'Being part and parcel of the school'

The views and experiences of children and young people in relation to the development of bullying policies in schools.

Dirk Schubotz and Ruth Sinclair

with

Stephanie Burns, Chris Busby, Duana Cook, Jamie Hanna, Margaret Jackson, Robert McCallen, Jack McGinn, Laura McMurran, Lorraine Millar and Finn Toner

NICCY
northern ireland commissioner
for children and young people

national
children's
bureau

Bullying

Bitterness, hatred and contempt
Needing a shoulder to cry
Someone to listen to your problems
Complications, a mistake, a nuisance.
Kaleidoscope of confusion,
Repressed anger and hurt,
Displaced anger and hurt,
Paranoia personified.
Dignity eroded,
Innocence murdered,
Birth, growth, bullying, death
Does it have to be this way?

Anna
Aged 15

Contents

List of Tables

Acknowledgement

List of Tables

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the staff and students of the following schools for their kind co-operation and assistance in this project:

Annalong Primary School
Belmont Special School Londonderry
Brookfield Special School Moira
Campbell College Belfast
Carnlough Controlled Integrated Primary School
City Armagh High School
Crawfordburn Primary School
Drumragh Integrated College Omagh
Rostulla Special School Jordanstown
Sperrinview Special School Dungannon
St. Anne's Primary School Derry
St. Gerard's Education resource Centre Belfast
St. Mary's College Magherafelt
Star of the Sea Girls' Primary School Belfast

We would like to thank the following schools for supporting and facilitating some of their students to become Young Researchers on the project

Campbell College Belfast
Drumragh Integrated College Omagh
Methodist College Belfast
Rostulla Special School Jordanstown

Dirk Schubotz
Ruth Sinclair
April 2006

Executive Summary

Introduction

Bullying in school, has been identified as a matter of concern to many young people living across the UK and in Northern Ireland. In recent years there has been a range of policy and practice developments related to bullying and bullying in schools, from central and local government, the voluntary sector and from schools and other agencies. The present report is concerned with the views and experiences of children and young people in Northern Ireland in relation to the development of bullying policies in schools.

Aims of the research project

The overall aim of the research was:

> To determine the views and experiences of children and young people in relation to the development and review of bullying policies in schools in Northern Ireland.

More specifically the central aims of the study were to:

- Determine how children and young people have been involved in developing anti-bullying policies in school;

- Explore their views on how these policies work out in practice;

- Ascertain how specific issues such as race, homophobia, gender and disability are addressed in schools' anti-bullying policies;

- Establish how bullying is monitored within schools;

- Explore pupils' views on successful steps taken within schools to reduce bullying.

Methodology

A mixed-method approach was adopted to undertake the research. Namely, the following methods were used:

1. Review of relevant literature
2. Content analysis of school documents such as behavioural, pastoral care and anti-bullying policies;
3. Interviews with school staff involved in monitoring school-bullying policies;
4. Talkshops (participatory focus group discussions) with pupils;
5. One-to-one interviews with pupils;
6. Questionnaires administered to pupils.

A purposive quota sample of 14 schools (5 primary, 4 post-primary, 5 special) was recruited which, within the available budget and timeframe, represented the different sub-sectors of the diverse and segregated school population within Northern Ireland. The sample included schools of different sizes, rural as well as urban locations, single-sex as well as co-educationally, boarding as well as day schools. The target sample was chosen to include schools from all five Education and Library Boards. Within these given criteria, the selection of schools for the research project was random.

A group of ten post-primary students were identified and recruited to work on the project as peer researchers. Six of the ten Young Researchers came from post-primary schools that were part of the school sample. Two Young Researchers came from a special school included in the study. Two Young Researchers were recruited through the NICCY Youth Panel.

Findings

Developing school policies

All schools did have an anti-bullying policy either as a stand-alone document or incorporated into an overall set of pastoral care policies.

Schools used various definitions of bullying. Generally, a no-blame approach was favoured in dealing with incidences of bullying.

School policy-making did involve school staff and parents, but very few school policies directly referred to consulting pupils. However, senior staff believed generally that it was useful to consult with pupils and there was an increasing awareness that active steps should be undertaken to systematically involve pupils rather than an ad-hoc approach.

Incidences of bullying were recorded by all schools, albeit in different ways.

Schools' policies provided guidelines on the frequency of review, even if these were not always followed, but only one school recommended an annual review.

Raising awareness

The perceived extent of school bullying was similar in primary and post-primary schools, with around two thirds of pupils saying that students in their schools were bullied a little (49%) or a lot (18%).

The schools used poster campaigns, assemblies, circle time (primary and special schools), PSHE (post-primary schools) and induction weeks at the start of the school year to raise awareness with regard to school bullying. Some schools also used outside agencies to support them in their anti-bullying work.

Pupils had a good understanding of the seriousness of bullying, the mechanisms of reporting bullying and of the consequences that bullying may have to the victim. However, among post-primary students there was some reason for concern about their ability to differentiate between acceptable banter and unacceptable bullying.

Involving children in decision making in schools

Only 15 percent of primary school pupils and under one third (32%) of post-primary pupils said that they had ever been asked their opinion on how something was done in their school. The differences between schools in the different sectors were significant.

Less than one in five (18%) primary school pupils and just over one in ten (11%) post-primary pupils said that they had helped to change something in their school. Again, the differences between schools in each sector were significant.

Two out of five primary schools and three out of four post-primary schools had a formally established school council. However, the majority of pupils in two out of

these five schools did not know about or thought that there was no school council, suggesting that the schools did not involve most pupils in any meaningful way. Data collected suggests that pupils in schools with an active and working school council had a greater sense of ownership of their school.

Teachers and the school principal were the first points of contact for pupils who were unhappy about something in their school, but pupils did use other avenues of support where schools promoted these.

Anti-bullying practices

Over three quarters of pupils in both primary (79%) and post-primary (77%) schools said that their school had dedicated staff to deal with bullying. However, primary school children were most likely to report school bullying first to their parents, and only 15 per cent of post-primary pupils said that most students would talk to this dedicated staff member if they were bullied (68% said it depended on the circumstances)

Two thirds (67%) of post-primary students felt that their school provided real help to students who were bullied.

Nine out of ten (93%) primary school pupils and eight out of ten (80%) post-primary pupils said that their schools had an official anti-bullying policy. Most (90%) primary pupils had discussed bullying in school. Only one third of post-primary school students said they were involved in drawing up their school's anti-bullying policy.

Discussions with pupils revealed that the most effective way of dealing with bullying in school should involve a number of different mechanisms and should include outside agencies as well as school staff and pupils themselves.

School bullying should be seen as a very specific issue that may occur in any school and needs to be dealt with beyond other existing networks of participation and support that may exist in each school.

Summary of key messages

Involvement of young people in the development of school anti-bullying policies

All schools did have school bullying policies; some were specific anti-bullying policies, some as part of pastoral care policy. Few were reviewed regularly; hence policy-making was often seen as a reactive rather than a pro-active process. Commonly, school policies were discussed at staff training days, or around a time when school inspections took place.

Overall, the involvement of pupils in school-policy making was limited. Less than half of the schools visited operated school councils; some of these were seen by pupils as inactive and ineffective. More schools operated other means of participation, however, the selection of pupils involved was limited and almost always teacher-led.

3

Barriers to the active engagement of young people in bullying policies

The three most common reasons were:

- A perception of the limited ability of children and young people to inform policy making – through age, immaturity and doubts about intentions and motivations of pupils;

- The lack of training on how to involve pupils into policy making;

- Time constraints and organisational demands in school.

Many teachers had simply not thought about direct involvement of pupils into school policymaking – and pupils tended to accept this. While there was no open opposition to pupils' involvement in policymaking, in most schools there was no culture of pupil participation.

Thus the main barrier to pupils' involvement in school policies was simply that they were not asked to participate.

Schools which had adopted ways of involving pupils commented on the positive effect this had had on the school climate.

School anti-bullying policies work in practice

Every school in the research made it absolutely clear that bullying would not be tolerated. This was reiterated in every-day school life through posters, class discussions assemblies or anti-bullying pledges. However, this does not mean that bullying does not take place.

Pupils were generally aware of ways of reporting and dealing with bullying. But although the great majority of pupils said that their school had particular staff to deal with school bullying, only 15 per cent of post-primary pupils said they would unconditionally talk to this staff member - most thought 'telling a teacher' was not a helpful or effective option.

A good level of rapport between pupils and staff is very important. Also schools which offered a range of different age-appropriate means of dealing with bullying and revisited the subject of school bullying on a regular basis were best equipped to deal with incidences.

Young people's views on engaging them in the development of schools bullying policies

Individual pupils differ substantially in the particular form of participation that they find most comfortable. Schools need to offer a variety of structured as well as informal ways of involving pupils in school policy making. Possible ways range from informal anonymous suggestion boxes to discussions and debates within the school curriculum, a formal school council and peer-mediation schemes, such as anti-bullying squads.

The absence of any culture of pupil participation limited the aspirations and expectations of many pupils. It is clear that the development of good relationships

between pupils and school staff is key for the development of effective ways of participation and ultimately a sense of ownership of the school among pupils.
Issues such as homophobia, race, gender and disability in schools bullying policies

In general, bullying incidences were treated the same, regardless of their nature. Special schools were sensitive towards individual needs of pupils with disabilities and challenging behaviour linked to specific disabilities. None of the bullying policies of mainstream schools singled out bullying connected homophobia, xenophobia or gender. Most participants in the research agreed that students were bullied because they were different from the majority or the socially accepted 'norm' – in whatever way this may be. Homophobic bullying did not arise as an issue throughout the research project, perhaps because even discussion of homosexuality itself is regarded as threatening.

Monitoring bullying in school

Schools had different methods of monitoring bullying incidences. Overall responsibility to oversee the school bullying policy rested with a senior member of staff, with a remit to record bullying incidences and to involve all parties, including parents in resolving the issue.

In Conclusion

This research shows that the individual schools vary enormously in the way in which they develop and implement anti-bullying policies. While there were some examples of really excellent practice in devising and applying anti-bullying policies and in involving pupils in this, the general picture is of very limited participation of pupils. This seems to derive from the absence of any culture of pupil participation in policy making within schools. The interviews and discussions with pupils suggest that most have no sense of involvement in the way in which their school is run.

1. Introductory context

1.1 Introduction

Bullying, especially bullying in school, has been identified as a matter of concern or serious concern to many young people living in the UK (For further information on a range of reports on the experiences of children and young people see NCB Research Highlight No 216, May 2005, Smith, 2005). There is also growing evidence that the concern caused by bullying is also true for children and young people living in Northern Ireland (DE, 2002, Collins et al., 2004, Childline, 1998, DE, 2005, YLT, 2005).

In recent years there has been a range of policy and practice developments in both England and Northern Ireland related to bullying and bullying in schools, from central and local government, the voluntary sector and from schools and other agencies (DE, 2001; DE, 2003; DfES, 2002, Smith et al., 2004). There is also some literature on the effectiveness of intervention strategies and many resources on implementing new strategies and practices. It is becoming increasingly clear that initiatives to reduce bullying are most effective when they involve children and young people. Hence understanding the nature of children's participation in schools and school policy making is another important component to the development and implementation of bullying policies.

We will briefly review some of the literature in these areas to set the context for the research study reported here.

1.2 Definition of bullying

The concept of bullying is a complex one. Bullying is essentially a subjective experience which manifests in many different forms within different contexts and which often varies depending on the gender of the young people involved. All this makes it difficult to provide a simple definition of bullying. It also highlights the importance of asking young people to define for themselves when they have experienced bullying. However there is now a general consensus on the elements that go to make up bullying:

- Aggressive behaviour that intentionally hurts or harms another person
- Is repetitive
- Involves an imbalance of power between the bullied and the bully
- Can be physical, verbal or indirect, (for example spreading rumours).

In its publication *Pastoral Care in Schools: Child Protection*, the Department for Education in Northern Ireland defines bullying as:

> *'deliberately hurtful behaviour, repeated over a period of time, where it is difficult for the victim to defend him or herself'* (DE, 2001)

More recently, in 2005, the Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum (NIABF) agreed the following definition of bullying:

> *'The repeated use of power by one or more persons intentionally to harm, hurt or adversely affect the rights and needs of another or others'* (NIABF, 2005)

(For further discussion on definitions see the website of the Anti-bullying Alliance found at www.NCB.org.uk/aba or http://www.anti-bullyingallinace.org/)

Even given this clarification of what constitutes bullying there is still discussion, not least among young people themselves, whether to include behaviour such as teasing or banter or fighting. Here intention becomes important and whether the behaviour is perceived to meet the criteria in the above definitions of deliberate, hurtful, repetitive and between people with different degrees of power.

Children and young people also instigate bullying and while most concern rests with the impact on the victims of bullying, research also suggests that bullying is harmful to all who are involved, including those who bully or witness bullying (Katz, Buchanan & Bream, 2001).

1.3 Nature of bullying

Bullying can take many different forms and can be both physical and emotional. The Anti Bullying Alliance includes the following as forms of bullying experienced by children (ABA, 2005):

- Name-calling
- Taunting
- Threats
- Mocking
- Making offensive comments
- Kicking
- Hitting
- Pushing
- Taking and damaging belongings
- Text messaging
- Emailing, gossiping
- Excluding people from groups
- Spreading hurtful and untruthful rumours.

Almost all studies suggest that name calling is the most prevalent form of bullying. In the Whitney and Smith (1993) study in Sheffield most bullying took the form of general name calling, with 'being physically hit' and 'being threatened' the next most frequent forms in both primary and secondary schools. Boys were more likely to be hit and threatened than girls, who were more likely to experience more indirect forms of bullying such as having no one to talk to or having rumours spread about them.

Again, in the Northern Ireland study, name calling was the most common form of bullying experienced by both primary and post primary pupils.   For example almost 35 per cent of primary school pupils reported having been '*called mean names, made fun of or teased in a hurtful way*' over the past few months (Collins etal.,2004).

Regarding the location of bullying incidences, the above study identified the most common location as the 'playground/athletic field' (42%) followed by 'lunchtime'

(18%). This again reflects the Sheffield study in which the majority of bullying was reported to have occurred in the playground, with reports of bullying going to and from school being less than half that of reported incidence in school (Smith, 1999).

1.4 The extent of bullying

There is now a growing body of evidence, drawn directly from children and young people, of both the extent and nature of bullying and of bullying in schools in particular (DE, 2002; Collins et al., 2004; Smith, 2000, Oliver & Candappa, 2003, Sullivan, 2004, Smith, 2005).

However the different timing and contexts of the various surveys, different definitions of bullying, together with variations in the methods and questions asked means it is difficult to draw comparisons between the different results in terms of reported incidence of bullying. Added to this is the further complication of change over time. As it becomes clearer to children and young people that bullying is not acceptable, and they have growing confidence that it will be dealt with, then they are more likely to report incidence of bullying. This may mean that as anti-bullying strategies begin to take effect that there is a rise in reported incidence of bullying.

Reported incidence of bullying in schools from research studies in England range from figures of 10 per cent to 54 per cent of all children experiencing bullying at school at some point in time. All studies show a decline in reported incidence by age. (See Smith, 2000; Smith, 2005).

In a nation wide survey in the Republic of Ireland 31 per cent of primary level pupils and 15.6 per cent of post primary students reported having been bullied in the last term (O'Moore, Kirkham & Smith, 1997)

Data from Northern Ireland

There is also evidence that bullying is an issue of concern to children in Northern Ireland. In 1998 Childline published an analysis of the calls which it received from people in Northern Ireland. (Childline, 1998). Although the report does acknowledge the particular circumstances of children living in Northern Ireland, what is clear is that the matters which concern children here are very similar to those affecting children from across the UK. For both groups the single most common reason for children calling Childline was bullying. This accounts for 14 per cent of almost 8000 calls from children in Northern Ireland in the 3-year period 1994-1997. The comparable figure for the UK was 13 per cent. However compared to the UK children in Northern Ireland were much more likely to report that the bullying was on- going and to last longer.

In 1999, the Department of Education commissioned a major study on the prevalence of bullying in Northern Ireland. The research was undertaken by a team from the University of Ulster which published their findings October 2002 (DE, 2002; Collins et al., 2004)[1].

This was a large-scale quantitative study undertaken in both primary (one class of Year 6 from 60 schools, 1079 pupils) and post-primary schools (one class of Year 9

---

[1] This study is currently being repeated.

from 60 schools, 1353 pupils) across NI. A well-recognised standardised instrument - the Olweus Bullying Questionnaire – was used to gather information from pupils.

The results of this study indicate that 40 per cent of primary school pupils and 30 per cent of post-primary pupils had experienced bullying in the previous few months. Name-calling was the most common form of bullying in both primary and post-primary schools. These figures on bullying were higher than in the 1993 English study which also used the Olweus Questionnaire. The English study found rates of 27 per cent for primary and 10 per cent for secondary school children (Whitney and Smith, 1993). The figures from Northern Ireland were also higher than the figures reported in the study from the Irish Republic, noted above (O'Moore, Kirkham & Smith, 1997).

The most recent data on bullying in schools in Northern Ireland was collected by the **2005 Young Life and Times** (YLT) survey of 16-year olds. The fieldwork for this survey was undertaken in August and September 2005 and thus overlapped with the data collection for this present project (For more information, visit www.ark.ac.uk/ylt). 819 respondents took part in the 2005 survey. YLT data was collected via postal questionnaires using the Child Benefit Register as a sampling frame to identify all those who were 16 year olds on a certain date. With regard to the questions asked on bullying, an advantage of this sampling technique compared to a school-based study could be that respondents were completing the questionnaires at home, thus teachers did not have the opportunity to 'brief' them on the answers that they should give.

Table 1 summarises the results of the YLT survey regarding the perception of respondents regarding the extent to which they felt students were bullied by other students in their school.

