

**Experiences of Post-primary School Communities Transitioning to a  
Settings-base for Mental Health and Wellbeing Promotion: The  
Impact of Policy on Context, Competition and Care.**

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## **Declaration**

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that all citations and references are correct and complete.

Signed:

Date:





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*Ar dheis Dé faoi shuaimhneas, go raibh siad.*

## Abstract

This multi-case case study explores the experiences of post-primary school communities as they transition to a mental health and wellbeing promotion model. The research study includes the voices of students, principals, teachers, career guidance counsellors and parents/guardians across a sample of eight post-primary schools in a region of Ireland operating under the aegis of an Education and Training Board. The research examines the impact of educational policy on the operational context of post-primary schooling.

The study examines a range of educational policies using policy theories outlined by Ball (2008) and a variant of Bronfenbrenner's ecological frame as a visual mapping tool. The study tracks policy trajectories from policy as text, to interpretation, to enactment and argues that the political economic and social context of our education system must be explored in order to fully appreciate how meaningful mental health and wellbeing promotion can be achieved. The study explores the consequences of class-based schooling in Ireland and the challenges this presents for schools, particularly DEIS designated schools, as they transition.

The mixed methods research approach employed in this study allows for a triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data gathered using an amalgam of qualitative interviews, focus groups and quantitative surveys. Data analysis was conducted using grounded theory and the constant comparison methods of analysis which yielded major thematic trends for further analysis and exploration.

This research study argues that contemporary capitalism and its impact on educational reform and governance, has greatly impacted the Irish system. This study finds that the marketisation of the education system, within a class-based schooling model, has developed an intense competition between many schools. This intense interschool competition stratifies the student cohort into those that are valued and less valued by the education system. The author argues that to view education and educational provision purely from the viewpoint of the market, and the citizen as a customer, loses sight of the social and emotional needs of a population and supports the Rational Economic Actor model of the citizen. This research study explores meso (policy as interpretation) and micro (policy as effects) level examples of the failure of neoliberal and new managerial market values to accommodate care in our post-primary schooling system.

The author argues that the post-primary system which culminates in a product-orientated, competition-based assessment challenges a school's ability to be a settings-base for meaningful mental health promotion. This research study contributes to existing knowledge by tracking the influence of the market model on the operational context of Irish post-primary schools in terms of stratification. The study demonstrates the challenge this creates for meaningful mental health promotion particularly in DEIS schools. The recent positive developments in terms of universal school supports for mental health promotion are recognised and the experiences, attitudes and opinions of stakeholders are explored. In terms of *the Health Promoting School (HPS) Framework* (1995), this study argues that supports for students at risk are inadequate and that the importance of care must supersede the importance of competition if we are to improve adolescent mental health and wellbeing outcomes in society.

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## Abbreviations

<b>ADHD</b>	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
<b>ASD</b>	Autistic Spectrum Disorder
<b>ASTI</b>	Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland
<b>AMHU</b>	Acute Mental Health Unit
<b>BOM</b>	Board of Management
<b>BTEI</b>	Back to Education Initiative
<b>CAMHS</b>	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
<b>CASE</b>	Child and Adolescent Self-harm in Europe
<b>CBA</b>	Classroom Based Assessment
<b>CD</b>	Conduct Disorder
<b>CEO</b>	Chief Executive Officer
<b>CGC</b>	Career Guidance Counsellor
<b>CID</b>	Contract of Indefinite Duration
<b>CIPC</b>	Counselling in Primary Care
<b>COP</b>	Community of Practice
<b>CSO</b>	Central Statistics Office
<b>DCYA</b>	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
<b>DES</b>	Department of Education and Skills
<b>DEIS</b>	Delivering Equality in Schools
<b>DESL</b>	Developing Schools Enriching Learning
<b>EBD</b>	Emotional Behavioural Disturbance
<b>EC</b>	European Commission
<b>ECB</b>	European Central Bank
<b>ECF</b>	Employment Control Framework
<b>ENHPS</b>	European Network of Health Promoting Schools
<b>EPSEN</b>	Education of Persons with Special Education Needs
<b>ESRI</b>	Economic and Social Research Institute
<b>ETB</b>	Education and Training Board
<b>ETBI</b>	Education and Training Board Ireland
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FDI</b>	Foreign Direct Investment
<b>FET</b>	Further Education and Training

<b>FF</b>	Fianna Fáil
<b>FG</b>	Focus Group
<b>GDPR</b>	General Data Protection Regulations
<b>GERM</b>	Global Education Reform Movement
<b>GP</b>	General Practitioner
<b>HEA</b>	Higher Education Authority
<b>HEI</b>	Higher Education Institute
<b>HPS</b>	Health Promoting Schools
<b>HSCL</b>	Home School Community Liaison
<b>HSE</b>	Health Service Executive
<b>IAYMH</b>	International Association of Youth Mental Health
<b>ICEPE</b>	Institute of Child Education and Psychology Europe
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communications Technology
<b>IFSC</b>	Irish Financial Services Centre
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>IPPN</b>	Irish Primary Principals Network
<b>ISA</b>	Ideological State Apparatus
<b>IUHPE</b>	International Union for Health Promotion and Education
<b>JC</b>	Junior Cycle
<b>JCSP</b>	Junior Certificate Schools Programme
<b>JMB</b>	Joint Managerial Body
<b>KPI</b>	Key Performance Indicator
<b>LCS</b>	Love, Care and Solidarity
<b>LRC</b>	Labour Relations Commission
<b>L2LP</b>	Language 2 Learning Programme
<b>MHC</b>	Mental Health Commission
<b>MHR</b>	Mental Health Reform
<b>MHPS</b>	Mental Health Promoting School
<b>MIC</b>	Mary Immaculate College
<b>MIREC</b>	Mary Immaculate College Ethics Committee
<b>MWS</b>	My World Survey
<b>NAPD</b>	National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals
<b>NBSS</b>	National Behavioural Support Service
<b>NCCA</b>	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

<b>NCSE</b>	National Council for Special Education
<b>NEPS</b>	National Educational Psychological Service
<b>NFQ</b>	National Framework of Qualifications
<b>NLC</b>	Neoliberal Capitalism
<b>NOSP</b>	National Office of Suicide Prevention
<b>NQT</b>	Newly Qualified Teacher
<b>NTMA</b>	National Treasury Management Association
<b>NUI</b>	National University of Ireland
<b>NWCI</b>	National Women's Council of Ireland
<b>ODD</b>	Oppositional Defiance Disorder
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>PD</b>	Progressive Democrats
<b>PERL</b>	Psychiatric Epidemiology Research across the Lifespan
<b>PISA</b>	Programme for International Student Assessment
<b>PNA</b>	Psychiatric Nurses Association
<b>PR</b>	Public Relations
<b>PSA</b>	Public Service Agreement
<b>RAPID</b>	Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development
<b>RDD</b>	Regression Discontinuity Design
<b>REA</b>	Rational Economic Actor
<b>RSA</b>	Repressive State Apparatus
<b>RSE</b>	Relationships and Sexuality Education
<b>RTÉ</b>	Raidió Téilifís Éireann
<b>SDP</b>	School Development Planning
<b>SES</b>	Socio Economic Status
<b>SEN</b>	Special Education Needs
<b>SENO</b>	Special Education Needs Organiser
<b>SERC</b>	Special Education Review Committee
<b>SIP</b>	School Improvement Plan
<b>SICAP</b>	Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme
<b>SNA</b>	Special Needs Assistant
<b>SPHE</b>	Social, Personal and Health Education
<b>SPSS</b>	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
<b>SSE</b>	School Self Evaluation

<b>STEM</b>	Science Technology Mathematics and Engineering
<b>TUI</b>	Teachers' Union of Ireland
<b>TY</b>	Transition Year
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
<b>US</b>	United States
<b>VEC</b>	Vocational Educational Committee
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organisation





## Chapter One

### Introduction

#### 1.0 Rationale

Over the past two decades, the social and economic cost of mental health issues for young people in Ireland has reached the highest level ever recorded. Dooley and Fitzgerald (2013, p.20) argue in the *My World Survey* that ‘*The number one issue for [Irish] young people is their mental health*’. Regrettably, they argue that matters have worsened since 2013 with a notable increase in anxiety and depression among young people (Ibid, 2019). The National Suicide Research Foundation (2018) also warns that self-harm is increasing across the adolescent population and caution that the onset age has decreased to the pre-teen age profile in recent years. A Eurofound survey (2019) indicates that 12% of Irish-based 15 to 24-year-olds report chronic depression in contrast to an average rate of 4% across European States. Mental health difficulties in adolescence are consistently associated with less favourable social and economic outcomes in later life, placing an increased financial burden on State services into the future (see Forgeard, Jayawickreme *et al.* 2011). Dooley and Fitzgerald (2013) estimate that the Irish government need to spend €118 million annually to appropriately address the scale of youth mental health issues. Indeed, suicide is now among the leading causes of death among young people in Ireland (CSO, 2018). In relation to European rates of adolescent suicide, Ireland has the fourth highest rate among thirty-seven countries and ranks third place among EU member states (UNICEF, 2017). Moreover, Ireland has the highest suicide rate for female children in the EU (NWCI, 2018) and the location of the sample, has been identified as a suicide blackspot (NOSP, 2015).

In tandem with developments regarding how European nations view and respond to population-wide mental health issues, there has been a shift to a settings-based approach to mental health promotion, over the past two decades. Multiple research studies have led the World Health Organisation (2015) to report that 50% of all mental health issues present by the age of fourteen. Therefore, given the scale and frequency with which young people attend second level schooling across Europe, it is clear that the critical role of the post-primary school in promoting positive mental health has

been identified by the European Network of Health Promoting Schools (2002). Apple (1998) and Sahlberg (2018) outline that teachers should engage in research activity which will illuminate the reality of policy enactment at the coalface. The researcher's position as an insider: a teacher, manager, parent and student, renders her suitably positioned to explore and appreciate the voices of stakeholders. The researcher argues that voices from the microsystemic level must be listened to and heard in order to record, review and evaluate the current experiences, beliefs and attitudes at the microsystemic level so as to inform future policy and practice.

The author contends that the macrosystemic level identification of schools, as a setting for mental health and wellbeing promotion, does not automatically result in enactment at the coalface. She also argues that the effective enactment of mental health and wellbeing promotion in schools is influenced by the contextual situation of each type of school (case). The researcher explores the context of the sample cases using a '*Policy Sociology Approach*' which is formed using the political, economic, cultural and affective dimensions of egalitarian theory outlined by Baker, Lynch *et al.* (2004; 2009). The influence of the capitalist political economy on educational policy and practice is examined through the experiences of post-primary school communities. The researcher captures the stakeholders' authentic attitudes and experiences of the transition to a school settings-base for mental health and wellbeing promotion within a competitive market model. This study illuminates the impact of such policies on the mesosystemic and microsystemic level happenings across the multi-case case-study.

## **1.1 Research Objectives**

This research study seeks to explore the experiences of post-primary school communities regarding the transition to a settings-base for mental health and wellbeing promotion policy and practice in their schools. The multi-case case study is founded on the premise that the multi-layered policy context of post-primary schools must be appreciated and understood in order to examine the subject matter. Stake (2006) cites the importance of the situational context of each case in the data collection and analysis. The researcher endeavours to capture the complex collage of elements that influence the sample schools as a collective. In an effort to assist researchers to appreciate how multiple cases can feed into one comprehensive body of work, Stake (2006) proposes and defines the concept of a quintain as an overarching subject matter within a multi-case case

study design. The quintain for this research study is identified as the impact of context, competition and care on the experiences of post-primary school communities transitioning to a settings-base for mental health and wellbeing promotion. Stake (2006) illustrates that emphasis on the quintain changes the researcher's focus, from seeking an individualised understanding of each case, to an appreciation of how each case contributes to understanding the quintain. The span of eight separate cases enabled a comprehensive exploration of the quintain which is underpinned by five embedded research questions, these are:

1. How has the post-primary schooling system affected the operational context of schools in the sample?
2. Does the socio-economic profile of the school/catchment influence the scale of need in terms of mental health promotion and mental health supports?
3. What is the impact of a performance-orientated product system of assessment on the context of mental health and wellbeing promotion at post-primary level?
4. What impact has new managerialism had on the principals and teachers' context and ability to champion mental health and wellbeing promotion?
5. How can policy makers ensure mental health promotion is meaningful for *all* post-primary students?

Each of the embedded research questions are explored in a designated chapter from chapter four to chapter eight. Chapter four aims to examine the first embedded research question. It explores the class-based nature of post-primary provision and illustrates the intensification of competition since *the Education Act* (1998). The chapter argues that this intense competition centred on a product-orientated, performance-based model has stratified students in accordance with their ability to perform. The second research question is explored in chapter five. It examines if the socioeconomic profile of the school catchment influences the level of demand for mental health promotion and mental health supports. The chapter argues that DEIS school have a greater level of students in the 'some' and 'few' categories and that DEIS schools receive no extra resources in relation to mental health and wellbeing. Chapter six examines the impact of a performance-orientated product system on the context of mental health and wellbeing at post-primary level. It argues that this competitive outcomes-based context relegates care to second place in schools. It creates a hidden curriculum which

runs contrary to the overt messages of care often contained in mission statements and other facets of documents associated with the overt characteristic spirit of schools. Chapter seven examines the impact of new managerialism on teachers' operational context and their collective ability to champion mental health and wellbeing promotion from this position. Chapter eight seeks to provide recommendations to assist policy makers to ensure that mental health promotion is meaningful for all post-primary students, across all school types.

## **1.2 Personal Epistemology - Researcher as a Reflective Practitioner**

In approaching this research study, the author was mindful of the influence of her socialisation and past experiences on her thinking and analytical practices. Bernstein (1991, p. 205) captures the potentiality of the influence of our cultural and sociological past experiences on our thinking and actions in the present. *'our concrete historical forms of life are always shaped by traditions, social practices and communal bonds that are more concrete and complex than our rational discursive practices'*. Therefore, an understanding of the position of the researcher in this research study is essential in order to appreciate the perspective from which she has emerged.

