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Lúnasa 2021

Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
School Bullying and the Impact on Mental Health

August 2021

33/ES/05

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CATHAOIRLEACH'S FOREWARD

The Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research met senior academics from the National Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre in Dublin City University (DCU) on 5th November 2020 to discuss the impact of School Bullying, including Cyberbullying, during the Covid 19 Pandemic. This was a seminal meeting, held on the First United Nations International Day against Violence and Bullying at School, including Cyberbullying. The compelling oral evidence and background research material demonstrated clearly that the issue of School Bullying and the Impact on Mental Health is a national issue of concern that warranted examination in a considered and sensitive way.

The Joint Committee agreed to produce a report having identified the following key areas:

- The Nature and Impact of Bullying on Mental Health.
- The Nature and Impact of Cyberbullying on Mental Health
- Towards a Whole School and Community Culture
- International Evidence and Best Practice.

The Committee are aware that some young people have endured great suffering because of school bullying with short term and long-term consequences of a very serious nature. It is not an exaggeration to say that school bullying can affect a person for the rest of their lives. It can affect a person's ability to lead a full and positive life as they struggle to deal with serious mental health issues and loss of self-esteem and even the belief that they can lead worthy lives. No human being should have to endure this, and immediate action must be to be taken to resolve an issue that reflects badly on the entire nation.

The Committee also recognised that cyberbullying has increased significantly as an unintended consequence of advances in digital technology. Research shows that the Covid 19 pandemic has exacerbated this insidious form of bullying.

The Committee agreed that a sustainable resolution will only be found by developing an inclusive and kind culture in school communities that moves beyond intolerance of bullying to a place where positive mental health and student support is an integral part of the ethos of the school.

The Committee sought and received written submissions from a wide range of stakeholders. The quality of the evidence based on comprehensive research findings and the poignant examples of the detrimental effect of bullying on individuals is warmly welcomed by the Committee.

The Committee met with key stakeholders including clinical psychologists and child and adolescent mental health experts; relevant Unions; School Patron, Parent and Management Bodies; the Ombudsman for Children; organisations dealing with cyber safety for children and young people and, most importantly, we heard the voices of young people themselves. Mr. Matthew Ryan, Welfare Officer, Irish Second Level Students Union (ISSU); Mr. Ben Holmes, Webwise Youth Advisory Panel Member and Mr, Hugh Ahern, Patrician Academy, Mallow, County Cork, assisted the Committee greatly by sharing their perspectives and experiences.

It also met with academic staff from the National Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre in Dublin City University (DCU) again and with another senior academic staff member from DCU on a panel of international academic experts. I would again like to express gratitude to DCU for their consistently excellent guidance and support to the Committee. DCU has engaged with the Committee in a spirit of great partnership on this and other issues and has added immense value to our work.

Department of Education Officials also briefed the Committee on measures that are in place and plans to tackle the issue of school bullying and support mental health.

Arising from this, the Committee examined the evidence heard and the submissions received and drew up this Report containing concrete and feasible recommendations. The Committee genuinely believes these can be implemented without delay and will impact positively on the whole school community leading to a

transformative cultural change where not only is there zero tolerance of bullying, but schools foster a genuinely inclusive ethos.
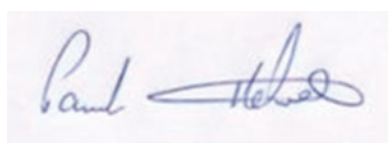
It is imperative that the twin issues of school bullying and mental health are treated as a matter of top priority by the Department of Education. Irish schools must be inclusive places of learning where all students feel accepted, safe, and respected. Difference should not only be accepted but welcomed and celebrated. School Communities should foster a spirit of kindness and friendship that sees positive mental health as paramount and as the foundation stone upon which all students can learn and develop to reach their full potential.

I have said in a previous report that young people are our future. I believe this needs to be said again here and in an emphatic way. This Committee is determined that it will play a role in making sure that all young people benefit from educational opportunities free from behaviour that impacts adversely on their mental health and causes distress, anxiety, fear and trauma that may be carried into their adult lives.

The Committee is committed to ensuring these recommendations are implemented as expeditiously as possible.

On 20th July 2021, the report was agreed to be published by the Committee.

The Joint Committee also requests that the issues raised in this report be the subject of a debate in both Houses of the Oireachtas.

Paul Kehoe T.D.,

Cathaoirleach,

Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

August 2021

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Action Plan on Bullying and the related *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools* were both published by the Department of Education in 2013. They have not been updated since. Over the last eight years, there have been significant developments in research and international best practice relating to bullying prevention and dealing with bullying behaviour. The Action Plan needs to be urgently audited so that it is connected to subsequent policies on Child Protection, Wellbeing, Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and benchmarked against the recommendations that were recently published by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Scientific Committee on tackling bullying and cyberbullying in schools. The Procedures need to be updated based on the Audit findings.

Data on individual bullying cases, their causes, the steps taken to address them, and the outcomes of these interventions are currently being collected by schools and reported to their Boards of Management. However, this data is not being fed back systematically to the Department of Education. The non reporting represents a missed opportunity to use this data to assess the efficacy of existing anti-bullying efforts and to improve the development of future interventions and programmes.

The Department of Education's Inspectorate could play a key role in monitoring the performance of schools Anti Bullying and Wellbeing Initiatives through Whole School Evaluations (WSE)s which are published on education.ie. Bullying is so widespread in every urban and rural school with children most likely in the role of bystanders watching incidences as well as the children who experience bullying as a victim or perpetrator. An inclusion of Anti-Bullying Measures in WSE reports as a separate section is urgently required to allow a record and mitigation steps be implemented for incidences of bullying in individual schools, the nature of the bullying, the steps taken to resolve the issue and the final outcomes. Separate Anti Bullying Inspections should also be conducted on a regular basis and published to reassure parents and teaching staff that the school have robust measures are in place. Such inspections would allow for the prompt identification of any areas of concern and additional supports should be rapidly provided.

The provision of school-based emotional counselling and therapeutic support services is an area where Ireland is behind many other countries and which could prove transformative in childrens and young peoples lives. Having professional supports on site would allow for early intervention and, in many cases, reduce the need for onward referral to more intensive services. Emotional Counselling and Therapeutic Supports on site should be provided, as needed, in all primary and post primary schools through a reconstituted and expanded National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS).

The appointment of an Online Safety Commissioner would play a crucial role in addressing cyberbullying, acting as a central point for complaints about abusive social media content. It is important that the Online Safety Commissioner has the power to receive and investigate complaints from individuals. The Commissioner should also have an educational function, promoting educational initiatives, on social media and more traditional media platforms, related to online safety.

Teachers must receive the requisite training in bullying and related areas to support students properly. This is particularly true in relation to the rapidly changing digital and social media landscape. Teachers should also receive adequate training to ensure that they are comfortable in promoting and maintaining an inclusive classroom environment. Such training should be included in both Initial Teacher Education (ITE) for new teachers and in Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for existing teachers.

Middle management and school leadership posts are an invaluable resource for schools in providing effective leadership to prevent bullying and tackling bullying behaviour where it is identified. The reduction in the number of posts has made it difficult to provide the necessary supports and fully implement anti bullying policies in schools. Middle management posts should be restored to previous levels and increased where there is an identified need, with primary school posts aligned with secondary schools.

The FUSE programme has been developed and is run by the DCU National Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre. This programme *fuses* together the needs of the students, the concerns of the parents and the professionalism of the teachers. It is currently in its second year with 127 schools participating, 30 of these are primary schools. Given the very positive feedback from these schools, the innovative FUSE Programme should be rolled out to all primary and secondary schools, by DCU Anti Bullying Centre, as a model of best practice. The Department of Education should liaise with DCU to ensure the Centre is given adequate funding and resources to undertake this task as an urgent priority.

The FUSE Anti-Bullying & Online Safety Programme requires a national investment and roll-out with regional co-ordinators to achieve impact with over 3,240 primary schools and 722 post-primary schools (Oireachtas Library & Research Office Statistical Snapshot 2019). The team at DCU has developed an excellent programme however at current rate of engagement it will take over 30 years for FUSE training to reach all schools across the country.

The Barnardos *Friendship Group* and *Roots of Empathy* Programmes should be rolled out as a pilot and then, pending evaluation, nationally.

The other recommendations include:

- School Charters,
- School Community Forums,
- Student Well Being Officers,
- more time for extra-curricular activities,
- a Roadmap of Supports,
- Pathfinder Project,
- National Mental Health Programme for Children and Young People,
- Senior Officials Group on Cyberbullying and Internet Security,
- expediting the Education (Student and Parent) Charter Bill, 2019,
- enacting an Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill expeditiously,

- resourcing the Research Observatory on Cyberbullying, and supporting collaboration between schools, social media, gaming platforms and statutory agencies
- Adequate Guidance Counsellor and/or Home School Community Liaison Officers (HSCLOs),
- Revising Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexual Education (RSE),
- Training in Restorative Practices for teaching staff.

TEN KEY REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

Below are the Ten Key Report Recommendations, listed by order in which they appear in the main body of the Report.

1. A Department of Education Audit of the Action Plan on Bullying (2013) to ensure that:

   • It continues to be informed by up-to-date research and evidence, including research to ascertain why some schools are encountering challenges in implementing the existing Action Plan on Bullying (2013), related Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2013) and Circular 0045/2013

   • It is connected to subsequent policies on child protection, wellbeing, and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE).

   • It is benchmarked against the recommendations that were recently published by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation Scientific Committee (UNESCO) on tackling bullying and cyberbullying in schools (Behind the Numbers, UNESCO, 2019)

   • The Department of Education to publish updated Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2013) based on the audit findings, with specific actions to address homophobic, transphobic, disability and racist bullying behaviours.

2. The Department of Education to establish a National System for the compilation of disaggregate Data Collation and Measurement on incidences of Bullying and Cyberbullying in all Primary and Secondary Schools. The data should record not only the incidences, but the nature of the bullying, the remedies initiated and the outcomes. This data should be used to inform the development of anti-bullying policy on an ongoing basis.

3. Whole School Evaluation (WSE)s should include an assessment of the five areas of focus for school performance regarding Anti Bullying Initiatives and Programmes. Where the inspectorate identifies issues of concern, additional supports should be provided to individual schools. Separate Anti Bullying Inspections should be conducted by the inspectorate on a regular basis in all schools.

4. The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) should be reconstituted and expanded urgently as the National Educational Psychological and Counselling Service (NEPCS) and mandated to provide specialist Emotional Counselling and Therapeutic Supports, on site, in all primary and secondary schools. The Service should be adequately resourced and funded to ensure it can deliver on its mandate.

5. The Office of an Online Safety Commissioner should be established by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media as an urgent priority, with both an investigative mandate, which would include dealing with individual complaints, and an educational function. The Office should be given sufficient resources to perform its functions optimally. It should also receive funding for a national advertising awareness campaign on its establishment.

6. The Department of Education should provide a mandatory online Cyber Bullying and Internet Safety Training Programme for all teaching staff.

7. Separate Mandatory Modules on School Bullying, Wellbeing (including Developing Resilience and Emotional Intelligence), Autism and Neurodiversity, Disability, Racism and Inclusivity should be provided in all Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses, and to all primary and secondary school teachers as part of their Continuous Professional Development (CPD).

