

Hello everyone and thank you for inviting us here today. As 17-year-old students we have a lot to say to you about the issue of cyberbullying. We shall start off by explaining some of the things we implemented last year for our anti-cyberbullying campaign, and then further discuss some of the additional suggestions we have for this committee. Hopefully you can take some of what we say to reflect upon and act on in any way you can.

Last year Megan and I ran a students-only safer internet day committee, and through this we organised a successful anti-cyberbullying campaign. We set up an Instagram account which Megan ran and managed and we encouraged our school community to follow this account. We posted lots of internet safety tips, focusing mainly on cyberbullying. We strongly believe reaching adolescents through social media is an important step in promoting internet safety and tackling the issue of cyberbullying.

As well as this, we visited all 10 of the first-year classes to hold internet safety workshops. In these workshops we made sure students learned about cyberbullying and online safety in a fun, interactive way, through quizzes and walking debates. We put up posters all around the school and ran a poster competition for first-years on the issue of cyberbullying. We were thrilled that our student committee, and indeed all-girls committee, were highly commended for our anti-cyberbullying campaign at the Safer Internet Day Awards 2020.

In terms of other suggestions, we have generated largely education-based ideas. The first suggestion is that cyberbullying should be covered to a greater extent in 1st-3rd year SPHE. This is because, from our experience, cyberbullying is most prominent among junior cycle students. Coming into first year students are unprepared for this aspect of social media outlets, and don't have the necessary tools and resources to handle cyberbullying. Therefore, another suggestion is to cover the topic of cyberbullying in depth in 6th class.

Teachers should also be given more resources and information so that they can best educate their students. Holding workshops, online or otherwise, for SPHE teachers focusing solely on this issue can help them to understand and educate better. Providing them with teaching materials, expert advice, and designated resources created by reliable organisation like Webwise can be crucial to the process.

~Following on from what Sarah has said, in these SPHE classes, students should also be made aware of the sanctions that come with cyberbullying, from a school-based and a legal perspective. This is not to frighten students, but to speak to those who may engage in cyberbullying, and to take preventative measures so cyberbullying doesn't happen in the first place. While our school takes a 'reform not blame' approach, knowledge of these sanctions is also important.

Perhaps a government-led initiative recruiting young online safety activists and enabling them to visit schools and talk to students could also help, as could a youth advisory board working in collaboration with this committee or with a specific online safety/cyberbullying government group. Whilst our adult counterparts wish to help and inform, and *can* indeed help and inform, sometimes students listen better to other students. As well as this, adults and teachers don't have the experience of growing up with social media and with cyberbullying, and so need youth input when learning about the issue. Sometimes it can be infuriating for students to be lectured on the dangers of social media by parents who perhaps don't understand that this is an integral part of growing up. Listening to young people, and young people with experience on this issue, is the best way to inform decisions and to educate.

Preventative measures are obviously crucial, but we also need better investment, or perhaps just better awareness of the supports available to victims of cyberbullying. Let's face it, the issue of

cyberbullying often goes hand-in-hand with anxiety, depression and in some cases, suicide. We need an awareness of the ways you can access help, so that victims of cyberbullying do not feel alone or isolated. We also, as a society, need to face up to the fact that cyberbullying is largely a feminist issue. Being aware of this and talking about this can help us find better solutions to the problem. As teenage girls growing up in Ireland, we all have a friend who has experienced horrifying cyberbullying, online harassment, manipulation, and often there is no way or no where to ask for help, and no way of imposing sanctions on the perpetrator. We need to act on this issue in a way that will invoke real change and I hope that what Sarah and I have said here today will help in enacting this change.

Thank you.