My personal experiences of education at post-primary level as a student, a teacher and an Assistant Principal have greatly influenced my views on post-primary schooling system in Ireland. My primary schooling was received in middle-class suburbia on the Northside of Limerick City. I attended primary schooling through the recessionary years of the 1980s and given my father's public sector position, I remained largely sheltered from the difficult economic circumstances experienced by many families throughout that period. I remember, as a young child, infrequent and vague intimations that corporation estates were dreadful places and a sense that those who inhabited them were the epitome of having failed, either educationally or socially or both. I remember my younger sister's friend who moved from a nearby housing estate to a corporation estate in the mid-1980s following the separation of her parents and was never heard of again in our middle-class setting.

My parents were both from rural agricultural backgrounds as were most of the inhabitants of our relatively new middle-class estate which was established in the 1960s. Education was held in high esteem in our house in equal measure to honesty,

integrity and a strong work ethic. Education was understood in our home as personal enlightenment, the seeking of truth and meaning and higher order thinking and analysis culminating in the emancipation of the human mind. My parents, identified as our primary educators in *Bunreacht na hÉireann* (1937), recognised the multiple intelligences of their children and great emphasis was placed on the arts particularly music, drama and theatre. In hindsight I now realise that perhaps unwittingly, in the theoretical sense, my parents had instilled an understanding of education as a praxis model and an appreciation for multiple intelligences. That is not to suggest that my parents were not acutely aware of the nexus between education and societal mobility, for they were. My father having left the remote isolation of the Beara Peninsula in the mid-1950s, aged sixteen and on a State scholarship to *'Posts and Telegraphs'* in Dublin's GPO had borne witness to this fact, having avoided emigration unlike the vast majority of his friends and peers.

My primary education was received in a Salesian school on the northside of the city. There my experience of the lived characteristic spirit was one of Christian Socialism which mirrored that of the order's founder St. Don Bosco. The school was situated in and serviced a middle-class catchment, yet I clearly remember the Salesian Sisters facilitating the attendance of a number of girls from the Travelling Community during the late 1980s. The girls' families had established a temporary halting site on the main Limerick-Ennis road on the periphery of the school's catchment area. It was the first time that members of the Travelling Community had attended our school. I, by chance, observed the Salesian Sisters' discreet weekly routine of providing the children with freshly washed uniforms and books as well as tending to their hair prior to the arrival of the student masses. While the attendance of these girls from the Travelling Community did not endure, the memory has in my mind's eye, for the Sisters' motivations resonated with the lessons instilled by my parents. I could appreciate that the Sisters were loyal to the Christian ideals which underpinned the work and legacy of Don Bosco.

A short number of years later when my third and youngest sister was diagnosed with a moderate intellectual disability, I again witnessed this loyalty. My parents had enrolled my sister to attend a school for children with moderate or profound special needs across the city. Two Salesian Sisters called to our house to assure my parents

that there was a place for my sister in their school. My parents declined the offer, but the gesture had touched my parents' hearts and our family because at that time there was no *Education for Persons with Special Education Needs (EPSEN) Act* (2004), no resources for mainstreaming those with additional Special Educational Needs (SEN). The sincerity of the Sisters' inclusive characteristic spirit further shaped my formative years and my understanding and vision for what '*education*' is, should be and could be.

I commenced my post-primary education in the nearest school in our catchment area as was the norm, particularly among my peers with parents from agricultural backgrounds in 1990. The school was a community college run by Limerick Vocational Education Committee (VEC) and was marginally closer than the Salesian Secondary School. The school was located between a middle-class area and a corporation estate. In fact, the front door opened into middle-class Limerick and the back door opened into a green area at the rear of the school with a highwall and a gate leading into the corporation estate. I remember Year Heads' making references to the rear gate being locked in the morning once school commenced. However, this was not the practice for those entering from the front elevation. Due to the high wall encompassing the rear, a student would have to do a lengthy round trip of up to 3 kms to the front entrance should they encounter the locked gate. The school at that time was heavily subscribed with seven classes of thirty students in my year group. The classes were graded and streamed according to '*ability*' following an Entrance Examination the previous spring in English, Irish and Mathematics. The highest ability class was named A1 and it descended a scale of As from 1 to 4 and then Bs 1 to 3. I observed that the first three 'A' classes were populated by my middle-class friends from primary and other middle-class children from rural south east Clare. This phenomenon has also been noted in the UK context by Reay (2017, p.34), she argues that streaming ensured that the '*upper streams were largely working-class free zones*'. I had been assigned to the fourth A class which I was informed was for the '*average*' and was mixed between middle-class and education-focused working-class students. It was from that vantage point that I noticed that the children in the B classes were predominantly from a working-class background. It was as if an invisible wall or divide existed between both sides, and given my positioning between the two groupings, I had become conscious of it. I was also uncomfortable in my base class

as I was forced to see the reality of class division in terms of its impact on individual students rather than on a group of *others* as I had unconsciously categorised them prior to that time.

This experience of class-division in school exposed me to the existence of class inequality and the hidden curriculum within the schooling system as a whole. My integration with both working-class and middle-class students at post-primary provided an experience of what Bourdieu's theory of cultural and social capital conveys. I was experiencing a discomfort in terms of my sense of belonging. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p.127) explain this phenomenon in the reverse, '*When habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a 'fish in water': it does not feel the weight of the water, and it takes the world about itself for granted*'. I was conscious that I and my middle-class counterparts had greater currency with the teachers in the classroom. There was a '*hidden subsidy*' to being middle-class and an innate '*feel for the game*' of education prevailed as outlined by Bourdieu (1986). I observed a spectrum of reactions from the working-class students, the majority appeared aware of the potential of education to transform their socio-economic classification but were largely unconvinced. A significant minority displayed persistent recalcitrant behaviour which Reay, Crozier *et al.* (2011) indicate is commonplace. In my observation it resulted in such students either conforming or dropping out of school. Fagan (1995) illustrates that dropping out in those times was not unheard of and in the case of challenging students it was sometimes suggested to them. However, a minority working-class grouping which stimulated my critical awareness were those who were socialised with the same educational beliefs and values as me but who lacked the economic, social or cultural capital to achieve their full potential within the system. These students were deeply invested in the educational system and viewed it as a meritocracy which would reward their hard work and perseverance. The perception of education as a meritocracy among working-class students is argued by Reay (2017) in the UK context.

My critical awareness of the post-primary educational context that I found myself in was enhanced by my older brother's position in the A1 class in his year group. Conversations with him and his peers made me aware of the perception that the higher the class, the better the teacher assigned. This grading of the teachers was entirely

based on grades achieved in the State Examinations. At that time there was a developing extra tuition (*grind*) culture and it was not unheard of for students to avail of *grinds* if either they or their teacher were perceived to be struggling. For the most part those engaged in grinds were doing so in secret as in our context it would be construed as a slight on the teacher's ability or the student's intellect. Engaging in grinds was not a common feature in the B classes, this observation has been supported by Lynch and O' Riordan (1998) who argue a higher uptake of grinds among middle class students in comparison to working class students emerged at that time in Ireland. Lynch and Moran (2006) argue that the growth of the grinds culture in Ireland demonstrated the ability of wealthier middle-class parents to convert economic capital to create an educational market outside of the schooling system which would seek to advantage their offspring.

My time as a student and later a teacher in a post-primary Delivering Equality in Schools (DEIS) school has provided me with a continuum of experiential learning. In my time as a student (1990 to 1995) *the Education Act* (1998) did not exist and middle-class parental involvement in education was less intense. Therefore, our school catchment remained intact resulting in an amalgam of the middle and working classes to the tune of over one thousand students. In the years that have followed the implementation of *the Education Act* (1998) the post-primary school I attended reduced to a third of its previous size. This reduction in size occurred as a result of the emerging phenomenon of *Parental Choice*, increased competition and the desire of many middle-class parents to avoid schooling their children with certain working-class students. The post-primary school I attended had a mixed catchment in terms of social class and gradually middle-class parents began to choose to send their children elsewhere. This phenomenon was exacerbated by the creation of waiting lists and problematic selection criteria. It was documented by the Limerick media in the mid-2000s when the issue of '*soft barriers*' for less desirable students became politically charged. Councillor John Ryan stated in the *Limerick Leader* (May 15th, 2004) that the term '*educational apartheid*' characterised the selection policies of some Limerick post-primary schools.

In 2016, the post-primary school I attended was amalgamated with another formerly large school in my area which had also become unviable. This second post-primary



was the post-primary school run by the Salesian Order. It had exercised the same open enrolment policy and practices I had witnessed in the Salesian primary. It is noteworthy that this school was located in one of the most affluent areas in Limerick yet had steadily declined in terms of middle-class intake which was its natural geographical catchment. Both these schools had open enrolment policies which did not place ‘*soft barriers*’ in the way of those with less social and cultural capital and this resulted in the steady decline in enrolments within the marketised model of education introduced in 1998. The Salesian post-primary school closed in 2017 having operated from that site since 1925.

My personal motivation for conducting this research study and the subject matter are inextricably linked, because my passion and vocation in life is working with and supporting adolescents at post-primary level. I have seventeen years’ experience in a Delivering Equality In Schools (DEIS) context in the post-primary system and in that time, I have acted as a teacher and mentor to adolescents. I have encountered and dealt with many student-related challenges and observed an increase in mental health issues among an increasing number of adolescents. A rise in an earlier onset of anxiety and other mental health issues among adolescents has been highlighted in research by Fitzgerald and O’ Reilly (2019). The impact of socioeconomic context became clearer to me as my role expanded into the area of student support which coincided with the economic downturn (2008 onwards). My emerging roles on various Boards of Management (BOM) increased my capacity to observe enrolment trends and patterns across a number of schools in relation to the mesosystemic and microsystemic level interpretations and enactments of *the Education Act* (1998) and *the EPSEN Act* (2004). I therefore believe that a study of attitudes and experiences of mental health promotion in post-primary schools cannot be conducted in a vacuum without acknowledging and understanding the competitive context in which contemporary Irish schools operate.

My biggest regret, in the course of my career to date, is the death by suicide of three former students. These students died in their twenties and although they had left our school, I believe that due to social and environmental circumstances in their formative years, they did not receive appropriate life/ coping skills. I believe passionately that the current education system could do more to develop life skills as well as academic

skills. This is particularly poignant in some cases where it is exclusively schools and outside agencies that provide such skills to young people. I believe the meaningful promotion of mental health in primary and post-primary schools is crucial and will reduce adolescent alienation, self-harm, attempted suicide and death by suicide. My motivations are driven by a sense of moral obligation and an innate sense that a teacher's duty is to realise they are teaching people that matter and not merely a subject matter.

The contextual experiences of school communities transitioning to a settings-base for mental health and wellbeing promotion has yet to be studied in the Irish context. This study looks at policy implementation from a fresh perspective giving a voice to all stakeholders in the school community: students, staff, parents and management. This research study looks at schools' experiences of implementing *the HPS Framework* (1995)<sup>1</sup> and highlights the operational challenges which exist.

### **1.3 Structure of Thesis**

#### **Chapter One**

Chapter one outlines the rationale for conducting this research study by presenting statistics in relation to the scale of youth mental health in the geographical location of the sample, and nationally. The chapter identifies the European-wide movement to a settings-based approach to mental health promotion and the recognition of schools as a significant setting in the lives of young people. The chapter identifies key research objectives in relation to the overarching research question and the supportive embedded questions. The personal motivations of the researcher as a reflective practitioner are outlined in addition to the structure of the thesis.

#### **Chapter Two**

This chapter commences with a discursive and visual presentation of the theoretical framework which underpins the entire body of research. It outlines two approaches which combine to form the theoretical framework. Firstly, the researcher created a visual hybrid frame using Ball's (1993) policy tools and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological frame. The chapter presents two such visual frames which overlap in a Venn

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<sup>1</sup> The *Health Promoting Schools Framework* was first outlined in the World Health Organisation (1995) Global health School Initiative, Helping Schools to Become Health Promoting Schools

diagram (see figure 2.1). The two separate frames represent two separate policy trajectories. The first represents policy which originates from the political, economic context. The second originates from a health and wellbeing promotion context. These frames enable policy to be explored throughout the various stages in its trajectory: the chronosystemic stage, the macrosystemic stage, the exosystemic stage, the mesosystemic stage and the microsystemic stage.

Figure 2.1 was created to demonstrate the convergence, at a meso and microsystemic level, of both educational paradigms represented by the two circles. Chapters four, five, six and seven examine the convergence of both paradigms through the experiences of school communities transitioning to *the HPS Framework (1995)*. The framework underpins recent policy documents such as the *Framework for Junior Cycle (2015)* and *the Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines (2017)*. Within these chapters, four central themes emerged organically within the data collected from each of the stakeholders. These are: the effects of the competitive market model on the operational context of schooling; the impact of the schools' socioeconomic profile on transitions to a settings-base for mental health promotion; the impact of the high-stakes gatekeeping system of assessment at the end of post-primary; and the challenges for principals and teachers as agents of mental health promotion at the coalface.

Secondly, the researcher adopted Ball's (2008) '*policy sociology approach*', incorporating various sociological theories and concepts, to advance discussion. The policy sociology approach is created using the multiple systems of inequality proposed by Baker, Lynch *et al.* (2004; 2009). These are: the economic system, the political system, the cultural system and the affective system. To begin, the economic and political systems are combined and theories relating to economic reproduction, hegemony and the role and function of curriculum in education are outlined. Secondly, the cultural system is examined using Bourdieusian theory. Bourdieu's (1986) *thinking tools* identified an individual's agency as *habitus* and *capital* which are contextualised within *fields* or social structures. Lastly, inequality is outlined from an affective perspective using arguments made by Baker, Lynch *et al.* (2004; 2009) and Noddings (1984; 2002). Their arguments suggest that inequality results from being denied love, care and solidarity.