8. The Department of Education should restore middle management positions, primarily Deputy Principals and Year Heads, removed from schools and undertake an assessment of School Leadership posts at Primary level, with a view to aligning the number of leadership posts with equivalent posts at secondary level.

9. A national roll-out of the FUSE Anti-Bullying and Online Safety Programme to all primary and secondary schools, by DCU Anti Bullying Centre, as an evidence-based model of best practice. The Department of Education currently support this programme however to achieve maximum reach to close to 4,000 primary and post-primary schools, increased investment to resource Regional Co-ordinators and Task Force is urgently required.

10. The Barnardos Friendship Group and Roots of Empathy Programmes to be piloted in Primary Schools across the country, and, pending evaluation, rolled out nationwide.

CHAPTER 1 – NATURE AND IMPACT OF SCHOOL BULLYING ON MENTAL HEALTH

INTRODUCTION

1. The Committee is conscious that bullying is not a straightforward or simple issue. Bullying can take a wide variety of forms, and young people can find themselves victimised for many different reasons. The Committee believes it is necessary to first outline the nature and scope of the issue.

2. In oral evidence on 18 May 2021, Ms Ann Piggott, President, Association of secondary Teachers Ireland (ASTI) said: '*Some people are vulnerable and more likely to be targeted. Anyone can be bullied at any point for any particular reason. A person may be in the wrong place at the wrong time. A person may be jealous or maybe someone got 100% in a test. I do not believe we can narrow it to any one reason, but we should keep talking about it and make people aware that it is happening. We need to highlight that people have to talk to others. That is where we have to go in future*.'

TYPES AND FORMS OF BULLYING

3. Ms. Stella O'Malley, Psychotherapist, in her submission, provides a definition of bullying, developed by the psychologist Dan Olweus, as '*repeated verbal or physical harassment that involves an imbalance of power'*.

4. The Dublin City University (DCU) Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre submission identifies the three main features of bullying as being *intentional, repeated* and *involving a power imbalance*.

5. The Irish Second-level Students' Union (ISSU) submission lists different types of bullying, including:

- Physical bullying, which involves, but is not limited to, hitting, pinching, spitting, vandalising someone's property or belongings,
- Verbal bullying, which can range from constant passing of comments to unrelenting verbal abuse,

- Exclusionary bullying, which involves deliberately leaving someone out or excluding them specifically,
- Sexual harassment,
- Gesture bullying, which involves threatening or intimidating signs and gestures from one individual or group to another, and
- Prejudicial bullying and racism.

6. Bullying is often based on any perceived difference in the victim. Bullying victims are often victimised due to sexuality, gender identity, physical appearance, having a disability, race or membership of an ethnic minority, or social class. The SpunOut submission refers to the findings of a survey of 430 young people, (91% of whom were aged between 14 and 21), it conducted in February 2021. Of the respondents who reported being bullied, 54% said it related to weight or appearance, 23% said it related to their accent or background, and 18% said it related to homophobia.

7. SpunOut submission also reports that the same survey found students with a disability or condition that might require accommodation reported the highest level of bullying of any single group. Of those with a disability or condition who reported being bullied, 26% had been bullied specifically about their disability or condition and 59% had been bullied about their physical appearance.

8. SpunOut submission found that 25.6% of respondents who identified as non-"White Irish" and who experienced bullying said that it was based on their race, ethnicity, or background.

9. Mr Brian Wall, Guidance Counsellor, in his submission, highlights the phenomenon of '*positive negative behaviour'*, where individuals engage in negative behaviour, either consciously or unconsciously, to gain a positive outcome. Mr Wall states that bullying can allow the perpetrator to experience the positive feeling of dominance over others, gain respect and recognition, reinforce acceptance, and achieve a certain social status within a peer group. He also states that there is a strong relationship between poor self-esteem and bullying behaviour.

PREVALENCE OF BULLYING

10. Jigsaw submission refers to the 2019 *My World Survey 2*[1], which was developed by Jigsaw and the UCD School of Psychology and was completed by 19,000 young people. *My World Survey 2* found that 39% of adolescents in secondary school in Ireland have experienced bullying. It is encouraging that this figure has dropped from 45% since 2012, when the first *My World Survey* was published. However, the figure is still worryingly high. Significantly, of those who reported being bullied, 73% said that it occurred in school, compared to 12% by text/online/phone, and only 3% at home.

11. Teachers Union of Ireland (TUI) submission states that 7.6% of Irish children aged between 11 and 15 will encounter chronic bullying, compared to the OECD average of 10.8%.

12. Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC) submission cites academic evidence that globally, 30.5% of 12 to 17-year olds reported being bullied within the past 30 days. They also state that in a study of 6 to 11-year olds, 14.3% of children were identified as bullies, 18.2% were identified as victims, and, 19% were identified as both bullies and victims.

13. Inclusion Ireland submission cites the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Report on the rights of persons with disabilities, to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health,[2] that children with disabilities are six times more likely than other children to experience violence and abuse. It goes on to say that the way in which children with additional needs are separated from their peers within the education system facilitates a culture where children with intellectual disabilities are treated as "others" by their peers, teachers, and by the system itself.

14. Down Syndrome Ireland submission states that around 16% of students with Down syndrome reported experiencing bullying in school, but that this figure may be an underestimation, as children who may have significant communication

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[1] My World Survey 2: Available here
[2] Report on the rights of persons with disabilities to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health: Available here

challenges may not be able to describe and report behaviours of concern when they are happening.

15. Dr Maria Garvey, CEO, Cooperative Learning Institute, in her submission, warns that only 23% of the parents of bullied 10-year olds were aware, and only 15% of parents of bullied older children.

16. Isolation from peers seems to be a major risk factor for children with additional needs in terms of being bullied. The AsIAm submission reports that at least 40% of autistic students experience bullying during their time in education.

17. In her submission and oral evidence on 4 May 2021, Ms. Mary Briody, Psychotherapist, suggests that bullying should be considered as part of a continuum of behaviour, rather than a standalone issue, and in some cases this behaviour may escalate to serious physical or sexual assault or harassment.

18. Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI) submission refers to research they carried out on adolescents' experiences of sexual harassment. This found that adolescents reported high levels of sexual harassment within their school communities. 63% of respondents disclosed that they were subjected to unwelcome sexual comments, jokes, or gestures to or about them in the last year. 23% felt that sexual harassment within school is common, often overlooked or not adequately disciplined by school authorities, 47% stated that they would not know how to report sexual harassment within their school, and 36% reported receiving no formal education pertaining to sexual harassment while at school.

19. Dr Claire Hayes, Consultant Clinical Psychologist, in her submission cites research conducted by *the End Bullying Be Kind Online*[3] campaign. The Research found that 50% of LGBTI+ secondary school students are bullied, 67% of students have witnessed bullying of LGBTI+ students at school and 60% said that if someone comes out as LGBTI+ in their school, they will be bullied.

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[3] End Bullying Be Kind Online: Available here

20. Children's Rights Alliance (CRA) submission references a 2019 *BeLonG To* survey[4] of 788 LGBTI+ students between 13 and 20, which found that 70% felt unsafe at school. Additionally, 67.8% reported other students making derogatory remarks in school frequently. Almost half of the survey participants said they heard homophobic remarks from teachers or staff and 45% reported that staff never intervened when homophobic remarks were made in their presence.

21. In oral evidence on 4 May 2021, Dr Niall Muldoon, Ombudsman for Children, requested that disaggregated data should be compiled by the State regarding cases of bullying and harassment in schools.' In his written submission, he encouraged the Joint Committee to include the '*matter of oversight, monitoring and evaluation in its current examination and to improve the collection, collation and analysis of data about bullying in schools involving children and young people*'.

22. In oral evidence on 1 June 2021, Ms. Rachel O'Connor, Vice President, National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD), stated that comprehensive data on bullying was collected by her school and reported to the Board of Management, but did not appear to go any further and was thus not effectively used.

2013 ANTI-BULLYING PROCEDURES FOR PRIMARY AND POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS

23. The Department of Education submission refers to the publication, in 2013, of *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*, as part of an Action Plan against School Bullying. All schools are required to formally adopt and have in place an anti-bullying policy which fully complies with the requirements set out in the document. School Policies must make explicit reference to the issue of cyber-bullying and identity-based bullying. An anti-bullying policy template is provided in the procedures along with a standardised

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[4] BeLonGTo Youth Services 2019 School Climate Survey: Available here

template for recording bullying behaviour and a standardised annual review checklist and notification letter.

24. The Department of Education submission states that the Inspectorate is currently reviewing how it evaluates schools' implementation of anti-bullying measures with a view to improving the effectiveness and consistency in how this is reported.

25. In oral evidence on 22 June 2021, Ms Yvonne Keating, Deputy Chief Inspector, Department of Education, reported that the inspectorate is working to strengthen its oversight of, and reporting on, the implementation of anti-bullying procedures in schools in the coming school year, by examining five key areas of focus:

- the extent to which schools have anti-bullying policies in place;
- the timely reporting by principals to the board on anti-bullying matters as required under the 2013 Procedures;
- the annual review by boards of management of anti-bullying in schools;
- the communication of the school's anti-bullying policies to all members of the school community, including parents; and
- the recording of incidents of bullying behaviour in accordance with the 2013 procedures.

26. Although the Procedures are broadly acknowledged as being valuable in the fight against school bullying, several submissions highlighted the fact that they had not been updated in the eight years since their publication, and, so, do not take into account more recent evidence based research.

27. ASTI submission recommends that the Procedures should be reviewed to reflect current bullying prevention and intervention research and the societal landscape in which children and adolescents live, in today, particularly the impact of digital technology.

28. DCU Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre submission opines that the Procedures need to include all the forms that bullying can take, including the impact that ethnicity-based bullying can have on ethnic minorities such as members of the Traveller community.

29. The Irish Second-Level Students' Union (ISSU) submission suggests that the DES should review the *Anti-Bullying Procedures* on a biannual basis, to ensure that they are reflective of the ever-changing school environment.

30. Dr. Niall Muldoon, in his submission, points out that The 2013 *Action Plan on Bullying* recommended that the Inspectorate take the lead on a thematic evaluation of bullying in schools, in collaboration with relevant partners and involving a sample of primary and post-primary schools. The purpose being to assess the effectiveness of actions taken by schools to prevent and tackle various forms of bullying, including homophobic bullying.

31. The Department of Education submission points out that the Programme for Government includes a commitment to '*update the National Anti-Bullying Plan to include gender identity bullying'*.

32. In oral evidence on 18 May 2021, Ms. Ann Piggott, President, ASTI, proposed that the Department of Education Inspectorate could play an important role in monitoring how schools are performing in terms of Anti bullying and Wellbeing Initiatives to include examining the incidences of bullying in individual schools, the nature and the outcomes. She proposed that it should be an integral part of Whole School Evaluations (WSE) but also that there should be separate *Anti Bullying and Wellbeing* inspections. Individual schools should be offered additional supports where the inspectorate identifies there is a need.