Table 1:	**Would you say that students at your school get bullied by other students? By gender and school type (YLT, 2005)**

%	Gender		School type			
	Male	**Female**	**Planned Integrated**	**Grammar**	**Secondary**	**All respondents**
A lot	9	12	11	6	16	11
A little	67	70	64	72	68	69
Not at all	12	8	11	11	8	9
Don't know	10	9	14	11	8	10

Respondents were also asked if they had ever been personally bullied in school or had taken part in bullying other students and to what extent this was the case in the previous two months in school. Table 2 shows the results of these questions.

Table 2:   Respondents saying they … (YLT, 2005)

%	Gender		School type			
	Male	**Female**	**Planned Integrated**	**Grammar**	**Secondary**	**All respondents**
…were bullied by other students	26	32	25	30	32	30
…had taken part in bullying other students	12	4	14	7	7	7

Of those who said they had been bullied by other students, over one quarter (28%) said they were also bullied a little or a lot in the past two months in school. Of those respondents who said they had taken part in bullying other students, 43 per cent said they had also taken part in bullying other students in that past two months.

Despite this evidence of the extent of bullying, it is interesting that in a recent survey of school children in Northern Ireland which asked about the implementation of children's rights, the issue of bullying was only the fourth most frequently reported issue concerning children among those relating to school. This accounted for 12 per cent of all submissions in respect of school. However of real significance was the number of children who mentioned 'having no say in school' as a matter that was important to them, a finding that is very relevant to this study on involvement in school policies (Davey et al., 2005).

YLT also asked three questions that are more closely related to school bullying policies and, as such, are most relevant to this report. Respondents were asked:

- Whether their school had particular staff whose job it was to deal with bullying;
- Whether respondents felt that most people would go to one of these members of staff if they were being bullied; and
- Whether they generally felt that their school provided real help for people who were bullied.

Over three quarters of respondents said that their school had particular staff whose role it was to deal with bullying; 14 per cent of respondents said that there was no such staff in their school and 17 per cent said that they did not know if there was such staff. Table 3 shows that only 16 per cent of respondents said they would talk to these members of staff. Nearly one quarter (23%) said they would not talk to these staff members and three out of five (62%) respondents said they were not sure or it would depend on the circumstances.

However, over half (54%) of all respondents felt that their school provided real help to pupils who were bullied. One quarter (25%) felt that this was not the case and 17% said they did not know, as Table 4 shows.

Table 3: If they were bullied, would people talk to school staff whose job it is to deal with bullying*?   By gender and school type (YLT, 2005)

%	Gender		School type			
	Male	**Female**	**Planned Integrated**	**Grammar**	**Secondary**	**All respondents**
Would talk to them	15	17	21	13	18	16
Would not talk to them	28	19	17	23	23	23
It depends	54	64	62	62	58	60
Don't know	3	<1	0	2	1	2

* Of those who said their school does have such staff

Table 4: In general, do you think your school provides real help for people who are bullied or not? By gender and school type (YLT, 2005)

%	Gender		School type			
	Male	**Female**	**Planned Integrated**	**Grammar**	**Secondary**	**All respondents**
Yes	54	55	67	56	53	54
No	21	28	22	25	26	25
Don't know	20	15	11	18	17	17

At this descriptive level of analysis, the data shows that students who said they attended integrated schools were most likely to say that their schools provided real help to pupils who got bullied. The same students were those most likely to talk to members of staff whose role it was to deal with bullying in their schools. Whilst males in the sample were least likely to talk to dedicated staff in schools, females were most likely to say that school did not provide real help to students who got bullied. Respondents who were identified as same-sex attracted were significantly less likely ($p=0.003$) to say that their school provided real help to students that were bullied. Only 42 percent of same-sex attracted respondents said their school provided real help compared with 56% of opposite-sex attracted respondents. Thirty seven per cent of same-sex attracted respondents said their school did not provide real help compared with less than one quarter (24%) of opposite-sex attracted respondents.

One of the most interesting findings from the 2005 YLT survey with regard to the present research report is that only 36 per cent of respondents who went to schools where they said students got bullied a lot felt school provided real help to victims of bullying compared to 82 per cent from schools where students did not get bullied (Table 5). Significantly, of those who said they had been *personally* bullied in school, one third (33%) said their school did *not* provide real help for people who were bullied compared with less than one quarter (22%) of those who had **not** been bullied. Moreover, those who were bullied were also more likely to believe that students who

got bullied would not go and talk to school staff whose role it is to deal with bullying (28% compared to 21%).

Table 5:   Does school provide real help to pupils that are bullied, by extent of bullying in school (YLT, 2005)

%	A lot	A little	Not at all
Yes	36	54	82
No	49	26	8
Don't know	12	17	9

In terms of the extent of bullying in schools, the results from the 2005 YLT survey confirm the findings from DE (2002). The fact that respondents who had personally experienced bullying in school were significantly less likely to say that their school provided real help and also more likely to say they would not talk to dedicated staff raises questions about the effectiveness of anti-bullying policies in schools.

It is also useful to look at the results of the 1998 YLT survey that asked identical questions as the 2005 survey, but to 12-17 year olds. Among the 425 respondents in 1998, 58 per cent said that their school had particular staff to deal with bullying. In 1998, 41 per cent of respondents said that most students would not talk to these members of staff, whilst just over one quarter (26%) felt that most students would and 30 per cent believed that depended on the circumstances.

Half (50%) of all respondents then said that their school provided real help for people who got bullied. Fifty-nine per cent believed that their school had a policy on bullying and nearly two thirds of respondents (64%) said they had received classes on bullying (Table 6).

Table 6:   Does school provide real help to pupils that are bullied, by extent of bullying in school (YLT 1998)

%	A lot	A little	Not at all
Yes	43	55	49
No	47	27	17
Don't know	10	18	34

1.5 Who is bullied?

All children have the potential to either be victims of bullying or to engage in bullying others. Nonetheless there does appear to be some groups of children who are more likely to experience bullying than others. These are most often to be found in groups

where the victims cannot readily escape from the situation or circumstances that seem to encourage people to bully them.

Children who tend to get bullied in school are those with few friends, especially friends that can be trusted or who are not themselves poorly regarded by peers (Smith, 2001). This was also demonstrated in the Northern Ireland research, which found that children with fewer friends were more likely to report incidence of bullying in school and that having a large group of friends seemed to be a protective factor against bullying (Collins et al., 2004).

This finding around friendships is reflected among children with other attributes which may contribute to their lack of friendships. For example, children in public care, especially those in residential care, may be particularly vulnerable to bullying. In England, the Social Exclusion Unit found that 60 per cent of looked after children reported being bullied in school compared to 17 per cent of all children (SEU, 2003). Similarly children with special needs are 2 or 3 times more likely to be bullied (Smith & Sharp, 2004; Smith, 2005; Save the Children, 2000).

More recently attention has been focused on homophobic bullying. A recent review found estimates of 30 to 50 per cent of young people in secondary schools who were same-sex-attracted had experienced bullying. In this study 82 per cent teachers were aware of verbal homophobic incidents and 26 per cent of physical homophobic incidents of bullying in their school. Despite this only six per cent of schools made explicit reference to homophobia in their anti-bullying policies (Douglas et al., 1997; Warwick et al., 2004).

Data from Northern Ireland

The 2005 YLT survey included a proxi-measure for social class. Respondents were asked whether they thought their families were financially very well off, well off, average well off, not well off or not well off at all. Cross tabulations with questions on Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) that were also asked in the survey showed that the self-reported proxi-measure is indeed reliable. With regard to the relationship between school bullying and social class, YLT found that of the 16-year olds whose families were not well off, 38 per cent said they had been bullied at school. This compares with 31 per cent of young people who said their family was 'average' and only 25 per cent of those whose family was well off. The difference among the groups was statistically significant ($p<0.05$).

Another statistically significant difference was found with regard to sexual orientation and school bullying. In order to establish the sexual orientation of YLT respondents the following question was asked:

Which of the following statements applies best to you:

> I have felt sexually attracted:
> …only to females and never to males
> …more often to females and at least once to a male
> …about equally often to females and males
> …more often to males and at least once to a female
> …only to males and never to females
> I have never felt sexually attracted to anyone at all.

YLT found that 10.5 per cent of female respondents and 6.3 per cent of male respondents were at least once sexually attracted to a person of the same sex. As Table 7 shows, those who reported same-sex attraction on at least one occasion were significantly more likely to have experienced bullying at school (p=0.003). The results were significant for both males and females, however, same sex-attracted males in the sample were even more likely to have experienced school bullying, with two thirds (67%) saying that they were bullied.

Table 7: Experience of school bullying by sexual attraction (YLT, 2005)

%	Opposite sex attracted	Same-sex-attracted
Bullied in school	28	47
Not bullied in school	70	50
Not answered	2	3

Within Northern Ireland, Traveller families are a small but distinct minority ethnic group. There have been concerns expressed about the particular difficulties faced by Traveller children in Northern Ireland in respect of their educational experience (OFMDFM, 2000). The Department of Education wished to establish a clearer picture of children's experience within mainstream post-primary schools and commissioned a study undertaken in 2002 by a team from St Mary's College. This study, which included interviews with 44 Traveller children, reported on many aspects which the children experience at school, including the issue of bullying (DE, 2005).

Half the Traveller children interviewed had, at some time, experienced some form of bullying at school; 15 per cent were experiencing bullying at the time of the interview. About half of those who experienced bullying thought it happened because they were Travellers.

1.6 Policy context

Within a UK context the most significant policy framework for developing any policy in respect of children is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The Convention was passed by the UN in 1989 and ratified by the UK government in 1991. The UNCRC has many different Articles related to all aspects of children's lives. Article 19 is perhaps the most directly relevant to bullying. This Article gives children the right to be protected form all forms of physical or mental violence and calls upon all governments to take appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect children. Also relevant to this study is the framework that UNCRC provides around children's participation in decision making. Article 12 in particular gives to children the right to be involved in all matters that affect them and this would include the development of bullying polices in school.

Growing recognition of the problem of bullying in school in recent years has led governments in both England and Northern Ireland to introduce a range of policy initiatives to attempt to deal with bullying in general and bullying in schools in particular.

For example in England the 1998 School Standards Act required schools to have written policies on measures to prevent bullying. Although these should be clearly distinguishable from general behaviour polices it was also recommend that they are part of wider Whole School Policy and most importantly that pupils should be involved in their development. To support the implementation of this law, DfES published guidance in 2000, revised and updated in 2002 entitled *Bullying: Don't Suffer in Silence* (DfES, 2002). The duty on schools in respect of children was further strengthened with the 2004 Education Act, which placed a duty on schools to safeguard and promote children's welfare. This was also supported by guidance on *Safeguarding Children In School* (DfES, 2004).

Recently in an attempt to support practice developments that will deliver on these polices the government has supported the Anti-Bullying Alliance (ABA[2]), as a way of co-ordinating the work of all those concerned with reducing bullying among children and to support those who have been bullied. ABA, which is based at NCB, offers practical support to schools through its Regional Development Officers. The ABA website acts as a tremendous resource on all aspects of bullying for children, young people, parents, teachers, Head, LEA's and others. A further sign of the Government's determination to tackle bullying is its support for Anti-Bullying Week, co-ordinated by ABA. This was first held in 2004 and repeated on a much larger scale in 2005. Anti-Bullying Week involves a very wide range of activities in schools, including encouragement for all schools to sign up to the Anti-Bullying Schools Charter. New provisions regarding discipline and behaviour in schools is also included in the new Education Bill currently going through Parliament.

1.7 Policy context in Northern Ireland

The Department for Education in Northern Ireland has also recognised the importance of bullying in schools as an important issue. In 1999 they commissioned the major research study, referred to earlier, and which was launched in 2002 (DE, 2002; Collins et al., 2004). In 2001 the Department produced good practice guidance on disciplinary strategies, *Pastoral Care in Schools: Promoting Positive Behaviour*. While this addressed all aspects of behaviour it also highlighted the importance of schools addressing bullying and contained detailed advice on tackling bullying (DE, 2001).

More recently, through the Education and Libraries Board Order NI 2003, the Department introduced two very significant amendments to the legal framework in respect of bullying policy.

The first of these was a requirement for schools to include measures to prevent all forms of bullying among pupils. The second amendment was a requirement that pupils be consulted on all policies or changes to polices within schools, including those on bullying.

The Department for Education clarified these changes within Statement on Bullying, issued on 17 November, 2003 (DE, 17 November 2003).

---

[2] The Anti-Bullying Alliance (ABA) was founded by NSPCC and NCB in 2002. ABA brings together over 50 national organisations from the voluntary and private sectors, LEAs, professional associations and the research community into one network to work together to reduce bullying and create safer environments in which children and young people can live, grow, play and learn.

As a measure of its commitment to these initiatives the Northern Ireland Government supported the preparation of resources to facilitate good practice. In November 2002 a good practice anti-bullying guide, *Focus on Bullying*, produced by Save the Children, was issued to all post primary schools (Save the Children, 2002). In 2005 Save the Children launched a further resource, *Something to Say,* this time addressed to management and staff in primary schools.

Also important in terms of the policy context for addressing bullying in Northern Ireland is the Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum (NIABF), launched at the end of 2005. NIABF, an interagency body with representatives from the statutory and voluntary sectors, supported by the Department of Education and NICCY, has set out its Strategy and Action Plan for 2005 to 2008. NIABF is chaired by Save the Children and is '*committed to working together to create and promote an environment free from bullying for children and young people'* (Save the Children, 2005).

Within Northern Ireland the Education and Library Boards are another important source of policy. The websites for each of the five Education and Library Boards shows some information on bullying, although these vary in coverage and have a different focus. For example the WELB has a very fully developed Anti-Bullying policy, the SEELB has a Position Statement of Bullying, while the SELB has a comprehensive set of resources under the heading Challenging Bullying Behaviour and the NEELB has a copy of the Save the Children Guidance and information on training. The BELB website has least information that specifically addresses bullying, although this is included in several of their other documents, for example in their training programme.

Each school is also required to have a policy to deal with bullying. Policies were collected from the 14 schools which were visited as part of this research and these will be discussed as part of the report on the findings.

Recently McGuckin and Lewis (2005) surveyed all 1,233 educational institutions in Northern Ireland (910 primary, 167 secondary, 73 grammar, 54 special, 29 further education colleges) on their bullying policies. 285 schools and colleges replied to the questionnaire. Over 90 per cent stated that they did have an anti-bullying policy. Most often this was incorporated into the overall pastoral care or disciplinary policy of the school. Over 95 per cent of principals said they had communicated this policy to staff and students, with the most frequently used resources being KIDSCAPE, NSPCC, Save the Children, and resources from the ELB Positive Behaviour Teams. The latter were the most often quoted source of teacher training on school bullying. However this study relied entirely on the information given by principals.

However, there is less evidence in the public domain which reports the way in which children and young people are involved in helping to devise anti-bullying strategies, for example through the development and evaluation of anti-bullying polices in schools. NICCY has therefore identified this as a matter on which it wishes to gather evidence that will inform the recommendations addressed to Government Departments, Education and Library Boards and schools.

1.8 Children's participation in schools

Alongside the development of anti-bullying strategies there have been significant policy developments in terms of children's participation in schools. As noted previously the UNCRC provides an overarching policy framework for promoting the rights and participation of children in all matters affecting them. Most specifically

there have been important initiatives which have addressed pupils' involvement in schools in a more general sense. Significant among these has been the development of schools councils (for a range of resources see the website of Schools Councils UK, a charity devoted to encouraging children's participation in schools http://www.schoolcouncils.org) and the National Healthy Schools Standard (NHSS) (DfEE, 1999).

The NHSS encourages and supports schools to take a whole school approach to physical and emotional health and provides practical support to enable schools *'to create an enjoyable, safe, productive learning environment and minimise potential health risks'* (DfEE, 2001) Schools are assessed against a range of criteria. Key among these is the way in which schools '*give pupils a voice'*. There are four elements which schools must meet in order to satisfy these requirements: this includes establishing mechanisms for involving pupils in policy development. An evaluation of this element of NHSS indicated that higher levels of participation were found in larger schools and those with older students. It also pointed to many innovative schemes to involve pupils and highlighted some of the factors which encouraged participation, such as the general school ethos. Building confidence and self-esteem were pivotal to successful pupil participation with peer mediation schemes and clubs seen to be beneficial in reducing isolation, conflict and loneliness (Madge et al., 2003). In 2004 guidance was launched, to help schools promote pupil participation (DfES, DH and NCB, 2004).

As discussed below, there is growing evidence of the importance of the school ethos in the effective implementation of school policies on bullying and that a crucial element of a positive school ethos is a school that respects and listens to the views of its pupils. This is now widely recognised in the recent policy initiatives in respect of bullying in Northern Ireland.

> *'The creation of an anti-bullying ethos is the result of consultation, careful planning, widespread support and is 'lived' by all. The ethos of a school is evident in the relationships in and out of the classroom'* (DE, 1999)

However a recent survey of over 1000 school children in Northern Ireland (Kilkelly et al., 2004) identified having 'no say in school' as the most frequently mentioned issue. Almost 40 per cent of children criticised the lack of power that they have in having their views taken into account in their every day experience of schools. They cited many areas where they thought this was so, including: uniform, communication with teachers, school dinner facilities, rules, subject choice, state of the building, toilets, lunch time activity. The authors conclude that the children felt a real sense of injustice

> '*with respect to the failure on the part of adults to treat children and young people with respect, particularly to listen to their views and to give them due weight. The importance of this point is underscored by the emphasis children and young people place on their lack of voice in the everyday decisions which take place in their schools…'* (Kilkelly et al., 2004)

1.9 Effective anti-bullying strategies

The evidence on effective anti-bullying strategies is still rather limited, with few robust studies that demonstrated with confidence the impact of different interventions, although there is a considerable body of smaller scale qualitative studies (Smith, 2005).

When considering anti-bullying strategies it seems useful to separate strategies into those dealing with different aspects of the problem:

- policy development and implementation,
- awareness raising,
- preventing or dealing with incidence of bullying.

