School Matters

The Report of the Task Force
on Student Behaviour in
Second Level Schools

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AN ROINN
OIDEACHAIS
AGUS EOLAÍOCHTA | DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION
AND SCIENCE

Chairman's Foreword

The report which follows represents the culmination of an intense period of work, devoted to a comprehensive review of Student Behaviour in Second Level Schools. The process was initiated at the beginning of 2005, by the Minister for Education, Mary Hanafin T.D., when she invited eleven educational professionals to constitute a Task Force under my chairmanship. The composition of the Task Force ensured that its membership was reflective of the sectoral, regional and professional interests which constitute the educational community within this state. While the mode of operations adopted by the group is detailed in Chapter Two of this report, I wish, at this point, to take the opportunity to record my personal appreciation of the manner in which each and every member of the group brought to their accepted mission the highest measure of commitment, interest and industry. Each took on a variety of tasks and discharged these efficiently and with good humour. Throughout our work, we were ably assisted by superb administrative support provided by the Department of Education and Science, which also appointed a Secretary to the Task Force. I wish to record my thanks and admiration to these support staff for their unstinting application and the high standards of professionalism which they both contributed to our collaborative endeavour. The Task Force takes considerable satisfaction from the fact that, by dint of hard work on the part of all, the report has been delivered within the prescribed time frame.

Thanks to that collaborative spirit and a shared work ethic, it was possible to carry out a thorough analysis of many facets of the Irish second level school system, and their relative influence on student behaviour. The process continued until we all reached a common perspective on the issues, and were in a position to make considered Recommendations on how to improve the teaching and learning climate in our schools. The application brought to the task was, in part, a generous response to the level of interest displayed by so many groups and individuals who offered information, experiences and judgements to the Task Force. To all these, I wish to express my thanks and appreciation. For the schools and Centres that we visited, this entailed a measure of inconvenience in the midst of their busy routines. In all locations, our enquiries were met with great courtesy and valuable, insightful sharing, and I am particularly grateful for that.

The most intense personal engagements occurred during the course of our meetings with the Partner groups. These were focussed, structured encounters from which we learned much. In all cases, the delegations represented their members' interests comprehensively and persuasively. Finally, a collective thank you to all our colleagues in our own workplaces, and to the education family for their continuing interest in the work of the Task Force. We hope that through this report we have made a contribution that will do justice to the trust that you placed in us.

Maeve Martin
Chairman of the Task Force, 2006

Overview

The Task Force on Student Behaviour in Second Level Schools held its inaugural meeting in February 2005. The twelve members of the Task Force comprised coordinators from national programmes, representatives from school leadership, classroom practitioners, a solicitor, and a psychologist working in teacher education, who chaired the work. The Task Force received administrative support from the Department of Education and Science, which also sanctioned the appointment of a secretary to the group. The Terms of Reference which required an in-depth exploration of the issues relating to student disruption in second level schools, and evidence-based strategies for combating it, determined our modes of enquiry in the following eleven months.

The Task Force was assisted in its work by excellent co-operation from the Partners in Education, from the wider education community and allied agencies with expertise relevant to the lives of young people. The work was enriched by the 153 submissions that were received in response to the call in the national press. In the course of our work, Task Force members visited schools and Centres for Education where we met with staff, parents and students who engaged with us on the central issues of concern linked to the Terms of Reference. We took briefings from statutory agencies and consulted with researchers in England and Scotland who have specialist knowledge of the area under our review. The Task Force wishes to record its gratitude for and appreciation of the tangible data that these procedures yielded, and also for the encouragement and goodwill that we experienced in the process.

It is undoubtedly true that student behaviour in schools is influenced not just by what transpires within the school, but also by factors operating outside of the school. In an attempt to establish the systemic nature of student behaviour, our work led us to focus on some external influences that permeate the life of the school. Alongside the external influences impacting on school life, we also considered some of the many institutional developments that have been influential during the school life of the present student cohort.

Information before the Task Force indicates that in the majority of schools there continues to be a healthy teaching and learning environment. This is not to suggest that there are many schools that are totally free of disruption, but what appears to be the case is, that in the majority of schools the breaches of discipline are containable and amenable to correction. This is especially true where there is good leadership, quality teaching, supportive parental involvement, caring relationships and effective structures in place. However, the troubling reality is that there are schools in the system where teaching and learning are severely curtailed by disruptive student behaviour. In such schools, the toll of dealing constantly with serious and deeply offensive student misbehaviour is having adverse consequences for the whole school community.

In response to the Terms of Reference that asked us to identify best practice in fostering climates conducive to high standards of teaching and learning, our findings indicate that some of the factors are intangible, e.g., school ethos, the characteristic spirit of a school and the culture of a school. These elusive aspects, coupled with the human capital within a school community, and the range of structures that a school employs to underpin its work, contribute to the complex nature of what it is that makes some schools more successful than others in their efforts to create and maintain orderly, happy, effective schools.

Finally, the Task Force has put forward Recommendations that represent the results of extensive engagement with our mandate. Our judgement, which we consider to be vindicated at both national and international levels is, that if implemented in a consistent and coherent fashion, these Recommendations will work, and work well. The framework for these Recommendations was flagged in the interim report of July 2005. Subsequent discussions on that report with the Partners in Education, and the feedback from interested stakeholders have given us confidence in presenting these Recommendations. It is the earnest hope of the Task Force members that our cumulative deliberations on the vitally important theme of student behaviour in second level schools will produce some positive outcomes not only for school communities, but also for civic society.

Chapter One

Introduction

Minister,

In establishing a Task Force in the year 2005 to report to you on the issue of student behaviour in second level schools, you chose a most propitious time. This is a time when Ireland is poised on the crest of an economic boom. Our new found affluence has brought with it great progress, but the progress has come with a shadow side.

This is a time when Ireland's education system is transitioning from a system that operated on practice and custom to a system that is defined by a new and rigorous legislative framework. Those candidates who sat the Leaving Certificate in 2005, represent the first cohort to go through our second level system within the new legislative framework.

This is a time when policy makers within national governments and international agencies are focusing their attention on the characteristics of "Schooling for Tomorrow" (CERI, 2006). There is understandable disquiet lest we discard much that has served us well in the past. This disquiet occurs alongside concern not to be left behind, in an era, where learning and knowledge are vital to the progress of a nation and the personal fulfilment of its citizens.

This is a time when the 3Rs are ideally complemented by the 3 Ts - thinking, teamwork and technology. For our schools, this means new ways of presenting material and involving our learners. This is a time when the school population has become more heterogeneous than was the case a decade ago. The contemporary student population is reflective of a new multicultural, inclusive Ireland.

This is a time when children have been afforded new status and when perspectives on childhood are the focus of policy makers and service providers alike. This pride of place granted to the nation's children has brought with it a new sense of rights and responsibilities with which we are still coming to terms. This is a time of mesmerising technological advances, when the accessing and manipulation of knowledge, coupled with the speed and ease of telecommunications have brought us, imperceptibly, into a knowledge society and a global world.

This is a time of fragmented relationships, a time of the erosion of social capital when the old order of family and of neighbourhood networks have, in some instances, given way to a world of blended households, time-consuming commutes, and traffic gridlock. This is a time when reports of violent acts, local, national, and international form the basis of news headlines. This is a time of unprecedented educational opportunity and career choice for the beneficiaries of a good education system, a system available in this country free of charge, right through to, and including tertiary level. This is a time when there continue

1

to be worrying numbers of our young people who do not participate in or derive benefit from their school experiences.

These are some of the forces that made it a propitious time for the establishment of the Task Force. They have set the context for our work, but more importantly, they currently shape the work of schools, where the meshing of the new and powerful influences occurring at macro level in our society are mirrored at micro level within the school.

Your foresight in setting up the Task Force reflected your concern for schools grappling with the challenges posed by these rapid, and in many ways, unanticipated changes. Your concerns have been confirmed by the accumulated data presented to the Task Force from a wide range of key informants.

On the occasion of the launch of the Task Force in February 2005, you acknowledged the complexity of the task which you entrusted to us. You also pointed out that the Task Force was set up, not because student disruption is at crisis level in our schools, but because you anticipate that the work of the Task Force will be a consolidating influence in contributing to the orderly and harmonious patterns of behaviour that characterise the majority of second level schools at present. You further pointed out that you wish that the work of the Task Force will help to provide a basis of support and guidance for those schools that are troubled by persistent indiscipline. Your press release on announcing the establishment of the Task Force stated *"I want the work of this Task Force to provide a solid foundation for developing policies and best practice in our schools into the future. I expect*

that the Task Force will be linking closely to a wide range of interests across our education system on this very important issue." As the report will show, the Task Force has been guided by your concerns and also by your sense of how it should conduct its enquiry.

More specifically, the Terms of Reference that were set for the Task Force have given us a template of enquiry for our work. These have helped us to develop an accurate profile of the issues of concern for the school community and have focussed our deliberations in ways that were structured and efficient.

The four Terms of Reference were as follows:

1. To examine the issue of disruptive student behaviour as it impacts upon teaching and learning;

2. To consider the effectiveness of strategies at present employed to address it;

3. To advise on existing best practice both nationally and internationally, in fostering positive student behaviour in schools and classrooms;

4. To make Recommendations on how best to promote an improved climate for teaching and learning in classrooms and schools.

These Terms of Reference have compelled us to paint a very broad canvas indeed. We learned as we progressed, that every aspect of within-school life influences student behaviour.

1

The aspects comprise:

• The values espoused by the school

• The nature of the curriculum, the approaches adopted to teaching and learning

• The structures and resources that are in place

• The leadership style

• The quality of the relationships

• The architecture and state of the school building

• The access to extracurricular activities

• The mindset of the learners

The interplay of these internal aspects, coupled with powerful external forces that include the role of parents, neighbourhood factors, societal influences and the lifestyle associated with youth culture make a review of student behaviour a complex task and a serious challenge. The Task Force has been stimulated by these intertwining dimensions.

The structure of the report is as follows. Firstly, the procedures adopted to address the Terms of Reference are documented (cpt.2). As the Task Force has been very conscious throughout the work of the permeable nature of schools, and of how they are buffeted by outside influences, consideration is then given to the social context within which schools function (cpt.3). There then follows an overview of some recent developments from within official circles, mostly from the Department

of Education and Science, which have altered much of what happens in schools (cpt.4). Having set this context for the main thrust of the report, attention turns to Term of Reference 1, which deals with the issue of disruption and its impact on teaching and learning (cpt.5). Much of the good practice regarding the management of student behaviour that typifies schools nationally coincides with good practice internationally. This practice is authenticated in the educational literature on this topic. In view of this convergence, the Task Force has conflated Terms of Reference 2 and 3 in an effort to avoid duplication and overlap. The four Chapters Six, Seven, Eight and Nine address this aspect of the work. Finally, the report concludes with a series of Recommendations in response to Term of Reference 4, (cpt.10).

With regard to Term of Reference 4, the Task Force has chosen to adhere closely to the issues that it signalled in the interim report of July 2005 with the addition of some others that were deemed significant. Readers will see evidence of other Recommendations, explicit or implicit, throughout the report. The Task Force has decided against putting before you a long litany of Recommendations in the hope that by being selective, and by staying with the central issues flagged in the interim report, you will be prepared to act on these. We feel confident that in so doing, Minister, the task that you set for us on behalf of the school community, and ultimately, on behalf of civil society will have borne fruit.

Chapter Two

Procedures

2.1 Introduction

At its initial meeting of February 3rd 2005, the Task Force devoted considerable time to charting how best to set about meeting the requirements of our mandate. We were conscious that our time allocation was relatively short, though there are precedents both in Scotland in 2001, and in England, October 2005, of similar reviews being conducted within tight time parameters. We decided to make a virtue of the timeframe allocated to us, and we committed, at that initial meeting, to carry out focussed, intense work with a solution-based orientation. We identified collaboration with the Partners in Education as a priority. We discussed how best to access relevant and comprehensive information to inform our evolving work. We analysed our Terms of Reference, and sought to ensure that our procedures would be sufficiently robust to respond to them. On a continual basis throughout our work, we revisited these Terms of Reference to ensure that we had not lost sight of any aspect of our allocated brief. We are confident that we have been thorough in our approach to the matters in hand.

We were sustained throughout by the co-operation, the goodwill and encouragement of those whose help we sought. We soon realised that there was a high level of interest in the work of the Task Force. Our collaborators stressed how important it was that we produce a report that would be of value, and that would point the way forward for much needed improvements in the system. As our work took shape, we felt a sense of collective responsibility to the education community. This sense of obligation together with a sense of privilege and collegiality served as powerful motivating factors right through. We hope that the fruit of our work will meet the expectations of those whose trust and confidence we experienced.

There was a number of strands to our procedures, and the following gives an account of these.

2.2 Call for Submissions

The national press of January 27th, 2005 (Foinse, January 30th) carried a notice inviting interested individuals and organisations to make submissions to the Task Force on the issue of student behaviour in second level schools, as part of the review process. The closing date for receipt of submissions was March 31st, 2005. In all, we received 153 submissions. These came from agencies, advocacy groups, subject associations, targeted initiative personnel, school groups comprising teachers, parents and students, and also from individuals. Some of the submissions are posted on the link to the Task Force that is accessible through the Department of Education and Science Home Page (www.education.ie). The submissions gave us access to a wide spectrum of views on the issues pertaining to student behaviour. We consulted them on an

ongoing basis as we worked, and used them to substantiate our evidence as our views on matters crystallised.

2.3 Invitation to the Partners in Education

The Task Force, at its inaugural meeting of February 3rd 2005, prioritised collaboration with the Partners as a guiding feature of our work. In order to bring about this collaboration, we wrote to the Partners and invited them 1) to meet us and share their concerns, and 2) to make written submissions of a substantive nature to complement their exchanges with us. The time spent with the Partners both at meetings and in analysing their written submissions has been a central plank of our work in interpreting and responding to the Terms of Reference. On resumption of the task after the summer recess, and in the context of the publication of the Interim Report (July, 2005), we met immediately with the Partners to ascertain their views on the issues flagged in that report. At a subsequent meeting, during that second phase of our work, we met with seven of the eight Partners in plenary session. This provided an opportunity to give an overview of our work up to that point and to indicate the pattern for the final phase, prior to the submission of our report.

Our earlier meetings with the Partners involved meeting with each, delegation by delegation. In all we met with eight groups, presented in alphabetical order as follows:

• The Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS)

• The Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland (ASTI)

• The Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA)

• The Joint Managerial Body (JMB)

• The National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD)

• The National Parents Council, Post Primary (NPC, Post Primary)

• The Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI)

• The Union of Secondary Students (USS)

The written material which the Partners shared with us, taken in conjunction with our discussions with them, served not only to give us insights into what are the issues of concern for their various constituents, but also deepened our appreciation of the complexity of student behaviour. While there were areas of broad agreement among the Partners on certain issues, there were also issues that were of particular concern to individual delegations. In meeting with them, the Task Force stressed that in its work, it sought to be even-handed in its analysis and would be unbiased in the Recommendations contained in the final report. This stance was indicative of the stance adopted by us throughout our work. We set our accumulated data within the context of our Terms of Reference, and embedded the data in the relevant aspects of the unfolding portrayal. It was important to us that we do justice to all parties while bearing in mind the import of their various priorities. This was a guiding principle of our work.

We devoted a considerable share of time at our plenary sessions to engaging with the Partners. In dialogue with

2

them, we had the opportunity to obtain clarification where necessary on their written submissions and to process their views and their priorities. The work of the Task Force has been enriched by their earnest, and on occasion, robust engagement with us.

2.4 Direct Approach to Specific Agencies

At the opening meeting of February 3rd, 2005, the Task Force identified a number of agencies or advocacy groups with high levels of expertise and relevance in the area of youth and schooling. This we did in recognition that school is but one facet of a young person's life, and in the realisation that some of our students come in contact with a variety of agencies other than the school. We were also guided by the Minister's remarks at our inaugural meeting where she anticipated that we *"would link with a broad range of agencies"*. Members of the Task Force were conversant with a wide spectrum of relevant personnel in the field of education and beyond. We identified a number of these and wrote to them inviting them to make a submission to us in line with our remit. In response to our invitation we received submissions from the following:

• Childcare Policy Unit, Department of Health and Children

• National Coordinator, Disadvantage Initiatives

• Irish Association of Pastoral Care in Education

• Chairperson, Irish Learning Support Association

• Director, National Children's Office

• Director, National Drugs Strategy Team

• Director, National Educational Psychological Service

• CEO, National Educational Welfare Board

• National Co-ordinator, School Completion Programme

• Visiting Teacher Service for Traveller Education

• National Co-ordinator, Youthreach

The Task Force has been greatly assisted in its work by the submissions from these agencies, and we thank them for their positive response to our invitation to help us with our review. We are confident that they will see evidence of their contributions throughout this report.

2.5 Fora

Our mandate asked that we constitute Fora of teachers, parents and students with a view to testing emerging ideas and proposals. This dimension of the work of the Task Force has been of immense interest and value to us. It has enriched our understandings and has helped us to heighten our awareness of the discipline issues that are the daily business of schools and Centres for Education as they go about their work. Our visits also provided us with an opportunity to see good practice in action, and to learn of the varied responses that are required to sustain an orderly teaching and learning environment.

2

The Fora were inclusive in that they provided an opportunity for all the school community to participate. **The model whereby students, teachers, parents, and management personnel sit together and discuss, in a serious manner, a matter of mutual concern is a very democratic, worthwhile and unifying process. We commend this model to the school community**. Those who formed part of our Fora made similar positive observations, spontaneously, in the course of our gatherings. The Task Force wishes to record its gratitude to the Centres for Education and schools who received us so graciously and so hospitably. In particular we thank them for helping us to advance our work in a way that was authentic and open, and that focussed our engagement. Without exception, the Fora were conducted in a manner that was respectful of the stance of each of the stakeholders and responsive to the validity of the concerns expressed.

In all, we visited six schools representing mainstream provision and six Centres for Education representing alternative provision e.g. Youthreach Centres, Youth Encounter Projects, Youth Training and Employment Workshops, and some local initiatives that cater for students who are out-of-school either in the short term or the long term. These venues were chosen in an effort to select a sample of schools and Centres for Education that are representative of schools and Centres available nationally in the education system. Initially we thought that we would have difficulty in gaining access to venues. We worried lest schools that agreed to host a forum would be perceived as schools experiencing troublesome levels of student disruption. Our concerns were ill founded.

The schools and Centres that we visited showed evidence of the effectiveness of their discipline strategies and were happy to invest time in sharing with us the difficulties, the challenges, and the satisfactions that they experienced in creating and maintaining their orderly teaching and learning environments. In the end, we were turning down invitations to conduct Fora in other school communities and Centres for Education. Many of the venues that we visited wanted us to return so that we could discuss further the discipline agenda and allied issues. This enthusiasm serves to demonstrate the topicality of the work of the Task Force. It further demonstrates the benefit for a school community of sitting together, in a spirit of harmony and mutual respect, in the presence of an unbiased, but competent chairman, to reflect on, and share issues of mutual concern.

2.6   Conduct of the Fora

Each member of the Task Force participated in a number of Fora. The typical format involved a visit to a school or Centre by four members. Following an initial conversation with the Principal / Director and other staff members, we held parallel meetings composed of representatives of each of the groups who form the school community - teachers, students, parents. On most occasions there was a member of the Board of Management present. The Terms of Reference 1 and 3 - to examine the issue of disruptive student behaviour as it impacts upon teaching and learning; to advise on existing best practice in fostering positive behaviour in schools and classrooms - formed the theme of our meetings. Following those meetings, we had a short interval, and then met in plenary session to

2

share the deliberations of the earlier meetings. The Chairman of the Task Force chaired all of the plenary meetings.

The format of our visits to the Centres for Education was less structured, but intentionally so, as we co-operated with the format suggested by the local personnel there. In the Centres for Education we met typically with the learners, with parents, and with a wide range of staff with different areas of expertise who contributed to the work of the Centre. Each school and Centre furnished the Task Force with relevant documentation that helped us to comprehend more fully the essence of the work that was undertaken there. We were struck by the openness and willingness to share with us in an honest way the minutiae of the work.

These Fora assumed great importance for us as they fleshed out, in a real way, much of the written documentation that came to us from a variety of sources. Not only were the Fora valuable learning experiences for the Task Force, but they also provided an opportunity for the Centres and schools to reflect on, and to review their initiatives, their obstacles and their successes. The Fora visits were so influential that they consistently informed the deliberations of the Task Force and are reflected in the tone and content of this document. We commend the judgement that recommended to us that we conduct Fora as an integral part of our work. **Further, the Task Force advocates the adoption of Fora as a democratic and productive way for school communities to work collaboratively and in so doing, strengthen stakeholder partnership**.

2.7 Additional Visits

In the course of its work the Task Force learned of provision in schools or alternative locations which offer education to students of varying ages. We took the opportunity of visiting some of these and of meeting with the personnel who assume responsibility for their functioning. Some of these alternative locations have official sanction from the Department of Education and Science, and are part funded from central purse, while others are reliant on either funding from religious communities and /or from a variety of funding streams. It is the view of the Task Force that these sites are meeting a need that is not currently met through official provision offered by the Department of Education and Science. Our information is that pupils are well behaved in these locations and are making satisfactory progress with their education. The children who attend have a multiplicity of needs and in these alternative sites they access a wide spectrum of provision that includes curricular activities coupled with counselling and quasi-therapeutic interventions. The Task Force understands that there is a waiting list for admission to this alternative mode of schooling, in most cases, from children who are of official school-going age, but who are out-of-school, and unlikely to enrol in a mainstream school. The ad hoc nature of this provision is clearly unsatisfactory, and it is difficult to sustain the good work done in the locations due to the precarious nature of funding and staffing there. **The Task Force is of the view that a member of the Inspectorate or a person with relevant expertise appointed by the Department of Education and Science (DES), carry out an audit of all**

2

of these ad hoc Centres with a view to assessing the work carried out there and reaching a determination about their continued functioning in the light of our Recommendation on out-of-school provision in Chapter Ten.

2.8 Plenary Sessions of the Task Force

The Task Force held 19 plenary meetings. The composition of the Task Force ensured that, around the table, there was a group of people who because of their professional backgrounds, were in an admirable position to contribute to the agenda. The 153 submissions that reached the Task Force, following the call in the national press, were distributed among the Task Force members. These were read with great care and synthesised in a structured and thematic format. Submissions were read and re-read, and used to substantiate or influence our emerging thoughts. Data from the submissions played an important role in the deliberations of the plenary meetings. We wish to record our thanks to all who took the time and the care to respond to the call for submissions. Taken as a whole, they form a bank of data that is an interesting portrayal of the discipline situation in schools and what it is that contributes to its development. They also have the potential to become a very interesting archive, representing as they do a snapshot of our schools at a period in time.

In between plenary meetings, a number of tasks was assigned to the members. These ranged from setting up and participating in Fora visits, to summarising data, to preparing presentations for the group, to carrying out research on identified themes, to tracking and clarifying issues. With the

passage of time, the group was in a position to identify a range of emergent issues that seemed to be intricately bound up with the theme of our work. These were recorded in the interim report of July 2005, and are pursued throughout this final report, either incidentally throughout the text or overtly as in the Recommendations section (cpt.10).

2.9 The Wider Environment

The Task Force is of the view that it has fulfilled the requirement to engage in wide consultation. Quite apart from the work documented above, we have taken the opportunity to meet with a variety of stakeholder groups, viz, school principals, personnel working in the School Completion Programme, clusters of Home School Community Liaison teachers, teacher educators and representatives from a newly qualified teachers' cohort (NQTs), who were participating in an Induction Programme. To further deepen our understandings of issues we invited 1) The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and 2) The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) to offer us their perspectives on a range of pertinent issues. Both of these organisations had made submissions to us that indicated to us their importance, and their relevance to our work.

The presentation from NEPS impressed us with the potential that this organisation could offer in terms of support and developmental work with schools. At present, with the implications of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) framework taking hold, their time is largely taken up with assessments. Consequently, their capability to function in a preventive and collaborative way with schools is

2

restricted. A large number of submissions to the Task Force documented frustration with the logjam regarding assessments, but to perceive NEPS solely as a body carrying out psychological assessments is to miss the capacity that this organisation has to assist schools in ways that extend far beyond that associated with assessment data.

Our time with the delegation from the NCCA highlighted for us the importance of the interface between teaching, learning, curriculum and behaviour. Any serious consideration of student behaviour must include a focus on curriculum and how it is presented to learners. This was borne out not just by the NCCA presentation, but also, by many of the submissions. The Task Force had an opportunity to get clarification on some programme innovations that are underway, and that are of real significance in retaining and engaging some of our vulnerable young students in schools. We also learned of the rolling reviews of existing programmes and the relevance of emerging findings to our work. Both the NEPS and NCCA delegations had much to contribute to our work, and we wish to express our thanks to them for responding so willingly to our invitation to share their insights with us.

2.10   The Research Dimension

The Task Force did not commission any empirical work as part of our process. We gave consideration to so doing, and in the end decided that we did not have sufficient time to carry out a national survey to supplement our data gathering. We were mindful that one of the time consuming and important aspects of empirical research is the development of an appropriate research instrument and the selection of a

sample with which to work. When this preparatory work is complete there is the fieldwork and subsequent collating and analysis of data. While conscious of the fact that interested parties may point to the absence of original research as part of this review, the Task Force is nonetheless confident that we have a comprehensive picture of the situation that is obtaining in the school system, regarding student behaviour.

The Task Force had access to valuable sources of data contributing to the national picture of discipline in schools. These included 1) a recent survey carried out by the ASTI (2004), 2) some questionnaire data collated by the Marino Institute of Education in response to the call for submissions, 3) school survey work carried out in Donegal VEC, also in response to the call for submissions, and 4) excellent school-based work carried out in a voluntary secondary school in a large urban centre in Co. Kerry, and similar work in Co. Dublin, that gave a comprehensive account of in-school matters. We had still further sources of valuable data. These included 1) the MORI survey conducted on behalf of the National Education Welfare Board (2005) that gave us information on school absences, suspensions and expulsions, and 2) figures for Section 29 Appeals of the Education Act. Taken as a corpus of data, this added up to a significant compilation of valuable material. We are confident that no issue relevant to our mandate has eluded us.

2.11 The Literature Base

A very helpful dimension to our unfolding work was offered by the timely publication of a number of reports on student behaviour in other jurisdictions. The Task Force read these reports from Northern Ireland (1998), Scotland

2

(2001,2005) and from England (2005) with interest. It is worth noting that the issues relating to student behaviour are common across different educational cultures. The solutions and interventions may vary. An interesting overview of the area with particular reference to violence and globalisation by Debarbieux (2003) makes the point that "violence in schools has become a major preoccupation all over the world". We engaged in an in-depth way with the work from the neighbouring cultures and assessed its relevance to our own context. We set up consultation with researchers who had contributed to the work of these reports, and set our own work alongside theirs, discussing points of similarity and of difference, determined by context. This comparative dimension has served to confirm that we are ad idem with the critical thinking on the issues, and that we are informed and well-grounded in our final Recommendations.

In order to supplement our readings and consultations, we have also examined in detail the wealth of US literature coming from a generously resourced research base that utilises the expertise of niche researchers. This research thread informing our work, coupled with the experiential knowledge gained from the sources already outlined, gives us confidence about the authenticity and credibility of our process.

2.12 Conclusion

In conclusion, we wish to summarise the sources that have informed the compilation of this report. They are:

- The Partners in Education through their written and oral submissions

- The 153 written submissions from a variety of contributors

- The Fora in the sample schools and Centres for Education

- Our visits to Centres of voluntary provision

- The agencies with expert knowledge who visited the Task Force in session, and shared their views with us

- The briefings with colleagues in Birmingham, Edinburgh, Leicester and Penrith

- The empirical work carried out by relevant, interested parties

- Statistical data from the NEWB and the DES Appeals Board

- The meetings with stakeholder groups

- The extensive literature base

- The accumulated expertise of the Task Force members

Against the backdrop of the procedures outlined above, the Task Force is confident that our thorough approach has harvested comprehensive and accurate data. We feel that we can comment authoritatively as we have taken many opportunities to verify the authenticity of our perceptions and our hypotheses. Our accumulated data have placed us in a strong position to address our Terms of Reference (see chart, over).

The remainder of this report will focus on these Terms, but firstly we turn to the context in which second level schools operate. This context-setting helps to situate our work, and helps to portray some of the intertwining influences that are at play in the dynamic world of a school in 21st century Ireland.

2

Minister Launches Task Force
February 2005

Terms of Reference:

- To examine the issue of disruptive student behaviour as it impacts upon teaching and learning

- To consider the effectiveness of strategies at present employed to address it

- To advise on existing best practice, both nationally and internationally, in fostering positive student behaviour in schools and classrooms

- To make recommendations on how best to promote an improved climate for teaching and learning in classrooms and schools

Partners in Education: Oral and written submissions	19 Plenary Sessions of the Task Force	Engagement with Stakeholder Groups

Call for Submissions in national press (153)	Fora in schools and in Centres for Education Additional Visits	Briefings: Edinburgh, Birmingham, Penrith, Leicester	Presentations from NEPS/NCCA	Specific Agencies with Expertise	Research Dimension & Literature Base

Interim Report July 2005

Final Report 2006

Chapter Three

The Changing Social Context in which Schools Operate

3.1 Introduction

Schools do not operate in a vacuum. They are hubs of local communities and are the locales through which many of the external influences that impact on the lives of young people are filtered. Schools are intense, focussed environments for all who inhabit them. They cater, on a daily basis, for numbers of young people who are negotiating a significant developmental phase of their lifespan development. This phase brings with it its own challenges and developmental tasks. For some young people this can be a problematic and absorbing period in their lives as they work out their identity, their value system, their vocational choice, their changing physique, their relationships and their sexual orientation. Alongside these developmental issues, there is the challenge posed by being part of a large group of people, in a rule-governed environment, in a confined space, for long periods of time. Most students cope very well with the concomitant demands of adolescence and of making satisfactory progress in school. Others find the demands difficult and this may spill over into behavioural problems in the school setting.

Schools are, at their most obvious, places of teaching and learning, but they are also social laboratories where many agendas are played out. They require high levels of support and engagement from their stakeholders in order to realise their functions. The Education Act (1998), Part 2, Section 9 documents the functions of a school. They include, inter alia, the identification of and provision for the educational needs of all students, including those with a disability or special educational needs; the promotion of their moral, spiritual, social and personal development, and the provision of health education in consultation with their parents, having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school. (pg.13).

Schools, like their students, have their own scripts. They have their traditions and legacies, their values, their ambitions and their accountability to parents and society at large. Against this backdrop, some retain a traditional structure, based on older practices, linked to a points driven examination system that appears to reward passive learning, and the mastery and retention of material in an uncritical fashion. In this context, there is little time for personalised teaching; active teaching methodologies; collaborative endeavour among students; critical thinking, and newer approaches to knowledge acquisition, features consonant with a shift to a knowledge society. Irrespective of which style prevails, all schools confront circumstances which make it difficult to meet the mandate set out in the Education Act.

A chief contributing factor to this difficulty is the discrepancy between a school system that is largely rooted in past traditions and practices, and dynamic societal changes whose influences are at variance with much that schools cherish and nurture. Schools

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that continue to espouse traditionally esteemed values and structures can find themselves at odds within a society, which has in some instances, jettisoned older values and structures. This phenomenon translates into a clash of cultures which is often fought out in the frontline of the school system.

Societal changes have been dramatic in contemporary Ireland. The family as a social unit has undergone change; authority figures have been discredited; young people have been granted new status; lifestyle patterns have altered. Ireland is not unique in its adherence to a long established model of schooling. Schools are still largely based on an industrial society model, while the aspiration, in the more general articulation of official policy, is towards a knowledge society. The question must be asked, can schools that continue to adhere to practices which evolved to meet the needs of a more restricted cohort, in more restricting times, but which are now providing education for 83% of the age cohort, respond to the needs of students who belong to a society that has changed dramatically?

Positioned as Ireland is in an era of economic boom, the envy of many of our European counterparts, and in a world that holds out so much opportunity for young people, it is more important than ever that schools are successful in their efforts to prepare their students to avail of unprecedented possibilities. The Irish have embraced this new world of myriad opportunities with enthusiasm. The riches and progress that we now experience have led some to view this country as an object lesson for economic development. Quite apart from our significant economic success, Irish society is more open and tolerant than twenty

years ago, less insular, more multicultural. But, as many observers have noted, these changes also have a darker side. For example, in her address to the 7th Annual Céifin Conference (2004), the Ombudsman and Information Commissioner, Emily O' Reilly noted the negative consequences for Irish society of the stunning and unanticipated changes of the past 20 years. Having traced the most dramatic of these changes, Ms O' Reilly goes on to comment *"Here we are, twenty years later, in the paradise we might have imagined at Céifin 1984 and I ask myself; why are we whingeing? Why after that gargantuan transformation of public and private life in a direction that many of the country's most thoughtful and concerned citizens wished for, is there still an enormous disquiet about the nature of our Irish society and the sort of people that we have become?"*

Her analysis challenges us to re-examine the quantum changes that occurred so rapidly in contemporary Ireland, a challenge re-echoed by President Mc Aleese, at the Céifin Conference of 2005. In responding to this, we are forced to speculate on whether the old values and lifestyle that served so well in the past, have given way to a new value system and lifestyle, that does not enhance the general well-being of individuals, or civic society. In many ways, the new value system and lifestyle are as open to questioning as were those of the old.

3.2 The General Context

There are many features of modern society that make it a stimulating and daunting time to be alive. Major forces at work across the turn of the new century have included economic restructuring in the Eurozone, the rise and fall, and

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rise again of dot.com enterprises, and demographic change. In his introduction to a seminar on **Learning in the 21st Century**, John Coolahan (2004) made the following remarks:

"We have the privilege and the challenge of living in one of the great eras of social, economic, cultural and technological change in world history. It is recognised by international agencies and by national governments that the accumulated and contemporaneous impact of a range of developments indicates that we are in a period of civilisational change, such as the Renaissance and the Industrial Revolution, which has wide-ranging and fundamental impacts on the way of life of society. Such developments include globalisation, the ICT revolution, the unprecedented expansion of the knowledge base in all disciplines, but especially in science and technology, the growth of service industries, and so on. Terms such as the "knowledge society", the "learning society" are being applied to this contemporary and emerging era".

Professor Coolahan's remarks highlight the pulse and the dynamism of many of the current forces that are upon us, forces that are immediately related to opportunities for personal growth and development. Schools are obvious places for capitalising on these exciting and enriching developments. It would be unfortunate if due to lifestyle and destructive patterns of behaviour, some of our otherwise privileged students might miss the opportunity provided by schooling, to be the beneficiaries of this new flourishing era of intellectual and cultural capital.

Recent and emerging developments have brought opportunities that translate into careers that did not exist even a decade

ago. Young people today can choose from a bewildering array of career options and many have the luxury of delaying their career choice, or of diversifying, if not happy with an initial choice. For those with technological skills there are new and exciting ways of accessing and utilising knowledge. For the focussed there is goal-setting and ambition, and probably a balance between academic and healthy leisure pursuits. For others less fortunate, there is the limiting reality that comes from not being literate or numerate or skilled in the use of computers. Added to this, there is the limiting influence of deeply ingrained patterns of low expectation and motivation, low self-esteem and absence of a support system that offers encouragement and goal setting.

It is evident that as this new world is full of opportunity, it is also full of risk. It is characterised by speed of change, fragmentation of markets, lifestyles and communities, and individualisation. According to Stokes (2000) writing for the European Commission (2000):

"The result is a shift, from certainty to contingency and from predictability to impermanence and fluidity. Young people have more choice and more freedom than at any time in human history. But there is also less structure and less certainty - less guidance, less orientation and less support in making the transition to adulthood. Young people appreciate their freedom and choice, but they also want, or need, a framework that offers support and guidance".

In similar vein, Stokes in 2003 remarks:

"The freedom and choice are exhilarating but the uncertainty and lack of structure are unnerving, particularly in that awkward, difficult transition between

child and adult, in which we demand to be treated as individuals, yet contrive so often to be like everyone else".

In many ways, young people today live in the best of times and the worst of times. For those many students who, thanks to their life circumstances and/ or their personal dispositions, have been able to exploit the opportunities that this exciting era has heralded, it is the best of times. For those less fortunate students who, also because of their life circumstances or their personal dispositions, have not been able to avail of the opportunities, there is a relative lessening of their life chances, as the gap between those who succeed and those who do not, increases. Schools are catering for both categories of learners and many shades in between.

Against these global influences others of a more local nature may be seen. These include the changing demography of the Irish labour force in which the participation of women has risen from 39.7% to 51.45% between 1995 and 2005. Increased disposable income in many families has facilitated increased consumerism, travel and property ownership. Concerns have been raised as to the effects of these patterns on young people's care, recreation, diet and supervision. Recent years have also seen an increased awareness of personal rights and a growing tendency towards litigation to vindicate those rights. In tandem, though perhaps unrelated, there is an increased cynicism towards figures of authority. The diminished influence of the church in our society has doubtless contributed to this erosion of respect for authority figures. Yet, respect is such a central concept, that its dilution as a bulwark from an older era is now problematic for school staffs and others placed in authority positions.

In the following paragraphs a number of societal factors are discussed that directly affect schools and the behaviour of students.

These include:

• Part-time employment

• Youth cultures

• Lifestyle

• Popular culture

• Language patterns

• The growth of violence

• The mental health difficulties of some students

3.3 Part-time employment

Among the success features of new school programmes in our second level schools, such as Transition Year (TY), Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), is a work placement component. This dimension is valuable as it gives students a sense of responsibility and independence, an opportunity to relate to adults other than teachers and parents, e.g. their supervisor and others in the workplace. Further it helps to develop a range of important work related aspects that include reliability, punctuality, teamwork, and accountability. It also gives students an opportunity to experience work environments that may correspond to circumstances and conditions in their emerging vocational choices.