33. In oral evidence, on 15 June 2021, Professor O'Higgins Norman, UNESCO Chair on Anti Bullying, DCU Anti Bullying Centre, stated that *'in the past 10 years, there have been some very significant developments at a policy level in relation to school bullying. Most significantly, the introduction of the Action Plan on Bullying (2013) and related Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2013) as well as Circular 0045/2013 all of which were a landmark in educational policy related to bullying prevention and intervention. We suggest the Action Plan on Bullying (2013) be audited to ensure that*

- *it continues to be informed by up-to-date research and evidence,*

- *it is connected to subsequent policies on child protection, wellbeing, and Relationships and Sexuality Education*
- *and benchmarked against the recommendations that were recently published by UNESCO's Scientific Committee on tackling bullying and cyberbullying in schools (Behind the Numbers, UNESCO, 2019).*

UNESCO's Scientific Committee consulted with over 50 researchers around the globe, and highlights that we need to recognise bullying not just as an individualised issue but also as a systemic issue in society and as such a whole education rather than a whole school approach is required to prevent bullying in schools.

A brief review and audit of our Action Plan and Procedures to ensure that they comply with UNESCO's recommendations will not be overly burdensome nor will it allow us to be distracted from the continuing challenge of implementing the Action Plan and Procedures in schools now.

Our research shows that despite being required to do so in the Action Plan and Procedures,

- *Only 51% of schools have appointed a specific member of staff to investigate and tackle bullying in their school,*
- *less than half (45%) of schools had researched and identified a specific anti-bullying programme to use in their school'.*

Recommendations:

1. A Department of Education Audit of the Action Plan on Bullying (2013) to ensure that:

    - It continues to be informed by up-to-date research and evidence, including research to ascertain why some schools are encountering challenges in implementing the existing Action Plan on Bullying (2013), related Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2013) and Circular 0045/2013

- It is connected to subsequent policies on child protection, wellbeing, and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE).
- It is benchmarked against the recommendations that were recently published by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation Scientific Committee (UNESCO) on tackling bullying and cyberbullying in schools (Behind the Numbers, UNESCO, 2019).

- The Department of Education to publish updated Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2013) based on the audit findings, with specific actions to address homophobic, transphobic, disability and racist bullying behaviours.

2. The Department of Education to establish a National System for the compilation of disaggregate Data Collation and Measurement on incidences of Bullying and Cyberbullying in all Primary and Secondary Schools. The data should record not only the incidences, but the nature of the bullying, the remedies initiated and the outcomes. This data should be used to inform the development of anti-bullying policy on an ongoing basis.

3. Whole School Evaluation (WSE)s should include an assessment of the five areas of focus for school performance regarding Anti Bullying Initiatives and Programmes. Where the inspectorate identifies issues of concern, additional supports should be provided to individual schools. Separate Anti Bullying Inspections should be conducted by the inspectorate on a regular basis in all schools.

BULLYING WITHIN THE WIDER SCHOOL COMMUNITY

1. While the key focus of this report is on students engaging in bullying behaviour with other students, the Committee recognises that students bullying other students is not necessarily the only form of bullying within school communities.

2. Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN) submission points out that there is evidence of adult bullying in schools, which can take the form of parents bullying teachers, or teachers, principals and other staff bullying each other or students. It reports that school principals experience nearly twice the incidence of threats of violence and actual physical violence at work than other population groups, with the incidence being higher for female principals. School leaders and teachers are sometimes the subject of derogatory, and even defamatory, comment on social media sites, and it is important that staff are protected. It states that while teachers receive significant training and preparation for dealing with children, they receive far less in how to deal with adults, leaving them ill equipped for negative interactions with parents.

3. TUI submission states that school staff are as entitled to dignity and safety in the workplace as any other workers. TUI is working with other unions to create a teacher charter, to clarify what rights teachers and school leaders should have.

    Recommendations:

    4. The Department of Education should mandate all Primary and Secondary Schools to produce a School Charter that clearly outlines the School's Ethos, Culture and Value Systems. Each School Charter must contain specific actions to prevent bullying and promote a positive school culture. The Department of Education should provide a Template Charter and Guidelines to assist Schools.

    5. The Department of Education should issue a Circular containing clear Guidelines on the Development of School Community Forums in all schools. These fora should include parents, staff members and school council representatives to encourage full engagement of the whole school community in developing a positive school culture.

EFFECTS OF BULLYING ON MENTAL HEALTH

4. Several submissions report both short and long-term negative consequences for children and young people who are bullied.

5. Ms. Stella O'Malley, in her submission, warns that school bullying can have long term consequences, including alcoholism, depression, anxiety, and other mental health disorders.

6. Irish Primary Principal's Network (IPPN) submission states that bullying can cause significant mental health issues including stress, anxiety, depression, psychotic episodes, and suicide as well as physical health issues including an increased risk of heart disease and other illness.

7. The Anti-Bullying Campaign submission asserts that bullying can have both short and long-term effects. Short-term effects can include a detrimental effect on the victim's education experience and outcomes. Longer-term effects, leading into adulthood, include damage to self confidence and self-esteem, and can lead to self-harm and suicide. It states that victims of bullying may develop feelings of insecurity, humiliation and extreme anxiety and thus may become more vulnerable.

8. Irish Medical Organisation (IMO) submission warns that bullying is associated with higher levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms, suicidal intentions, and suicide attempts, with adolescents who had been bullied 6.6 times more likely to report having attempted suicide compared to their peers.

9. Several submissions highlight that bullying has negative consequences for its perpetrators as well as its victims. Professor Shelley Hymel's submission states that bullying perpetration has been linked to internalizing problems (anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, self-harm), externalizing difficulties (aggression, antisocial behaviour), academic difficulties (lower achievement, absenteeism) and substance use. Bullying can also become a generalised pattern of negative interpersonal behaviour, with links to later violence, delinquency, and criminality.

10. The Anti-Bullying Campaign submission states that bullying perpetrators are at higher risk of depression, and may develop an anti-social personality, anxiety disorders, a likelihood of substance abuse and law-breaking behaviour in adulthood and decreased educational and occupational attainment.

11. ISPCC submission states that when compared to non-bystanders, bystanders of bullying are significantly more likely to experience psychological symptoms, somatic symptoms, and low life satisfaction.

12. INTO submission states that the long- and short-term effects of bullying can be more pronounced in LGBT+ children. Children who do not conform to stereotypical standards of masculinity or femininity may be targeted in primary schools. The most common age for an individual to realise their LGBT+ identity is 12 years of age.

13. Barnardos submission highlights the physical psychosomatic health problems linked to bullying, including headaches, poor appetite, poor sleep, abdominal pain, dizziness, fatigue, musculoskeletal pain, sore throats, and cough and colds.

14. AsIAm submission states that autistic children are 4 times likelier to develop a mental health condition, like clinical depression, than their neurotypical peers and are 28 times more likely to attempt suicide. Individuals on the spectrum without an intellectual disability are 9 times more likely to die by suicide.

15. In oral evidence on 4 May 2021, Dr Niall Muldoon, stated that '*Youth Mental Health Pathfinder Project was designed to take a whole of Government approach to tackling mental health issues for young people. This project was backed by 3 Departments (Education, Health and Children) but has not been progressed, an issue I have raised many, many times over the past 5 years. The implementation of Pathfinder would undoubtedly have a positive impact in tackling bullying in schools and dealing with other mental health issues affecting young people*'. He further stated at the meeting that the main

obstacle to commencing the Project was the issue of the allocation of budgetary resources to one Departmental Vote.

16. In oral evidence on 11 May 2021, Mr. Ben Holmes, Webwise Youth Advisory Member, who is also a Suicide Prevention Ambassador, stated that in cases where a person may be suspected of feeling suicidal, 'positive affirmation' is often not the correct approach. Ms. Suzanne Connolly, CEO, Barnardos, concurred with Mr. Holmes and outlined how suicidal ideation needs to be acknowledged first and then comprehensive supports provided.

Recommendations:

7. The Youth Mental Health Pathfinder Project should be commenced without further delay through early and constructive dialogue between the Ministers for Education; Health; Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and Public Expenditure and Reform and their Senior Officials.

8. A National Mental Health Programme for Children and Young People should be initiated as a top priority by the Government, with the immediate establishment of a Cabinet Sub Committee. The Cabinet Sub Committee should be mandated to publish the Programme by end 2021 with a view to establishing an Interdepartmental Unit, overseen by the Department of An Taoiseach, to ensure it is implemented fully and expeditiously.

MEASURES TO COMBAT BULLYING

17. Dr Paul Downes and Dr Carmel Cefai, in their joint submission, state that '*Given the seriousness of the long-term impacts of bullying, a prevention strategy needs to encompass not only prevention of the bullying but prevention of the consequences of bullying through a holistic focus on system level emotional, cognitive and social supports*'. They state that such supports at an early stage could prevent the escalation of negative effects of bullying such as self-doubting.

18. Ms. Stella O'Malley, in her submission, asserts that in order for anti-bullying programmes to be effective, they need to be more engaging and inspiring rather than simply providing bland and negative messages such as '*Don't be a bully*' and '*Bullying is nasty*'. She opines that workshops which teach emotional wellbeing, assertiveness skills, coping mechanisms, social skills and anger management can be very successful at creating a culture of acceptance and tolerance.

19. Ms. O'Malley also states in her submission that many victims of bullying fear that speaking out will leave them open to retaliation from their bully, and that such victims must be afforded the opportunity to speak out '*without feeling the world will end if they make a noise*'.

20. SpunOut submission acknowledges the important role of teachers and school leaders in addressing bullying, but also recognises the limitations of non-mental health professionals. They recommend that there should be greater access to professional counsellors for school-age students.

21. CRA submission refers to 2018 research in which 918 Irish principals were surveyed. Of these, only 40% agreed pupils could access qualified counsellors when they experienced bullying. The associated report highlighted the '*lack of access to counsellors and psychological support risks a situation where problems associated with mental or emotional health become worse without early intervention*', with responsibility for mental health issues often falling to teachers who are not appropriately skilled or trained.

22. The Joint Committee Report on *The Impact of Covid 19 on Primary and Secondary Schools*, published in January 2021, recommended that '*emotional counselling and therapeutic supports should be provided in all primary and secondary schools as an urgent priority*' (Recommendation 25, Key Recommendation 10). This was based on the evidence and findings from written submissions and oral evidence.

23. In oral evidence on 4 May 2021, Dr Niall Muldoon, Ombudsman for Children, stated '*I will repeat my call to have an independent therapist available to every*

primary school. Having an easily accessible therapeutic service would aid the whole school community to know they are doing their best for every child.

24. In oral evidence on 15 June 2021, Professor James O'Higgins Norman, UNESCO Chair on Tackling Bullying and Cyberbullying, DCU National Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre, when discussing access to therapeutic supports in schools, said: '*Something that has come up in our research is that access to this type of therapeutic intervention is not always immediately available or clearly immediately available to schools. Something on this would be very helpful to provide the service for those who need it. Not everybody who experiences bullying would need this type of care but for those who do need it, it should be easily accessible and readily available*'.

25. In oral evidence on 22 June 2021, Mr Hugh Ahern, Secondary School Student, when discussing access to counselling services and supports, said: '*I do believe that there is a need for more services, for counselling services in Ireland because teachers and school staff are not trained, they don't get professional training on how to deal with bullying… (Students) should be referred to a proper counselling service or an in school counsellor. Bullying is something that lasts with people. It never goes away*."