Both of the Save the Children Educational Resources (*Focus on Bullying* and *Something to Say*) provide a range of ideas and activities to address each of these elements in primary and post-primary schools (STC, 2002; 2005)

Policy development and implementation

Research on the extent to which pupils are involved in the development and implementation of school polices is limited. However there is much evidence that children would like to be involved (see Kilkelly et al., 2004). One study demonstrated that almost 60 per cent of children agreed that children should be involved in deciding what to do about bullying (Oliver & Candappa, 2003).

Studies of anti-bullying policies point to several key elements that support their effectiveness: preparation for the introduction of policies; work to promote ownership; the development of whole-school polices; the development of polices in an inclusive way, in particular involvement of pupils in the development.

Evaluation by Save the Children of its pack *Focus on Bullying* resource pack highlights the importance of 'school readiness' (STC, 2005). One way in which schools can help prepare is to undertake an audit of current practice or the application of readily available self-assessment questionnaires which help point to current strengths and weaknesses. Tools to help with these tasks are now widely available (see STC, 2005, the ABA website and also, as noted earlier, from several of the ELB websites).

Part of school readiness also relates to the ethos of the school and the extent to which it attempts to build wide ownership of school policies through, for example whole-school policies and a genuinely participatory culture. Research would suggest that each of these elements is a crucial component of an effective strategy and that each are mutually reinforcing.   For example research on factors associated with levels of bullying suggest that school ethos, attitude of teachers and the degree of supervision in free time are all of major significance for the extent of bullying (Smith, 2000). A whole school policy ensures that all the activities of the school are working towards the same objectives and become mutually reinforcing, for example development of comprehensive behaviour policies and curriculum development ensuring that topics discussed in PSHE/ PSE/ Life skills classes help to reinforced the messages contained in school polices.

A positive school ethos and effective whole school policy requires the involvement of all stakeholders – managers, teachers, governors and not least pupils (Smith and Sharp, 1994). As noted in Bullying: *Don't Suffer in Silence*

> '*A policy will only be effective if everybody in school has discussed and understood the problem of bullying, and agreed on good and bad practice*'

> (DfES, 2002)

Awareness raising

Awareness raising fits with the concept of school readiness which has already been discussed in respect of development of policies. But this needs to be a continuing process and one which ensures that pupils are aware both of policies and the best way for them to support an anti-bullying strategy and to get help, if needed. Research suggests that the impact of school policies declines after a couple of years and sustained effectiveness requires strong implementation that is regularly monitored and reinforced (Glover et al., 1998). This points to the need for awareness raising to be on-going, with policies re-visited frequently to take account of changing circumstances or new research (Smith & Sharp, 1994).

Preventing or dealing with incidence of bullying

There is now an array of different initiatives or strategies for dealing with incidences of bullying with different methods targeted at different elements of bullying.

Recent research with children and young people suggest that they engage in a complex process of risk assessment in deciding how to deal with bullying (Oliver & Candappa, 2003). This is particular so in terms of who they should tell about it. Telling teachers was certainly seen as risky and more likely to be employed where pupils felt that the situation was beyond their control (Hunter and Boyle, 2004). As well as being perceived as risky, many pupils reported that telling teachers was ineffective – teachers did not seem to be able to understand how bullying was experienced by pupils, again identifying the importance of giving pupils a voice.

The findings from this study reflected those of others (Smith et al., 2004) in identifying the three most helpful strategies in preventing or dealing with bullying as friendships; avoidance strategies; and 'learning to stand up for yourself'.

Given the importance of friends as both a protective mechanism against bullying and as a crucial source of support, strategies to strengthen friendships would seem to be important (Oliver & Candappa, 2003; Collins et al., 2004). Buddying and befriending schemes are now found in many primary schools while peer mentoring or lunch time clubs are seen as being valued by pupils in secondary schools (Smith and Watson, 2004). Also important is confidential sources of advice and help that children feel they can trust.

What children seem to be saying is that they need strategies which minimise the risks and maximise the support that they receive. This is likely to require a range of different strategies or mechanisms, rather than looking for a single solution. As well as changing the culture in school towards one that is more participatory, there is a need for a range of initiatives that help to build pupils confidence and strengthen the support they receive from friends as well as staff.

2. The Research Project

2.1 Aims and objectives of the research project

The overall aim of the research was:

> To determine the views and experiences of children and young people in relation to the development and review of bullying policies in schools in Northern Ireland.

More specifically the central aims of the study were to:

- Determine how children and young people have been involved in developing anti-bullying policies in school;
- Explore their views on how these policies work out in practice;
- Ascertain how specific issues such as race, homophobia, gender and disability are addressed in schools' anti-bullying policies;
- Establish how bullying is monitored within schools;
- Explore pupils' views on successful steps taken within schools to reduce bullying.

Addressing these aims led to this research project with the following objectives:

1. To carry out a literature review that will provide the necessary background information to inform the project.

2. To train, support and manage a group of young researchers to enable them to contribute significantly to the research project.

3. To design a research project using appropriate research methods, to gather information on the four themes below, with an emphasis on the first theme:

   a. The views and experiences of children and young people
   b. Policies and practices in schools in respect of bullying
   c. The role of government departments in addressing bullying in schools
   d. A comparison of the situation within NI and that in the rest of the UK.

4. To prepare a report of the research project and its findings, including recommendations that can be addressed to Government Departments, Education and Library Boards and schools.

5. To provide feedback, in relevant formats, to children and young people and working with NICCY, to disseminate the research findings as widely as possible, involving the young researchers as they wish.

2.2 Methodology

The ethos of the research project was fundamentally child and young people centred. This was achieved by involving peer researchers in the research process from the start. The involvement of Young Researchers is discussed further below. The research instruments were also designed in young-people friendly way.

NCB has extensive experience in using young people centred research methodologies. For example, NCB has developed Talkshops as a means of collecting data through a participatory form of focus groups, in which participants are actively engaged in discussion and in completing exercises. These Talkshops are designed to create a safe environment for young people to share their views on potentially sensitive topics as well as to stimulate debate on the relevant issues. Each Talkshop starts with an explanation of the aims and objectives of the research project and an agreement on ground rules. These ground rules are an agreement between the research team and the participants. They include rules on confidentiality, openness and truthfulness, participation in the research and whatever else the participants deem to be important.

Considering the aims and objectives of this research project, a mixed-method approach was adopted, which facilitated data-triangulation.
Namely, the following methods were used:

1. Review of relevant literature,
2. Content analysis of school documents such as behavioural, pastoral care and anti-bullying policies;
3. Interviews with school staff involved in monitoring school-bullying policies;
4. Talkshops with pupils;
5. One-to-one interviews with pupils;
6. Questionnaires administered to pupils.

Furthermore, available documentations were also collected from the five Education and Library Boards (ELB) as well as the Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DE). A questionnaire was submitted to DE staff responsible for school bullying policy. However, no response was received. This is partly because the DE commissioned a major review of school bullying policies themselves when the present project was undertaken, and hence departmental input into the present report was very limited.

The research study was carried out in fourteen schools across Northern Ireland. Details of the sample schools and how they were accessed is discussed below, as are details of the respondents.

First, appropriate written documents were collected from all participating schools. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with senior staff in each school. These interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed where consent had been given.

Third, Talkshops were undertaken in all schools. In primary schools, between eight and fifteen pupils from either P6 or P7 (8-11 years) took part in the Talkshops. In post-primary schools between twelve and twenty students of different ages took part in the Talkshops. In special schools, between four and ten pupils participated. Talkshops lasted between forty five and ninety minutes, depending on arrangements in each individual school. Generally, a set of activities, which were mainly small-group based, were undertaken in each school. Full schedules of the Talkshops can be found in Appendix 2. Activities were designed to gain an understanding of:

- Pupils' perceptions of bullying in school including most common types of bullying;

- Pupils' involvement in policy making in school and policy making on bullying in particular;

21

- Forms of support available to pupils affected by bullying (both victims and perpetrators),
- What ways of effective support, pupil involvement in dealing with bullying and being involved in policy making in school would pupils prefer.

Whilst the purpose of the Talkshops was identical in each school, the types of activities used varied in degree of complexity between post-primary, primary and special schools. It was also necessary to facilitate the needs of individual schools in terms of the timetable and schedules. For example, lessons in each school had different lengths, and schools had different policies with regard to whether or not break times had to be observed. Some schools wished to use the findings of the research project to directly inform their own school policy making on bullying and/or pupil participation. This also had implications on how Talkshops were undertaken in practice.

Fouth, One-to-one interviews with pupils were only conducted in post-primary schools and selected special schools. Lastly, questionnaires were only distributed in primary and post-primary schools. Interview schedules and survey questionnaires can be found in Appendices 3-6. Questionnaires in primary schools were distributed to all P6 and P7 pupils. Questionnaires in post-primary schools were distributed to one entire year group of the school, although this was not necessarily the same year group that participated in Talkshops.

2.3 Involvement of peer researchers

One way of ensuring a young people centred approach to the project was to involve peer researchers throughout the project, from the planning phase to the final phase of data analysis and dissemination. A group of ten post-primary students were identified and recruited to work on the project as Young Researchers. Six of the ten Young Researchers involved came from post-primary schools that were part of the school sample. Two Young Researchers came from a special school included in the study. Two Young Researchers were recruited through the NICCY Youth Panel. These two researchers were also post-primary students.

The Young Researchers took part in a one-day training event prior to data collection. During the training day the Young Researchers were made familiar with:

- The purpose of undertaking social research, in general;

- The aims and objectives of the project;

- The development and practice of means of data collection used in the research.

Young Researchers were given the opportunity to practice interviews and provide input into the design of data collection. At the end of the training day the Young Researchers received a pack with further background information on school bullying and signed a contract with NCB. The contract outlined the Young Researchers' role in the research project, their duties and details of how and when they would be reimbursed (see Appendix 1). Young Researchers worked in pairs, each taking part in data collection in two schools. They were treated as full members of the research team and it was their responsibility, as with everyone else, to collect data, take field notes and to submit these to the NCB team prior to report writing. One Young Researcher withdrew from his contract shortly after the initial training day.

Young Researchers were encouraged to assist with all stages of the research process: in framing the questions; selecting the methods; designing the research tools; undertaking the data collection; data analysis; report writing and dissemination. When data collection in the schools was completed, all Young Researchers took part in a data analysis and focus day. Together with the full-time research staff, they were given the opportunity to review the outcome of the project and share their views and experiences. They were also asked to comment on their own role in the project and make suggestions on how the contribution of peer researchers in future research projects can be optimised and enhanced. Young Researchers were sent the draft copy of this report and given the opportunity to comment and make amendments before the report was finalised.

2.4 Sample selection

Northern Ireland's education system is deeply segregated along socio-religious lines. The great majority (95%) of pupils in Northern Ireland attend schools which are religiously divided. Additionally, the system of academic selection at 11 years (11+ tests) results in post-primary schools which are also segregated by academic achievement, i.e. grammar schools and secondary schools. Therefore a purposive quota sample of schools was selected that represented the different sub-sectors within the school landscape in Northern Ireland. Additionally it was intended to include schools of different sizes, rural as well as urban locations, single-sex as well as co-educational, boarding as well as day schools. The target sample was chosen to include schools from all five ELBs. It was also regarded as most important that the views of all groups of children and young people were represented from all schools sectors, i.e. primary, post-primary and special schools. Within the given financial and time frame constraints, a sample of fifteen schools was regarded as both apt and manageable. Within these given criteria, the selection of schools for the research project was random.

Accessing schools

Initial letters were sent out to sixteen selected schools in early September 2005. These letters included general information about the research project and in the case of post-primary schools - both mainstream and special – information about the opportunity to nominate Young Researchers to participate in the research. Interested pupils had to complete a brief application form. The decision on whether or not they would be selected as Young Researchers was made on the basis of the application form and their participation in the one-day training course. The letters were followed up by a phone call from the research associate.

Half (50%) of the original sample of 16 schools agreed to take part in the research. The other half declined for a variety of reasons. Some of the reasons given for non-participation were:

- The school was already involved in too many other research projects;
- Sickness or absence of staff involved in behavioural management;
- The school had already agreed to take part in another (research) project on bullying;
- The school did not have the resources to facilitate the research;
- The school was in the process of introducing an new behavioural management approach and did not want the research to interfere with this;

- The school was undergoing building work, so they tried to avoid any further disruption to the every-day school life.

With regard to the findings of this project it is important to keep in mind that the sample is partially based on self-selection. We cannot be entirely sure why some schools decided to take part in the project and others did not. However, it is noticeable that some schools decided to opt-in because they were undertaking a review of school participation policies and/or anti-bullying policies. In these cases, the research project directly informed policy-making in these schools. One school also decided to take part despite major renovations in the school building. One principal declined to take part because he felt that 'bullying was not an issue' in his school.

In total twenty nine schools were invited to take part. A final sample of fourteen schools was achieved. Table 8 summarises the final sample of participating school by sector, geographical area and management type.

Table 8:   Schools included in sample, by sector, geographical area, management type

	Primary	**Post-Primary**	**Special**
Belfast ELB *Management*	Star Of The Sea Girls' Primary School *Catholic maintained*	Campbell College (excl. male intake) *Voluntary Grammar, (boarding section), predominantly Protestant intake*	St Gerard's Education Resource Centre *Catholic maintained*
South Eastern ELB *Management*	Crawfordsburn Primary School *State controlled*	none	Brookfield Special Primary School *Controlled, primary*
Southern ELB *Management*	Annalong Primary School *State controlled*	City Armagh High School *Controlled secondary*	Sperrinview Special School Dungannon *Controlled*
North Eastern ELB *Management*	Carnlough Controlled Integrated Primary School *Controlled planned integrated*	St Mary's Grammar School Magherafelt *Voluntary Grammar, predominantly Catholic intake*	Rosstulla Special School *Controlled*
Western ELB *Management*	St Anne's Primary School *Catholic maintained*	Drumragh Integrated College *Grant maintained integrated*	Belmont House Special School *Controlled*

24

Participating schools varied considerably in size. The smallest school in the sample (Carnlough Controlled Integrated Primary School) had an enrolment of fewer than 50 pupils, the largest one (St. Mary's Grammar School Magherafelt) of around 1,100 students. Around 70 students among the 900 in Campbell College are boarding.

In total, a non-probability sample of 687 pupils - 317 primary school students and 370 post-primary students - completed the short survey questionnaire. The data was processed and analysed using SPSS. Twenty-four students completed one-to-one interviews. Interviews were also conducted with senior management staff in all 14 participating schools. Additional to the data from the questionnaires and the interviews, around 100 pages of field notes on the school visits, including data gathered during the Talkshops, were produced by the research team.

3. Findings

During the fieldwork on the project it became evident that means of involving pupils in policy making in schools in general as well as in anti-bullying policies in particular varied significantly between individual schools rather than between school sectors or geographical areas. For this reason, findings are being presented topically rather than by school type or by type of data collected. The findings section of the report is divided in three main sections. These focus on the following areas:

> 3.1 How school policies in general, and policies on school bullying in particular, are developed;
>
> 3.2 How awareness of school bullying is raised in schools;
>
> 3.3 The anti-bullying practices which schools pursue.

At the end of each of these three sections a summary of key findings is provided. At the end of the report, these findings are summarised into key messages that relate to the six main questions which the research sought to answer.

3.1 Developing school policies

> **'Bullying is an issue that never goes away and you have to be aware of what form it takes in each school.'** (Pastoral care teacher, primary school)
>
> **'Relationships, to my mind, are central to everything that goes on in the school.'** (Principal, primary school)

School Policies

All 14 schools in the sample had a written policy that addressed bullying in school. In most schools the bullying policy was incorporated into the overall discipline policy; however five schools had specific anti-bullying documents. In the majority of schools, anti-bullying policies were seen as an integral part of the pastoral care policy. One vice-principal from a special school said:

> *'Well the pastoral type policy is quite a comprehensive document, dealing not only with bullying, but with the promotion of positive discipline within the school, with the areas of solvent abuse, with the areas of home school liaison, stuff like that, it's a very, very general and very, very comprehensive policy.'*

The principal from another special school reported how the specific anti-bullying policy links with a positive behaviour policy of the school:

> *'The anti-bullying policy really came from the discipline policy initiative. When I came here, eight years ago, it was a discipline policy. The first thing to do was to look at that, to audit the procedures that we had for monitoring discipline in the school and really developing it into a positive behaviour policy. And that positive behaviour policy has looked at all the areas of school.'*

Generally, senior management staff felt that it was necessary to take a holistic view of anti-bullying policies and regard it as an integral element of the general set of pastoral care policies that schools operate, whilst at the same time having clear disciplinary procedures in place if bullying occurs. One principal from a primary school said:

> *'Discipline is good in the school I have to say, I have very few serious issues to deal with and that's because, I think, the bullying policy is encompassed in a number of initiatives as well as clearly identifying what steps we will take in the event of a bullying incident taking place. So, I see the bullying policy as just part of a package, that's what I'm driving at here, it's much wider than that, so the children and parents and staff have been involved in developing a whole range of initiatives which stem from our anti-bullying policy.'*

As could be expected, the written policies were diverse in design and length. Some anti-bullying policies were only one page long; the longest document the research team received extended over ten pages. There was clear evidence that schools were generally aware of the issue and complexity of bullying. Typically, anti-bullying policies covered the following elements:

- A definition of bullying
- A list of types of bullying
- Symptoms of bullying
- Proactive and reactive measures to prevent bullying
- Guidelines to deal with bullying incidences, including the recording of incidences
- Specifications of disciplinary procedures and actions to be taken if bullying persists
- Procedure of reviewing the anti-bullying policy (selected schools).

Definitions and symptoms of bullying

Schools worked with a variety of definitions and contextualisations of school bullying. For instance one special school policy stated:

> *'Bullying is a very complex problem and is difficult to define. However, we should see it as a wilful desire to hurt threaten or frighten someone.'*

Before specifying particular types of bullying, the policy of one post-primary school commenced with this statement:

> *'Bullying affects everyone, not just those who bully and the victims. Bullying is not an inevitable part of school life nor necessary part of growing up.'*

One primary school defined bullying as follows:

> *'Bullying is any deliberate attack, or threat of attack, which may be verbal, physical or emotional. Bullying is systematically carried out against any individual, or group of individuals, unable to make their own defence.'*

It would be difficult to argue that any one definition or contextualisation was better than another. However, school bullying policies that were clearly developed by the schools themselves rather than just copied or adapted from a sample policy, were most convincing. These policies took into consideration the specific circumstances of the school and the specific conditions under which the school worked.

