

Speech by Barney McNeany, Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, at the launch of research into children and young people's involvement in school bullying policies, on 30th June 2006.

Good morning boys and girls and older people, can I echo Vishal's welcome to NICCY, and to today's launch of the report into this important research about children and young people's involvement in developing school bullying policies.

When we started on our journey as the Commissioner for Children and Young People, we commissioned research into children's rights in Northern Ireland. Queen's University, in 2004 produced a very comprehensive report, detailing a raft of areas where children's rights were being breached in Northern Ireland. The report into that research highlighted bullying as a major issue for children and young people. That research highlighted the:

- Lack of a generally agreed definition of bullying. There was a perception that bullying was inevitable, that some children were over-sensitive; and that some children even 'invite it'.
- Difficulties teachers face in addressing the issue and the need for appropriate training in the identification and management of bullying for all staff (including playground and bus supervisors).
- Need for the curriculum to specifically address issues of diversity and tolerance.
- Vulnerability of certain groups of children and young people, in particular: LGBT; Travellers; ethnic minorities; and young people with disabilities.
- Absence of directives to schools in relation to addressing issues such as racial harassment or homophobic bullying in their anti-bullying policies.
- Need for innovative strategies for dealing with bullying such as peer mediation.
- Particular difficulties in identifying and addressing bullying in playgrounds and school transport.
- Need for proper strategies for monitoring the incidence of bullying.
- Fact that school culture (in particular the lack of respect which teachers afford pupils) can provide an atmosphere where bullying thrives. Bullying by teachers emerged as a key issue across a range of focus groups and among children themselves, although the children did not tend to describe this as 'bullying' but rather as certain teachers 'picking on them', 'shouting at them' or 'putting them down'.



- Need for designated officers in both schools and ELBs to co-ordinate services for both victim and perpetrators.

In general terms, it was considered that the resources to tackle bullying existed but that more work needs to be done in terms of: educating pupils for tolerance; training teachers and support staff to identify, monitor and address it; and co-ordinating support services for all involved (Kilpatrick et al 2004).

Further direct consultation with Children and Young People indicated that bullying was the most important issue that they wished addressing by NICCY.

As you are aware, NICCY's work is underpinned the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 12 of the Convention – the child's right to have a voice and be listened to, is a key feature of our work. We constantly strive, through our own work, and in influencing others to meaningfully engage with children and young people, listen to what they have to say and encourage them to help make decisions about their lives.

So, in looking at what we could do to further enhance existing good practice across Northern Ireland in relation to prevention of bullying, we identified that there is a gap in our awareness of how engaged children and young people are in relation to developing, reviewing and monitoring school bullying policies.

Over the last 9 months NCB and their young researchers have been actively involved in identifying information to bridge that gap in our knowledge, as they have been speaking directly to children, young people and school staff across Northern Ireland about their school bullying policies. Today's report will share the findings of the research we commissioned from NCB. The research team were comprised of Dirk Schubotz, Ruth Sinclair, Stephanie Burns, Chris Busby, Duana Cook, Jamie Hanna, Margaret Jackson, Robert McCallen, Jack McGinn, Laura McMurrin, Lorraine Millar and Finn Toner. Before I invite them to share the key findings with you, I would like to take the opportunity to thank them for their work and for the report before you today. I would also like to thank all the schools who so willingly gave their time to make this research a reality. You will find a list of schools at the front of the report.

Thank-you for listening, and can I welcome the NCB team to speak to you about their research.