26. On 23 June 2021, the Committee received a letter from Dr Niall Muldoon, Ombudsman for Children, following up on a request made by the Committee during the meeting of 4 May 2021 to generate a scenario for the possible trialling of therapeutic services within schools. This letter is contained at *Appendix 3*.

27. In his letter to the Committee, Dr Muldoon cites evidence on school-based counselling in the UK, which found that More than 90% of children and young people report that they experienced an improvement which they attributed to counselling, and more than 82% reported that counselling was helpful. The letter also set out two possible structures for trialling the provision of school-based counselling in Ireland.

28. In oral evidence on 19 December 2020, Dr Paul Downes, Associate Professor in Psychology in Education, DCU, referred to international evidence that clearly demonstrated the clear benefits of Participatory Outdoor Learning and Extra Curricular activities involving children's localities.

29. In oral evidence to the Committee, on 18 May 2021, Ms. Ann Piggott, President, ASTI, stated that teachers should be given time to organise extra-curricular activities as an important measure in combating bullying behaviour and pupil isolation.

30. Thus, it seems reasonable to conclude that engaging students in outdoor and extra-curricular activities should be encouraged as a fundamentally important part of inculcating a positive school culture that can, inevitably, improve the physical and mental health of students. Involvement in activities that students enjoy, and, where they succeed, enhances their self-esteem and confidence. It gives them a strong purpose, fulfilment, and a sense of belonging. It also creates a culture of cohesion, inclusivity, and collective purpose in a school. A positive culture can play a hugely important role in preventing bullying and other types of negative, insidious behaviours. It also equips students to deal with bullying behaviours through enhanced resilience, self-esteem, and confidence.

Recommendations:

9. The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) should be reconstituted and expanded urgently as the National Educational Psychological and Counselling Service (NEPCS) and mandated to provide specialist Emotional Counselling and Therapeutic Supports, on site, in all primary and secondary schools. The Service should be adequately resourced and funded to ensure it can deliver on its mandate.

10. Teachers should be encouraged to organise extra-curricular activities for students and given the time to do it. The Department of Education should issue a circular giving an allocation of 3 hours weekly to teachers who organise

activities and time in lieu for time devoted to these activities outside their contract hours. A range of activities should be provided recognising the diverse nature of the student population in a school and their interests.

CHAPTER 2 - NATURE AND IMPACT OF CYBERBULLYING ON MENTAL HEALTH.

INTRODUCTION

31. The issue of cyberbullying has become prominent in recent years. The proliferation of digital technology such as smart phones and the rise of social media has meant that interacting in the online environment has become an everyday aspect of young people's lives. While this has had many benefits, it is also important to note that it has also had negative consequences, including cyberbullying. Evidence suggests that school closures and the subsequent move to online learning, arising from COVID-19, has led to a not insignificant increase in the prevalence of Cyberbullying.

NATURE OF CYBERBULLYING

32. DCU Anti-Bullying Centre (ABC) submission states that cyberbullying refers to bullying which occurs online or using technology. Cyberbullying can be more difficult to prove than traditional bullying, as, on many online platforms, the perpetrator remains anonymous.

33. ASTI submission states that cyberbullying can involve a larger audience, and a greater distance between the perpetrator and the victim.

34. CyberSafeKids submission cites research that indicates as children's access to technology and the internet grows, so too does the risk that they will become the victims of cyberbullying. Their own latest annual report shows that 93% of 8 to 12-year olds own their own smart device. This indicates that a significant majority of children may be at risk given the high rate of device ownership.

35. Dr Claire Hayes, in her submission, highlights that the vast majority of students who are bullied online are also victims of in-person bullying. Although traditional and cyber forms of bullying tend to target the same victims, traditional bullying is more uniquely associated with negative psychological outcomes.

36. DCU Anti-Bullying Centre (ABC) submission states that while one can often distinguish between online and offline bullying, this does not always serve to understand the nuances of young people's lives. In other words, the two can be inextricably linked. It states '*We know that most school students do not distinguish bullying in this manner and in many cases, students can be targeted both online and offline at the same time. As such, the term school bullying is used here to refer bullying in the broader sense that includes online and offline bullying*'.

37. CyberSafeKids submission states that while much cyberbullying among children and teenagers is activated outside of school hours, the hurtful behaviours and damage caused arise largely from relationship problems, which are formed during school hours, linking both.

TYPES AND FORMS OF CYBERBULLYING

38. CyberSafeKids, submission, identifies several types of cyberbullying including:
    a. excluding people from groups
    b. posting nasty comments
    c. sending hurtful messages
    d. using someone's photo without permission
    e. threatening to share information about a person online
    f. sending non-consensual images and videos taken of a person
    g. using fake profiles or accounts to target, threaten or scare someone
        h. "band wagoning" - others jumping in to repeat or continue the online harassment.

39. Image based sexual abuse (IBSA) is the non-consensual sharing of intimate images. 22.5% of respondents to SpunOut's survey reported experiencing this form of cyberbullying. 35% of those identified as transgender, non-binary or 'other', 22.5% as women and girls and 15% of men and boys. Alarmingly, 23.5% of respondents aged under 17, the age of consent, had experienced IBSA.

40. 49% of respondents to the SpunOut survey on bullying had attempted to report cyberbullying on an online platform. Of those respondents 54% reported that the platform had been unhelpful; 36% reported a mixed experience and 3% reported that the platform had been consistently helpful

41. CyberSafeKids submission refers to a survey they conducted of 2089 8 to 12-year olds between September 2020 and February 2021. It found 27% of respondents had experienced some form of cyberbullying; 14% experienced social exclusion, 12% had been sent hurtful messages and 9% had nasty comments posted about them. When asked what they did about it, 30% of children said they kept it to themselves. Boys were much more likely to keep it to themselves than girls (31% of boys versus 17% of girls).

IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH

42. Webwise submission quotes one of their Youth Panel Members as saying ""*In my opinion, cyber bullying is one of the worst forms of bullying. It follows you everywhere and there's little to no escape from it'*.

43. The IMO submission states that cyberbullying is having a significant emotional impact on Irish young people, with online victimisation in Ireland found to range between 9-14% in primary and post primary schools. They also report that there has been a 20% increase in cyberbullying during lockdown.

44. CyberSafeKids' submission points out that cyberbullying may go unnoticed as online activity allows for far greater freedom from adult supervision. As well as this, it can be harder to address, as it can be difficult to have the offensive comments or material removed from the internet.

45. Mr Hugh Ahern, Secondary School Student, warns in his submission, '*Cyberbullying can often be more harmful and more threatening than other forms of bullying as it is always with you and there is no getting away from it.'*

MEASURES TO COMBAT CYBERBULLYING

46. Mental Health Ireland submission asserts that all social media providers have a responsibility to have credible and robust age of consent policies in place. They also warn that anonymous posting to social media allows online behaviour to become decoupled from social sanction and legal consequences and are unhelpful.

47. IMO submission similarly states that social media organisations have a duty to protect young people from dangerous content, exploitation, and cyberbullying. It calls for the publication of the new Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill as a matter of urgency and states that strict measures are required to protect children from online material which promotes bullying, self-harm or eating disorders.

48. Webwise submission states that more could be done by social media companies and platforms to raise awareness of cyberbullying. Additional measures could include pro-actively signposting relevant resources and supports, highlighting safety features available, and engaging with stakeholders to ensure that cyberbullying reporting methods are clear and effective. In oral evidence, Ms Ann Piggott, ASTI, said that social media companies should monitor their sites for bullying or negative comments, and as soon as they see such comments, they should remove them or be found responsible and fined.

49. Mental Health Ireland submission recommends that training on the safe and appropriate use of social media should be included in the school curriculum and in training for teachers.

50. CyberSafeKids' submission refers to evidence, that indicates, in countries who have fully embedded internet safety in the curriculum, young people have become more digitally aware and proficient. It reports the earlier children are introduced to regular class discussions on cyberbullying, the better they will be at recognising the signs, coping with the negative behaviour, and seeking help, where necessary.

51. CRA submission reports that over 80% of teachers say that online safety is a significant issue in their school, and 22% said they would not feel confident in the steps they would take to respond to a cyberbullying incident. 28% of children and young people reported that they had been a victim of cyberbullying during the Covid-19 lockdown while 50% reported seeing it happen to others.

52. Several submissions and oral evidence recommend the early appointment of an Online Safety Commissioner. The CRA submission states '*There is a role for the Online Safety Commissioner to promote public awareness of online safety issues including cyberbullying. It will also promote educational initiatives and activities relating to online safety and to advise any educational or training institution, Ministers, Departments of State or any public body*'.

53. In oral evidence on 11 May 2021, Mr Philip Arneill, Head of Education and innovation, CyberSafeKids, stated that he would like to see the Online Safety Commissioner '*… have the teeth that we believe they should have, including an individual complaints mechanism, which would also address things like cyberbullying. Individuals would be in a position to complain to the commissioner and to have that content removed, rather than trying to take on huge social media giants like Facebook or Twitter and clearly coming up against a brick wall.*'

54. The former Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, in its Report on *Cyber Security for Children and Young Adults* (March 2018, recommendation 4), states '*The Joint Committee recommends that an Office of a Digital Safety Commissioner should be established and that it should have particular regard to ensuring that Children and Young People, who are some of the most vulnerable online users, are protected. This Office should be provided with sufficient resources and personnel to ensure that it can perform its functions adequately*'.

55. Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) submission welcomes the recent commencement of *The Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Bill 2020*, also known as Coco's law, which creates two new offences criminalising the non-consensual distribution of intimate images.

56. ETBI submission also welcomes the agreement between the Department of Justice and DCU Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre to fund a Research Observatory on Cyberbullying, focused on providing up-to-date research, advice and resources related to cyberbullying, cyberhate, and online harassment.

57. In oral evidence, on 15 June 2021, Professor O'Higgins Norman, UNESCO Chair on Anti Bullying, DCU Anti Bullying Centre, stated that ' *Published information on bullying content that is detected proactively by AI(Artificial Intelligence) would be more meaningful if we had more information, such as the overall incidence of bullying involving minors on a given platform and what supports were provided'*.

To that end, it will be increasingly important to ensure inter-Departmental collaboration between the Department of Education, which is responsible for the Action Plan and Procedures; the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and the Media, which is responsible for the Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill (OSMR), as well as the Department of Justice, which is responsible for the implementation of Coco's Law.

Furthermore, in addition to their role in preventing bullying behaviour within schools, school staff need to understand that they also have a role under the Action Plan and Procedures in relation to bullying that occurs elsewhere, including online (Circular 0045/2013). Consequently, mechanisms to support closer collaboration between school communities, social media/gaming platforms, and statutory agencies will be required. This has already started informally, for example, between DCU, Facebook and the Department of Education in relation to the roll-out of our FUSE Anti-Bullying and Online Safety Programme. The

results of our current fieldwork suggest this could also include greater

collaboration between schools and online platforms in reporting abusive content'.