### **Chapter Three**

This chapter details the methodological approach for this research study, discussing the merits of a multi-case case-study research design. The rationale for the usage of a mixed methods approach to data collection is explored along with an overview of the qualitative and quantitative data collection methods used. The gatekeeping role of the employment partner and the associative agreement with the researcher is discussed in the context of the researcher as an insider. The eight sample schools (cases) are profiled in terms of socio-economic catchment. The various components of data collection from instrument design to data collection are explored. Finally, the process of analysing the data in accordance with the constant comparison method is outlined. Chapters four, five, six and seven examine the operational context of post-primary education and schooling in Ireland. The chapters explore the microsystemic level context in which the stakeholders are experiencing the transition to a mental health and wellbeing promoting school.

### **Chapter Four**

Chapter four examines the influence of the political economy on the operational context of post-primary schooling in Ireland. It argues that key government policy documents such as the *Schools for Health in Ireland Framework* (HSE, 2013-2014) claim to be underpinned by the following core values: equity, sustainability, inclusion, empowerment and democracy; yet the organisation of the post-primary schooling system provides a spectrum of school types from private fee-paying to DEIS schooling. Cahill (2015) refers to this as a class-based schooling model. His argument identifies the nexus which often exists between financial, social and cultural capital. The context and implications of a stratified post-primary schooling system within a competitive market model are outlined. The context and implications of a stratified post-primary schooling system within a competitive market model are outlined. To this end, particular focus is given to the tension between DEIS and non-DEIS schools in areas of high inter-school competition. This chapter argues that the current system creates a hidden culture of stratification, segregation and relegation of students with a habitus ill-matched to those in positions of greater economic and cultural capital.

The chapter explores trends of stratification and segregation within the sample location arguing that the focus on competition has relegated care to second place. The chapter

uses a Bourdieusain lens to highlight the obedience of various stakeholders to the unwritten rules of the game. In this regard, data relating to certain practices is highlighted, such as: the tracking and monitoring students in the primary school; the creation of soft-barriers to enrolment by principals and senior management in some schools; as well as parents segregating their own children in accordance with their perceived suitability for the DEIS/ non-DEIS contexts. The chapter therefore outlines the inequality that exists in the post-primary educational system which is attempting to transition to a mental health and wellbeing promotion model.

### **Chapter Five**

The chapter highlights that the post-primary schooling system has limited in-school supports for students in the ‘*some*’ and ‘*few*’ categories of the HPS framework. This chapter builds on chapter four which details trends of stratification and segregation of students from lower socioeconomic profiles and young people with a SEN, within the competitive outcomes-based product system of education. The recognition of social determinants for mental health and wellbeing decline suggests that a higher percentage of students in ‘disadvantaged’ schools (DEIS) will present with or be at risk of mental health and wellbeing issues. Indeed, the data illustrates that DEIS schools sampled are experiencing greater challenges, as the percentage of their students in the ‘*some*’ and ‘*few*’ categories are higher in comparison to the non-DEIS schools. The student data indicates that DEIS schools cater for a greater number of students presenting with self-harm and suicidal ideation.

The chapter explores the reasons for the higher rates of DEIS students presenting in the ‘*some*’ and ‘*few*’ category by exploring the impact of the primary care location (home) on students. The chapter explores students’ attitudes to, and experiences of, their primary care locations and demonstrates a correlation between a compromised primary care location and a greater level of mental health issues. The data suggests that DEIS schools cater for a greater level of such students in comparison to non-DEIS schools in the sample.

### **Chapter Six**

This chapter argues that there is a perception of the Leaving Certificate as the measure of the worth and value of all the teaching and learning which took place throughout

second level schooling. It demonstrates the gatekeeping role of the Leaving Certificate in terms of access to prestigious progression pathways associated with a higher standard of income and living. This in turn rationalises why parents, student and society are invested in this performance model of assessment for social mobility or maintenance of the status quo in many middle-class cases. The ability of the Leaving Certificate assessment to precipitate the entire second level educational experience is discussed in relation to *the Framework for Junior Cycle* (2015). The views of stakeholders indicate that the ability to transition to a mental health promotion model is challenged as non-examination subjects are less valued. Therefore, it is argued that the performance-based, product model of gatekeeping assessment impacts on the schools' ability to champion mental health promotion. This is because performance and high-status progression to a HEI is viewed as the role and function of the post-primary education system is at odds with education as a human right.

## **Chapter Seven**

This chapter defines and explores the concept of new managerialism as an organisational instrument (see Lynch 2012; Lynch *et al.*, 2012) which projects the logic of market principles into the oversight and governance mechanisms of the public service structures. This chapter explores the impact of new managerialism on the terms and conditions of post-primary teachers in the context of economic recession and a decline in international standardised test results (PISA, 2009) as outlined by Conway (2013). The chapter recognises that the role and function of teachers and principals is also changing in line with the transition to a mental health and wellbeing promotion model of schooling. Simmie (2014) argues that the reforms at Junior Cycle are aimed at increasing control, accountability, efficiency and surveillance on teachers and schooling. Her arguments support those of Sahlberg (2007) who identified the Global Educational Reform Movement (GERM); Lynch, Grummell *et al.* (2012) who detail the progression of new managerialism and Ritzer (1993) in his analysis of the McDonaldisation of the public services. The chapter explores the experiences of teacher and principals as they transition to a care model within a competitive market context of education. The chapter presents data in relation to the challenges created by this context for these school-based adult stakeholders. It explores their experiences and attitudes towards balancing care with competition.

## **Chapter Eight**

Chapter eight concludes the research study by summarising the main findings and making a series of recommendations. The recommendations suggest how the current operational context of post-primary schooling can be modified to create a system conducive to meaningful mental health and wellbeing promotion. The chapter makes recommendations which align with the visual theoretical framework outlined in chapter two. It identifies recommendations which pertain to the post-primary education system on a macro, meso and microsystemic level. It is envisaged that these recommendations could be implemented on a microsystemic level in schools, on a mesosystemic level across the ETB scheme and on a macrosystemic level by policy makers in the Department of Education.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter outlines two theoretical approaches which combine to form the theoretical framework. Firstly, the researcher created a hybrid frame using Ball's (1993) policy tools and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological frame. Secondly, the researcher adopted Ball's (2008) 'Policy Sociology Approach' to advance discussion. The policy sociology approach is created using the multiple systems of inequality outlined by Baker, Lynch *et al.* (2004). These are: the economic system, the political system, the cultural system and the affective system. Each of these approaches are discussed in detail in this chapter.

#### **2.1 Configuring a Conceptual Lens for Education Policy Analysis**

This research study examines the impact of contemporary educational policy on post-primary school communities' transitioning to a mental health and wellbeing promotion model. The chapter highlights that educational policy over the past five decades has impacted on the operational context of schooling. Ball (2008, p.7) argues that policy by its very nature is ever evolving and therefore subject to constant change and therefore must be viewed as an organic, multifaceted and ever-changing entity. He argues against objectifying policy but instead viewing it as a continuum which is subject to change over time and space, '*as a process, something ongoing, interactional and instable*'. In order to analyse policy as a continuum, Ball (1993) proposed three policy analysis tools: policy as text, policy as discourse and policy as effects.

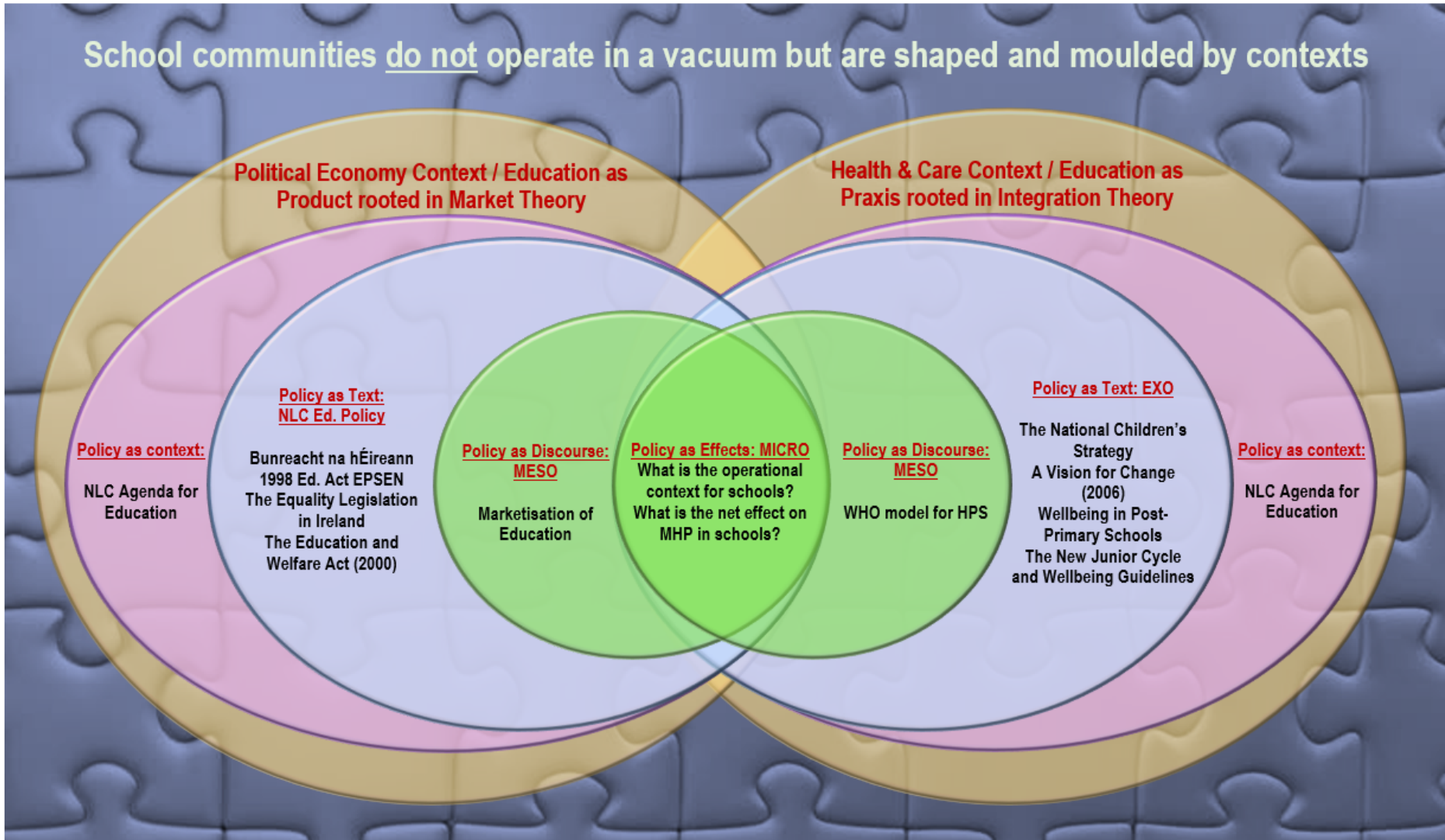
This study applies these policy analysis tools through the creation of a visual framework. This is achieved by merging Ball's policy tools (1993) with Bronfenbrenner's ecological frame of child development (1979). Bronfenbrenner's original ecological frame was developed to illustrate how influences in a child's environment affect the child's growth and development. The frame placed the child in the centre of a multi-layered framework depicted by five concentric circles which circumference one another. Each of the five circles represents five socially organised subsystems: the chronosystem, macrosystem, exosystems, mesosystem and the



microsystem. The combining of Ball (1993) policy tools and Bronfenbrenner (1979) creates a variant framework which places the school (as a microsystem) in the centre and adds the chrono and macro systems to the exo (policy as text), meso (policy as discourse) and micro (policy as effects) systems. This newly formed variant theoretical frame depicts educational policy as a continuum and illustrates the interrelated dynamic between the chrono, exo, macro, meso and microsystems.

This research study argues that educational policy in Ireland is rooted in two separate educational paradigms: a market-orientated paradigm of education and a social justice paradigm of education. Therefore, the variant visual frame is created twice to represent the separate educational paradigms which shape contemporary educational policy. These two visual frames are illustrated in figure 2.1. The independence of both circles at the chronosystemic, macrosystemic and exosystemic levels depict the existence of two separate educational paradigms. The left represents the influence of the political economy on educational policy and the performance-orientated operational context of post-primary schooling. The right circle represents the transition to a mental health and wellbeing promotion model of schooling. The visual framework illustrates that recent mental health and wellbeing related policy has created an overlap of both educational paradigms at the coalface in schools. The convergence of both circles at a mesosystemic and microsystemic level depicts the operational context of contemporary post-primary schooling. The researcher argues that this has become a site for tensions which relate to context, competition and care.

**Figure 2.1 The Theoretical Framework – A Visual Frame**



The researcher uses Ball's (2008, p.4) '*Policy Sociology Approach*' in order to analyse where the separate educational paradigms overlap at the school level. Ball (2008, p.4) argues that this approach uses '*sociological concepts, ideas and research*' to aid discussion in relation to how policy is interpreted and enacted at the meso and microsystemic levels. Therefore, the researcher draws on sociological concepts, ideas and research, which have originated from an egalitarian perspective, to discuss stakeholders' experiences of challenges as they emerge. These concepts and ideas emanate from economic, cultural and affective theory and are expanded upon later in this chapter.

The author uses two broad educational paradigms to frame aspects of contemporary educational policy in this research study. The paradigms are explored in the next section.

## **2.2 What is Education? Exploring Contemporary Understandings of Education**

The right to education is recognised in Ireland in *Article 42 of Bunreacht na hÉireann* which acknowledges the primary and natural educator of the child as the family and therefore guarantees to respect the right of parents to provide for the '*religious, moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children*'. Education is also recognised internationally as a basic human right by various legal agreements which have been ratified by Ireland, such as the *United Nations Convention on Human Rights* (1948), the *United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child* (1959) and the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989). Tomasevski (2001) argues that the right to education has been recognised as a multiplier of other rights. To fulfil its obligations to recognise and support education as a human right, the State is obligated to provide appropriate formal education and schooling for young people, and this has been progressed particularly in recent decades with the introduction of *the Education Act* (1998), *the Education and Welfare Act* (2000) and *the EPSEN Act* (2004). This study argues that while the right to education has been upheld, the construct of education has changed significantly over time.

