Voices of Children: St. Raphael's Primary School, Ballyfermot

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Terms of Reference

Methodology

Key issues:

- **Bullying**
- **Willingness to stay on until Leaving Certificate: Appreciation of the value of education**
- **Teacher-Pupil interaction and availability of social and emotional support**
- **The need for a time and space for silence**
- **Lack of opportunities for pupil choice and responsibility**
- **Change to the Physical Environment**

Conclusions/Recommendations:
- **A. Strategies to maintain progress regarding bullying**
- **B. More child-centred procedures and opportunities for choice and responsibility:**
- **Pupil representation**
- **Responsibility for plants and animals**
- **Change to the physical environment**
- **Peer mentoring**
- **C. Teacher-Pupil interaction: Clarifying the role of the teacher as a social and emotional support**
- **Scope for 'quiet time'**

- **D. A holistic strategy for continuity with secondary school and access to third level:**
- **extracurricular activities**
- **emotional expression and development**
- **a relational and contextual approach to motivation for future education**

Terms of Reference

This survey of St. Raphaels' pupils' perceived needs is for the purpose of:
- comparison with responses from pupils in other Ballyfermot primary schools provided in the URBAN Ballyfermot survey, in conjunction with the Local Drugs Task Force (Downes 2002)

- providing suggestions for change within St. Raphael's primary school to establish best practice to further meet the identified needs of its pupils.

The scope of this study is more limited than the previous examination of Ballyfermot pupils' needs (Downes 2002) as it focuses only on analysis of pupils' declared needs and not on parents, schools and community organisations' perceptions of their needs.

Any suggestions for best practice at primary school level to emerge from this study are additional and complementary to those needs to be met through the intervention of Ballyfermot Psychological Service (established in 2004)

Methodology

The importance of a child-centred consultation process so that young people are actively consulted regarding issues affecting their own welfare is well recognised (e.g., UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; National Conjoint Child Health Committee Report 2000; Downes 2002; Messages from Children 2003)

Young people's input into the consultation process was obtained through:
 a) questionnaires given to 5th and 6th classes
 b) focus groups of students from 4th class selected on the basis that they represented a range of abilities in the class, and were not simply the students of high ability or those least problematic for the teacher (see Patton 1987 on the 'logic of maximum variation).

All pupils were female.

38 questionnaires were received in total from the 5th and 6th classes
2 focus groups of 5 students each were conducted with pupils from 4th class
No pupil refused to participate.

This approach is consistent with that adopted in the earlier report (Downes 2002). However, due to the sample size and for purposes of confidentiality, no identifying ages or classes will be provided in their responses.

The questionnaires were administered by a teacher who is not employed in the school nor known to any of the children involved. The pupils were informed that:
- their responses would be placed in a sealed envelope
- they were not being judged
- there was no right or wrong answer
- their response does 'not go to the police, your school, your family or your friends'.

Bullying

There is a need for anonymous school surveys on bullying given the finding from international and Irish research that teachers consistently underestimate levels of bullying in their class and in the school (Tattum 1997; Downes 2002).

The previous Ballyfermot study of primary schools (Downes 2002) highlighted that:
- bullying was an issue of concern and distress to a significant number of pupils and was raised as such even in responses to questions which did not deal directly with bullying
- large variation occurred regarding levels of bullying from class to class (even in the same school) where numbers bullied could be as low as none to as high as most of the class
- Extremely high and low levels of bullying occurred in classes of both genders
- A small minority of pupils explicitly linked non-attendance at school with being bullied

In contrast to this earlier study it is noticeable that in the St. Raphael's responses:

- bullying was *rarely* raised as an issue of concern in the 5th and 6th class questionnaire responses regarding questions which did not deal directly with bullying.

- on those occasions where it was raised it was almost never explicitly specified as being in the school context:
  If you had a younger sister or brother, what would be the 3 most important pieces of advice/help you would give to her/him ?

'I would tell her to be careful when she is out playing. Don't fight with anyone. And tell her that I love her'

'if someone hits you hit them back if someone calls you names say it back to them, do on to others as on to you'

'if somebody hits you try not to hit them back because if you hit them you're getting in more trouble'

'I would give my brother advice to be good in school not to fight with anyone'

'watch out for your self'

'watch out for yourself, stand up for yourself'

'don't start fights be good and don't be cheeky'

- the levels of bullying reported when 5th and 6th class pupils were asked directly about this issue in the questionnaire was with three exceptions at a relatively low level:

16)
'no one in my class has been bullied'
'I don't know'
'3'
'none'
'I don't know my guess would be 1 at the very most'
'none'
'2'
'a few' ['I cry when someone hits me hard']
'none'
'I don't really know but I think 2 or 3 have been bullied'
'none'
'me/3'
'no-one but sometimes they have rows which is only normal'
'none, I don't think'
'I don't know' x
'I was a while back for my nanny being fat but she is not' [do you ever cry ? 'yes and lots']
'2 people'
'two people'
'I think most of the girls in my class has been called names by each other'
'two'
'I say a few including me' ['I cry a lot because I have a lot to cry about']
'none'
'just one and me'

Three responses did however suggest a higher figure than the responses of their classmates:
'lots and lots'
'I'm not sure probably most'
'4 or 5'