However, in the economic climate of the times, another work pattern has gained

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popularity among some second level students. This is where students engage in part-time work. Many of the positives that have been mentioned above can accompany this part-time work. However, there is also the part-time job that is of such a character as to reduce students' attention spans and engagement while in school. This drift, with its impact on school-work, comes from fatigue or from failure to complete school assignments. The consequence of this is that it is very difficult for teachers to motivate their students and harness their engagement satisfactorily, with obvious consequences for teaching and learning.

The work of McCoy and Smyth (2004) on the influences of work while in school is of relevance here. Their research shows that there is increased likelihood for those who work more than 10 hours per week to become Early School Leavers. Further, their data show that anything over 10 hours per week leads to underperformance in the Junior Certificate for all candidates. When it comes to Leaving Certificate, all levels of part-time work have a negative influence on examination performance.

The work of McCoy and Smyth (2004) is partly substantiated by similar research for the same age groups of second level students carried out in the UK by Davies (1999), who writes *"Overwhelmingly the motivation for students to mix work and study is to earn more money. In the large majority of cases this appears to be to maintain a preferred lifestyle, rather than as a result of financial hardship. Depriva-tion does not appear to be a major factor."*

"Whilst engagement in work for a limited number of hours each week (up to 10) does not appear to have any great negative impact, and in some

instances appears to enhance academic performance, beyond this level there is a strong negative correlation between hours worked and examination grades". The evidence seems clear enough. Some work for students while still at school can have beneficial results. Ten hours seems to be the tipping point. Anything more than ten hours correlates negatively with academic attainment.

In some instances, the earnings from part-time work are used to fund a lifestyle that is potentially destructive. In a previous less affluent climate it was often the case that the earnings of young people in a family were an economic necessity. The same may be true today in some households, but for others, the earnings go to fund alcohol consumption, and/or the trappings of an adolescent lifestyle, e.g., mobile telephones, electronic equipment, entertainment, holidays abroad with their peers, and "gear". It bears repeating that part-time work may help to develop growing responsibility, and cultivate a good work ethic, but it also carries the risk of jeopardising school attainment while distracting students from their scholarly pursuits.

3.4 Youth culture

That young people's culture and behaviour is of concern to adults is not new. It is recognised that during the period of adolescence young people will adopt tastes, codes and signifiers unknown or incomprehensible to adults. These include clothes, hairstyles, sexuality, music, technologies and language and, for some, experimentation with alcohol and drugs. In the early years of the 21st century, a young person is part of a global multi-culture. This is reflected in successive fashion or group allegiances

and in the myriad forms of music a young person enjoys today. Each new phase of technology has been embraced with gusto. Brand names and logos, modes of communication such as mobile phones, modes of entertainment such as gaming consoles, personal digital music players and multiplexes all form part of a young person's paraphernalia. In establishing perspective, it is realised that to some extent culture clashes between the generations have been part of the human condition. Yet, it is generally accepted that the lifestyle of numbers of adolescents in contemporary society places an extra strain on relationships between them and their parents and teachers.

Youth is a period to be cherished; the hope is that a balanced maturity may be fostered at this very formative period. The concern is to protect it from some destructive aspects of the subculture such as abuse of alcohol and other substances.

3.5 Lifestyle

One aspect of global youth culture overarches all other influences on young people's patterns of drinking in this country. It is sometimes referred to as Ibiza culture, and its initial impetus derived from UK media dominance in this market. In this culture, and its media representations, heavy drinking, hedonism and a lack of personal responsibility are seen to be part of everyday life, and one drinks in order to get drunk. Findings from a European Survey (ESPAD, 2003) rank Ireland highest among 35 European countries in terms of the numbers of young people who regularly binge drink and the second highest in reported regular drunkenness. Research evidence (Mediascope (www.

mediascope.org/pubs/ibriefs) shows that youths, who begin drinking before age 15 years, are four times more likely to develop alcohol dependence than those who begin at age 21 years. A survey also reported by Mediascope showed that more than 43% of teenagers who began drinking before the age of 14 years later became alcoholics.

Excessive drinking may be linked to a range of antisocial behaviours that include aggressive outbursts, fights, brawls and unbridled use of foul language. It may also lead to accidents that may further place the young drinkers at risk. A recent article by O'Neill, Fadi & Keavney (2005) in the Irish Medical Journal, describes some retrospective analysis of all patients, under sixteen years of age, admitted to Mayo General Hospital with a diagnosis of acute alcohol intoxication. Of the 56 adolescents admitted, 22 were females; 34 males. The mean age for girls was 14.2 years, while the mean age for boys was 13.8 years. These authors comment on the co-morbidity associated with alcohol misuse. This study showed that 30% of those admitted to the hospital were found comatosed, outdoors and alone; 30% had associated head injuries. A third of the parents did not visit their child for 12 hours following admission. They cited anger with the child as the reason for this. The recent report published by the Health Promotion Unit (2005) on Alcohol and Injuries in the Accident and Emergency Department (A & E) in six major acute hospitals in Ireland, makes for very disturbing reading, documenting as it does the admissions to A & E departments and the associated drinking patterns attaching to these admissions.

The figures for young girls who are involved in underage drinking are

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alarming. In the 2003 Irish survey, already cited, more girls (39%) than boys (31%) reported regular use of alcohol. Ireland and Greenland are the only two of the 35 ESPAD participating countries in 2003 where girls are ranked higher than boys in terms of regular alcohol use. Girls in Ireland ranked first in the prevalence of regular alcohol use, followed by girls in Denmark and Austria. (Drugnet, Ireland, 2005) Alcohol misuse may also lead to unprotected sexual activity with serious consequences for the parties involved. For students who are drinking irresponsibly in their leisure time, there is a knock on effect when they come into school. They are either too fragile or too hung-over to participate in their work. They are apt to be volatile and with a very low threshold of tolerance for anything that annoys them. This may lead to impulsive outbursts of aggression or confrontation in response to a perfectly legitimate request or enquiry from a teacher, behaviour ill suited to the smooth functioning of a classroom.

3.6 Popular Culture and its subtle messages

It is difficult for today's young people not to be influenced by the barrage of messages coming to them from the media. Examples include the recurring media message that self-indulgence brings with it enhanced acceptability or guaranteed happiness and enjoyment. There is a suggestion woven through advertising and lyrics that instant gratification is the route to inestimable pleasures. The individual is king and the indulgence of the self is to be cultivated *'because you're worth it'*. Consequences can be ignored is another message that is promulgated. *'Just do it'*. These messages are at variance with values and practices that schools strive hard

to develop in their students. Schools generally try to cultivate in their students a sense of altruism, a sense of team, and consideration for other people. Because so much of learning is developmental and incremental, schools also teach their students that success or mastery is not immediate. These goals must be earned and, perhaps delayed, until some interim steps or processes are firstly negotiated. This is not the message of the media, but is another example of a societal influence that runs counter to values that the school seeks to nurture.

Linked in with the celebration of immediate gratification in the media, is the trend to sexualise behaviour. It is very difficult for both parents and school staffs to promote age-appropriate attitudes and values regarding the sexual development of their young people. Magazines targeted at young readers tend to give a slant on interpersonal relationships that is totally inappropriate. These magazines often advocate or describe sexual practices that are unduly explicit, and that are more appropriately the preserve of the adult world rather than that of a young second level student. The role models presented in these media may not be worthy of emulation. Television and related technology like DVDs also present a series of sexually laden messages. The programmes that go out before the watershed hour may not always be suitable for young viewers. In any case, a proportion of our students enjoy the luxury of having television sets in their bedrooms, so the notion of a watershed hour is not a factor in determining viewing options. There are considerable numbers of students who devote a lot of time to viewing television or DVDs. Ireland has the highest average of televisions per household in the EU, with 53% owning three TV sets.

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The preoccupation of many young people with technological devices such as mobile telephones, Ipods, Play Stations etc bears testimony that we live in an age of mass media with which it is difficult for schools to compete. Devotion to these modes of entertainment and companionship contrasts with an earlier age in society, where it was through team sports or scouts that enjoyment and friendships developed. Team sports and organisations like the scouts help to foster a sense of responsibility and commitment to others with reduced preoccupation with the self. Recent figures, which will be discussed later in this report, show that fewer and fewer students participate in team sports. The scouts no longer attract large numbers of young people. Many of the pursuits today that typify the recreational life of our young students are solitary, or best enjoyed by the individual alone. With a government target to have 60% of women in the workforce by 2010, it is likely that more and more of our students may be alone in their homes for periods of time in the absence of a parent. It is understandable that with changing family practices they develop ways of entertaining themselves or of communicating that are markedly different from their counterparts of an earlier period.

Silence is now a rarity as our world is becoming increasingly noisy. School work is best accomplished in a quiet, peaceful atmosphere. This world of quietude represents a different experience for some young people who have a dependence on buzz, and the high decibel level of the disco to stimulate their senses. With so much easy access to media that bombard our young people with messages which flood their senses with promises of ecstatic pleasure, heightened stimulation, a disregard for consequences (*Just do it!*), and levels of excitement hitherto not experienced, it is difficult for schools to get on with the more sober and rigorous demands of enacting the curriculum in a predictable, orderly environment. It is also challenging for schools, in conjunction with families, to uphold and promote norms of behaviour that are age-appropriate and healthy.

3.7 Language Patterns

In some pockets of society today, crude language patterns are normative. It can be a source of annoyance to have to tolerate ugly language on public transport, in sports stadia and in public places where gangs of young people come together. Certain sectors of the media, through their use of coarse and, on occasion, offensive language, reinforce the apparent acceptability of this pattern. Schools must have a different tolerance level for inappropriate use of coarse language, from that exercised in wider society. Frequently, students address their peers and their teachers in ways that violate norms of courtesy, but in ways that are habitual for them, and with no intention of offering offence. Teachers find great difficulty in adjusting to this, or indeed in tolerating it. They have a professional duty to uphold standards. This tendency to use coarse language in settings and in company where it is totally inappropriate can be at the root of many contentious issues relating to student behaviour in our schools. There is the added fact that young students assimilate slang terms at a pace that baffles and challenges the adult world. Adults may be bewildered or angered by their exchanges with some of our young people. Misunderstandings occur where the adult world is out of tune with the lexicon of youth culture.

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The situation regarding the usage of inappropriate language can be exacerbated where, occasionally, parents who may be in a school to discuss their child's behaviour, resort to the usage of offensive or aggressive language in their exchanges with the child and/or school personnel. This may be triggered by anger or frustration at the apparent helplessness of school authorities to bring a student into socially acceptable ways of behaving. School personnel need to appreciate that for some, the social register is simply different, and it may be that there is no malice of intent. "Strong" language may be normative for some students and their households. What is important is that students learn that certain institutions and settings require language patterns that are appropriate and expected there. School is one such institution.

3.8 The Growth of Violence

Another concern for some of our schools is the fear that violence, so widespread in our society would find its way through the permeable fabric of our schools. A recent documentary on Irish television (Prime Time, November, 2005) showed how violence is no longer confined to sprawling soulless conurbations, but is a blight on some of our most beautiful villages and affluent suburbs. This violence in society comes in a variety of forms ranging from aggressive confrontations to verbal and physical assaults and to the use of weapons. Some of this violent behaviour is triggered by excessive consumption of alcohol or the use of illegal substances. Some of it is attributable to impulsivity and a lack of self-control. Some of it is mischievous in the extreme, and aimed to cause anguish and fear in a community. The violence often represents a form of protest

caused by deep-seated resentment and frustration that life has been so bleak and crippling for some, compared with others. Some of it is learned behaviour, learned in the presence of key others who have displayed similar behaviour. The consequences of violent behaviour are grave.

Violent behaviour in the household leads to the breakdown of harmonious family relationships which are so important for the healthy development of children. Children living in an atmosphere of fear and tension are unlikely to be psychologically available to engage in life in school, albeit that school may represent the good and safe wedge of their lives. Some of our students may live in households that have been wrecked by violence to the point where a significant adult may be out of the household serving a prison sentence or on a barring order. These students carry heavy burdens. As with all students who have personal difficulties, schools are often safe havens for them and school staff usually can be nurturing of them. They display admirable tolerance levels and empathy for their students' predicaments. They also seek to develop, in their students, constructive ways of handling aggression and conflict.

In many ways, making this part of the curriculum challenges schools, but the evidence is that it is increasingly important to develop curricular opportunities in areas like anger management, restorative practices, conflict resolution and character formation, as these new curriculum opportunities have the capacity to develop life skills and dispositions that are personally enriching and have applicability in a wide range of settings. Aggression and violence, as our society

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currently experiences them, are relatively new foci, but the reality is that they are features of contemporary Ireland, and the country is the more diminished for that.

It is now customary to hear medical personnel speak in the public media, with deep concern, about the increase in admissions to hospitals' Accident and Emergency (A&E) units of patients who have been the victims of stabbings and/or kicking in the head. Our Gardaí in common with many members of society share a concern about the lawlessness that is now a feature of modern society. The outbursts of gang fights, foul mouthed rants, street brawls, mindless vandalism, random attacks on innocent victims are not confined to our large cities or urban areas, but are to be found in villages and townlands across the country.

The internalisation of self-discipline appears to be an old fashioned trait and no longer a hallmark of modern Ireland in many spheres of life. There was justifiable outrage recently when unprovoked aggression and violence seemed to be creeping into the world of sport. Some of our high profile sport stars were involved in incidents that ill became the sports, but that, more importantly, also risked the safety of the competitors. The Secretary of Dublin Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), John Costello in his annual report noted that the number of referees' reports containing cases of juvenile indiscipline in 2005 is over 200, which is more than three times the number dealt with in 2004. Costello, like others in leadership roles in sporting organisations, condemned unequivocally indiscipline on the sporting field, and advocated greater responsibility and restraint among the players.

Schools have to work hard to protect themselves against this destructive trend of increased violence. Even a neutral consideration such as school design can contribute to occasions of aggression. Some schools are constrained by serious space limitations which poses a problem in student movement around the school. There are large numbers of students occupying confined spaces at a number of points in the day and inevitably there will be some pushing and shoving. Great vigilance is required to ensure that what is playful and harmless jostling does not escalate into a row or ugly shouting match. Incidents of bullying with a violent dimension may occur in areas of a school where school personnel do not go. Anti-bullying policies must be sufficiently comprehensive and robust to cater for this.

In some areas of society, violence is not too far from the surface. Some schools have students who mirror the patterns of behaviour often found in their communities. For these students, their anger is precariously poised and occasionally there is a flare up. Schools are constantly battling with the dilemma posed by reconciling safety and rights issues with understanding and empathy issues. They need the understanding and strong support of the public to walk this tight rope.

3.9 The Mental Health of Young People

There is increasing evidence to suggest that the mental health of some of our young people is a real source of concern. The period of adolescence is typically a period when some young people experience difficulties in areas such as eating disorders, anxiety, or depression. Figures coming from the National Mental

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Health Information Center in the US, report that studies show that at least one in five children and adolescents have a mental health disorder, and that one in ten have a serious emotional disturbance. Recent work carried out by Martin & Carr (2005) on a sample of children and adolescents in the South East of Ireland shows that the prevalence of mental health problems among their adolescent sample was 26%. Chief among the problems which they identified were those associated with rule-breaking and aggressive behaviour of the type associated with conduct and oppositional defiant disorder. A research study, commissioned by the Nuffield Foundation (2004) which looked at the mental health of adolescents in the UK over the past 25 years, found that there was a trend indicating deterioration in the mental health of the young people in their sample, when compared with a similar research sample of ten years earlier.

3.10   Death By Suicide

There is considerable concern already in this country concerning the figures for young men who die by suicide.

A report from the National Suicide Research Foundation (2004) makes the point that while national data show that boys are more at risk of ending their life, girls are three times more likely than boys to engage in deliberate self-harm. The sample in this study comprised 3,830 students aged 15-17 who were selected from 39 schools in the Southern Health Board Region. Those who reported harming themselves had inferior coping strategies and more life problems than those who did not harm themselves. The behaviours are indicative of high levels of anxiety or depression and not primarily motivated by a desire to die. Commonly reported motives cited by the sample show the fragile state of mind of those who engaged in this seriously dangerous behaviour *"I wanted to get relief from a terrible state of mind"* (79%) or *"I wanted to show how desperate I was feeling"* (52%). The desire to die was cited by 61% of the sample, but, interestingly, the wish to die was not the sole reason for the self-harm. Families and schools that are bereaved know of the anguish and the pain that the death of a young person invokes. Equally disturbing is the large number of people presenting in Irish hospitals following deliberate self-harm attempts. A further recent report from the National Suicide Research Foundation (2004) details the most recent figures for self-harm. The highest rates of self-harm were among the age-group 15-19 year old women. At 613 per 100,000, this rate implies that one in every 160 girls

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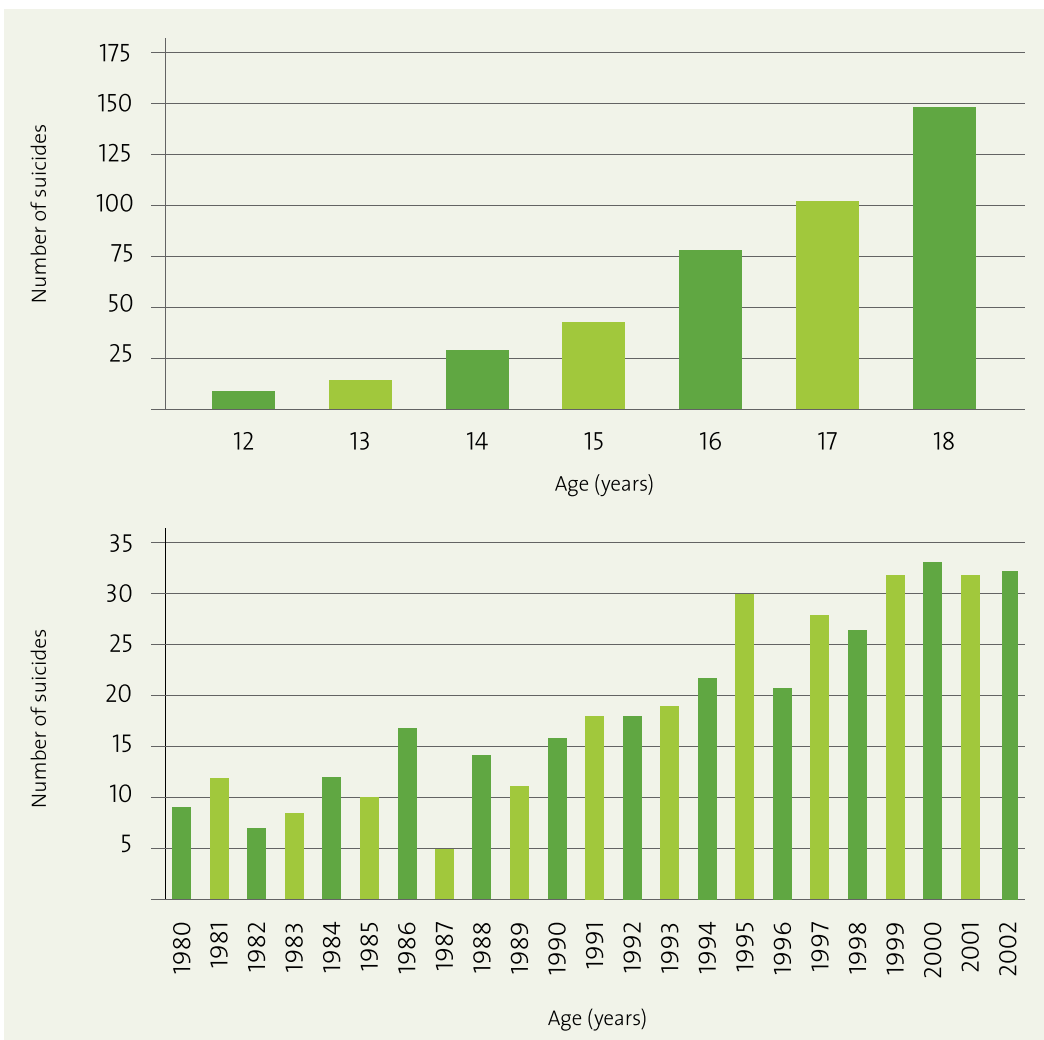
Suicide by 12-18 Year-Olds in Ireland:

· **In the period 1980–2002, 426 12–18 Year Olds died by suicide**

· **Boys accounted for more than 80% of these deaths (346, 81% vs. 80, 19%)**

· **The number of suicides was greater in older adolescents.**

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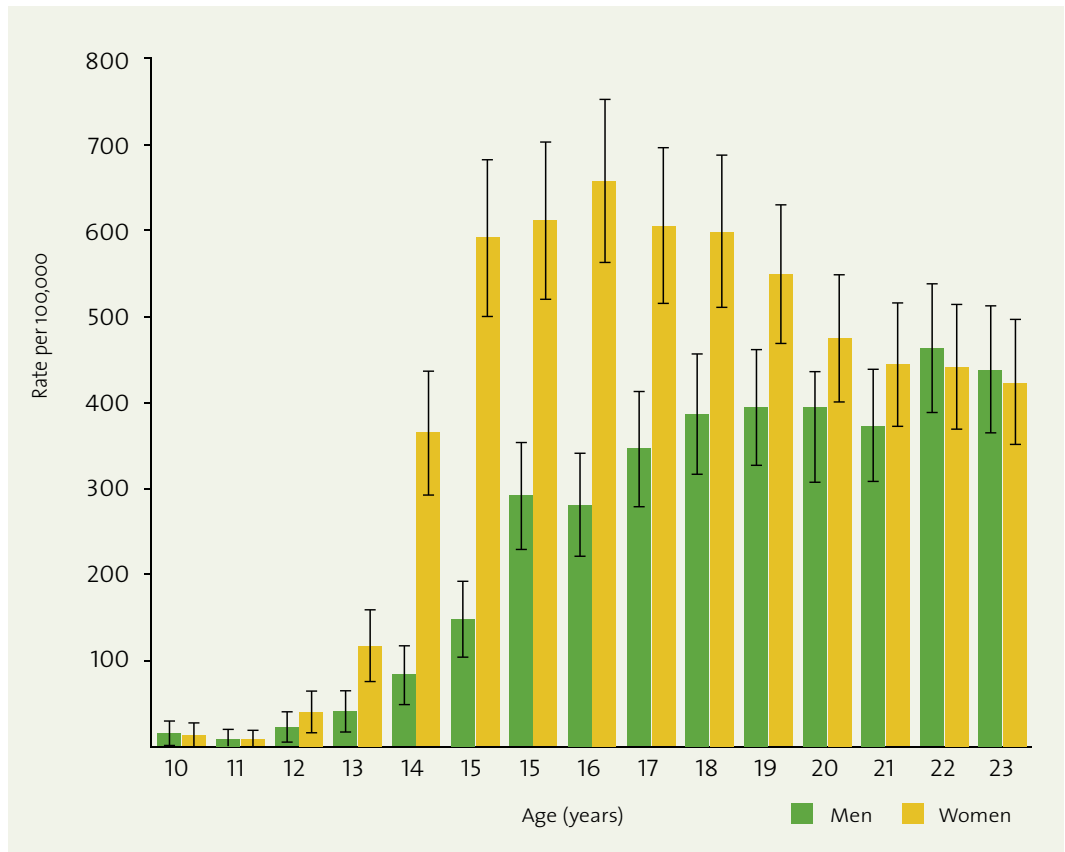
Self harm by age 10–24 years (2004)

in this age group presented at hospital in 2004 as a consequence of deliberate self-harm. One of the recommendations contained in this report stresses the need for additional resources from the Health Service Executive (HSE) to support mental health promotion and the provision of specialist mental health services for this age group. The Health Promotion Unit of the Department of Health and Children, in its submission to the Task Force stressed the importance for us of taking into account the reality and complexity of adolescence and the wide range of environmental

influences on the behaviour of young people. The submission went on to say *"Many of the behaviours 'acted out' in the classroom are linked to events happening outside of the school itself, including family relationships, alcohol and drug use or mental health issues"*. This observation matches that of many of the submissions which we received. It is also in line with oral submissions and discussion with some of the partners in education. Submissions referred to the toll that family discord and changed family compositions can take on young adoles-cents. Some display covert or overt anger;

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others drop out of the learning net and withdraw into an inaccessible world. For schools, there exist constant challenges in providing assistance in ways that are sensitive and timely for their students, while simultaneously fulfilling their core purpose of managing teaching and learning.

The accumulated evidence before us and substantiated in a vast body of literature, is that there are considerable numbers of students in our schools who have mental health difficulties that may not be school-related in their origin. Issues relating to students' personal difficulties are now a pressing reality for the majority of our schools. Schools represent a significant aspect of these young people's lives. The challenge for schools is to provide for both the educational and the well-being needs of these young students. Clearly they cannot do this alone. The Health Promotion Unit suggests that *"all interventions must seek to **work in partnership with the community and families** to support young people to make a healthy transition to adulthood"*.

The plans that are currently underway in the National Children's Office to commission A National Longitudinal Study on Children, which will investigate among other things, the factors which contribute to, or undermine, the well-being of children in contemporary Irish families, will be a real asset and should fill an existing gap in our data concerning the national well-being of our young people. These data, coupled with the National Set of Child Well-Being Indicators should provide us with vital information that will feed into the tracking of national goals in the area of child well-being.

The section above sketched the external influences that are so powerful in the lives of many of today's learners. The Task Force deemed it important to explore these contextual factors, as we are conscious of the multiple origins of student indiscipline. These were of concern to many of the agencies and groups which provided us with relevant data. In the final part of this chapter, we turn to the issue of social disadvantage, which was another recurring theme put to us in our work.

3.11 Social Disadvantage

The recent publication of the DEIS report (2005) is a clear indication of the commitment of the Department of Education and Science to strengthen and extend its efforts to combat the negative correlates of social exclusion. Tackling disadvantage and inclusion has proved very difficult and at times some of the difficulties appear to be intractable. The Task Force welcomes this expansion of provision and is heartened by the intention that the report signals, to adopt a more coherent and harmonised approach involving shared initiatives between the many agencies that contribute to the social inclusion agenda. It also notes the position articulated in the report of the Educational Disadvantage Committee (August, 2005) which also calls for a comprehensive, coherent, integrated approach but, also, for a re-examination of some of the fundamental assumptions underpinning policy interventions to date. The Task Force welcomes the view expressed in the Disadvantage Committee report that efforts need to go beyond the school and the education context if real progress is to be achieved. This view is ad idem with a recurring voice of the Task Force which recognises, that school and the education system, are but one set of players in determining a learner's progress through school.

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Taken from Shulman, 2004 :
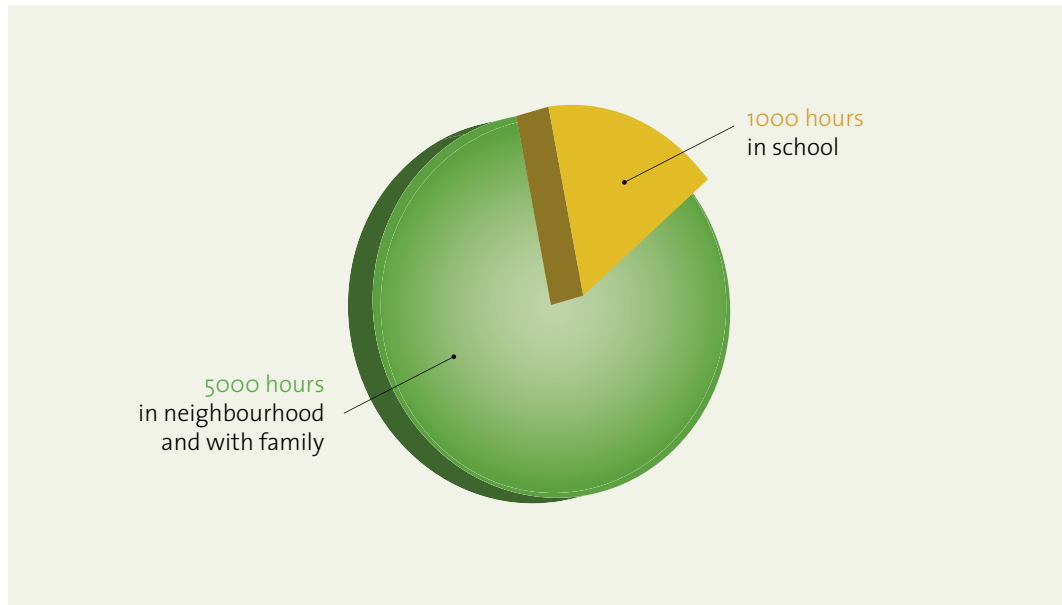
A number of submissions before us give detailed portrayals of the particular challenges that face schools catering for students from neighbourhoods at the extreme end of the continuum of socio-economic disadvantage. These schools, nested as they are in RAPID[2] or CLÁR[3] catchment localities, miss out on the acknowledged advantages that are associated with having a mixed intake of students from a cross-section of socio-economic backgrounds. Instead, their typical enrolment comprises a concentration of students, many of whom have a multiplicity of needs. In her submission to the Task Force, the National Co-ordinator for Disadvantage Initiatives in the Department of Eduction and Science wrote:

"...marginalised children, living in designated areas of socio-economic disadvantage, often present in school with social, emotional, health and developmental needs that are barriers to learning. They may come from homes where poverty exists to such a degree as to preoccupy the family and to affect its ability to enhance life chances. In addition, they are generally young people from the families of the unskilled and unemployed working-class, with a history of educational failure".

The Task Force has had the privilege of visiting some schools located in RAPID areas. We are fully aware of, and sensitive to the obstacles that social context factors pose for these schools. We wish to record that we have been impressed by the good practice that obtains in these schools. They are exemplars of cultures of commitment. Undoubtedly, they are creating capacity for their students. They are, without doubt, enhancing their life chances as evidenced by the destination of their graduates. It would be misleading to suggest that it is only

[2] Revitilising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development (RAPID)
[3] Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtanais (CLÁR)

in neighbourhoods of socio-economic poverty or in all such neighbourhoods, that discipline issues pose problems. The evidence before the Task Force is that in areas of privilege, schools also experience difficulties. It would appear that neighbourhood and socio-economic status are not the sole determining factors. There are difficulties irrespective of social context: what may differ is the scale and the nature of the infringements.

3.12 Cultural Continuity

As indicated above, this chapter has focussed on a clash of cultures: the culture which a school espouses and the countervailing outside-of-school culture. The diagram on Page 36 graphically shows the ratio of out-of-school time to within-school time that is typical for a second level student. It helps us to see, at a glance, the time imbalance that exists between the two worlds. Where there is discontinuity between the two cultures it is a daunting task for schools to reconcile the two. For those many schools, where the within-school and the outside-of-school cultures are compatible, there is a sense of security and predictable, trustworthy reference points for young people. Where this is not the case, there can be misunderstandings and challenges to a school's norms of order and authority structure. Some school staffs must feel like King Canute, who despite the trust and the belief shown to him by his courtiers demonstrated to them the finite nature of his powers. He failed to stem the tide. Schools enjoy society's trust and belief, but their efforts to stem the tide of external influences that laps around the gates of some schools are also finite.

3.13 Conclusion

This section has sought to situate the social context in which many schools function. It would be biased and unfair to suggest that all of these societal factors are obtruding equally in all schools, or on a grand scale. It is essential to keep a perspective here. Many of our informants celebrated their students and indicated their sense of personal fulfilment and privilege in working with them. Considerable numbers of schools are not buffeted by the insidious ills of our contemporary society. School staffs have the satisfaction of working with large numbers of students who behave in a co-operative and motivated way and who live healthy age-appropriate out-of-school lives. They also enjoy the support of great numbers of responsible parents who partner schools in ways that contribute to advancing the work of the school.

The vast majority of students and families hold their schools in high regard. This high regard is not confined to students and their families, but extends to industry and to the corporate world with their readiness to link with schools and create viable networks that lead to capacity building and employment for large numbers of students. Our young graduates are prized not just because of their academic qualifications, but also for their work ethic and reputation of sociability coupled with professionalism. These are attributes acquired in part in school, and in part in their families and their peer groups. There are varying school landscapes with differing issues of concern. We must recognise this and, in so doing, keep a balance in our consideration of the total picture.

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Chapter Four

Institutional Developments

4.1 Introduction

Alongside the accelerated change in the social fabric of our society which formed the focus of the previous chapter, there has been an equally significant range of developments in other arenas. These too form an integral part of the context within which schools function, and as such, warrant our consideration. It is not the intention of this Task Force to tease out the detail of these developments, but it seems relevant to situate them, with particular reference to those coming from the DES in particular, in the overall context of our work.
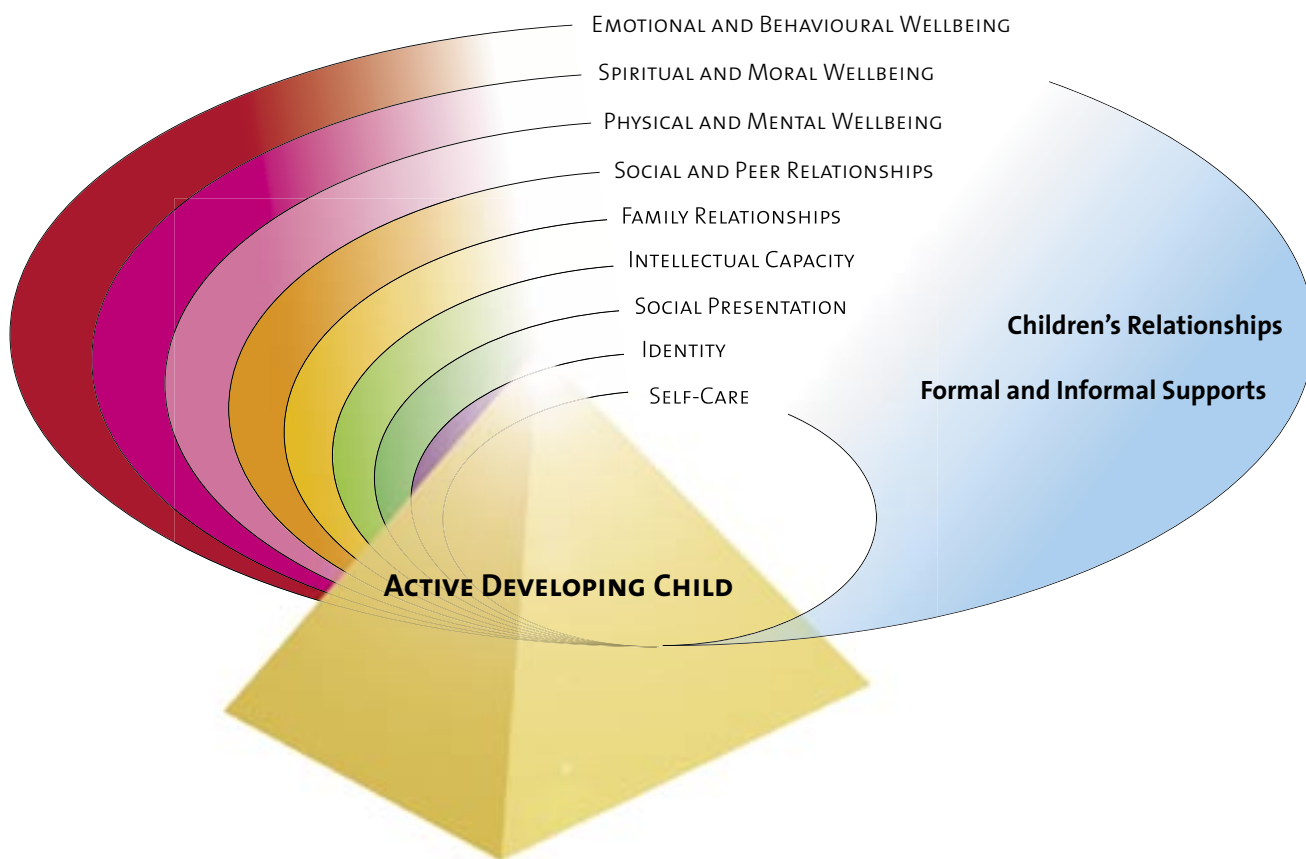
In the year 2005, some 56,792 candidates sat the Junior Certificate. For the vast majority of the cohort, this milestone coincided with fifteen or sixteen years of life in an accelerating economy, nested within a society in transition from high levels of unemployment, emigration and pessimism, to the Ireland of the 90s with its newfound status that made it the envy of fellow EU member states and beyond; the Ireland of Riverdance, of U2, the Ireland of swagger and the "feel good" factor. The year 2005 also marked the completion of some eleven years in the education system for those Junior Certificate students. During that time, perhaps unbeknownst to many of the candidates, there occurred some major developments at official state level, all directed towards improving their lives and educational experiences.

The short overview which follows points to developments that occurred mostly in the education arena, but the Task Force has become increasingly aware in the course of its work, of the multitude of initiatives, directed at young people that are occurring cross-sectorally. The recent report (2005) from Ireland to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, prepared by the National Children's Office (NCO), (www.nco.ie) gives a comprehensive account of the range of new structures that are in place, and it charts the way forward for consolidating and expanding on these many developments. In its envisioning and planning, the National Children's Office adopts a whole child perspective which adds to the appeal of this work for schools. This holistic approach is evidenced in the range of developments articulated in the publications coming from this valuable Body.