This research study argues the subjectivity of education and what it means to be educated cautioning against objectifying education in a reductionist sense; yet the

objectification of education is evident in education systems operating in capitalist economies. In recognition of the dangers of objectifying education, Lynch (2016) describes rather than defines education. She recognises the potential of education as a public good because as well as acting for the good of the individual it can augment life, socially, politically and economically. She argues that education has many potentials for individuals to shape and change their social context such as the realisation of personal freedom, emancipation from socio-economic oppression and mobilisation of participation in society. Lynch (2016) identifies four positive potentials which can be achieved through equality-focused education. These are: its ability to play a defining role for an individual in terms of educational and personal identity; its ability to define what is of cultural value; its ability to provide a voice and parity of representation; and its ability to truly care for and nurture the learners. This concept is explored in relation to the number of young people in Ireland that become *inactive* NEETs. Power, Clarke *et al.* (2015) define inactive NEETS as citizens who are not seeking employment, education and/or training. The fact that the majority of these young people have dropped out of second level education is significant.

Similarly, Apple (2006, Foreword) highlights the dangers and inconsistencies involved in objectifying education. '*Debates rage over what is to count as 'official knowledge', over what counts as good teaching, over what counts as evidence of success, and over who should ask and answer these questions*'. He argues that the construct of education is influenced by the societal, political and economic context which shape school communities resulting in debate as to the form and function of education in contemporary society.

The crux of the argument is explained by examining the etymological foundation for the word education. It is noteworthy that it derives from two differing Latin roots '*educare*' and '*educere*' as noted by Craft (1984). *Educare* means to mould or train whereas *educere* means to lead out or guide. This has created a binary perspective on the meaning, role and function of education. The binary perspective relates to two distinct educational paradigms: the constructivist epistemology and the realist epistemology. Freire (1972) argued the coexistence of both opposing epistemologies, explaining that education is never neutral in political terms as it is, he argues, either used for emancipation or domestication. Bekerman (2006) supports this by arguing

that the function of education is either a mode of access to participation as citizens and workers in a democratic society, or a means of social reproduction where access to wealth and power is controlled and rationalised. More recently, Bathmaker, Ingram *et al.* (2016, p. 2) argue that Higher Education '*can be viewed as an instrument of social justice, or conversely as a tool for elite reproduction*'. This theoretical argument is explored in chapter four of this research study which argues that the class-based schooling model of educational provision in Ireland assists in the perpetuation of the political economy.

Bekerman's (2006) identification of education as a mode of access to participation as citizens and workers, is the essence of education as a praxis model. In the last century, Dewey (1916) described education as a social process central to living and not in preparation for future living. He argued that learning should be viewed as a continuum '*the object and reward of learning is the continued capacity for growth*' (Dewey, 1916, p. 100). Dewey's philosophy of a shared meaning supports collaborative practice in a shared process between teacher and students culminating in a personal understanding of the subject. Gramsci (1971, p.40) argued that those who were truly educated could '*rule as well as be ruled*' thus creating an equality-base for democracy. hooks (1994, p.13) argues the importance of a constructivist, praxis approach to pedagogical practice. She argues that to educate is an inclusive practice which is inherent in teachers that '*believe that there is an aspect of our vocation that is sacred; who believe our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students*'. This concept is explored further in chapter seven which illustrates the pressure on school leaders and teachers as they balance quantitative performance indicators with the more qualitative caring aspects of their roles.

In contrast, is the latter function of education proposed by Bekerman (2006) which views education as a means of social reproduction in a context where access to wealth and power is controlled and rationalised. Archer (2006, p.7) has argued that despite the recognition of education as a fundamental human right, it is infringed upon by governments globally. Blackmore (2000, p.134) supports this argument by citing countries where education has been transformed to become '*the arm of national economic policy*' viewed simultaneously as both the problem and the solution in

tandem with the fluctuating economy. This concept is examined in chapter seven where a decline in PISA results (2009), in tandem with recession and austerity, created the '*perfect storm*' for educational reform as outlined by Conway (2013). Blackmore (2000, p.34) highlights that the product system of schooling, within the neoliberal capitalist competitive context, has shifted '*the emphasis from input and process to outcomes, from liberal to the vocational, from education's intrinsic to its instrumental value, and from qualitative to quantitative measures of success*'. Ball (2008) argues that such an education serves the needs of the economy and not the needs of the individual or society. Harvey (2000, p.103) supports this point arguing that capitalism places a paradoxical demand on the educational system, as capitalism depends on workers' ability to think independently regarding assigned workplace tasks, but it does not require workers that can critically evaluate the system in which they function. He adds '*while the education of the labourer appears important it cannot be the kind of education that permits free thinking*'.

Harvey (2005, p.2) defines neoliberal capitalism as '*Political economic practices which suggest that the advancement of human well-being can be achieved by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade*'. In the Irish context, Lynch, Grummell *et al.* (2012) argue that neoliberal capitalism alters the context, rationale and reason for the learner and charts a new and unique function for education that is contrary to education as a human right. They argue that the application of economic/market ideals and terms to education objectifies education presenting it as a marketised product and not a basic human right. Ball and Nikita (2014, p.83) argue that the market model is based on the principle of '*supply and demand*' causing schools to act like business entities and on the demand side, resulting in learners and their parents/guardians acting like consumers. This argument is explored further in chapter four which argues that such a supply and demand model has augmented inequality as students' currency in the market depends on their cultural capital and habitus. The impact of this altered understanding of the role and function of education is explored later in this research study (chapter six) in relation to the over emphasis on the product model of assessment.

This is contrary to education as a human right as access to the market is subject to inequalities. These inequalities can be viewed and understood from a number of different perspectives and these are outlined and discussed later in this chapter. The next section examines the emergence of two separate educational paradigms and therefore establishes a context for this research study.

### **2.3 Mapping the Theoretical Framework to Policy Developments in Education and Schooling**

The theoretical framework visually depicted in figure 2.1 illustrates two competing educational paradigms. These paradigms emanate from two competing positions on education and schooling: education as a product emanating from market theory shaped by the political economic context (left circle) and education as a praxis emanating from integration theory and shaped by the affective domain (right circle). The visual framework allows the researcher to view the chronosystem, macrosystem and exosystem as historical components of the policy continuum. It enables the contemporary nature of the meso and microsystems to be understood by analysing the current happenings at the coalface across the sample schools. Therefore, it is logical that this theoretical framework chapter will explore the chronosystemic, macrosystemic and exosystemic levels in order to establish a theoretical foundation on which to build the meso and microsystemic analysis. To this end, this section explores both largescale circles (see figure 2.1) separately using Ball (1993) policy analysis tools.

### **2.4 Understanding the Capitalist Political Economy and its Influence on Contemporary Education**

#### **2.4.1 Introduction**

This section explores the chrono, macro, and exosystemic levels of the policy trajectory outlined in the left circle. The *chronosystem* for the left circle encompasses political and economic shifts, in line with the progression of capitalism, over the past century to the present day. It demonstrates the catalysation of free-market principles and international trade which have evolved capitalism across the globe since the 1970s. The merging of Ball's policy tools and visual aspects of Bronfenbrenner's frame create a macro-level prelude to the initial policy as text phase proposed by Ball (1993). This

*macrosystemic* level represents what Foucault (2002a) argues as the political and social influences which instigate debate which creates the impetus for policy creation or modification. Foucault (2002a, p. 49) proposes that the object of policy is created through political discourse ‘*objects of which they speak*’ which in turn becomes public discourse and subsequently creates the need for policy. Ball (2008, p. 63) argues that macro level educational policy ruptures are a response to shifts in the political economy. He argues that viewing the language of policy over time enables patterns to be identified which expose the ‘*contradictions and incoherence’s*’ which exist within policy. For instance, this research illustrates that the ideology of choice and equality contained in the text of *the Education Act* (1998) was not translated into educational practice at a mesosystemic level in the urban centres sampled.

This chapter explores the nexus between the *macrosystemic* shift to neoliberal economic policy and the role of education in supporting this shift. It examines the influence of the neoliberal economic and political context, which sought to transition education and schooling to a competitive market model. Ball (2008) connects the macroeconomic policy shifts with *ruptures* in education commencing in the US and UK in the 1970s. He outlines that each historical shift within the UK political economy had brought with it a rupture or change in the education system. Ball (2008) and Lynch (2012) outline distinctive hallmarks which signify the influence of neoliberal Capitalism on education. The *exosystemic* level focuses on the construct of Parental choice, in the Irish educational system, underpinned by *the Education Act* (1998), *the Equality Legislation* (2000) and *the EPSEN Act* (2004).

#### **2.4.2 The Chronosystem for the Emergence of a Neoliberal Capitalist Economy**

The chronosystem for the educational policy trajectory influenced by the political economy aims to objectify neoliberal capitalism in time and space. This allows an exploration of its origin, intention and impact in relation to educational policy in the Irish post-primary schooling system. Ball (2008) positions neoliberal capitalism clearly within the historical trajectory of capitalism. He illustrates that viewing historical policy developments, through the lens of social class, yields a chronology of four distinct historical capitalist policy epochs from 1870 to 2007, these are: The



Modern State; the Welfare State; the Neoliberal State and the Managerial State (Table 2.1).

**Table 2.1 The Four Stages of the Development of Capitalism**

Shift (UK)	State
<b>1870-1944</b> (first liberalism)	
Political problems of management of urban working-class migrations and imperial industrial development and trade	Modern (or interventionist) State
<b>1944-76</b>	
Post-war economic growth and the expansion of the middle-class	Welfare State
<b>1976-97</b> ( <i>Thatcher and Major/ Conservative Party</i> )	
Economic crises, mass unemployment, and shift from Fordist to post-Fordist regime of accumulation and the first stage of deindustrialization	Neoliberal State
<b>1997-2007</b> (second liberalism) <sup>2</sup>	
Assertion of the knowledge economy and new forms of work	Managerial or competition state

(Source: Ball, 2008, p. 57<sup>3</sup>)

The shifts which determined the four main policy epochs outlined by Ball (2008) are explained, in economic terms, by Frieters (2013, p.28). He explains that within capitalism, governments have two choices in relation to the management of the economy. They can either intervene or allow a free market to prevail. This study is primarily concerned with the third and fourth policy epochs outlined by Ball (2008). These policy epochs, the neoliberal capitalist State and the Managerial State, developed under a free market political economic and represent the context of our contemporary existence.

<sup>2</sup> Ball expanded this period to cover the present day in his subsequent work.

<sup>3</sup> Table 2.1 has been modified to remove the educational aspect which is discussed as part of the macrosystem later in the chapter

Frijters (2013, p.28) explains that capitalist ideology is underpinned by competition and that the aggregate view of mainstream economists is that *'humans are primarily motivated by greed, and competition between greedy individuals leads each of them individually to specialize in doing what they do best'*. Frijters (2013, p.28) outlines that a movement to neoliberal capitalism was propelled by an economic perspective which viewed competition as the key to efficiency in production which *'would produce an optimal outcome for society as a whole ... and therefore, should be encouraged on the grounds of social surplus'*. This shift in economic perspective was advanced by a shift which Ball (2017) argues was underpinned by a social and political narrative that highlighted the failures of the State, particularly within a context of decreased economic performance and the OPEC oil crisis of 1973.

Ostry, Lougani *et al.* (2016) illustrate an unequivocal global shift to neoliberal capitalism since the late 1970s and the early 1980s. They outline that the neoliberal policy agenda involved policies of deregulation to increase domestic competition: the privatisation of State services and utilities; the augmentation of global trade; the attraction of foreign direct investment as well as the movement of capital between countries. Griffin (2002) outlines that the neoliberal perspective viewed the market model as the antidote to the societal and economic deficits caused by the welfare State system. Ball (2008, p. 75) argues that, in the UK, Thatcher and the new right critique of the welfare State sought to replace ineffective bureaucratic State institutions by applying market forces, deregulation, and the reduction of State intervention in concurrence with *laissez-faire* ideology. Ostry, Lougani *et al.* (2016) illustrate a global movement to neoliberal Capitalist policies by the 1980s. They detail these macro policies which included deregulation and movement of capital between countries, the augmentation of global trade through globalisation, foreign direct investment, privatisation of State services and utilities and the reduction of trade union power and influence. In the Irish context, the policy epochs which signpost the development of capitalism in broad terms over the last century also exist. However, the context was different to that of other countries.

In the Irish context, the political and economic practices began to shift from a protectionist model to a liberal economic model in the late 1960s as outlined by O'Hearn (1998). This shift in policy was significant given Ireland's historical reliance

on agriculture. McCabe (2011) outline Irish economic policy in the 60s and 70s was to sell natural resources and reduce protectionism for indigenous industry. O'Hearn (1998) argues that this resulted in a vulnerability for indigenous firms which was compounded by Ireland entering the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973. A plethora of issues challenged the government of the time: ranging from industrial relations disputes, to inflation cause by oil crises of 1973 and 1979, to increased taxation and an economic downturn in the late 1970s and 1980s. It was within the context of high unemployment and mass emigration that cooperation between a minority (FF) government and the main opposition party (FG) developed. The '*Tallaght Strategy*' (1987) ensured that Ireland's political leaders adopted a united political and economic vision which allowed policies centred on economic openness, deregulation, innovation and flexibility to develop. In an effort to stabilise the economy and promote growth, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) became a key priority for the Irish government from the 1970s and continued under the '*Tallaght Strategy*' as outlined by O'Hearn (1998).