The majority of school policies specified types of bullying, including physical, verbal and emotional bullying, exclusion and damage to property or theft. Four policies specifically addressed the question of where bullying is likely to occur and suggested measures, such as increased supervision, to prevent this from happening. This issue of where bullying takes place in the school building was also raised in many interviews and Talkshop discussions. Pupils and staff in one school in particular that was not housed in a purpose-built school building felt that they had to address this through supervision:

> *'Because this, the very nature of this building, I think we're different from other schools, there are lots of places where you can hide, and I think we need to do that bit more.'*

Measures to prevent bullying

All school bullying policies provided a list of proactive and reactive measures to deal with school bullying. Proactive measures typically included:

- The promotion of good discipline
- The creation of a caring and supportive school environment
- A good pastoral care system
- The involvement of all staff (teaching and non-teaching) in implementing the policy, provision of adequate staff training.

In interview a number of senior management staff pointed out that they saw their anti-bullying policy as a **pro**active rather than **re**active policy. In relation to this one primary school principal said:

> *'We tend to be proactive rather than reactive and I like to feel that we are in a position whereby we can accommodate most situations that will arise in the school setting but it's impossible to actually, I suppose, cover every eventuality. We do everything we can to ensure that the children in our care are secure […] and that they feel they can talk to us about issues that affect them including bullying. So relationships, to my mind, are central to everything that goes on in the school. So, you know, when it comes to drawing up the policy it is important that you listen to the views of everyone concerned and we hopefully do that in a number of ways both formally and informally.'*

Some, but not all, policies referred to ways in which bullying can be addressed within the school curriculum and in every-day school life. Measures included for example: raising awareness in assemblies, in PS(H)E (Personal Social (Health) Education), displaying anti-bullying posters etc. Only one (special) school mentioned circle time in their written bullying policy as a means to discuss school bullying with the pupils and as a means for pupils to contribute to policy making in school.

Raising awareness among parents and creating a level of rapport between pupils and school staff at which reporting of bullying incidences was acceptable was seen

as part of adopting a proactive anti-bullying strategy by a number of schools. With regard to reporting of incidences, one school policy stated:

> *'Remember that your silence is the bully's greatest weapon.'*
>
> *'Always try to tell an adult you trust straight away – you will get immediate support.'*

All of the primary schools and two post-primary and special schools each worked with good behaviour pledges or anti-bullying pledges that all pupils signed at the start of the school year. Primary school and special school pupils were also involved in drawing up school rules or class rules at the start of each school year. These rules usually included statements on bullying.

Recording of bullying incidences

All schools involved in the research recorded bullying incidences and kept these on record. Depending on the schools' management and pastoral care structure, bullying was recorded by responsible senior staff. Usually this was the pastoral care teacher, vice principal or principal of the school. Parents were informed about school bullying incidences and records were kept, for different lengths of time, often depending on the severity of the incidence. A number of schools operated stringent complaints procedures in case parents (or someone else) had concerns about bullying incidences. Some schools also used more visual forms of indicating to children if their behaviour was unacceptable. This was more so the case in primary and special schools. Two special schools, for example used a traffic light model where a yellow light indicated a warning to the concerned students, whereas a red light for continuous misbehaviour or bullying was followed by a sanction.

One principal from a primary school explained their comprehensive recording practice as follows:

> *'I ask the parents to write down their concerns, and we have these observation sheets to record what we see happening between their child and the child they think is causing the problem, at obvious times such as break time and lunchtime. The children have the same classroom assistant every day, and the teacher tells them to keep an eye on 'so and so'. She comes back to say if there's anything to report, and I write it down. This goes on over a seven-day period. I then send that out to the parent, ask them if they're happy, and they sign it. As long as they sign it off, it's okay. That file can then be kept until the child is 21.'*

Another model of recording bullying incidences, which also involved parents and daily supervision was reported by another primary school: The principal explained:

> *'If a child has been bullied and we're satisfied that that is the case, we open an incident log and that would be open for a period of a half term initially, and the child who is the victim has the opportunity to meet with the teacher towards the end of each day, whether or not there's been a problem that day. That child can say to the teacher: I've had a great day, there have been no problems - and that is noted in the incident log. However, if there was a problem we then build up a picture of the difficulties this child may be continuing to have. But the other positive aspect is that the bully realises that a daily check is being kept because they will be informed that an incident log is being kept. Now, there's an*

element of trust here. You have to trust the child who's the victim to be honest with you because there is the potential for abuse of this: Oh yes I was bullied today. […] You have to balance things up and this is where you need wisdom as to what actually constitutes an incident of bullying. So, possibly once a year we may have to open an incident log, it's not even as frequently as that. That's a method which we have found successful. We also inform the parents, sometimes on a weekly basis, more often than not it will be at the end of the period and say: look we have had an incident-free period of six weeks here and, you know, we are reasonably satisfied as things stand that the situation has resolved itself, but we could reopen the incident log and the parents also have an opportunity to contribute to it. They are made aware at the beginning this is being done and if they wish to contribute, you know, the child has come home and he's fretful, still concerned, not sleeping or whatever, they have an opportunity to come back to us. I find it works and it's very successful. In the couple of occasions we've used it we have, as far as I'm aware, no further problems involving the child or children so it definitely works and the parents feedback has been very positive: Yes the child is much happier, happy to come to school, sleeping, you know, and it's definitely made a lot of difference.'

Two other schools used conduct cards or a school diary on a regular basis to monitor behaviour in general and to communicate this with the pupils' parents. Minor incidences of bullying would also be recorded on these conduct cards or diaries. However, there was a special recording procedure for more severe incidences.

Dealing with incidences of bullying

In their policies, most schools suggested a variety of ways in which bullying would be dealt with if it occurs. The majority of schools reiterated that they would use a 'no-blame approach'. One post-primary school's policy read:

'When bullying is suspected we use the 'no blame approach' and talk to the suspected victim, the pupil suspected of bullying and any witnesses.'

The emphasis of school bullying policies was clearly on protecting the victim, however schools also stressed the need to help those who are doing the bullying. A number of schools offered counselling services for both the victim and the perpetrators and stressed that it was equally important to praise pupils for good behaviour as to condemn unacceptable behaviour.

Most written policies failed to include any active involvement of pupils in addressing the issue of school bullying. However, some schools did mention the role that pupils could have in preventing reoccurring bullying. One school stated, for example:

'If necessary, a senior pupil may be asked to befriend the victim.'

Little evidence was collected that schools did not take bullying incidences seriously, once they were reported. The Talkshops with pupils and the survey questionnaires showed that the main problem was that some pupils did not feel comfortable reporting bullying incidences because they were either afraid of the consequences – for example, how would the incidence be dealt with and would it actually make matters worse – or because they anticipated that teachers would not want to know. This is discussed further below. However, once an incidence was reported, it was usually dealt with professionally and satisfactorily for the victim. Perhaps inevitably,

practice in schools as reported by the pupils did not always match that set out within the policies. This suggested to the research team that some senior staff were naïve in believing that it would be sufficient to put in place sanctions for school bullying and to simply nominate a member of staff whose responsibility was to deal with school bullying. With regard to this, one pastoral care teacher admitted in an interview:

> *'Like any mixed group, you are going to have staff who are very receptive and very warm and very comforting for children who have got a worry, but you've also got staff who have got 150,000 other things to do. And if somebody comes in saying: I've been bullied - they just don't want to know.'*

There was similar awareness by senior staff in other schools that an open-door policy itself was not a sufficient guarantee that pupils would report bullying incidences, as the following quote from a principal in a special school exemplifies:

> *'The pupils know that there's that open door policy. And that for me has been pleasing to see that that is working. And I'm not saying that you don't have to revisit or re-evaluate it and see that it is maintained. So, you need to revisit the topic in different ways, so the children do know, and that they keep that uppermost in their mind.'*

Reviewing policies

It became evident during the research that even though most policies stated on paper that a policy review should take place regularly, a number of schools had not reviewed their school-bullying policy for a while. It was evident that one of the main reasons there wasn't more regular review of policies was the sheer workload – both academic as well as administrative – of teaching staff. One principal from a primary school quoted that there were currently 64 different educational initiatives that were targeted at schools in Northern Ireland, which seems to represent a truly astonishing inflation of policy interventions in the education sector.

Although senior management staff in four schools implied that their school policies were reviewed annually, on paper only one policy (from a special school) stated that an annual review was to be undertaken. Generally those school policies that further specified how and how often a policy review should take place did state that teachers, non-teaching staff, parents and governors were to be consulted during school policy reviews. An involvement of pupils in this process was not specified, and with very few exceptions, schools did not involve pupils **directly** in any school policy review.

Five of the schools that participated in the project were in the process of reviewing their anti-bullying or pastoral care policies whilst the fieldwork took place. In fact, three schools asked for immediate feedback of the research results in order to use some of the findings to inform policy-making at school level. Each of these schools intended to enhance the involvement of pupils in school-policy making. One primary school principal explained that they reviewed their school policy on a three-yearly basis and intended to involve children directly in the next review:

> *'The children are asked for their views on a range of issues. I mean, we have a number of special events in the school and the children are, obviously, central to those and they would actually have a part to play in the planning of those events. They occasionally write their own assemblies, there'd be a variety of messages there, one of which could*

be anti-bullying. So, that message is brought through by the children acting, whether it be drama, music and so on, so they'd participate in that. And, with our whole school development review, we have a three-year plan which is due for review. Children are personally asked for their views. We will actually set questionnaires in place, and the children will be asked for their views. We haven't done that yet quite honestly, but that's part of our future planning.'

One senior staff interviewee from a (special) school reported back that as a result of taking part in the research project, a school council was to be established. In a number of schools visited, the review of school policies was directly related to changes in school staff (e.g. a new principal, a new pastoral care teacher). Review processes of policies did involve pupils in some schools, but not in others. For example, one post-primary school had carried out a survey among staff, parents and pupils, which found that a majority of students were not comfortable talking to school staff about issues and problems with which they were concerned. As a consequence, the pastoral care system of the school was re-examined and measures were taken to enhance the role of the existing school council. A 'Buddy System' was also introduced, training senior school prefects to become what the school called 'link persons', that is, mediator between staff and students. The pastoral care teacher reported:

'I would have found that in the junior school particularly it came up again and again, they didn't feel there was anybody they could talk to. A criticism of the staff, they didn't feel able to talk to the staff. I forget the statistics, but it's very high and it was frightening, they didn't feel they had anybody within the school to listen to them, and that was why I decided we had to do something, and that was my thinking behind it, and that was why. And working with children, I find that they are probably more receptive going maybe to another student, than to us, and that's why I'm trying to set this up within the school. […] I want to do the survey again, within a 12-month period, and I do want to see an improvement, that's really my goal, because some of the figures did concern me, and some of the results did concern me where we worked it out in percentage terms. And I'm really keen for not just an immediate lift but a lift that we will continue with this, and, as I say, I want to then try the survey again and hopefully see the major concerns that I have are at least less.'

Two other schools had also recently reviewed their policies (one primary and one special school). In each of these schools, the role of pupils in school-policy making was strengthened.

Overall, the two anti-bullying policies that positively stood out in this project, for their sensitivity towards the problem of bullying in their specific school context came from two special schools. Arguably, special schools may have a higher sensitivity to individual pupils' needs. Some special schools cater for pupils with very complex special behavioural needs; all of them care for pupils who were seen to be 'unsuitable' to attend main-stream schooling. Whilst some policies from mainstream schools' recommended '*permanent exclusion (expulsion)*' of pupils who failed to end bullying behaviour, this was not the case in special school policies - whether this was because special schools simply do not have the same option of expelling a pupil or whether special schools were generally more aware of individual need of their students. The definition of bullying designed by one of the special schools would

suggest the latter and is evidence for the school's sensitivity towards both deliberate bullying and children whose condition may include challenging behaviour.

> *'In* [name of school]*, we view bullying as any form of behaviour or indiscipline which hurts, intimidates or offends mentally, physically or emotionally, or in any way inhibits another's entitlement to feel safe and secure and enjoy being part of our school community. It is also important to try to distinguish between bullying and challenging behaviour.'*

In the interviews with the two principals from these special schools, the difficulties that may arise from pupils' disabilities with regard to bullying were reiterated. One principal reported:

> *'We've had a slight difficulty with those children who have autism, who can perceive that people are attacking them or laughing at them when they're not actually. That's one thing. And the other thing is that, what* **we** *might perceive as relatively innocent or trivial, to them is far from trivial. […] I think you have to be very careful because you can sometimes minimise, you may think it's not so important, but to that child it's very important. And also, you will get other children who know the triggers. They know that they can say something that sounds very innocent to me or you, but to that particular child will be extremely annoying. And so, you're constantly looking out for those things. And I think that's, in a school like this one, sometimes the children's, their developmental delay affects their skills and their understanding of language.'*

The other principal reported similarly how the school has to deal with challenging behaviour that is part of a disability and can be perceived as bullying and has the same impact as bullying:

> *'One particular pupil - her behaviour, it's part of her condition. Now we're working very hard to give her the means to control it. It's something that she's always going to have to deal with. She is extremely violent. When an incident occurs, as I say thankfully now it doesn't happen as frequently, we do understand that she isn't doing it to pick on them. We find the children are very gracious in accepting her apologies. They know that she's genuinely apologising, and they'll say: no problem, that's okay, and so you'll get a big smile, or a hand shake, or a hug, and they do very much accept it, and it is seen as different to an incident of bullying. But it is still very difficult, and it can be very frightening for the other pupils when it's happening. So we have a very strict programme in place for this child, and it's a programme that has been agreed through consultation with her parents. I suppose really now the reason that there haven't been so many difficulties now is because the procedures in place are followed, and we would look for triggers. There are certain times with her generally, that you can see we're going to have a bad day, but the triggers are not always obvious, but most of the time they are, and if we know things are heading in that direction. But that takes huge co-ordination throughout the school to do that, and everybody has had input into that, through the school.'*

The policies of these schools were thus geared towards creating an '*emotionally stable environment*' in school (staff/staff, pupil/pupil, staff/pupil). The befriending of vulnerable children that may show signs of challenging behaviour or bullying was

also seen as key. These schools followed a 'no blame approach' or 'positive behaviour policy' which included giving sanctions as well as rewards as appropriate. This was seen as the best proactive measure to prevent bullying and provided staff with guidelines on how to praise pupils.

Summary

1.   All schools did have an anti-bullying policy either as a stand-alone document or incorporated into an overall set of pastoral care policies.

2.   Schools used various definitions of bullying. Generally, a no-blame approach was favoured in dealing with incidences of bullying.

3.   School policy-making did involve school staff and parents, but very few school policies directly referred to consulting with pupils. However, senior staff believed generally that it was useful to consult with pupils and there was an increasing awareness that active steps should be undertaken to systematically involve pupils rather than ad-hoc.

4.   Incidences of bullying were recorded by all schools, albeit in different ways.

5.   Schools' policies provided guidelines on the frequency of review, even if these were not always followed, but only one school recommended an annual review.

3.2. Raising awareness

'**Bullying is always at the forefront of our minds. It's something that I'll be talking to the children about a lot. In different ways, in different guises, but it would be something that you'd be acutely aware of all the time**'. (Principal, special school)

'**Each teacher coming to this school would have an induction day with the vice-principal and in that day she would take them through policies that exist in the school and one of the policies that she would touch on would be the anti-bullying policy'.** (Pastoral care teacher, post-primary school)

'**Sometimes they don't realise what they're doing is bullying, they think that bullying is hitting, they don't realise that seclusion is a form of bullying, and are quite surprised when you discuss all of that in the sessions that you do with them**'. (Principal, special school)

Young people's awareness of bullying

This research project is primarily concerned with school bullying policies and pupils' involvement in policy making. However, the research team felt that it was important to ascertain participants' perception of the extent of bullying experienced by pupils in school.

Tables 9 and 10 show that the extent of perceived bullying in primary and post-primary schools was very similar. Just under one fifth (18%) of respondents in both primary and post-primary schools said that students get bullied a lot. About half (48% and 50% respectively) of respondents felt that students got bullied a little. Less than one in ten respondents (9% and 5% respectively) felt that students did not get bullied at all. The difference between schools in the sample was significant, as the tables show. Noticeably, in School 4 no respondent felt that pupils got bullied a lot and half of respondents said that pupils got bullied not at all. In School 6, no respondent felt that students did not get bullied at all.

Table 9:   Would you say that students at your school get bullied by other students?   Primary Schools

%	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4	School 5	All Primary students
A lot	34	16	4	0	4	18
A little	40	52	56	12	53	48
Not at all	5	7	12	50	15	9
Don't know	20	24	28	38	28	24

Table 10: **Would you say that students at your school get bullied by other students? Post-primary schools**

%	School 6	School 7	School 8	School 9	All post-primary students
A lot	34	7	52	13	18
A little	58	44	22	48	50
Not at all	0	8	2	8	5
Don't know	7	42	24	27	26

Table 11 compares the survey results of this project with the findings of the YLT, 2005 survey. The table provides a breakdown by gender. The table shows that more females than males in primary schools, but more males than females in post-primary schools felt that students got bullied a lot. Males in primary schools were twice as likely as females to say that pupils did not get bullied at all.

Table 11: **Would you say that students at your school get bullied by other students?**

%	Primary		Post-primary		YLT, 2005	
	Male	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**
A lot	10	21	23	10	9	12
A little	47	49	49	51	67	70
Not at all	14	7	5	4	12	8
Don't know	27	23	21	36	10	9

The level of awareness of bullying among pupils was also investigated through a number of activities in the Talkshops, namely the **Walking Decisions** activity and other small group activities in which scenarios of bullying were discussed (post-primary) or where pupils had to identify aspects and causes of bullying through pictures (primary and special schools, see Appendices 2 and 7). Questionnaires completed by pupils in participating primary and post-primary schools also contained a small number of questions on the perceived extent of bullying in school.