- Although some 4th class focus group responses:
    - raised bullying as an issue without being directly questioned about it,
    - cited high figures for bullying in their class ('about 15', 'about 8', 'about 8', 'about 3', 'about 4'),
all of these stated that bullying was a very big problem the previous year but significant improvements had taken place:

'it's getting better 'cos a lot of mothers came down to the school'
'I think the school has got much better…two people on duty in the yard'
'hasn't been bullying for a while'
'all the bullying and fights last year…this year not as much'
'bullying poems are helpful…'
'classes to help making decisions telling how to stop [being bullied]'

'a while ago there was fighting but as we grow up we have more sense, in circle time we put questions in a box'
'I told the teacher'
'when you hold it in you don't know who is bullying'
'if you are getting bullied you should tell'
'activity room, circle time, we speak any problems happening in school, have a suggestion box for problems if don't want to tell, only rule not allowed to say any people's names'.

- While in-class bullying in the 4th class group interviewed does not seem to be currently a problem some responses indicated that *in the yard* and *after school* tensions exist *between* classes

'fighting with people out of other classes, in the yard, sometimes they [teachers] don't see it'
'the fighting, some of the 6th class fight with ours, we can't skip now, used to have our den but 6th class say it's for the seniors'
'some girls saying they would get them after school'
'mostly in school being bullied, 5th class higher than me, for no reason'
'same person bullied me but now she stopped, she bullies very often, whenever the people come into the yard …'
'I once got bullied and didn't tell anyone because I thought it would stop'
'probably more people getting bullied but not telling and think the bully will come after them, I didn't tell anyone for two years, mostly in the yard, because it kept carrying on in the yard, I didn't want to go to school'

see APPENDIX A for other focus group responses regarding bullying

Willingness to stay on until Leaving Certificate: Appreciation of the value of education

The dangers of school failure and alienation from the school system have been recognised by research regarding:
- The strong correlation between early school leaving and drug misuse (National Drugs Strategy 2001-2008; Morgan 2001; Downes 2003)
- high levels of early school leaving and literacy problems among the prison population, both male and female; such high levels of literacy problems also existed in younger prisoners despite the fact that literacy problems tend to be significantly higher among older groups compared to younger groups in the general population (Morgan & Kett 2003)

The Combat Poverty Agency policy submission (2003) sets a target to reduce the proportion of early school leavers nationally to 10% by 2005. Fingleton's (2003) interviews with eleven early school leavers in the Canal Communities Area of Dublin also highlights their alienation from the school system as well as the desire of many for further paths to education though not through traditional routes.

The responses in the previous study (Downes 2002) to the question: 'Do you think you want to stay on at school to finish your Leaving Certificate ?' were as follows:

Of those at primary school level asked this question by questionnaire the overall results were as follows:

Yes   295
No   35
Don't know   6
Probably   2
No answer   4

Girls in particular had a clear commitment to stay on until Leaving Certificate

Yes   162
No   11
Don't know   6
No answer   1

Boys had a clear commitment also but not to the same extent as girls

Yes   133
No   24
Probably   1
No answer   4

The responses to this question from pupils at St. Raphael's (including the ten 4th class focus group responses) also revealed a clear commitment to stay on until Leaving Certificate
Yes   45
No   2
Don't know   1

- This commitment is also evident from the large range of elaborated responses describing the perceived importance of education and willingness to attend school, including pupils elaborating to explain why they want to stay on at school until Leaving Cert..

- Zappone's (2003) child centred approach to facilitate expression of children's voices through interviews and role play noted that making children see 'the value of education' tended to be reduced even by the children themselves to 'getting a job, getting a job, getting a job'. While many St. Raphael's pupils responses echoed this perspective, many others also offered a much wider variety of motivations for going to school than simply being viewed in functionalist/instrumentalist terms.

- It is arguable that these overwhelmingly positive attitudes to school and strong commitment to staying on at school needs to be channelled through a long-term strategy for their educational well-being[1]

Pupils reasons for attending school and staying on until Leaving Cert.

i) Job related reasons to stay on until Leaving Cert.
'I would go to school because I want to be a vet'
'no you need to go to school for a good career'
'because you have to get education'
 'Yes because I want to be able to get a job'
'I would go to school because I want to get a good job when I'm older and an education, sometimes it would be nice to have lie in's though'
'I would stay in school to get an education and a job when I grow up'
'I'd like to be a teacher in science, if I didn't go I wouldn't know science'
'If you wanted to get a job, if you had not gone to school you wouldn't know what to do'
'I want to go to college'
'I want to try to go to UCD'
'If we didn't do our Leaving Cert we couldn't do our job'
'I want to be a teacher'
'I want to be a teacher'

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[1] See Conclusions/Recommendations

'I want to get an education, want to investigate crimes and know the way they get samples from labs'

'so I can go to collage'

'I am never going to leave until I finish big college'

'I would go to school'

'I would go to school because you need the edgecation'

'[if I left before Leaving Cert. I] would probably get a little job, not get much money to get a house, just a job in a small shop'

'to get a good education to get a good job'

'I would go to school because you need to learn'

'you need to go to school to learn and get a good job'

ii) Social reasons to stay on at school

'I would to meet new people and have a experience'

'I would go to school because I'll make friends and I'll have something to do'

'Yes I would because I would miss my friends'

'to mix with your friends, even if you forget the maths, with your friends you'll never forget'

'I like going to school, being with my friends'

'to see friends and learn different thinks that I never knew'

iii) Learning as a value in itself

'so I could learn'

'I would go to school because I want a good education (if it was easyer)'

'No I would go to school because I want to learn'

'No ! I would go to school !'