Recommendations:

11. An Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill should be enacted expeditiously, and a Roadmap published to ensure the legislation is fully implemented. The legislation should mandate Social Media Companies to monitor and remove offensive messages within a 48-hour period.

12. The Office of an Online Safety Commissioner should be established by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media as an urgent priority, with both an investigative mandate, which would include dealing with individual complaints, and an educational function. The Office should be given sufficient resources to perform its functions optimally. It should also receive funding for a national advertising awareness campaign on its establishment.

13. The Research Observatory on Cyberbullying should be adequately resourced on a sustainable basis so that it can play a leading role in provision of up-to-date research, advice and resources related to cyberbullying, cyberhate, and online harassment.

14. A Senior Officials Group on *Cyberbullying and Internet Security* should be established comprising Assistant Secretaries (or equivalent) from the Departments of Education; Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and the Media and Justice, by end September 2021. The Group would be responsible for ensuring increased inter departmental collaboration by initially publishing an Action Plan with Key Objectives and Timelines. It would report back quarterly to An Taoiseach and the relevant Ministers on progress made in the implementation of the Plan.

15. The Department of Education should take the lead role in establishing mechanisms that can be rolled out nationally to support collaboration between schools, social media/gaming platforms and statutory agencies. DCU Anti Bullying Centre should be commissioned to assist the Department in the development of the mechanisms.

CHAPTER 3 – TOWARDS A WHOLE SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY CULTURE

INTRODUCTION

58. The Committee is of the view that bullying cannot be addressed by teachers alone. It is important that all members of the wider school community work together to implement solutions that tackle bullying and minimise its negative consequences.

59. The Committee supports the development of a whole school culture which emphasises Respect, Kindness, and Inclusivity and where student voices and experiences are also at the very centre of all decisions made.

60. In oral evidence on 25 May 2021, Ms Ann O'Dwyer said '*The significant ingredients in a good school culture are care and respect. These two values permeate all other elements and actions.*'

61. Parents must also be welcomed as an integral part of the community and be given opportunities to engage with their children's schools in a real and meaningful way. Schools should also reach out to the wider local community so that students and the wider community have a sense of connection, mutual understanding, and mutual pride in both the school and their locality.

ROLE OF PARENTS, STUDENTS AND TEACHERS WORKING TOGETHER

62. Joint Managerial Body (JMB) submission asserts that approaches to bullying should be '*school-wide'*, involving not only school management and teachers, but also taking in all the communities which interact with schools.

63. Ms. Stella O'Malley's submission states that schools who downplay or minimise bullying tend to have more instances of it, while schools who are more open about bullying tend to have better results in tackling it.

64. In oral evidence on 1 June 2021, Mr John Irwin, General Secretary, Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS) said that there has to be an openness on the part of school management to engage with all stakeholders, and that schools must engage parents, but they also must engage students.

65. In oral evidence, on 4 May 2021, Dr Claire Hayes stated that having respect for other people is paramount in creating good school relationships. This extends to all Members of the School Community. It is imperative that there is a culture of mutual respect and understanding where students, teachers and parents can work together to prevent bullying and foster a positive whole school culture of mutual understanding and support.

66. IPPN submission asserts that the proposed Student and Parent Charter Bill presents an opportunity to identify, implement and embed best practice in terms of bullying prevention and counteraction.

67. The National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD) submission opines that a positive school climate where there is a culture of dialogue between students and staff to create a "*telling*" school is the best way to inhibit bullying in schools.

68. In oral evidence on 1 June 2021, Ms. Rachel O'Connor, Vice President, NAPD, reported on the need to engage parents in a real and meaningful way as an integral part of the solution. The NAPD's submission proposes that an active Parents' Council where parents voices can be heard, and, that they can feel part of the school community, is vital.

69. ISPCC submission, raises the issue of bullying that occurs outside of school grounds, but which may be viewed as school-related, such as on the school bus. These types of bullying raise the question of who is responsible for dealing with it.

Recommendations:

16. The Education (Student and Parent) Charter Bill, 2019 should be enacted as expeditiously as possible and then fully implemented as a key priority of Government.

TEACHER TRAINING

70. Mental Health Ireland submission asserts that the recognition of signs of bullying must be an integral part of the training for Teachers, Special Needs Assistants and School Principals at all levels within the Irish Education system. Skills based training in the recognition, resolution and ongoing management of bullying must be a component of annual in-service training for all school staff.

71. IPPN submission highlights the need for Continual Professional Development (CPD) material to be updated, particularly in relation to homophobic / transphobic/gender-based bullying and cyberbullying.

72. In oral evidence on 25 May 2021, Ms. Ann O'Dwyer, Director of Schools, Kerry ETBI, recommended sustained support and funding of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for teachers on bullying and mental health issues. She also stated that ETBI would welcome CPD regarding the wellbeing of Principals, Deputy Principals and Teachers, whose own resilience and positive mental health is vital for engaging with issues regarding student bullying and mental health.

73. AsIAm submission states that teachers are not well placed to teach students about autism or to recognise when an autistic student is being bullied or experiencing mental health issues unless they have had adequate training regarding autism.

Recommendations:

17. The Department of Education should provide a mandatory online Cyber Bullying and Internet Safety Training Programme for all primary and secondary school teachers.

18. Separate Mandatory Modules *on School Bullying, Wellbeing (including Developing Resilience and Emotional Intelligence), Autism and Neurodiversity, Disability, Racism* and *Inclusivity* should be provided in all Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses, and to all primary and secondary school teachers as part of their Continuous Professional Development (CPD) .

RESOURCING ISSUES AND ROLLOUT OF PROGRAMMES

74. INTO submission points out that the average Irish class size is 25, compared to an EU average of 20. Larger classes make it difficult for teachers to effectively support the social, emotional, and behavioural needs of students.

75. In oral evidence on 25 May 2021, Mr John Curtis, General Secretary, Joint Managerial Body (JMB), noted the OECD *Education at a Glance 2020* ranks Ireland last out of 36 countries for investment in second-level education as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product. Since the 2009 financial crash, he noted that schools have not had allocations of teachers and guidance counsellors restored to pre-crash levels.

76. JMB submission recommends that schools need additional resources to tackle bullying, including:

    i. '*more Deputy Principals*
    j. *Substitution provision to allow in-school meetings – particularly about investigating bullying*
    k. *Provision of coordination time*

> l.   *DES approval for in-school in-service*
>
> m. *Provision of professional development on bullying'.*

77. In oral evidence on 15 June 2021, Dr Alan Gorman, Research Fellow, DCU National Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre, said that it is important for schools to build up leadership capacity, particularly for early-career principals, so that schools have the capability to identify areas they need to work on and can address those areas.

78. TUI submission points out that schools rely heavily on outside agencies to support children suffering from bullying, but that these agencies are under severe pressure and often face significant waiting lists. It highlights that, in March 2018, 2,691 children and young adults were waiting for a CAMHS appointment, including 386 who were waiting more than 12 months and 128 who were waiting more than 18 months.

79. Irish College of General Practitioners' (ICGP) submission states that the ongoing lack of resourcing of mental health services requires urgent attention in the form of properly funded, integrated, structured programmes of care for patients with mental health conditions.

80. Health Service Executive (HSE) submission states that CAMHS is part of a tiered model of care, with primary care services such as GPs usually being the first port of call. Secondary services consist mainly of community-based services delivered by different clinical members of the Community CAMHS team. Tertiary services comprise intensive community-based care and in-patient care. The submission states that only a small percentage of the population would require access to CAMHS.

81. IPPN submission proposes that multidisciplinary teams focused on bullying and the other emotional needs of children, should be developed jointly by the Departments of Education and Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. These multidisciplinary teams should include access to Occupational Therapists, Speech and Language Therapists, Psychologists, and other services.

82. ETBI submission proposes the development of a '*Roadmap of Supports'* to guide schools towards efficiently accessing resources available to assist them in mediating the social and cultural changes occurring in classrooms and schools.

83. Similarly, IPPN submission recommends that a central helpline or hub should be established to provide school leaders, teachers and parents with expert guidance and support in relation to all forms of bullying and effective strategies, tools, and materials to prevent and counteract bullying behaviour.

84. Several submissions highlight the need to restore previously cut middle management positions in schools to support principals in tackling bullying. The ASTI submission states that filling such positions is key to ensuring that whole-school policies are delivered, monitored, and regularly reviewed. TUI submission states that cuts to pastoral supports had made it difficult for schools to support students in difficult situations. INTO submission calls it imperative that the middle management layer removed from schools since 2009 is restored to assist in providing effective leadership for preventing and tackling bullying.

85. Several submissions call for an increase in career guidance provision. ASTI submission states that schools cannot effectively address complex societal problems without enough specialist teachers such as guidance counsellors. The TUI submission states that vulnerable students require the presence of ex quota guidance teachers and called for the guidance allocation of schools to be dramatically increased. In oral evidence on 18 May 2021, Mr David Duffy, Education and Research Officer, TUI, stated that while there has been an increase in guidance support over the past few years, schools do not have the ex-quota guidance support they had previously. He went on to say that guidance counsellors in post-primary schools are the 'main line of defence' regarding mental health issues.

86. TUI submission proposes that Home School Community Liaison Officers (HSCLO)s provision be expanded beyond DEIS schools, where they are

currently available, to all schools. In oral evidence on 18 May 2021, Mr David Duffy, Education and Research Officer, TUI, pointed out that while DEIS schools account for around 30% of all schools, bullying is not restricted to any one sector or individual school and that HSCLOs can play a vital role liaising between homes and schools.

87. In oral evidence to the Committee on 25 May 2021, Mr. Damian White, President, IPPN, stated that he would be in favour of increasing the availability of HSCLOs. He said that in schools which have HSCLOs, you can see the '*devastating effect*' if they are removed.

Recommendations:

19. The Department of Education should produce and then maintain an up to date '*Roadmap of Supports*' which would guide schools towards efficiently accessing the most current and appropriate resources available to assist them in mediating the social and cultural changes occurring in all primary and secondary schools.

20. The Department of Education should restore middle management positions removed from schools and undertake an assessment of School Leadership posts at Primary level, with a view to aligning the number of leadership posts with equivalent posts at secondary level.

21. School Inspections should identify where additional Guidance Counsellor and/or Home School Community Liaison Officer support is required. Ring fenced funding should be made available so that the additional supports can be provided without any delay.

BUILDING RESILIENCE AND SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

88. Mr Brian Wall states, in his submission, that while the term resilience is used in many policy documents on promoting wellbeing in adolescents, it is often poorly defined, or not defined at all. The definition in *Well-being in Post-Primary Schools. Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention* is *'the ability to cope with adverse circumstances'*. Mr Wall states that this definition mirrors the concept of 'emotional repair', the ability to acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills one needs to recognise and manage their emotions and use this to guide their behaviour in a healthy way.

89. According to Mr Wall, the key to developing the skill of emotional repair is the development of emotional intelligence, both interpersonal intelligence (the capacity to understand others), and intrapersonal intelligence (the capacity to understand oneself). Researchers have found that increasing the self-awareness component of emotional intelligence is associated with higher quality relationships with friends and that adolescents' capacity to repair and recover from negative emotional states was found to have lasting implications for the quality of their social interactions.