The remainder of this chapter offers a resumé of the range of developments that have occurred within the past two decades. These are put forward as follows:

• The Enhanced Status of Children

• Policy Framework

• Legislative Framework

• Social Inclusion Context

• The Establishment of Statutory Bodies

• Department of Education and Science Initiatives

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EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIOURAL WELLBEING

SPIRITUAL AND MORAL WELLBEING

PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELLBEING

SOCIAL AND PEER RELATIONSHIPS

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

INTELLECTUAL CAPACITY

SOCIAL PRESENTATION

IDENTITY

SELF-CARE

Children's Relationships

Formal and Informal Supports

ACTIVE DEVELOPING CHILD

The 'Whole Child' Perspective

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4.2 Enhanced Status for Children

In recent years there have been significant developments in the acknowledgement afforded to the status of children in Irish society.
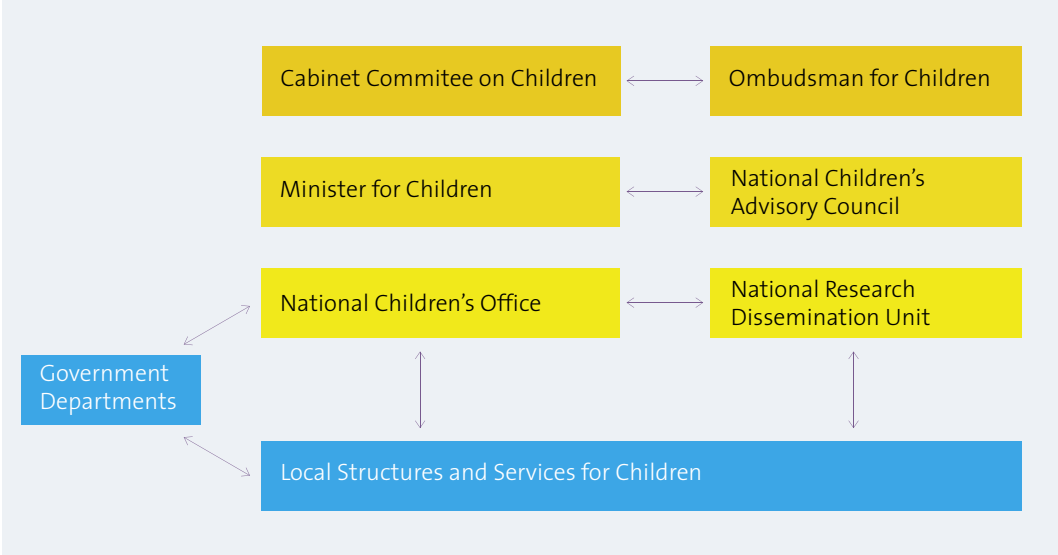
The initiatives documented with such care in the NCO publication of July 2005 bear testimony to the importance that childrens' rights have assumed in political deliberations. Children have been the focus of policy formation and analysis, and of legislation, in ways that are unprecedented. In referring to children, the Task Force follows the stipulation of Article One of the UN Convention which defines a child as "every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained later". The ratification by Ireland in 1992 of the United Nation's Charter on Children's Rights heralded this new and significant era for children. This ratification provided an impetus for the development of a range of new policies.

4.3 Policy Frameworks

In 1993, the Children's Rights Alliance was formed to support the implementation of the UN Convention in Ireland. In 1994, the first Minister of State for Children was appointed. In 1995, there was the establishment of The Ark Children's Centre in Dublin city as a cultural and education centre. 2001 saw the setting up of the Children's Centre, located on the campus of St. Patrick's College, in Drumcondra, Dublin. This Centre has as its focus, research relevant to children, and is now renamed the Children's Research Centre. Also in 1995, the Commission on the Family was set up and, later in 1998, presented its report *Strengthening Families for Life*.

In 1997, *The Partnership 2000, Expert Group on Childcare* was established and published its report, *National Childcare Strategy*, in 1999. In the same year, the document, *Children First-National Guidelines*, was issued. There followed in the millennium year, 2000, the publication of a significantly important strategy document relating to the status afforded children in Irish society. This document, *Our Children, Their Lives (2000)*, was the culmination of work comprising a high level group that included representatives from nine government departments. This landmark document represents the fruits of what the Taoiseach, Mr. Bertie Ahern, T.D. referred to as *"one of the most extensive consultation processes yet undertaken"*. In his foreword to this visionary document the Taoiseach went on to say *"Rooted in the positive vision of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, it represents a different way of doing business, which will, if we all work together, help us become a society which fully values and respects its children"*. As a further indication of the newfound status being afforded to our children, in official circles, the National Children's Office was established in the same year, 2000. This was followed in 2001 by the passing of the Children's Act. In 2003, the Children's Ombudsman was appointed.

One of the obvious implications of this range of developments, occurring simultaneously across different sectors, and predicated on a whole child perspective, is the vital importance of co-ordinated, integrated working, among those agencies charged with responsibility for any aspect of a child's development. This theme was underscored in the recent DEIS report (2005). The Task Force has been struck in

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Cabinet Commitee on Children	←→	Ombudsman for Children
Minister for Children	←→	National Children's Advisory Council
National Children's Office	←→	National Research Dissemination Unit

Government Departments

Local Structures and Services for Children

'The Engine for Change'

the course of its work by the apparent parallel efforts of many professionals on behalf of children and families. It prompts the judgement that there be a more collaborative and coherent approach to avoid the duplication, and indeed the triplication of interventions that have been brought to our notice. The National Children's Strategy has a working model to promote more synergy and integration. The *'Engine for Change'* diagrammatically depicts a way of bringing greater co-ordination and tighter monitoring of efforts that are in many cases aimed at achieving comparable goals.

This brief overview sends out a strong signal that children are no longer to be seen but not heard. An implication of

this enhanced view of children's role as active, articulate participants in their own learning, is that it determines the way in which students interact with their teachers. Their voice is now a central one in schools and where it is heeded, it has a positive influence in establishing a sense of community within schools.

The official status now afforded to children has carried with it implications for schools. Student Councils have been established in a majority of schools, where they play an important role. A related feature of the granting of increased status to children is the trend that now exists for our children to be more vocal and assertive. On occasion, this can present difficulties when there is a misunderstanding between adults

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who perceive the new assertiveness as challenging the no longer tenable belief that teacher is always right. Many school programmes promote the articulation of views, and seek to develop skills of assertion and discussion with an opinionated cohort of learners. Aspects of this, present teachers with new challenges. It can happen that there is a narrow line between assertion and a perceived challenge to authority. This blurring often leads to difficulties for both teachers and students alike.

4.4 The Legislative Framework

There has been an impressive growth in legislation over the last ten to fifteen years that brings with it implications for young persons and indeed for schools. A quick summary of some of the legislative milestones serves to illustrate just how quickly things have moved on, and just how vibrant the sector is. The educational landscape and allied areas have, without doubt, been impacted by this surge in legislative developments. They represent in part, attempts by Ireland's legislators to enshrine the principles of the UN convention in national law. Many of these laws strengthen children's rights. They include:

• The Status of Children Act, 1987, which abolished discrimination against non-marital children

• The Child Care Act, 1991, which deals with children in need of care and protection. The welfare of children is the paramount principle underpinning this act

• The Children Act, 1997,which updated the law on guardianship, custody, and access, and introduced a comprehensive range of measures to safeguard the interests of the child

• Non-Fatal Offences against the Person Act, 1997, Section 24 of which abolished the common law rule under which teachers had immunity from criminal liability for physically punishing pupils

• The Education Act, 1998, which gives a statutory basis to existing arrangements governing the running of schools at primary and post-primary level, including making provision, in the interests of the common good, for the education of every person in the State, including those who have a disability or who have other special educational needs

• Protection for Persons reporting Child Abuse Act, 1998, which provides immunity from civil liability to any person who reports abuse 'reasonably and in good faith' to designated officers in the health system and to any member of An Garda Síochána

• Education (Welfare) Act, 2000, which established the National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) on a statutory basis as the single national body with responsibility for school attendance and provides a comprehensive framework promoting regular school attendance and tackling the problems of absenteeism and early school-leaving

• Equal Status Act, 2000, which provides protection against direct and indirect discrimination outside of employment on 9 grounds - gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller community

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- The Children Act, 2001, which constitutes a fundamental revision of existing legislation governing the treatment of children in conflict with the law and non-offending children in need of special care or protection

- Ombudsman for Children Act, 2002, which established the Office of the Ombudsman for Children

- Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004, which provides for the education of people with special educational needs.

This new legislation secured within a legal framework what in some cases had been hitherto accomplished by custom and practice for a period of years. Its impact on the system has brought with it far reaching implications and has altered the dynamic between the education stakeholders in some fundamental ways. There is now an increased awareness of rights and responsibilities accompanied by an increased sense of accountability and transparency. Its impact has certainly increased the paper work for school staff and has led to increased reliance on legal opinion regarding school policies. One outcome of the new legislation is

that it is now more difficult for school authorities to expel a student, though recent figures from the NEWB report show that for 2004-2005 there were 93 recorded expulsions at post-primary level. Now there is the opportunity for parents, or students over the age of 18 years, to contest such a decision. Current legislation ensures that parents have negotiating rights and responsibilities as full partners in all matters relating to the education of their children. The number of appeals taken under Section 29 in 2004-2005 was 195.

4.5 Impact on Schools

It is obvious that the far-reaching implications of the legislation are going to take some time to become embedded in practice. While this process is unfolding, there are inevitable start-up difficulties for those who lack the knowledge or expertise to interpret and implement its articles in a rigorous and meticulous fashion. While there are difficulties for schools in coming to terms with the spirit and the letter of the legislation, what is clear, is that the motivation to safeguard the education and well-being of the children of the nation is paramount in

Appeal Statistics for 2005 (as at 31st December 2005)

	Withdrawn	Local Resolution	Facilitation	Upheld at Hearing	Not Upheld at Hearing	Total
Post Primary						
Permanent Exclusion	7	1	6	8	37	59
Refusal to Enrol	16	39	11	28	32	126
Suspension	3	0	0	3	4	10
Total	26	40	17	39	73	195

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official circles. Schools need a lot of support in implementing the legislation, and in maintaining a balance between the letter of the legislation and the human and moral enterprise that catering for large numbers of young people entails. There is the assumption that school authorities understand the full implications of the legislation and that they have the expertise to devise policies that are responsive to the aspirations of the legislation. The legislation has increased the workload and volume of paperwork for school staffs in ways that may not always be fully appreciated.

4.6 The Social Inclusion Context

There is now a concerted effort across government departments to work within a social inclusion framework. This too carries with it significant implications for schools. The Lisbon European Council (March, 2000) which identified as one of its objectives the eradication of poverty and social exclusion, set 2010 as a target date by which considerable progress should be made. Towards this end, each EU member state has been required to put in place a National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAP/incl). In response to this, Ireland has established a Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, chaired by the Taoiseach, which works with an inter-departmental Senior Officials Group to ensure integrated and sustained progress on related aspects of the social inclusion agenda. There have been other factors driving this agenda. These include the social partnership agreement, *Sustaining Progress* (2003-2005) and the very influential *National Anti-Poverty Strategy*, first published in 1997 and subsequently revised in 2002. There is a synergy attaching to all

of these policy initiatives, in that they use a common language to document their objectives and their priorities; their strategies and their timeframes and their monitoring and evaluation processes. The Task Force is encouraged by the commitment of government departments to work in a linked and uniform way across the various sectors.

4.7 Education and Social Inclusion

Clearly, education is a major plank within this determined and clearly conceptualised governmental resolve of social inclusion. The Task Force is encouraged both at national and European level to position ourselves in a context of not just "learning for all", but, "lifelong learning for all". The EU Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (2000) noted *"Lifelong learning must become the guiding principle for provision and participation across the full continuum of learning contexts. The coming decade must see the implementation of this vision"*. Learning is now acknowledged as a vital force in the promotion of human resource development. The recently published *Education at a Glance* (2005) demonstrates the rewards that investment in education brings not just to the individual, but also to the collective good. It further points out that a child now aged 5 years, living in an OECD country can expect to undertake between 16-21 years of education during his/her lifetime.

The challenge for schools against this backdrop is to identify ways to promote learning skills and competencies in a cohort which will demonstrate varying abilities, varying levels of motivation, varying levels of family support and

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varying levels of engagement with their schooling. Helping all students to "learn how to learn", in order to become fully participating members of our society and beneficiaries of the unprecedented educational opportunities that are available to them is indeed a daunting task.

4.8 Inclusion of Children with Special Educational Needs

There has been a growing trend nationally and internationally to educate students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in mainstream schools. This development has occurred quickly and without adequate preparation in some cases. Inclusion is a process and involves much more than placing a student in a location, e.g. a mainstream school or classroom. It is only fair to point out that provision in this area is taking shape and progress is being made. The challenge associated with this evolving and sensitive situation is considerable for all concerned - the children and their families, the Department of Education and Science, the allied agencies and statutory bodies linked to provision for children with disabilities, and the schools in the system. Schools are currently maximising their potential to cater for diversity. They are working at not simply enrolling children with SEN, but ensuring that they participate and attain in a holistic way that embraces academic attainment and social gains. Worthwhile educational experiences alongside their peers, in the least restrictive environment is not just rhetoric, but is a function of a school today (cf Education Act, 1998).

Lasting inclusive practice can only evolve gradually, but it may not be for every child. The umbrella Association in the UK that has a particular focus

on children with Social Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBDA), writes in its inclusion policy pamphlet:

For Children and Young People with SEBD inclusion means

- Maximising their access to and engagement with the social and educational settings most appropriate to their present and future needs and aspirations

- Providing environments where they experience a personal sense of security

- Respect and being valued

- Supportive relationships

- Sharing their lives with positive adult role models

- Clear, humane and flexible boundary setting

- Successful achievement boosting their self-esteem

- Opportunities to obtain academic and/or vocational qualifications

- Chance to develop and to exercise personal responsibility

- Making available effective support services and facilities whose purpose is to help the young people overcome potential and actual barriers to a healthy social, emotional and educational development

The SEBDA stance is that for many young people inclusion is best promoted by their attendance at mainstream schools with their neighbourhood peers. But if mainstream schools lack the capacity

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to address the needs of some young people with SEBD, then inclusion can be better promoted in special schools, units, and other alternative forms of education and training. It is important to recognise this, and to reflect on what is the best provision for all students. This is a crucial consideration and will be addressed later in this report.

4.9   Schools and Retention Rates

Present retention rate to completion of the senior cycle is c.83% of the age cohort. The current buoyant economic circumstances seem to be the main barrier to raising this figure higher, as many young people avail of the

employment opportunities that these have generated. The figure 83% has remained stubbornly fixed over the last ten years or so. While there may be disquiet in some circles about the fixed nature of the participation rates, they are remarkable when compared with the figures for some 40 years earlier when only 20% of the cohort went on to senior cycle. Now a commendable 58% of the senior cycle go on to pursue their studies at third level. It is probable that this increase is in part attributable to the abolition of undergraduate fees since 1996, and to the expansion of the availability and range of third level programmes. This is further evidence of the thrust towards
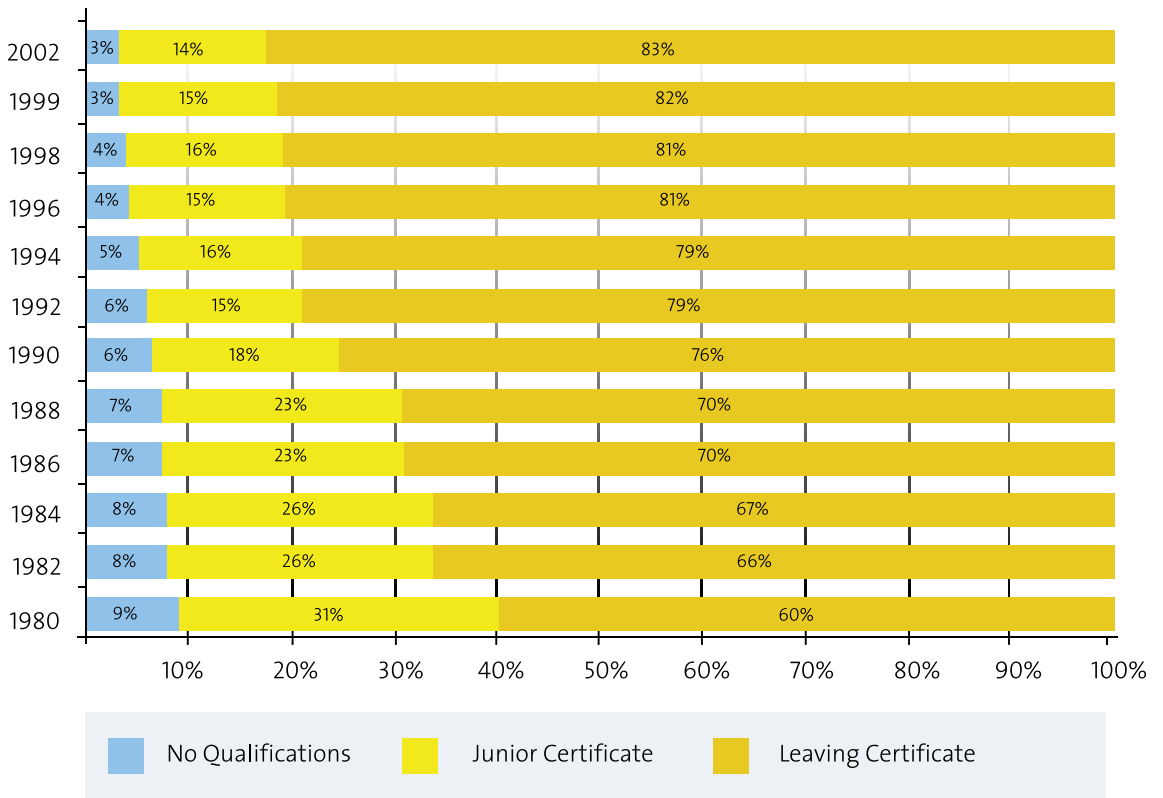
Long Term Trends in Retention at Second Level, 1980–2002

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social inclusion and the recognition of education as a social good.

4.10 Establishment of Statutory Bodies

In parallel to all of the developments mentioned above, a number of important bodies relevant to the education and progress of our students was established on a statutory basis. These include The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA); The State Examinations Commission (SEC); The National Qualifications Authority, Ireland (NQAI); The National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB); The National Disability Authority (NDA) and the Teaching Council. In addition, the role and scope of the Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) has been gradually expanding over the years. This body is an executive agency of the Department of Education and Science and it provides psychological services right across the system at both primary and post-primary levels.

4.11 Early Years Intervention

The report of the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) (2005), on Early Childhood Care and Education, makes the point that despite a sequence of major reports on the theme of early childhood care and education, implementation has been inadequate, as has financial investment to date. The Task Force welcomes the recent interest within official circles in the whole area of early years, and the importance attached to good quality Child Care, as a matter of priority. The Task Force has taken account of the importance of early intervention for children who are at risk of presenting with difficulties throughout their life

in school. It has received a number of submissions documenting early interventions that make persuasive claims for their success. Examples of these include The Incredible Years programme associated with the Lucena Clinic in Dublin and in Wicklow. This is a programme that involves parents of pre-school children, offering as it does support and guidance to parents in an effort to develop their children's readiness for school. A further example of early intervention brought to the attention of the Task Force is The Working Together project currently underway through a partnership arrangement involving The Centre for Educational Disadvantage Research located at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, and three primary schools in Limerick city, located in RAPID districts there.

The Department of Education and Science initiatives targeted at young children, that are outlined in the DEIS report, represent another good example of effective early intervention. There is obvious merit in putting in place proactive interventions rather than having to institute elaborate reactive measures when problems are embedded. That task is much more complex with the passage of time. In view of that, **The Task Force advocates that where possible, interventions occur at an early stage, rather than when difficulties have become ingrained over a long period of time. Where early interventions are in place under the aegis of the DES, the Task Force urges that these be evaluated, and that some longitudinal data be collected to indicate their impact for their beneficiaries and for the schools which they attend**.

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4.12 Department of Education and Science Innovations

Within the Department of Education and Science the period under review has been one of remarkable change, a period which has witnessed unprecedented reappraisal, analysis, consultation and policy formulation. The roll call is long and impressive. It includes two Green Papers and three White Papers on Education; A National Education Convention (1993) and a National Forum on Early Childhood Education (1998) which were landmark events, brought together representatives from all aspects of Irish democratic life to carry out a root and branch examination of the education system. There have been two reviews of teacher education, a process of rolling curriculum reform, the introduction of modern technologies and increased access to all levels of education for minority groups. As a consequence of new legislation there has been a restructuring within the Department itself, and the establishment of some agencies on a new statutory basis. All of these have had wide-ranging implications for schools, and they represent efforts by officialdom to improve and enrich the quality of educational experiences for all. Some of these developments will be explored at a later point.

4.13 Curriculum Innovations

The period between 1990 and 2005 has been a period of curricular reform that has made for progressive developments in both the primary and second level system. Teaching staffs have responded generously to the challenge of implementing these reforms to the benefit of the students pursuing the new curricula. Examples of some of the curricular innovations include the introduction of modern languages into the primary schools; a comprehensive revision of the primary school curriculum; a revision of the Leaving Certificate syllabi; a major restructuring of senior cycle education to include the mainstreaming of the Transition Year Programme (TYP), the introduction of Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), while the junior cycle has seen the introduction of the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP). These programmes were introduced with a set of guidelines, which emphasised the aim of providing maximum flexibility in catering for the different aptitudes, abilities and needs of pupils. All had the express purpose of enriching young people's educational experiences. Most of these developments were accompanied by relevant Continuing Professional Development opportunities for teachers in an effort to introduce them to good effect in our schools. A fruitful initiative was the establishment of Support Teams to help embed the innovations.

In a review of the distinctive strands that are a feature of the senior cycle suite of programmes, Jeffers (2003) cited the following:

- A focus on personal and social development of students

- An orientation to and guidance for adult and working life

- Learning for citizenship

- An emphasis on self-directed learning

- The application of active teaching and learning methodologies

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- A response to the challenge of increasing retention rates

- Closer links between schools and local communities

- Innovative forms of assessment

- Greater autonomy for individual schools

- The promotion of Information and Communication Technologies

- An emphasis on school staffs working collaboratively

- Changing relationships between teachers and students, more in line with a facilitative approach, influenced by models in adult education programmes

The Task Force discussions were interspersed consistently by references to the impact of the various features highlighted by Jeffers (2003) and which were also evident in observations on the JCSP. There will be further reference to the JCSP in Chapter Eight. It is interesting to note that there is such congruence between the vision and aspirations of the programme architects and many of the issues of concern before the Task Force. Perhaps, there is a need for programme implementers to build closer links between the underlying educational perspectives and rationale of these excellent programmes and the nuts and bolts of their delivery.

This vocational orientation that is one of the strands of the programmes is not confined to the world of work, but it runs through the academic components as well. For example, curricular music has a technological dimension in

the knowledge that this may be a prerequisite in the work environment of many in the music industry. Likewise, language programmes now have a focus on aural and oral skills, in the recognition that speaking competencies are required in many spheres of life, and are especially necessary in a global economy that places so much emphasis on communication. The acknowledged competencies of young graduates in this field have given us a competitive edge in the world economy. They also offer some "value added" in an era where our young people are so mobile, and see travel as a built-in feature of their normal life. It is not just in third level programmes that work orientated dimensions develop; they are a feature of our rolling curricular innovations, in recognition of the fact that over 40% of the cohort will not pursue studies at tertiary level. Instead, these students are most likely, in our buoyant times of full employment, to be assumed into the workforce or to an apprenticeship, on completion of their second level schooling.

4.14 Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

This is an era of mesmerising technological development. The Department of Education and Science (DES) has exploited this, and in conjunction with the National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE) has sought to work with schools in an effort to ensure that our students are at the cutting edge of this advance in Information and Communication Technology (ICT). The rolling out of broadband to every school in the land, and the accompanying support offered to teachers represent the serious efforts of the DES to unleash the potential

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that this new era of technology offers to this generation of learners. Many learners are more comfortable with the emerging technology than are their teachers or parents. They access and manipulate knowledge in ways that were unimaginable some short time ago. Large domains of knowledge, hitherto inaccessible to our students are now a mouse click away. This facility involving new technologies carries with it implications for approaches to teaching and learning. It places a strain on traditional modes, and may explain why some students find aspects of school life boring and rigid. The opportunities created by the technological advances are not confined to more gifted or able students, but in real and tangible ways, they offer unprecedented learning opportunities for students with Special Education Needs. Their chances of autonomous, fulfilling lives are enhanced through new avenues created by the breathtaking technological advances of the last decade or so.

4.15   Impetus to Promote Science

Alongside the increasing relevance of ICT as an important facet of contemporary educational provision, there has been a concerted effort to give an impetus to science subjects in our curricula. There have been a number of initiatives aimed at increasing the take-up of science subjects among our learners. This is reflected not only in the curricula at second level, but also on foot of the revision of the primary school curriculum, science is gaining in popularity among our younger learners in the primary sector. Recent participation by large numbers of pupils in a national "Science Week" involving as it did, partnership with university science departments, and

high profile media attention, testifies to the taking hold of a developing interest in science among our learners. Another positive indicator of a blossoming interest in science is the increase in entries to the annual Young Scientist and Technology Exhibition, sponsored by BT. The 2006 Exhibition received 1152 entries, an increase of 8% on 2005 entries.

4.16   Subject Developments

Another development worthy of mention that has occurred during the lifetime of recent Junior Certificate students has been the addition of two new subject areas to their programmes, viz, Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) and Social, Personal, and Health Education (SPHE). In the case of SPHE, its broad reach has the capacity to influence many important aspects of a young person's development. This subject domain combines education and health dimensions. Its descriptor claims that it *"provides students with a unique opportunity to develop the skills and the competence to learn about themselves and to care for themselves and others and to make informed decisions about their health, personal lives, and social development"*. (Social, Personal, and Health Education, Junior Cycle, pg.3).

The NCCA is currently formulating proposals to extend this subject to senior cycle. There is a sense in which the two subjects above have had to struggle to earn the status that they deserve in the curriculum. They were not "examination subjects" for a period of time following their introduction, but CSPE is now examinable at Junior Certificate level. With this added prestige, it is to be hoped that they assume greater focus in the curriculum. There is an acknowledged correlation between curricular

4

provision and student behaviour. For example, the discussion and design of a behaviour charter can be a very active and developmental classroom activity during a CSPE class, work relevant to the theme of the Task Force.

### 4.17   Additional Developments

Other developments that occurred during this vibrant period include the introduction of School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI) at both primary and post primary levels. This development provides schools with the opportunity to take stock of their work and to reflect on areas that require attention or fine-tuning. Linked to SDPI has been the introduction of Whole School Evaluation (WSE). This process involves the whole school community in a systematic

evaluation of the work of the school. Meanwhile there has been the extension of targeted initiatives that were already in place, and the introduction of new strands e.g. School Completion Programme (SCP), most of them aimed at reducing social exclusion. The recently published DEIS report (2005) gives a comprehensive account of these. In 1999, the Points Commission carried out a comprehensive review of how access to further education is determined. Partnerships were forged with the third level sector aimed at opening up routes for second-chance learners and minority groups wishing to participate in tertiary education.

All in all, the decade when our most recent cohort of Junior Certificate students attended school was a period of significant change; change aimed at improving their educational experiences. The challenge posed by these institutional changes has been considerable, but the response of those charged with their implementation has been generous and pragmatic.

Chapters Three and Four have sought to establish the context in which the work of the Task Force is situated. Chapter Three, had as its focus societal influences on life in schools, while this Chapter (Four), offered an overview of some significant institutional developments and responses that are also influential in school life. It is time to examine how these developments have modified the learning environment within the ecosystems of our schools.
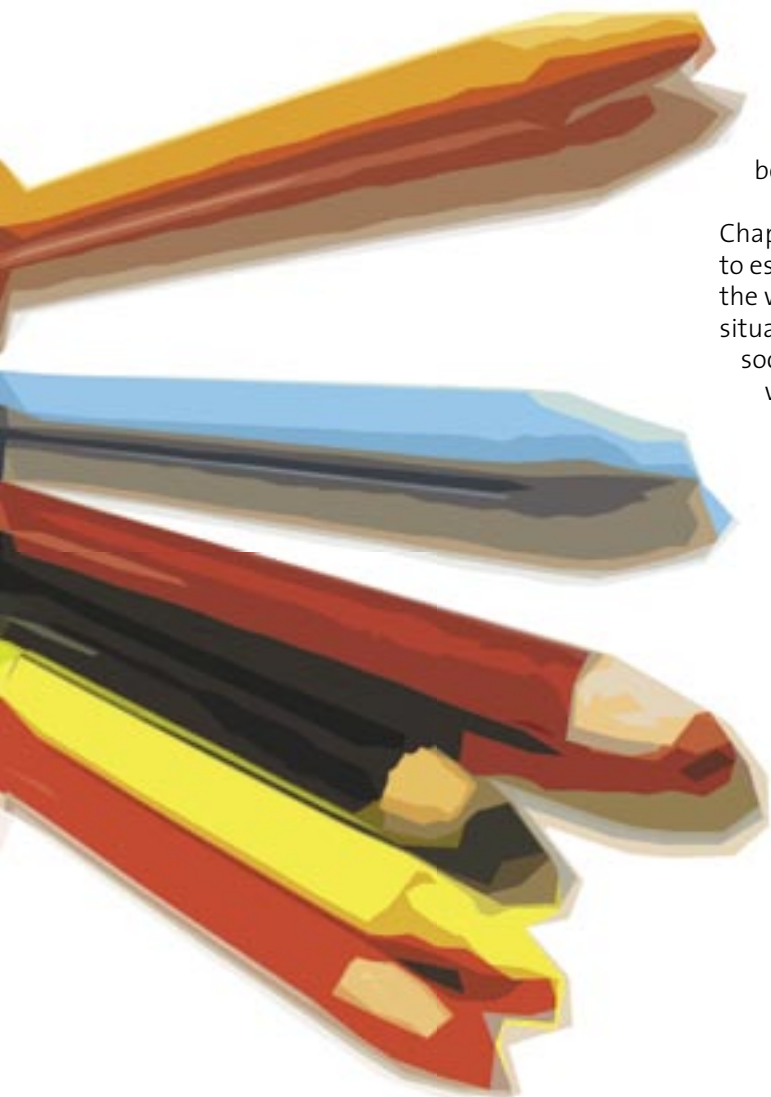
Chapter Five

Term of Reference 1:
The Issue of Disruptive Behaviour and how it Impacts upon
Teaching and Learning

5.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out to address Term of Reference 1 which required that the Task Force examine the impact upon teaching and learning of disruptive behaviour by second level students. In introducing this chapter, there is a number of important points linked to its theme that warrant attention. These points have emerged with clarity in the course of our work and have helped to anchor our thinking as we processed the vast amount of data put before us. They also play a very influential role in determining the final recommendations. The Task Force makes these points at this stage as they are relevant to the theme of the chapter, and they also serve to situate the major thrust of the subsequent material in this report. The points are as follows:

- The vast majority of students in the system conform to a dominant pattern of acceptable behaviour in their schools

- Problems of disruption appear to be more frequent in second and third years than in the senior grades

- It is a minority of students who disrupt the learning opportunities of the majority, i.e. their more conforming peers

- Though caused by a minority, the toll that the disruptive behaviour takes on the school community and especially the teaching staff is a source of ongoing stress, disillusionment and loss of morale

- While many of the incidents of disruption may not appear in themselves to be of undue seriousness, taken cumulatively and on a recurring basis, they undermine the climate for teaching and learning in ways that are corrosive for the school community

- Where they exist, the patterns of disruption are more prevalent in some schools than in others, and are perpetrated by boys more often than by girls

- Some schools are seriously challenged in meeting the needs of a very demanding student cohort, and these are the schools that as a priority deserve any added measures that might be introduced on foot of this report

- The incidents of really serious disruption are becoming more frequent and appear to be carried out by students who have a wide range of needs that mainstream education cannot be expected to fulfil without support from outside agencies

- There is a small minority (c.1%-2%) of students for whom the mainstream

system is patently unsuitable and for whom alternative provision is a necessity

· Disruption is context specific, i.e. it is influenced by variables such as subject domain, teaching methodology and time of day. Students who may be disruptive in one context, may not be so in another context

· The origins of disruption are varied and complex but although many origins lie outside the school, the school is, nonetheless, expected to respond to the disruption, often without external assistance

· Schools need more resources (skilled personnel, time, space) in order to manage misbehaving students, especially if the schools are to succeed in being inclusive and responsive

· Any serious consideration of the issue of disruption must include a systemic approach that has a focus on school ethos, relationship building across the school community, the quality of teaching and learning, school leadership, the classroom management skills of the teaching staff, the suitability of the curriculum, the level of parental support and involvement, and the efficacy of a school's attempts to be proactive in minimising disruption

· Schools that have good structures, well developed pastoral care systems, imaginatively implemented curricula, key staff skilled in diffusing potentially disruptive situations and in extending help to vulnerable students, cope better than schools that lack these

We now move on to discuss in greater detail many of the points noted above, linking them into the Term of Reference which is addressed throughout this chapter. The Task Force has interpreted this Term of Reference as embracing 1) a working definition of disruption, 2) an exploration of the causative factors contributing to disruption, 3) the impact that disruption has on teaching and learning, 4) the nature of disruption, and its implications 5) the scale of the disruption. It is obvious that these are not discrete categories, so inevitably there will be some overlap within the sections that make up this chapter.

5.2 Definition of Disruptive Behaviour

Defining what is meant by disruptive behaviour is fraught and confusing. To arrive at a definition, it is necessary to characterise the purpose and nature of the school as a social institution. Reference has already been made to the functions of a school as per the Education Act, 1998, (cf.cpt.3). However, in simple terms, a school's intrinsic role is to provide teaching and to promote learning for its student body. Consequently, any event or incident which frustrates this process can be characterised as disruptive behaviour.

5.3 Causative Factors of Disruption

The origins of disruption in schools may lie 1) outside the school, as discussed in Chapter Three, and consequently will not be discussed within this section, 2) within the student, 3) within the classroom, 4) within the school as an organisation, or 5) in a combination of these.

5

5.4 Within-Student Factors

There are students in schools who bring to the school a range of personal difficulties. Some come from homes characterised by chaotic parenting practices, and so lack the internalised norms of socialised behaviour that lead to readiness for engagement with school and its processes. They have little internalised discipline or self-control and are unaccustomed to operating within a structured, rule-governed environment. Some come from homes that are hostile to authority figures and their attitude to teachers may be one of passive aggression or open confrontation. Some come from homes in which there is criminal behaviour, psychiatric illness, alcoholism, family disharmony, or a value system that is at variance with that of the school. For such students, the demands of navigating the world outside of school and the world within school are often a challenge that they find overwhelming. They move uncomfortably between the two cultures and may express this discomfort in ways that breach the school's code of behaviour. Misbehaviour in school is often an indication of a personal life history that is sad and bleak, that holds little promise, little accomplishment and little to celebrate.

One factor that students in second level schools share in common is that they are all negotiating the period of adolescence. This is a transitional period in a young person's life between childhood and adulthood. It is a period when young people are working out their identity. This is a process that may involve experimentation with a number of roles. The behaviour of some may involve risk-taking in ways that are potentially destructive. In this transitional phase, some young people may adopt an identity that predisposes them, for example, to be sulky, withdrawn, arrogant, disrespectful towards elders, oppositional, disaffected with course work, and hypersensitive. It is to the credit of schools that throughout this critical lifespan milestone, their staffs usually recognise the transient nature of this period and show tolerance and understanding.

Schools generally create supportive structures for these young people to the point where the majority of them behave as reasonable young people in school. For the minority of students who fail to adapt to the norms of civility compatible with school expectations there are negative consequences for both the young students and for the school authorities. Schools often report that young people who were extremely disruptive in Junior Cycle "settle down" in Senior Cycle, and engage seriously and meaningfully with their studies. This may occur spontaneously or it may be the result of a combination of effective pastoral provision, co-operation from parents, and time investment from key personnel in the school. The realisation that the period of adolescence often brings with it age specific pressures, helps school personnel to keep perspective when sorting out disruptive incidents. It may also help those staff members who intervene in an effort to curtail the unacceptable behaviour, to implement the precept of separating the behaviour from the person. It is also probable that some teachers encounter student misbehaviour which is attributable to medical/neurological factors. This is an area of contention which requires some elaboration in the context of this report. It is examined in the following section.

5.5 Within-Student Factors and the Pathology of Disruption

In the context of today's discourse on school disruption there is an increasing tendency to "medicalise" a range of student behaviours that may, or may not have their origin in any medical or pathological condition. Hence, the distinction between intended rudeness and a verifiable medical/neurological condition is often problematic. Teachers often have a dilemma in deciding whether problematic student behaviour is symptomatic of a "condition" for which the student requires medical/psychological help or whether the behaviour is attributable to ingrained patterns of uncorrected "bold" behaviour, i.e. poor socialisation in early years development. The negative consequences that stem from inconsistent or chaotic parenting are a form of "faulty learning", and they often translate into a range of antisocial behaviours. With proper management and skilled intervention, often on the part of a teacher, especially in primary grades, this "faulty learning" is amenable to improvement, and the student can learn how to behave in a manner appropriate to the social context.

In the immediacy of a busy classroom in a second level school, when a teacher is confronted with "acting out", defiant behaviour or withdrawn, passive behaviour, it is nigh impossible to determine the aetiology of such behaviour. The confusion and misunderstandings that arise from this are considerable, and are at the basis of some school detentions, suspensions and ultimately to decisions to expel a student. The blurred edges persist between "faulty learning", and an identifiable medical /neurological condition requiring added supports. It would be hoped that all

programmes of teacher education would sensitise new entrants to the profession to the probability that in this new era of inclusion, they are likely to encounter in their classrooms, students with an identifiable medical condition. The pedagogic and management implications of this development must be provided for in teacher education, despite the already crowded programme.

5.6 Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD)

Part of the difficulty for class teachers in responding to challenging behaviour lies in the fact that there is a lack of clarity amongst the professionals about certain conditions which students might display. The term Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (EBD) is sometimes employed to designate students manifesting troublesome behaviour. Some professionals prefer to designate such behaviour as constituting Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD). Apart from the different nomenclature, there is the added difficulty that there does not seem to be a universally accepted set of descriptors of these interchangeable designations. In its submission to the Task Force, the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI) expressed the view that *"the term Social and Emotional Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD) is currently considered to incorporate best, all of the elements involved in behavioural difficulties"*. The Task Force found this observation quite persuasive and helpful.