'to get more smart'

'I would go to school to learn and be kind and write'

'I would because I like to lern'

'Yes I would go to school because I love school'

'no I would stay in school because it makes you smart'

'I would go to school'

'Yes I weth go to school'

'I would go because if you didn't you would be dumb'

'No because I would learn anything'

'probably learn nothing if don't stay and just be dumb'

'Yes because you get to learn new stuff'

'I would go to school because you learn new things every day'

'yeah because if you didn't go to school you wouldn't know anything'

'because you're missing out on [school] work'

'I would like to be kind and nice and learn words. But I would never do that in my [opinion] it is bold running off like that and you should go to school'

'when I'm learning and when my teacher is really nice'

'I have never done that before. And I will try not to miss a day in school because school is very important'

'to learn more often and learn more stuff'

iv) Stay on because they like school

'no I like school very much'

'Yes I would go to school because I like school'
'I wouldn't quit school and I like school very much'
'I was not absent before I look forward to going to school'
'what if they did fun stuff, like art and you missed it ?'
'art every day'

v) To help their future children
'I'd go to school…for your child when you grow up, to help her with Irish or else would go to school without doing homework'
'for your child'

vi) No other alternative
'I would go to school because there is nothing else to do'
'would probably just end up going to your friend's house'

vii) Other
'I'll go to school more often because I'd like to get away from home'
'I would go to school but I wish we had Fridays of'
'my uncle now, he's a teacher, in Trinity College I think'
'Yes, I want to be a singer'

Reasons not to attend school and not to stay on until Leaving Cert.

i) Being involved in fights
'I would never do that. If every body doesn't fight in my class'
'I have never been absent without telling my parents. If there wasn't any fighting and when your ever in a fight people always lie'

ii) Getting into trouble
'Well maybe I would be afraid of going to school in case I didn't do my homework then I would get yelled at. If we had enough time out the yard and more free time'
'Being bolded/not learning anything'
'because I might be upset and could not face school. There is another thing I would not go into school if I have done something bad. I am not saying any more'
'no, less work and the teachers to under stand you' (see also 'for the teachers not to shout at you for something you did not do')

iii) Other
'My reason will be: I was sick and when you went to work I went to bed or I went to town'
'I never want to stay out I try to get there but I do be late. You ditch school without your family knowing about it'
'No I want to be a hairdresser'
'to be allowed do more stuff'
'I hate going to school because we get treated like babies'
'I would not go to school because it sucks'
'No I wouldn't go to school because I don't like it'
'I would start a little later, it's very early'
'havin a fight with me ma, breaking up with me fella, if there were boys'
'No because its always work. But I problery would'

Teacher-Pupil interaction and availability of social and emotional support

The new revised curriculum represents a clear challenge to a Cartesian compartmentalisation between reason on the one hand and emotion on the other. The teacher's role can no longer be to have minimal regard to the child's emotional development through focusing solely on his or her academic, intellectual development (see also NEPS 2004 on the relevance of a supportive and caring ethos in the school through SPHE programmes for planning for critical incidents). Glasser (1969) refers to the "emotional bridge to relevance" in the classroom. The role of the teacher as a potential emotional support for the child need not envisage a role for the teacher as counsellor or therapist (see also Morgan 1998). Rather the teacher can provide emotional support at the levels of:

- mental health promotion and
- stress prevention.

Such a role in helping prevent the build up of emotional stress in the child does require the teacher to be comfortable in a listening role and with adopting a strengths based focus which has been advocated elsewhere in the Irish childcare system (McKeown et al 2001) .

The benefits for mental health in having even only one person to confide in is well recognised for the general population (Levitt 1991; Antonucci 1990). The importance of just one figure, such as a teacher, as a source of emotional support for children and youth at risk is evident from international research. Werner & Smith (1982) noted from their longitudinal study that in circumstances of poverty and/or family instability:

> Without exception, all the children who thrived had at least one person that provided them consistent emotional support – a grandmother, an older sister, a teacher or a neighbour

In the U.S context, it has been observed that natural mentors or non-parent, non-peer support figures may contribute to the psychosocial adjustment of high risk youth (Cowen & Work 1988; Galbo 1986; Garmezy 1987). Yet in Northern Ireland, Caul & Harbison (1998) found that "more than half the pupils" identified as consistent school absentees "felt they had no one with whom they could discuss" their dissatisfaction

with school. An important aspect of drug prevention programmes in the Irish National Drugs Strategy 2001-2008 is to:

> seek to strengthen resilience amongst young people in or out of school by fostering positive stable relationships with family or key community figures especially in the early years…

Such key community figures include teachers.