The government developed an attractive tax and legal framework and nurtured its strong historical diasporic ties with the US. Ireland became largely dependent on FDI which was in turn dependent on the variable global economy. O'Hearn (1998) argues that Ireland's increasing economic dependency on FDI necessitated an education system which would produce an appropriately skilled workforce to meet the demands of the global economy. Ireland's ability to attract FDI was dependent on the provision of an effectively trained workforce. This economic objective gradually shifted societies collective view of the citizen's role and function to a utilitarian model. Lynch (2016) argues that this utilitarian economic perspective views the ideal citizen through the lens of the Rational Economic Actor (REA) model. This model measures human activity and value in accordance with the contribution made to measurable economic prosperity. Rooney (1998) outlines that societies perceptions of education began to shift and those who were uneducated were increasingly viewed as a liability. Equally, Ireland's increasing dependence on FDI necessitated political leaders and policymakers who could predict and project economic growth and workforce skill needs.

### **2.4.3 The Macro and Exosystemic Level Impact of Neoliberal Capitalism on the Irish Post-primary Educational System**

This section illustrates how macro level neoliberal capitalist policies reconfigured societal perspectives regarding the role and function of education and schooling. Ball (2008) argues that economic shifts throughout the progression of capitalism have yielded ruptures in the education system. In table 2.2 the researcher maps Ball's (2008) UK-based template for the economic shifts and resultant ruptures in the educational system, to the Irish context. Drudy and Lynch (1993) argue that the Ireland's colonial past underpinned by religious tensions ensured that the experience of school choice differs here in comparison to other marketised jurisdictions such as the UK. Lynch and Moran (2006) argue that choice in the Irish context originated through religious difference rather than market-led ideology but that the outcomes are class-based in both cases. Whitty and Power (2000) argue that the Irish schooling system is a privatised denominational one which has become state financed over time unlike the experience of other countries. The introduction of free education in 1967 marked the commencement of a universalist welfare state education system. Prior to the introduction of '*free education*' in 1967, most church-run schools serviced the wealthier classes who could afford to pay for education. The introduction of '*free*' education offered existing denominational schools the opportunity to volunteer to opt in which resulted in them being categorized as '*voluntary secondary schools*'. Under the terms of the arrangement, the voluntary secondary schools would remain in private ownership and management but would be subsidised by the government to provide '*free*' education to qualifying citizens. This increased post-primary access to education significantly. However, as Raftery et al. (1993) noted exclusive private schools could opt out of the free education scheme thus, ensuring they maintained an offering of privileged education to the wealthiest families.

An appreciation for the historical links between social class, education and the church in Ireland is important in order to explore the reasons for the type of class-based schooling system evident in the Irish context. Lynch (2016) and Canny and Hamilton (2017) argue that education is the main system of transferring capital in Ireland as a post-colonial nation previously unaccustomed to a tradition of inherited economic wealth. Historically, Ireland in contrast to jurisdictions such as the UK did

not have a distinctive capitalist class instead it had a strong agricultural dependency. McCoy, Byrne *et al.* (2019, p. i) note the '*crucial role played by upper secondary grades in access to Higher Education (HE)*' and the more lucrative employment in Ireland. This has made examination performance and HEI progression a central objective and measure of educational success. Additionally, the role of religious denominations particularly the Catholicism in the Irish schooling system and assist in understanding the delineation of class structures in Irish society.

The newly formed Irish free state emerged from the political and societal tensions that followed the Civil War and was underpinned by a weak economy and resulted in a recurrent trend of mass emigration during difficult economic periods. The existence of a denominational schooling system ensured that religious persuasion was a factor in school access and social capital. The Powis Commission (1868-1870) acknowledged the ownership and management of primary schooling in Ireland was largely in the hands of the Catholic church and therefore it recommended the acceptance of the defacto denominational status of primary schooling in Ireland. This recommendation was palatable for the state, in the economic context of the times, as '*this deferral of authority left the government off the hook in terms of funding schools*' as outlined by Irwin (2009, p.3). This persisted well into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Thus, the state support for the Catholic church and the dominance of the church within education provision ensured that education and religion became intertwined in the Irish cultural psyche. Indeed, Kennedy (2001) outlines that the pre-welfare context of the time ensured a convergence between church and state as the conservative church values of chastity and marriage ensured the protection of title to family farms, assets and homesteads, '*land, family and church form a trinity which dominated much of Irish life at least until the 1960s*' (2001, p. 4).

The state's first attempt to establish state run post-primary education was the Vocational Education Act (1930) which created a system of vocational education nationally. The Act established Vocational Educational Committees (VECs)<sup>4</sup> which provided vocational education through a system of technical schools. O'

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<sup>4</sup> Vocational Educational Committees were replaced by Education and Training Boards in 2012.

Raifeartaigh (1958) argued that despite initial progress, the vocational educational model did not advance as successfully as other European nations, as Ireland was less industrialised and therefore resources were diluted over large areas of rural population (1958, p. 48). The establishment of state-run vocational educational provision created a binary system of education in Ireland with academic education remaining the remit of privately-owned secondary schools. O' Raifeartaigh (1958) illustrates that in Ireland vocational education was not held in the same parity of esteem as other European countries such as Germany. The desire for an '*academic*' education and the social mobility it offered was evidenced by the continued growth of voluntary secondary schools the 1940s and 1950s. Indeed, secondary schools were thriving independent of the state and maintained the right to sever their '*connection with the state at any moment*' (O' Raifeartaigh, 1958, p. 44). He illustrates that in the academic year 1921-1922 there were 20,776 pupils in denominational post-primary schooling and by 1957-58 the number of students had exceeded 66,000. Tormey (2006) argues that the system of locally managed church-run schools existed was essentially a market model of education because wealth was necessary to afford a place due to dearth of state funding. This also ensured economic reproduction in Irish society which reaffirmed the position of the voluntary secondary sector with those from higher socioeconomic profiles.

In the UK, the post war period from 1944 onwards saw an expansion of the middle classes and the emergence of a welfare state. Lee (1989) illustrates that unlike much of Europe a coherent welfare state did not develop in Ireland after the Second World War. However, the post-war expansion in the US and UK in the 1940s and 1950s did create an emigration pathway for many Irish. Kennedy (2001) outlines that challenging economic circumstances continued in to the 1950s with emigration peaking during this decade. Emigration from agricultural, unskilled or unemployed profiles, to the UK increased significantly due to a demand for the reconstruction of infrastructure in the post-war era. Therefore, education was reinforced as the means to a greater sense of financial security and stability against the threat of a weak economy.

**Table 2.2 An Application of Ball’s Diagram ‘Shifts, Ruptures and the State’ to the Irish Context**

Shift (Ireland)	Rupture	State
Pre-1960		Modern (Interventionist State)
<b>1960-1980</b>		
<p>Move from protectionism of indigenous industry</p> <p>Entry to the EEC 1973</p> <p>FDI attraction and dependence</p> <p>Post-war economic growth and the expansion of the middle-class</p>	<p>Move to universalist welfare State education ~ (free education year 1967)</p> <p>Skilled workforce needed by economy</p> <p>State education- national system locally administered</p> <p>OECD report <i>‘Investment in Education’</i> (1965)</p> <p>A shift from a traditional liberal educational system to one which meets the economic needs of the State</p>	Welfare State
<b>1980-1999</b>		
<p>Economic instability, mass unemployment, and shift from Fordist to post-Fordist regime of accumulation and the first stage of deindustrialization</p>	<p>OECD report <i>‘Reviews of National Policies for Education: Ireland’</i> (1991)</p> <p>Utilitarian and individual focus to education</p> <p>Breaking from emerging comprehensive national system and the end of professional autonomy for teachers and schools</p>	Welfare State
<b>2000-2007</b>		
<p>Economic upturn, Celtic Tiger era</p>	<p>Benchmarking</p> <p>NLN</p> <p>Public Private Partnership</p>	Neoliberal State

Knowledge Economy- new forms of work		
<b>2007- ongoing</b>		
Recession- fiscal deficit reduction through a programme of austerity Continuing knowledge economy and new forms of work Progression of GERM/McDonaldisation Need for skilling, reskilling, upskilling to become normalised across the lifespan Need for a resilient workforce	Changes in work practices in line with ‘reform of the public services’ Establishment of Teaching Council Reform of JC via Framework for Junior Cycle (2015) and the introduction of the Wellbeing Guidelines (2017) underpinned by HPS Framework (1995)	Neoliberal State and the progression of new managerialism as an instrument of governance in the Neoliberal State (Lynch, 2014) Advancement towards a Competition State

(Modified from the original source: Ball, 2008, p. 57)

Kavanagh (1993) highlights that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) became a key influencer in relation to Irish education policy since the late 1960s. The organisations influence on the evolution of the Irish education system is visible in educational reports since the 1960s. These reports include: ‘*The Investment in Education*’ (1965) report and ‘*Reviews of National Policies for Education: Ireland*’ (1991), which cite theories and concepts such as *Human Capital Theory* and the *Knowledge Economy*. Human Capital Theory promoted government investment in education and training in order to enhance the potential and value of the workforce.

Clancy (1996) argues that following the ‘*Investment in Education*’ report (1965), Irish education policy shifted away from a traditional liberal model of education to one which would meet the prevailing economic needs. This resulted in a major shift in Irish educational policy (exosystemic) with the introduction of a universal system of free post-primary education in 1967. The policy shift sought to ensure greater numbers of citizens received post-primary education in order to augment the profile of the Irish workforce and Ireland’s reserves of human capital. From a social welfare perspective,



this policy shift was positive in so far as it offered post-primary education to citizens from poorer backgrounds for the first time in Irish history. Cahill (2015) illustrates that *'The Investment in Education'* report therefore also led to the first attempt to address educational disadvantage in Ireland, as prior to 1967, post-primary education was fee-based. It indicates that in that time and space there was a convergence of the desires of the economy and the human rights of citizens.

In the 1990s, Ireland began to experience an economic upturn and FDI into Ireland steadily increased. Irish graduates began competing for higher paid and more skilled jobs in pharmaceuticals, computers and electronics, business etc. The increasing FDI resulted in an increased demand for a semi-skilled workforce. The OECD report *'Reviews of National Policies for Education: Ireland'* (1991, p.69) outlined the need for a utilitarian education system which would support the economy by either developing *'a stronger vocational system or restructuring second level education'*. This report influenced the Green Paper entitled *'Education for a Changing World'* (1992, p.3-5) which outlined the need to reform the education system in line with the development of an enterprise culture and the need to ensure the workforce could meet the demands of increasing industry. Clancy (1996, p.28) argues that this intensified the product model of education, within the Irish education, by developing a *'utilitarian and individualistic'* focus.

The policy movement in the 1990s was paving the way for increase parental involvement and choice in education. A series of publications, such as the *Education for a Changing World* (1992) document and the Irish White Paper on Education *'Charting Our Education Future'* (1995), preceded the *Education Act* (1998). The *Education Act* (1998) was a legislative watershed in Irish education as it provided a statutory framework for the Irish education system at primary and post-primary levels. The Act proposed to provide equality of education for all, irrespective of status. The Act placed statutory responsibilities on the DES and education system as a whole in a number of key areas, such as: to provide appropriate education for every citizen up to adulthood; to include persons with a disability or Special Education Need (SEN); a requirement for the educational system to be accountable to students, parents/guardians and the State for the education provided in its institutions; a respect for diversity within the educational system and the promotion of a spirit of partnership

between the stakeholders. In addition, parental choice in relation to enrolment for schools was legislated for and post-primary schools were required to disclose their enrolment policies and the criteria used in selecting children for enrolment to allay any fears of discrimination. Similar to the US and UK educational systems a decade or more previously, the Irish government legislated for parental choice in relation to school enrolment applications. It is provided for, in *the Education Act (1998)*, through the following statement:

*‘It is open to parents to seek to send their children to a school of their choice...post-primary schools should disclose their enrolment policies and the criteria used in selecting children for enrolment. Parents will thus be fully informed on the selection procedures which will help allay any fears of discrimination against their children’.*

This provision for parental choice was viewed as an augmentation of the earlier Constitutional recognition of the role and rights of parents with regard to the education of their children. Cahill (2015) illustrates that Articles 42 and 45 of the Irish Constitution were adopted by proponents of parental choice in relation to school choice and became central to the argument for the establishment of a legislative framework to support the ideology of parental *choice* in relation to school enrolment applications. Articles 42.3.1 and 42.4 state:

*“the State shall not oblige parents in violation of their conscience and lawful preference to send their children to schools established by the State, or to any particular type of school designated by the State” and “when the public good requires, provide other educational facilities or institutions with due regard, however for the rights of parents, especially in the matter of religious and moral formation”*

(Bunreacht na hÉireann, 1937)

Cahill (2015) argues that contemporary supporters of neoliberalism became advocates of the *vision* of our forefathers and promoted *choice* rather than viewing the Constitution in the context of the time and the spirit which permeated all aspects of the document; to promote equality for all citizens. Cahill’s arguments are supported by the views of Orfield and Frankenberg (2013, p.255) who argue that the construct of ‘*choice*’ can be underpinned by ‘*market theory*’ or ‘*integration*

*theory*' which yield contradictory results. They argue that the ideology of choice rooted in '*integration theory*' has objectives rooted in social justice and inclusion or, in contrast, '*choice*' can be founded in '*market theory*' which has been shown by researchers to augment social segregation and inequality. This study argues that the Irish education system is as rooted in market theory now as it ever was and that the parental choice outlined in the Education Act (1998) is merely a construct which has not yielded equality of access rather reproduced inequality. Indeed, this is supported by an OECD *Spotlight Report for Ireland* (2012, p.13) which argued that '*providing full Parental choice can result in segregating students by ability, socioeconomic background and generate greater inequities across education systems*'. Indeed, Smyth, McCoy *et al* (2004) indicate that half of the post-primary cohort do not attend their nearest school.