The literature on the EBD/SEBD range of behaviours reflects the absence of agreement in this contentious field of study. Reference to mental health literature suggests that the phenomenon

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of disruptive behaviour is attributable to internal student malaise or disorder. This assumption is questioned in the literature, in that, as already hinted at, it appears to ignore other forces that may be at play in determining disruption. The PSI submission previously cited, made the point that the origins of behavioural difficulties are interactive and vary in degree in accordance with both "within child" dispositions and environmental variables. Visser et al (2003) suggest that the areas of overlap between the fields of education and mental health include key areas like disruptive, anti-social and aggressive problems or difficulties; over-activity, attention and concentration problems; somatic, emotional and related symptoms; peer and family relationships and poor school attendance (para 3.8,pg 16).

As an added example of the confusion for people working in the field, the Scottish Executive (2001) has noted the difficulty in defining SEBD, but posited the following:

"Children with behavioural difficulties are often the least liked and least understood of all children with special educational needs. Whether a child "acts out" or "acts in" they may have barriers to learning which require to be addressed. Children "acting out" may be aggressive, threatening, disruptive and demanding of attention - they can also prevent other children learning. Children "acting in" may have emotional difficulties that can result in unresponsive or even self-damaging behaviour. They can appear to be anxious, depressed, withdrawn or unmotivated and their apparent irrational refusal to respond and co-operate may cause frustration for teachers and other children."

(para.2.13, Better Behaviour - Better Learning, 2001)

The report of the Scottish Executive (2001) went on to outline some of the characteristics of children with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD).

Children with SEBD may:

- Be unhappy, unwilling and/ or unable to work

- Receive less praise for their work and have fewer positive child/adult interactions

- Have learning difficulties or be under-achieving

- Have poor social skills and fewer friends

- Have low self-esteem

- Be emotionally volatile

- Be easily hurt

(para 2.14 Better Behaviour - Better Learning, 2001)

The area of SEBD becomes even more complex when one considers whether it falls into the category of Special Educational Needs (SEN). The Special Education Circular SPED 02/05 issued to Boards of Management, Principal Teachers and all Teaching Staff in Primary Schools includes emotional disturbance and/or behaviour problems as a low incidence disability. It is reasonable to assume that when a comparable circular is issued to second level schools that the same classification will obtain.

The implications of this are important. They imply that schools may be able to draw down supports to help them in taking "all reasonable steps to meet the educational needs of a student". This will

be contingent on the completion of the staged process of determining whether a student has or has not a Special Educational Need. If the assessment process verifies that a student has a Special Educational Need, steps will be put in place, in conjunction with the Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) from the National Council for Special Education to formulate an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for the student. With the supports in position to translate the IEP into reality, it seems reasonable to anticipate that schools will be expected to tolerate manifestations of the condition that first prompted the concern that led the school and/or parents to engage in the process of assessment and its consequences.

Greater understanding is needed by school staffs in interpreting the behaviour of some students with Special Educational Needs. Offence may be taken where none is intended. As pointed out above, the behaviour of some students may be attributable to learning difficulties or emotional difficulties and not because a student is disrespectful or confrontational.

The Task Force is at pains to make it clear that it understands that it is not all children with SEN who constitute disruptive students in a school. Some areas of special need are coterminous with manifestations of behaviour that interfere with orderly classroom and school patterns. What the Task Force wishes to stress is, that there is a lot of confusion in differentiating between behaviour which represents a wilful disregard for acceptable norms, and that which is a manifestation of a Special Educational Need.

Schools catering for numbers of students with Special Needs require a lot of

support and guidance from experts in the area of special education. The Special Education Support Service (SESS) with designated responsibility for this area has a lot to contribute to this evolving and perplexing area. The above short account serves to demonstrate just how difficult it is to speak definitively on within-student factors linked to disruption and its behavioural manifestations. It is important to appreciate just what a minefield the area is, as policy and provision are influenced by understandings/misunderstandings of it, and its ramifications for teaching and learning.

5.7   Within Classroom Factors

Some of the origins of student disruption lie within the classroom. The classroom is an ecosystem in which some young people feel inadequate. Some students may have difficulty in mastering the curriculum in specific subject areas with consequent loss of self-esteem in the presence of their peers. This is very humiliating for students who wish to present as competent in the full gaze of their social group. A perceived sense of failure and frustration may impel them to lash out and behave inappropriately and offensively, with their negativity directed at the generally well-meaning teacher.

Some students can experience high levels of boredom and though motivated to be co-operative and compliant, begin to drift off-task and behave in a heedless and disengaged manner. The enactment of the curriculum should be differentiated to suit the range of competencies and learning points of the class of students. Some students will have had a range of supports while in the primary school that are not as

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visible or accessible to them in their new environment. For these students, there comes a point, when their pent-up sense of helplessness and bewilderment is such that they, too, disrupt in ways that jeopardise harmony and progress.

Not all of the within-classroom factors as sources of disruption lie with the students. School policies linked to streaming, banding or setting can result in some students being placed in classes that are perceived among the student population as catering for less able or less motivated learners. Often in these classes there is lack of engagement with the curriculum and students see the class as a "doss" and are very likely to be off-task. There is the added risk of premature labelling of students placed in these low attaining classes, with possible consequences of low self-esteem. Apart from the policies on streaming etc., the curriculum may appear to students to be either, too demanding, too boring or too irrelevant to their lives and their aspirations.

There are individual teachers whose classroom management skills need to be improved or modified in ways that support the smooth functioning of lesson presentation. Likewise, there are teachers who would benefit from some support in the skills of lesson presentation. It can also be that there are some teachers whom students perceive to be partisan and not even-handed in their interactions with all students. This perception breeds resentment and may lead to uncontrolled outburst or to hostile withdrawal of co-operation from those students who rail against what they perceive to be injustice or disrespect meted out to their peers. The relationship-building that supports teaching and learning is a reciprocal process that

requires co-operation from both student and teacher to help it develop into a positive and sustaining aspect of classroom life. Finally there are individual teachers who have dedicated themselves unstintingly to their students, and their teaching over a period of time and who go into "burn-out", from the sheer unrelenting demands of being responsive to students who, in some cases give little back. (Noddings,1993)

5.8 Within School Factors

The culture and ethos of a school have a pervasive influence across the school community. Schools that practise high levels of care and support, that maintain a focus on quality teaching and learning, that give careful attention to their curriculum, that have good structures in operation, and that engage in a meaningful way with parents, are the schools that are less likely to experience severe levels of persistent disruption. These are schools that have in position a range of measures and approaches that act in a preventative way to ward off frequent occurrence of disruptive incidents. When breaches of discipline occur, they have the capacity to resolve the issues in ways that are developmental and constructive for the misbehaving student/s.

There may be from time to time, a few schools in the system that undergo a difficult period in their attempts to function effectively. Such schools may not be models of good practice on all criteria related to the prevention and management of disruption. This can be attributable to a change in leadership where good practices are allowed to slip or have not been instituted in the first place, with negative consequences for

both staffs and students. These leaders and their schools require help and guidance to get them back on track.

The demands on schools today to cater for the diverse needs of a diverse cohort require not only material resources, but wise, skilled, good humoured, mentally strong, balanced personnel. In the newly evolving legal and inclusive environment they need wisdom and discernment and good judgement to help them to make some serious decisions on behalf of their students, especially their most vulnerable students. The decisions they make will carry life-changing influences for their students. Schools are aware of this, and it is for this reason that recurring disruption of a serious nature weighs heavily on those charged with managing behaviour. In some instances they will be forced, following repeated but unsuccessful efforts to make things better, to take the view that it is not in the best interest of a particular student, or perhaps the best interest of his/her peers, for that student to continue in that school. In initiating a process to exclude a student or to place him/her elsewhere, schools know that they may be curtailing a young person's life chances. The values that a school espouses play an important role here. For those values to prevail when it comes to catering for the needs of a repeatedly recalcitrant student, schools need not only indefatigable tolerance, but also, a broad range of supports and resources to make the values endure and bear fruit. For school leaders who carry the main responsibility, in conjunction with a Board of Management, for a decision to admit, re-admit or exclude a student, there is a need for support and trust from his/her staff. Equally, a school principal needs empathy and understanding towards his/her staff who

will be central in the implementation of these serious decisions. Collaborative cultures help. Emotional intelligence helps. Vocational commitment helps. The dynamics of the school as a workplace are influential indeed in determining the course that disruption may take.

5.9   Combination of Factors

The sections above give a brief sketch of some of the sources of disruption in second level schools. They should not be construed as stand alone causative factors, as they often operate in interaction with each other and are so intertwined, that intervention is often required on a variety of fronts. The important point for the purposes of this Term of Reference is the recognition that disruption must be considered in a systemic way and not confined to a focus on the student who is causing the disruption. The acclaimed Framework for Intervention (FFI), originating in Birmingham (2001), uses a Behaviour Environmental Checklist as an initial step in tracing the possible origins of student misbehaviour (cf Appendix 6). The use of this checklist points to areas that are easily amenable to resolution without invoking elaborate steps to do so. The areas covered by the checklist include whole school policies, classroom organisation and management, rules and routines and out-of-classroom behaviour. Data gathered through use of the checklist act as a platform for discussion among relevant members of a school staff. This structured and collaborative approach helps devise solutions that are linked to the source of the difficulty and draws on the collective expertise that schools have, but may not always fully utilise. In many cases, there is little need for further

5

interventions beyond what can be provided within school, if it is exploited.

The Task Force advocates the adoption of a systemic approach to an analysis of disruption in the belief that this not only ties in with a whole school approach but is also effective. Where schools perceive that they have not got the capacity to explore and contain their disruption within tolerable limits, they should not be reluctant to declare this to the Board of Management. The consequences of failing to do so are too damaging for the school community.

5.10   The Impact of Disruption

In the interim report of the Task Force in July 2005, the term "low level disruption" was used to describe a range of behaviours that occur on a regular basis in an increasing number of schools. It has been drawn to our attention that to describe the range of behaviours thus, is in some way to trivialise it or fail to appreciate its impact. The Task Force is very aware that the behaviours are not in the least trivial nor are they neutral in their impact. Rather they serve to impede a teacher's capacity to teach and a student's opportunity to learn. The whole tempo and rhythm of a lesson are disrupted due to the frequent, inappropriate interruptions from a student or group of students who may be apathetic, angry, hung-over, bored, bewildered or simply unsocialised in the norms of courtesy or respect. Teachers can have their teaching methodologies compromised to the extent that they hesitate to adopt certain approaches, in the knowledge that to do so, would threaten the precariously balanced classroom order. Precious time is lost in reprimand and hitherto motivated

students may either drop off-task, abandon their engagement and possibly join in with the disruptive minority.

The well-behaved students, like their teachers, are impatient with the disruption caused by their peers. In extreme cases, they manifest their frustration by leaving the school entirely and enrolling in another school. Where student attrition occurs, there is a loss of morale for the staff in the school that is adjudged to be failing in its efforts to curtail its disruption. There is an inevitable undermining of the confidence of the parents who are not in a position to move their child, nor inclined to move their child elsewhere. What they wish is for the disruption to be dealt with in a way that eliminates it for good and for all.

Where efforts at creating a suitable teaching and learning climate fail, the teacher cannot enact the curriculum in accordance with his/her plan, and, all in all, there is an infringement of the rights of the majority to learn, and of the teacher to teach. This point was made over and over again to the Task Force. Schools need to have a repertoire of approaches to help turn around the unacceptable behaviour of the minority. Otherwise the patterns of disruption seem to escalate and become endemic. Ultimately the incessant nature of the disruption takes its toll not only on the quality of teaching and learning in a school, but also on individual teachers. These teachers experience work-related stresses that can lead to illness that precipitates early retirement from the profession, or the option of a career break that otherwise might not be called in. Newly qualified teachers (NQTs) sometimes start to reassess their choice of career

as their professional life is turning out to be other than what they envisaged.

It is not always that disruption is a school wide phenomenon. It can be that the disruption is confined to some individual classes. The reasons for this may be due to a range of variables that could include curriculum issues, the unpredictable way in which some classes simply are more difficult collectively than others, the time of day, the classroom facilities or lack of availability of resources. But it is also the case that there exist some individual teachers who experience ongoing difficulty in presenting classroom work in a way that engages the interest of students. The result is that there is constant disruption in the classroom with little progress in assimilation or mastery of the subject for students. Where this is the case, there is concern among the students, parents and the teacher's colleagues. This is an issue that requires sensitive intervention from Management in a way that is supportive and understanding. Measures should be put in place in an effort to help the struggling teacher to improve the requisite skills and competencies necessary to create an orderly and harmonious environment in which to teach. Ideally, there should be access to peer support and coaching within the school, but the tradition is more one of teacher isolation. Cultural changes aimed at developing a culture of more collaborative peer support and the sharing of expertise and professional concerns are to be encouraged in schools. Where internal efforts to ameliorate a staff member's situation are not successful, then help from other sources needs to be invoked. This may include participation in a Continuing Professional Development programme or working

in conjunction with an experienced colleague from a relevant Support Service.

The impact of school disruption has serious consequences for the academic attainments and social development of large numbers of students. School disruption undermines the smooth functioning of a school community and for many, especially, for the teaching and support staff, it is a major stressor and a source of frustration and disillusionment that may eventually lead to burn out and illness. For the well-behaved peers it is a source of frustration and perhaps resentment. They want the disruption to be eliminated and may be impatient with their teachers for not being more effective in their efforts to win over the disruptive students into more conforming ways.

For the young people who engage habitually in antisocial, disruptive behaviour it is likely that their life chances will be seriously compromised as a consequence of their failure to adapt to the dominant patterns of acceptable school behaviour and those of civil society. It is also a very serious matter for civic society itself. It is important that our young people acquire the norms of civility and internalised self-discipline that fit them to live as viable and participating members of a democracy. In the absence of fundamental civilities, these young people are destined to lead lives that place them at risk of underachievement and with a propensity to social ills. They also pose a hazard for the well-being of society. It is therefore important that schools, recognised as they are, as a major agent of socialising, receive adequate support for their efforts from the Department of Education and Science, but equally importantly, from

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society at large. To quote the African proverb *"It takes a village to raise a child"*. Appropriate student behaviour is in everybody's best interest.

5.11 The Nature of Disruption and Some of its Implications

The Task Force received very informative data on the nature of disruption in the many submissions that came before it. Task Force members brought with them a wealth of knowledge regarding the nature of disruption in schools today and how to deal with it effectively. They also had a well-earned track record in dealing successfully with it. These skilled practitioners brought great credibility to the consideration of this Term of Reference and demonstrated insights developed through their hands-on experience. The Task Force is confident therefore, that its portrayal of the nature of disruption is accurate and representative.

The range of behaviours that is typical in disruption prone classes includes:

- Non-stop talking

- Coming late for class

- Ongoing failure to bring relevant class materials

- Constant challenging of teacher authority

- Ignoring the presence of the teacher in the classroom

- Blatant refusal to follow instructions or to comply with requests

- Throwing paper aeroplanes/pens/objects

- Walking aimlessly around the classroom

- Using inappropriate language

- Making noises/humming

- Rummaging in bags

- Taunting and pushing

- Shouting each other down/slagging/offending remarks about a student's mother, siblings or other family members

- Eating, and chewing gum

- Cyber bullying and using mobile telephones in ways and times that are inappropriate

It is not difficult to imagine the inroads that disruptive student behaviour, such as that just cited, makes on effective teaching and learning. The TUI delegation in a presentation to the Task Force made the point that behaviour that would once have been classified as serious or "high level" disruptive, was now classified as "low level" disruptive. In other words, the bar of acceptable behaviour seems to have dropped with the passage of time, and behaviour that was exceptional some time ago is now normative. The tolerance levels that school staff display towards disruptive behaviour have had to alter, with negative consequences for teaching and learning, heightened frustration and a sense of disempowerment among the school community.

Other sources pointed out the difficulties that schools experience in trying to

negotiate persistent disruption. Many schools appear to feel helpless and are of the view that the disruptive student has the high moral and legal ground. The Task Force received some angry submissions that documented frustration and incredulity that matters had reached such an impasse. Other submissions lamented the difficulty experienced by some schools in enlisting the co-operation of parents in their efforts to turn around unacceptable student behaviour. By contrast, submissions also stressed how difficulties could be resolved satisfactorily, where all parties to an incident or a dispute worked collaboratively and respectfully towards a positive outcome.

The data before the Task Force on the issue of disruption indicate that there is a continuum of disruption that ranges from the kinds of behaviour already cited, to rare instances of extreme behaviour, with indifference, apathy and passivity in between. At the extreme end of the spectrum are behaviours like:

- Threats to teachers, and damage to their property

- Fighting and physical assault of peers

- Open defiance of an insolent and deeply offensive nature

- Remarks to teachers of an overt sexual nature

- The use of foul or obscene language with no regard for boundaries

- The carrying of dangerous weapons into the school environment

- Efforts to sell illegal substances in the school environment

- Vandalism and theft of school property

- Bullying of all kinds to include homophobic bullying, harassment and intimidation of others

It should be stressed that the incidences of such serious breaches of discipline are rare, but appear to be increasing in their frequency. The data supplied to the Task Force suggest that these, in effect, are more easily dealt with because they are more clear-cut, and in a category that warrants decisive action. The seriousness of gross indiscipline of this magnitude is such, that nobody in the school community could condone it, or dispute its gravity. The incidents tend to pose severe risk to the safety and well-being of teachers or peers. While there can be no disputing the gravity of such incidences, there is the sense among school personnel that it is very difficult to process and bring satisfactory closure to a troubling incident. The legislative implications have made the observance of due process a prime consideration, so in the aftermath of a serious breach of discipline, there is a period when the matter is "work in progress". This can be undermining for a school staff, and disconcerting for the students and parents, while for the Board of Management, there is the need for immediate action and for meticulous handling of the situation in all its aspects.

The impact of a serious breach of misbehaviour can be a defining moment for a school. It tends to call into play the totality of a school's response system for dealing with misbehaviour. It may put the school's code of behaviour to the test, but equally importantly, it demonstrates the school's value system and resourcefulness in dealing

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with all aspects of the incident. It is indisputable that schools must have a tolerance threshold. Our evidence is that while schools try to do their best for all students, and this includes the seriously disruptive, they are, on occasion, caught in the dilemma of balancing the rights of the well-behaved majority against the rights of the offending minority. There are also issues of health and safety that schools now have built into their policy structures. Schools, especially those with an inclusive and pastoral ethos, typically invoke a range of measures and sanctions aimed at changing the behaviour pattern of the troublesome student and keeping him/her in school. Key people invest a large amount of time, energy and expertise in finding approaches to disruptive incidents that protect the rights of the focussed and engaged students while at the same time not jeopardising the education and life chances of the offending student/s. This can be a difficult circle to square.

If the decision of the Board of Management is that the school must move to "permanently exclude" a repeatedly offending student, this decision is one of last resort, and is not taken lightly. There then begins a process that schools find stressful, time consuming and disheartening. However, before this critical juncture of permanent exclusion is reached, there is a series of sanctions and measures that a school typically adopts to curtail unacceptable behaviour. These vary from school to

school, but generally include a ladder of sanctions depending on the gravity of the misbehaviour. Typical examples are notes in journals, an "on report" card system, lines, in-house suspension, temporary out-of-school suspension. The point was made repeatedly to the Task Force that, in many instances, out-of-school suspension is often more of a reward than a sanction. By contrast, some suspensions involve missing an enjoyable activity with peers, and when this is the case, the suspension can be corrective. Co-operative parental involvement at a certain stage can be very effective and preclude further disciplinary incidences.

5.12 The Scale of Disruption

It is clear that there is great variation across the system in how the levels of disruption are distributed. The Task Force was helped in its examination of the scale of disruption by a number of sources. These are now presented and their data reported. A very comprehensive survey carried out by the ASTI (2004) indicated that incidents of disruption in the classroom were caused most frequently by a small group of students, while some incidents involved just one student (cf Appendix 7). By contrast, some submissions to the Task Force portrayed classrooms in which it was nigh impossible for teaching and learning to proceed unimpeded due to the pervasive lack of interest and engagement of a considerable number of students. The ASTI survey reported that

Number of Appeals for Permanent Exclusion

2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
28	32	34	53	59

in the academic year of the survey (2004) some 71% of the respondents had *"taught classes in which some students engaged in continuous disruptive behaviour"*.

Another source of data that contributed information on the scale of disruption came from figures made available to the Task Force by the Department of Education and Science. Extreme cases of persistent disruptive behaviour have led to school authorities invoking Section 29 of the Education Act as a measure to protect the teaching and learning environment. Data on the numbers of appeals since 2001 suggest that there is an increase in the numbers of students who are the subject of a Section 29 appeal.

The fact that a school embarks on a Section 29 process suggests that all in-house interventions have failed to turn around the misbehaviour that has led to invoking the legislation in the first place. The ramifications of this process are serious for all involved. While appreciating the confidentiality of the detail of these appeals, an in-depth analysis should provide a valuable source of data relevant to policy measures linked to provision.

Yet another source of data came from the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB). A recent research report carried out by MORI on their behalf (2005) gives a breakdown of the 93 expulsions in second level schools across their five regions for 2004/05.

It is interesting to note that in Munster there was a total of 33 expulsions compared to 3 in the area designated North/North West. Further analysis is required to get behind the discrepancy

NEWB Region	Total
Dublin City	17
Leinster North	21
Leinster South	19
Munster	33
North / North West	3
Total	93

(Table 4.5, NEWB Report (2005))

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in the figures in Table 4.5. Further data from the survey show that on average there were 21 suspensions per second level school in the year 2004/5.

Following the call for submissions in the national press, some interested parties conducted local research that included samples that are less extensive than the substantial and comprehensive work of the ASTI. The ASTI findings at national level are supported, however, by the findings gathered in the smaller samples. One such piece of work was reported to the Task Force by a sub-committee of Co. Donegal Vocational Education Committee who carried out a survey of 409 teachers. Further information related to scale comes from The Centre for Education Services at The Marino Institute of Education. The valuable submission from this Centre contained data on a survey which members of their team had carried out in four locations. Their sample of 131 respondents included both principals and classroom teachers. The survey found, inter alia, that over 80% of the respondents were of the view that the incidence of disruptive behaviour had increased over the past five years.

Approaching the issue from a different perspective, the National Educational

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Psychological Service referred to the difficulty in determining prevalence of children with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulty (EBD) because as already discussed, definitions and thresholds vary. They cite figures ranging from 20% to 10% to 5%. Consultations with academic researchers in both Scotland and England who are the leading experts in the complex area of Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulty (SEBD) and allied provision, put the figure at c.10%. One consultation referred to the statistic, substantiated by a sound research base which estimated that there is a minority of children with behavioural difficulties - 0. 4% to 0.6% of the school going population, for whom the mainstream school, at no point is suitable and for whom it is likely that residential, high security provision is required.

A submission from a principal in a school in a RAPID area in west Dublin, made the following observation *"within our catchment area in any given entry cohort we would usually have 1%-2% of pupils who are unable to handle mainstream schooling - these are pupils who cannot handle the size, institutional nature and structure of a second level school. I firmly believe that there is a need for centres other than schools to provide education in a small number of cases as is available in other jurisdictions"*. This extract is totally in line with the view clearly articulated to the Task Force by researchers with years of practical well-grounded school experience, that these children require special provision on an ongoing basis; provision that in some extreme instances needs to be of a residential nature.

There were individual schools that engaged in data gathering among the staff while others focussed on data gathering among students. In a very insightful and considered submission, a large co-educational voluntary secondary school, catering for a large number of students in a prosperous and expanding urban centre in Munster, reported that in any year cohort of approximately 200, there are 5-10 students who *"present with acute behaviour problems"*. This figure represents an increase from a similar survey conducted in 2001/2 which estimated that then the figure was 4/5 students in any year cohort, who required extra measures to integrate them successfully into the work of the school. The data showed that the majority of students in the same school are *"exemplary in their behaviour"*, but a well-argued and entirely reasonable case was made for a range of provisions, both on-site and off-site, that are necessary, if the needs of students in the school's catchment area are to be met. The Munster town is representative of other conurbations where there are clusters of schools with similarly pressing needs.

By contrast in size, a Community College, in a coastal town, caters for fewer than 300 students with a ratio of 3:1 female to male students in its enrolment. The students come from the seaside town and from the rural hinterland. Some research carried out in this school, also, in response to the call in the national press, documents the frustration of the majority of well-behaved students with the disruptive few. Their frustration is further exacerbated where the efforts of the teacher are ineffective in bringing the behaviour into acceptable limits.

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5.13 Conclusion

The information before the Task Force is that there are few, if any schools, irrespective of neighbourhood, that are totally free from the insidious nature of disruption. It is without doubt the case that some schools shoulder a disproportionate volume of persistent disruption that saps energy, causes stress and botheration, and makes serious inroads on the process of teaching and learning. Some schools fare better than others in their attempts to prevent and to deal with disruption. As the work of the Task Force developed, it became clear that there are students enrolled in mainstream schools with a multiplicity of needs that are so extensive, that it is unrealistic to expect mainstream schools to fulfil these. This was borne in on us through most of the channels already cited, but most forcefully through the Fora visits.

There is a need for alternative provision that has an educational basis, but also has, what the literature refers to as 'rehabilitative' basis. In these alternative settings, the vulnerable and needy students can have a programme of education and care that is tailored to their specific needs. The Task Force saw examples of interdisciplinary, holistic work occurring successfully and humanely in a range of the settings visited. Students placed in these settings were making progress, were happy, and had settled into their new environment with enthusiasm and, in some cases, with relief. Their parents were equally satisfied and recognised the lack of 'fit' between the processes in the former mainstream school and their children's response while attending, or as was often the case, not attending, there. It should be stressed that many

of the alternative settings that the Task Force visited are in reality not 'alternative' as they form part of the continuum of official provision. Because of the diversity that is now a feature of the school going cohort, the Task Force is of the view that official provision needs to become more flexible and diverse in order to be responsive to the varied needs of the range of learners. There is a number of official initiatives e.g. HSCL, School Completion Programme, NEWB etc., aimed at getting reluctant learners to school, and keeping them there until at least age sixteen. For these initiatives to be successful, forms of schooling must be flexible and differentiated in order to achieve sustained success.

Many schools are doing exceptional work in their efforts to prevent and to manage disruption. In the main they succeed, and the next section of this report explores what it is that schools of good practice do to shore up their orderly environments, and in so doing, allow teaching and learning to proceed unimpeded.

Chapter Six

School Ethos and Culture

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6.1 Introduction

The next four chapters represent the efforts of the Task Force to present in a clear and comprehensive fashion its views on the interlocking factors that help to minimise disruption, and foster appropriate student behaviour in schools and classrooms. In presenting this section of the report, the Task Force has decided to conflate Terms of Reference 2 and 3. These Terms asked a) to consider what strategies are currently effective and b) to advise on national and international best practice in promoting positive student behaviour in classrooms and schools. In adopting this approach, the Task Force is aware that the parameters of these combined chapters are very far-reaching indeed. But, as suggested earlier, the Task Force has come to realise that student behaviour in school is influenced by the interplay of a myriad of variables, some tangible, some elusive, some linked to human transactions, others to structures, but all unique in their functioning in any given school.

The Task Force sees the school as the centre, nested in its unique ethos and culture, so in this chapter ethos and culture set the scene for the exploration of these interlocking factors. At the heart of the school, there are the people who form the school community - principal, deputy principal, staff, students, parents, Boards of Management, and collaborators from beyond the school. These key stakeholders or school community form the focus of Chapter

Seven. Finally, Chapters Eight and Nine turn to the structures and policies that schools have in place to help them with their core purpose. Some of these are to be found in mainstream schools while others relate to the provision found in Centres for Education. It is this tapestry of factors, interacting in many different ways, that determines why it is that schools differ in how they develop as places of welcome and community, and as settings that are conducive to effective teaching and learning.

6.2 School Ethos and Culture

A school is imbued with its own unique ethos and culture. Any discussion on school ethos or culture tends to hinge on somewhat elusive variables like values, aspirations, ideals and practices. While there is often a lack of clarity about the intangible nature of such concepts, there is an acceptance that their influence permeates life in schools in ways that are powerful and subtle. The ethos and culture of a school have a fundamental impact upon the experiences of the members of the school community. They sense it in all their school related transactions. The business of the school is mediated through its culture. It envelops the daily workings of the school and as such, is a potent dimension of what it is that contributes to how students behave.

The White Paper on Education *Charting our Education Future* (Govt. of Ireland, 1995) refers to school ethos as follows:

Factors Influencing Student Behaviour

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"Every school has a tangible quality defined by its physical and organisational structures. However, it also has a critical, intangible character called "ethos" which encompasses collective attitudes, beliefs, values, traditions, aspirations and goals. It is important to emphasise that the ethos of a school is an organic element, arising, first and foremost, from the actual practices which are carried out in that school on a daily, weekly and yearly basis."

It may be because of its complexity as a concept, that the word "ethos" was replaced in the Education Act (1998) by the preferred term "the characteristic spirit" of a school. The Act tells us that this is determined by:

"...the cultural, educational, moral, religious, social, linguistic and spiritual values and traditions which inform and are characteristic of the objectives and conduct of the school."

Whether one prefers ethos to characteristic spirit, it is clear that in either case, we are referring to something that however elusive and problematic in terms of definition, still plays a major role in determining the values which a school espouses, and influences in turn, how practices within a school are developed and play out. These are "in the air" and influence the behaviour of those who breathe that air.

6.3 The Mission Statement

A school's mission statement represents the institution's proclamation of its ethos and culture. Many schools display with pride their mission statement in a public area of the school and in school documents, confident that it captures the core purpose and commitment of

the school. Habitually, this statement refers to the praiseworthy ethos of a school and to the aspirations it seeks to realise on behalf of its students. The mission statement derives from a shared vision of the collective staff and other stakeholders who inspired it. It is often a guiding force in school development planning. In voluntary secondary schools, the mission statement frequently owes its origins to the charism of the founders. In practice, there is a high level of correspondence across schools with little to distinguish between mission statements, irrespective of school type.

To their credit, the majority of schools strive to be faithful to their mission statements. These schools go the extra mile to cater for the needs of the total spectrum in ways that are consonant with the noble and emancipating vision articulated in their mission statement. For students in these schools, especially those students who are at risk of educational failure and its serious consequences, there is a concerted effort among the staff to be inclusive, to create capacity, and to empathise with those whose personal life circumstances and challenges may disadvantage them. The culture within these schools is one of acceptance, respect and a sense of family. For vulnerable students these are very powerful attributes in a school's characteristic spirit. They contribute to the creation of a sense of co-operation and collaboration within a school community, with obvious positive implications for student behaviour. By contrast, there are some schools across the education sector, with mission statements that imply a culture of care and inclusion, in which students feel a sense of alienation and failure. They feel outside the fold, and the sense of

estrangement often leads to disruptive behaviour as a form of protest. Is it that there is a mission statement implementation gap, or is it that the deep seated difficulties of a minority of students are such, that however attentive schools are in translating the mission statement into a reality, these students still experience a sense of anomie in the school community? Schools and their students are inextricably linked in a reciprocal relationship. Both influence each other's actions and reactions. The mission statement, however carefully developed, may appear rhetorical on some occasions, and insufficiently robust to cater for all equally. In the words of President Mc Aleese (2000):

"It is easy to outline a wonderful set of inclusive, progressive values in the school brochure, but a lot more difficult to realise those ideas in practice".

Schools face dilemmas when confronted with the realisation that what they aspire to in good faith, may not become a reality for each and everyone of their students. Their sense of moral purpose is often challenged by the growing realisation that their best efforts are sometimes powerless in the face of difficulties that extend well beyond the walls of the school. On the positive side, the Task Force learned that there are many instances cited by students and their parents alike, of students whose troublesome behaviour has been turned around, due in large part to the pastoral ethos of the school and the significant time investment by key people within the school.

A minority of students, who have access to similar levels of care and concern in their schools, frequently violate

acceptable norms of discipline, and ultimately either drop out of school or are invited to leave. These same students are sometimes placed in alternative settings, and often go on to behave within acceptable limits while responding positively to the care and education on offer in the new setting.

School culture and ethos are potent influences, but knowing how exactly they interact with other sets of influencing factors is something of a blurred area. What is less blurred is the reality that, for the majority of students, a culture of care and respect helps them to adapt to the dominant patterns of behaviour, keeps them reasonably content and participative, makes them feel safe and valued, and that they belong in the school community. Their experience of school is positive and life enhancing, not negative and personally disillusioning.

6.4 Enrolment Patterns

Some students have their sense of failure or not belonging exacerbated by being refused admission to the school of their choice. Parents seeking to enrol their child in a school of choice, in their locality, may be advised to place their child in an alternative school in the locality. The basis for this advice from the refusing school is that the other school is in a better position to cater for the child in a more responsive way. This is indefensible, particularly in the context of a mission statement that suggests a policy of inclusion. Perhaps there is a perception that the 'other' school will cater better for the aspirant student, in that as a consequence of its open enrolment policy, it has attracted a disproportionate number of students who require additional supports. These additional

supports have been put in place, and now the school is a "victim of its own success". It earns a reputation in a neighbourhood for its inclusive policy, with the result that schools close by, can to an extent, cherry pick their students. This seems patently inequitable and warrants official intervention to curtail the practice.

The refusal of a school to enrol a child within his or her locality may be contrary to the officially proclaimed characteristic spirit or mission statement of the refusing school, but there are even more serious aspects to this practice. The refusal to enrol translates into a covert selection process and can act as an instrument of social division. The consequences of this practice have been described to the Task Force as a form of "educational apartheid". Parents and students are sensitive to this, and the result can make for hurt and bitterness among those who experience a perceived rejection. For the school that carries the responsibility for enrolling those students who have been refused entry into neighbouring schools, the challenge and stress resulting from this is more in some instances, than a given school can accommodate comfortably.

These schools feel put upon. Their examination results, a very powerful indicator in the judgement of the consumer, may appear less than impressive when compared with their higher attaining neighbours, who may be catering for a cohort of, largely, self-starters. The reality is that it is a tribute to the Herculean efforts of these schools, less celebrated in league tables, that their cohort come to school on a regular basis, and acquit themselves in ways that are not quantifiable solely in terms of examination points. The attainments

of their students, on a variety of measures, compare favourably with other schools in the system whose academic successes are publicly proclaimed. Housing policy is a contributing factor to the homogeneity of school enrolments, especially in some urban areas. However, there is also the reality that due to enrolment policies which act as an instrument of social division the situation exists where a number of schools that previously had a mixed intake of students now cater for a disproportionate number of students who have low educational aspirations, and who display above average challenges to authority. The resultant distortion to a school's intake makes for an uneven playing field, with some schools almost disruption free, while others in the same locale struggle to keep the lid on. **The Task Force is of the view that a student who lives within the catchment area of a school, as prescribed by the DES, has a legitimate right to enrol there**.

6.5 Interpersonal Relationships

There are certain aspects of school culture that are of special significance in the context of student behaviour. Chief among these are the relationships that develop between teacher and student. In our visits to schools and Centres for Education, we were constantly struck by the emphasis which students placed on this feature of school life as a key influencing factor in determining how students behave. It was very impressive to hear the Students' Council in an all boys' mainstream school speak of how their teachers care for them and take a personal interest in every single student. This sense of personalised teaching is attracting the interest of researchers and academics who are writing about schools for the

21st century (Fink, 2004, Hargreaves, 2004, Pollard & James, 2004).

It was very moving to listen to young students now pursuing their education in Youthreach programmes or in Pre-Employment Training Workshops speak with warmth and enthusiasm about Miss Y or, Mr X in their former mainstream school. In these teachers, the students found and recognised somebody who had taken a deep personal interest in them, who appeared to understand their issues and who did not apportion blame. All mentioned the perennial issue of "respect". Where these students perceived that they were respected and valued, and that they were not depicted as failures, they tended to adjust their otherwise unacceptable, and often challenging, deeply offensive behaviour in favour of more pro-social norms. But where they met with perceived dismissal, where they felt discriminated against in favour of the more able or affluent students, where their voice or that of their parents was not listened to, then the experience was one of negativity and deep resentment. This resentment is often carried as a lifelong negative force in the lives of some individuals.

The Fora visits highlighted for the Task Force the vital importance of building healthy, respectful relationships which inspire confidence and develop self-esteem, especially for those students who may not have these dimensions of their adolescent development nurtured in their home environments. The students who cause most difficulty within schools are usually those students who have a range of personal issues, the origins of which lie beyond the school. Teachers who show empathy for the lot of these vulnerable students and who give them the confidence and the belief that they

can achieve their dreams, contribute in ways that have far-reaching implications. By contrast, those who interact with them in ways that reinforce their sense of inadequacy do them a great disservice and confirm their sense of "can't do".

6.6 High Expectations

Another feature of school culture that correlates with reduced levels of disruption is the transmission of high expectations. Students and their parents need to be told early and often that there is an expectation within the school that students can succeed and that good behaviour and co-operation are expected. This is especially important for students coming from homes or neighbourhoods that may not place a high value on school attainments, or that do not hold high expectations for their young people. The communication with clarity and frequency of a positive, optimistic orientation, based on the assumption that all students can learn and progress, is affirming for students and parents. This message coupled with an assurance that the school will work to ensure that each individual student will reach his/her potential builds a good platform for co-operation and support. The school is signalling that it has a teaching and learning focus and that it plans not to be deflected from this agenda. It also signals, that, of course, it will take sensitive steps to include all students in the realisation of its agenda.

Schools must recognise a multiplicity of talent in their cohort. In communicating high expectations to their stakeholders, they win allies by making clear that the many talents of their students will be exploited both within and beyond the classroom. This indicates that schools

6

are determined to offer "value added", by cultivating in their students, not just the academic, but also the equally important broader dimensions of a holistic education. The work of Jeffers (2001) describing *'Folders of Excellence'* is an attractive idea, whereby students choose to compile a folder of what it is that they wish to present as their samples of 'excellence'. This folder can act as a platform for discussion at a parent-teacher meeting, or in any discussion, where the student's efforts, or indeed lack of efforts are a focus.