Responses across the primary schools to the question 'Would you talk to someone from the school about your problems if they promised not to tell anybody else ?' were as follows:

YES	NO	MAYBE	DEPENDS	DON'T KNOW
142	176	6	8	5

Responses from St. Raphaels' Pupils (5th and 6th class) were as follows:

YES	NO	MAYBE		DON'T KNOW
14	20	3		1

• Samples of pupils being willing to talk to someone from the school emerged as follows from one class:
 'I'd tell my best friends, someone I'm really close to, I could trust, I'd tell the teacher and the Principal'
'I'd tell me maths teacher'
'probably'
'probably'
'I'd tell a teacher, the teacher would have more sense'
'would tell a teacher'
'it is better to tell than keep it inside'

• It is noticeable that there were almost no criticisms of teachers specifically or more generally from any pupils[2] (see Downes 2002 on the issue of pupil-teacher interaction in other Ballyfermot schools). With regard to the question: *Are you always treated fairly in school ?*
5 responses from the 38 were negative though not elaborated on in contrast to some of the other questions:

'no I'm not'
'not all the time with the teachers'
'no !'
'no because you might have loads of work to do and you might be tired'
'not most times'

Sample positive answers include:
 'yes I am'

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[2] The one exception was the following statement regarding what to change at school: 'for the teachers not to shout at you for something you did not do'

'most of the time'
'most of the time'
'I would say that I am I'm not any different'
'yes sometimes'
'sometimes'
'the teacher likes me best' ['I look forward to going to school']
'yeah sometimes'
'yes some times'
'yes I am'
'yes sometimes'

Responses to the question 'Do you have anyone to talk to if you feel sad ?' revealed:
- quite a high level of social support, usually expressed as being from family or friends, though only occasionally from a teacher
- levels of social support directly comparable to pupils in other Ballyfermot schools

Responses from other Ballyfermot primary schools (Downes 2002)
Yes   305
No   30
Sometimes   3
No answer   4

St. Raphael's
Yes   34
No   3
Sometimes   1

- *The need for a more focused whole-school strategy regarding the teacher as a social and emotional support* will be discussed in the recommendations section

See APPENDIX B for some examples of the need for social and emotional support

The need for a time and space for silence

The purpose of the question *'Is there a room in your school where anyone can go if they just want some peace and quiet, some time to think ? Do you think it would be a good idea if there was a room like this ?'* in the previous study (Downes 2002) was:
- to examine pupil's comfort with exploring feelings and feeling at home in the school environment
- with a view to examining the suitability of establishing a counselling room onsite in the school

A feature of the responses to this question in the current study was the overwhelmingly positive attitude to such a room and more significantly, *the degree of elaboration by pupils on:*
- *the importance of having such a room*
- *their liking for such an opportunity to be quiet*

'Is there a room in your school where anyone can go if they just want some peace and quiet, some time to think ? Do you think it would be a good idea if there was a room like this ?'

'No and it would be great to have one'

'I think it would be a good idea to have a room like this'

'Yes because if someone mam or dad had past away they could have peace and quiet'

'no there is no room yes I think that would be a great idea'

'no there is not a room but it would be good to have one'

'no but I think it would be a great idea'

'There is no room like this but I think it would be great to have one'

'yes I would like this room''

'there is no room like that but I wish there was'

'I would love if there was a room like that because I have a lot to think about'

'yes I think that's a good idea because you might need to think about a problem'

'No there is no room in my school like that I would really like one'

'we have none but it would be nice'

'yes that would be excellent for people so they can think alone'

'yes I do think they should have a room like that'

'no but I would like a room like that'

'no but I would like if there was'

'no I don't think there's a room but it will be nice if there was'

'no there isn't but I would like one'

'yes I would like a room like that'

'yes they might be sad and don't want to tell anybody about it they might want to just get over it all'

'There is not a room like that in our school and I think it would be a very good idea'

'no, yes I would think it would be a good idea'

'a great idea because you don't need people shouting, sometimes need your own space to think'

'if you had some peace, a good idea, in a library it would be nice because wouldn't be allowed to talk'

'if too much noise in the house I go to the library so I can hear myself think'

'It would be good…I'd like a crowd so won't feel lonely'

'most of the times I have headaches and I could have some peace'

'I'd like that, give you time to think and relax'

'change class to library, there's a door at the back of the class, could change the room'

'it's very hard for everyone to be quiet'

- *This enthusiastic response also suggests a basic sense of belonging to the school environment as it is difficult to envisage pupils wishing for such opportunity for a time of quiet in an environment where they felt alienated from*

Lack of opportunities for pupil choice and responsibility

- Only two pupils referred to aspects of school where they felt they were in control or had any power

In what areas of your life do you feel you are in control, that you have the power?

'in school because were in sixth class'

'when I get up in the morning and go to school because Im trying for a good career'

- one pupil explicitly criticised the lack of opportunity for pupil responsibility while a small minority stated that they had control in no area of their lives

'I hate going to school because we get treated like babies'
'nowhere'
'never'
'no where'
'I don't really know'

Other responses included:
 'When I get money'
'to take care of myself and my brothers and sister'
'a lot of things but I would like to stay out later at night'
'I am in control of whether I see my dad or not'
'when I'm being really nice to the ones I love'
'I chose what I want to eat'
'my boyfriend'
'When I mind kids and babies'
'I feel I have the power to choose what to wear'
'When Im out playing with my friends'
'my bedroom'
'my bedroom'
'when I go shoping and in my own room'
'I'm in charge of what I were and what I eat'
'my room'
'When I have my dog'
'When I'm in my friends house or the sea side when I'm picking out my clothes to wear'
'my dog and cat'
'my bed room'
'When I'm with my friend I can feel it'
'at home/with my best friend'
'most stuff in my life are up to me, but the rest are up to my parents'