90. Irish Second Level Students Union (ISSU) submission recommends that The Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) curriculum should be updated, and steps should be taken to ensure that it is taught consistently across schools.

91. The Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI) submission states that it is important to remember, when discussing the introduction of education and awareness in RSE, that the serious nature of different forms of sexual harassment can be both explicitly and implicitly condoned by social norms. They recommend that the RSE curriculum should address the experiences of both younger and older adolescents, in addition to experiences based upon ability, gender and sexual orientation.

92. ISSU, in their submission, assert strongly that current sexual education is outdated and does not represent the reality of young people's lives. This is evidenced in the results of a national survey conducted by the ISSU of their Members. In oral evidence on 18 May 2021, Mr. Matthew Ryan, Welfare Officer, ISSU, stated that the curriculum focuses on heterosexuality exclusively and does not include LGBTQ sexual education.

93. INTO submission recommends that the revised Primary School Curriculum should place more emphasis on pupil wellbeing, drawing on the Department of Education's *Wellbeing Framework for Policy and Practice*

94. NAPD submission, attests that education should be holistic and aim for the development of the full person. Evidence would suggest a need to recalibrate the balance between preparing students for higher education and employment and educating students for a '*good life'.*

95. In oral evidence on 25 May 2021, Mr. Seamus Mulconry, General Secretary, Catholic Primary Schools Management Association (CPSMA) stated that one of the roles of primary schools is the socialising of children, that is, providing children with an opportunity to learn how to get on with other people. He also said that '*Schools have a greater focus on trying to manage those interpersonal relationships and giving children the skills to get on with one another. It is something that schools are doing constantly.'*

96. Several witnesses highlighted the efficacy of Restorative Practices in helping to develop a positive school culture regarding bullying. In her submission, Ms. Noreen Duggan, Psychotherapist, states that Restorative Practices enable people to relate to each other in a caring, positive, respectful, honest, and non-judgemental way and therefore, the school becomes an inclusive, safe, and calm environment of trust, support, and encouragement. Similarly, the NAPD submission states that Restorative Practices can repair fractured relationships between bully and victim where practicable. The Anti-Bullying Campaign submission stated that a restorative '*Reform not Blame'* approach

is supported by students, as they feel it is fair, and so they will report bullying when given the opportunity.

97. In oral evidence on 25 May 2021, Mr. Seamus Mulconry, General Secretary, Catholic Primary Schools Management Association (CPSMA) recommended that targeted training should be provided to teachers and Boards of Management in Restorative Practices to help resolve bullying issues. In oral evidence on 1 June 2021, Rachel O'Connor, Vice President, NAPD, called for more investment in Restorative Practices to create *'a culture of dialogue and openness in our schools'*.

98. Barnardos submission states that their breakfast and afterschool clubs, as well as providing nutritious meals to children who need them, also provide an opportunity to engage in activities that lend to positive peer interactions, and support improved social and emotional wellbeing. Their *Friendship Group* Programme works with small groups of children to build their prosocial and play skills and strengthen their self-regulation, interpersonal problem-solving, and anger coping skills. Their *'Roots of Empathy Programme brings a baby and parent from the local community into the classroom, allowing children to learn to be kind and practice empathy by watching the loving interaction between parent and baby and watching the infant grow and develop'*.

99. ISPCC submission recommends that children should be taught from an early age how to recognise their emotions, how to recognise a change in them and how to cope with that change. They state that the concept of resilience as a protective measure in combatting school bullying and limiting its impact on children's mental health ought to be embedded into the school's curriculum.

100. In oral evidence on 15 June 2021, Mr Darren Heaney, Project Manager, DCU National Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre, highlighted the success of the Centre's FUSE programme, which is designed to fuse together the agency of the children themselves, the concerns of the parents and the professionalism of the teachers. He reported that in the 2020/21 academic year, 127 schools participated in the programme, 30 of

them primary, with this being the first year the programme has been piloted in primary schools. He also stated that the best way to continue rolling out the programme across the country is through getting schools to work together in clusters.

101.   In oral evidence on 15 June 2021, Dr. Seline Keating, Research Fellow, DCU National Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre, said regarding Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE): *'I think there should be more time on it in initial teacher education and the school curriculum. At primary level it is only 30 minutes per week. That is where the life skills take place, the decision making, feelings and emotions and how to manage and regulate them and how pupils learn to cope with scenarios they may face. It also includes media education. It is very challenging for teachers to deliver meaningful lessons in a 30-minute slot.'*

Recommendations:

22. Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) should be reconstituted as a key subject in the Curriculum at both Primary and Secondary level. It should include, inter alia, the study of, *Emotional Intelligence, Developing Resilience, Racism; Inclusivity and Relationships and Sexual Education (RSE).* It should be allocated at least 30 minutes per day in Primary Schools and a similar time allocation in secondary schools.

23. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) should initiate a Review of Relationships and Sexual Education (RSE) specifically, in Primary and Secondary Schools, with a view to revising the syllabus by end 2021. The review should involve consultation with all relevant stakeholders, but particularly with students.

24. A national roll-out of the FUSE Anti-Bullying and Online Safety Programme to all primary and secondary schools, by DCU Anti Bullying Centre, as an evidence-based model of best practice. The Department of Education currently support this programme however to achieve maximum reach to

close to 4,000 primary and post-primary schools, increased investment to resource Regional Co-ordinators and Task Force is urgently required.

25. The Barnardos *Friendship Group* and *Roots of Empathy* Programmes should be piloted in Primary Schools across the country, and, pending evaluation, rolled out nationwide.

26. A Module in Restorative Practices should be provided in all Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses and to all primary and secondary school teachers as part of their Continuous Professional Development (CPD).

GIVING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE A VOICE IN IDENTIFYING SOLUTIONS

102. Jigsaw submission maintains that incorporating the student voice in decision making is a key contributor to a positive school culture, as students are less likely to engage in bullying behaviour when they feel valued.

103. ISSU submission recommends that school staff should be encouraged to use a student's preferred name and personal pronouns to create a school culture that is inclusive of Transgender and Non-Binary students. In oral evidence, on 18 May 2021, Mr Matthew Ryan, ISSU stated: '*Language can be so much more inclusive than it normally is. We have the default of using "he or she", whereas if we change that to "they", it will be much more inclusive of students who might be non-binary and might not identify with the "he or she" pronouns. Little things like that can make the school culture more inclusive. If a student is sitting in class and is not feeling represented, or if someone is speaking about only "he or she" or one particular group people, and if the student does not identify with that, immediately that student will feel ostracised and will not feel part of the conversation*.

104. AsIAm submission states that although the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004 provides for the education of all students to better understand disability and their peers, there is a

reluctance in many schools to lead this discussion, often through a fear of getting it wrong. AsIAm state that it is vital that young people are taught about disability from a young age and given the language or knowledge to understand why people may need to do things differently in class or in social settings

105.   AsIAm submission also calls for the development of an evidence-based programme to support autistic young people to better understand and accept themselves and their needs and abilities, and how to effectively self-advocate

106.   Mr Hugh Ahern, in oral evidence on 22 June 2021, recommended '*that there is a student representative present at key policy decisions pertaining to student issues, such as an Anti-Bullying policy on the school board of management as the* students *get very little or no say in these policy decisions and they are the ones with the experiences*.'

Recommendations:

27. The Department of Education should issue a Circular to all Post Primary Schools, making it mandatory to nominate a Student Council Official as a Well Being Ambassador, who will attend all School Management Meetings, including School Management Board Meetings, relating to Student Well Being.

28. The Department of Education and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth should jointly develop an Evidence-Based Programme to support autistic and neurodiverse young people to better understand and accept themselves and their needs and abilities, and how to effectively self-advocate with a Module to educate all students about autism, neurodiversity and disability

CHAPTER 4 – INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE AND BEST PRACTICE

INTRODUCTION

107.   The Committee invited several international academics in the fields of psychology, education and bullying to provide an overview of international academic research on school bullying, and best practice on how it has been addressed internationally.

108.   DCU Anti Bullying Centre also provided evidence based on international findings and research

INTERNATIONAL EVIDENCE ON THE EFFECTS OF BULLYING

109.   Professor Shelley Hymel, in her submission, asserts that school bullying is not a normal part of growing up, or a rite of passage that can make kids tougher, but is a form of interpersonal aggression that has a significant impact on the victims, perpetrators and bystanders who witness the bullying.

110.   Professor Hymel's submission also states that individuals who engage in bullying do not necessarily fit the traditional stereotypes of socially incompetent individuals who rely on aggression and intimidation to get what they want. Instead, they are often highly popular and socially intelligent, and engage in bullying as a means of attaining or maintaining their social status. This correlates with the oral evidence of Ms Ann Piggott, President, ASTI, that '*The stereotype of the schoolyard bully taking lunch money fails to encompass the wider reality. Bullies are often charismatic and charming. They please and impress superiors and demand the respect of others for whom they show little regard. Definitions often omit how subtle bullying can be'*.

111.   Professor Hymel points out that bullying victims are at greater risk of a variety of mental health problems, especially internalizing difficulties such as depression, anxiety, poor self-worth, and increased suicidal ideation, and externalizing difficulties such as aggression, conduct problems, delinquency, and self-harm. She points out that children who witness bullying are also at

risk, with research showing evidence of greater feelings of helplessness, substance abuse, mental health difficulties and suicidal ideation.

112.   Dr Downes and Professor Cefai highlight, in their submission, outline research on the impact of homophobic bullying, which found that LGBT students who experienced high levels of bullying, reported higher levels of substance use, suicidality, and sexual risk behaviours than heterosexual peers who also reported high levels of victimization. Another study cited by Dr Downes and Professor Cefai found that homophobic name-calling is correlated with an increase in anxiety, depression, personal distress, suicidality, and other mental health problems, with LGBT students more than twice as likely as their peers to be depressed and think about or attempt suicide.

113.   They also report research that shows being a victim of bullying leads to a desire to resignation regarding an inability to change oneself and to socialise, causing range of escape or avoidance behaviour, such as social withdrawal and avoiding others, as well as trying to be socially invisible in the classroom and other school settings. They state that this has implications for the potential role of emotional counselling/therapeutic supports in and around schools in helping students construe their reactions to bullying and to minimise self-blaming approaches.

114.   In oral evidence on 8 June 2021, Professor Hymel stated that children who bully others engage in '*moral disengagement',* where they justify and rationalise their behaviour. Professor Hymel stated that there is some evidence that components of anti-bullying programmes that address moral disengagement and create empathy are very effective.

115.   In oral evidence on 15 June 2021, Dr Angela Mazzone, DCU National Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre, also addressed the concept of moral disengagement, stating that children who bully tend to justify their bullying and immoral behaviour, and to put the blame for the behaviour on the target, for having provoked the bullying.

INTERNATIONAL EVIDENCE AND BEST PRACTICE

116.   In oral evidence, on 15 June 2021, Dr Angela Mazzone, DCU National Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre stated that with regards to bullying levels and success in addressing bullying, Ireland is comparable to countries such as Italy, Sweden, or Norway.

117.   Dr Paul Downes and Professor Carmel Cefai's submission states that given the associations between bullying and mental health issues, bullying is both an education and a health issue and requires an integrated strategic policy approach across both areas.