It is very disheartening for students to receive subtle messages that they are incapable of reaching reasonable standards in any aspect of the varied curriculum that schools now offer. A self-fulfilling prophecy kicks in, and students with a sense of "can't do" have their failure identity reinforced. By contrast, schools that are student-centred, set high standards for their students and support them in the attainment of those standards. These are schools that create capacity for their learners and where the climate for teaching and learning is both purposeful and caring. The work of Smyth (1999) demonstrates how schools differ in their ways of developing the academic and the personal development of their students. One of the caveats before the Task Force concerning the much applauded JCSP, was that placement in that programme might fail to stretch more able students, thereby failing to push them to reach their true potential. Placement in that programme might also determine final placement for senior cycle studies, irrespective of attainments at JCSP level and student ability.

6.7 Communication Patterns

An important dimension of a school's culture is its capacity to communicate and to operate in a way that is transparent and accessible. Where the culture of the school is open, and receptive to listening to the voice of staff, students and parents, there is a strong likelihood that many difficulties regarding student behaviour will be brought to a satisfactory outcome. One Forum visit, in particular, gave the Task Force insight into the importance of this. In our shared discussion during the plenary session of the Forum with the representatives of the whole school community, the Principal, in response to a query on what it was that contributed to the excellent student discipline in the school, responded, that it was largely attributable to the fact that everybody - student, parent, teacher, got "a fair hearing".

Parents must be prepared to share with the school their apprehensions concerning aspects of their child's schooling, or their concerns about his/her personal difficulties. This is especially important at point of enrolment in a school. Parents must be brought to know that school authorities treat confidential information with sensitivity, and only share it on a need-to-know basis. Equally, school personnel should share their concerns early with parents and not wait until problems have escalated. This point was made to the Task Force very strongly by parent groups in the Fora. The parent groups expressed a strong wish to be kept informed of their children's progress at regular intervals. They registered their dissatisfaction at being invited into a school when indiscipline matters involving their children had developed to an advanced stage.

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Communication channels should be open both vertically and laterally across the school community. Teachers should not feel reluctant to voice their concerns about student behaviour issues, and where they feel that they need support in dealing with recurring problems, this should be handled in a way that is constructive and blame free. School principals should communicate their expectations unambiguously to staff, students and parents. Effective use should be made of staff meetings, and these should provide opportunities to discuss matters that really matter. Time in school is a very precious commodity, and careful attention should be paid to ensure optimal usage of time devoted to meetings.

Increasingly, school personnel are working in conjunction with professionals from fields allied to education and beyond. It is essential that if this cross-sectoral working which is so relevant and so necessary is to be effective, the parties involved should engage in ways that are genuinely collaborative, and not defensively protective of their professional interests. Meetings are work, and warrant the same attention, as does the more public, traditional work of the classroom.

School and year assemblies offer a good opportunity to communicate reminders about expectations regarding behaviour across the school. They also offer opportunities to celebrate publicly success and improvement. Where good behaviour is reinforced and acknowledged, it is more likely that it will become internalised. Public acknowledgement of positive student behaviour also helps to promote a sense of

community within a school. Schools can work at finding opportunities to affirm students who may not have a record of positive recognition from authority figures. Students can, on occasion, take responsibility for the conduct of assemblies. This is good learning for students and there are many ways in which students can contribute to the orchestration and conduct of a school assembly/gathering.

6.8 Conclusion

This concludes the exploration of school ethos and culture. These concepts permeate the work of a school, and help to determine the success or failure of many of the processes that unfold in any school, on any day. As such they warrant constant consideration. Caring schools, listening schools, communicating schools are likely to come through even the most problematic of encounters.

Chapter Seven

The School Community

7.1 Introduction

While the culture and ethos discussed in the previous chapter are influential, the quality of the people involved in the school community is of paramount importance in bringing to life a school's mission. By school community the Task Force means the students, the parents, the school staff, and the Board of Management. The personal dimension of a school community is given expression through the style of leadership, the manner in which teachers interpret and discharge their teaching and pastoral roles, the nature of engagement among the stakeholders, and the openness to reach out to

Think

Cognitive Development

Fusion

Emotional Development

Behavioural Development

Feel

Act
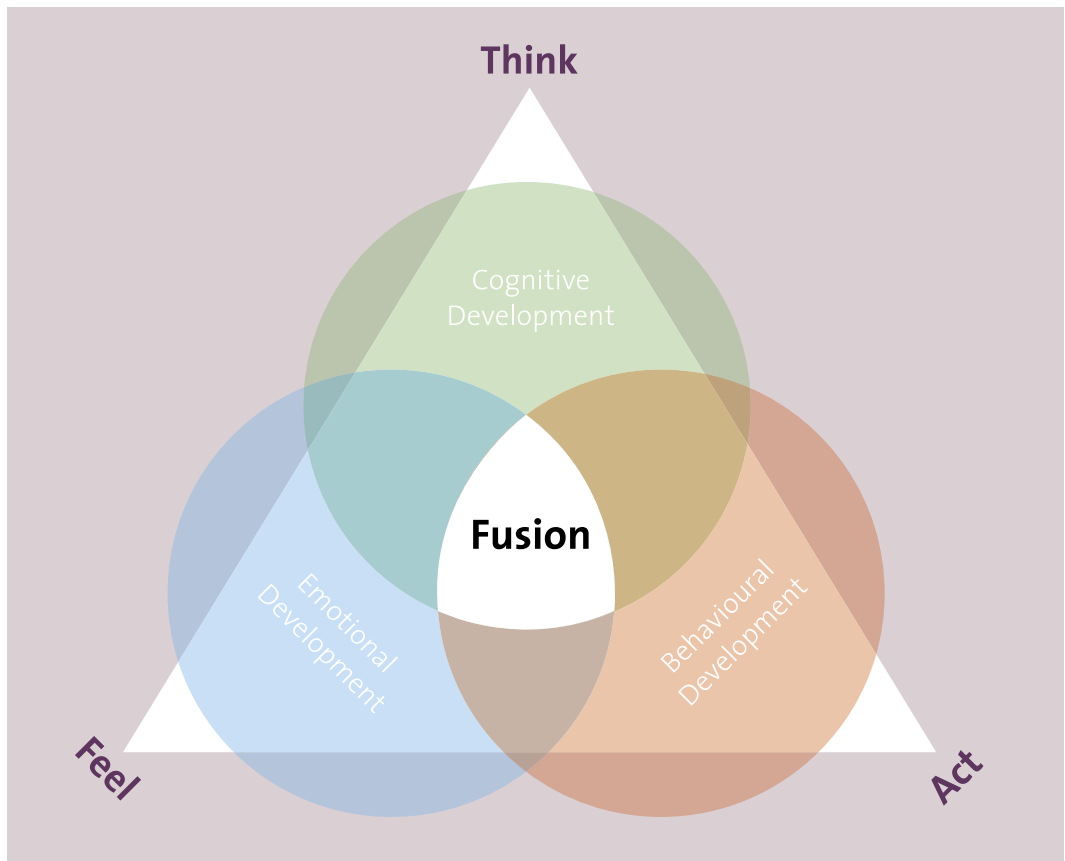
The Emotionally Intelligent School

and become involved with the wider environment. In order successfully to create positive student behaviour, schools must develop, in a consistent and sustaining way, the person-oriented dimension of their organisation. They must display high levels of emotional intelligence i.e. the ability to empathise, to motivate, to build supportive alliances, to persist, and to show warmth and acceptance. The focus of this chapter is an exploration of the centrality of key people in the school community, and their capacity to influence student behaviour, through their thinking, their actions and their feelings.

7.2 Leadership

The central importance of effective leadership in schools cannot be overstated. Whatever the educational setting, a major determinant of a school's success and provision is the quality of leadership exercised by senior management, and in particular that of the principal (Visser and Cole 2003; Cooper, Smith and Upton, 1994; Ofsted 1999a, Cole et al 1998). Recent research in this area advocates the practice of distributed leadership whereby the principal delegates responsibilities to other members of staff. In a paper with particular reference to the Irish context, Fullan (2005) points out that it is not individual leaders who make for success, but rather the leaders who establish a critical mass of leadership. Effective leaders can accomplish success in a finite period of time, but leaders who distribute their leadership, build enduring effectiveness by laying the foundation for continued success after their term of office. The role of principal is now so complex and demanding, that it is unrealistic to think that any one person can discharge the role without

the assistance of considerable numbers of colleagues, both from the teaching and support staff. In this context, the role of the Deputy Principal as a major source of support is vital. The wide involvement of staff in as wide a range of school processes as possible, increases ownership of issues and empowers staff members. It also ensures that, in a context where a school principal is called on to be absent from the school on related business, the school continues to function in a smooth and normal fashion.

Recent work of Leithwood et al (2004), drawing on the vast literature on school leadership, points out that successful leaders engage in three sets of core practices

1. Setting directions (shared vision and group goals, high performance expectations);

2. Developing people (individual support, intellectual and emotional stimulation, and modelling);

3. Redesigning the organisation (collaborative cultures and structures, building productive relations with parents and the community).

This portrayal of successful leaders resonates well with work carried out by the National College for School Leadership in London (Harris, 2002). This centre engages in a range of work relevant to principals as they lead their schools forward in an era of change. One aspect of its work focuses on leadership in schools facing challenging circumstances. The aim of this particular work is to extend the knowledge base about leadership practice in schools that have an above average enrolment of challenging students. There exists a good

7

deal of evidence on this theme already, but it refers to a US context of urban settings (e.g. Louis & Miles 1990; Louis et al 1996; Elmore 2000). The recent UK research is of interest here, in that many of the circumstances will be comparable to situations that obtain here in Ireland. The salient features of good leadership in schools facing challenging circumstances have been identified as follows. Leaders in these settings are:

• Constantly managing tensions and problems directly related to the particular circumstances and context of the school

• Coping on a daily basis with instances of unpredictability and conflicts, while retaining the core values of the school

• Governed by practices which are underpinned by a set of personal and professional values that place human needs before organisational needs: in other words they are people-centred

• Sharing leadership and decision making with others through staff empowerment

These effective leaders see their job not as a 'desk job', but as a people-centred enterprise. They require a high degree of emotional intelligence and are acutely aware of the importance of building positive relationships with students, teachers and parents. This they do through a process of trust and empowerment, engaging where possible, students, teachers and parents in decision-making.

7.3   The Teacher

There is a vast international literature which emphasises the pivotal role played by the teacher in fostering classrooms that are conducive to quality teaching and learning. The inextricable link between teaching and learning and behaviour is a fundamental premise of all the descriptions of good practice. It is meaningless to discuss behaviour in a school context without simultaneously focusing on teaching and learning. Behaviour difficulties are reduced where teaching and learning are tailored to suit the learning capacities and interests of the students. Quite apart from the pedagogic skills of the teacher, is his or her capacity to build positive, mutually respectful relationships with students.

Evidence of this was brought home to members of the Task Force who visited Centres for Education catering for students who had been excluded from mainstream schools, or who had excluded themselves. Their observations about their secondary school experience matched exactly the findings of Daniels et al (2003) who interviewed large numbers of excluded students in the UK. They reported how they enjoyed reasonable or very good relationships in the primary school phase of their schooling, but that they were alienated by what they perceived as the vast impersonal nature of their secondary schools. In primary school they had bonded with their class teacher, but in the secondary school they felt disconnected and unsupported with many staff having little appreciation of their feelings or factors impinging on their lives outside the school gates. The students we met with, like their UK counterparts, disengaged from most of their lessons, were troubled by their perceived teacher impatience with their inability to master the material before them, and either started to miss school or to take refuge in challenging

behaviour. This further exacerbated their precarious situations, and those who were not sensitively managed, spiralled downward into further school related difficulties. The evidence before the Task Force was unequivocal – "at risk" students need to find not only teachers who are skilled pedagogues, but to find teachers who are also caring, sensitive, empathic human beings with a genuine commitment to work with them in ways that demonstrate understanding and compassion.

There is a body of literature that describes what it is that potentially disruptive students need if they are to behave in a co-operative and engaged way in their schools. The following section offers some of the perspectives.

In their review of the literature on managing challenging behaviour, Visser & Cole (2003) make the point that students with emotional and behavioural difficulties are the first to be disruptive when faced with inappropriate or unskilled teaching. Cole et al (1998), who have carried out extensive work in this area, report on a large survey of the characteristics of teachers who work with difficult students. Their findings overlap with previous and subsequent research in this area. The following list gives a sense of what is typically characteristic of the response of effective teachers to challenging behaviour:

- Well planned, well organised, structured lessons

- Fair, consistent and with a good sense of humour

- Patient and empathic, adaptable and flexible

- Calm and relaxed

- Setting clear boundaries

- Holding and transmitting high expectations for students

- Using an eclectic mix of teaching methodologies with a strong emphasis on differentiation to suit the needs of individuals

- Open and able to form positive relationships with students

According to Greenhaigh (1994), a warm, healthy relationship between teachers and students facilitates effective class teaching. The research literature in the area coming from the US (Kauffman, 2001) endorses this finding, as does the work coming out of Scotland on dealing with students who are challenging (Munn et al, 2000, Scottish Executive 2001). The message is clear. It is not sufficient for teachers to be competent subject experts. They must also take a real interest in the social and emotional needs of their students. When describing effective teachers of challenging students, Kauffman (2001) writes:

"Effective Teachers...

- Work hard to develop a classroom environment that is caring, pleasant, relaxed, and friendly, yet orderly and productive

- Show a sincere interest in the life of each individual student

- Model the behaviour that they desire in their students and convey that such behaviours are truly important

7

- Encourage active student participation in decision-making that is relevant to them

- Appreciate and accept students' concerns and opinions

- Avoid producing feelings of shame but focus more on pride and less on guilt

- Provide frequent and positive feedback, encouragement, and praise

- Respect diversity

A further international perspective on teaching in challenging circumstances comes from the work of Rogers, in Australia (1997, 2000). His writings echo what has already been set out above. His 2000 work emphasises how important it is for teachers not to fuel confrontation with students by getting into arguments or inflammatory situations with them. He stresses how careful teachers should be to use appropriate language with students and be polite in their dealings with them. He advocates that correction should be balanced with encouragement, and that behaviour should be linked to consequences and outcomes. He also advises that reprimands should be dealt with one to one, rather than in the public gaze of a classroom or corridor. He recommends the re-establishment of the relationship following an incident and the letting go of grudges.

In summary: the research evidence is, that in order to make progress with students who are challenging, it is important to adapt teaching methodologies and curriculum to suit the students preferred learning modes and interests, while simultaneously building healthy relationships with them.

7.4 The Teacher's Pastoral Role

The literature on teaching potentially disaffected students highlights the importance of teachers adopting a pastoral approach. This pastoral dimension is picked up by students in all manner of ways, in their many interactions with their teachers, and in their observations of their teachers, both in the classroom and throughout the school campus. Students who have their emotional needs met in other spheres of their lives are not as reliant on this kind of pastoral approach as is the case with their more vulnerable peers. They still have basic human needs and like them, they appreciate working in an accepting and caring environment. It is now obvious that teaching and learning occur in a social context, and that the emotional tone and climate in a school or classroom are major variables in influencing the quality of the educational experience of students.

Our awareness of the manner in which these variables interact and in which they can be shaped has been significantly enhanced in recent years through the work of the Irish Association of Pastoral Care in Education (IAPCE). This body emerged in response to the pioneering work of Una Collins, in highlighting the significance of a pastoral approach to working with students, especially the vulnerable in our schools. The Irish Association of Pastoral Care in Education (IAPCE) has in its ten year duration contributed greatly to the development of Pastoral Care in schools through its publications, its Conferences and its Continuing Professional Development programmes. There is evidence to suggest that the adoption of a pastoral approach has been

of significant benefit to school staffs. What is clear is that the care aspect in schools is not optional any more. It is vital. It is no longer realistic for teachers to see their role solely as subject-domain specific. The needs of many students go beyond mastery of the curriculum. Schools attend to the care aspect of a holistic education through the culture and ethos of the school, through the structures which form part of the school's operations e.g. Year Heads, Class Tutors, School Guidance Counselling, Chaplaincy etc., but above all, it is through the building of wholesome, respectful and supportive relationships between students and their teachers that much that is conducive to good discipline is accomplished.

7.5   The Care Team

The point has been made that the capacity of a school to form positive relationships is a critical factor in determining the patterns of behaviour that characterise the school. Within the school, there are staff members who have designated responsibility that involves an overt care role. These staff members are now increasingly referred to collectively as the "care team". They usually comprise the Principal and Deputy Principal, Year Heads, the Guidance Counsellor, the Home School Community Liaison Teacher where one exists, and the Chaplain where one exists. On occasions they may need to meet with representatives from an outside agency working with the school or with individual students e.g. a psychologist from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), or a Juvenile Liaison Officer (JLO) from the Department of Justice.

It is these staff members, like the class tutor and others with ostensible pastoral

roles who are in the front line when it comes to sorting out behavioural difficulties that may arise. The role of the Year Head in influencing the behaviour patterns in a school is of vital importance and so it is critical that the persons who occupy this role be suited and competent to discharge it. It is also important that they have sufficient time to fulfil their role and to deal in a satisfactory and comprehensive manner with issues that arise. Problems can fester if they are left unattended. These two issues i.e., 1) suitability for the role and 2) time to discharge it, pertaining to Year Heads, were frequently put before the Task Force from a wide variety of sources, both written and oral.

7.6   Student Involvement

In the interim report of July 2005, the Task Force advocated a role for students as contributors to good discipline levels in a school. There is a growing recognition that students are capable, and ready to assume responsible roles in their schools. They are a rich resource for schools, and where trusted and guided, they can be a wonderful asset in helping to contribute to a healthy school culture, based on democratic principles and open communication. They can assume leadership roles that influence the overall climate for teaching and learning.

A Forum meeting in a particular school which the Task Force initiated, was hosted and largely orchestrated by members of the Gluais team in that school, which was located in a RAPID area. Gluais is a leadership-training programme for Transition Year or fifth year students. Participants undergo five days of training to give them skills to become a self-directed group, aimed at improving school life for students. We

7

saw evidence of the leadership and poise of the students. We were also impressed by the competent way in which they took responsibility for the smooth running of the meeting and for the logistics that went into the arrangement of the event.

A recent Ofsted report (2005) on students' satisfaction with their schools found that satisfaction is high in schools that actively seek, value and act on their student's views. The same report found that the quality of teaching, range of enrichment activities and leadership of the principal were among the factors that correlate strongly with student satisfaction.

7.7 Students' Councils

The recent publication from the National Children's Office (2005) on Student Councils in Second Level Schools in Ireland not only makes interesting reading, but it also makes a powerful case for the role that Student Councils can play in a school. Commenting on some of the positives associated with a Student Council, the report has the following to say:

"The advantages (of a Student Council) were mainly related to positive school atmosphere and creating a caring school environment which is supportive and inclusive. The student council was considered to be a vehicle for student participation. In some schools, this participation was reported to have a beneficial impact on issues such as discipline, bullying and staff-student relations. It was also reported that the student council provided students with educational opportunities and an interactive learning environment. Students could develop communication and leadership skills as well as responsibility and accountability. The student council was also seen as a valuable resource to management, teachers and other students". (pg. 6)

The Task Force in the course of its work met with a delegation from the Union of Secondary Students (USS). This gave us an opportunity to discuss and develop ideas put forward in the written submission from this group to the Task Force. Their position is clear and convincing. It can be summarised as follows: where students have a real voice in the life of a school, there is an increased likelihood that difficulties with student misbehaviour will be minimised. The Fora meetings in schools demonstrated clearly that students do not condone the unacceptable behaviour of their peers any more than do teachers or management. In fact they may be more impatient than the school authorities in this regard.

Research conducted in the UK on the impact of student participatory structures found that there were ways in which School Councils could help to reduce the number of exclusions in a school (Davies, 1999). They identified the following areas that stemmed from Student Councils:

• Peer monitoring of and support for "at risk" students

• Enabling the disclosure and resolution of bullying incidents

• Generating codes of conduct and anti-bullying policies which are owned by the students

7

• Conveying to students and parents the sense that students in schools are listened to and treated with respect

These are all very positive outcomes. In 2004 there were Student Councils in 561 of the 744 second level schools in Ireland. There are challenges for schools in setting up these councils. Apart from the fact that they are advocated in the Education Act, 1998, Subsection 3, their worth in fostering positive student behaviour seems persuasive. The Task Force recognises the potential that a well-organised, viable Student Council can bring to a school. It also acknowledges that some Student Councils may lack real strength and may smack of "tokenism" rather than real engagement as participants in the life of a school. There is the added caveat concerning the composition of the Student Council. It is important that it be truly representative of the whole student body rather than constituting an "elite" group.

The evidence before the Task Force, reinforced by the Fora visits to schools and Centres for Education, where students have an active role to play in school processes, has led us to encourage all schools to be truly inclusive, and to engage with their students in democratic ways that serve the best interest of all the school community. To miss out on the empowerment of students is to fail to exploit their often creative and constructive contribution and is a missed opportunity to work with them as participating members of a school community. Students, like parents are potential allies and partners. Mature schools recognise this and guide their students into the processes of democracy and citizenship in ways that are liberating for all. It is

also reasonable to anticipate that with meaningful student participation in democratic processes in schools that this educational experience will spill over into participation in democratic roles, when these students leave school.

7.8 Parental Involvement

Parents and students are schools' most powerful allies. However, it takes a concerted effort to forge successful partnerships between home and school. A recent review of the literature on parental involvement and its impact on pupil achievement and adjustment by Desforges & Abouchaar (2003) provides a comprehensive overview of the gains that come from parental support. It also sketches the multidimensional challenges that confront both schools and families in establishing high quality parental engagement. Connections between home and school are not automatic. They work best when they stem from "want to" motivation rather than "have to" or "ought to" orientations from the partners. There are benefits for all the stakeholders arising from healthy home-school collaboration, but for students the benefits include higher rates of engagement with the work of the school, increased attendance rates, a reduction in suspension rates, improved attitudes towards school and better self-concept. Support from home for school and learning, or what Wahlberg (1984) refers to as the "curriculum of the home", is a more reliable predictor of academic attainment than is the socio-economic status of the family. The review referred to above offers a resumé of the many facets of parental involvement. It states:

"Parental involvement takes many forms including good parenting in the home,

7

*including the provision of a secure
and stable environment, intellectual
stimulation, parent-child discussion,
good models of constructive social and
educational values and high aspirations
relating to fulfilment and good citizenship;
contact with schools to share information;
participation in school events;
participation in the work of the school;
and participation in school governance".*

(Pg.4 Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003)

Clearly this account is representative of
many examples of parental involvement
in homes and schools in Ireland today.
However, there is also the reality that it
is difficult for schools to engage some
parents, especially those who face a
wide range of difficulties. Again, the
Desforges & Abouchaar literature review
(2003) cites some of these problems.
They include:

- The effects of extreme poverty and
  of social chaos and threat in some
  neighbourhoods

- The effects of substance abuse
  and of domestic violence

- The effects of psychosocial
  illness, notably depression

- The impact of a difficult child

- The effect of barriers set up by schools

- The impact of inappropriate
  values and beliefs underlying a
  fatalistic view of education

- Parental lack of confidence in or
  knowledge about how to be
  appropriately involved

(Pg.88 Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003)

Currently the DES provides a range of
initiatives directed towards building
sustainable partnerships between
families and schools. These include the
HSCL initiative, the work of the School
Completion Programme, and the work
of the Education Welfare Officers from
the NEWB. While adopting a different
focus, each of these initiatives, in
one way or another, addresses home-
school-student matters. Many issues
relating to student progress, student
attendance, retention, and other school
related matters are mediated through
the tactful and sensitive handling of
school staff and are supplemented
where opportunity permits, by personnel
from these agencies. Links with these
agencies and the home may not result
in bringing a parent into school on
a regular basis, but the relationship
involves the home in ways that are
positive and supportive.

There are barriers to fostering
good home school partnerships.
Liontos (1992) has identified the
following barriers for parents:

- Feelings of inadequacy

- Previous negative experiences
  with schools

- Suspicion about treatment from
  established institutions

- Limited knowledge about school
  policies and procedures or how to
  assist with homework

- Transportation difficulties

- Childcare responsibilities

- Daily survival constraints

7

- Communication from school tends to focus on problems

There are barriers also operating from the school side of the partnership. These include:

- A belief that the parents will be totally partisan and will fail to understand the parameters within which schools function

- A feeling of insecurity in dealing with parents who may question teachers' pedagogic approach or management of situations

- A wish to avoid discussion with parents who have unrealistic expectations for their child

- The busy nature of life in school which limits the time for working with parents

- Lack of clarity about the rights of parents in the education system

Apart from the targeted initiatives aimed at developing viable home-school links, there are more formal structures aimed at involving parents in collaborating with schools. These are the Parent Associations. There is the perception that these are not always representative of the parent body as a whole. It is difficult to entice people to take office and to attend the meetings. Discussion with the delegation from NPC (Post Primary) to the Task Force explored this, and they, like the Task Force, would wish to see enhanced participation by parents in ways that complement the work of the school. Parents are legitimate partners in the education system and their role is enshrined in legislation (Education Act, 1998, Education (Welfare) Act 2000). It is therefore regrettable

that parents feel that there is some ambivalence in schools regarding their role. There needs to be clarity about the complementarity of the roles of home and school with the focus at all times on conditions and practices that enhance the progress of the young people, who are their mutual concern.

It is too easy, but perhaps, understandable for parents to leave important behavioural issues to the schools to sort out. Most encounters between school personnel and school staffs are respectful and focussed. Parents are often embarrassed, and perhaps somewhat guilty at some of their children's behaviour at school. They do not condone unacceptable behaviour, and the majority will work in partnership with school staff to remedy this in ways that are supportive of the school. However, this co-operative parental stance is not always forthcoming. It is very upsetting for a school staff to meet with parents who act in an abusive and defensive way when invited by school personnel to come and discuss matters of concern regarding their child. School authorities will attest that it is much easier to bring an incident to a positive outcome where the adults involved behave in a way that is reasonable and compassionate. This may involve a teacher apologising to a student for an ill-judged or hasty remark. Likewise, it may entail parents having to endorse the school decision to invoke an appropriate sanction for their child, following a breach of the code.

Where the tone of the joint meeting is one of mutual respect and shared understandings, then it is likely that progress can be made. Anecdotal evidence suggests that it is possible to sort out an issue with a student where

7

the adults (teacher or parent) do not insist on "their pound of flesh". Schools should be centres of reconciliation and not places for power struggles or holding out, to triumph over some other person, especially over a vulnerable student.

7.9 The Board of Management

Another important stakeholder in the school community is the Board of Management. In accordance with the encouragement advocated in the Education Act, Part IV, 14, most schools now have a Board of Management. The establishment of a Board presents an opportunity for partnership and for democratisation within the school community. The members of the Board, though elected or nominated by different interest groups, act as a unit in the best interest of the entire school community. The educational and welfare needs of all students are central to the work of the Board. This is best realised when Board members have a good working knowledge of school life. It is important that school staffs and parent groups are confident that they are well represented on the Board, and that the Board is closely interested in safeguarding their positions. In the context of the new legislative framework already mentioned in this report, it is sometimes difficult to find people who are willing and competent to serve on a Board of Management. Serving on a Board can be very time-consuming and demanding, especially if there are some sensitive and intricate issues for a Board to discuss in the course of its meetings.

The erosion of social capital is another factor that makes it difficult to secure the help of people willing to serve on a Board. Today, people juggle their time in an effort to maintain a healthy work-life balance, at a time when the pressures of the workplace and family life are such, that there is little time for extraneous community service. A Board of Management plays a very important role in supporting the school community, and it is important that the members are people who understand their role, and who discharge it with impartiality and with meticulous attention to detail. The responsibilities are serious for a Board, and it is for this reason that their work should be supported and appreciated by those whom they represent.

7.10 Conclusion

It is obvious from the foregoing that the school is a co-operative educational enterprise in which a number of discrete groups hold a legitimate stake. These groups comprise the students, the school staff, the parents and the Board of Management. Where there is both a culture and a structure which enable these stakeholders to discharge their respective roles collaboratively and harmoniously, it is probable that such collaboration and harmony will be reflected in the teaching and learning climate of the school.

Chapter Eight

School Initiatives

8.1 Introduction

To date, in the review of the many factors that contribute to fostering positive student behaviour in schools and classrooms (ToRs 2+3), this report has focussed on the importance of 1) school ethos and culture and 2) the personnel, who are centrally involved, as members of the school community. Attention now turns to a third important dimension. This dimension embraces the range of structures and supports that also play a vital role in influencing student behaviour. The view of the Task Force is that it is these three dimensions i.e. ethos, school community and structures, working in concert, that are the major determinants of the levels of order in schools.

In the interest of clarity, this chapter with its focus on structures and support, is divided into the following sub-sections:

- Code of Behaviour

- Transfer programme from primary to post primary

- Curriculum provision

- Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

- Extra-curricular activities

This overview of structural support draws on both national and international best practice in this area. The next chapter (cpt.9) will develop the theme further, by describing on-site and off-site provision, to which we wish to draw particular attention.

8.2 A School's Code of Behaviour

In the new legislative framework in which schools now function there is much attention paid to a school's code of behaviour. The overall purpose of the code should be to ensure that schools are both physically and psychologically safe for everybody; that teaching and learning can proceed unimpeded, and that people and property are treated with respect. But codes should play a large part also in helping students acquire internalised norms of civility. **The discipline policy in a school must have reach beyond the immediate demands of ensuring an orderly environment. It should contribute to the overall development of the young person as a responsible and contributing member of a democratic society**. There is an increased likelihood of this happening where students contribute to the development of the code, are instrumental in its implementation, and are involved in any review of the code that may occur. Without such ownership of the code in all its facets, students are likely to perceive the code in a negative and punitive way, rather than as a resource to help them and enhance their learning environment. Students whom we met in Centres for Education reported that one of the chief factors that contributed to their alienation within the mainstream

school was the long list of complicated rules that was put before them, on entry into the "big school". Many could scarcely read them, and found them bewildering and unduly rigid.

8.3 Parents and the Code of Behaviour

It is customary to ask parents, prior to the enrolment of their child, to sign a statement indicating that they will be supportive of the school in its efforts to implement the code of behaviour. Practice suggests that it is general for parents to give this written assent, but what is then disappointing, is the failure of some parents to follow through in support of the school, when a violation of the code is brought to their attention. The current ambivalent status of the written parental agreement to abide by the terms of the code is very unsatisfactory for school authorities. As matters stand at present, it is not possible to enjoin parents legally. The Task Force thinks it preferable for co-operation to evolve, in a spirit of mutual support and collaboration, in the knowledge that both parents and school authorities hold the interest of the student as their primary concern.

There is need for greater parental engagement with the development, implementation, and review of the code. More communication, focussing on the code, is required between school and home. The induction phase of a student's entry to a school is a critical time to highlight the importance of the code. The rationale for the code should be explained, and it should be portrayed as a guiding and beneficial document that protects the rights, but that also highlights the responsibilities

of all the school community. It should be portrayed, also, as a way of developing some level of self-control in students, a trait that will stand them in good stead throughout their lives. Parents' questions regarding any aspect of the code should be invited and answered at the induction sessions that occur when a student is entering his/her second level school.

In concluding this section, it bears repeating that there are dual benefits deriving from the implementation of an effective, well-designed school code. The immediate operational outcome is the orderly teaching and learning climate of the school. An equally significant outcome will be the more long-term good of inculcating in young people positive social values, which will contribute to the general well-being of our society.

8.4 The Code and the Legislative Context

The Task Force recognises the constraints on schools in the development of their behaviour codes especially against a backdrop of legislation, where in a Section 29 appeal, the Code assumes such a central focus. Correspondence before the Task Force from the Equality Authority stressed the need to have a code of behaviour that is in line with Section 17, of the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000. This too is a further legal imperative that emphasises for schools the need to ensure that their documents are robust enough to stand up to any challenge on grounds of discrimination under any of the areas covered by the equality legislation. The Task Force appreciates the relevance and the merit of this legislation, but has concerns that the current preoccupation with the legal dimensions may serve to distract schools

8

from the developmental capacity of a code to help foster positive practices and habits among their young students.

8.5   Features of a Code

In the course of its work, the Task Force examined and discussed a number of Codes. Those that impressed most had the following features:

• They were written in simple, accessible language

• They reflected the values and goals of the school

• They were couched in a way that promoted positive student behaviour rather than focusing on negative, punishable behaviour

• The rules were few in number and were positively stated

• Consequences for both positive and negative behaviours were outlined

• The consequences were commensurate with the infraction

• Sanctions for extreme forms of serious disruption were clearly stated

• They were compiled collaboratively with input from the whole school community

• They were implemented in a manner that was fair, consistent, compassionate, and that respected the dignity of all

• They took account of the age spread of the student body and were constructed in a developmentally appropriate way

• They signalled high expectations for good behaviour across the school and for locations in which students would be while on school related activities, e.g., school bus, school outings or off campus, at lunch break

One issue that the Task Force observed in its consideration of a number of codes was that some failed to differentiate between their expectations and their rewards and sanctions, for the different cycles within a school. It is hardly reasonable to expect a student of 17 or 18 years of age in senior cycle, to be governed by the same rules and sanctions as a student of 12 or 13 years of age in junior cycle. Those charged with the development of a code of behaviour should try to accommodate the significant differences in age range and expected responsibility for those for whom the code is being prepared. Codes are often supplemented by the use of journals, report cards, merit certificates, detention slips etc. The Task Force examined a number of these also, and noted the variability in their tone and content.

However adequate the code, of, and in itself, it is not sufficient to ensure the smooth, disruption-free functioning of schools. Unless there is within the student body an a priori positive disposition to play a constructive role as a member of a school community, these codes will be powerless. Where there is a predetermined sense that they want to learn, that they want to make progress, and meanwhile belong to a school that is safe and orderly, then the code acts as the official document protecting all this. Codes and their implementation will not convert recalcitrant students into conforming students. More is required.

Schools and their processes are but one agent of socialisation, admittedly a vitally important one, but not the sole agent. They need the unequivocal support of parents to carry out their work, and they rely on parents to take the lead role in socialising their children. Schools will sometimes mismanage incidents with students. Where they are judged not to have acted with fairness and sensitivity, or where what was a simple matter was allowed to escalate into something other than it was, there will, inevitably, be frustration and anger on the part of the student who feels ill done by, and his/her parents who would have wished for a different outcome. These situations should not be allowed to fester, but the culture of the school should allow for open and honest discussion of this, so that the issue can be put to rest in a spirit of mutual respect and understanding. The Task Force understands that a restorative practices approach can serve to resolve situations through a process which affords a fair hearing to all, and thereby affirms the dignity of all.

8.6 Transition from Primary to Post Primary

The majority of students settle into their second level school with enthusiasm and with ease. However, evidence before the Task Force has persuaded us that there are considerable numbers of students who experience anxiety and apprehension on making the transfer from their primary school into the larger and more demanding environment of the second level school. These anxieties include apprehension about not making friends, about subject choice, the fear of being bullied in the new setting, and travelling an extended distance on the school bus. It is not just students who travel by school bus to schools in an unfamiliar urban area who feel under pressure, but also students who live in close proximity to their second level school. Parents can also feel anxious about the process, and this is especially true for parents of children with special educational needs. The evidence before the Task Force is that there should be a structured programme of transition from primary to post primary in place in every school.

Where students fail to get off to a positive start in their new setting, they may be labelled prematurely as troublesome, or at least identified as potentially troublesome. They may become the butt of ridicule from their more robust peers. The fear of "slagging" and of humiliation is a constant worry. Other difficulties can stem from disenchantment with the processes of teaching and learning as experienced by the new learners in their new environment. It can be that disaffection sets in at an early stage and persists well into a student's time in school. This can manifest itself in absence from school or more seriously, in dropping out of school. In some instances there may be the onset of psychosomatic symptoms that owe their origins to anxieties relating to the transfer and settling in period in the second level school.

The study carried out by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) in conjunction with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), called "Moving Up" (2004) makes for very interesting and relevant reading in this area, as does the work of O'Brien in 2001. The Task Force has had the opportunity to learn about and examine many examples of good practice linked

8

to the transfer process. It recognises that many schools have excellent procedures in place to ensure a smooth and trouble free transition for their students.

Early contact between schools with their incoming students and their parents opens up excellent opportunities for schools to showcase their school and to communicate their values, expectations, practices, and of course, their stance on student engagement and behaviour. It is important that this process starts well in advance of the students' actual attendance at the school of choice, so that there is adequate opportunity for all to get a good grasp of what is entailed. Good communication between the primary feeder school and the relevant staff in the receiving second level school is important, especially where there are apprehensions about the adjustment or learning needs of a student making the transfer. If the crucial milestone of transfer is well planned for and sensitively handled, it can result in a genuine sense of partnership between home and school; it can minimise apprehensions, and can influence a young student's academic and social development. "Tús maith, leath na hoibre".

8.7 The Curriculum Provision and Teaching Methodologies

One of the factors that is a major determinant of student engagement in school is the curriculum and how it is presented. This next section offers some observations on curricula and modes of learning. It also speculates on how the processes of the school might promote more autonomous learning and thus contribute to the realisation of the "creative society".

Recent years have brought many exciting changes in the range of programmes, and in the introduction of new and modified syllabi in various subject domains for second level schools. New themes have been added and the range of options for our learners was never greater. While this is so, it still remains a reality that one of the factors contributing to student disaffection is a perception that a lot of material that they are asked to engage with in classrooms, is either irrelevant to their life's aspirations or is too incomprehensible or obscure to be within their grasp. Also, quite a number of well motivated students on entering their second level schools, experience a sense of anti-climax, and many report that the curriculum that they experience, fails either to engage their interest or to stretch them intellectually (ESRI / NCCA 2005). They find life in classrooms uninteresting for a lot of the time. Boredom and a sense of disillusionment with some aspects of the curriculum lead to students being inattentive and off-task. It can also be that there are pedagogic aspects contributing to student lack of enthusiasm for their experiences of the curriculum, especially in the early years of their second level schooling.