Awareness in special and primary schools

Primary and special school pupils were asked to discuss whether a certain behaviour constituted bullying, and how often they had personally encountered such behaviour in their school either as victim, as perpetrator or as witness. The list of behaviours included:

1. Being called bad names;
2. Being pushed or pulled about;
3. Being hit or attacked;

4. Having your bag taken away from you or thrown about;
5. If people say things about you or your family that are bad or not true;
6. Having your money taken off you or something else that belongs to you;
7. Having your lunch thrown about.

The vast majority of pupils identified each of these actions as bullying. While all of these were common in participating schools, being called bad names was most common. Pupils identified feelings of hurt, annoyance, sadness, anger and distress with these behaviours. However, pupils also identified that some of these behaviours (pushing and pulling, name calling, having things thrown about) were most common on the playground or on the way to or from school. It was evident that these may sometimes be part of boisterous and playful encounters. Frequent comments from participants such as: '*They may be just joking*' and '*It's bullying if you keep on doing it*' showed that whilst the behaviour in itself was unacceptable, harm was often not intended unless repeated. With regard to this, one principal commented:

> *'I do think 'bullying' is a misused word. Nine times out of ten the person is not actually being bullied, it's more one-off events. I still have my concerns over the word 'bullying. […] When I was at school, bullying was the term for giving someone a hiding. It's a repeated thing too, when they constantly pick on someone. I mention bullying every morning in assembly. I tell the children, if anything happens, if you're annoyed you tell a member of staff.'* [Principal primary school]

In primary and special schools classroom rules or school rules addressed the issue of school bullying. These rules were usually decided upon by pupils at the start of each school year. Rules were displayed in the school building or in the classroom. One principal said:

> *So, when you interview the primary four children hopefully they will mention that they're aware of the posters, they have been made aware and they know what to do if there is an incidence of bullying. […] I would like to think that the children are fully aware of the procedures if an incidence of bullying is alleged. Again, just around the corner from you, you'll see posters in the corridor: 'If you're worried and need help' is the other one, and we've kept a very simple message: if you think you're being bullied, talk to another adult, talk to a teacher, talk to a friend, if you can't come on your own bring a friend with you to talk to an adult, that kind of thing and another important message is, never be afraid to say something, you know, because bullies rely on your silence is one of the final phrases I think we use. [*Principal, primary school]

In the Walking Decision Activity, Talkshop participants in primary and special schools were given a number of photographs showing different people. Participants were asked whether they thought the people in the photographs were bullies or victims of bullying. No further information was given. The photographs depicted the following:

- A female sitting in front of a blackboard. The female was associated with being a school teacher
- A female teenager sitting on the floor of a room with a control in her hand, probably pointing it at a TV (outside the picture)
- A male teenager standing with his arms folded, looking serious
- Two men with their arms around each other, one of them smiling
- Two children – one male, one female - from an Asian ethnic background smiling

- A boy with hat standing on a playground in front of swings and climbing frames
- A girl in a wheelchair, smiling.

(Copies of the pictures can be found in Appendix 7.)

It is unknown whether the persons portrayed in the pictures actually were bullies, victims of bullying or neither. The sole purpose of the exercise was to engage children in discussions on signs of bullying and possible causes of bullying, including homophobic and xenophobic bullying. This activity was piloted during the training day with Young Researchers and was found to be a suitable tool to yield information about perceived causes of bullying.

Few Talkshop participants in the schools commented that they were unable to conclude from the pictures alone whether people were bullies or victims of bullying. The majority of participants attempted to conclude from the body posture, expression and looks of people in the photographs whether they were victims of bullying or not. Unsurprisingly, participants came to contradictory conclusions.

In terms of homophobic and xenophobic bullying, only one 16-year old participant from a special school associated the two men with their arms around each other as gay men and concluded that they might have been bullied because of this. Neither in primary schools nor in special schools the issue of homophobic bullying was taken up. On the other hand, participants in most schools where the exercise was undertaken commented that the two children with Asian ethnic background were likely to be bullied because of their different skin colour. Participants gave evidence that they witnessed people calling people of Chinese ethnic background 'choons' or 'chinkies'. However, pupils also confirmed that children from Chinese background would not get bullied in their own school.

One principal from a primary school reported with regard to xenophobic incidences in his school:

> 'We do have Travellers here. The kids are aware of the children from the Traveller community. But the worst thing you could be called in Derry is a 'Stoke'. One child hits the other, and you ask him why and he says: 'He called me a stoke!' He would feel offended by it. I did have two boys fighting once and one boy told me 'I hit him because he called me a Traveller'. I said to him, 'You are a Traveller, and you're a proud people'. Those issues are also discussed in circle time.'

> 'We also have some black people, and quite a few disabled people – 27 disabled children. It's mostly physical disabilities, and we've 8 deaf children. I find the children in class become very attached to the disabled children, they're very protective of them. My son years ago hit a boy who was making fun of a girl in his class who had severe cerebral palsy. The whole ethos of our school is acceptance. I'll never forget seeing a boy who had Spina Bifida was sitting eating lunch, and he sneezed loudly and his crisps and snot and everything went all over him. But the girl beside him just took out a tissue and wiped his nose down. She was ten years old, and she just did it quietly, she didn't make fun of him.'

A principal from a special school attended by pupils with mild and severe learning disabilities reported how a special school can provide a safe haven for special needs children:

> *'A special school - it's a more homely environment - and youngsters generally within that system perform very well. Bullying is not a huge issue within the school. A lot of children would experience bullying prior to coming to us, and that's where you're starting to pick up the pieces, they have a very difficult time in mainstream. We've had quite a few come in who've been bullied in mainstream school, and then when they come here we find out a lot about what's gone on, and they're relieved to be here.'*

According to this principal, the majority of bullying incidences would be experienced outside the school, especially by students with a mild learning disability:

> *'I suppose to an extent that other youngsters may be saying: there's the yellow bus, and you go to that funny school, yes there'd be a bit of that going on. But that's unfortunately society and I can't change it, all I can do is empower my youngsters to deal with what society throws at them, because their disability will not cure itself, it won't go away, they've got to learn to deal with it, and that's probably the most difficult thing. And it's because it's a very hidden disability - a child with Down's - it's very obvious that there's going to be an elementation, but with many of our young people it's not. It's more difficult then for other youngsters to accept it.* […] *I think the mild sector find it the most difficult. Children with severe needs, society is a lot more supportive of,* […] *and with them there's a lot more empathy when you take them out.* […]

> *The only time really they mix is with other students at Tech.* […] *We did have one incident at BIFHE* [The Belfast Institute for Higher Education] *where our young people complained that there was an issue, a sectarian issue, and that was dealt with between BIFHE and ourselves, and when we addressed it with the young people in BIFHE, they were quite shocked, and they hadn't appreciated perhaps where our young people were coming from, and they apologised.'*

Students themselves from this school who participated in the Talkshop responded similarly to their counterparts from other schools. Generally, pupils perceived the body language of people e.g. whether they smiled or not and how they stood - as indications whether or not they were bullied. The female seen in the wheelchair was exclusively seen as a victim and never as a bully, but the accounts from the principals above show that children with learning disabilities are the more vulnerable group with regard to bullying. Even though it was established in the Walking Decisions Activity that there are a variety of non-physical ways of bullying other pupils which people with physical disabilities would be capable off, most participants concluded that a disabled person is unlikely to be a bully.

In summary, the Walking Decisions Activity revealed that most primary school pupils had a clear understanding of bullying and were sensitive to the idea that body language can be used to identify whether or not pupils experience bullying.

Awareness in post-primary schools

Similar to primary and special schools, in post-primary schools (and two special schools) a Walking Decisions Activity was conducted as both an icebreaker exercise and an activity to establish participants' understanding of issues related to bullying. Participants were asked to agree or disagree with the following ten statements:

1. A lot of what people call bullying now is really just a little bit of banter or fun.
2. Some people will always be bullied – no matter what.
3. Bullies have usually problems themselves. Bullying is just their way of expressing these problems.
4. Talking to a teacher or other staff when you've been bullied can actually make things worse. It's best to sort things out amongst each other.
5. Girls don't usually bully other people. It's just boys.
6. Smart people rarely get involved in bullying others and rarely get bullied themselves.
7. One in three pupils in post-primary schools in Northern Ireland have experienced bullying.
8. One in three pupils in post-primary schools take part in bullying other students.
9. Usually people are being bullied for something they cannot change like their appearance or their physical fitness.
10. Bullying would not happen as often if it was left to students and not to teachers to sort out the problem.

Since the statements were polarising in nature, it was not surprising that opinions were divided. The activity showed that most participants were generally aware of the extent of bullying in schools. Most agreed with statements 7 and 8, which were based on latest Department of Education research findings.

Participants were equally divided on Statements 1 and 2. Whilst about one third of the participants said that banter and fun is sometimes mistaken for bullying and that some people are just 'too sensitive', the majority felt that everyone's perception of bullying is different and it should be up to the people objecting to the 'banter and fun' to decide whether they felt they were bullied or not. Similarly, about one third of participants felt that some people will always get bullied (Statement 2) and that this was usually for things they could not change (their appearance, their ethnicity etc.) Male participants were more likely than females to associate bullying with 'banter and fun'. Participants from the two special schools in which this Walking Decisions Activity was used were overwhelmingly opposed to the idea that bullying is just banter or fun.

With very few exceptions, participants disagreed that it was only males that took part in bullying (Statement 5), but there was an understanding that females bully in different ways, i.e. in less physical ways. Only a minority of participants agreed that smart people rarely get involved in bullying. Some participants said that smart people may become victims of bullying because of jealousy by other students that do not perform so well. Again, this was voiced more by males than females. The long-term impact that bullying can have on school results was voiced by one participant in a post-primary school who also volunteered to be interviewed on a one-to-one basis. He reported that due to continued bullying over several months, he dropped several

grades. The problem was eventually solved after he reported the incidences, but his school results only slowly recovered. However, some participants also said that smart people may flaunt their academic ability and tease others who are not as good performers in their school.

Whilst most participants agreed that reporting a bullying incidence to a teacher can make things worse for the victim, the vast majority disagreed that it would be best left to students to sort things out among themselves. This discussion showed that most participants were not thinking of peer-mediation techniques to resolve issues of bullying, but rather thought about informal ways of dealing with this with friends. These means were deemed inappropriate by most participants, especially if things become serious.

Overall, the Walking Decisions Activity showed that pupils were aware of the seriousness of bullying and the mechanisms and consequences of it. However, the activity also showed that some – mainly male – participants found it difficult to define the fine line between banter and fun and actual bullying. This finding was in line with the information gathered from senior school staff who also indicated that it was sometimes difficult to differentiate between one-off incidences, minor bullying and serious bullying incidences.

Using outside agencies to raise awareness

Some schools reported that they would use outside agencies to support their work on pastoral care. These outside agencies were for example local voluntary sector organisations, peer education organisations, counsellors or staff from behavioural units of statutory organisations. Whilst most senior management staff saw outside agencies as beneficial for the school's development, some teachers also expressed concerns with regard to how these programmes and agencies impact on the school's ethos and ownership of policies.

> *'If you develop from within, then you develop ownership, and if you get outside agencies to come in and try and give you advice, sometimes teachers say: Well what do they know, because they don't work and teach here? So, if we develop the policy ourselves, then we have the responsibility for it, developing within.'*

Summary

1. The perceived extent of school bullying was similar in primary and post-primary schools, with around two thirds of pupils saying that students in their schools were bullied a little or a lot.

2. The schools used poster campaigns, assemblies, circle time (primary and special schools), PSHE (post-primary schools) and induction weeks at the start of the school year to raise awareness with regard to school bullying. Some schools also used outside agencies to support them in their anti-bullying work.

3. Pupils had a good understanding of the seriousness of bullying, the mechanisms of reporting bullying and of the consequences that bullying may have to the victim. However, among post-primary students there was some reason for concern in terms of their ability to differentiate between acceptable banter and fun and unacceptable ongoing bullying.

3.3 Involving children in decision making in schools

'**I think we like to think of ourselves as having a very relaxed and open relationship with our kids, and they can talk to us if there's anything that's going on. Whether they do or not, is entirely different course**.' (Vice principal, special school)

'**And I think it's good for the staff too to learn from the students for a change because the students are going to be the experts**' (Pastoral care teacher, post-primary school)

Consultation with pupils in schools

The evidence gathered from the survey questionnaires handed out in all primary and post-primary schools confirms that only a minority of pupils said they were directly involved in decision making in their schools.

Evidence from the survey questionnaires shows that only 15 per cent of primary school pupils and under one third (32%) of post-primary pupils said that they were ever asked their views on how something was done in their schools (Tables 12 and 13). Only in one post-primary school surveyed did a majority of students (56%) feel that they were asked their views on how something was done in school. The differences between schools within the primary and post-primary sectors was significant. Within the primary school sector, as few as one in twenty-five (4%) pupils in one school said they had been asked for their views.

Table 12: **Have you ever been asked for your views on how something was done in your school? Primary schools**

%	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4	School 5	All Primary students
Yes	11	16	4	13	28	15
No	60	44	72	50	45	50
Don't know	30	40	24	38	28	34

Table13: **Have you ever been asked for your views on how something was done in your school? Post-primary schools**

	School 6	School 7	School 8	School 9	All P-p students
Yes	40	26	56	13	32
No	37	46	38	45	42
Don't know	23	26	6	40	25

This dearth of consultation with pupils in schools generally is one of the main findings of this research. Senior management staff interviewed during the research project conceded that whilst efforts were made to involve all school staff directly into policy making in schools, pupils were only involved indirectly. For example, one principal from a primary school said:

> *'The views of the staff were sought in relation to anti-bullying issues and the views of the children informally and also through a number of different activities that they undertook in class.'*

The pastoral care teacher of another school said that students were not consulted when the policy was drawn up and even concluded that the anti-bullying policy was essentially *'a staff policy as such for how staff are to react to bullying incidents'*. At the same time, '*the experience with the students would help* [the school] *modify the policy*.' However, as already noted above in relation to bullying policies, the interviews with school staff also revealed a growing awareness that it is good for the general climate of a school to involve pupils in policy making.

The survey questionnaires showed that among those who said they were asked for their opinions, most respondents from primary schools said they were asked about activities on the play ground, for example what activities they would like in good or bad weather, what toys they wanted and what equipment the school should acquire for the active kids vouchers they had collected. A number of pupils from one school said that they were asked about eating sweets, which would suggest that the school discussed with the pupils participation in a healthy school meal programme. However, pupils from two schools also said that they were asked about their views on school bullying. One of these schools did have a school council, and one respondent who said he was a member of this school council commented that in the council he: *'was asked if we wanted a library. We have one now.'* (Respondent School 2).

Students from post-primary schools were significantly more likely to have discussed school rules. Respondents from all four post-primary schools said that they were asked about the school rules. Some respondents also said they had been given the opportunity to discuss school-bullying. Other issues discussed included the content of PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education), general improvements in school, the running of the school's open night and the type of produce sold in the school's tuck shop and canteen. Respondents from two post-primary schools referred in their comments to their class representatives and school councils. They said that they could go and talk to them about issues they were concerned with. Two examples for these responses were:

> *'We are asked about stuff like improving the school and things, so we tell the class rep and they tell the council.'* (Respondents School 9)

> *'We were asked about what we could bring into the school. School council reps would give us choice of what we wanted to change for better, and also what we can do for others in our school.'* (Respondent School 6)

Participation in policy-making in schools

Tables 14 and 15 show that under one fifth (18%) of primary-school pupils and just over one in ten (11%) post-primary students felt that they had helped to change the way something was done in their school. Interestingly, the percentage of primary

school children who said they had changed something in their school was higher than the percentage saying they were asked for their opinion on something.

Table 14:   Have you ever helped to change the way something was done in your school?   Primary schools

%	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4	School5	All Primary students
Yes	11	22	16	0	23	18
No	46	43	52	50	49	46
Don't know	40	45	32	50	28	35

Table 15: Have you ever helped to change the way something was done in your school?   Post-primary schools

%	School 6	School 7	School 8	School 9	All p-p students
Yes	20	7	8	7	11
No	57	69	78	60	65
Don't know	24	23	14	32	23

A look at the comments from pupils reveals that a lot of primary-school respondents associated their own positive actions in the every-day life of their school with this question, for example:

> *'I help keep the school tidy by picking up the litter.'* (Respondent School 2')

> *'To put bottles in the canteen and pictures on the walls outside.'* (Respondent School 2)

> *'I helped to raise money for things in our school.'* (Respondent School 1)

Others did mention their somewhat more sophisticated roles they had in their school:

> *'I am an agony aunt in the school newspaper, I solve people's problems.'* (Respondent School 5)

Some respondents referred directly to school bullying and to their role as members of the school council:

> *'I have helped my friend by telling the principal that she is getting bullied.'* (Respondent School 1)

> *'I was in school council last year, and we helped bullying, healthier foods in the canteen & more toys in [play] bins.'* (Respondent School 2)

Post-primary students were generally reporting more on formal decision making processes that they had been involved in, as the following examples show:

> *'I am in the school council and we changed the uniform that you could go home in, tracksuit or school uniform.*' (Respondent School 6)

> *'I passed on some of my views to the school council and they passed it on to the principal.'* (Respondent School 6)

> *'I am on the school council and we have given ideas on how to improve the anti-bullying process.'* (Respondent School 6)

> *'We were asked to write down some rules we wanted in the school and they changed them.'* (Respondent School 9)

However, few comments also related to more specific issues, such as snack options available in school:

> *'I asked for vending machine and they brought in 2 new vending machines with healthy eating options.'* (Respondent School 6)

Comments came almost exclusively from respondents who attended the two schools that had working school councils. This seems to suggest that pupils at post-primary school level had a much more formalised concept of decision-making in their school than primary school pupils had. It can also be seen as evidence that students from these schools had developed a much greater sense of ownership in their school.