- Significantly, *no one mentioned any activity like sports, drama, or another extracurricular activity as a situation where they felt in control*. The importance of extracurricular activities in providing:
a) a sense of belongingness to school
b) opportunities for a success identity that can transfer and 'snowball' to other aspects of the pupils life
c) opportunities to develop problem solving and social skills
d) opportunities to be given responsibility and choice
is well recognised from international research (see Kellaghan et al 1995; Downes 2003; Gilman et al 2004)

- The low level of extracurricular activites available for pupils, especially girls, at primary school in Ballyfermot was highlighted in the previous study (Downes 2002).

- Numerous pupils at St. Raphael's mentioned going to an afterschool club, with others referring to art and basketball.

Are you involved in any activity in the school outside school hours ?
Sample positive answers include:
'yes I do basketball I really enjoy it'
'yet I play basketball it is excellent'
'I go to basketball and I am going to an art collage for six weeks'

Elaborated answers with no extracurricular activity:
'go to the library and play at home'
'no but I would like to'
'I go to the bowler with me mates'
'nothing'
'I play out with me friends'

- A very noticeable difference between the 5th class and 6th class responses was evident

Are you involved in any activity in the school outside school hours ?
5th class (Group A)
Yes   15
No   3

6th class (Group B)
Yes   6
No   14

- Although these figures for extracurricular participation are noticeably higher than those in the previous study (Downes 2002)[3], it is a matter of concern that 6th class has considerably less scope for participation than 5th class. Given the role of extracurricular activities as a protection against early school drop-out, a strategy of targeting 6th class pupils for extracurricular involvement would be central to a transition strategy between primary and secondary

Change to the Physical Environment

- *There was a strong consensus regarding the need to improve the yard in particular*

If you had the power, what would you change in your school ?
'the yard and the pupils'
'I would get more games and things in the yard'

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[3] 4th to 6th class figures in the previous study (Downes 2002) in response to the question 'Do you do anything in your school after school hours ? were as follows:
No activity: 239
Yes   87
No answer   16

'I would like to change some of our teachers and our yard more games and seats just for the 6th and were allowed our phones on and our classrooms more colour and in yard more colour'

'to have more abillities in the yard, to be able to bring stuff out'

'I would make sure we were bring anything we want out to the yard and make learning fun for everyone'

'I'll change the lunches and I'll make sure the children don't have to go to the yard in break'

'new desks, more designs in the yard and benches to sit on in the shed if it is raining'

'everything like balls, board games out in the yard. If its cold we should not were skirts but trousers. And not get much homework. Go on loads of trips. And have sweets on Fridays and lunch'

'make it more coulerfull'

'I would change the whole school and make it look better'

'The ground in the yard because when you fall it hurts badly'

'I would put mor activitys in the yard and more games for the classroom'

'make the yard more colourful'

'the yard and I would change more activities'

'to make it brighter and the yard better'

'I would like to change the P.E hall'

'the yard my class the hole school'

'classrooms/pe hall/rules'

'I think there should be grass in the yard and benches because people get hurt with all of the stones'

'I would get grass in the yard instead of the stones'

'we'd like the sheds painted'

'I'd change the messing in the yard and most people get hurt, the ground is real hard, stones get in your face, people get hurt'

'[another school has] loads of games on the ground, they painted the yard'

'the yard'

See APPENDIX C for other responses to this question

CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Strategies to maintain progress regarding bullying

- Levels of reported in-class bullying by 5th and 6th class appear low in comparison with some classes in the previous study (Downes 2002). However, this does not take away from the possibility that bullying may have serious impact upon those individuals who are still being bullied.
- The accounts of the 4th class focus groups highlight the very important role of the class teacher in creating a climate where emotional expression is facilitated and bullying is not tolerated.
- The previous Ballyfermot study found that there is considerable variation in levels of bullying even among classes of the same age in the same school (Downes 2002). Although bullying does not appear to exist to a large degree in the surveyed classes at St. Raphael's, this does not mean that that it can be presumed not to exist to a large degree in other classes at St. Raphael's. The role of the class teacher in each class is vital.
- Increased yard supervision has brought benefits regarding bullying although tensions still exist between classes despite the progress made in in-class bullying
- The 4th class pupils' focus group responses provide an account of the benefits of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programmes involving circle time as a protection against bullying. Pupil ownership of the problem as recommended from research in Scotland (Mellor 1997) seems to be occurring in at least some classes whether through circle time or otherwise
- 4th class pupils indicate a willingness to talk to the teacher about problems regarding bullying
- A whole school approach is recommended which would utilise the best practice adopted for the 4th class pupils interviewed, such as a) bullying poems, b) a suggestion box for problems without mentioning names as part of circle time for SPHE., c) 'classes to help making decisions telling how to stop [being bullied]'
- Research on bullying emphasises the need for regular follow-up to maintain progress (Olweus 1997)
- Three domains of bullying need to be regularly examined: in-class, in the yard (between classes and years) and after school