Recent research conducted by the ESRI in conjunction with the NCCA (Smyth et al, 2005), on second year students' experience with their early years at second level is of relevance here and deserves a lot of attention from school staffs and interested parties. This research shows that students have a marked preference for subjects that have a "doing" or action component e.g., Art, Woodwork, Technology, Metalwork, Technical Drawing, Home Economics, Music and Physical Education. Teaching methodologies are clearly an important

8

factor in engaging students' interests across the curriculum. There are some students who would prefer to take ownership of their own learning, aided in many cases by the use of technology. This implies a trend towards more personalised teaching and learning, with customised programmes to suit the varying interests and capabilities of learners. The implications for those charged with the formation of teachers to work effectively in the changing contexts of schools of the future are great and wide-ranging. The Task Force notes with interest the current work of the NCCA with regard to its proposals for senior cycle and their vision of schools in 2010 (www.ncca.ie/reports), where students are to become more responsible for their own learning within a less authoritarian school structure.

An OECD Forum in 2003, on the theme of *"Schools and the Future"* speculates on the role that schools could play in making 21st century transitions happen. The report prepared by Miller (2003) suggests that the role for schools preparing students for the "creative society" of the next 30 years is to develop capacity in the following areas...
1) autonomy,
2) experimentation and reflection,
3) dealing with unpredictability, and
4) learning throughout life.
Miller (2003) goes on to suggest that today's classrooms might fetter the development of these capacities by being rooted in older modes with older goals. Another potential problem that he addresses, in the context of future schooling, is that posed by current systems of assessment which are a poor indicator of a person's capacity to work alone or as a member of a team in real-time situations.

Of particular interest to the theme of this report is the view of "futures thinking" concerning the capacity of present day schools to meet the challenge of socialising young people. Miller (2003) in the report cited above writes...

"Today schools are expected to socialise the young in a number of ways such as citizenship values, awareness of collective needs, public conduct, ecological sustainability and more. For a wide variety of reasons this role, which mixes cognitive and behavioural objectives, appears to have become more difficult to fulfil. Leaving aside whether or not it is an illusion that schools once performed this role more effectively, what is clear is that the old methods of assuring socialising are no longer as effective as people would like. However, this demand does not mean that schools as currently configured are likely to be the most effective way to respond to the need for new ways of constructing social capital, particularly the heterogeneous and small-scale affiliations that transition-scale might involve".

On that sobering note, this report now moves from a wider European perspective on schools and the possible way forward, to a consideration of the impact of some programme and curricular developments in fostering good student behaviour in the Irish system. In particular we have looked at the following: JCSP, LCA, TY, CSPE and SPHE.

8.8 The Junior Certificate School Programme

In the course of its work the Task Force noted enthusiasm for the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) and the capacity of this programme to

8

engage students who otherwise might either drop out of school altogether or develop a sense of "can't do" in terms of academic attainment. There was general acclaim for the merits of the JCSP from a variety of sources. These included written submissions, dialogue with the Partners and discussions in the course of the Fora which we conducted. It is worth noting that many of the features of the JCSP mirror the curricular orientations that we observed in the Centres for Education that we visited.

A very compelling submission came before the Task Force from the JCSP Support Service. What made it thus, was that the description of the programme resonates with the research literature on how to minimise challenging behaviour in the classroom and the school. The features of this student-centred programme include

• A genuine matching of the curriculum to the student with an approach that is cross curricular

• A co-ordinated approach to its delivery that involves teachers meeting together to discuss and reflect on practice, with teaching and learning as their focus

• Short term attainable goals and targets that lead to students experiencing success, many for the first time in their school

• An emphasis on improving literacy and numeracy

• Adoption of active teaching methodologies that are based on truly differentiated teaching that result in personalised learning for each student

• Pedagogy that is experiential, interactive, purposeful, relevant and systematic and structured

• A recognition of the importance of social and communication skills for students, and scope within the framework of the programme to develop these

• The opportunity to give the student a voice in profiling his/her progress and evaluating progress

• The ethos of care and respect which characterises the programme

• A parental involvement dimension that opens up an opportunity to affirm parents who otherwise might be intimidated by encounters related to their children's schooling

The Task Force can see how this programme is attractive for certain kinds of learners, and indeed for learners who otherwise would lack enthusiasm or application for the traditional Junior Certificate. Many of the advocates of the merits of the JCSP regretted that it was not more widely available and that a comparable programme is not available in senior cycle. The Task Force notes the ongoing work of the NCCA relating to this programme and looks forward to the programme developments aimed at improving it still further.

However, while it might seem that progression on to the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) would be a natural step for students completing the JCSP, the Task Force has learned from reliable informants that the transition to LCA is too great for some students. The Task Force is aware of the immense success of

the LCA in retaining and motivating many students, and of providing them with certification that equips them well for their future. Our information, however, is that there are at present some students who enrol in the LCA, but do not stay on to complete their programme. Rather they choose to leave school on reaching their sixteenth birthday. The view was expressed to us on many occasions that there is a need to award certification on completion of each module of the LCA, so that those students who choose to leave school on reaching age 16 years will leave with some accredited qualification, if they have already completed a module/s of LCA. There was also the view that there is a need to put in place a programme at senior cycle, more in line with the JCSP, for those students who responded well to JCSP, but who seem unable for, or disinterested in the LCA.

It is very encouraging to learn that there are some students who are not disaffected in school once they find a programme that engages them, that gives them a sense of accomplishment, that is presented in a way that grabs their imagination and harnesses their participation. It is obvious that in these circumstances disruption is reduced, school attendance improves and teachers are in a position to help these young people make progress and benefit from their teaching.

8.9 The Transition Year Programme (TY)

The Transition Year focuses in particular on students' personal and social development. The TY Guidelines for Schools (Dept. of Ed.1993) emphasise that schools should adapt the programmes to suit their students'

needs. A range of active learning experiences is encouraged. TY offers schools great opportunities to present new learning experiences inside and outside the classroom. Many students engage very positively and experience new successes in TY. As their personal and social development progresses, teachers report that, often those who had behavioural issues in junior cycle, enter a Leaving Certificate programme more focussed and better behaved. The TY clearly has great capacity to help students mature, and form different kinds of relationships with a variety of adults in the work place environments which TY opens up for them. The programme has the potential to capture many of the facets that Miller (2003) in the futures thinking mode, sees as likely features of the schools of tomorrow.

8.10 Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE)

The Junior Cycle syllabus in Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) seems to offer an excellent framework for exploring with a class, issues pertinent to student behaviour. There are seven concepts that underlie the CSPE programme. Two of them are titled respectively 'Rights and Responsibilities', and 'Human Dignity'. In these modules students are encouraged to view the connection between their own behaviour towards others, and how they would wish to be treated. The programme promotes learning through doing, and assists students to see the link between actions and their consequences. It also offers scope to prepare students for participative citizenship, focusing as it does on concepts like democracy, human dignity, interdependence, law, stewardship etc.

8

Despite an imaginative syllabus and an innovative assessment, CSPE struggles to survive in many schools (Redmond & Butler, 2003). This may be due to the allocation of time for this potentially very influential subject. In essence, the 70 hours allocated to it translates into little more than one class period per week. It is worth noting that a focus on citizenship and character education are increasingly viewed internationally as a valuable curriculum measure, aimed at developing in students an appropriate sense of responsibility and commitment to the common good associated with democratic living.

8.11 Social, Physical and Health Education (SPHE)

Like CSPE, the subject SPHE also provides an opportunity to explore with students important dimensions of their behaviour. A submission to the Task Force from the SPHE Support Service notes the scope that the programme module 'Belonging and Integrating' offers to students making the transfer from primary to second level school. Learning outcomes for this module include *'the development of group work and communication skills; an awareness of students' own responsibility as members of the school community; an awareness of the characteristics of bullying behaviour; a willingness to adhere to the school policy on bullying; setting goals and targets for the year ahead; have a greater appreciation for the factors necessary for effective learning to take place; and, have drawn up a personal and group contract for the year.'*

While all of the learning outcomes of this module are worthy, it is interesting to note the focus on bullying. It has been stressed to the Task Force that bullying behaviour is a serious issue in some schools, and particularly distressing and potentially damaging for victims. The seminal work of O' Moore (O'Moore & Minton 2003, and O'Moore et al 1997a) in this country has helped not only to raise awareness of the pernicious effects of bullying behaviour, but also to contribute to the development of anti-bullying policies in our schools.

A further emphasis in the SPHE programme is the importance of a supportive school environment and its close relationship with pastoral care within a school. This is also a programme that has health promotion as a major focus. It is clear that the core aspects of this holistic programme are central to student behaviour. As with, CSPE, it seems regrettable that the time allocation for SPHE is so scant. It has been put to us, that one 40 minute class period per week is totally inadequate to do justice to this important programme. It gives little time for the use of appropriate teaching methodologies in conjunction with the programme. The view was expressed that the syllabus be developed into senior cycle so that students' Life Skills could be further developed. The Task Force is aware that proposals are being developed within the NCCA to extend SPHE into senior cycle.

8.12 Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

The point has already been made that the rolling curriculum reform has been accompanied by Inservice provision designed to acquaint teachers with programme content and assessment procedures. The Task Force has received many submissions that stressed the

need for teachers not only to have subject specific knowledge, but also high levels of competence in classroom management skills, in active teaching methodologies and the allied skills necessary to deal with differentiated teaching. There were repeated calls for professional development in areas that could help to diffuse some of the anger and frustrations that some young people in our schools exhibit. Suggested areas include Anger Management, Conflict Resolution, Restorative Practices, Cognitive Behaviour Therapy etc. The Task Force considers these calls are well grounded and advocates that these themes form the focus of future CPD initiatives.

The gains for the school are likely to be best when the CPD activity impacts on the whole school community, rather than residing in pockets of expertise that is not disseminated at local level. If there is a real community of learners in a school, it is unlikely that expertise will be "born to blush unseen".

Dissemination of best practice strategies should be a concern for school leadership and integral to the culture of a school. It is incumbent on the leadership to try to ensure that expertise that individual staff members bring to their work is shared with colleagues. Building capacity across the whole school heightens the likelihood of new initiatives or improvements taking hold. School and team development needs should be identified through the School Development Planning Initiative process, and should be situated in the context of whole school development with a particular focus on teaching and learning.

8.13 Extra-Curricular Activities

Great tribute must be paid to the generosity of many dedicated members of the teaching profession who commit to a range of extra-curricular activities on behalf of their students, a commitment that is over and beyond the call of duty. A recent ESRI report (2005) on the take up of sport in schools acknowledges this and suggests that if it were not for the goodwill of teachers the levels of student participation would be even more disappointing than they are. In their survey of 7,000 students in second level schools the researchers found that 1 in 4 students engaged in no sport at all. This ratio becomes 1 in 3 by 6th year. Girls were less likely to participate in sport than boys with 38% playing no games at all as compared with 17% of boys. The report notes a link with the obesity problem among adolescents that is now a source of concern.

Not only does access to extra-curricular activities help to develop the students in a holistic manner, but engagement in a leisure activity may give a young person a valuable and enjoyable gift for life, and may in some cases determine vocational choice. Many teachers are able to cite example after example of how students who may not shine in the more formal aspects of the formal curriculum find an outlet for other talents on the sports field or stage, or art room in their school. Many go on to represent parish, county or country in a sport or pursuit. Their initial interest may have been awakened by a helpful and interested teacher who introduced them to the activity in the first instance. A feature of a Behaviour Support Classroom brought to our attention gave students placed there an opportunity

8

to learn to play chess. Some of the students became not only interested in chess, but became very competent at it. The sense of achievement and success engendered by this experience had wider connotations in the area of discipline. Student behaviour improved and the students moved from a sense of "can't do" to a sense of "can do".

Teachers find that their extra-curricular activity with a student group can create a good opportunity to build a more informal relationship with them than is the case in the more formal setting of a large class, where the priority is faithful enactment of the curriculum. Students see aspects of the teacher that may not be as apparent when the teacher is in formal teaching role. The same holds true for the teacher who learns about the student in another context, and may see positive facets of the student that do not emerge in the classroom. This less formal relationship building is a positive feature of the Transition Year programme where students often have the opportunity to relate to a teacher in ways that are more collaborative and democratic than is the case in other classroom contexts. There is inevitably spill over of the goodwill and co-operation that characterise the extra-curricular activity into the broader arena of the classroom. The result is that indiscipline diminishes as the healthy relationships built outside of the classroom extend to within the classroom.

8.14 Conclusion

The Task Force is of the view that if schools have in place the initiatives touched on above, and if these are in the capable hands of committed professionals, and infused by a caring ethos, then the management of student behaviour should fall within tolerable limits. However, the Task Force also acknowledges that in some situations, more is required to bring about a school climate that is conducive to teaching and learning. This "more" forms the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter Nine

Continuum of Provision: On-Site and Off-Site

9.1 Introduction

The preceding three chapters have outlined the views of the Task Force on the combination of factors that contribute to positive student behaviour in mainstream schools. The focus in this chapter is on the continuum of provision that is necessary to cater for the needs of the system's most vulnerable and difficult to manage students. Consideration of provision for this group of students has been a central preoccupation of the Task Force. Before reaching our position on this continuum of provision, we have read widely and visited Centres for Education. We also visited some centres which although not having official recognition cater for out-of-school students. In the course of these visits, we have discussed widely with practitioners and researchers in the field. Our consideration of this area has been greatly assisted by some members of the group who are experienced in the area of educational provision for students outside of the mainstream. Respondents and delegations to the Task Force emphasised repeatedly the need for a strategic, systematic and integrated approach to student behaviour management both **in** and **out** of schools. All stressed the pressing need for cohesion and consistency of provision in the context of what was identified as variability and patchiness in the multiple ranges of services that currently exist.

9.2 The Ladder of Provision

The Task Force wishes to propose a continuum of provision to cater for the educational needs of the most challenging students. This continuum is characterised by linearity and flexibility and it applies to **on-site** (i.e. within the mainstream school) and **off-site** (i.e. linked to, but not within the mainstream school) provision. This is outlined in the Ladder of Provision diagram. The previous chapters have taken into account the measures up to and including level 5 and other important variables contributing to the creation of orderly schools. All of these are envisaged as occurring in a concerted way within the mainstream school, and should be sufficient to protect positive student behaviour in the majority of schools. It is the view of the Task Force that where the measures work in an integrated, orchestrated way, there should be little need to adopt the measures higher up the ladder of provision, i.e. Level 6, which is referred to here as a Behaviour Support Classroom on the Ladder of Provision, with Level 7 representing placement in a Centre for Education or YEP facility outside of the mainstream school setting. Level 8, Residential Care is appropriate for children with a wide variety of needs that require more multifaceted provision than that available in non-residential provision.

9

Level 8 Residential Care
Level 7 Centre for Education/YEP
Level 6 Behaviour Support Classroom
Level 5 Deputy Principal/Principal
Level 4 Care Team
Level 3 Year Head
Level 2 Class Tutor
Level 1 Classroom Teacher

Ladder of Provision

9.3 Behaviour Support Classrooms

Behaviour Support Classrooms represent a form of provision (**on-site**) in schools whose enrolments include a significant number of challenging students. They are classrooms to which some students can be referred if their disruptive behaviour in the regular classroom is of such a serious and persistent nature that ongoing teaching and learning cannot proceed. These classrooms are not to be thought of as 'sin bins' or dumping grounds. Rather they constitute an integral part of such a school's provision for its cohort of students. They are not envisaged as permanent classrooms for recalcitrant students, but as a short time form of intervention aimed at "turning around" unacceptable student behaviour. Thus, they are envisaged as a support to both students and staff for those students whose behaviour temporarily warrants help in an environment other than their regular classroom. In broad terms their function is to assist referred students to develop skills and attitudes required for participation in the mainstream classes. The duration of placement in a Behaviour Support Classroom will be determined by the seriousness of the student behaviour which necessitates placement there in the first instance. The role of these Behaviour Support Classrooms is:

- To provide schools with a facility for students as an alternative to suspension/expulsion from school

- To allow for specific "cooling down" periods on a short-term, part-time basis

- To form part of a reintegration strategy following exclusion or suspension from school

9

- To allow curricular work to continue as prescribed by the subject teacher

- To receive help in the area of social skills training, communication and anger management, if there is a perceived need for this

- To prepare the student for reintegration to his/her regular classroom with support and encouragement to do so from school staff

9.4 Considerations about Behaviour Support Classrooms

In order to ensure the efficacy of Behaviour Support Classrooms, there are some important considerations that must be borne in mind. Firstly, it is important that Behaviour Support Classrooms be established only in those schools where there is a genuine need for them. Schools that judge that they need this level of provision should be required to make a case for this to the DES which will determine if the level of need experienced by an applicant school warrants the setting up of the provision.

Secondly, once established, the Behaviour Support Classroom should be utilised with discretion by school staffs, and should not preclude reliance on the steps outlined in levels 1-5 of the ladder of provision. It is essential that a whole school approach be adopted in schools where Behaviour Support Classrooms are introduced, with clear understandings of their function. Access to a Behaviour Support Classroom does not preclude the habitual practice of staff in their efforts to maintain an orderly environment. It is of vital importance that, in the first instance, when a student behaves inappropriately in a class or some area of the school, that the classroom teacher or staff member on duty, invokes a corrective strategy to deal with this. If this reprimand is not successful, the usual ladder of referral should be invoked, i.e. class tutor, Year Head, Care Team, Deputy Principal/Principal. Only when these steps fail should a student be placed in a Behaviour Support Classroom.

Thirdly, the aim of placement in a Behaviour Support Classroom is to prepare the student in all cases to return to his/her regular classroom. Ideally, there should be an assessment of the range of needs of a student placed in a Behaviour Support Classroom and where possible, an Individual Education Plan (IEP) should be drawn up for the student. This IEP should then become the focus of a student's time with tuition and guidance relevant to the IEP forming the basis of time spent there. It is probable that the needs of the student will be in the areas of basic literacy and numeracy with accompanying needs in the area of social skills, anger management and communication competencies. This combination of basic curricular areas and semi-therapeutic/counselling foci will form the basis of work in the Behaviour Support Classroom.

Fourthly, the staffing of the Behaviour Support Classroom is important. The critical factor is the capacity of the staff there to establish a relationship of trust and respect with the students. Staff who work there need a combination of both pedagogic and nurturing skills. The success of placement within this recommended setting depends largely on the expertise, the knowledge and the disposition of the personnel chosen to work there. Ideally the staff should have a good knowledge of adolescent

development; be able to build healthy relationships with students and their parents in a no blame culture; be competent in setting achievable targets for the students, with a focus on both curricular and behavioural components; be comfortable in working collaboratively with colleagues, with parents and with personnel from outside agencies. For those schools which are sanctioned for the setting up of a Behaviour Support Classroom, it is obvious that additional staff will be required. The Task Force sees NEPS as playing a significant role in helping schools to chart the way forward with these classrooms. It also envisages that other agencies that work closely with the school i.e. NEWB and the Health Service Executive also collaborate to ensure the efficacy of this recommended within-school provision.

9.5   Additional On-Site Supports

The mandate for the Task Force asked to advise on best practice both nationally and internationally in fostering positive student behaviour. In compliance with this aspect of Term of Reference 3, some information is now presented on some measures that are gaining in currency in Scotland and in the UK. Firstly, we refer to the Framework for Intervention (FFI). There has been earlier reference to the FFI in Chapter Five.

9.6   The Framework for Intervention (FFI)

FFI (www.f4i.org) is a Birmingham based behaviour management strategy designed to manage concerns about behaviour in settings ranging from nursery to secondary. It has gained popularity not only in the Birmingham area, but also across the UK. Schools in Scotland, following its Task Force,

Better Behaviour, Better Learning (2001) have adopted a phased model of intervention, based largely on FFI principles. The Framework is also gaining popularity in Norway and personnel from the Birmingham area travel there to introduce interested groups to the Framework. The mission statement of FFI describes it as *"Empowering all staff in schools through a supportive, systematic approach to the management of the behaviour environment. Framework for Intervention fosters a positive ethos which enables all to promote effective teaching and learning"*. The supporting literature on the FFI describes its features as follows:

- Preventative - a belief in early intervention using least intrusive approaches

- Theoretical basis - addresses the environment in which behaviours occur

- Empowerment - supports teachers to address behaviour concerns both inside and outside the classroom

- Whole school improvement - tackles whole school issues, for example, a school's Code of Behaviour

- Professional Development - enables teachers to reflect and develop their own skills in a non-threatening way

- Cost-effective - efficient use of resources embeds good practice

- Flexible - tackles both low level disruption and more challenging behaviour

There is very comprehensive and accessible literature on the FFI which

9

describes this three level approach for dealing with behaviour problems. Essentially the model is one that concentrates on the teaching and learning environment, or general school environment. It uses a problem solving approach and its popularity appears to be attributable to the emphasis that it places on the empowerment of teachers, and on teachers working collaboratively to deal with issues that disrupt teaching and learning.

The process begins with Level 1, which focuses on the environment in which the behaviour giving rise to concern occurs. If issues are not resolved at that level, as they frequently are, the process continues in a graduated fashion to two further levels, with a concentration on the individual student or students who are the focus of concern. The intervention can be triggered by any staff member who raises a concern about a student or a group of students. This staff member then becomes the lead person, remains involved throughout the intervention process, and works in collaboration with a staff colleague, (The Behaviour Co-ordinator) who has had training in FFI processes. Together, they develop a plan aimed at reducing or eliminating the behaviour that triggered the concern in the first place. A Behaviour Environment Checklist is used to facilitate this process (cf Appendix 6). A handbook for schools or support services wishing to get started with the FFI is also available.

The submission to the Task Force from NEPS makes clear that it considers the FFI to be a promising approach. They point to its potential to support and empower class/subject teachers that leaves them less dependent on outside agencies with specialist expertise. Specialist help and referral on may ultimately be required,

but first, a number of other possibilities will have been explored, many of which will have produced positive outcomes. It is worth noting that the approach adopted by NEPS is itself a three level, staged model that moves from classroom support, to school support, to school plus support. Consultation with academics in the UK and in Scotland, who are familiar with FFI, were positive about it, but noted that many new approaches or interventions are effective initially, but that their efficacy may not be durable. Inevitably they are replaced by "newer" approaches that are the current approach of choice at a given time.

9.7   Nurture Groups

The attention of the Task Force was also drawn to the growing popularity of Nurture Groups, especially in the UK. Although these developed initially as provision for younger children, they are now being adopted as a promising intervention at second level. Some information on Nurture Groups is now presented, as many of the principles governing Nurture Groups have applicability in settings other than those designated Nurture Groups as such. This is true with special reference to students who present with EBD or SEBD.

The research literature in the area of EBD students is now paying a lot of attention to the efficacy of Nurture Groups (Cooper et al, 2001, Cooper et al, forthcoming paper, Doyle, 2004, Colwell & O'Connor, 2003). *"A nurture group is an early intervention resource for children whose social, emotional and behavioural needs are unable to be met in a mainstream classroom"* (Doyle, 2004). The underlying theory of Nurture Groups owes its origins to the work on Attachment Theory pioneered by Bowlby, 1969,1973 and 1980.

Subsequently, Bennethan & Boxall (2002) working as Educational Psychologists in a London Local Education Authority established classes for approximately 12 pupils in mainstream primary schools who, in their view, presented with emotional and behavioural difficulties due to problems encountered in their earlier attachment to their primary caregivers. As a result of this early experience, these pupils on entering formal school were unable to benefit from or access the curriculum in the mainstream classroom. Their behaviour was disruptive of the education of their peers. However, the experience of placement in a Nurture Group, where they were helped to develop age-appropriate socialisation enabled them to reintegrate into their regular class. There are similarities between the Nurture Group provision and that available here in neighbourhoods where Early Start programmes operate. These programmes aim to prepare young children for full participation in their subsequent schooling. They also involve two adults working collaboratively.

It is obvious from the above short description, that Nurture Groups are more appropriate as an intervention in early years or primary education, than in second level where the gaps or deficits in socialisation are even greater than might be encountered in a young primary school pupil. That notwithstanding, the establishment of Nurture Groups or variants thereof, are gaining in popularity in post primary provision in the UK. To quote Cooper & Whitebread (forthcoming paper) "*Nurture Groups can be understood as a school-based learning environment specifically designed for pupils whose difficulties in accessing school-learning are underpinned by an apparent need*

for individual experiences that can be construed in terms of unmet early learning needs." Personal communication with Professor Cooper in preparation of this report suggests that often schools in the UK have class groups on-site that are predicated on some of the principles and practices of the original Nurture Groups set up by Bennathan & Boxhall, 2000; and Boxhall, 2002, but are not referred to as "Nurture Groups", but rather designated in a school's own choice of descriptor, as fits the local context. Whatever the designation, the intervention is established to provide students with an educational bridge to permanent and full-time placement in mainstream classrooms.

One of the positive outcomes of the establishment of a Nurture Group type provision within school is that the benefits extend beyond that actual facility. Teachers in schools where Nurture Groups have been established report that the nurturing approach adopted within the designated classroom are often adopted across the school. This leads to an increased understanding of the needs of all students. This deepened understanding and new perceptions seem to replace a previously held sense of helplessness, on the part of teachers.

The principles underlying the supports just described have a shared rationale in recognising the value of collaborative intervention by professionals in responding to the needs of a demanding group. These principles will have an equal value in the management and organisation of Behaviour Support Classrooms which the Task Force sees as a central plank of its Recommendations.

9

9.8   Off-Site Provision

This section of the report now focuses on off-site or out-of-school provision. In presenting this, the Task Force is keen to stress that the provision that it describes when referring to Centres for Education (e.g. Youthreach) and Youth Encounter Projects (YEPs) is part of the official provision of education offered at present by the DES to meet the needs of children in the system who are unsuited to placement in mainstream provision. As such this provision constitutes a form of schooling and warrants parity of esteem from the education community alongside more traditional or mainstream schools. Greater flexibility and mobility between mainstream i.e. **on-site**, and **off-site** provision are strongly advocated by the Task Force.

9.9   Key Characteristics of Successful Off-Site Provision

Relevant literature (Aron & Zweig (2003); ERIC Development Team (2003) in the area of off-site provision indicates that the characteristics which distinguish such centres are:

• The presence of caring, knowledgeable adults who understand and care deeply about young people, and who provide significant care and attention while establishing a climate of listening, trust and mutual respect

• A sense of community where the young person has a sense of belonging, attachment and of "family"

• A focus on problem-solving rather than problem identification

• An approach that is oriented on an assets rather than a deficit model whereby the young person feels valued, connected and purposeful

• Programmes provide both safety and structure. High expectations for success are communicated and the young person agrees an individual learning plan that is attainable and monitored at regular intervals, and supported by a variety of resources

• More freedom of choice given to the students, and a regime that is more informal and more adult than might be the case in mainstream settings

• A curriculum that is holistic, learner-centred and experiential. It is matched to the student's needs, interests and learning styles, with success experiences built in

• Many programmes integrate academic and vocational education, with career development and work-based learning as features

• Students in alternative programmes may be able to access other services with the help of staff from the Centre e.g. medical, dental, counselling etc.,

9.10   The Task Force and visits to Centres and Projects

Members of the Task Force saw evidence of the range of characteristics, just outlined, in many of the Centres for Education (Youthreach), the YEP and other alternative settings that we visited. Youthreach is the principal national response aimed at those who have left school early and who are aged 15-20. It is delivered in 90 Centres for Education maintained by VECs and 45 Community

Training Centres funded by FÁS. A similar programme is delivered in Senior Traveller Training Centres, though these cater in the main for adult learners. Youth Encounter Projects are five in number, and are located in Cork, two in Dublin's North inner city, Finglas, and Limerick.

The Task Force found the experience of visiting this provision and discussing with the staff to be a very informative and developmental experience. It has influenced our thinking in a very fundamental way. There is very valuable work being carried out in these Centres. This work is challenging and largely uncelebrated. It is emotionally and professionally very demanding on the staff who commit to it. Of more pressing concern to our present enquiry is, that it is also very effective. In all instances the students appeared very happy with their placement there. They told us with some pride that their "new" environment suited them very much better than the mainstream school in which they were often miserable and in constant trouble with school authorities.

Parents of the children shared with Task Force members their high levels of satisfaction with the alternative placement and they were of the view that gaining a place in the programme had opened up second chance opportunities for their sons or daughters. Many students had completed the Junior Certificate or were in preparation for it. Some students wished to re-enter mainstream schools to pursue the LCA, but reported difficulty in gaining entry to local mainstream schools.

Centre personnel expressed the wish that more productive links be established with mainstream schools with a view to reintegrating students in these

schools should a student feel ready and motivated to do so. This seems to be entirely reasonable and the Task Force recommends collaboration of this student-centred kind.

Without exception the staff were dedicated totally to the care and development of the young people in their charge. They brought to their demanding role a sense of pride in their work, a compassion that allowed people to make mistakes, a recognition that boundaries coupled with respect were necessary for their students, and in all cases, a good sense of humour.

Of course the Task Force saw evidence of such similar quality care and education in the Fora in the mainstream schools. Despite such care, the fact remains that there is a very small percentage of students, estimated to be about 1% -2%, who despite a school's best effort to be pastoral and to reach out, do not experience it in that way. The intimacy and lack of perceived pressure in the alternative off-site provision meets the needs of these vulnerable and often troublesome children better. It was clear to the Task Force that placement in these Centres suited the clientele in a way that mainstream education did not. The good thing was that these marginalised students were, with help, raising the ceilings of their lives. The Task Force learned of a Centre from which, out of the 50 students who graduated, there have been only three who have been subsequently placed in custodial care. This is a source of pride for the staff as the personal biographies of their graduates bore all the characteristics of young people destined to find themselves in trouble with the law. The difference was that the latter group had not had

9

access to a Life Skills programme[4]. Not all staff in these off-site Centres came from a teaching background, but all shared a belief that behaviour could change, and that they could make a difference in the lives of their students. Some of the Centres that the Task Force visited were housed in inadequate accommodation. The staffs were working with a volatile population in circumstances that were restricting, and on occasion, potentially dangerous. The Task Force noted that there was little reporting of student behaviour being so disruptive in these alternative settings as to warrant exclusion.

Many Centres have long waiting lists for places, but due to space restrictions are unable to enrol any more candidates. The result of this, according to the Directors with whom we spoke, is that young people of legal school-going age are roaming around the neighbourhood unable to gain admission to either a mainstream school or Centre for Education/YEP. Our work in the Task Force has impressed on us that there is growing recognition of the need for high quality alternative provision both within and beyond the mainstream school i.e. **on-site** and **off-site**, and we urge this most vehemently.

9.11 One system, Two Modes, and the Ladder of Provision

After much careful consideration and debate, the Task Force has come to the conclusion, hinted at above, that the mainstream school, cannot cater for all students equally. This determination has led us to advocate the strengthening and the widening of provision, of the kind portrayed in this section of the report. The provision is that which would be available **off-site**, and would be accessible

to a number or cluster of schools in a given locality to which they could refer their students when all of their efforts to integrate the student of concern had failed. We are persuaded from our experiences of the sites that we visited, of the humane and focussed work that occurs in these off-site facilities. In a sense, we see it as liberating for a student to be placed in such an environment where a tailored made programme is put in place to allow the young person to develop and attain in ways that suit his/her pathway. As envisaged by the Task Force, placement in an off-site Centre/ school is the step that is presented as Level 7 on the ladder of provision.

9.12 Observations on Off-Site Provision

This off-site provision is not a separate system, disconnected from and/or moving on parallel lines to a mainstream. Rather, it must be seen as another and equal mode of completing education, offering continuous opportunities for learners to interchange with and return to more normative settings. High levels of co-operation and mutual respect and understanding will be required to ensure the flexibility and the efficacy of this interdependent relationship between the two modes of schooling i.e. **on-site** and **off-site**. Participation should be on the basis that the off-site setting is the most appropriate provision for a given young person at a particular stage in his/her schooling. The core objective of the system and its different modes should be to deliver, as far as is practical, comparable outcomes for the child wherever he/she learns. It is the view of the Task Force that advocating this will not necessitate a totally new form of provision. Instead, as suggested earlier, it will require a

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[4] Life Skills Centres offer schooling to children from both primary and second level who are no longer attending mainstream school. They have been set up in Dublin, Cork and Waterford by the Congregation of Christian Brothers who provide the venues and some of the staffing. Funding is also provided by the Christian Brothers and is supplemented by a variety of other funding sources that includes the DES and local VECs.

strengthening and extension of existing models that are already in the system, but are too limited at present to cater for current and pressing needs.

Accordingly, there is need within the officially recognised provision to develop further these programmes and facilities, and to place them on a sure footing both in terms of funding and staffing. The Task Force is of the view that the YEP model should be extended in a limited number of urban areas where numbers of potential referrals are substantial enough to warrant this development. This could be achieved by changing the designation and operating criteria of existing Centres or programmes. However, doing so would require a substantial review of a wide range of provision (see Chapter Ten). Each YEP should be linked to feeder schools and (with particular reference to progression) to other Centres for Education providing for 16-20 year olds through the Youthreach programme.

It is also the case that the numbers in many areas are not sufficient to warrant the establishment of a YEP for 12-15 year olds. Centres providing the Youthreach programme offer both an appropriate learning environment and a more widely available resource that could be extended to pick up the younger children in a district who require off-site provision to continue with their schooling. The Youthreach programme's remit and resourcing should be extended to allow for the enrolment of children in the younger age group. This will require careful consideration. Alternatively, the Department of Education and Science may wish to consider the establishment of a separate programme targeting the 12-15 age range to be delivered in Youthreach settings under the joint direction of the School Completion and

Youthreach programmes. In all cases, this provision must be accompanied by appropriate staffing levels and resourcing mechanisms, each based on identified levels of need. The final section of this report dealing with Recommendations will develop this more fully.

9.13 Observations on Alternative Off-Site Provision Within the System

The Task Force was struck in the course of its work by the plethora of initiatives that are in operation across government departments and non-statutory organisations aimed at offering some kind of educational provision to young people. Many of these initiatives work independently and their mode of procedure demonstrates little evidence of central co-ordination or streamlining. Reference has already been made to the initiatives that have official recognition, e.g. Youthreach and Youth Encounter Projects. However many initiatives that the Task Force learned about do not have official recognition, and are operating unilaterally on an ad hoc basis, drawing their funding from various sources. The initiatives have in common that they seek to cater for the needs of students who are at risk of failing to acquire basic skills, and of drifting or "being lost", in educational terms. A list of some of these initiatives is included in Appendix 8. In parallel, the Task Force also notes the number of professionals, many of them working in parallel, with little conjoined thinking or coherence of provision. A child in difficulty might encounter any number of these (Appendix 9). The Task Force is of the view that all of these sectoral initiatives referred to above, should be closely examined, and over as short a period of time as is feasible, they should be realigned and, where appropriate,

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assimilated into an official alternative provision for youth of school going age.

It is also the case that in many districts there is provision for children who are out of school and who are benefiting from services that are variously run by other statutory bodies such as the HSE, by youth organisations, community groups, and by religious or charitable organisations. The Task Force has been bewildered by the range of the provision, but alarmed by the lack of coordination and the apparent replication of much that is on offer in certain neighbourhoods. In that context, it calls on the DES and the NEWB to commission a full review of such provision with a view to:

• Describing it and setting it in its appropriate historical and structural contexts

• Cataloguing where and how it exists

• Recommending how it may be brought within the remit of the existing legislative and operational framework

• Designating (under the Education Act, 1998) and prescribing (under the Education (Welfare Act) 2000) such of it, as is of acceptable standard

• Setting in place transparent mechanisms for resourcing, supporting, monitoring and evaluating

9.14 Cases of Extreme Need, and Lack of Sectoral Coherence and Integration

The Task Force also accepts that there is a small percentage (c. 0.3%-0.5%) of young people whose needs cannot be met even in the Centres of the kind

referred to above. This is consistent with international experience. In general, these young people are from dysfunctional backgrounds and present extremely challenging behaviours. They may need residential care (Level 8, on the Ladder of Provision). They certainly need all services operating in concert if they are to survive. Such is certainly the vision of many initiatives such as the Springboard projects and the RAPID programme. These children are the focus of the Children Act (2001). However, the Task Force was repeatedly informed that in many cases the services do not cohere and children regularly slip through the various nets. The Task Force is acutely conscious of the cyclical nature of disadvantage and dysfunction. This most problematic end of the spectrum of behavioural difficulty is as much in need of cohesion and continuity as any other and making it so must be a priority for Government Departments, agencies and NGOs alike.

Some rationalising of services for children would be both cost effective and positive in its impact on the lives of those for whom the services are designed. Services to children are, as the Irish Times (Dec 12, 2005, p4) puts it: *"riven with faultlines that result in fragmented and uncoordinated services for troubled young people and their families"*. In this context, the Task Force notes that at the time of writing it has been announced that responsibility for childcare, child protection, juvenile justice and early years education is to be taken over by an expanded Office of the Minister for Children. In addition, changes have been announced in the way that young people are dealt with before the law. The Task Force welcomes and acknowledges the intention behind these changes.

In summary: The Task Force has learned of a wide range of provision that is "out there", especially in districts serving children of greatest need. However, there is at present no coherent framework to tie all of this provision together in a way that makes it navigable and accessible, and that assesses its standards and its efficacy. It looks forward to the fruits of the forthcoming processes, aimed at bringing coherence to this labyrinthine range of provision.

9.15   Interagency collaboration

This report has repeatedly made the point that schools or off-site Centres cannot meet the needs of all their students without help from agencies with complementary expertise in the healthy development of young people. In the normal course of events most schools are not reliant on input from professionals beyond the world of education, but there are occasions when they need others to supplement their in-house expertise. This help may be forthcoming from psychologists, Garda Juvenile Liaison Officers, Counsellors, Health Care Workers or Education Welfare Officers. Schools that work in close contact with the local community are usually able to network with a variety of agencies and can call in the help of the relevant professionals as needs dictate. However, there is often a long delay in the delivery of the service that these people can offer. Schools report a lot of frustration with the logjam experienced in accessing psychological assessments for students. Linked to this, is the delay in pulling down resources for a student following an assessment that confirms that the child is eligible for added supports. There is also frustration at the difficulty in accessing mental health appointments should, a school

in conjunction with the parents, seek to get help in this area for a young person.

