents and Learners Unit, Department of Education
Sarah Benson, CEO, Women's Aid
Sharon Eustace, Regional Director, National Educational Psychological Service, Department of Education

Apologies:

Áine Lynch, CEO, National Parents Council Primary.
Caitlin Faye Maniti, President, Irish Second-Level Students' Union
Prof James O'Higgins Norman, Director, UNESCO Chair on Tackling Bullying and Cyberbullying, Director, DCU Anti-Bullying Centre
Jane McGarrigle, Project Officer, Webwise
Majella O'Dea, Teacher Education Section, Department of Education
Maria Bracken, Digital, Teacher Supply, Teaching Council Unit, Department of Education.
Moninne Griffith, CEO, Belong To.
Niamh Molloy, Parents and Learners Unit, Department of Education
Seònaid Ó'Murchadha, Board member, Independent Living Movement Ireland
Paul Rolston, National Parents Council Post-Primary
Rebecca Galligan, Senior Inspector, Inspectorate, Department of Education
Yvonne Keating, Deputy Chief Inspector, Inspectorate, Department of Education.
Zak Moradi, Anti-racism Activist.

Purpose of the Meeting:

The ninth meeting of the Steering Committee to review the Action plan on Bullying 2013.

1. Welcome, overview of agenda, minutes of previous meetings

Dr Noel Purdy welcomed the attendees, thanked members for their work to date and read the apologies.

Dr Purdy then introduced today's speakers: Dr Bernadette Ní Áingléis, report writer for the Consultation with Children and Young People; Kate O'Carroll Report writer for the Public Consultation Strand 1, and Mary Gilbride Report writer for the Public Consultation Strand 2.

2. Presentation by Dr Bernadette Ní Áingléis report writer for the Consultation with Children and Young People

Bernadette has previously presented to the Steering Committee regarding the findings of the consultation with children and young people held on 11th and 12th May 2022 date. Bernadette advised that the purpose of this presentation was to speak about the additional consultations that were held over the summer.

The DE organised and facilitated four additional focus groups consultations in July involving children and young people attending summer programmes in special classes, special schools, and in a STAR programme centre providing for Traveller and Roma children and young people. The voices of children in the international protection system 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 a good geographical spread. In addition, a number of students attending iScoil completed an online questionnaire.

Bernadette discussed the 11 key themes that emerged from the data collected. The themes are set within the four key areas of the DE Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice:

- ✓ Culture and Environment
- ✓ Relationships and Partnerships
- ✓ Curriculum (Teaching and Learning)
- ✓ Policy & Planning

The 11 themes are as follows:

1. School Climate
2. Leadership
3. School building and Grounds : Safe Places
4. Supports
5. Webs of Relationships (School-in-Community)
6. Trusted Adult : Safe Faces
7. Student Council
8. Communication and Language
9. Subjects and Programmes: A connected Curriculum with Supports
10. Teacher Education and continuing professional development
11. Policy development and dissemination

3. Question and Answer Session

Maria Joyce (NTWF) thanked Bernadette for her presentation and advised that it's a shame that Traveller and Roma children who are in the system for decades do not have the same feeling of inclusion and asked was there any evidence of teacher /student bullying?

Bernadette NÍ Áingléis advised that this did not arise in these additional consultations.

Maria Joyce (NTWF) commented that school culture week has representations from many cultures but there is no inclusion of Traveller and Roma children.

Bernadette Ní Áingléis advised that the work of the NCCA looks at various cultures and agreed that references should be made to Traveller and Roma children.

4. Presentation by Kate O'Carroll report writer for the Public Consultation Strand 1 – Public Questionnaire

Kate presented the results of the public consultation questionnaire which included responses from parents, primary pupils, post-primary students and school staff. 2774 parents responded – 1895 primary parents and 807 post-primary. The majority were parents of children from third class in primary to third year in post-primary. 1086 school staff responded – 482 selected 'teacher' and 290 'principal' to describe their role; a wide range of student-support roles was represented. A summary of the main highlights are included below.

- The responders were electing to respond with interest and experience in the area and were asked to select from a menu of reasons as to who is targeted and why?
  Being different from their peers is seen as negative and was the most common reason for being targeted, with having a learning disability and being considered exceptional able or gifted in the top five reasons. Identifying as LGBTQI+ was placed second by staff and eighth by parents as a reason for being a target of bullying.

- A bullying definition was provided and respondents were asked to provide their feedback and observations of the definition. This question received an enormous response.

- Parents, post-primary students and school staff were asked if they were bullied in school. Almost half of parents and staff and two-fifths of students said yes. Some staff responses indicated that the bullying experienced was in their current professional lives, not their former student lives.