Formalised participation in decision-making in schools

Tables 16 and 17 show the responses to the question whether schools had a school council. Among primary schools, two schools (Schools 1 and 2) had a working council. The fast majority of pupils in School 2 were aware of this, and other means of data collection (Talkshop, interviews with the principal and pastoral care teacher) did confirm that this school council was indeed very active and considerably involved in the day-to-day running of the school. In School 1, the school council was created with the support of the NSPCC counsellor that the school worked with regularly. This had happened recently before the research team had visited the school.

The responses from pupils in School 1 show that there was some confusion about the existence of a school council. Responses from Schools 4 and 5 are interesting in that they give evidence for other means of pupil participation short of a school council. Schools 1 and 5 did have class-rep systems and School 4 did consult with pupils in other ways. This may account for the real confusion among pupils about whether or not their school had a school council.

Table 16:   Does your school have a school council? Primary schools

%	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4	School 5	All primary
Yes	34	97	4	25	26	61
No	34	0	68	0	23	16
Don't know	31	3	28	75	62	23

Table 17: Does your school have a school council? Post-primary schools

%	School 6	School 7	School 8	School 9	All Post-primary students
Yes	99	46	0	90	63
No	1	25	98	0	24
Don't know	0	29	2	8	13

Similar to primary schools, students at post-primary level attending schools with a working school council were overwhelmingly aware of this. Responses from School 7 came from first-year pupils who were not fully aware of their schools means of student participation. Triangulation with data from the Talkshop and the interview with the vice principal in this school revealed that the school did run a school council for senior pupils only.

Formalised avenues of support for pupils with concerns

Respondents were asked who they would go to if they were unhappy with something in school. This was a multi-response question. Tables 18 and 19 show that respondents in schools with working school councils were significantly more likely to say they would go to a class representative if they were unhappy with something. However, as could be expected, it is evident that at both primary and post-primary level a member of staff (teacher or principal) remains the most likely point of contact for pupils who are unhappy with something in school.

Interestingly the results show that whatever different policy or support mechanisms that schools had in place or promoted, pupils were likely to take advantage of these. For example, School 1 and School 9 did have a regular counselling service in place, and the majority of respondents who said they would talk to someone other than teacher, principal or class representative, did mention their counsellor. School 7 had an 'anti-bullying squad' in place consisting of six 6th form prefects, and the overwhelming majority of 'other' responses related to this 'squad'. Schools 3 and 4 promoted the use of friends and parental support, and again, the open responses from pupils supported the view that the pupils did use these avenues of support.

Table 18:   If a pupil is unhappy with something in school is there someone they can go to for help? Primary schools

%	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4	School 5	All Primary students
Teacher	66	66	88	25	83	69
Principal	77	52	80	38	40	59
Class Rep	8	44	28	0	8	27
Other	44	17	60	50	19	29
Don't know	2	8	12	12	6	7

Table 19: **If a pupil is unhappy with the way they are dealt with in school is there someone they can go to for help? Post-primary schools**

%	School 6	School 7	School 8	School 9	All Post-primary students
Teacher	81	83	56	52	74
Principal	40	33	36	45	37
Class Rep	22	44	8	30	30
Other	37	46	30	18	36
Don't know	7	3	24	7	8

Class sizes in special schools are much smaller than in mainstream schooling. Additionally, most of the special schools included in this research had classroom assistants or even personal school helpers in place for pupils with more severe learning disabilities. Consequently, pupils and school staff had a closer level of rapport than in mainstream schools. This was confirmed in the interviews with the senior management staff in schools. One vice principal from a special school reported:

> *'First and foremost the school itself, the structure and the organisation of the school, although we are running from key stage one to key stage four, we are organised on a primary model, and the primary model means that in the secondary end of the school, each class has a class teacher who they stay with most of the day, so they would have teacher for all of the title subjects, and then they would go off for specific subjects, such as Art, PE, Music and so on, but then, first and foremost, that should give them the opportunity to develop a close relationship with a particular teacher, and it also should give them an opportunity then to be able to talk to that teacher, that's what we have in terms of the particular structure. We have considered moving towards the subject base, but would find then that if we were to move then, it would create greater movement within the school, and it's one of the things that we, as a school, we try and avoid.'*

Pupils from primary and special schools reported back that they would indeed usually seek the attention of their form teacher or classroom assistants if they were unhappy with something in school.

None of the special schools included in this research did have a school council. One vice principal from a special school reported:

> *'We don't have a school council. We have a system in school of setting in the school a class prefect. Class prefects can most certainly work with and approach their class teachers, and they can then make an approach to myself if they feel it's important.'*

The interviewee still felt that students could approach the school management with any concerns. For example, the vice principal reported that pupils of this school initiated a change in the school uniform. He concluded that:

'I think we like to think of ourselves as having a very relaxed and open relationship with our kids, and they can talk to us if there's anything that's going on. Whether they do or not, is entirely different course.'

It was not just in special schools, but in most primary and post-primary schools as well, that class prefects were chosen by teachers. Often this was done on merit; that is whether they were good performers academically or in sport. In fact, among post-primary schools, this was by far the most common way of selecting pupil representatives. It was also apparent from discussions that most pupils saw the role of prefect as having little or no real influence or authority.

Among primary schools the picture was more varied. However, only one primary school operated a system in which class representatives were entirely selected by pupils themselves. Some primary schools operated a weekly rotation system, which meant that all pupils had responsibility at some time. The principal explained:

'Because our numbers are small we felt that it would be unfair to have the same children acting as Playground Friends because they're, in essence, not being able to play freely with other children, there's very little free time. So, we have decided just to take a whole class and operate on a rota basis, so they work on a basis once a month. I think, it gives a lot of the children a chance - we have children with special needs - for example, who might not otherwise have that kind of responsibility. Not that you'll be accused of fraternisation or favouring but, I think, giving every child an opportunity, they're all treated equally and equally fairly so they all have a role to play.'

Generally, interviews conducted with senior management of the schools confirmed that there was an increasing understanding that students were an integral part of the school community and therefore had a role to play in school policy making. Some schools had already introduced a wide variety of participatory mechanisms. One principal from a primary school reported:

'The P4 to P7 pupils have a school council and school reps in each class who the children elect themselves. They also have a suggestion box for their ideas. [The pastoral care teacher] *looks after the school council. Every class does circle time. Training on circle time is given to teachers on what to do, how to handle it. There's also a bus stop sign where a child stands if they are sad. The other children know that if they see a child standing there that they should go over and ask them to join in with what they're doing. 'In the school council the children bring up issues to* [the pastoral care teacher] *and ask for things which may be bought. Each year has a bin of toys and equipment for use at play times.'*

The range of involvement of pupils in school policy-making in this primary school. stood out compared to all other schools. In terms of bullying, this school also had a range of policies in place, which aim to deal with the issue of bullying not only at school level, but that also took into account the home situation of each child.

Pupils and parents in this school both sign an anti-bullying pledge at the start of each new school year. This pledge is contained within each child's homework planner, alongside advice on what to do if they are being bullied. The children also wanted the anti-bullying pledge painted on the wall of the assembly hall. Proactively, a 'Friendship Stop' scheme is being run in the school for pupils in years 1 to 3. This involved any child that was feeling lonely or left out at break time going to stand beside a 'Friendship Stop', often a lollipop stick placed at various points across the

playground. If a child stands at this stop, any other pupil from their class must go and invite them into their game. A similar scheme existed for pupils in Years 4 to 7, which is known as the 'Buddy System'. This ensured that each child always had someone to play with and so no one was left out.

Citizenship Education had also been built into the school timetable to facilitate assembly themes and help integrate both home and school life. The pupils had participated in a number of anti-bullying programmes and competitions including a quiz that was hosted by an outside agency, an anti-bullying poster competition and a workshop on bullying for children in Years 6 and 7.

The school had an active school council and the councillors were also trained as peer mediators. The pastoral care teacher felt that this gave the children ownership of working through their problems themselves. She commented:

> *'They are surprisingly alert. They know a lot more than the teacher does of what's going on. Though in some circumstances you do need the intervention of other members of staff, they can't sort it all out between each other. ' The 'Buddy System' has worked well in the school too for the P4 –P7 pupils. It means no-one is left out or hurt. One Buddy sticks up for the other person like a witness – they tell the teacher what happened if there was a fight. We do see a decrease in the number of complaints brought forward to the school. Again, the pupils know they can go to their school councillors as to what can be discussed in the council meeting.'*

Overall the schemes of participation had contributed to a feeling of ownership among children in the school and an improved relationship between pupils and teachers:

> *'They feel ownership and part and parcel of the school. They feel like leaders in the school and they feel valued and important. Their thoughts are considered and they know that the teachers are working as best they can to work alongside them. Therefore the kids are more willing to speak to the teachers. The child is more conducive to open up to the school and their teachers.'*

The pastoral care teacher concluded:

> *'I hope the children know what's there for them but you can't be complacent. You have to keep encouraging them.'*

The principal from another primary school also reported how involving children proactively in anti-bullying measures reduced bullying incidences in the school:

> *'One of the most recent things we've done, for example, extending out from the anti-bullying policy, we realised that most of the issues obviously happen in the playground and we have introduced something called 'Playground Friends' which has proved very helpful. The children wear baseball caps in the playground. We actually have playground friend trainers. So the children are trained, if I can describe it in that way, to look after younger children within certain strict parameters and they become eyes and ears for us with any authority problems, you know, they alert us to them but they don't take the law into their own hands. So, this has all stemmed from anti-bullying policy, it's stemmed from our self-evaluation work and it has also helped, I think, to reduce the level of the number of problems that we might face. […] I feel and that's why I mentioned playground friends, if we're able to direct the children's energies and enthusiasms in a positive way then the potential for*

bullying, I think, is diminished greatly and I do believe that has happened. We have noticed a decline in incidences of bullying for a number of years because of the initiatives we've put in place.'

Talkshops with pupils and interviews with senior management staff confirmed that most schools involved pupils sporadically, usually at the start of the school year. In primary schools this was done through drawing up of class contracts or curricular activities. Often the emphasis was on good behaviour in school. One primary school principal said:

'We have class contracts, for example, and each teacher at the start of a new school year will discuss issues of concern to the children. In my own case, the children are divided into groups and they're given the opportunity to discuss in those groups issues of concern to them, how they feel they should behave so the emphasis is on them adhering to their own rules in class and it also applies equally to the playground setting and the dinner hall, and I asked classes to devise a set of rules that could be used in the dining hall and the playground and actually behind you there you'll see a set of plastic stars.'

Table 20 summarises the findings from the questionnaires of available pupil participation mechanisms in primary and post-primary schools.

Table 20:   Reported ways of pupil participation in primary and post-primary schools

%	School has school council		Asked for view on something		Helped to change something	
	Primary	**Post-primary**	**Primary**	**Post-primary**	**Primary**	**Post-primary**
Yes	61	63	15	32	18	11
No	16	24	50	42	46	65
Don't know	23	13	34	25	35	23

Summary

1. Only 15 percent of primary school pupils and under one third (32%) of post-primary pupils said that they had ever been asked their opinion on how something was done in their school. The differences between schools in the different sectors were significant.

2. Less than one in five (18%) primary school pupils and just over one in ten (11%) post-primary pupils said that they had helped to change something in their school. Again, the differences between schools in each sector were significant.

3. Two out of five primary schools and three out of four post-primary schools had a formally established school council. However, the majority of pupils in two out of these five schools did not know that there was a school council or thought that there was not. Data collected suggests that pupils in schools with an active and working school council had a greater sense of ownership of their school.

4. Teachers and the school principal were the first points of contact for pupils who were unhappy with how something in their school, but pupils did use other alleys of support where schools promoted these.

3.4 .Anti-bullying practices

'**Discipline is good in the school I have to say, I have very few serious issues to deal with and that's because, I think, the bullying policy is encompassed in a number of initiatives as well as clearly identifying what steps we will take in the event of a bullying incident taking place. So, I see the bullying policy as just part of a package, so the children and parents and staff have been involved in developing a whole range of initiatives which stem from our anti-bullying policy**.' (Principal primary school)

Dedicated anti-bullying school staff

Seventy-nine per cent of respondents in primary schools and 77 per cent of respondents in post-primary schools said that their schools had particular staff in place whose job it was to deal with school bullying (Tables 21 and 22). Again, whilst the overall findings were similar for the primary and post-primary sector, within the sample differences were significant. Over twenty percent of respondents in two primary and two post primary schools did not know whether their school had dedicated staff to deal with bullying, as the tables show. Additionally, nearly four out of ten (38%) respondents in one primary school and one quarter (24%) of respondents in one post-primary school said the school had not such staff.

Table 21:   Are there particular staff whose job it is to deal with bullying? Primary schools

%	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4	School 5	All Primary students
Yes	92	81	76	38	58	79
No	1	3	4	38	15	5
Don't know	6	15	16	25	23	14

Table 22:   Are there particular staff whose job it is to deal with bullying? Post-primary schools

%	School 6	School 7	School 8	School 9	All Post-primary students
Yes	74	93	56	62	77
No	8	1	24	7	7
Don't know	16	5	20	25	14

Primary school pupils were then asked who they would first talk to when they themselves were bullied. Table 23 shows that, overall, most pupils would tell their parents first, with a teacher being the second most popular response and friends being the third. Again, differences between the schools were significant. As already

commented above, this table gives further evidence for the different strategies schools adopt in dealing with bullying. School 1 did have a school counsellor in place that also dealt with issues of school bullying, if it occurred. A number of respondents from this school said they would go to see the counsellor. Pupils in this school as well as in School 3 were encouraged to involve parents, if bullying occurred. The results show that the pupils did take the advice from the school. In Schools 3 and 4 a lot of emphasis was placed on the role of friends in the school. The fact that four in ten (42%) respondents from this school (School 3) and one third of respondents from School 4 said they would talk to friends first, exemplifies that the school's policy to talk to friends was followed by pupils reasonably well.

Table 23:   If you were bullied, who would you tell first?

%	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4	School 5	All Primary students
Teacher	14	37	11	33	42	29
Principal	12	10	5	33	6	10
Class rep	3	11	0	0	0	6
Parents	62	23	37	0	31	36
Friend	3	14	42	33	19	14
Other	8	0	5	0	0	3

Awareness throughout the schools was also raised through poster campaigns. Some schools displayed posters of outside agencies, such as Childline or NSPCC which gave numbers of free and confidential phonelines that young people could ring if they were concerned about bullying. Other schools produced their own posters either at the start of the school year or during circle time, PSE or poster competitions and displayed these posters throughout the school building. With the exceptions of one special school, pupils were aware of the posters and their messages. The principal of one primary school explained how the school tried to raise awareness of the issue of bullying:

> *'You'll see posters in the corridor: If you're worried and need help' and we've kept a very simple message: If you think you're being bullied, talk to another adult, talk to a teacher, talk to a friend. If you can't come on your own bring a friend with you to talk to an adult. That kind of thing and another important message is: Never be afraid to say something because bullies rely on your silence. This is one of the final phrases I think we use. So this message has been brought home to the children in a number of ways including circle time, assemblies, class discussions, school, class contracts, the rules I've mentioned that we're using around the school. So, there is a procedure which is clearly identified in classrooms and in the corridor here. Parents are aware of it as well through the school prospectus.'*

The questionnaire in post-primary schools had a slightly different format. Respondents were asked if they thought most students would go to talk to school staff whose job it was to deal with bullying. As Table 24 shows, only 15 per cent of those who said their school did have dedicated staff to deal with bullying would also

talk to this staff. Over one in ten (11%) respondents said most people would not talk to this staff. The majority of respondents felt that it depended on the circumstances whether or not most people would approach such staff.

Table 24:   If they were bullied, would most people talk to school staff whose job it is to deal with bullying*?

%	School 6	School 7	School 8	School 9	All post-primary students
Would talk to them	4	20	14	23	15
Would not talk to them	22	6	14	3	11
It depends	70	66	72	64	68
Don't know	5	8	0	10	7

* Of those who said their school does have such staff

Generally, over two thirds of respondents from post-primary schools felt that their school provided real help to students who got bullied. Females were more likely to say that their schools provided real help (77%) than males (61%). Compared with the findings of the YLT 2005survey where the same question was asked, respondents in the school-based sample were significantly more likely to say that their school provided real help for pupils who were bullied (Table 25)

Table 25:   In general, do you think your school provides real help for people who are bullied or not?

%	Post-primary pupils			YLT 2005survey		
	Male	**Female**	**All**	**Male**	**Female**	**All**
Yes	61	77	67	54	55	54
No	18	11	15	21	28	25
Don't know	18	11	16	20	15	17

Table 26 cross-tabulates the perceived extent of bullying with the perception of respondents about whether their school provides real help to students who are being bullied. The table shows that there is a significant relationship between these two variables. Only just over half (52%) of respondents who said that students in their school got bullied a lot said that their school provided real help to students who got bullied compared with nearly three quarters of respondents (70% and 71% respectively) who felt that students got bullied a little or not at all. Even though the questions deal with the perceived extent of bullying rather than actual experience of bullying, the findings would suggest that there is a direct relationship between effective school bullying policies and the extent of bullying in school.

Table 26: **Does school provide real help to pupils that are bullied, by extent of bullying in school. Post-primary schools**

	A lot	A little	Not at all
Yes	52	70	1
No	32	11	24
Don't know	15	17	0

Significance tests were carried out to investigate whether or not there is a relationship between the perceived extent of bullying in school and the availability of dedicated school staff. No significant relationship was found in the primary school sample, however, respondents in post-primary schools who said there was no staff available in their school to deal with bullying were more likely to say that students get bullied a lot (p=0.037). Keeping in mind that knowledge about available school staff varied considerable within some post-primary schools (Table 27), these results have to be treated with some caution. It has also to be said that if pupils are unaware of dedicated staff, then this strategy is unlikely to be useful or effective.