B. More child-centred procedures and opportunities for choice and responsibility

Several strategies can be employed to ensure that pupils feel that they have more control and power in the school environment. Increased opportunity for pupil control and power can:
- bring benefits to mental health
- bring benefits to pupil motivation and learning (Glasser 1986; Deci, Nezlek & Sheinman 1981; Flink, Boggiano & Barrett 1990; Ryan & Grolnick 1986; Deci & Ryan 1992; Ryan & Stiller 1991; Amabile 1986)
- give expression to rights of the child[4] to be consulted on issues regarding their own welfare

Pupil representation

- It is recommended that more structures for pupil representation be established at St. Raphaels (see also Fingleton 2003 on the voices of early school leavers regarding their need to be consulted and respected)

Responsibility for animals and plants

- It is recommended that more emphasis be given to bringing animals and plants in to the school environment with control and responsibility given to pupils to pick and take care of them (see also Glasser 1986; Downes 2002, 2004). This could be one motivating factor for school attendance for those at risk
- Pupils, especially those targeted as being at risk, could be members of committees with responsibility for particular plants and animals both during and outside term time

Change to the Physical Environment

- The broad consensus among pupils about the need for change to the yard - even though they were not asked directly about this issue - is an opportunity for practical expression of possibility for pupil choice and responsibility
- Classes from 4th onwards, if not earlier years also, could be engaged in the planning as well as implementation work for this change – both during school time and perhaps as part of a summer project
- Developing this sense of control and ownership regarding the physical environment of the school obviously also applies to the classroom itself. Pupils need to be consulted and given opportunity to express their opinion on how the classroom environment could be changed while appraising them also of budgetary realities
- The physical environment for the 'quiet time' (whether in the classroom, library or otherwise) would also require a major input from the pupils to maximise pupils sense of belongingness to the process and sense of ease in the environment

Peer mentoring

- The opportunity for a volunteer mentoring system to be developed between 5th/6th

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[4] Cf. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

class and younger years could be explored in conjunction with local organisations including afterschool clubs

- It is recommended to develop this in pairs from the older and younger years so that four pupils would be in one mentoring group
- The mentoring could be at a variety of levels: schoolwork, sharing responsibility for animals and plants, anti-bullying programmes, change to the physical environment, extracurricular activities such as sport and drama

C. Teacher-Pupil interaction: **Clarifying the role of the teacher as a social and emotional support**

Given the:
  - overwhelming lack of criticism or hostility in the pupil responses towards their teachers
  - enthusiasm of the vast majority of pupils to stay on at school until Leaving Cert.
  - value given by the vast majority of pupils to education thereby expressing the importance to them of school
  - sufficient sense of belongingness to the school environment to feel at ease with and express the need for a 'quiet time' in school
  - finding that the majority of 5th and 6th class pupils stated that they would not be willing to talk to someone from the school about their problems
  - improvements regarding prevention of bullying in 4th class through circle time and a 'suggestion box' to discuss problems anonymously
  - international research on the importance of a non-parent/non-peer figure such as a teacher for the provision of psychosocial support to at risk youth

it can be concluded that:
  - there is sufficient sense of pupil belongingness and lack of fear in the school environment to provide a basis for a proactive whole-school policy to develop the role of the teacher as a social and emotional support for pupils
  - this proactive whole-school policy regarding the teacher as social and emotional support is a potential which still needs to be fully realised

Scope for 'quiet time'

- The largescale enthusiasm of pupils responses regarding an opportunity for a space for silence could be given practical expression even in the classroom through a 'quiet time' facilitated by the teacher

- For this 'quiet time' to be owned by the pupils it is important that they would:
a) have choice in rearranging the classroom environment during this time
b) be consulted regarding an appropriate time during the week for this 'quiet time'
c) be given the opportunity to provide feedback as to how this 'quiet time' could be improved for them

- The 'quiet time' would need to be scheduled at a time which is not at the very end of the school day in case a pupil becomes upset during this time and has not been given the opportunity afterwards to ease back into the routine of the day

D. A holistic strategy for continuity from primary to secondary school and planning for access to third level:
- **extracurricular activities**
- **emotional expression and development**
- **a relational and contextual approach to motivation for future education**

<u>Extracurricular activities</u>

The disruption to the social environment of the pupil during transfer to post-primary is well recognised (see also Fingleton 2003 for early school leavers' accounts of loss of friendship due to this transfer in the Canal Communities Area)
As extracurricular activities offer opportunities for:
- responsibility and success,
- decision-making and social skills,
- protecting against early school leaving
it is extremely important that any such supports at primary level are sustained at secondary level

The Educational Disadvantage Subcommittee (2003) has recommended that School Plans address 'key areas' such as:
- extracurricular programmes and connection to youth service provision within the local area
- transition from primary to post-primary

Yet it is arguable that these two elements need to be firmly connected to each other so that a plan would exist for continuity between those extracurricular activities at primary level and at secondary level (see also Downes 2004).

- 5th/6th class and first/second year post-primary need to be targeted regarding extracurricular activities with a focus on how to develop continuity within these activities from primary to post-primary. There is a need to develop bridges with local organisations and secondary schools to implement this strategy

- The participation of 5th class pupils in extracurricular activities is extremely high, both in itself and in comparison with results from the previous study (Downes 2002). Nevertheless, the discrepancy between 5th and 6th class regarding opportunities for participation in extracurricular activities clearly needs to be remedied as part of a strategy for transition to post-primary.