The survey asked "If you weren't bullied, is there a reason? This question received free-text responses from c.1000 parents, 450 schools staff and 100 post-primary students. Themes and patterns emerged in two broad categories: school/societal, and personal. The importance of strong friendship groups and family groups in ensuring individuals were not isolated and vulnerable was referenced. It was noted that there is a need to ensure that highlighting confidence doesn't lead to seeing those who are targeted as weak.

- Reporting incidents of bullying – pupils and students - would you tell?
  49.1% of post-primary student respondents said yes, and 50.1% said no.

- Did telling help? 87% of primary pupil respondents said they would get a lot of help or some help.
- Only 30% of post-primary students indicated they had reported bullying; of these one third said it helped, almost half found no improvement and one in six said it made things worse

- Could schools do more about bullying? 19.3% of primary pupils and 17.4% of post-primary students felt that schools could do more. Training and education to help deal with and prevent bullying for a safe and inclusive school environment to be provided.

- Post-primary students were asked to choose whether they had learned a lot, a little or nothing about a list of topics relating to bullying, wellbeing and safety. The eight topics that ranked highest, from highest to lowest, were: Cyberbullying; Rights and responsibilities; How to keep safe online; Internet safety and online etiquette; Peer pressure; Different types of bullying; Emotional and mental health; the importance of respectful and inclusive behaviour. The eight topics that students indicated they had learned least about , starting with the

lowest, were: Sexual harassment; Dealing with criticism and conflict; Maintaining and ending friendships; Assertiveness; Gender identity; Sexting

- Participants were asked what would you ask the Minister to do that would help to stop bullying in schools. Kate O'Carroll highlighted some of the most common themes emerging from this including:

    o Take on the tech giants and make them accountable for the content they carry on their platforms.
    o Fund anti-bullying training for schools and fund anti-bullying initiatives in schools.
    o Funding and rollout of relevant courses for parents.
    o Introduction of a forum or structure outside of the school that would consider appeals from parents regarding bullying incidents that were not resolved to their satisfaction.

5. Question and Answer Session

Sarah Benson (Women's Aid) asked if Sexism was a listed category in the questionnaire as part of the well-being options?

Kate O'Carroll advised that the categories included in the questionnaire were shown on slide 13 of the presentation. Categories on sexual harassment and sexting were listed but not sexism.

6. Presentation by Mary Gilbride report writer for the School Staff Focus Group Consultations

Mary Gilbride introduced the context of the focus group which was limited by sample size and the methodology used which included 41 participants; 27 primary; 14 post-primary. There were 2 Focus groups, which took place on 1st and 8th June, 1 primary and 1 post primary and each was held for 90 minutes. The 2 questions for the focus groups were as follows:

- Topic 1: How is bullying prevented and tackled in your school?

Mary Gilbride indicated that the respondents talked about the following: leading from the top to ensure all were educated on the values and expectations of the school, kind words and kind faces and the importance of doing the right thing. She also highlighted the active promotion of anti-bullying measures and student voice.

- Topic 2: What supports do you and/or your school need to do this better?

Mary Gilbride indicated that the respondents talked about the following: the need for more funding and time allocated for training, care and support staff, Increase in allocated time for SPHE, a whole school approach to anti-bullying and inclusion issues as well as relevant training for the whole school community. There is a need to provide more clarity in terms of the roles and responsibilities of each person. There needs to be time to attend the relevant CPD. Staff need to know how to record bullying instances and to ensure they are properly investigated and brought to a proper conclusion.

Common themes and issues emerging from the voices of school staff were:

- School Culture and Environment
- Cyberbullying: A huge issue that happens outside the school but spills into school
- Creating a positive and inclusive school culture

- Openness among staff and students to all identities – avoid labelling children as such data is kept on children forever
- Roles and responsibilities
- Core values of inclusion, kindness and respect. Celebrate difference
- What is the remit of the school?
- Elevate the importance of procedures and what to do if a bullying instance occurs
- Ensure there are safe pathways for those who do report bullying

Cyberbullying

Specific areas relating to cyberbullying included:

- Procedures should clearly clarify the remit of the school if cyber bullying happens outside school yet spills into school
- The templates should be adapted for different age groups
- More emphasis should be on Pastoral care
- A specific post with responsibility for promoting anti bullying and cyber bullying awareness

Training

- Calls for more relevant training at initial teacher training and throughout the teaching career
- Training for upcoming, new and all teachers
- CPD needed for the whole school and the whole island approach
- Remove 'barriers' to non-Irish people becoming teachers

7. **Question and Answer Session**

Maria Joyce (NTWF) called for more diversity among teachers and more recruitment from traveller backgrounds to become teachers. Maria advised that the bias in recruitment and staffroom bias needs to be removed. Maria also enquired about the no blame approach and how to deal with the children who are bullying?