118.   Dr Downes and Professor Cefai also assert that, given the serious long-term impacts of bullying, a prevention strategy needs to encompass both the prevention of bullying, and also the prevention of the consequences of bullying, through a holistic focus on system level emotional, cognitive and social supports. They state that intensive individual emotional counselling/therapeutic supports in and around schools are required for early intervention.

119.   Professor Hymel highlights the importance of ongoing assessment of the impact of anti-bullying programmes to ensure that they are effective. Her submission warns that despite the documented success of many of these programs, results have been limited.

120.   Professor Hymel's submission reports that neuroscience research has shown how the effects of peer victimisation can impact on neuro-biological functioning across an individual's lifetime.

121.   In oral evidence on 8 June 2021, Professor Cefai stated that research shows that children are more likely to engage with anti-bullying resources which children have been involved with developing.

122.   Dr Downes and Professor Cefai's submission references research analysing 213 social and emotional education (SEE) programmes which found that if a school implements a quality SEE curriculum, they can expect better student behaviour and an 11-point increase in test scores. A similar study found that SEE programmes showed statistically significant effects on social skills, antisocial behaviour, substance abuse, positive self-image, academic achievement, and prosocial behaviour. Dr Downes and Professor Cefai express concern that curricular time given to SPHE at primary level has been reduced in the past decade in Ireland.

123.   In oral evidence, on 8 June 2021, Professor Cefai stated that research shows that the socio-emotional education is more likely to be effective the earlier it is introduced, and ideally it should begin from the early years in education.

124.   In oral evidence, on 15 June 2021, Dr Mairéad Foody, Research Fellow, DCU National Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre, reported that a recently completed project on which she was one of the principal investigators found that respect for diversity decreases bullying. If there is a school culture that is positive and that promotes, acknowledges and encourages diversity and difference then there will be less bullying.

125.   Dr Downes and Professor Cefai's submission states that there is a growing consensus on the use of multi-tiered approaches of prevention. They cite a three-tier approach, with distinctions made between universal intervention as school-wide positive behavioural supports, school climate promotion, targeted interventions for students at risk (e.g. social skills and anger management groups, classroom management strategies), and intensive individualized interventions with community support (e.g. therapy, implementation of behaviour intervention plans) in schools. A US-wide three-tier model for providing a continuum of supports for positive behavioural interventions and supports (PBIS) estimates that 10% to 15% of students will not respond to universal school-wide interventions but will benefit from increased structure and contingent feedback.

126. Dr Downes and Professor Cefai's submission asserts that the *Action Plan on Bullying 2013* does not adequately distinguish these three distinct levels of prevention of bullying and is weak on the indicated prevention level of intensive individual supports for both perpetrators and victims of bullying in and around schools. They identify a clear strategic gap in system supports in schools for emotional counselling/therapeutic supports in and around schools to prevent problems of trauma accelerating into clinical levels of need, and state that not all bullying perpetrators or victims require referral to CAMHS.

127. Dr Downes and Professor Cefai's submission refers to a meta-analysis of research which found that parent training was one of the programme elements significantly associated with both a decrease in bullying and being bullied. They also cite a US study which found a significant association between parental maltreatment and pupil aggression. Dr Downes and Professor Cefai posit that this points to a need for increased parenting programmes on positive communication approaches across age ranges to develop a culture of emotionally empathic communication, and for increased funding for family support services, with stronger links between these services and schools.

128. Dr Downes and Professor Cefai's submission states that when discussing the role of peer supports and bystanders in bullying prevention, the negative unintended side-effects have tended to be neglected. They quote research which claims that while peer-support programmes appear effective, they are not related to actual levels of bullying or victimization and are quite often related to an increase in bullying and victimization. The same research also says that peer interventions may reinforce the aggressive behaviour of school bullies and promote a cycle of violence. Dr Downes and Professor Cefai also state that bystanders who intervene may or may not be putting themselves at risk of being bullied, depending on the motivations and power of the child/children who are perpetrators of the bullying. They also highlight that encouraging interventions to defend the victim against the perpetrator of the bullying may also place the intervening child at risk of being bullied, and this may be problematic legally

129. In oral evidence on 15 June 2021 Dr Mairéad Foody, stated that according to both Irish and international data, traditional bullying is still more prevalent than cyberbullying, but that the impact of cyberbullying can be more severe. She stressed that it is important not to focus too much on the distinction, as children are often the victims or perpetrators of both at the same time, and that to children they are both the same.

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF SUBMISSIONS

Written submissions were received from the following organisations and individuals. All submissions are available here:

- Ms. Stella O'Malley, Psychotherapist & Author on bullying.

- Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI)

- Irish College of General Practitioners (ICGP)

- Joint Managerial Body (JMB)

- Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland (ASTI)

- Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN)

- Sean Fallon, Anti- Bullying Campaign

- Irish Second Level Student Union (ISSU)

- National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD)

- Inclusion Ireland

- Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO)

- Education and Training Boards, Ireland (ETBI)

- Catholic Primary School Management Association (CPSMA)

- Health Service Executive Mental Health Services

- Ms. Mary Briody, MSc, MA, Dip. Therapeutic counselling, Dip. Parent mentoring, Dip Child and Adolescent Therapy.

- Ms. Noreen Duggan, former principal of Scoil na Naomh Uilig

- Prof. Shelley Hymel, PhD, Lando Professor in Social and Emotional Learning, Faculty of Education – Department of Educational & Counselling Psychology & Special Education, University of British Columbia

- Dr Claire Hayes, Consultant Clinical Psychologist.

- National Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre, Dublin City University

- Barnardos

- Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC)

- Secretary General, Department of Education

- SpunOut.ie

- Mental Health Ireland.

- Dr Niall Muldoon, Ombudsman for Children

- Dr Paul Downes, Associate Professor of Psychology, DCU and Professor Carmel Cefai, Professor of Psychology, Director, Centre for Resilience and Socio-Emotional Health, University of Malta
- Irish Medical Organisation (IMO)
- Jigsaw
- Webwise
- CyberSafeKids
- Children's Rights Alliance (CRA)
- Professor Carmel Cefai Professor of Psychology, Director, Centre for Resilience and Socio-Emotional Health, University of Malta
- Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI)
- Mr. Hugh Ahern, Secondary School Student
- Down Syndrome Ireland
- AsIAm
- Dr Maria Garvey PhD, CEO, Cooperative Learning Institute
- Mr. Brian Wall, Guidance Counsellor, St. Mary's College
- Dr Paul Downes, Associate Professor of Psychology, DCU

APPENDIX 2: ENGAGEMENT WITH STAKEHOLDERS

On 4 May 2021, the Committee held a roundtable discussion with Dr Claire Hayes, Consultant Clinical Psychologist, Ms. Stella O'Malley, Psychotherapist, Ms. Mary Briody, Psychotherapist, Dr Niall Muldoon, Ombudsman for Children and Dr Colman Noctor, Board Member of Mental Health Ireland.

The debate can be accessed here

On 11 May 2021, the Committee held a roundtable discussion with Mr. Mark O'Connor, Community Engagement Manager, Inclusion Ireland; Ms Saoirse Brady, Head of Legal, Policy and Public Affairs, Children's Rights Alliance; Ms Suzanne Connolly, CEO, Barnardos; Mr. Philip Arneill, Head of Education and Innovation, CyberSafeKids; and Mr. Ben Holmes, Webwise Youth Advisory Panel Member, and Ms Jane McGarrigle, Project Officer, Webwise.

The debate can be accessed here

On 18 May 2021, the Committee held a roundtable discussion with Mr Matthew Ryan, Welfare Officer, Irish Second-level Students' Union (ISSU), Ms. Ann Piggott, President, Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland (ASTI), Mr. David O'Sullivan, Assistant General Secretary, Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO), and Mr David Duffy, Education/Research Officer, Teachers Union of Ireland (TUI).

The debate can be accessed here

On 25 May 2021, the Committee held a roundtable discussion with representatives from school patron bodies as follows: Ms. Ann O'Dwyer, Director of Schools, Kerry ETB, Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI), Mr. John Curtis, General Secretary, Joint Managerial Body (JMB), and Seamus Mulconry, General Secretary, Catholic Primary Schools Management Association (CPSMA).

The debate can be accessed here

On 1 June 2021, the Committee held a roundtable discussion with Mr. Damian White, president of the Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN); Ms. Rachel O'Connor, Vice President, National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD) and Mr. John Irwin, general secretary of the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS).

The debate can be accessed here

On 8 June 2021, the Committee held a roundtable discussion on international psychological evidence and best practice with Dr Paul Downes, Associate Professor of Psychology, School of Human Development, Dublin City University (DCU); Professor Shelley Hymel, Edith Lando Professor in Social and Emotional Learning, University of British Columbia, Vancouver and Professor Carmel Cefai, Department of Psychology, Director, Centre for Resilience and Socio-Emotional Health, University of Malta..

The debate can be accessed here

On 15 June 2021, the Committee held a roundtable discussion with Professor James O'Higgins Norman, UNESCO Chair on Tackling Bullying and Cyberbullying, DCU National Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre, Dr Seline Keating, Research Fellow, DCU National Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre, Dr Mairéad Foody, Research Fellow, DCU National Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre, Dr Angela Mazzone, DCU National Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre, Dr Alan Gorman, Research Fellow, DCU National Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre, and Mr Darren Heaney, DCU Project Manager, DCU National Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre.

The debate can be accessed here

On 22 June 2021, the Committee was briefed by Officials from the Department of Education and engaged in a discussion with Mr. Hugh Ahern, Secondary School Student, Patrician Academy, Mallow, County Cork.

The debate can be accessed here

APPENDIX 3: PROPOSAL FROM DR NIALL MULDOON, OMBUDSMAN FOR CHILDREN

2021/304

23/6/21

Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and

Science

Re: School Bullying and Mental Health

Dear Deputy Kehoe,

I hope you are keeping well.

I am writing in response to your request of 04/05/21 for me to generate a recommendation in relation to therapeutic services within schools.

In my statement to the Committee, in the context of the mental health implications of bullying in schools, I had repeated a call I had made to a number of Ministers for Education over the last few years. That is, to have an independent therapist/counsellor available to every primary school in the country. I stated that I believe it would complement the Wellbeing Policy and Framework for Practice currently employed across the education system. It would also afford extra comfort to teachers who know they have somewhere to send their pupils if they are impacted by bereavement, separation/divorce, alcohol/addiction issues or domestic violence. Having an easily accessible therapeutic service would aid the whole school

community to know they are doing their best for every child. With regard to Post Primary schools I urged that all Career Guidance Counsellors become formally trained to provide therapy for serious emotional and traumatic issues as well as around careers.