Interagency working is time consuming. It also requires clear understandings on the complementarity of roles on the part of those engaged in it in order to be effective. And just as those outside the school or Centre need to reach out to other services and agencies, so too must the latter reach in to the school and Centre. This necessitates the establishment of clear, workable and solution-oriented operational arrangements at local level. Structures, processes and lines of communication regarding agencies, referrals, transfer and processing of information should form a key part of each school's development plan. There is a recognition now taking hold, that if the general well-being of children is not taken care of, then there will be ongoing barriers to learning. The recent publication from the UK Department of Education and Skills, *Every Child Matters: Change for Children in Schools (2005)* stresses the importance of a variety of agencies working in tandem to deliver a total package of integrated services aimed at contributing to students' wider well- being and educational success. Much of the frustration experienced by schools and families is linked to the apparent lack of cohesion across services dealt with in the section above.

9.16   Conclusion

The discursive and analytical exploration of the issues associated with student behaviour documented in the preceding chapters, concludes at this point. This exploration has established a platform from which it is possible to frame a series of substantive Recommendations. These are set out in the final chapter which follows.

Chapter Ten

Recommendations

10.1   Introduction

This section of the report gives an account of a range of measures that the Task Force has identified as essential if those schools, that are currently experiencing serious levels of disruptive behaviour are to be enabled to fulfil their core function of providing a good standard of educational experience for all their learners. In the interim report of July 2005, the Task Force indicated that it would make Recommendations in areas which had emerged as important, during the first phase of the work. It has adhered to that intention and has added other Recommendations on themes that merit inclusion.

It is the judgement of the Task Force that the evident deterioration in levels of student discipline requires a response that is comprehensive, coherent and flexible. The Task Force anticipates that if the measures suggested here are adopted, then schools will be in a stronger position to meet the challenges of motivating and catering for a number of young people, whose troubling behaviour is reflective of a wider societal breakdown of acceptable norms of courtesy and civility. The interim report stressed the need for all the key players to come together in an effort to stem the corrosive influence of persistent, serious disruption in our schools. We reiterate that call. This "teacht le chéile" of stakeholders is a fundamental tenet of the set of Recommendations set out below. Schools alone cannot supply all the remedies. They need and deserve the support of the Department of Education and Science, management bodies, parents and society in general. The Task Force calls on all the players to make their contribution, and to do so in a spirit of generosity and collegiality, in the knowledge that as an investment it can yield only good.

Our Recommendations are presented in a serial fashion, but not necessarily in order of priority. Not all schools require the full range of added measures to help them to provide for the educational and holistic needs of their students. As highlighted right through this report, some schools are catering for students who bring with them a multiplicity of needs, many of which act as barriers to successful achievement in school. These schools require a range of measures accompanied by adequate resources to guarantee their efficacy. We are confident that the Recommendations that we put forward can make a significant contribution to the creation of a more harmonious teaching and learning environment in our classrooms and schools.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Out-of-School Provision

Interagency & Intercollegial Collaboration

Development of a Discipline Survey Instrument

Dissemination of Good Practice

Implementation of Report's Recommendations

Whole School Approach

Diversity within Student Cohort

Class Size

Empowerment of Students

Transfer from Primary to Second Level

Curriculum

Teacher Education

Quality of Leadership & Professional Competence of Teaching Staff

Time for Year Heads

Parental Involvement

Legislation

Updating Current Circulars on Discipline

Rights & Responsibility

Expansion of NEPS

Behaviour Support Team

Access to a Behaviour Support Classroom

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A Whole-School Approach

Evidence before the Task Force points up the importance of schools adopting a uniform and consistent approach to all matters relating to student learning and behaviour. It is a matter of frustration for colleagues, students and parents when individual members of a staff depart from the school's adopted practices in these matters. School staffs now engage in the process of school development planning initiative (SDPI). This process allows schools to take an overview of the totality of their work. It presents an opportunity to ensure that there is an internal coherence and a consistency of tone in the range of policies that are now mandatory for all schools. These policies should be living documents informed by the characteristic spirit of a school and reflective of its dominant culture and value system. It is obvious that the SDPI process in tandem with policy development influence practice across a school. The role of senior management involves supporting and monitoring faithful implementation of these policies.

In that context...

The Task Force recommends that schools implement school policies in ways that are uniform and that are consonant with the characteristic spirit of the school.

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A Whole-School Approach: Action Plan			
Commencement Date	Action to be taken	Responsibility of	Target Date
Immediately	School Development Planning should translate into a set of adopted practices that are uniformly implemented across the school	Board of Management, Senior Management and Staff in consultation with parents, students and others as appropriate	On-going
	New members of staff, whether permanent or substituting, should be made familiar with school policies, especially those that pertain 1) to teaching and learning, 2) the code of behaviour and 3) ways of dealing with breaches of discipline	Senior staff member or designated mentor	
	Schools should produce a handbook for staff members that outlines agreed practices relating to school policies	Principal and Sub Committee of the SDPI	
	Encouragement should be given to the sharing of the within-school expertise that exists among staff members on how to create and maintain good levels of discipline. Peer support and collaboration should be characteristic of a school culture.	Principal, Deputy Principal, Care Team	

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The Diversity within the Student Cohort

One of the most remarkable developments that have occurred in second level schools in recent years has been the enrolment of considerable numbers of students from cultures outside of Ireland. Another major development of equal import has been the growing trend towards including students with special educational needs in mainstream schools. These developments occurred in a short space of time and, in many ways, our schools were insufficiently prepared to respond fully and effectively to them. Despite the lack of adequate preparation for these major changes at national level, and in the absence of prior experiences on which to draw, individual schools have responded magnificently in their efforts to be inclusive and to provide quality education for all of their students. There is general acceptance in the education community, that the policy of inclusion, which is now being implemented across government sectors, is worthy and beneficial, especially for those at risk of social exclusion.

School personnel wish to be at the forefront of leading this policy forward and are keen to work within an inclusive framework. This has been represented to us both in the many submissions which dealt with this issue, and further substantiated in our discussions with the partners in education. However, lasting inclusive practice can only evolve gradually, and requires a lot of support to be genuinely responsive to the needs of a very diverse cohort. Inclusion is a process that involves much more than being enrolled or placed in a class in a school. The Task Force endorses the view

that mainstream schools should continue to work towards providing effectively for the total spectrum of students. In order to advance the meaningful implementation of a policy of inclusion, and thus enable schools to take all reasonable steps to ensure that the whole school cohort reaches its potential

The Task Force recommends that schools receive the range of supports that is necessary to ensure that meaningful inclusion and integration are implemented for the full spectrum of students.

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The Diversity within the Student Cohort Action Plan			
Commencement Date	Action to be taken	Responsibility of	Target Date
Spring 2006	A set of guidelines be issued to all schools outlining criteria for admission of students to schools located within a specified catchment area	DES	On-going
	Students with special education needs who transfer from primary to second level school should retain as appropriate, supports at second level, comparable to those that they received at primary.	DES, SENOS	
	The current logjam that exists with accessing psychological assessments and clinical assessments be resolved.	DES, NEPS, Health Service Executive	
	CPD for teachers should include a focus on teaching methodologies suitable for students with varying abilities, motivational levels, language competencies, cultural norms, so that truly differentiated teaching and learning can occur.	CPD Providers	
	Teachers should be assisted in developing competence that enables them to distinguish between disruptive behaviour that is associated with a special educational need and behaviour that is a manifestation of a wilful violation of a norm of social acceptability.	SENOS, NEPS, Teacher Educators, SESS, NEWB	
	Schools should have access to Support Teams to assist them with both the curricular and the behavioural dimensions of catering for an increasingly diverse student population.	DES with help as appropriate from NEPS and SLSS	

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Class Size

Many submissions before the Task Force outlined the need for class size to be reduced. The view was expressed to us that if teachers are to be enabled to carry out their teaching role in an effective and competent manner they have to engage, almost individually, with the variety of learners that is in their classrooms. The trend now in schools is for mixed ability classes. Schools are being encouraged to engage in individualised or personalised teaching. In some situations, current class size does not facilitate this. In view of this

The Task Force recommends that the McGuinness report be implemented and that the plans that were devised following its publication be activated.

Class Size Action Plan			
Commencement Date	Action to be taken	Responsibility of	Target Date
September 2006	The McGuinness report to be implemented in the interest of promoting more individualised teaching.	DES	On-going

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The Empowerment of Students

We live in an era in Ireland that has taken on a new perspective on children, viz, persons aged 0-18 years, and that has granted them newfound status. This report has indicated some of the origins of this positive development. According to the National Children's Strategy, (2000), granting children a voice means:

- Encouraging children to express their views and demonstrating a willingness to take those views seriously;

- Setting out clearly for the children the scope of such participation by them to avoid misunderstanding;

- Providing children with sufficient information and support to enable them to express informed views;

- Explaining the decisions taken, especially when the views of the child cannot be fully taken into account.

(National Children's Strategy, Our Children - Their Lives, pg.30)

The establishment of Student Councils is a welcome and visible expression of a school's commitment to translate these aspirations into a reality. A Student Council is a vehicle that gives students some direct involvement in the running of the school, as appropriate. Students have much to contribute, and it is to the benefit of schools to unleash that potential. By increasing the capacity of students to participate and collaborate in the running of the school, as appropriate, schools give to their students the skills and competencies to strengthen civic society, and to be involved as responsible citizens in our democracy. Promoting

student engagement at policy level in schools can also help to reduce student misbehaviour across the school. It is a missed opportunity for schools if they fail to involve their students as key players in the resolution of difficulties that arise. Where students perceive that they are treated with respect, and listened to in ways that reflect being valued, there develops an ethos of mutual regard and co-operation between students and staff that helps to minimise, in a majority of situations, the likelihood of disruptive behaviour. In view of the many advantages that come from the empowerment of students in school,

The Task Force recommends that schools create opportunities to allow the voice of students to be heard in ways that contribute to the creation of constructive working relationships with the student body.

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The Empowerment of Students Action Plan			
Commencement Date	Action to be taken	Responsibility of	Target Date
Academic year 2006	Student Councils should be established as a matter of priority in those schools where they are not already in place.	Principal and designated staff member	On-going
	Every effort should be made to ensure that the Student Council is representative of the total student population.	Staff members involved in the setting up and conduct of the Student Council	
	Students should be involved as appropriate in the construction, the implementation and the review of school policies, especially the code of behaviour.	School management and SDPI teams	
	Students should receive help in developing the requisite skills to enable them to put forward their views in ways that are constructive.	CSPE teacher in conjunction with colleagues	
	Where Student Council suggestions are not acted on, clear explanations should be given to it as to why that is so.	School personnel	
	Students should receive guidance in the skills of conflict resolution and/or restorative practices so that issues that cause dissent may be brought to a swift and satisfactory resolution.	School Guidance Counsellor, staff member with relevant expertise, outside facilitator	

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The Transfer from Primary to Second Level Schools

The transfer from primary to second level school is an important milestone in the educational life of a learner. Best practice suggests that it is necessary to set in train at an early stage procedures aimed at ensuring a smooth and promising transfer. This report has already explored some of the apprehensions that accompany this juncture for both students and their parents (cpt.8). The Task Force has had the opportunity to observe good examples of the transfer practice that many schools adopt at present. Some transfer practices draw on the expertise of personnel in targeted initiatives like Home School Community Liaison, School Completion and Educational Welfare Board where these are available. The joint work carried out by the NCCA and the ESRI shows that schools could facilitate transfer by 1) providing more developed integration programmes in first year, 2) developing a more positive school climate with good relations between teachers and students, 3) facilitating a continuity of learning experiences by building upon the primary experience and allowing access to subjects with a practical focus. With a view to embedding good practice across the system,

The Task Force recommends that all schools ensure that they have a transfer programme in place that is comprehensive and sensitive, so that new entrants into a school, and their parents, have a sense of belonging to a school community that is inclusive and caring, and that promotes collaboration among all the stakeholders so as to ensure a happy and enriching educational experience for the student.

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The Transfer from Primary to Second Level Schools Action Plan			
Commencement Date	Action to be taken	Responsibility of	Target Date
Academic Year 2006	On entry into the school at the beginning of the academic year, new students engage in an induction programme that offers them an opportunity 1) to experience a sense of belonging and attachment to the school, 2) to have a detailed explanation of their timetable, the expectations governing homework, the use of the journal, and the location of their classes, 3) to learn about school rules, their rationale, the rewards and sanctions that accompany them, and the "chain of command" that is invoked to ensure their implementation, 4) to receive clarification on any issues that are of concern to them, 5) to become thoroughly familiar with the school building, 6) to learn of the range of supports and the extra-curricular facilities that are available in the school, 7) to communicate a sense of a school that is committed to caring for students, but that has clear expectations about the behaviour of all who are part of the school community, 8) to receive some help and guidance with time management and approaches to study skills.	School personnel, with the Year Head, class tutors, School Guidance Counsellor, Pastoral care personnel playing a lead role	Ongoing
	All relevant information, that is permissible, to be made available by the "sending" primary school to the "receiving" second level school. This would be helped by the official introduction of the student report card that is in the process of development by the NCCA.	Primary and Second level school personnel in collaboration	
	Parents to share with schools any information that will assist the school in making provision for the care and the education of their child.	Parents	
	Continuity of contact with key personnel e.g. SENO, HSCL teacher, School Completion officer, EWO etc	Support Agents	
	Where "buddy systems", mentoring systems, or equivalent are in operation in a school, that these be presented and their role explained.	School Personnel	
	Parents and school personnel to share, at an early stage, concerns that may emerge so that matters do not develop to a point where it is difficult to sort them out satisfactorily.	Parents and School Personnel	

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The Curriculum

In any review of student behaviour in schools the curriculum, which the students follow, must be a factor that warrants consideration. Some of our students become disenchanted early in their second level schools because they find aspects of the curriculum unappealing. Research tells us that students who risk disaffection at school respond best to a curriculum that is holistic, that actively engages them, that is responsive to their needs, interests and learning styles, that combines integrated academic, social skills, and vocational education with career development and work-based learning. The Task Force has been interested in the proposals from the NCCA relating to senior cycle, and it wishes to endorse those proposals focusing as they do on flexible, student centred programmes of study, with certification accruing for each module followed.

Where students experience success and enjoyment in their classrooms or workrooms, it is obvious that their engagement will be increased and their misbehaviour lessened. This report has already reported enthusiasm for the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), and it notes that the NCCA has been carrying out a rolling review of this valuable programme. The Task Force is of the view that recent and continuing advances in curriculum have much to contribute to reducing the corrosive nature of indiscipline in our schools. It is for this reason that

The Task Force recommends that the curriculum reform which is well underway and which is taking hold in our schools be continued, and that innovations related to curriculum innovations be evaluated and disseminated.

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The Curriculum Action Plan			
Commencement Date	Action to be taken	Responsibility of	Target Date
On-going	The JCSP, which is available at present to a limited number of schools, become more widely available with appropriate support structures to ensure successful introduction and roll out.	DES, JCSP Support Service	On-going
	Consideration should be given to extending this programme to senior cycle in the form of a Senior Certificate School Programme (SCSP).	DES, NCCA	
	The lessons learned from the rolling review of the JCSP should be factored into the programme as it continues to develop.	NCCA, Schools offering the programme, JCSP Support Service	
	Schools offering the JCSP should exercise discretion and good judgement in the selection of students for the programme so as to ensure that only those students for whom the programme is intended, follow it.	Schools offering the programme	
	Consideration to be given to the introduction of a programme in senior cycle, of possibly one year duration, with emphasis on pre-employment, with possible FETAC recognition for modules within such a programme.	NCCA, FETAC, DES	
	Future senior cycle programme should feature, FETAC type modules at appropriate levels, to meet the characteristics of the varied school's cohort.	NCCA, FETAC, DES	
	Information on programme innovation and evaluation should be widely disseminated and the broader school community encouraged to engage with the important developments in a more participative way.	NCCA, School Community	

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Teacher Education

School personnel in many ways are at the centre of this whole report. This is because the Task Force recognises that school personnel play such a pivotal role in the lives of young people, whether that role be as school leader, classroom teacher, member of a care team or as administrative or support staff. The Task Force has listened to powerful advocates for teaching staff. We have had numerous, extensive submissions that documented the complexities and the pressures that are real for today's teachers of young people. We appreciate the toll that even a small minority of students, who are persistently and offensively disruptive, can take on school staffs. It appears that in the privacy of their classrooms, some individual teachers struggle with managing very challenging behaviour. More than ever, schools need to be responsive to the changing needs of their students, and ultimately to the needs of the local or global society in which so many of those students will function. We know that already many schools have had to reinvent themselves and to restructure in fundamental ways in order to keep abreast with the pace of change and to meet the ever growing demands and expectations that are placed on them. It is for this reason that in common with so many other interested parties

The Task Force recommends:

1) that Pre-service Teacher Education prioritise the skills of active teaching methodologies, personalised teaching that engages the interest and ability of learners, and a repertoire of coping strategies for the needs of a changing cohort in a dynamic education system;

2) that an Induction Programme become a compulsory component for newly qualified teachers (NQTs);

3) that Continuing Professional Development (CPD) become an integral part of the teaching profession, and

4) that a National Framework for the CPD of the teaching profession be put in place.

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Teacher Education Action Plan			
Commencement Date	Action to be taken	Responsibility of	Target Date
Academic Year 2006	Pre-service teacher education programmes should provide each student teacher with as wide a range of teaching practice placements, as can be accommodated, so as to ensure that placement mirrors the realities that will confront the teacher when appointed to a school, following qualification.	Teacher Education Departments	On-going
	Arrangements should be put in place to make available Centres for Education as locations for student teachers in which to carry out their teaching practice placements.	Teacher Education departments in conjunction with Directors of Centres for Education	
	Components of teacher education programmes should include a focus on role-play, case histories, video vignettes, audio clips, and any other mode of presentation to ensure that all teachers develop a repertoire of coping strategies for the "new" realities of contemporary classrooms.	Teacher Education providers whether based in Education Departments or as part of CPD provision	
	Schools should have the opportunity to develop their capacity in approaches aimed at coping with challenging behaviour among their students. Such areas include anger management, conflict resolution, cognitive behaviour therapy, restorative practices etc.	NEPS, Teacher Education Providers, Health Executive, Justice personnel etc.	
	Schools should have access to a Behaviour Support Team that would help to embed good practice across the school in areas like classroom management, personalised teaching, special education needs, development of social skills, good citizenship among students, working with parents, interdisciplinary collaboration, adolescent development.	DES, NEPS, Second Level Support Service, SESS etc.	
	A National Framework to be established that would set out a satisfactory system for all aspects of the professional development of teachers. This Framework would address issues of CPD to include, timing, frequency, duration, accreditation, possible mandatory nature of CPD, financial aspects etc.	DES, Teaching Council, Unions, Teacher Education Providers	

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The Quality of Leadership and Professional Competence of Teaching Staff

Effective leaders and competent teachers form the foundation of excellent schools. By excellence here we mean schools that strive to cater for the needs of an inclusive enrolment, representative of the full spectrum of students in the system. These are schools that maintain a whole student perspective, schools that in their provision value the affective as much as the academic. They are schools that care, schools that listen, schools that respond, and schools that are relentless in their efforts to help each and every student reach his/her potential. These may or may not be the schools that receive plaudits in the league tables that are gradually gaining attention in our public discourse. These are "moving" schools, reflective schools, and it requires commitment and stamina from their staffs to maintain high quality, professional performance there over a long period of time. Their task is made even more demanding where they face challenging behaviour on a persistent and pervasive basis. In such circumstances, some school leaders and teachers start to feel symptoms associated with "burn out" while others feel disillusionment setting in. The result may be that their performance starts to slip from its former high standards. Noddings (1992) writes about the emotional toll and consequent energy loss that teaching takes on teachers who care too much. Hargreaves (1994) writes graphically about the "intensification" of teaching and the associated stress that it brings, culminating ultimately in burn-out.

The Task Force is sensitive to just how demanding it is to stay at the

"cutting edge" of the profession today. It welcomes the intention in the DEIS (2005) report to create sabbatical leave for 50 principals and teachers who are participating in the School Support Programme (SSP) "to undertake a period of development to enhance their own professional learning and effectiveness, and bring subsequent benefits to their students and their school". With regard to a school principal who is experiencing difficulty in the discharge of his/her role, the Task Force acknowledges how sensitive and difficult it might prove to address this. However, as with a teacher who experiences difficulties in the discharge of his/her professional role, failure to do so brings with it serious implications for the effective functioning of the school. Consequently, the Task Force wishes to recommend that steps comparable to those envisaged to help a teacher should also be made available for a principal. These steps are not meant to cut across the normal Grievance Procedures that may be invoked.

We know that for a variety of reasons, irrespective of school location, there is a small number of teachers whose performance is a cause of concern to the teacher himself/herself, to the principal, the Board of Management, to colleagues, to students, and to parents. In this context, the Task Force welcomes the Department of Education and Science's steps already in train to introduce a system of support for teachers to replace the Teachers' Employee Assistance Service. It also anticipates that when the Teaching Council is more established in its functioning, that it will play a significant role in determining constructive ways of helping teachers to maintain their performance in line with rigorous professional standards. In the absence of these supports being

currently available to provide help to individual teachers and principals

The Task Force recommends that where a teacher is experiencing difficulty in the discharge of his/her professional role, that a series of steps should be invoked, aimed at bringing the situation to a satisfactory resolution. Similarly, the Task Force recommends that where a Principal is experiencing difficulty in the discharge of his/her professional role the Board of Management move to bring that situation to a satisfactory resolution.

The Quality of Leadership and Professional Competence of Teaching Staff Action Plan			
Commencement Date	Action to be taken	Responsibility of	Target Date
Earliest Opportunity	In the first instance the Principal should address the difficulties with the teacher in a sensitive and tactful way that demonstrates empathy and understanding.	Principal	On-going
	Some within-school support should be put in place. This may involve help from a trusted and credible colleague. It may entail guidance in the area of classroom management, the presentation of lessons, peer observation etc., or other aspects linked to the teacher's professional duties.	Principal and colleague/s	
	In the event of this within-school intervention being unsuccessful, every effort should be made to access relevant continuing professional development for the teacher.	Principal, and teacher for whom the CPD is being sought CPD providers	
	In the event of this step failing to improve the professional performance of the teacher, then some consideration should be given in consultation with the teacher, and with the help of the Board of Management to find ways that would allow the teacher to withdraw from the profession on a temporary or permanent basis in a way that preserves his/her dignity.	Principal, agreed colleague/s, BoM	
	Where a principal experiences on-going difficulty in the discharge of his/her role, with serious consequences for the effective functioning of the school, a series of measures should be put in place to help the principal achieve a level of competence commensurate with the demands of his/her post. This may involve learning from a principal in another school who would act as "critical friend"; attending relevant CPD; choosing to assume a teaching role in his/her school or another school, and in the event of all steps failing to improve the situation, the principal should be allowed to leave the profession on a temporary or permanent basis in a way that preserves his/her dignity.	BoM, Managerial Bodies	
	The existing arrangements whereby members of the teaching profession can avail of early retirement should be retained	DES	

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Time for Year Heads

The Task Force has received a number of submissions that stressed the important role played by Year Heads in the management of discipline issues throughout a school. The role of the Year Head was also a recurring theme in our discussion with the Partners in Education. Two aspects relating to Year Heads emerged, 1) the need for adequate time to deal effectively with issues as they arise, and 2) the need to appoint persons of suitability to fill the important role of Year Head. A sense of frustration concerning both of these aspects permeated the information coming to us.

Regarding the matter of time, the view was expressed to us that it was not possible to bring to a successful resolution many of the indiscipline issues that arose, because the Year Head simply did not have time to do so, due to the obligation of fulfilling timetabled teaching duties. Consequently, other colleagues without designated responsibility have had to intervene. Linked to this, was a suggestion that in some cases, matters were being referred to Year Heads that should ordinarily be dealt with by the class teacher. On the matter of suitability, there was a number of submissions that stressed the importance of Year Head post-holders being chosen, not primarily on a criterion of seniority, but rather, on a criterion of suitability. Where a candidate meets both the criteria of seniority and suitability, then clearly the system works very well.

The Task Force recognises that this is because Year Heads are key players in influencing the behaviour of their students. The pastoral dimension of their role is a major element of their

remit. In the majority of cases, they develop very positive relationships with their students, and, often also, with the students' parents. Students tend to bond with their Year Head, and, in the majority of cases, they hold them in high regard, and see them as 'significant others' in their school lives. When difficulties arise relating to breaches of discipline or other matters, Year Heads are at the forefront of mediating between the student/s and other parties. In large schools the work of a Year Head can be very onerous as the number of students for whom the Year Head has responsibility is obviously quite considerable. Where Care Teams are established in schools, they have an important voice within this structure. They also act as a key link person in discussions with colleagues from other agencies outside of the school. In view of the centrality of the role of the Year Head within the school organisation,

The Task Force recommends that Year Heads receive a time allocation consonant with the demands of their role, relative to school size, and that these hours be compensated for by the Department of Education and Science in line with the teacher: pupil ratio within that school.

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Time for Year Heads Action Plan			
Commencement Date	Action to be taken	Responsibility of	Target Date
At earliest opportunity	The anomalies that exist regarding the allocation of time within the system be resolved	DES, Managerial Bodies	Phased process to be completed by academic year '07 - '08
	The criteria for appointment be reviewed towards harmonisation		
	Appointment to the post of Year Head to be based on suitability as the guiding criterion	School authorities + Unions	
	The job description for the post of Year Head be clear and unambiguous	School authorities. Teacher Unions	

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Parental Involvement

There is a wealth of evidence to indicate the centrality of the role of parents in influencing their children's adaptation to and progress in school. This evidence has been put before the Task Force at many points in our work. The importance of parents as collaborators with schools is also a recurring theme in the education literature. Parents are enshrined in the legislation as partners with full negotiating rights (Education Act 1998, and the Education (Welfare) Act 2000). In recognition of the vital role that parents can play in determining the success of their children's experiences at schools, there is a number of targeted initiatives that have, as a priority, the engagement of parents in support of their children's attendance and participation at school. We are aware of the efficacy of these initiatives and of the factors that can limit their work. The Task Force wishes to stress the importance that it attaches to the role of parents as a major source of support for schools.

The Task Force notes that Section 25 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000,provides for a graded series of sanctions for parents who fail to ensure that their children attend school after a suitable warning. As stated in an earlier section of this report, the Task Force is not in favour of invoking the law as a means of engaging parents. While recognising the need for having the legal sanctions in place it advocates a partnership based on mutual understanding and respect between home and school. Furthermore, the Task Force understands the barriers that some parents experience that make it too demanding a challenge for them to engage with a school. The absence of parents from a school does not always

indicate lack of engagement with the school. In an effort to create and sustain a mutually supportive and respectful partnership between home and school

The Task Force recommends that Schools and Parents ensure that at all times they work in ways that promote genuine collaboration in the best interest of the young people whose progress and well-being both aspire to achieve.

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Parental Involvement Action Plan			
Commencement Date	Action to be taken	Responsibility of	Target Date
Immediately	Parents' Associations to be established in all schools.	School Management, NPC Post-Primary	On-going
	Models of parental engagement that work well to be continued and lessons learned disseminated.	HSCL Personnel, SCP Personnel, Local Parent advocates	
	The transfer phase from primary to second level school to be used to emphasise to parents that they have a real part to play in determining the success of their child's time at school, and the many ways that translate this into reality should be clearly explained and discussed, with parents' questions answered.	Parents, Year Head, School Guidance Counsellor and Senior Management	
	The importance of parent responsibility in support of the school in its implementation of the code of behaviour to be highlighted during the induction phase of settling in a new student.	School Management and staff	
	Where circumstances allow, schools should have a Parents' Room, with parents encouraged to drop in, to meet each other and the teachers of their children, in the knowledge that they are welcome as important and valued members of the school community.	School Management HSCL teacher	
	Parents to share information with schools that is relevant and necessary for the school to know, in the knowledge that it will be treated with confidentiality and respect.	Parents and School Authorities	
	Parents to attend meetings that the school organises for purposes of developing good communication and working relationships with them.	Parents and school authorities	
	Parents to take seriously the school journal as an instrument of two-way communication between home and school.	Parents and school personnel	
	The Department of Education and Science to encourage good home-school partnerships in all schools, and to highlight the quality of this partnership as part of a Whole School Evaluation report.	DES	
	Parents to be involved in the compilation, implementation and review of school policies and in the SPDI as appropriate.	Parents and School Authorities	

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The Legislation

By far, the most frequent issue that came before the Task Force from all of our sources of data hinged on dissatisfaction with certain aspects of the recent legislation, in particular the operation of Section 28 and Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998. This dimension of due process involves Appeals to the Secretary General of the Department of Education and Science relating to the decision of a school's Board of Management not to enrol or to exclude a student. It was Section 29, in particular that assumed the greater significance of the two. The sources of the dissatisfaction, which formed a recurring theme throughout our information, were attributable to
1) the cumbersome nature of processing a Section 29 appeal,
2) the large investment of time and expense entailed,
3) the consequent inroads on a school principal's other more appropriate role related work,
4) the experience of the actual appeal hearing
5) the composition of the appeals' board,
6) the loss of morale for a school when an appeal is upheld,
7) the sense that schools are now becoming disempowered in their efforts to implement a rigorous code of behaviour,
8) the perception that the pendulum has swung too far in favour of the misbehaving student and away from the rights of the teacher to teach and the compliant students to learn.

While the Task Force is sensitive to the stress and frustration that have been the experience of some schools in their experiences with this evolving aspect

of the new legislative framework, it is also mindful of the parallel stress and bother that parents, and perhaps, their child experience too. They, also, are key players in this process. However, the Task Force also notes that the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) in its submission to the Task Force expressed the view "that the advent of the appeals system has been positive for schools. It has prompted schools to re-examine and review their policies, and to ensure, as far as possible, that policies and procedures are balanced, fair, and transparent". The submission went on to say that "the Board would not favour any weakening of the legal access to redress under Section 29 of the Education Act (1998)".

With regard to all of this legislative area, the Task Force is mindful that these are early days in coming to terms with the impact of this currently contentious legislative framework. The Task Force has examined the legislation in great detail and has invested considerable time in discussing its implications. An example of an amendment to make it less contentious is to be found in Appendix 10. In order to help with embedding the legislation in ways that observe due process and fair procedure, and that protect the education and welfare of all the school community,

The Task Force recommends that the legal department of the Department of Education and Science revisit the legislation with a view to amending it in ways that are more protective of all the school community.

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The Legislation Action Plan			
Commencement Date	Action to be taken	Responsibility of	Target Date
Immediately	The amended legislation should seek to stress the rights of the compliant majority to learn while at the same time protecting the rights of the persistently disruptive student to an education.	Responsibility of the Legal Department of the DES	December 07
	A timeframe for the conduct of appeals which is less protracted than that which is currently in place should be stipulated.		
	School Boards should be helped in the preparation for an appeal through the use of a protocol outlining the aspects that they need to attend to in advance of the process.		
	Improving the present educational provision for a student who is out-of-school pending an appeal.		
	Promoting the role of the Education Welfare Officer as agents of support and intervention both for families and for schools.		

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Updating of Current Circulars on Discipline

The Task Force has examined the Department of Education Circulars issued to schools (Circular 32/85 and M33/91) and while acknowledging that there is much to commend in the Circulars, we are of the view that, in the context of recent legislative and allied developments, there is need to replace these. Consequently,

The Task Force recommends that a new Circular be issued to schools which reflects accurately the current legislative framework, and makes clear the rights and the responsibilities of all parties.

Updating of Current Circulars on Discipline Action Plan			
Commencement Date	Action to be taken	Responsibility of	Target Date
For academic year 2006			DES

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Rights and Responsibilities

A recurring theme from the submissions to the Task Force was reference to the perception that many of today's students have a finely honed sense of their rights but that some have a much less finely tuned sense of their responsibilities. The Task Force has looked at the possibilities of introducing contracts for members of the school community, but has taken the view that it wishes the school community to work as a 'community' and not as a group of stakeholders who are legally bound to behave in a stipulated way. However, in response to the evidence before the Task Force, there was also a view that some clarification of roles and responsibilities is required if the spirit of community is to be realised in action.

The data before the Task Force also suggested that the rights of the misbehaving students seems to have taken precedence over the rights of their well-behaved peers and their teachers. This perception is a source of real concern and frustration to many interested parties who communicated with us. The Task Force also appreciates that this perception has led to a sense of apparent powerlessness among some principals and teachers, with a resultant stifling of professional motivation and fulfilment. It is obvious that where school staffs feel that their students have gained some "higher ground" than they as teachers, occupy, that some action needs to be taken, to realign this situation. Teachers have a legitimate right to work in a safe environment, in a hierarchical relationship with their students. They should be able to exercise their professional authority, especially if that authority is exercised in an effort to promote effective teaching and

learning, and to carry out their duty of care. The Task Force acknowledges that not all schools may choose to introduce a charter in support of their processes, but in response to persuasive calls for this, and in recognition of the necessity to clarify that all members of the school community have both rights and responsibilities,

The Task Force recommends the development of a Charter of Rights and Responsibilities for the school community so that all its members can feel more confident about the safeguarding of their own position.

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Rights and Responsibilities Action Plan			
Commencement Date	Action to be taken	Responsibility of	Target Date
End of academic year 2006-2007	A charter of rights and responsibilities should be drawn up that would assist all who form the school community to clearly understand their roles and their responsibilities	DES, Unions, NPC, USS, Management Groups	Academic Year 2008
	This may be undertaken in conjunction with the updating of the proposed revision of the Circular on discipline		
Following the drawing up of the charter	This charter to become a discussion document for all members of a school community in a school that chooses to adopt the charter, so as to ensure clarity and understanding on their respective roles and responsibilities. The model of meeting held in Task Force Fora could help this process.	School Community	
	The charter should become a focus within SDPI for those schools that adopt it.	SPDI sub committee	
	The charter should be included in the school journal or handbook with ease of accessibility for relevant parties.	Any school wishing to adopt the charter	

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Expansion of NEPS

The Task Force has learned in the course of its work of the valuable contribution that many agencies can make in assisting schools in their efforts to manage students' behavioural difficulties. It has also learned that schools experience long delays in accessing the level of support and guidance that they require. This is due to the demands of the caseload that agencies such as the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) carry. The Task Force notes calls from within the education sector for an expansion of the NEWB and lends its support to these calls. It has also been pointed out to us that there is room for closer collaboration between the NEWB and the Home School Community Liaison initiative. Greater synergy between the workings of those agencies would seem to be in the best interest of the families whom they support.

Some of our Recommendations are predicated on assistance provided in particular, from NEPS. The Task Force does not wish to place this vitally important agency in an invidious position by suggesting that it add to an already overextended caseload. Equally, the Task Force does not wish to make Recommendations that cannot be implemented because of the lack of availability of key contributors needed to ensure the viability of those Recommendations. In the light of this,

The Task Force recommends that at the soonest feasible date there be additional personnel recruited into NEPS so that this influential Body can assist schools in a more satisfactory way than is currently the position.

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Expansion of NEPS Action Plan			
Commencement Date	Action to be taken	Responsibility of	Target Date
Earliest Opportunity	Additional personnel to be recruited to NEPS	DES	Phased in as plans for establishment are put in place
	NEPS to play a central role in helping schools with the development of coping strategies to combat the escalation of disruption in schools.	NEPS & School Authorities	
	NEPS to assist with the Continuing Professional Development of teachers, so that classroom teachers and key personnel in schools become more skilled and empowered in the management of disruptive behaviours	NEPS & School Authorities	
	For those schools who are granted sanction to establish a Behaviour Support Classroom by the DES, that NEPS work collaboratively with the DES personnel, school personnel and parents to ensure the success of this costly initiative.	DES, NEPS, School Authorities, Parents	

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A Behaviour Support Team

The intertwining links between behaviour, curriculum, teaching methodologies, active learning approaches and modes of assessment are well recognised. At present in the system, there is a range of Second Level Support Teams, all making a valuable contribution to the advancement of the curricular and programmatic innovations that have taken shape in recent years. The Task Force does not see disruptive behaviour as some student phenomenon that can be addressed in isolation from a number of contingent variables. It wishes to advocate a systematic analysis of the phenomenon and a systematic approach to its management. The Task Force sees merit in the establishment of a Behaviour Support Team, based in regional centres, which could be of assistance to schools experiencing difficulty in coping with unacceptable levels of student disruption.

The Task Force is of the view that school staffs respect the competence of colleagues who have worked successfully "in the field", preferably in situations that they can relate to, and that bear similarity to their own work environments. They are receptive to support and guidance from these peers, especially if they bring credibility that has been hard won in the realities of classroom and school life. The Task Force would like to see coherence and complementarity between the current Second Level Support Service that already exists, and any newly formed Behaviour Support Team. It envisages that on some occasions members of the Behaviour Support Team would work alongside colleagues from the curricular and/or programme areas, while on other occasions they might work with colleagues from NEPS or other allied

agencies. In an effort to strengthen the Second Level Support initiatives that are already in place,

The Task Force recommends that a Behaviour Support Team be established within an overall coherent, clearly articulated, national framework of support for schools.

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A Behaviour Support Team Action Plan			
Commencement Date	Action to be taken	Responsibility of	Target Date
Academic Year 2006	A Behaviour Support Team to be established that would be easily accessible to schools experiencing difficulty in coping with persistent and serious student disruption.	DES	On-going with evaluation
	Persons appointed to the Behaviour Support Team should have comprehensive knowledge about student behaviour and should have demonstrable skills in the successful curtailment of excessive student disruption and the fostering of positive behaviour patterns among student cohorts.	Selection Process	
	Thorough and effective training in all aspects of working with peers and of supporting school staffs in the management of student behaviour should be available to team members before going into the field to carry out their work.	NEPS and skilled CPD personnel with relevant expertise	

Access to a Behaviour Support Classroom

The Task Force is of the view that schools with a high intake of difficult students should have a Behaviour Support Classroom. This is a classroom located within the school, where seriously disruptive students could be placed, on the occasions when their behaviour is not amenable to correction through the usual channels. Students placed in Behaviour Support Classrooms will continue with their ongoing curricular work. Alongside the curricular work, placement in the Behaviour Support Classroom should present the student with an opportunity to develop social skills, and to have help with anger management and allied aspects of behaviour, if these are thought to be priority needs to help integrate the student back into his/her class.