Dr Noel Purdy advised that the no blame approach was renamed as the "support group method" for dealing with bullying. There is always a need to consider restorative and non-punitive approaches as alternatives to punitive approaches. There are different approaches used for younger children.

8. **Tea Break**

9. **Presentation by Mary Gilbride report writer for the Public Consultation Strand 2 – Written Submissions**

Mary Gilbride presented on the 78 written submissions received. Mary advised that over half of the submissions are from individuals and the remaining ones from organisations.

Interested parties were asked to answer four specific questions:

- How the 2013 Action Plan on Bullying and Anti-bullying Procedures have supported schools?
- Any relevant recent statistics and research?
- What is missing or needs strengthening in the Action Plan?
- What is missing or needs strengthening in the Procedures?

The main positives that were evidenced in submissions included, that the procedures provide:

- A solid foundation, framework and guidelines
- A common set of processes
- A clear set of escalation procedures when dealing with bullying.
- Easier for school staff to recognise bullying behaviour

The main negatives that were evidenced in submissions included, that;

- Procedures do not always work on the ground and are not lived by schools
- It is a changed landscape since 2013
- There is a significant rise in racism, cyber, homophobic and transphobic bullying.

The main observations included under "What is missing or needs strengthening?" included:

- Focus on a positive and open school climate
- Stress the importance of teacher modelling, more focus on staff accountability
- Relationships within schools - Call for guidance in relation to teacher bullying with clear and robust measures to address it
- Role of the Board of Management
- Focus on educating the whole school community
- Ensure ITE providers focus more on bullying, increase resources to schools
- Train and recruit Travellers and Roma teachers, Remove barriers to enter teacher education. Need for inclusive curriculum.
- Review the RSE and SPHE programmes - RSE to explore gender-based harassment, violence, consent, gender identity etc.

Specifically in relation to Policy and Planning the following were highlighted:

- Procedures to be updated
- Focus on the collection of data on bullying – the numbers, types, actions taken to resolve bulling and the outcomes
- Greater focus on different types of bullying- Transgender and homophobic bullying
- Bullying of children with a family member in prison, racially, ethnically and culturally-motivated bullying in schools
- Clarity of remit of school and resources to support both school and parents
- Distinguish between once off instances and ongoing bullying

10. Question and Answer Session

Sarah Benson asked was an analysis done of the 2013 Action Plan to determine what had progressed, what hadn't progressed and what lessons could be learned from this?

Judith Lyons responded that the report on the review of the 2013 action plan will need to include this.

Deirdre Shanley advised that some actions will always be ongoing.

Aileen Hickie (Parentline) asked what is the role of the Board of Management and is there training provided for the Board?

Deirdre Shanley advised that there has been more training for Boards of Management in recent times but that turnover is quite high.

Aileen Hickey (Parentline) advised that board of management members are volunteers and more supports should be in place to avoid door stopping at school gates. Also when is it appropriate for the Board to get involved? Is there a designated person on Board for dealing with bullying?

Dr Noel Purdy advised that in Northern Ireland the initial proposal was that one named person on the Board would be designated to deal with bullying instances, however in the end this was removed from the legislation (as it was felt it would be unfair on any individual governor) and the responsibility is shared across the membership of the board of governors.

Maria Joyce (NTWF) asked when will the report be published and has the timeline changed?

Judith Lyons advised that the priority now is to focus on the actions that might be included in the new action plan and advised that we are aiming for publication in November.

11. Update on definition/context of bullying and feedback

Dr Noel Purdy introduced an update on the ongoing work on definition/context of bullying. He spoke of the complexities of definitions and how it was not possible to say everything in a couple of sentences. He explained that we were considering whether to refer to context rather than definition. He also discussed how the language is shifting away from the term cyberbullying towards online bullying.

Sarah Benson (Women's Aid) questioned why the term 'intentional' remained in the proposed definition.

Aileen Hickie (Parentline) echoed her concerns and asked how it could be proven that somebody had intended to bully and where is the burden of proof placed?

Maria Joyce (NTWF) spoke of the Imbalance of power mentioned in the definition and advised that it would be better to reword slightly to 'including members of the travelling community'.

Deirdre Shanley advised that clarity is very important for schools and that the extra lines in the draft definition help provide more clarity.

12. Summary and close

Dr Noel Purdy thanked the Steering Committee and presenters for attending and contributing to the discussions at the meeting and advised that the next meeting is scheduled for September 29th in person.