Table 27: **Respondents' perceived extent of bullying in school by availability of dedicated staff to deal with school bullying**

%	Primary Schools			Post-Primary Schools			2005 YLT Survey		
	Staff	No staff	Don't know	Staff	No staff	Don't know	Staff	No staff	Don't know
Bullied a lot	19	12	11	17*	30	20	11	14	7
Bullied a little	51	38	38	51	52	43	71	73	64
Not at all bullied	8	31	7	4	11	4	10	8	7
Don't know	21	18	44	27	7	31	8	5	21

* Statistically significant at 0.05 level

Anti-bullying policies and rules

Over 90 per cent of primary school pupils said their school had a set of rules on bullying. Nine out of ten primary school pupils also said that they had discussed bullying in their class (Tables 28 and 29).

Table 28: **Does your school have a set of rules on bullying? Primary schools**

%	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4	School5	All Primary students
Yes	94	94	96	88	89	93
No	0	0	0	0	2	<1
Don't know	6	4	4	12	9	5

Table 29: Have you talked about bullying in your class? Primary schools

%	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4	School5	All Primary students
Yes	83	92	96	75	94	90
No	7	4	4	12	2	5
Don't know	8	2	0	12	4	4

Eight out of ten respondents from post-primary schools said their school had an official policy on bullying (Table 30). Of those respondents, one third (33%) said students were involved in drawing up the bullying policy. Only in one school, more than half of respondents said that students were involved (Table 31). When asked how they were involved, most students from this school commented that they were asked to make anti-bullying posters that were then displayed in school. Others said that some students were involved in the school's anti-bullying squad. Respondents from other schools commented that students were involved in policy making through the school council or through workshops that were held on the subject of bullying.

Table 30: Does your school have an official policy on bullying? Post-primary schools

%	School 6	School 7	School 8	School 9	All Post-primary students
Yes	72	92	88	62	80
No	3	<1	6	3	2
Don't know	25	7	4	22	14

Table 31: Were students involved in drawing up this policy*?

%	School 6	School 7	School 8	School 9	All Post-primary students
Yes	16	55	0	24	33
No	27	11	100	8	28
Don't know	56	32	0	68	38

* Of those who said their school did have an official policy

Interviews with school staff showed that in most schools pupils were only involved to a limited degree in anti-bullying practices or that only a few students were involved. One post-primary school had an anti-bullying squad, consisting of six senior school prefects. The pastoral care teacher conceded that these students were probably the only students who were fully aware of the school's anti-bullying policy.

> *'The anti-bullying team would be familiar with the anti-bullying policy.*
> *They come here to my room one lunchtime a week and they have this as*

a meeting place, and the children all know they're here and if there's a child with a little problem that they don't want to discuss with the teacher they might feel free to come that lunchtime. And during that lunchtime we would've discussed this anti-bullying policy and maybe where there were gaps or where there were changes that could be made. But that's just six upper sixth you're talking about. But essentially I would say, no. I suppose the students are not consulted.'

Pupils' involvement in school bullying policies and practice

One Talkshop activity in post-primary schools was specifically designed to ascertain what means of pupil involvement in school policy making participants regarded as most effective and appropriate. This activity was carried out in all post-primary schools and in two special schools. Participants worked in small groups.

They were asked to discuss and record advantages and disadvantages of six possible means of dealing with bullying in school – and whether their school used this method or not. Finally, they were asked to rank these in order their usefulness. The six ways of dealing with bullying in school were:

- Involving school staff
- Having trained staff from outside coming into school
- Peer mediation (i.e. students from school trained to solve problems)
- Discussions in circle time/PSHE
- Having the school council dealing with this
- Phoning confidential helplines.

Results of this activity were diverse, not only between schools, but also within schools. On a number of occasions, one group would rank one method – e.g. peer mediation first, whilst another group from the same school ranked this last. Generally, pupils recognised that each method had advantages and disadvantages. The main finding of this exercise was individual differences led pupils to prefer one method over another. There was no evidence that students that did have certain mechamisms in place (circle time, PSHE or peer-mediation schemes such as anti-bullying squads) were more likely to be in favour of these schemes. Generally, older respondents were more sceptical about the effectiveness of circle time or PSHE.

From the discussions it was also apparent that pupils thought some methods could be effective in raising awareness of bullying, or in influencing the climate about bullying in the school. Others could be effective in dealing with specific incidence of bullying. For example, pupils may use circle time or sessions with outside speakers to discuss the issue of bullying generally, but they won't see these as a helpful way of resolving a particular real incident.

The findings from this exercise suggest that pupils in schools do prefer different means of dealing with bullying incidences. Thus, the research team concludes that a range of anti-bullying policy measures, which include the involvement of pupils and school staff as well as the promotion of external agencies, is best suited to meet individual needs of students affected by bullying.

Table 32 summarises the main advantages and disadvantages recorded by participants who took part in this exercise.

Table 32: Means of dealing with bullying: Advantages - Disadvantages

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Involving school staff	• Staff knows school and students well • Staff likely to know both parties involved in incident	• Is confidentiality being kept? Will staff gossip? • Does reporting of bullying make things worse? • Possible lack of trust among students • 'Baggage of history' of pupils' behaviour may impact on staff's decision-making
Having trained staff from outside coming into school	• Expert knowledge, trained in dealing with bullying • Confidentiality guaranteed • Objective about school policy • Will treat each case independently	• Don't know the students, and their background • Students might be shy and uncomfortable because of attitudes towards seeing a counsellor • Might cause tension among staff, might backfire to pupils • Uncertainty about how feedback to school will be given
Peer mediation (ie. students from school trained to solve problems)	• Peer mediators more in touch with students, have student perspective themselves • Less formal than professional counselling service, more accessible • Would work well, provided training and development of scheme over time	• Possible lack of maturity? • Are mediators and problems be taken they taken serious? • Will confidentiality be kept? • What information will they pass on? • Uncertainty about status of the scheme in school
Circle Time/PSE	• More suitable for younger pupils, • Good, relaxed atmosphere • More appropriate for raising awareness rather than focussing on single incidents	• Older students may not take this seriously, especially circle time • Incidences of bullying unlikely to be raised • Perpetrator in same room as victim
Having the school council dealing with this	• Has impact on management of school, minutes are recorded, ideas heard, decision makers have to listen to this • Once taken up by council, school has to deal with an issue, • promotes own responsibility of pupils	• May not be taken seriously, no real structure, tokenism • Unreasonable ideas being brought forward by students • Jealousy among students. Might be mistaken for popularity competition
Confidential helplines	• High level of awareness through poster campaigns • Professional, competent trained and unbiased staff • Useful as first step to deal with bullying	• Talking to a stranger, might be impersonal; • Unrealistic advice given, does have to make judgement based on just one side of the story • Can only advise on what steps to take, caller still has to take all other steps

Relation between anti-bullying practices and perceived extent of school bullying

Tables 33 and 34 are an attempt to summarise the relationship between anti-bullying mechanisms and school policies and the perceived extent of bullying in schools. Directly related to bullying, the mechanisms considered are:

- Whether the school had a policy/rules on bullying;
- Whether students were involved in drawing up this policy;
- Whether the school had dedicated staff to deal with bullying;
- Whether students would be happy to talk to these staff (post-primary schools);
- Whether students had talked about bullying in class or not (primary schools).

Other school-climate and participation variable tested were:

- Whether the school had a school council;
- Whether had been asked for their opinion on something or had changed something in school.

As Table 33 shows, the only statistically significant relationship existed between the extent of perceived bullying and the availability of dedicated staff to deal with bullying. Interestingly, pupils who said their school did have special school staff whose role it was to deal with bullying were actually *more* likely to report higher levels of bullying in their school.

The causality cannot be explored conclusively. One possible way of explaining this finding is that specialised school staff might have been introduced to tackle frequent bullying. One other possibility is that by discussing bullying in school and promoting the availability of specialised staff, the awareness of bullying among children in primary school might have been increased. The fact that those who said they discussed bullying in their classes were also more likely to report higher levels of school bullying than those who did not discuss bullying in class (18% compared to 12% said bullying happens 'a lot') – even though this was statistically insignificant – would perhaps support the latter view. However, the table clearly shows that in primary schools other means of participation in school were unrelated to the extent of perceived school bullying.

Again, no statistically significant relationship was found between means of participation available to students in school and the extent of perceived school bullying. This would suggest that a participatory school climate is in fact un-related to the extent of school bullying.

The results for respondents from post-primary schools were somewhat different, as Table 34 shows. At a descriptive level, figures suggest that much lower levels of school bullying were reported by respondents who said that:

- Students were involved in setting up anti-bullying policy;
- Their school had dedicated staff to deal with school bullying; and
- Students would be happy to speak to these staff. This relationship was also statistically significant (p=0,003).

Table 33:   Respondents' perceived extent of bullying by available means of participation and school policies. Primary schools

%	Respondent saying pupils get bullied…			
	A lot	**A Little**	**Not at all**	**Don't know**
School has rules on bullying	19	49	9	22
School has no rules on bullying	*	*	*	*
School has dedicated staff to deal with bullying	19[1]	51[1]	8	21
School has no dedicated staff to deal with bullying	12	38	31	19
Talked about bullying in class	18	49	9	23
Not talked about bullying in class	12	56	6	25
Asked opinion on something	19	60	6	15
Not asked opinion on something	18	45	11	26
Helped to change something	14	66	5	14
Not helped to change something	18	47	12	23
School has school council	20	48	8	23
School has no school council	19	58	8	15

* Numbers too small to calculate percentage
 Mann Whitney test of significance. 'Don't know' answers excluded. p=0.036.

Table 34:   Respondents' perceived extent of bullying by available means of participation and school policies. Post-primary schools

%	Respondent saying pupils get bullied…			
	A lot	A Little	Not at all	Don't know
School has anti-bullying policy	17	53	4	26
School has no anti-bullying policy	22	56	11	11
Students involved in setting up this policy	14	47	6	34
Students not involved in setting up policy	23	51	3	22
School has dedicated staff to deal with bullying	17	51	4	27
School has no dedicated staff to deal with bullying	30	52	11	7
Students would talk to this staff member	7[1]	46	11	36
Students would not talk to this staff member	39	45	3	10
Asked opinion on something	20	60	2	18
Not asked opinion on something	20	42	6	31
Helped to change something	28	60	5	8
Not helped to change something	19	46	4	31
School has school council	21	53	3	21
School has no school council	18	47	7	28

1 Mann-Whitney test of significance. Don't know answers excluded. P= 0.003.

Overall the findings show that addressing the issue of school bullying and the perceived frequency of school bullying are closely related. In post-primary schools, less school bullying was reported from students in schools that had a formalised involvement of pupils in anti-bullying policies. Significantly, the availability of dedicated school staff that students are happy to talk was most closely related to

lower levels of reported bullying. In that respect post-primary and primary schools do not differ.

The fact that there was no correlation between general means of participation available to pupils in school and levels of reported bullying incidences should not be misinterpreted as evidence that pupil participation, after all, is just a cosmetic exercise with little bearing on the school climate. Rather, this should be seen as indication that school bullying is indeed a phenomenon that may occur in any school of any nature and requires specific policy measures to tackle it.

Summary

1. Over three quarters of pupils in both primary (79%) and post-primary school (77%) said that their school had dedicated staff to deal with bullying. However, primary school children were most likely to report school bullying first to their parents, and only 15 per cent of post-primary pupils said that most students would talk to this dedicated staff if they were bullied (68% said it depended on the circumstances).

2. Two thirds (67%) of post-primary students felt that their school provided real help to students that were bullied.

3. Nine out of ten (93%) primary school pupils and eight out of ten (80%) post-primary pupils said that their schools had an official anti-bullying policy. 90% of primary pupils had discussed bullying in school. One third of post-primary school students said they were involved in drawing up their school's anti-bullying policy.

4. Discussions with participants revealed that the effective way of dealing with bullying in school should involve a number of means and should include outside agencies as well as school staff and pupils themselves.

5. School bullying should be seen as a very specific issue that may occur in any school and needs to be dealt with beyond other existing networks of participation and support that may exist in each school.

4. Summary of key messages

The research project sought to answer the following six key questions:

1. How are school anti-bullying policies developed and reviewed? What involvement do young people have?
2. What are the barriers to the development of approaches in schools that actively engage children and young people in the formulation and review of bullying policies?
3. How do school anti-bullying policies work in practice?
4. What did young people see as the most effective ways of engaging them in the development of schools bullying policies?
5. How were issues such as homophobia, race, gender and disability addressed in the development of schools bullying policies?
6. How is bullying monitored in school?

Discussion of the key findings from the research leads the research team to summarise their responses in the following way:

How are school anti-bullying policies developed and reviewed? What involvement do young people have?

All schools did have school bullying policies - either as stand-alone documents or incorporated into the overall pastoral care policy of the school. At best, policies were reviewed annually; in most schools the review took place less often. The most recurrent reason given for a less frequent review was the heavy administrative and teaching workload on school staff. Schools are expected to be involved in a number of initiatives and found it sometimes difficult to deal with all these expectations. As a consequence policy-making was often seen as a reactive rather than pro-active process. Teachers were generally aware of the shortcomings of a reactive strategy, but a more proactive and ongoing policy-review often depended on dedicated individual staff. Commonly, school policies were discussed at staff training days, or around a time when school inspections took place. Teachers were also sometimes defensive about why they did not have more comprehensive involvement of pupils, usually citing lack of time and resources.

Overall, the involvement of pupils in school-policy making was limited. Less than half of the schools visited operated school councils. Some of these were seen by pupils as rather ineffective. More schools operated other means of participation short of a school council. However, the selection of pupils involved in participatory activities was almost exclusively teacher-led. Often it was just one particular school year or a sub-group of students involved in policy making. Typically, in primary as well as post-primary schools, these were the older year groups.

Primary schools operated more regular low-key methods of participation in school policy-making, such as circle time, worry boxes or suggestion boxes. Direct discussion of policies in most schools were one-off events, for example, at the start of the school year. Typically this included establishing school or class rules or the signing of positive behaviour and anti-bullying pledges (more so in primary schools). Comprehensive school audits on policy making were reported from two schools only.

What are the barriers to the development of approaches in schools that actively engage children and young people in the formulation and review of bullying policies?

The research extracted a variety of reasons why pupils remained largely excluded from policy-making in their schools. The three most common reasons were:

- The perception of a limited ability of children and young people to inform policy making, mainly because of their young age, their perceived immaturity and doubts about intentions and motivations of pupils who come forward to be involved;

- The lack of training on how to involve pupils into policy making;

- Time constraints and organisational demands in school.

Many teachers had simply not thought about direct involvement of pupils in school policy making. A substantial proportion of pupils themselves shared the school staff's reservation about the extent of meaningful pupil participation in school policy making. This was more so the case in post-primary schools where some students displayed noticeable levels of cynicism about what difference pupils could really make. Overall, the research concluded that whilst there was no open opposition to pupils' involvement in school policy making, in most schools there was no culture of pupil participation.

Thus the main barrier to the involvement of pupils in policy making was simply that pupils were not asked to participate.

Schools which had adopted mechanisms for pupil participating commented on the positive implications this had had on the school climate. However, even in these schools some pupils were found to be excluded from policy making. Once a policy was found to be working, schools may not review and revisit it on an annual basis.

How do school anti-bullying policies work in practice?

Every school included in the research project made it absolutely clear that bullying would not be tolerated. This was reiterated in every-day school life through posters, class discussions (circle time, PSHE, debates), assemblies or anti-bullying pledges. However, this does not mean that bullying does not take place. The questionnaires showed that only about one in ten pupils believed that bullying did not happen in their school. The Talkshops and one-to-one interviews confirmed this.

Pupils were generally aware of ways of reporting and dealing with bullying, even though this was not necessarily through their school. Furthermore, whilst over three quarters of respondents to the questionnaires said that their school had particular staff to deal with school bullying, only 15 per cent of post-primary respondents thought that most students would unconditionally talk to this staff member. Indeed there was a sense from the Talkshops in post-primary schools that 'telling a teacher' was not a helpful or effective option.

It was found that small schools with a good level of rapport between pupils and staff had some advantages in dealing with bullying compared to larger and more anonymous schools. The research team conclude that schools which offered a range of different age-appropriate means of dealing with bullying and schools which

revisited the subject of school bullying on a regular basis were best equipped to deal with any incidences that may occur.

What did young people see as the most effective ways of engaging them in the development of schools bullying policies?

Based on the Talkshop activities, the research team concludes that schools should offer a variety of structured as well as ad-hoc means of involving pupils in school policy making. For various reasons, individual pupils differ substantially in the means of participation that they find most comfortable. In order to give as many as pupils as possible the opportunity to have their say and express their views, schools should consider offering more than just one way to be involved. Possible ways of engaging pupils could range from informal anonymous suggestion boxes to discussions and debates within the school curriculum (e.g. Circle Time, PSHE, Citizenship Education), a formal school council and peer-mediation schemes, such as anti-bullying squads.

Again, the absence of a culture of pupil participation impacted on the aspirations and expectations of many participants in the research. Whilst individual school communities are best placed to decide what means of participation best suits their school's circumstances, it is clear that the development of good relationships between pupils and school staff is key for the development of effective ways of participation and ultimately a sense of ownership of the school among pupils.

How were issues such as homophobia, race, gender and disability addressed in the development of schools bullying policies?

Special schools were sensitive towards individual needs of pupils with disabilities and differentiated between bullying with the intent to harm and challenging behaviour linked to specific disabilities - whether these were emotional or physical needs. None of the mainstream schools' bullying policies singled out bullying connected homophobia, xenophobia or gender. Bullying incidences were treated the same, regardless of the nature of the incident. School managements generally highlighted their inclusive school ethos. However the fieldwork revealed that xenophobic incidences do occur in some schools. Bullying because of physical disabilities was uncommon in the schools the research team visited. Most participants in the research agreed that students were bullied because they were different from the majority or the socially accepted 'norm' – in whatever way this may be.

Homophobic bullying did not arise as an issue throughout the research project, even though pupils were given the opportunity to discuss this. As the 2005 YLT data shows, same-sex attracted people are particularly vulnerable in terms of school bullying. The fact that the issue was not taken up by participants in the research project may suggest that in a heteronomic society a discussion of homosexuality itself is regarded as threatening. On the other hand, other research shows that many same-sex attracted young people delay their coming out until they have left school for fear of being subjected to bullying (Rainbow Project 2006).

