



**Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI) opening statement to the  
Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research,  
Innovation and Science as part of the Committee's examination of the topic "*School  
Bullying and the Impact on Mental Health*".  
(May 18th 2021)**

**Introduction**

The TUI would like to thank the Chair and the Committee for the opportunity to make this opening statement and is pleased to answer any questions.

**Bullying in the Student Population**

Bullying is a damaging experience for students and the wider school community. The TUI and its members are committed to the prevention and elimination of bullying in schools and are proactively engaging with their school communities to this end.

Research points to the fact that Irish children and students are significantly less likely to encounter chronic bullying than the OECD average. A recent survey has found that bullying of young people halved in the last twenty years and is now significantly lower than the international average. Whilst certainly a cause for optimism, these facts must be viewed in the context of the emergence of online bullying.

**The consequences of online bullying**

Online bullying can be more harmful than traditional forms of bullying. It is relentless, has the potential to reach a large audience, and is often nameless and faceless. It often encourages others to participate in commentary which means that even when very little of it is published, can have far reaching consequences for the victims.

### **Bullying of School Staff**

The use of online platforms has also allowed the bullying of school staff to become a problem. Staff are entitled to dignity and safety in their workplace. School leaders and teachers are sometimes the subject of derogatory, and even defamatory, comment on social media sites. They are easy targets. Online bullying is particularly harmful and can, in extreme cases, lead to teachers leaving the profession which will further exacerbate the teacher supply problem. To protect staff and the whole school community clear guidelines and processes for investigation are essential in order to deal with the perpetrators.

### **Issues Post-Covid**

The TUI is concerned that post-Covid there may be a rise in certain types of bullying in schools. Covid-19 has exacerbated and highlighted socio-economic and educational disadvantage. Given the in-school teaching time already lost it would be horrendous if a fear of bullying should cause students to refuse to return to school. Concerns have been raised that teachers may become the victim of bullying because of their engagement in the accredited grades process.

Bullying does not just occur in schools. It is often a matter for parents and communities to address and occasionally, in very severe incidents, for Gardai to investigate. Schools cannot be held accountable for matters which arise outside of their control.

Schools are doing what they can to minimise bullying when students are in school, and where they are informed of the problem.

### **Recommendations**

The TUI would like to make the following recommendations to the Committee:

- It is essential that the guidance allocation, middle management posts and pastoral care supports to schools be dramatically increased. Whilst recent changes in middle management are a small step in supporting students in difficulty, a much larger move in terms of full restoration is needed.

- Significant investment is needed in out of school supports such as CAMHS and NEPS. if the school is to adequately support the affected students, both victims and perpetrators. Such supports are currently inadequate or lacking.
- Addressing the issue of bullying requires a whole school partnership approach of students, parents and school staff. The provision of HSCLOs in every school in this context would be invaluable.
- Appropriate training, resources and time need to be put in place for all the school community including the Board of Management. Staff need time to engage in CPD.
- The Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools which were published in 2013 should be updated.

**Thank you**

**Ends**

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