The ideology of *choice* has emerged as a cornerstone for the reform of education systems within a neoliberal capitalist economy. The OECD (2012) notes that school choice has become a feature in 66% of OECD countries in the past two decades. Similar to the US and UK contexts a decade previously, Gorard and Fitz (1998, p.393) outline that Parental Choice, in conjunction with the idea of good parenting, saw an increase in Parental involvement and competition for enrolment in '*good*' schools. The phenomenon of parentocracy increased in the market model of education. Parentocracy refers to parents' role and influence in the selection of schools for their children. Ball and Vincent (1998, p. 382) argue that the selection process is influenced by what they term '*grapevine knowledge*'. The grapevine is a social network of parents/guardians through which data is informally gathered and exchanged regarding schools and school related matters. They argue that certain middle-class parents/guardians go to great lengths to collect grapevine information to maximise their market knowledge, in contrast to working-class parents/guardians who tend to rely on their own instincts or their '*child's affective responses*'. Indeed, the OECD (2012, p.4) recommended that the Irish government improve access to information about schools and education system knowledge for families from disadvantaged profiles.

The introduction of parental choice resulted in a trend of moving further away from community education and into a competitive and individualistic model. This utilitarian

focus has been identified by Ball (2008, p.8) who argues that since the 1970s education has been fundamentally reformed or '*reimagined*' in line with an economic view of education. He argues the role played by discourses which create a need for certain educational policy goals. The construct of a knowledge-based economy within contemporary capitalism positions knowledge as the new driver of productivity and economic wealth within a global market. Ball (2008, p.13) argues that the constructs of the knowledge economy and globalization have reconfigured the education system to respond to economic needs as its main objective. He argues that this reconfiguration '*privilege particular social goals and human qualities and currently give overwhelming influence on the economic role of education*'. Ball (2008, p.81) identifies six hallmarks of educational reform within neoliberal capitalist economies. These are: parental choice, per capita funding, diversity of provision, inter-school competition, league tables and new organisational ecologies (new managerialism<sup>5</sup>). The role of the construct of parental choice in the reform of education is significant in jurisdictions where education has been marketised. (see Ball and Reay 1997; Sahlberg 2007; Ball 2008; Lynch 2016).

The six hallmarks outlined by Ball (2008) are evident in the Irish context and have been described also by Lynch et al. (2012). For instance, the construct of parental choice in terms of selection is provided for in the *Education Act (1998)* and discussed at length in section 2.4.3. A system of per capita funding operates via the student capitation grant. Diversity of provision exists in the Irish context with private fee-paying schools, non-DEIS and DEIS schools. Provision is nuanced further by denominational influences and patronage. Competition between schools for students and parents' preferences is argued and is explored in relation to the sample for this study. The provision of league tables which report data from examination and test results have been blocked in the Irish context. However, the national media have established a yearly pattern of publishing third level progression rates resulting in defacto league tables. And finally, the phenomenon of new organisation ecologies is listed by Ball (2008) and explained as an approach which involved modelling schools on a business model concerned with maximisation of resources, budgets, and

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<sup>5</sup> New managerialism is discussed independently in chapter seven

measurable outcomes. This approach has been observed in the Irish context by Lynch et al. (2012) who named it ‘new managerialism’.

Just a decade after *the Education Act* (1998), Lynch and Crean (2008) argued that liberalism had prioritised choice over equity and justice in education. Smyth (2017, p. 4) argues that *‘the interaction between Parental choice, patterns and school admission (where they are oversubscribed) has accentuated differences in composition between school sectors and among individual schools.* This concludes the education policy continuum represented by the left circle in figure 2.1. The chronosystem, macrosystem and exosystem are historical aspects of the frame which have been explored in order to establish the context of the meso and microsystems. The mesosystemic impact of this educational paradigm is examined in chapter four. The microsystemic level impact of the neoliberal capitalist economy is discussed in the remaining analysis chapters (chapters five, six and seven).

The next section of this chapter explores the advancements in relation to mental health and wellbeing promotion in contemporary education. This is represented in the right circle of figure 2.1 previously presented in chapter two.

## **2.5 Exploring Advancements Relating to Mental Health and Wellbeing Promotion in Contemporary Education (the right circle)**

### **2.5.1 Introduction**

This section focuses on the right circle of figure 2.1 and examines the mental health and wellbeing paradigm exploring advancements relating to education and schooling in Ireland. On a *chronosystemic* level, the development of societal understandings of mental health is explored, particularly the shift from a historical focus on illness and curing illness, over the past three decades. In the early millennium, the WHO (2001) recognised that in addition to biological and psychological causes for mental health disorders, social factors could also play a role.

On a *macrosystemic* level, significance of the European movement towards a settings-based approach for mental health promotion in school is examined particularly in the context of recession and austerity. This section outlines that advancements in mental health theory and wellbeing perspectives have centred on developing an appreciation for additional causative factors relating to humans' social environment. Indeed, the World Health Organisation and the United Nations have endorsed this view and argued that improving mental health outcomes correlates with decreasing social injustice and inequality. In recognition of the impact of social determinants, such as poverty and inequality, this chapter explores the impact of the recession and austerity on young people in Ireland. It argues that recession and austerity was experienced profoundly by Irish young people on a material and emotional level. Those who were infants and toddlers during the onset of recession and austerity are now the adolescent population of our post-primary schools. Others who were pre-teens and teens have now finished their post-primary schooling.

This section examines *exosystemic* policy developments which have enabled a settings-based approach to mental health and wellbeing promotion in Ireland. It argues that the shift is a reactive response to rising adolescent mental health issues and increasing associated costs to the State. It examines the rationale for the inclusion of schools as a setting for mental health and wellbeing promotion and explores the policy shift at post-primary level in Ireland. It identifies that a policy-led transition to a school settings-based approach to mental health promotion is currently underway through the

incorporation of the Health Promoting Schools (HPS) model into the *Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines* (2017). These guidelines are being implemented as part of *The Framework for Junior Cycle* (2015). It illustrates that the school settings-based approach to mental health and wellbeing promotion is transitioning from a non-statutory basis to a statutory one

Figure (2.1) illustrates that the microsystemic level of post-primary schooling is attempting to facilitate two separate educational paradigms. The right circle represents a mental health and wellbeing promotion (care-orientated) educational paradigm and the left circle represents a competitive market or performance-based educational paradigm. The diagram illustrates that both paradigms converge at a meso and microsystemic level creating a site for conflicting educational objectives. This study argues that analysis of the reported happenings, at the meso and microsystemic levels, illuminates the contextual challenges which schools must navigate in order for a transition to a meaningful mental health and wellbeing promotion to occur.

### **2.5.2 Advancements in the Mental Health and Wellbeing Perspectives: An Altered Paradigm**

Over the latter half of the last century, the definition of mental health evolved from a historical scientific definition which prevailed since the enlightenment period. Under the terms of the historical definition, a person was deemed healthy in the absence of a diagnosable physical or mental illness or disease. Developments in psychology yielded the concept of health promotion in contrast to the historical focus on illness and curing illness.

Barry & Jenkins (2007) identify that effective health promotion shifts the focus from individuals and prevention, to health actions and the wider social elements that promote and maintain health. Thornton (2001) explains that two major perspectives in relation to positive mental health and wellbeing exist; a hedonistic approach to wellbeing and an eudemonic approach. The hedonistic approach is temporary in nature inducing transient pleasure, whereas a eudemonic approach is underpinned by Aristotelian theory and the concept of 'human flourishing'. Aristotle argued that human flourishing could be achieved, over time, by living a virtuous life. The Aristotelian perspective has prevailed in the western world due to the formative

influence of Judeo-Christian tradition. In particular, as O'Brien (2008, p.100) outlines, the concept that life is a journey in the pursuit of happiness, in an eternal afterlife.

Thornburn (2018, p. 53) argues that contemporary health theory draws on Aristotelian theory and recognises humans as psychosocial living beings. He terms this perspective 'salutogenic health theory'. A salutogenic perspective argues that reaching personal goals is a lifelong continuum rather than a definitive endpoint. In line with the salutogenic perspective, mental health and wellbeing has been reconceptualised as a continuum which focuses on mental health and wellbeing promotion, as a preventative measure, rather than the historical singular focus on treatment.

The World Health Organisation has taken a eudemonic and salutogenic perspective and defined mental health as a '*state of wellbeing in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, copes with the normal stresses of life, works productively and fruitfully, and makes a contribution to his or her community*' (WHO, 2001, p.1). This illustrates that mental health is not merely the opposite of mental ill-health but that it has far-reaching ability to develop '*psychologically, emotionally, intellectually, socially and spiritually*' (Barry, 2009, p.6). A salutogenic perspectives is endorsed in *the Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines* (2017, p.12) which uses the above WHO (2001) definition and states that schools need to '*consider wellbeing less as a state of being but more of a process of well-becoming*'. These guidelines are discussed later in this chapter.

### **2.5.3 The Recognition of Social Determinants for Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing**

In tandem with advancements in our understanding of mental health, a refocus in relation to the causative factors for mental health decline has also occurred. Kinderman (2017) outlines a shift from a singular focus on the biological and psychological factors, to an appreciation of social causative factors for health decline. The World Health Organisation (WHO) (2001; 2015) has recognised poverty, inequality, discrimination and other issues pertaining to social justice as significant social determinants of mental health and wellbeing decline.



The recognition of social determinants as a factor in mental health decline has led to a re-examination of responses and treatment pathways in developed countries. A growing momentum to shift from an overreliance on pharmaceutical responses, to a mental health promotion model underpinned by social justice, has developed. The United Nations (2017, p.23) have advised member states to shift their focus from *chemical imbalance* to *power imbalance* to meaningfully tackle mental health problems *'This crisis in mental health should be managed not as a crisis of individual conditions, but as a crisis of social obstacles which hinders individual rights'*. This is supported by Winter (2018) call for social justice to challenge the prevailing culture where inequality and discrimination exists. (See also Kinderman 2017; Jenkins *et al.*, 2008; Patel *et al.*, 2010).

The social challenges experienced over the past decade have illuminated the demerits of certain neoliberal capitalist policies in terms of social injustice and inequality in society. Ostry, Lougani *et al.* (2016) and Hearne (2016) who argues that there is an increasing realisation that a political and economic policy agenda based on equality and sustainability is needed to restore a sense of predictability and harmony. McDaid (2017, p.10) argues that recession and austerity have contributed to mental health decline in Ireland. He argues that *'Economic uncertainty, unemployment, a decline in income relative to local ways, unmanageable debt, the threat or fear of home repossessions, job insecurity and business downsizing may all increase the risk of suicidal behaviour, especially for those who experience socioeconomic disadvantage'*. This contention is supported by Stiglitz (2017) who argues the significant social cost of neoliberal laissez faire economic policy since the 1970s.

Over the past two decades, the social and economic cost of mental health issues for young people in Ireland has reached the highest level ever recorded. Researchers Dooley and Fitzgerald (2013, p.20) argue that *'The number one issue for [Irish] young people is their mental health'*. Indeed, Ireland has the fourth highest adolescent suicide rate among thirty-seven countries and ranks third place among EU member states as outlined by UNICEF (2017). Mental health difficulties in adolescence are consistently associated with less favourable social and economic outcomes in later life, placing an increased financial burden on State services into the future (see Forgeard, Jayawickreme *et al.*, 2011). Notwithstanding the emotional and psychological costs

of mental ill health, there is a robust rational economic argument for investment in mental health. Indeed, Perou (2013) illustrates that mental health disorders rank amongst the highest cost to the State. Dooley and Fitzgerald (2013, p.20) argue that upward of €118 million annually is needed to appropriately address the national scale of youth mental health issues. Moreover, UNICEF (2013) highlight that there are aggregate costs associated with youth mental health decline due to an increased risk of early school leaving, negative encounters with the law, custodial sentences and reduced capacity as adult members of society. This highlights the symbiotic relationship between poverty and reduced mental health outcomes for many citizens. The next section examines the effect on the cost of economic decline and austerity on the social context of Irish young people and relates this to a decline in mental health and wellbeing.

#### **2.5.4 The Impact of the Political Economy, Recession and Austerity on the Social Context of Irish Young People**

This section illustrates the impact of the neoliberal capitalist political economy, recession and austerity on the social context of the population of Irish young people. Allen (2000) argues that the neoliberalist agenda had three core principles: a reduction in public expenditure; tax reductions to encourage entrepreneurial talent and enterprise; and the reduction of wages and union power and influence. Stiglitz (2013) and Reay (2017) illustrate the correlation between the diminishing power of unions and the resurgence of precarious employment conditions, for instance, casualisation and zero-hour contracts. This point has been supported by Bissett (2019) who argues that there has been a decline in decent paid work and an increase in zero-hour contracts and casualised and low-paid work in Ireland over the past decades. The OECD (2015) identifies an increase in income inequality across most OECD countries since the 1970s. A comparison of historical and contemporary statistics illustrate this phenomenon in the Irish context. OECD (2015) statistics show that 10% of the population own 53.8% of the net wealth and 1% own 15% of net household wealth and that the richest 10% of the population of Ireland earn 9.6 times the income of the poorest 10%. It is important to note that market income in Ireland is highly unequal but the tax and benefit system has a strongly redistributive effect.

Lynch and Cantillon *et al.* (2017) explain, these figures fail to truly illuminate the financial implications for families in Ireland. They argue that the figures are calculated using the GINI coefficient which provides an aggregate figure not specific to socio-economic profiles. They argue that analysis of austerity measures shows that *'the government disregarded the needs of some of its most vulnerable and powerless citizens'* (2017, p.10). Indeed, OECD (2015) data shows that the age profile of those at risk from poverty has shifted from the elderly to the young. In fact, it is young people and families with children that experience the greatest poverty in the majority of OECD countries including Ireland.