<u>Emotional expression and development</u>

- A strategy of continuity between St. Raphaels and the local secondary schools needs to also focus on a continuity of implementation in practice of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) – where primary teachers could provide feedback to secondary school teachers (and vice-versa) about:
a) what has and has not worked in creating a supportive climate of trust for pupils in Ballyfermot,
b) pupil needs and expectations within such a supportive climate which need to be sustained at secondary level to minimise the culture 'shock' of acclimatisation to second level

- The openness of the primary school environment may create expectations in young girls of an emotionally communicative and supportive environment at second level which could lead to a heightened sense of disillusionment if this atmosphere is not sustained across the transition to second level. There is a real onus on primary and secondary level schools to work together to sustain a continuity in approaches to SPHE in practice, as well as through provision of social and emotional supports.

- It is recommended that procedures of communication be clarified between primary and secondary teachers regarding SPHE approaches that work in the Ballyfermot context and pupil expectations carried over from primary to secondary

- Gilligan et al's (1990) research on adolescent and pre-adolescent girls has highlighted the loss of 'voice', loss of 'connection' and relation that occurs between 'the twelve year old's knowing' and the older girl's 'remembering'. In other words, girls may lose the capacity to be aware of and to articulate their emotional needs - both privately and to others. Gilligan et al argue that many girls lose the confidence to connect with their inner world at the onset of the teen years. Such a view would further imply that there is a heightened danger of disconnection if the girls are to move from a highly supportive primary school environment to a more remote impersonal secondary school atmosphere.

- In order to anticipate the real dangers of 'loss of connection' and disillusionment if there is not a continuity of approach from primary to secondary level, a proactive whole-school policy at St. Raphael's regarding the teacher as social and emotional support needs to be extended to become part of a 'between-school' policy with local secondary schools.

- This focus on transition is not simply at the level of the individual pupil but is at a systemic level regarding the transition in 'atmospheres' between St. Raphaels and the local secondary schools (see also Fingleton 2003 on loss of friends and the difficulties of forming bonds with a variety of teachers at secondary as opposed to the stability of one class teacher at primary)

<u>A relational and contextual approach to motivation for future education:</u>
<u>The bridge to third level, pathways from primary school</u>

- Four key guiding principles need to inform future pathways from primary education towards third level - and to help sustain and foster the high levels of interest in schoolwork and enthusiasm to stay on until Leaving Certificate through focused strategies

The four key guiding principles underlying this holistic long-term strategy to enable pupils gain access to third level are as follows:

i) Movement away from conceptions of choice and third level education where the pupil's choice regarding the future is founded on *only an abstract knowledge* of what third level is supposed to be like[5]

ii) Emphasis on a *relational* dimension to choice and third level – this attempt to move away from abstract motivational goals for the pupils future to concretise and immerse the pupils' experience in relations with identifiable role models[6] i.e. people they can relate to

iii) Emphasis on a *contextual* dimension to choice and third level – particular places for study at 3rd level, particular subjects and jobs to be given information about

iv) Issues of academic motivation cannot be separated from developing expression of young girls social and emotional needs. Recognising this need to overcome rigid divisions between reason and emotion involves adopting a strategy that embraces both dimensions as vital to sustaining the momentum clearly evident at primary level for many pupils at St. Raphaels to aspire to third level education.

Beyond third-level as an abstraction to third-level access strategies with a relational and contextual focus

- Identify their interests in fifth/sixth class, as part of long-term strategy to involve local Ballyfermot people as teachers, youth workers, childcare workers, psychologists and lawyers. This strategy would involve:

a) information about the jobs themselves through arranging meetings with people working in those areas,

b) visits to the relevant institutions providing these courses; though visits alone are insufficient as the pupils need to meet people whom they can identify with and sense an 'assumed connection' (Gilligan 1982) with, such as college students from broadly similar backgrounds to themselves,

c) involvement of parents in these meetings and visits where possible,

d) clarification of the necessary subjects at Leaving Certificate to gain access to the third level courses and examination of the availability of such subjects in the secondary school e.g., whether honours Irish is available as an option at second level as it is necessary for entry to the Colleges of Education. Some of the

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[5] Cf. Downes (2003b) on the contrast between choice based on abstraction and choice as a relational contextual process

[6] Cf. Gilligan (1982;1990) on an association of contextual relational thinking with female experience and Bandura (1977) on role modelling

information relevant for such careers could also be made part of projects in the school as part of what could be called, for example, a 'follow your dreams project'.

- This dual focus on transition includes not only transition to post-primary but also to third level. As it must be acknowledged that the teenage years is a time of changing identity with some strongly arguing for discontinuities between childhood and adulthood (Clarke & Clarke 1984), the goal of such project must include a large degree of flexibility and choice. Even if pupils change their views over time regarding specific careers, the opportunity to reflect on the costs and benefits of varying careers as well as clarification of important features of careers e.g., opportunity to help others, chance for choice and initiative in the workplace, variety within the work, salary levels, opportunity for travel, could help student motivation in the future.