How is bullying monitored in school?

Schools had different methods of monitoring bullying incidences, such as a log book, conduct cards, record cards, behaviour incident cards etc. Generally, the overall responsibility to oversee the school bullying policy rested with a senior member of staff, usually the principal or vice principal responsible for pastoral care in the school. It was within the remit of this member of staff to record bullying incidences and to involve all parties, including parents to resolve the issue. Teachers were involved in overseeing any sanctions. Schools that did have working schemes of pupil participation or peer mediation in dealing with bullying incidences, such as playground friends and buddy schemes (Primary Schools) or anti-bullying squads and school councils (post-primary schools) did report that minor incidences of bullying were resolved informally without the involvement of school staff.

In Conclusion

This research shows that individual schools vary enormously in the way in which they develop and implement anti-bullying policies. While there were some examples of really excellent practice in devising and applying anti-bullying policies and in involving pupils in this, the general picture is of very limited participation of pupils. This seems to derive from the absence of a culture of pupil participation within policy making within schools. The interviews and discussions with pupils suggest that most have no sense of involvement in the way in which their school is run.

References

Anti-bullying Alliance website www.anti-bullyingalliance.org

Anti-bullying Alliance (2005) *Bullying: the Facts*. NCB.

Childline (1998) *Children Calling from Northern Ireland.* London: Childline.

Collins, K.., McAleavy, G., & Adamson, G. (2004) 'Bullying in Schools: A Northern Ireland Study' *Educational Research* 46:1 (Spring).

Davey, C, Dwyer, C, McAlister, S, KilKelly, U, Kilpartick, R, Lundy, L, Moore, L & Scraton, P (2005) *An Analysis of Research Conducted with School Children into Children's Rights in Northern Ireland.* NICCY

Department of Education, Northern Ireland (2005) *Traveller children's experiences in mainstream post-primary schools in Northern Ireland: A qualitative study.* Co.Down: Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

Department of Education, Northern Ireland (2003) *Department of Education Statement on Bullying* 17 November 2003.

Department of Education, Northern Ireland (2002) *Bullying in Schools: A Northern Ireland Study.* Bangor: Department of Education, Statistics and Research Branch.

Department of Education, Northern Ireland (2001) *Promoting Positive Behaviour.*

Department for Education and Employment (1999) *National Healthy School Guidance London* DFEE http://www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk/PDF/Brochurenew.pdf

Department for Education and Skills (2002) *Bullying: Don't suffer in silence. An anti-bullying pack for schools (2nd revised edition).* London: DfES*.*

Department for Health, Department for Education and Skills, and National Children's Bureau (2004) *Promoting children and young people's participation through the National Healthy School Standard* http://www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk/PDF/NHSS_participation_briefing.pdf

Glover, D., Cartwright, N. & Gleeson, D. (1997) *Towards Bully-free schools: Interventions in action* Open University Press.

Katz, A., Buchanan, A. & Bream, V. (2001) *Bullying in Britain: Testimonies from teenagers* East Moseley: Young Voice.

Kilkelly, U., Kilpatrick, R., Lundy, L., Moore, L., Scraton, P., Davey, C., Dwyer, C. & McAlister, S. (2005) *Children's Rights in Northern Ireland*. NICCY.

Madge, N., Franklin, A. and Willmott, N. (2003) *Research Summary: National Healthy School Standard and Pupil Participation,* National Children's Bureau http://www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk/cat.php?catid=1056

McGuckin, C. and Lewis C.A. (2005): *"Out of sight, out of mind"?: Pre-legislative management of bully/victim problems in Northern Ireland schools.* Unpublished article.

Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum (NIABF) (2005) *Strategy 2005 – 2008*
http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/scuk_cache/scuk/cache/cmsattach/3806_NIABF_
Bully.pdf

Oliver, C. and Candappa, M. (2003) *Tackling Bullying: Listening to the views of Children and Young People* (RR 400) London: DfES.

O'Moore, A.M., Kirkham, C. & Smith, M. (1997) Bullying behaviour in Irish schools: a nationwide study, *Irish Journal of Psychology,* 18, 141-169

Save the Children (2002) *Focus on Bullying: Guidance and Resources for post-primary schools.* London: Save the Children.

Save the Children (2005) *Something to Say – Listening to Children.* London: Save the Children.

Save the children (2000) *No Choice. No Chance The educational experience of children with disabilities.*

Social Exclusion Unit (2003) *A better education for Children in Care.* London SEU.

Smith, P. (1999) *The nature of Bullying in schools* London: Routledge.

Smith, P. (2000) 'Bullying in Schools'*. Highlight No. 174.* London: NCB.

Smith, P. (2005) 'Bullying in Schools'*. Highlight No. 216.* London: NCB.

Smith, P., Pepler, D., & Rigby, K. (eds) (2004) *Bullying in Schools: How successful can interventions be?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Smith, P.K. & Sharp, S. (eds) (1994) *School Bullying: Insights and perspectives* Routledge.

Sullivan, K., Cleary, M. & Sullivan, G. (2004) *Bullying in Secondary Schools.* London: Paul Chapman.

Young Life and Times (2005) *Northern Ireland Young Life and Times Survey* www.ark.ac.uk/ylt

Whitney, I. & Smith, P.K. (1993) A survey of the nature and extent of bullying problems in junior/middle and secondary schools, *Educational Research*, 35, 1, 3-25

Appendices

1. Contract with Young Researchers

2. Schedule and Exercises of Talkshops
   a. Primary Schools
   b. Special Schools
   c. Post-primary Schools

3. Primary-School Survey Questionnaire

4. Post-Primary School Survey Questionnaire

5. One-to-One Interview Schedule with Pupils

6. Interview Schedule with School Management Staff

7. Picture Activity Primary and Special Schools

Contract between NCB and Young Researchers

**Involving Children and young people in developing bullying policies
in schools in Northern Ireland**

This contract is issued by the National Children's Bureau (NCB), 8 Wakley Street, London, EC1V 7QE.

Name: ....

Address: ....

....

....

I agree to act as a young researcher on the above project, and understand that this will involve:

- A one-day training and introduction course to be held on 15 October;
- Providing advice to the research team on matters such as: the sort of questions to ask; the design of the materials to be used in interviews and discussion groups; the meaning of the research findings; presenting the report to pupils who took part in the research;
- With support from an adult researcher, helping run group discussions and undertaking interviews with pupils, staff and government officers;
- Some preparation work before the interviews and group work and discussion of each session afterwards with the adult researchers;
- Travel to and from the training course and the schools where the research is taking place. The research team will arrange support for this when needed;
- Assisting with presentations of the research findings.

I understand that, as a young researcher, in return for undertaking these tasks, I will receive the following from NCB:

- Support, care and attention for the duration of the work with NCB, which includes the training;
- Travel expenses and assistance with travel arrangements, as needed
- A fee of £120 to cover all the work undertaken as a young researcher
- A certificate, which will be sent to my school for inclusion in my Record of Achievement.

Signed (NCB): ....   **Signed** (Young Researcher): ....

Date: ....   **Date:** ....

Research Schedule (Primary School)

1. **Introduction (5 min)**
2. **Ground rules (10 min)**
3. **Walking Decision Exercise (20 min)**

   - Read out statements and ask pupils to walk to one end of the room or the other, depending on whether they agree or disagree that this is bullying.
   - Ask for reasons why they think the behaviour read out is bullying or is not
   - Take notes

4. **Group work 1 (For what reasons do children get bullied? → including picture round) (15 min)**

   - Show children pictures of people and ask them why these people might be bullied?
   - Ask children to come up with reasons why other children may be bullied

5. **Group work 2 (Anti-bullying policy in school) (15 min)**

   - Ask children where they go if bullying takes place?
   - Is there someone special in school who is responsible for bullying policies?
   - Ask if they would go to this person?
   - Ask if there is someone else that they can go to (a class representative, a parent, another teacher, the school nurse, someone outside school)
   - Ask if they were involved in setting up the rules?

6. **Group work 3 (How are children involved in the running of the school?) (ground rules 2) (15 min)**

   - Ask in what parts of the school policy they think they should be involved in? Give examples
   - How would this make the school a better school?

Research Schedule (Special Schools)

1. **Introduction (5 min)**

2. **Ground rules (10 min)**

3. **Statements Exercise (20 min)**
- Read out statements and ask pupils to walk to one end of the room or the other depending on whether they agree or disagree that what is read out resembles bullying
- Ask for reasons why they think the behaviour read out is bullying or not

4. **Group work 1: Understanding of bullying and reasons for bullying:**
   - Picture round: show pictures of people and ask why people may bully others or might be bullied by others?

5. **Group work 2: Anti-bullying policy in school (15 min)**
   - Ask children where they go if bullying takes place?
   - Is there someone special in school? Who is responsible for bullying policies?
   - Ask if they would go to this person?
   - Ask if there is someone else they could go to (class representative, a parent, another teacher, the school nurse, someone outside school)?
   - Ask if they were involved in setting up the rules

6. **Group work 3: How are children involved in the running of the school?**
   - Ask in what parts of the school policy they think they should be involved in? Give examples (school meal, discipline policy, after-school activities, etc)
   - How would this make the school a better school?

→ **at same time: 2 one-to-one interviews take place with students (Young Researchers)**

Research Schedule (Post Primary)

1. **Introduction (5 min)**

2. **Ground rules (10 min)**

3. **Walking Decisions Exercise (20 min)**
   - Read out statements on bullying and ask pupils to walk to one end of the room or the other depending on whether they agree or disagree that what is read out resembles bullying
   - Ask for reasons why they think the behaviour read out is bullying or not

4. **Group work 1: Examples of bullying and solutions (15 min)**
   - Split into three small groups. Give each group one case scenario. Discuss possible solutions. Feedback to group.

5. **Group work 2: Anti-bullying policy in school (15 min)**
   - Ask students where they go if bullying takes place?
   - Is there someone special in school who is responsible for bullying policies?
   - Ask if they would go to this person?
   - Ask if there is someone else they could go to (class representative, a parent, another teacher, the school nurse, someone outside school)?
   - Ask if they were involved in setting up the rules

6. **Group work 3: How are children involved in the running of the school?**
   - Ask in what parts of the school policy they think they should be involved in? Give examples (school meal, discipline policy, after-school activities, etc)
   - How would this make the school a better school?

→ at same time: 3 one-to-one interviews to take place with students

Anti-Bullying Research

Questionnaire for Primary School Children

If you answer the following questions you can help make schools in Northern Ireland better places for children. We will be asking the same questions in 15 schools across Northern Ireland.

Thank you very much for taking part in our research.

Please put a tick in the boxes beside your answers. There are no right or wrong answers.

1. First of all, can you tell us, if you are a boy or a girl?

A boy ☐   A girl ☐

2. What age are you?   8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10 ☐ 11 ☐ years

3. Does your school have a school council?

Yes ☐   No ☐   I don't know ☐

4. Have you ever been asked for your views on how something was done in your school?

Yes ☐   No ☐   I don't know ☐

If yes, please tell us what you were asked about and how you expressed your view.

```



```

5. Have you ever helped to change the way something was done in your school?

Yes ☐   No ☐   I don't know ☐

If yes, please tell us what this was.

```



```

6.   If a pupil is not happy with something in your school, is there someone they can go to for help?

Yes, a teacher   ☐

Yes, the principal   ☐

Yes, my class representative ☐

Yes, someone else   ☐
Please tell us who this is: _____

I don't know   ☐

7.   Do you think that pupils at your school get bullied by other pupils?

A lot   ☐   A little ☐   Not at all ☐   I don't know   ☐

8.   Is there someone at your school whose job is to deal with bullying?

Yes   ☐   No   ☐   I don't know   ☐

9.   If you were being bullied, who would you tell first?

A teacher   ☐

The principal   ☐

My class representative   ☐

My parents   ☐

My friends   ☐

Someone else   ☐
Please tell us who this is: _____

10.   Does your school have a set of rules on bullying?

Yes   ☐   No   ☐   I don't know   ☐

11.   Have you ever talked about bullying in your class?

Yes   ☐   No   ☐   I don't know   ☐

Thank you very much again for your help.

Involving children and young people in developing bullying policies in schools in Northern Ireland: Identifying and sharing good practice

national children's bureau

Questionnaire for Post-Primary Students

Thank you very much for taking part in our research.

NCB is carrying out this project on behalf of the Northern Ireland Commissioner of Children and Young People (NICCY). Fifteen schools across Northern Ireland are taking part in the research. NICCY is keen to hear directly from children and young people about their experiences of the development and review of schools' bullying policies:

- How you have been involved in developing policies;

- Your views on how these policies work out in practice;

- How specific issues such as race, homophobia, gender and disability are addressed in policies;

- How bullying is monitored within schools;

- Your views on successful steps taken within schools to reduce bullying.

The information you give will be treated in confidence.

The findings of the research will be made available to the schools in Spring 2006.

If you would like to find out more about the project you can contact the researchers below:

Dr Ruth Sinclair
Director of Research
(020) 7843 6072
rsinclair@ncb.org.uk

Dr Dirk Schubotz
NCB Research Associate
(028) 9097 3947
d.schubotz@qub.ac.uk

Involving children and young people in developing bullying policies in schools in Northern Ireland: Identifying and sharing good practice.

Please tick the appropriate boxes.

1.   Are you male or female?

Male   ☐   Female ☐

2.   What age are you?   ☐☐ (Please write in)

3.   Does your school have a school council?

Yes   ☐   No   ☐   I don't know   ☐

4.   Have you ever been asked to express your views on how things are run in your school?

Yes   ☐   No   ☐   I don't know   ☐

If yes, please tell us what you were asked about and how you expressed your view.

```



```


5.   Have you ever helped to change the way things are run in your school?

Yes   ☐   No   ☐   I don't know   ☐

If yes, please tell us what this was.

```



```

6.   If a pupil is not happy with the way they were dealt with in your school, is there someone they can go to for help?

Yes, a teacher   ☐   Yes, the principal   ☐

Yes, a class representative   ☐   Yes, someone else   (*Please specify below*) ☐

I don't know   ☐   _____

7.   Would you say that students at your school get bullied by other students?

A lot ☐   A little ☐   Not at all ☐   I don't know ☐

8.   Are there particular staff at your school whose job is to deal with bullying?

Yes   ☐ *(Please go to the next question)*

No   ☐ *(Please go to question 10)*

I don't know   ☐ *(Please go to question 10)*

9.   Do you think that most people – if they were bullied – would or would not go and talk to one of these members of staff?

Would talk to them   ☐   Would <u>not</u> talk to them   ☐

It depends   ☐   I don't know   ☐

10.   Does your school have an official policy on bullying?

Yes ☐ *(Go to next question)* No ☐ *(Go to question 12)*   I don't know ☐

11.   Were students in your school involved in drawing up the school bullying policy?

Yes ☐ *(Please tell us how they were involved.)*   No ☐   I don't know ☐

12.   In general, do you think that your school provides real help for students who are bullied or not?

Yes ☐   No ☐   I don't know ☐

Thank you very much again for your help.

Involving children and young people in developing bullying policies in schools in Northern Ireland: Identifying and sharing good practice

Interview schedule for one-to-one interviews with pupils:

School: Date:

Name of interviewee: Age:

Name(s) of Interviewer(s):

Before you start with the interview:

1. Introduce yourself again.

2. Reassure respondent about confidentiality.

3. Tell respondent that the interview can be stopped at any time if he/she feels uncomfortable with the situation and that they do not need to feel bad about this.

Questions:

1. Ask respondents how they felt about the group discussions so far and if they enjoyed the exercises.

2. Ask if the results of the group discussions represented their views, or if they would like to add something else.

3. Ask to what extent they are personally involved in the school, what responsibility they have, how they are consulted in relation to school policies and, in particular in the bullying policy of the school.

4. Ask if they feel that there is somebody in the school they could go to if they wanted to discuss an issue that is important to them. If so, ask who would be that person. If not, ask if there should be a person like this

5. Ask if they ever had any personal experiences on bullying in their schools or if they know of other people who were bullied. Ask what they think the reason was for the bullying. Ask how this was dealt with in school.

6. Ask if they want to add anything to the research.

Involving children and young people in developing bullying policies in schools in Northern Ireland: Identifying and sharing good practice

Interview Schedule Principal

Date:

School:

Name of Interviewer:

Name(s) of Interviewee:

Notes about interview situation:

Background of research:

This research is undertaken by the National Children's Bureau (NCB) on behalf of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY). NICCY wishes to find out:

- How children and young people have been involved in developing school policies;
- Their views on how these policies work out in practice;
- How specific issues such as race, homophobia, gender and disability are addressed in policies;
- How bullying is monitored within schools; and
- Views on successful steps taken within schools to reduce bullying.

15 Schools from all areas in Northern Ireland have agreed to take part in this research.

I would like to thank you in advance for agreeing to be interviewed for this research. The project is scheduled to be completed in Spring 2006. We will provide a full report of the research to your school and will send you invites to any events that may be held in relation to this project.

1. Can you briefly outline your school's anti-bullying policy? And can you please tell us if there is a teacher or someone else who is responsible for dealing with bullying incidences in your school? Do you have an anti-bullying policy?

2. To what extent have students and staff contributed to your school's anti-bullying policy?

3. Do you think that your pupils are fit and mature enough to have some say in how their school is run?

4. What means of participation in school policy making for students, if any, do exist in your school?

5. What avenues of support do exist for pupils in your school who find themselves targets of bullying or who witness bullying taking place?

6. What disciplinary procedures exist for pupils who have been identified as bullying others?

7. Do you provide any training for staff of your school to help them identifying incidences of bullying?

8. What sort of support do you think policy makers (DE, NICCY, CCEA, etc.) should provide to help your school tackling bullying?

Thank you very much for supporting this research.

Talkshop Activity Primary and Special Schools:

Bullying: Who are the victims and who are the bullies?