The impact of austerity on Ireland's youth was arguably two-fold, impacting them on a material and emotional level. On a material level, there is evidence to suggest it was experienced as direct cuts to supports and services for young people. In terms of cuts to services and supports for young people, the OECD (2018, p.2) report that Ireland's expenditure on education has not increased in line with the rise in student numbers. Indeed, since 2010 spending on education reduced by 15% at primary and post-primary level, while the student population increased by 9%. Additionally, from 2010 to 2015, youth work services were cut by just under 30% from €73.1 million to €51.4 million. Meanwhile, community groups in working-class areas experienced a 72% budget cut. Traveller education experienced an 86.6% cut in expenditure from 2008 to 2013, and accommodation budgets for the Travelling Community experiencing a cut of 85% over the same period. On an emotional level, it was experienced vicariously, by young people, through the financial distress of parents/guardians in many homes. Gilligan (2018, p.8) argues that one in ten children in Ireland will endure a mental health difficulty serious enough to warrant specialist care and intervention. He argues a correlation between austerity and anxiety in young people. He reports that children and adolescents who were babies and toddlers during austerity are displaying increased levels of anxiety as they have *'learned the importance and integrated the importance of trying to achieve to make sure that they do well in their lives.... this is a reality of living in Ireland in the year 2018'*.

Recession and austerity have affected governments investment in mental health support services. The UN Human Rights Council (2014) identified that insufficient and ineffective public spending on children was a main obstacle to the realisation of

the rights of the child in Ireland. A strategic mental health policy entitled '*A Vision for Change*' was published in 2006 but has remained underfunded, under resourced and unrealised. In 2010, four years after the policy was adopted, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recommended that government expedite the implementation of the policy through the provision of appropriate resources and funding. More than a decade after the policy was published, Kelly (2017) supports the Mental Health Reform's call on the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Health for appropriate funding to implement '*A Vision for Change*'; given that a €20-million shortfall and a staffing level 21% short of the recommended level prevails. He argued the importance for appropriate care for children and adolescents, '*There is no alternative to A Vision for Change needed. We just need to implement the policy that we have*'.

In relation to the role and function of the home as a primary care location for young people, research indicates that adolescents were adversely affected by the financial hardship experienced by their households. These adverse effects can be categorised into material and emotional effects. On a material level, Murray, McNamara *et al.* (2019) show that at nine months post-recession, 13% of families indicated a 'difficulty' or 'great difficulty' making ends meet. This increased to 21% at the three-year mark and 25% by five years. One-parent families were on average twice as likely as two-parent families at each stage. UNICEF (2017) report that one in five Irish children live in a household where no adult is employed, a figure double the average of other high-income countries. The report indicates that 18.3% of children in Ireland live in relative poverty and 23% live in multidimensional poverty and that 17.9% of young people under fifteen live with an adult who is food insecure. These figures have remained static according to a *Social Justice Ireland (2019)* report which states that one in every five children live in a household with an income below the poverty line.

The emotional impact of inequality on young people must be considered in relation to mental health and wellbeing decline. This research study argues that the impact of the recession and austerity, on the adult population, had an effect on the younger generation. Numerous studies and reports have outlined the human cost of inequality in the context of the austerity. McDaid (2017, p.6) argues that during the recession there was a 0.54% increase in suicides for every 1% increase in debt across the EU20.

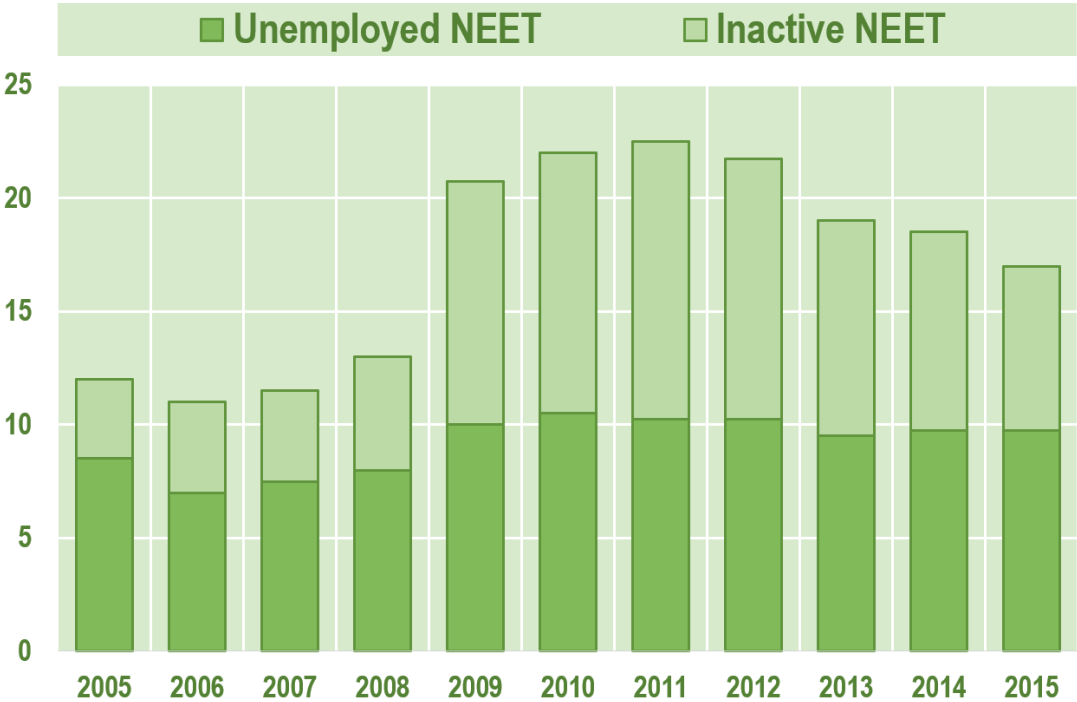
Multiple studies cite an increase in substance misuse and risk-taking behaviour in line with economic and social inequality (see Ivers *et al.*, 2010). The National Suicide Research Foundation (2012) found that the rate of male suicide by the end of 2012 was 57% higher than it would have been if the recession had not occurred. CSO (2012) figures for that period, indicate that there was a 9% increase in the suicide rate in 2009 on the previous year. Worryingly, McDaid (2017) argues that suicide risk remains high for people whose economic profile has not improved post-recession. These contemporary statistics are reminiscent of Bourdieu's (1998, p.41) empirical observations on the long-term human and financial costs of increasing inequality '*... policy cost in the long term in lost jobs, suffering, sickness, alcoholism, drug addiction, domestic violence, etc., all things which cost a great deal, in money, but also in misery?*'.

The negative impact of recession and austerity on citizens, particularly young families, has been highlighted by UNICEF (2017) who argue a decline in children's wellbeing since 2008. Gilligan (2018, p.8) argues that one in ten children in Ireland will endure a mental health difficulty serious enough to warrant specialist care and intervention. He argues a correlation between the impact of austerity and anxiety in young people. The impact of austerity-related cuts to education, youth services and supports for young people has arguably negatively affected Ireland's Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) rate which increased during austerity and has remained generally static (see Figure 2.2) despite the economic improvements. The impact of the cuts to career guidance and counselling hours during austerity are particularly relevant to this argument. Smyth and Banks (2012b) argue that enhanced and timely career advice could support and augment career aspirations of students from lower socioeconomic profiles. Gardner, Dermody *et al.* (2017, p 8) explain that the NEET indication was developed to measure young people who are '*not accumulating human capital through formal channels such as participation in the labour market or in education*'. The OECD (2016) indicate that one third of Irish NEETs were early school leavers.

The disassociation with education and the social system experienced by some Irish adolescents is evident in the inactive NEET rate. While Ireland has a relatively low NEET rate in the EU, it has a significant inactive NEET rate. Those classified as

'inactive' are as these young people who are not actively seeking employment, education or training. In the context of his argument, it is noteworthy that the (2015) level of inactive NEETS is higher than pre-austerity levels (Figure 2.2).

**Figure 2.2 NEET Rate by Activity Status for Ireland 2005-2015**



Source: Education at a Glance (OECD, 2016)

The OECD report highlights that Ireland has a significant percentage of inactive NEETs who are not seeking employment, education and/or training (see figure 2.2). This high NEET rate is a concern from a mental health perspective and an economic perspective. In terms of mental health and wellbeing a series of research studies indicate that NEETs are at an increased risk of early parenthood, criminal offenses and substance misuse (see McGinnity, Russell *et al.*, 2014). From an economic and societal perspective NEETs are estimated to cost approximately 1% of Ireland’s GDP according to the OCED (2016). Power, Clarke *et al.* (2015) found that NEETs are seven-times more likely to experience suicidal ideation than non-NEETs. The manifestation of diagnosed mental health disorders in childhood or adolescents are four-times more likely in NEETs. They also demonstrate that NEETs are twice as likely as non-NEETs to have an anxiety disorder and are three times more likely to have a mental health disorder or suicide attempts over their lifespan.

The Mental Health Action Plan for Europe (WHO, 2015) recognises the social and economic costs of rising mental health issues, arguing that positive mental health is essential to societal cohesion. Clarke (2010) argues that mental health is fundamental to social, cultural, educational, economic and environmental stability across communities. The identification of schools as a settings-base for mental health and wellbeing promotion is a significant development in the effort to combat the decline in young people's mental health and wellbeing.

### **2.5.5 The Identification of Schools as an Appropriate Setting for Adolescent Mental Health Promotion and Intervention**

In the Irish context, the identification of schools as settings for mental health promotion occurred a decade after the *Ottawa Charter* (1986). Indeed, the concept of school as a setting for health promotion is referred to in *the Education Act* (1998, section 9(d)) as among schools' functions is the obligation to '*promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students and provide health education for them, in consultation with their parents, having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school*'. Internationally, *The Egmond Agenda* (2002) recommended a whole school approach to mental health promotion and subsequently the school-based model, for mental health and wellbeing promotion, began to influence strategic policy documents across State-run and voluntary mental health organisations (see Appendix 1). The government formed an expert group for mental health policy (Department of Health, 2004) which identified the imperative for mental health promotion among school-aged children. Subsequently, '*Reach Out: The National Strategy for Action on Suicide Prevention*' (HSE, 2005-2015) recommend that mental health promotion should become a core strand of schooling. From 2020, the whole school preparation and implementation of these guidelines will be supported by the School Development Planning (SDP) process, already established by the DES and monitored by the DES Inspectorate, as outlined by McGowan and McHugh (2019).

However, a barrier to the provision of mental health and wellbeing supports via a school-based model in Ireland is the existence of health and education as separate government departments with separate organisational structures and personnel. Schulz (2019) argues that in many EU countries structural challenge exists in attempting to realise a health promoting school. The challenge pertains to the divide

between the Department/Ministries of Health and Education in most EU countries. Schulz (2019) argues that making health promotion the remit of the Department/Ministry of Education is more favourable and leads to more continuity less complications for schools. The Irish system has followed a dual-department approach which has resulted in mental health related policy emanating from both the Department of Health and a separate Department of Education. This challenge was evident in the comments of stakeholders. One Principal commented:

*“There can be a disconnect between schools [education] and the mental health services provided by the HSE as sharing information and data can be a major issue. I thought when I heard they [the government] were establishing TUSLA, that they would have a co-ordinated role. There are many agencies doing great work, but the co-ordination function is not there and this burden increasingly falls on schools particularly in cases where parent(s) can’t manage”.*

**Principal (DEIS)**

The last decade has seen a complete reform of Junior Cycle education in line with a HPS model. Irish education policymakers have recognised and explicitly stated the critical need for the positive mental health of ‘*all students if they are to participate fully in society and achieve their full potential at school*’ (DES, 2015, p.2). The *Framework for Junior Cycle* (2015) and *Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines* (2017) have laid the policy foundations for a transition to a mental health and wellbeing promoting model, at Junior Cycle, in the Irish post-primary schooling system. The *Guidelines for Wellbeing in Junior Cycle* (2017) are based on the settings-based model of mental health and wellbeing provision. The Guidelines (2017, p.v) state that schools are critical to supporting the mental health of young people and that adherence to the *HPS Framework* (1995) is critical ‘*to support a whole-school approach to mental health promotion and well-being*’.

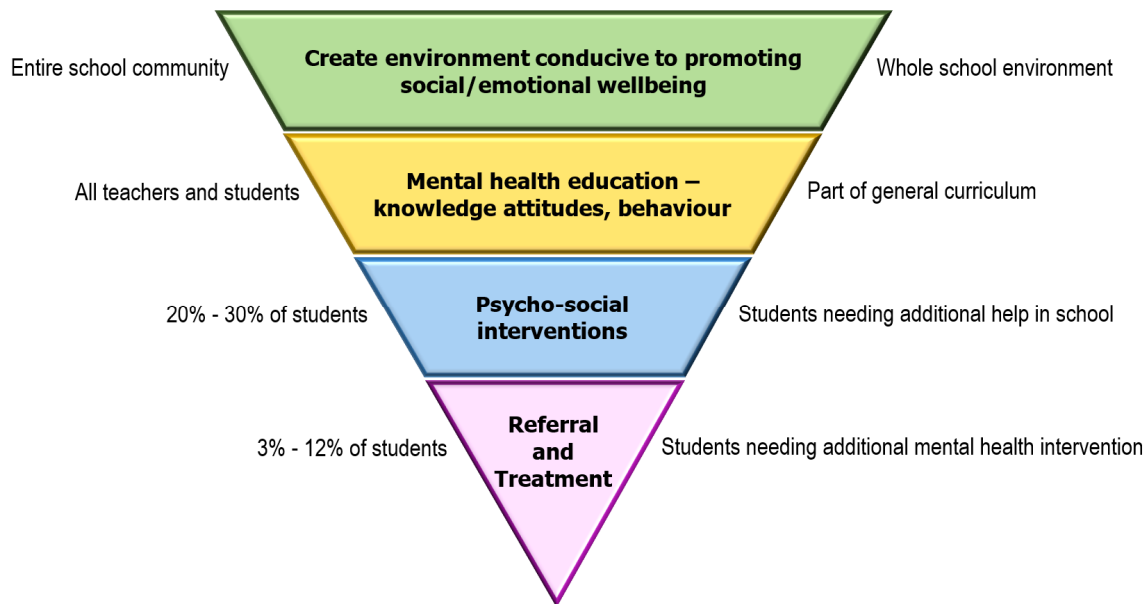
Parallel to developments in Ireland, a school settings-based approach to mental health had emerged in Europe since the mid-1980s. This convergence of mental health and wellbeing promotion and schooling was legitimised by the World Health Organisation’s *Ottawa Charter* (1986) which recognised the nexus between everyday settings and citizens’ health and wellbeing. The charter identified schools as an



appropriate setting for mental health promotion. A significant accelerant of the recognition of schools as a settings-base for mental health promotion was a joint research project in 1995, funded by the European Commission, WHO-Europe and the Council of Europe. The research project concluded that schools are effective sites for health promotion interventions. The WHO developed *the Health Promoting School (HPS) Framework* (1995) which promotes a continuum of care approach offering a three-pronged approach to provision. The approach includes: universal programmes - aimed at all categories of students; targeted Programmes- aimed at some; and indicated Programmes- aimed at few.