- A long-term strategy needs to be adopted to facilitate access for young people from Ballyfermot to third level - with particular strategic priority to be given to the areas of teaching, law, social policy, social work, youth work, childcare, sociology, psychology. Implementation of such a strategy would facilitate increased participation of local people in leadership roles in their own community

- This strategy would be aided by access policies at third level institutions (including Ballyfermot College) where there are reserved places for designated disadvantaged schools outside the Leaving Certificate points requirement (though with a minimum requirement) analogous to schemes already operating with regard to mature students. St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, has, for example, recently established a system of reserved places for students from designated disadvantaged schools in Dublin (see also National Forum Report, Ending Disadvantage 2003 on recommendations regarding 'direct entry' programmes)

Integration of development regarding social and emotional needs with academic and career/vocational needs

The need to integrate strategies to meet vocational and emotional needs is highlighted by the following conclusions from interviews with 'at risk' adolescent girls in the U.S context:

The choices and paths taken at adolescence have the potential to be pivotal, setting a course for the educational and vocational direction – and the psychological and relational character – of adulthood. The conventional paths set for many young girls, often 'fraught with danger', make adolescence a complex and consequential journey. It is not a journey that should be undertaken alone' (Taylor, Gilligan & Sullivan 1995).

- It is recommended that an integration of strategies be developed to connect:
a) relational and contextual approaches for choice and third level with
b) a programme to develop continuity in practice from primary to secondary level regarding self-esteem, sex and relationship education, SPHE

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APPENDIX A:
Other focus group responses regarding bullying:

How many in your class have been bullied ?
'sometimes bullied for being smart'
'probably a lot getting bullied, you wouldn't know if someone was getting bullied'
'don't know, we don't know what happens at home, in class they are happy'
'some friends don't get on, they fight and are angry, even best friends'
'some people can't share'

If you had the power, what would you change in your school ?
'fighting…sometimes it's coming in, odd times, bullying'
'people being left out of things, if someone's playing only some allowed to play'
'most bullying is name calling'
'when I was getting bullied it was physical, hair pulled'
'being called names, hitting when coming home from school'

APPENDIX B

What do you like about yourself most ?
'nothing [crossed out] that I have friends, that's it nothing else' [has been bullied she says]

Do you ever cry? Cry often?
'yes I cry a lot my mam and dad just split up so that makes me very upset'
'yes when me and me fella split'
'I cry a lot because I have a lot to cry about' ['I would love if there was a room like that because I have a lot to think about']

'This sounds a bit stupid but I feel that I can talk more to my friends rather than my mam and dad'
'Sometimes I would talk to my friend at home. I used to go to a counciler for when my nanny died but I don't talk to anyone I keep it in'
'I don't really like anything about my self I'm a bit funny'
'I would really hope so because I trust and love them'
'yes I cry but not all the time only when I miss someone'

APPENDIX C
What are the biggest problems your friends have ? How can they be helped ?
'one of them wants to have sex I told her no !'
' I don't know'
' well I have lots of friends and they have lots of problems'
'I can't say it's a secret'
'!'
'My friends really have a problem. They are all perfect in there own way'
'tell her mam'
'coming in late'

'to tell the teacher or there friends and family'
'no answer'
'I can't tell you'
'when people stair at them if the teacher talked to them'
'I help them with histery''
'let them tell you about it and we may get help for them'
'two grandads dying, play with them tell them that your allways there for them if they need a friend to talk to'
'my friends are ok they don't really have problems'
'My friends don't really have any problems'

Other responses regarding advice to younger brother or sister:
If you had a younger sister or brother, what would be the 3 most important pieces of advice/help you would give to her/him?

Importance of school
'stay in school and get a good education'
'Don't take drugs, work hard in school to get a good job be kind and treat others the way you would like to be treated'
'work hard in school, tell someone where you're going, and not to fight with any of your friends'
'go to school and work hard and get a good job'
'to stay at school'
'To do well in school and pay attention. Don't do what other people want you to do because there probebly only trying to get you into trouble'

Substance abuse
'do not drink or smoke until you are 18 or do not rob'
'tell them not to drink alcohol or smoke, I would tell them not to hang around the street'

Help with schoolwork
'to help him wiht schoolwork'
'I would help her to do her homework'

Other:
'stay out of trouble'
'I would say your family are always there for you'
'not to talk to skangers'
'to stay at school. Not to go off on your own' [do you ever cry ? 'Yes. Yes all of the time and I don't know why']
'I would give them a happy life and to be kind and make new friends for them'
'If they had danger in there life I would help them'
' don't talk to strangers, never robe, never tells what goes on in your home'
'not to be bold'
'just ignore them because maybe they'd just be jealous' [when they criticise you]
'be more helpful and watch where you're going'
'watch who you talk to because you never know what could happen'
'just say I love you'

If you had the power, what would you change in your school ?
The following responses wishing for change were as follows:
'everything'
'everything'
'for the teachers not to shot at you for something you did not do'
'make boys stay in it up to sixth class'
'everything'
'more activity'
'everything'
'everything'
 'everything'
'don't know'
'nothing'
 'I wouldn't really change anything I like my school I would give myself a brain'
 'everthing'
 'I would like to have Fridays off in school cause it just a waste of time comeing in for notting'
 'the couold'
'change everyone shouting up at the teacher'
'all the bullying and fights last year…this year not as much'
'everyone using all the phones'
'people being left out of things, if someone's playing only some allowed to play'