Placement in the Behaviour Support Classroom is to be seen as a temporary measure. Duration of placement will vary from student to student. It may be that a student need only spend a very short period of time there, for example, a short cooling off period following a sudden outburst of anger or frustration; for others the duration may need to be more prolonged. The purpose of placement in a Behaviour Support Classroom is to help the student to develop the requisite dispositions and self-control to behave in a co-operative way in his/her regular class. Where a student is returning to a school following a Section 29 appeal that has been upheld, the Behaviour Support Classroom should be used as a transition to help both student and school to work out a way forward for the reintegration of the student into the regular classroom.

Ideally, parents should be involved as much as possible in supporting the efforts that a school staff is taking in trying to provide for the needs of their child, through placement in the Behaviour Support Classroom. Placement there is likely to involve help from other agencies - Health Service Executive personnel, National Educational Welfare Board personnel, School Completion Programme personnel, and/or personnel from one of the many agencies that are likely to have a presence in the local community with much to offer in terms of helping young people. The Task Force does not suggest that Behaviour Support Classrooms will be an across the board intervention. Rather they will be located in those schools that cater, on a regular basis, for numbers of students whose behaviour is unsupportable within the confines of a mainstream classroom. Criteria for their establishment will be required and sanction for their establishment sought through the Department of Education and Science. Additional staffing and resources will be required to staff these Behaviour Support Classrooms.

The Task Force recommends that schools that cater for numbers of students who regularly challenge acceptable levels of discipline should have a Behaviour Support Classroom, in which students with serious and persistent disruptive behaviour can be placed, with a view to allowing teaching and learning to continue in the regular classroom, while providing an opportunity to support the disruptive student in modifying his/her behaviour in line with socially acceptable norms.

Access to a Behaviour Support Classroom Action Plan			
Commencement Date	Action to be taken	Responsibility of	Target Date
Academic Year 2006 – 2007	For those schools in the system that cater for numbers of persistently disruptive students, there should be a Behaviour Support Classroom to which the disruptive student/s could be referred on a temporary basis.	DES	On-going
	Criteria for the establishment of these Behaviour Support Classrooms to be determined, and schools seeking to establish such a Support Classroom to make application to the DES who will determine eligibility and allocate staffing and resources as appropriate	DES in conjunction with NEPS or other agencies with expertise in the area of challenging behaviour	
	These Behaviour Support Classrooms should be staffed by staff from within the school, and assisted in some aspects of the work there by personnel from agencies with expertise in social skills development, anger management, conflict resolution, restorative practices, cognitive behaviour therapy etc.	School staff in conjunction with outside agencies	
	Parents should be involved at the earliest possible time concerning placement in a Behaviour Support Classroom for their child.	Parents and school personnel	
	Agencies linked to the ongoing work of a school, like HSCL, SCP, NEWB should support the work that is undertaken in a school's Behaviour Support Classroom with a view to the reintegration of the referred student to his/her regular class, at the earliest possible opportunity.	Personnel from HSCL, SCP & NEWB	
	Arrangements should be put in place to evaluate the efficacy of this intervention	DES	

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Out-of-school Provision

As the work of the Task Force developed, it became clear to us that there is a minority of students whose holistic needs cannot be met within the mainstream school, even when there is a number of supportive measures in place. Key informants argued that it is necessary and appropriate to have some form of off-site provision in place to cater for this minority. It is estimated that the number of children for whom out-of-school provision is required is in the 1%-2% bracket.

During the course of its work the Task Force conducted Fora in a number of Centres for Education – Youthreach and Youth Encounter Projects. These Centres for Education are not a separate system of educational provision. They are legislated for in the Education Act, Section 10(4) and formally designated under Circular F49/04. The Task Force is of the view that it is not necessary to put in place a totally new form of provision to cater for the needs of the minority of students for whom mainstream schooling is untenable, while good examples of complementary provision exist already. The Fora visits to the Centres for Education i.e. Youthreach and YEPs strongly influenced the thinking of the Task Force in reaching this conclusion.

The Task Force recommends 1) the extension of the Youth Encounter Project (YEP) model, where numbers of potential referrals in the 12-15 age range from a cluster of schools are substantial enough to warrant this development. 2) The extension of the Youthreach programme to provide a Junior Youthreach, linked to existing Youthreach programmes, where numbers of potential referrals in the 12-15 age range are not sufficient to warrant the establishment of a YEP, 3) The extension of the existing Youthreach provision to accommodate the volume of referrals in the 16+ age range.

Out-of-School Provision Action Plan			
Commencement Date	Action to be taken	Responsibility of	Target Date
Immediately	Establishment of a high level action team to implement the above recommendation.	DES	On-going
	The YEP model to be extended in a limited number of urban areas where numbers of potential referrals are substantial enough to warrant this development.	DES	
	The Youthreach programme to be extended in numbers, distribution, reach and resources.	DES, DETE	
	Review of availability of Youthreach places towards this extension.	DES	
	Prescription of Centres delivering the Youthreach programme under the Education Welfare Act.	DES	
	Allocation to Youthreach and YEPs of resources that are appropriate to the needs of participants. This to include priority access to psychological services and supports for learners with SENs and EBDs.	DES and HSE; NEPS, NCSE	
	Appropriate arrangements to be set in place for the training and support of staff who operate in very trying circumstances in these out-of-school settings	DES and IVEA	
	Development of protocols governing processes of referral to ensure that arrangements are appropriate and to forestall the possibility that young people will be too easily referred out of schools.	DES, NEWB and programme providers	
	General review, overhaul and streamlining of services and processes for children in difficulty.	DES, DJELR, HSE and others	
	Review in the DES of responsibilities, lines of management and funding pathways for the various measures being extended on foot of this recommendation.	DES	
	Review of other educational alternate provision, not yet designated under the Education Act, including youth services, towards (i) rationalisation and (ii) designation, where of appropriate standard and (iii) inclusion in the above programme framework and associated quality assurance processes.	DES	
	Each school and Centre's development plan to include structures, processes and lines of communication regarding interactions with other agencies, including referral, transfer and processing of information, etc	School authorities; SDP Initiative; DES Inspectorate	

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Interagency and Intercollegial Collaboration

We live in an era of interdisciplinary collaboration. The Task Force is of the view that schools should establish links with the wider environment as this external orientation enriches the work of a school, and positions it as a focal point in the local community. The involvement of local individuals or agencies with something of worth to contribute to the life of a school makes for the forging of closer community links. This seems worth pursuing as our communities become more fragmented. The erosion of social capital has not been good for society, a theme that has been reinforced by Mr. Bertie Ahern, T.D., Taoiseach, in the last year, in particular. Building good links with the local community creates social capital and gives students reference points of worth and of significance in their locality.

Throughout the work of the Task Force there has been an emphasis on the necessity of enlisting cross-sectoral expertise to help with some of the difficulties that schools encounter as they endeavour to help their students. Schools adopt a holistic approach to the education of their students and are motivated to attend to all aspects of the "whole child". **Ideally, the Task Force would like to see a two-way engagement taking hold between school and allied agencies, whereby the schools would look outward to bring in added expertise, while the agencies would look school-ward in an effort to build supportive partnerships with schools.**

The complexities of life in contemporary society create problems for large numbers of young people. Consequently, some students bring into their school a variety of personal difficulties that often become barriers to successful adaptation to, and engagement in school life. It is unrealistic to expect school staff to have the relevant skills and expertise to deal effectively with what are often deep-seated problems of long duration, and that are outside the field of education. Nonetheless, teachers play a pivotal role in the life of a young person, not only in the overt work of classroom teaching, but in a variety of allied ways that often involve principles or approaches adopted from other disciplines, such as, psychology, counselling, or justice.

As referred to above, there is a wealth of expertise that exists within a school and in the wider locality. This is not always exploited to good effect. There is the added fact that much work relating to young people occurs in parallel, with little coherence or integration attaching to provision. The multi agency approach with little or no joint planning or delivery is bewildering for those who are the beneficiaries of the services, while the efficacy of the multiple providers is often diminished due to the duplication or triplication of their service. [Appendices 8 and 9 give a sense of the number of service providers with whom a young person may be in contact.] In order to maximise the expertise that is available within a school and in its locality

The Task Force recommends that there be increased collaboration between schools and those agencies and individuals with specialist expertise in catering for the needs of children and their families.

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Interagency and Intercollegial Collaboration Action Plan			
Commencement Date	Action to be taken	Responsibility of	Target Date
Academic Year 2006	Schools should be proactive in their networking with agencies and individuals in the wider environment with a view to contributing to the enrichment of students' school experiences.	Senior management, staff members	On-going
	Schools should become familiar with the variety of help and expertise relevant to the well-being of young people that is available in the school's locality.	Senior Management, School Guidance Counsellor, Members of the Care Team, Relevant support Agencies	
	Handbooks that are available noting the range of agencies that exist in a locality should be brought to the attention of relevant school personnel.	School Guidance Counsellor, Members of the Care Team	
	School based Inservice should be conducted, on occasions, by personnel from outside the field of education, e.g., from the Health Service Executive, from the Garda diversionary programme etc.	Senior Management and Agencies	
	Schools should draw on the expertise of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) in ways that go beyond psychological assessments, as this agency has much to offer that is of immediate relevance and benefit to schools.	Guidance Counsellor	

10

Development of a discipline survey instrument

The establishment of this Task Force indicates the importance attached by the Department of Education and Science to the issue of school discipline and the development of policy that is based on evidence. Our discussion with the Partners in Education, supplemented by the many submissions, also endorse the centrality of school discipline as a major concern. It is the view of the Task Force that there should be available a database to portray accurately at a given period the state of discipline in our schools, at primary and at second level. Data derived from such a survey could yield valuable information on the efficacy of approaches employed to promote disruption-free classrooms and schools. With a view to conducting a review of the state of discipline in our schools, at regular intervals,

The Task Force recommends that a survey instrument be developed, that would be employed to carry out a national audit in our schools at two-year intervals, and thereby provide accurate baseline data on the state of discipline in our schools, both at primary and second level.

10

Development of a discipline survey instrument Action Plan			
Commencement Date	Action to be taken	Responsibility of	Target Date
Earliest Opportunity	A working group with relevant expertise to be established to construct a survey instrument that would yield a range of useful information, both of a quantitative and qualitative nature, to inform the education community and the general public on the state of discipline in our schools at a given period.	DES in conjunction with a working party that includes a statistician and a researcher/s with expertise inquantitative and qualitative methods	Spring 2007
	The instrument to be developed should be sufficiently comprehensive in its coverage so as to yield useful information on what measures are effective in combating disruption.		
	The data derived from the survey should be made public and where good practice is noted in the data, this should be disseminated among the education community.		
	It should be mandatory for all schools to cooperate with the conduct of the survey.		
	Arrangements should be put in place to conduct the survey across the schools in the system at a given point in the school year.		

10

Dissemination of Good Practice

The Task Force has learned that there is much good practice in the area of student behaviour both within schools and among school linked agencies throughout the system. We also learned of the effectiveness of some approaches to dealing with problems that arise in schools - e.g. restorative practices, anger management, conflict resolution and cognitive therapy strategies. We also appreciate that in the majority of schools there is a valuable range of expertise and insights among staff. It is often the case that there is little opportunity for the sharing and dissemination of this significant reservoir of knowledge and skills, and the concept of the school as a learning community is not fully exploited. Participants on CPD programmes often observe that one of the most enriching aspects of these programmes is the opportunity to learn from colleagues through discussion and sharing of experiences. The Task Force is of the view that there should be a streamlined and formalised effort to make good practice more widely available to policy makers and practitioners.

The Task Force recommends that success experiences be documented by individual schools and by individual practitioners, and that these accounts be posted on a nominated website/s and also compiled as a database in local Education Centres. They should also be published in educational journals and newsletters, and presented at educational conferences.

10

Dissemination of Good Practice Action Plan			
Commencement Date	Action to be taken	Responsibility of	Target Date
Academic Year 2006	Schools and agencies that can demonstrate effective practice in managing student behaviour should document this and share it with the education community via their website, through conference presentation, or publication in an appropriate journal.	Schools, Agencies	On-going
	Local Education Centres should compile accounts of effective practice from schools in their area and make these available for interested parties.	Education Centres	
	In the event of a National Framework for Support Services and/or Continuing Professional Development being established, there should be a website link dedicated to examples of effective practice posted on the website of the National Framework.	National Framework, Support Services	
	Consideration should be given to posting data relevant to good practice on the Scoilnet website, and the necessary steps should be taken to facilitate this development.	Scoilnet website Manager in consultation with relevant personnel	
	Teacher Education should promote the dissemination of good practice among teachers at all levels of the profession, and should encourage teachers to share lessons learned with the education community.	Teacher Educators, the teaching profession, CPD providers	

10

Implementation of the Report's Recommendations

A number of the Partners who met with the Task Force made the point that following the publication of earlier reports viz, Committee on Discipline, 1985, the Martin report 1997, there was no implementation of the recommendations. Addressing a TUI Consultative Conference on School Discipline in December 2004, Oliver Mahon in offering a solution to the gravity of indiscipline in some schools stated *"Dr. Martin devoted chapter 4 of her report to making recommendations on ways to address the problem. Every one of these recommendations is sensible and well thought out, and each is deserving of implementation"*. Interested parties shared a concern that a similar fate of non-implementation would follow the presentation of this report. The Task Force is of the view that the set of Recommendations that is put forward here merits implementation.

Further, the Task Force is also of the view that many of the measures merit evaluation, so that their effectiveness, or lack of it can be assessed. Evidence based data are important in informing policy. The compilation of such data should be an integral dimension of interventions of significance and cost. With a view to ensuring the implementation and evaluation of the Recommendations of this report,

The Task Force recommends that a person or a panel of persons with appropriate competence be appointed to oversee the implementation of the Recommendations outlined in this report, and that the effectiveness of the Recommendations be assessed at the end of a suitable period of implementation.

10

Implementation of the Report's Recommendations Action Plan			
Commencement Date	Action to be taken	Responsibility of	Target Date
Academic Year 2007-2008	Following the submission of the report to the Minister, arrangements should be put in place to implement the Recommendations in line with the suggested dates.	DES	On-going
	Within a suitable period, a person or a panel with appropriate competence should be appointed to oversee the gradual implementation of the Recommendations. This monitoring process should continue until the Recommendations are fully implemented.	DES	
	Evaluation should become an integral part of the implementation, with a view to assessing the effectiveness of the measures set out in the Recommendations.	DES	
	Where possible, pre-implementation data should be gathered so as to inform the post-implementation evaluation phase.	DES, Schools, Partners in Education	
	Data gathered through the use of the audit instrument, (cf earlier Recommendation) should contribute to the evaluation process.	DES, Evaluator/s	

Concluding Remarks

As the Task Force has immersed itself in the issue of student behaviour in second level schools in this state, it has been struck by the commitment, flexibility, and frustrations that are to be found among the school community. Our admiration for school staffs and for those responsible for the many influential and visionary initiatives that are operating in support of the system has been reinforced. We have been struck by the pace and scale of developments that have become an integral part of the educational landscape in recent years. We have been amazed by the plethora of interventions and innovations on behalf of children that have been introduced right across government sectors. All of this has given us grounds for optimism.

However, our sense of optimism and admiration cannot ignore the reality that because of the socially unacceptable behaviour of a minority of students the national educational enterprise is being thwarted, because such behaviour is intrinsically prejudicial to the cultivation of a positive teaching and learning environment. In this troubling situation there are no winners, and we have come to appreciate that the main losers are the violators of the conventional norms of civility essential for schools to realise their core purpose.

It is our belief that the suite of measures outlined above offers the capacity to ameliorate this invidious scenario. The Task Force is convinced that these measures are contingent on each other in such a way that their implementation warrants a total and integrated response. Our sense of concern about the escalating nature of antisocial behaviour patterns in our schools, and the malign consequences that flow from these, compels us to urge you, Minister, to acknowledge the merits of these proposals, and to act on them as a matter of priority. In so doing, you will help our schools to position themselves at the forefront of the socially inclusive new Ireland while helping to maintain the high standards of education of which we are all so justifiably proud.

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• Appendices

Appendix 1

Membership of Task Force

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Seán Coffey
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Seosamh MacLochlainn
Teacher, Galway Community College, Móinín na gCiseach, Well Park, Galway

Patricia McCarthy
Deputy Principal, Coláiste Eoin, Cappagh Road, Finglas, Dublin 11

Sue Mulholland
Teacher, St. Laurence College, Loughlinstown, Dublin 18

Gene Murphy
Solicitor and Chairman of the Board of Management at the Presentation College, Bray, Co Wicklow.

Aidan Savage
National Co-ordinator of the School, Completion Programme

Dr. Dermot Stokes
National Co-ordinator of Youthreach

Michael McKeown
Secretary to the Task Force

Margaret Raftery
Administrative Support, Department of Education and Science

Appendix 2

Submissions Received

- ADD/ADHD Support Group - Attention Deficit Disorder/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder Support Group Finglas Cabra Partnership

- Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools

- Association of Management of Catholic Secondary Schools, Region 4

- Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland

- Athy Community College Student Council

- Ballymun Girls' Comprehensive School, The Staff

- Beaufort College, Navan, Staff and Parents' Council

- Boys' Comprehensive School, Ballymun Road, Dublin 9, Number of Staff

- Child and Family Centre, Ballyfermot, Dublin 10, Professor Michael Fitzgerald

- Church of Ireland College of Education, The Church of Scientology, Dublin

- City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee Education Support Service

- Clonmel Community Partnership Ltd

- Co Donegal Vocational Education Committee, Sub-Committee on Discipline

- Coláiste Bhríde Student Council, Carnew, Co Wicklow

- Coláiste Mhichíl CBS, Sexton Street, Limerick

- Crisis Prevention Institute, Worldwide Ltd, Co Tipperary

- Cullinan, Ph.D., Dr Veronica, Department of Applied Psychology, UCC; Healy, Ph.D., Dr Olive, Director of CABAS Ireland

- Department of Health and Children, Child Care Policy Unit

- Department of Health and Children, Health Promotion Unit

- Disadvantage Initiatives, Dr Concepta Conaty, National Co-ordinator

- Dóchas

- Economic Social and Research Institute

- Education Development Officer, Mercy Education Office

- Education Officer, Presentation Sisters, Northern Province

- Eileen Murphy Consultants

- Engineering Technology Teachers Association

- Equality Authority, The

- Fleming, Brian, Collinstown Park Community College, Clondalkin, Dublin 22

- Giving Children an Even Break
  Co-ordinator, Co Kerry

- Giving Children an Even Break
  Co-ordinators, Ballina Cluster

- HADD Family Support Group –
  Hyperactivity Attention Disorder Deficit
  Family Support Group

- Health Promotion Department, Health
  Service Executive, Sligo, The Restorative
  Practices Project 2004/2005 Donegal/
  Sligo

- Health Service Executive, Ballyfermot
  and Lucan Child and Family Centre

- Healthy Eating Campaign

- Home School Community Liaison
  (HSCL) and Giving Children and Even
  Break (GEBR), Tipperary/Kilkenny Local
  Cluster

- Home School Community Liaison
  (HSCL), Ballina/North Mayo Cluster

- Home School Community Liaison
  (HSCL), Ballymun, Dublin 11 Cluster

- Home School Community Liaison
  (HSCL), Clifden Community School
  Co-ordinator

- Home School Community Liaison
  (HSCL), Clondalkin Cluster

- Home School Community Liaison
  (HSCL), Co Limerick Cluster

- Home School Community Liaison
  (HSCL), Dublin 1, 3 & 7 Local Cluster

- Home School Community Liaison
  (HSCL), Dundalk Cluster

- Home School Community Liaison
  (HSCL), Enniscorthy Cluster

- Home School Community Liaison
  (HSCL), Farranree, Cork Local
  Committee

- Home School Community Liaison
  (HSCL), Finglas, Dublin 11

- Home School Community Liaison
  (HSCL), Jobstown Community College
  Local Committee

- Home School Community Liaison
  (HSCL), Limerick City Cluster

- Home School Community Liaison
  (HSCL), Loreto College, Crumlin Road,
  Dublin 12 Co-ordinator

- Home School Community Liaison
  (HSCL), Mercy College, Coolock

- Home School Community Liaison
  (HSCL), Mulhuddart and Corduff, Dublin
  15 Local Committee

- Home School Community Liaison
  (HSCL), North Donegal Cluster

- Home School Community Liaison
  (HSCL), North Dublin Cluster

- Home School Community Liaison
  (HSCL), Presentation College Headford
  Co-ordinator

- Home School Community Liaison (HSCL), South Donegal Cluster

- Home School Community Liaison (HSCL), South Midlands Cluster

- Home School Community Liaison (HSCL), Wicklow Local Cluster

- Irish Association of Creative Arts Therapists

- Irish Learning Support Association

- Irish Vocational Education Association

- James Norman, Joe O'Hara, Stephen Byrne, Gerry McNamara, School of Education Studies, Dublin City University, Dublin 9

- Janesboro Local Education Committee Jeffers, Gerry, Education Department, National University of Ireland, Maynooth

- Joint Managerial Body

- Junior Certificate School Programme Support Service, City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee Curriculum Development Unit

- Leadership Development for Schools, National Co-ordinator

- Loreto Community School, Milford, Co Donegal

- Loreto Secondary School Working Group, Fermoy, Co Cork

- Lucena Clinic, Dr Dermot O'Reilly, Head of Social Work, Dr Peter Reid, Head of Child Clinical Psychology

- Marian College, Mohill, Co Leitrim

- Marino Institute of Education, Centre for Education Services

- Mediators Institute of Ireland, The, Fiona McAuslan, Sarah Lohmann

- Mercy Secondary School, A Number of Staff and a HSCL Co-ordinator

- Mercy Secondary School, Mounthawk, Tralee, Co Kerry

- National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals

- National Children's Office

- National Co-ordinator, SPHE Support Service, John Lahiff

- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

- National Drugs Strategy Team

- National Educational Psychological Service

- National Educational Welfare Board

- National Parents Association of Vocational Schools and Community Colleges

- National Parents Council – Post Primary Netcare, Newry, Co Down

- Next Steps Group, Ballyfermot, Dublin 10

- Ombudsman for Children

- Parents – Education and Children's Health, Consultancy/Information Service

- Parents Council, Scoil Dara, Kilcock

- Profexel

- Psychological Society of Ireland, The Salesian Secondary School, A Number of Staff

- School Completion Programme Co-ordination Unit

- Scoil Mhuire, Presentation Convent NS, Portlaoise, Co Laois, Anne Buggie, Principal

- Second Level Support Service, Blackrock Education Centre, Michael Garvey, Director

- Second Level Support Service, Blackrock Education Centre, Maree O'Rourke, Regional Development Officer

- Southhill Local Committee, Limerick

- Springboard Project Leader, Ballybane Family Services, Western Area, Carmel Devaney

- St Enda's Community School, Kilmallock Road, Limerick

- St John's Education Centre, Holy Faith Grounds, Glasnevin, Dublin 11, Sr Antoinette Keelan

- St Kevin's School, The Rectory, Infirmary Road, Cork

- St Laurence College, Loughlinstown, Dublin 18, Staff

- St Paul's Community School, Lisduggan, Waterford, Board of Management

- Teachers Union of Ireland

- Teachers' Union of Ireland Westmeath Branch

- Techno Teachers Association

- Teen Counselling, Mater Dei, Mary Forrest, Clinical Director

- Union of Students in Secondary Schools

- Visiting Teacher for Travellers, Ann Curran

- Visiting Teacher Service for Traveller Education

- Whelan Marie, Learning Support Co-ordinator and Chairperson of ILSA

- Working Together Project, Mary Immaculate College, School Completion Project – Sexton Street, Southhill, St Munchin's, Rosbrien

- XLC Project, Nuala Jackson, Chairperson

- PERSONAL SUBMISSIONS - 41

Appendix 3

Oral Submissions

- Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools

- Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland

- Irish Vocational Education Association

- Joint Managerial Body

- National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals

- National Parents Council - Post-Primary

- Teachers' Union of Ireland

- Union of Secondary School Students

- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment / Economic and Social Research Institute

- National Educational Psychological Service

Appendix 4

Consultative Fora

- Presentation Secondary School, Ballyphehane, Cork

- Galway Community College, Móinin na gCiseach, Well Park, Galway

- Ó Fiaich College, Dundalk, Co Louth

- Collinstown Park Community College, Clondalkin, Dublin 22.

- St. John's Centre, Glasnevin, Dublin 9.

- Coolock Youthreach, Bonnybrook Activity Centre, Dublin 17.

- Second Chance, 'The House', Cox's Demense, Dundalk, Co Louth

- Youth Encounter Project, St. Kevins, Infirmary Road, Cork

- St. Macartan's College, Monaghan

- St. Peter's College, Dunboyne, Co Meath

- Ballymun Educational Support Team (BEST), School Completion Programme, Geraldstown House, Ballymun Cross, Dublin 9.

Appendix 5

*Consultation with Professionals
working in Related Areas*

Dr. John Visser
Director, Continuing Professional
Development, School of Education,
University of Birmingham

Professor Paul Cooper
Director, Centre for Innovation in Raising
Educational Achievement, The School of
Education, University of Leicester

Professor Pamela Munn OBE
Dean/Head of Moray House School of
Education, University of Edinburgh

Dr. Ted Cole
Director, Social Emotional and
Behavioural Difficulties Association
(SEBDA), Penrith, Cumbria, England

Appendix 6

Framework for Intervention: Behavioural Environment Checklist
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Framework for Intervention

Behavioural Environment
Checklist: SAMPLE ITEMS

- This checklist is not focussed upon individual pupils
- It is designed to help you to identify the areas within the environment(s) in which the problem is happening (e.g. classroom, playground etc)
- It is best to complete this checklist with a colleague, for example the school's behaviour coordinator (or equivalent). You may find observation by a colleague helpful
- Do not feel obliged to consider every statement- some may not apply to your situation
- Indicate where there are problems even if it seems that change is unlikely or impractical
- Once the checklist is completed it can give the basis for a Behavioural Environment Plan

Key   5 = Strongly Agree- no real room for improvement
         1 = Disagree- very significant need for action

SECTION A   Whole school policies

	Rules and implications:	✓				✗
1	A behaviour policy exists and is effective	5	4	3	2	1
2		5	4	3	2	1
3	Rules are communicated frequently and effectively to pupils, staff (including non-teaching), parents and governors	5	4	3	2	1
4		5	4	3	2	1
5	Staff have a clear idea of the range of sanctions that can and cannot be used	5	4	3	2	1
6		5	4	3	2	1
7	Pupils, as far as they are able, know the reasons behind the rules in school	5	4	3	2	1
8		5	4	3	2	1

	Support for Staff:	✓				✗
9	There is collective responsibility for behaviour management in school	5	4	3	2	1
10	Staff feel confident to acknowledge difficulties	5	4	3	2	1
11		5	4	3	2	1
12		5	4	3	2	1
13		5	4	3	2	1
14		5	4	3	2	1
15	Support services are used systematically, efficiently and effectively	5	4	3	2	1
16		5	4	3	2	1
17	Parents are routinely told of pupil's good behaviour	5	4	3	2	1
18		5	4	3	2	1
19	Governors are appropriately involved in issues relating to behaviour	5	4	3	2	1

SECTION B Classroom Organisation

		✓				✗
20	Equipment is easily accessible	5	4	3	2	1
21		5	4	3	2	1
22	Appropriate ambient temperature	5	4	3	2	1
23		5	4	3	2	1
24		5	4	3	2	1
25	No glare	5	4	3	2	1
26	Materials well labelled and located	5	4	3	2	1
27		5	4	3	2	1
28		5	4	3	2	1
29		5	4	3	2	1
30		5	4	3	2	1
31	Room organisation meets differing curriculum demands	5	4	3	2	1
32		5	4	3	2	1
33		5	4	3	2	1
34		5	4	3	2	1
35	Sufficient space	5	4	3	2	1
36		5	4	3	2	1

SECTION C   Classroom management

		✓				✗
37		5	4	3	2	1
38	Teachers voice is clear	5	4	3	2	1
39		5	4	3	2	1
40	Good Behaviour is noticed and acknowledged	5	4	3	2	1
41		5	4	3	2	1
42		5	4	3	2	1
43		5	4	3	2	1
44		5	4	3	2	1
45	Pupils bring correct equipment	5	4	3	2	1
46		5	4	3	2	1
47		5	4	3	2	1
48	Curriculum is appropriate and delivery is differentiated	5	4	3	2	1
49		5	4	3	2	1
50	Peer support is used to best effect	5	4	3	2	1
51		5	4	3	2	1

SECTION D   Classroom rules and routines

	Rules:	✓				✗
52		5	4	3	2	1
53	Are negotiated with, and understood, by pupils	5	4	3	2	1
54		5	4	3	2	1
55	Are positively framed	5	4	3	2	1
56		5	4	3	2	1
57		5	4	3	2	1
	Rewards:					
58	Are valued by pupils	5	4	3	2	1
59		5	4	3	2	1
60		5	4	3	2	1
61	Are small and readily achievable	5	4	3	2	1
62		5	4	3	2	1

	Sanctions:	✓				✗
63		5	4	3	2	1
64		5	4	3	2	1
65	Are understood by pupils	5	4	3	2	1
66		5	4	3	2	1
67	Are within a clear hierachy of severity	5	4	3	2	1
	Routines are established for:					
68	Entering or leaving the room/lining up	5	4	3	2	1
69		5	4	3	2	1
70	Gaining teacher's attention and help	5	4	3	2	1
71		5	4	3	2	1
72		5	4	3	2	1
73		5	4	3	2	1

SECTION E   Out of Classroom

		✓				✗
74		5	4	3	2	1
75	Short break time rules understood by pupils	5	4	3	2	1
76		5	4	3	2	1
77		5	4	3	2	1
78		5	4	3	2	1
79	Break times rewards/sanctions system clear	5	4	3	2	1
80	Behaviour policy adopted by ancillary staff	5	4	3	2	1
81	Corridors and social areas (including playgrounds) are well designed and monitored	5	4	3	2	1
82		5	4	3	2	1
83		5	4	3	2	1
84		5	4	3	2	1

Appendix 7

*Key Findings in ASTI Survey on
Discipline in Schools, 2004*

- 71% of teachers had taught classes in current school year in which some students engaged in continuous disruptive behaviour

- 81% of teachers stated that a small group of students were responsible for disruption in their classrooms

- 55% of teachers stated that one student was primarily responsible for disruption

- 64% and 34% of teachers strongly agreed/agreed respectively that unstable home life was cause of negative student behaviour

- 65% and 32% of teachers strongly agreed/agreed respectively that emotional and behavioural difficulties were causes of negative student behaviour

- 26% and 54% of teachers strongly agreed/agreed respectively that learning disabilities were causes of negative student behaviour

- 15% of teachers had participated in a professional development course in last twelve months which included a module on student behaviour

- 54% of schools engaged in an annual review of discipline policy

- 70% of teachers consider that the discipline policy is effective in promoting positive student behaviour

- 33% of teachers had taught classes in current school year in which some students were under the influence of either alcohol or drugs

- 79% of teachers stated that fears of legal repercussions undermined the implementation of discipline policies in schools

- 63% of teachers stated that students' recourse to external appeals procedure undermined the implementation of discipline policies in schools

- 65% and 26% of teachers strongly agreed/agreed respectively that more support form Principals was necessary to make discipline policy effective

- 73% and 24% of teachers strongly agreed/agreed respectively that better communication structures in schools were necessary to make discipline policy effective

- 67% and 28% of teachers strongly agreed/agreed respectively that a Stress Prevention Programme was necessary for teachers

Appendix 8

Out-of-School Programmes/ Services Targeting Young People

Youth Services

Other FÁS, Teagasc provision, etc.

Springboard projects

Projects and other actions supported by Area-based Partnerships

Barnardo's Family Support projects

Neighbourhood Youth Projects (Health Service Executive)

Steps Advice and Counselling Services

Ireland Fund projects/programmes

Probation and Welfare initiatives

Garda projects

Drugs Task Force projects

EQUAL pilot projects

Local Employment Services

Special Support Programmes for Peace and Reconciliation (SSPPR) – Peace II – projects (Border Area)

Other Cross Border Programmes Initiatives

Charitable organisations, trusts, etc

Other regional Programmes or Initiatives (e.g. apprenticeship support from Udarás na Gaeltachta)

Other community based services and initiatives (e.g. Women's shelters etc)

Local out-of-school education or welfare provision, e.g. Life Centre

Health Service Executive

Outdoor and Leisure pursuits

National Learning Network (NLN) projects

Court Service

Appendix 9

Range of Professionals who Work with Children

In School/Centres for Education

Teachers

Guidance Counsellors

Resource teachers etc

HSCL personnel

Special Needs Assistants

Instructors, Tutors

Centre co-ordinators, Directors

Out of school/Centres for Education

Youth workers

Advocates (FÁS funded); Mediators (Local

Employment Services)

Garda Juvenile Liaison Officers (JLOs) and

Community Gardaí

Probation and Welfare Officers

Social Workers

Drugs Awareness Facilitators/Mentors

Community Care workers

Outreach workers

District Nurses

Education Welfare Officers

Family Welfare Conference Co-ordinators

Family Welfare Conference facilitators

Family Welfare Conference mentors

Educational Psychologists

Counselling psychologists/clinical psychologists

Psychiatrists

Special Needs Organisers

Staff of NGOs (e.g. Barnardos, Society of

St Vincent de Paul, Focus Ireland, etc)

Counsellors/Mentors focusing on suicide, drugs, emotional issues, self harm, anger management, sexual health, etc

Court service personnel

Legal personnel, e.g. solicitors

Traveller Liaison Officers

G.P.s

Garda Students and other Students on work experience

Sports coaches/trainers

Appendix 10

Recommended Amendment to Legislation

6 Every person concerned in the implementation of this Act shall have regard to the following objects in pursuance of which the Oireachtas has enacted this Act:

(a) to give practical effect to the constitutional rights of children, including children who have a disability or who have other special educational needs, as they relate to education;

(b) to provide that, as far as is practicable and having regard to the resources available, there is made available to people resident in the State a level and quality of education appropriate to meeting the needs and abilities of those people;

(c) to promote equality of access to and participation in education and to promote the means whereby students may benefit from education and to have cognisance of the rights of all children to a proper environment for learning in our classrooms;

(d) to promote opportunities for adults, in particular adults who as children did not avail of or benefit from education in schools, to avail of educational opportunities through adult and continuing education;

(e) to promote the right of parents to send their children to a school of the parents' choice having regard to the rights of patrons and the effective and efficient use of resources;

(f) to promote best practice in teaching methods with regard to the diverse needs of students and the development of the skills and competences of teachers;

(g) to promote effective liaison and consultation between schools and centres for education, patrons, teachers, parents, the communities served by schools, local authorities, health boards, persons or groups of persons who have a special interest in, or experience of, the education of students with special educational needs and the Minister;

(h) to contribute to the realisation of national educational policies and objectives;

(i) to contribute to the realisation of national policy and objectives in relation to the extension of bi-lingualism in Irish society and in particular the achievement of a greater use of the Irish language at school and in the community;

(j) to contribute to the maintenance of Irish as the primary community language in Gaeltacht areas;

(k) to promote the language and cultural needs of students having regard to the choices of their parents;

(l) to enhance the accountability of the education system, and

(m) to enhance transparency in the making of decisions in the education system both locally and nationally.

7 (1) Each of the following shall be a function of the Minister under this Act:

(a) to ensure, subject to the provisions of this Act, that there is made available to each person resident in the State, including a person with a disability or who has other special educational needs, support services and a level and quality of education appropriate to meeting the needs and abilities of that person,

(b) to determine national education policy, and

(c) to plan and co-ordinate—

   (i) the provision of education in recognised schools and centres for education, and
   (ii) support services.

(2) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (1), each of the following shall be a function of the Minister:

(a) to provide funding to each recognised school and centre for education and to provide support services to recognised schools, centres for education, students, including students who have a disability or who have other special educational needs, and their parents, as the Minister considers appropriate and in accordance with this Act;

(b) to monitor and assess the quality, economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the education system provided in the State by recognised schools and centres for education, having regard to the objects provided for in section 6 and to ensure that the right of every student is balanced by the rights of the student body as a whole to an effective education, and to publish, in such manner as the Minister considers appropriate, information relating to such monitoring and assessment;

(c) to lease land or buildings to any person or body of persons for the purpose of establishing a school without prejudice to the establishment by patrons of schools which are situated on land or in buildings which are not leased to them by the Minister, the extension and further development of such schools when established and the recognition of such schools in accordance with section 10;

(d) to provide support services through Irish to recognised schools which provide teaching through Irish and to any other recognised school which requests such provision;

(e) to perform such other functions as are specifically provided for by this Act or any other enactment, and

(f) to do all such acts and things as may be necessary to further the objects for which this Act is enacted

(3) The Minister shall have all such powers as are necessary or expedient for the purpose of performing his or her functions.

(4) In carrying out his or her
    functions, the Minister –

(a) shall have regard to –

    (i) the resources available,
    (ii) the provision for education
        and training made by other
        agencies with funds provided
        by the Oireachtas,

    (iii) the need to reflect the diversity
        of educational services
        provided in the State, and

    (iv) the practices and traditions
        relating to the organisation of
        schools or groups of schools
        existing at the commencement
        of this Part and the right of
        schools to manage their own
        affairs in accordance with this
        Act and any charters, deeds,
        articles of management or
        other such instruments relating
        to their establishment or
        operation, and

(b) shall make all reasonable efforts
    to consult with patrons, national
    associations of parents, parents'
    associations in schools, recognised
    school management organisations,
    recognised trade unions and staff
    associations representing teachers
    and such other persons who have
    a special interest in or knowledge
    of matters relating to education,
    including persons or groups of
    persons who have a special interest
    in, or experience of, the education of
    students with special educational
    needs, as the Minister considers
    appropriate.

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