Context

Since that day I have been researching the possible recommendation that might be made by the Committee and I have looked at it in the context of the current Programme for Government that was finalised in June 2020, which states, under the heading - **An Inclusive Vision for Education**

> *"Inclusion in and access to education is the foundation for a more just and equal society. In welcoming everyone to participate in education, they deserve to be treated fairly. In order to support an inclusive and equal education system we will:*
>
> ☐ *Improve access to supports for positive mental health in schools."* (**pg. 111**)

I am also aware of your own Committee's recent report on the impact of Covid 19 on primary and secondary education which says that

> "*The provision of emotional counselling and supports and hot meals was identified as 2 key measures that should be extended to all schools to ensure that children in non DEIS schools do not fall through the cracks. In fact, Emotional Counselling Supports and a National School Meals Programme should be an integral part of the education system as is the case in other countries*." (**pg.8 - Executive Summary**)

It is important for context to also note that number 9 in your Top Ten Recommendations on the impact of Covid 19 on primary and secondary education the Committee was

> "*Emotional counselling and therapeutic supports should be provided in all primary and secondary schools as an urgent priority*" (**pg.12**)[5]

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[5] **https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/33/joint_committee_on_education_further_and_higher_education_research_innovation_and_science/reports/2021/2021-01-14_reporton-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-primary-and-secondary-education_en.pdf**

It would appear that this recommendation was derived from the strong evidence provided by Dr. Paul Downes (Dublin City University) during his testimony to the Committee on 17/12/20. He highlighted evidence from the EU via Donlevy, Andriescu, Day & Downes (2019) which was an evaluation, for the EU Commission, of the 2011 Council Recommendation on Early School Leaving. The research showed that emotional counselling supports in and around schools are widespread in many EU countries. Dr. Downes suggested that Ireland is radically behind in their provision of such services in comparison to many European countries and he further stated that

> "*there needs to be emotional counselling and therapeutic supports, such as play and art therapy, available in all DEIS schools and arguably beyond, as a key support for the mental health strain and trauma experienced by so many of our children*".(Transcript of Committee Session on 17/12/20)

Further support for the concept of Therapy/Emotional counselling in schools comes from research which sought the direct views of Primary School Principals here in Ireland. Dr. Rosaleen McElvaney and her colleagues researched the topic and found that

> "*School based counselling is increasingly being recognised as essential in addressing mental health as an early intervention mechanism. Countries across the globe are introducing onsite school counselling with recent evaluations showing marked improvements in children's well being. Many countries have opted to make this service provision mandatory*" (pg. 5 Mc Elvaney, R., Judge, D & Gordon, E. 2017)

The researchers surveyed over 1,200 primary school principals, which is approximately 40% of the total number in Ireland – a very robust sample size and indicative of the importance those busy professionals put on the topic. The study found a high level of interest expressed by school principals in having access to school-based counselling, particularly, individual counselling/ psychotherapy for children and consultation for staff.

It also found that the main blocks to such a service being created were
a) lack of a national policy and

b) lack of funding to allow schools purchase the resources independently.

The researchers further wrote that

> '*given the range and extent of complex difficulties experienced by primary school children, and the excessive burden being placed on primary schools to respond to such needs, urgent action is needed to develop a national framework to inform the development of counselling services for primary school children*'. (pg. 50)

Ultimately the recommendations from this report seek

1) the development of a national policy on counselling for primary school children;
2) that counselling should be based on-site in primary schools in line with international best practice and the proven demand for such a service; and
3) that professionals providing school based counselling should be appropriately qualified for this role.

In the context of developing a national therapeutic counselling/therapeutic service for the emotional and trauma needs of children across first and second level schools, the Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP) made a submission to the Programme for Government in 2020. In that submission they showed that for some time now school-based counselling programmes have been operating very effectively at second level in the UK. They clarified that there is a national school counselling strategy in second-level schools in both Wales and Northern Ireland – where statutory access is granted to all children in second level schools. They further highlighted that over 60% of secondary schools in England also have this access and in 2020, for the first time, the Scottish Government pledged to invest £80 million over the next four years in the provision of counselling in education, including the use of £60 million to provide counsellors to all second-level schools in Scotland.

 The IACP submission also offered the statistic that 90% of the 11,753 children and young people who attended school based counselling between 2018 and2019 in Wales did not need onward referral after completing their sessions (Counselling for Children and Young People Welsh Government Statistics released March 2020).

This provides very clear proof of the argument for early intervention and the value of same in reducing the pressure on Primary Care and even on acute services such as CAMHS.

Their submission also quoted from Cooper (2009) who created a comprehensive review of counselling experiences and outcomes of more than 10,000 children from across the UK found that:

- *School-based counselling is associated with significant clinical improvement from pre to post counselling*

- *More than 90% of children and young people report that they experienced an improvement which they attributed to counselling*

- *More than 82% of children and young people reported that counselling was helpful*

- *More than 92% of children and young people were satisfied with their counselling intervention*

- *Up to 90% of teachers reported that counselling had a positive impact upon concentration, willingness to participate in class and increased motivation for young people to attend school and study*

- *Teachers and head teachers found counselling an invaluable resource in schools, due to the professional training of counsellors, the time that they could give to young people, their expertise, their ability to provide a confidential service and their independence from the core business of the school*. (pg. 137-150)

English Experience

In private correspondence I was informed of important work being done in Dorset, England where they are bringing mental health support for students past just therapy and building up a much fuller Mental Health Support Team. This is being done jointly by the NHS and Schools. They work in both Primary and Secondary and a few of the Higher Education Colleges. Last year they achieved 25% coverage of the schools in Dorset and by 2022 they hope to achieve 50% coverage across both Primary and Secondary. The feedback they have received to date has been really good from the schools and as they start to deliver more face to face intervention post pandemic they will be able provide more quantitative outcome data in order to measure the impact of the service. (Personal Email correspondence - Stuart Lynch, Head of Dorset CAMHS, 19 May 21 and 23 June 21)

The following link https://www.england.nhs.uk/mental-health/cyp/trailblazers/ will take you to the NHS pages for the MHST's and this has further links to the UK government green paper on the issue.

The Mental Health Support Teams (MHST) will deliver

- **individual face to face work** (e.g. effective, evidence based brief, low intensity interventions for children, young people and families experiencing anxiety, low mood, friendship or behavioural difficulties)

- **Group Work** for pupils and parents such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for young people who experience anxiety or who may be self-harming.

- **Group Parenting Classes** to include issues such as conduct disorder and communication difficulties. Not currently an offer but we are looking to develop parent and teacher training packages. This would be more around emotional health and wellbeing including aspects such as low mood, anxiety and self-harm. It wouldn't really cover things like conduct disorder as this would require a more specialist intervention that would sit outside of the teams skill set.

These teams will add enormous value by mapping what services are available in school and locally and monitoring the well-being across schools, teaching about mental health and training parents/carers and teachers to identify and manage stress and anxiety in the students.

They are also acting as part of an integrated referral system with community services to ensure children and young people who need it receive appropriate support as quickly as possible.

Each Mental Health Support Team will work with, and in, schools (Primary and Post Primary) and Colleges to support them with mental health and wellbeing issues and to treat mild to moderate mental health issues. They are funded and accountable to the NHS.

Each Mental Health Support Team consists of

- 1 **Higher Level Therapist**,
- 1 **CAMHS practitioner**
- 4 **Education Mental Health Practitioners**,
- 1 **Team Manager** and
- 1 **Administrative Support staff member**.

This is a major achievement. It is hugely impressive and important to have both the Health Service and the Education Service working in such a co-operative manner and in a way which is clearly designed to prevent, rather than cope with, mental health issues. The MHST is meant to sit alongside and in co-operation with the school pastoral support team and the other mental health resources in place within the community. Therefore, each of those professionals on the team are adding value to what is already a very strong, child centred national policy around emotional health and wellbeing support for students. The MHST will be a major asset to any school seeking to create a culture of wellbeing for all members of that school community (teachers, students, parents, non-teaching staff) and within such a culture we know that our students will thrive.

This example is a long way off for the Irish education system but it should also act as a marker to for us to aim towards. We need to prioritise the in school therapeutic service and then aim to build again to create a more thorough and complete level of support for the whole school community.

OCO Recommendation re Therapy in Schools:

In light of all the evidence across the UK, and internationally, around the positive outcomes for children and schools, and the strong body of work currently in place to support a need for same in Ireland I believe that it is time to instigate a strong therapeutic service within the Irish education system.

I have looked at two viable alternatives and would suggest that as a Committee you might consider putting both forward to the relevant department.

Recommendation 1

Consider pilot in Dublin, Wicklow and Cork – to get range of urban and rural feedback and to allow for sufficient take up from professionals. I would suggest getting feedback from each of the four Dublin local authority areas (Fingal, DLRD, South County Dublin, Dublin City) so that would be six areas.

TO PREDICT AND BUDGET

- Allow for 6-8 sessions per child
- Allow for 10% of students to require some input but not all will need the full 6-8 sessions
- Cost would be predicted upon €50 per session (45 min, based on a class length) so if a student got all 8 sessions it would be €400
- Pilot for two Academic Years

Create a Panel of Professionals and allocate each to 1, 2 or 3 schools in their area depending on their level of availability.

You would expect a professional to be regular and consistent in their availability but if they are sick or on leave then another suitably qualified professional from the panel may take on a case, if it is deemed necessary.

Professionals could be psychologists, therapists, counsellors, play therapists, drama therapists, art therapists, music therapists (not an exhaustive list) BUT all must be fully accredited by the appropriate professional body and that body must be currently, or in the process of, being registered within CORU.

National Counselling Service

This new service might be run along the same lines as the National Counselling Service (NCS) with a regional office generating oversight and providing clinical and administrative assistance. The NCS also operates a separate service called Counselling in Primary Care (CIPC) - this service is available to adults over 18 years who are medical card holders and experiencing mild to moderate psychological and emotional difficulties such as: depression, anxiety, panic reactions, relationship problems, loss issues, stress.

CIPC provides up to 8 counselling sessions with a professionally qualified and accredited Counsellor/Therapist. CIPC operates from over 240 locations situated throughout Ireland, typically local Primary Care Centres.

CIPC is a client centred service, Counsellor/Therapists employ a range of psychological therapies depending on the presenting issues and assessed needs of clients who attend. Counselling approaches include person centred, cognitive behavioural, psychodynamic, integrative and supportive therapies.

Therefore CIPC offers a model to emulate for the school counselling service and each professional engaged by CIPC is an independent practitioner who is paid per session.

Recommendation 2

Consider a pilot across the whole country but in a smaller number of schools. This will cover both Primary and Post Primary and will involve the hiring of permanent therapists, akin to those working within the National Counselling Service (NCS). With permanent staff you will get added value of consistent presence around the school and a resource for staff and students alike to discuss issues on a more informal basis thereby acting earlier and reducing problems quickly.

TO PREDICT AND BUDGET

Rural N = 100 (25 Counties with 2 Primary and 2 Post Primary)

Urban N = 60 (3 Cities with 10 Primary and 10 Post Primary)

Attempt to have one third of all the schools from DEIS (to approximately replicate the larger demographics)

Cost = Mid point on NCS Scale Counsellor Therapist Scale for full time employee – €61,386 x 160 = €9,821,760 per year

The pilot should again be for two academic years but with a plan to roll it outacross the country as soon as possible after the evaluation period.

Thank you again for the opportunity to meet with the Committee on School Bullying and Mental Health, it is a hugely important issue and I look forward to your considerations around it. I trust that this is of benefit to you and your committee colleagues. If you have any questions or wish to discuss this further please feel free to contact me via niall.muldoon@oco.ie or 087 7549178.

Yours sincerely

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Dr. Niall Muldoon, Ombudsman for Children