

Hi I am LilyRose , I am 12 years old, and I go to St. Vincent de Paul Girls School in Dublin 9.

We are part of the Children's Council, we help The Ark with decision making and give our opinions on everything they do. I have been on The Ark's Children's Council since 2019.

We are a group of children in 5th Class, 6th Class and 1st Year from Dublin and its surrounding areas.

We did a national call out to children asking what the pandemic was like for them and some of these references will be in our speeches.

I would like to give you an insight into how the pandemic affected me and other school kids in Ireland , the impact 15 months ago and now.

I am not a vector

On the first lockdown we were all encouraged for our mental welfare to go walking with our families, the fact that older people shunned us and in many cases tried to walk in the middle of the road rather than pass us, left a bitter taste in my mouth and made me want to stay in rather than go out.

This week an Irish Paper had a report on the research into children being vectors at the start of lockdown – I found it amazing that it took 15 months to discuss this and even more amazed that it was not prioritised sooner.

I was lucky that my mother and father were with us always but I must say I was sick of sitting in a car while my mother did the shopping.

On Mother's Day my brother & I made a banner for my Granny and waved and danced outside her window – little did I know that would be the last time I would see her, as we were not allowed to visit her in the hospital before she passed away.

I am sure there are many Children in the same situation as me, but it doesn't make it any easier.

As part of our national callout we heard from many children about their school life experiences of the pandemic.

Grace (aged 13, from Louth) wrote 'I Miss Progress.' ...Although we learned how to use Google Classroom, we missed all the social element of school and learning, we did not progress socially and didn't get to reach our own goals.

Dave in 5th class missed 'Normal Life' – normal life for most kids is going to school, even if we give out about it.

Boredom doesn't happen so much when you are in school, we used to spend time discussing after school activities, but we didn't even have that at first.

Ava (5th class) said 'Now we are back in school I feel better' – I think that sums up a lot of kids' feelings.

Even if school feels different, hand sanitizers everywhere, only in pods, walking in one direction, Covid posters everywhere – please remember with the help of our school and teachers, who were also scared, we did what we had to.

Things have changed a lot now, sometimes my teacher will ask what we did over the weekend, and I would usually say before covid something that sounds amazing now, like swimming in the Wexford Sea, going to sporting events or some activity.

But now I would talk about much simpler things like the coconut scented soap in the supermarket or the fact that we had chicken for dinner.

Children with Specific Needs:

A lot of essential care for kids with specific needs was missed or reduced and this has caused an ongoing problem to them and their families, causing anxiety going into secondary school with no real additional help from anyone.

In our callout, Felix, age 6 from Dublin talked about how masks sometimes make communication more difficult for autistic children.

Basic needs like physiotherapy, assessments etc were cancelled, delayed or reduced causing issues to get worse daily.

Zoom was not always an option for a lot of people due to lack of devices in some cases, lack of knowledge about using it, glitches in the middle of sessions and some children just felt uncomfortable on it.

Special Occasions:

My Brother's communion has no date yet and he didn't have a graduation from his school last year.

My Confirmation is now due in November – will everyone attend as we will all be in different secondary schools?

No wake for my Granny's funeral who died in May and we only had 10 people. For my Aunt, who died in November, we only had 25 in the Church.

Primary School Graduation will be a blend of pre recordings and online.

Birthdays – Everyone had a birthday in lockdown but it is the Children would want to celebrate theirs most.

With not many shops open people didn't have many options for gifts.

What next

I am looking forward to getting vaccinated, but most of all having all my family able to travel home so we can all be together and especially not to feel scared anymore.

I think all children, even the very young who did not understand, deserve appreciation and respect for all the fear thrown at us and we would appreciate not to be forgotten by the same adults.

😊 ******FINISH****** 😊