Cassidy (2018) notes the role of the Schools for Health in Europe (SHE) over the past two decades, in mental health and wellbeing promotion, across the education systems of European nations. Schulz (2019) identifies eight principles for a whole school approach to mental health promotion. These are: the development of coherent policies; the creation of a healthy physical school environment; the development of a social environment/school culture conducive to health promotion; the creation and nurturing of partnerships with families, communities and health services; the professional development of staff to ensure quality health promotion and education; the need for a holistic curriculum which balances test results and life skills; and the need for school leadership which promotes professional collaboration among all stakeholders. The WHO *Health Promoting Schools Framework* (1995) has been depicted in many diagrammatic formats but are essentially the same as Schulz (2019) explains. In figure 2.3, it is represented by an inverted pyramid, or a continuum of care, which subdivides the school's functional role in mental health promotion into four strands. These are: the school environment, the curriculum for mental health education, targeted early intervention programmes and professional intervention.

**Figure 2.3 The Health Promoting School Framework (WHO, 1995)**



The model seeks to support all students via the whole school environment represented by the green section at the base of the inverted pyramid. This relates to the creation of an inclusive and caring environment which promotes social and emotional wellbeing. The creation of an environment conducive to mental health and wellbeing is at odds with the findings of chapter four where Parental Choice and competition has resulted in stratification, segregation and relegation within the sample. Chapter five examines the impact of this inequality in school contexts by focusing on the intensification of mental health and wellbeing needs in many of the sample schools. Chapter six focuses on the impact of a performance-orientated product model on the ability of the school to create a meaningful setting for mental health and wellbeing promotion. Chapter seven explores the impact of new managerialism on principals and teachers' collective ability to champion mental health and wellbeing promotion and care. The next layer of support for all students is accessed through the curriculum, for instance, mental health and wellbeing education, which forms part of the general curriculum. *The framework for Junior Cycle (2015)* and *Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines (2017)* address this curricular support by creating ringfenced hours for wellbeing, commencing with 300 hours at Junior Cycle in 2015 (NCCA) and moving to 400 hours by 2020. These hours have prescribed components which are Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE), Physical Education (PE) and Social, Political, Health Education (SPHE) and schools are afforded choice and flexibility to decide on other areas of learning related to wellbeing to complete the time allocation.

*The HPS Framework (1995)* support for ‘some’ are centred around psychosocial interventions and cater for a predicted average of 20 to 30%. These interventions are largely the remit of the schools and are facilitated by inhouse career guidance counsellors in conjunction with the SEN co-ordinator where appropriate. The State services available to support schools in this area are the NEPS, the NCSE and the NBSS (which was subsumed by the NCSE in 2018). These supports are requested by the school usually on a case by case basis. *The HPS Framework’s (1995)* provision of supports for a ‘few’ are represented in the pink apex of the triangle (see figure 2.3). This category is estimated at between 3% and 12% of the average schools’ population and this cohort require outside additional mental health intervention. These students can be referred for intervention, by the school via the parent/guardian. Chapter five illustrates that stratification and segregation has resulted in intensification of mental health and wellbeing issues in DEIS schools. It illustrates that the rate of students in these categories is higher which is compounded by a dearth of external services and the reduction in ring-fenced career guidance counselling hours.

The relevance of the model in the everyday running of a school was highlighted by one of the principals. He spoke of the importance of *the HPS Framework’s (1995)* continuum of care model for his school, identifying mental health as a continuum rather than a fixed position. He stated,

*“We try to promote positive mental health in our life experiences, we work towards that, but then sometimes life gets on top of people because of family circumstances and mental health gets challenged, you know and then it’s about trying to put structures in place to make up the deficit and trying to get people through the various levels of the continuum of support [the HPS Framework (1995)]”.*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

The willingness to adhere to the *the HPS Framework (1995)* was evident across the sample of principals and staff, however the context of the market model arose as a factor which worked against the full implementation of a care paradigm. Stakeholders’ data referenced the challenges created by the market model of education and schooling. The sample indicated that inequality exists within the competitive post-

primary schooling system which impacts on the mesosystemic and microsystemic level context of education and schooling with repercussions for the transition to a mental health and wellbeing promotion or care-orientated model. This argument reinforces the challenges for schools attempting to provide care in the context of competition. It highlights the weaknesses associated with introducing policy without structural change to the existing competitive system which exists in the post-primary system.

The thematic impact on education and schooling context relates to the stratification of schools, the intensification of mental health and wellbeing issues in socio economically disadvantaged schools; the consequences of a gatekeeping, performance-orientated terminal assessment; the impact of new managerialism in school leaders and teachers as champions of mental health and wellbeing promotion. These themes are discussed in chapters four to seven. A '*Policy Sociology Approach*' as outlined by Ball (2008) is used to analyse these themes. The Policy Sociology Approach for this study centres on egalitarian theories which emanate from the four identified systems of inequality: economic, political, cultural and affective as outlines by Baker, Lynch *et al.* (2004).

## **2.6 Forming a '*Policy Sociology Approach*' using Egalitarian Theory**

*The HPS Framework (1995)* aims to transition Irish post-primary schooling to a settings-based approach for mental health and wellbeing promotion. The application of the *the HPS Framework (1995)* occurs at the mesosystemic and microsystemic level and this section aims to analyse the happenings which occur there using Ball's (2008) '*Policy Sociology Approach*'. The application of egalitarian theory to education and schooling has yielded a range of theories which assist in framing the 'policy sociology approach' used to analyse and discuss post-primary educational policy in this study. This section explores theories such as those that emanate from perspectives grounded in the four main systems of inequality (see table 2.3). These are: the economic system, the political system, the cultural system and the affective system.

**Table 2.3 The Four Key Dimensions of Equality/Inequality**

<b>Systems of in/equality</b>	<b>Dimension <i>Re/distribution</i> (resources)</b>	<b>Dimension <i>Respect and recognition</i></b>	<b>Dimension <i>Representation</i> (parity in power and participation)</b>	<b>Dimension <i>Relational justice</i> <i>Affective equality= equality in doing and receiving of LCS</i></b>
<b>Economic system</b>	<b>xx</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>Political system</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>xx</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>Cultural system</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>xx</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>Affective system</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>xx</b>

(Source Baker, Lynch *et al.*, 2004; 2009).

The intersectionality of egalitarian perspectives is demonstrated in table 2.3, which illustrates the four key systems of equality and inequality and maps them to the four key dimensions of equality/inequality. Baker, Lynch *et al.* (2004) and Lynch *et al.* (2009) concur that these social systems ‘*operate intersectionally*’ to exacerbate or ameliorate the impact of injustice. Traditionally, egalitarian theorists have proposed theoretical arguments based primarily on the first three systems. Many of these theories are explored later in this section. Within the economic and political systems, the Neo-Marxist critique of education and schooling is explored. The cultural system has yielded a body of theoretical work from Bourdieusian scholars which are also explored and used to analyse emerging phenomena and findings within the research data. Baker, Lynch *et al.* (2004; 2009) argue that equality is a central element to the realisation of education as a human right. They propose the affective context in addition to the economic, cultural and political contexts for exploring egalitarian theory. O’Brien (2018) highlights the interrelated dynamic of economic reproduction through schooling and the implications this creates for student mental health and wellbeing.

### **2.6.1 Egalitarian Theory - Neo-Marxism as an Economic and Political Perspective**

Egalitarian theory can be explored from an economic and political perspective using the Neo-Marxist critique of education. Haralambos and Holborn (1991, p.790) argue that Neo-Marxism is an ideological perspective that has developed and evolved conventional Marxist theory to create a greater understanding of capitalist societies. Neo-Marxism, as a movement, has theorised greatly about education and the use of the education system in the maintenance of a middle- and upper-class monopoly within the system and in society. Apple (1979, p.1) argues the potential of Neo-Marxism as an analytical tool to critique education and educational provision. Indeed, he states that *'it appears to offer the most cogent framework for organising one's thinking and action about education'*. O'Brien (2018) points out that this perspective is particularly relevant to this research study as the schooling system plays a role in reproducing societal inequalities and this creates a challenge in the transition to supporting mental health and wellbeing.

The Neo-Marxist critique of schooling argues that the primary objective of education in a democratic society should be to prepare citizens to participate consciously in the democratic process. The theoretical framework for this research study explores several education-based theories which have contributed to the Neo-Marxist critique of schooling, these are: economic reproduction theory, the construct of educational meritocracy and hegemony, pedagogy as product or praxis and the role of curriculum on economic reproduction. These are analysed in the context of providing *the HPS Framework (1995)* within a competitive model of education.

### **2.6.2 Economic Reproduction Theory, Hegemony and Schooling**

The Neo-Marxist critique of schooling is a lens through which the construct of education and arrangement of schooling can be critically observed and discussed. The critique argues that the provision of education has been influenced by the capitalist economic context in which we live. Indeed, Irish post-primary education has emerged as a product delivered in diverse school types, the more desirable of which are more favourably disposed to middle-class habitus and culture. This section examines the use of hegemony to maintain inequality by creating the perception of a meritocratic

system. The gatekeeping role played by the Leaving Certificate assessment process in relation to accessing higher education is raised.

Marxian economics recognises *Economic Reproduction Theory* as the cyclical reproduction of society in social and material terms (Marx, 1859). Using historical materialism as a methodological approach Marx explored the historical development of human societies and ideological systems. His studies noted observable tendencies in relation to capitalist economies. He illustrated that such political economies create a ruling class (the bourgeoisie) and a subordinate class (the proletariat) to reproduce the capitalist political economy. Marx also looked at the different strata of the working-class such as the nomads, the paupers, the unemployed and the skilled. He maintained that the capitalist system created these subcategories within the working-class. He argued that all systems, be they political, legal, familial, or educational, were rooted in the class nature of our society and this was produced in accordance with the political economy.

The notion of human consciousness and awareness of experiences of power and control are the basis for the concept of hegemony. Gramsci (1971) defines hegemony as the maintenance of positions of power through forms of social control through the creation and dissemination of public knowledge. Gramsci's work argued that the school's role as a State apparatus is to support political and economic reproduction. He divided institutions into two categories those that were overtly coercive and those that were not. The coercive were overtly supporting the status quo, i.e. the police force, army and the judicial system, whereas the non-coercive were more subtle as churches, schools, unions and family. Althusser (1978) supported this categorisation of institutions or State apparatuses as RSAs and the non-coercive ones as ISAs. Both RSAs and ISAs were needed to ensure the reproduction of the political economy. Lynch (1998, p.161) supported this argument by pointing out that '*schools create and recreate forms of consciousness that enable social control to be maintained without the necessity of dominant groups having to resort to overt mechanisms of domination*'. This is evident in *the Education Act* (1998) or policy as text which purported to support parental choice but has failed to ensure equality according to examples provided by the sample. This misinterpretation of the policy as text phase of *the Education Act* (1998) as it passes through the policy as discourse phase indicates that schools can

reproduce the established patterns of privilege. It supports the assertions of Bowles and Gintis (1976, p.104) that education merely reflects rather than corrects inequality. This research study argues that recent educational policy as text, underpinned by *the HPS Framework (1995)*, has been more favourable to middle-class students as they can privately resource mental health and wellbeing supports which are beyond the financial means of many working-class students. Therefore, schools serving a predominately middle-class catchment can often access referrals to private services via the parents/guardians.

In the Irish educational context, Baker, Lynch *et al.* (2004) illustrates the role of schooling in middle-class reproduction through the recognition of the value orientations of certain groups in society. He identifies the gateway role of schools which redistributes social and economic capital. Drudy and Lynch (1993, p. 49) argue that schools, as agents of the State, encode and disseminate a nationally devised curriculum. The State therefore uses schools to convince people that capitalism is the fairest and most normal way to construct a progressive and free society. The construct of an educational meritocracy in capitalist economies has become an effective method of ensuring most citizens stay invested in the educational system. Reay (2017) informs us that this is effective as the majority of working-class students remain invested in the education system despite a body of research to suggest it is not a meritocracy. In the Irish context, the prevailing societal perspective of a meritocratic post-primary system centres on the Leaving Certificate State examination and the points system. The Leaving Certificate terminal examination categorises students ranking them in order of performance by awarding a set number of points for specific results achieved. Studies have shown that middle-class students generally perform better in this type of assessment as they are encouraged and supported from infancy to perform within the educational system in order to achieve status progressions and higher paid careers. Broadfoot (1996, p.32) highlights that such a system ensures the social order in the country is maintained as certification has a '*gate keeping*' role in society. Following the introduction of free education in Ireland in 1967, educational policymakers have come to focus on the need for equality of access and participation for students across the education system. Baker, Lynch *et al.* (2004) argued that this type of approach to educational policy distracts egalitarians by merely identifying the effects of inequality but fails to investigate the cause. The focus on access and



participation has rested on the premise that the Irish education system at post-primary level is meritocratic in nature. While this premise largely prevails in the psyche of society this study examines the evidence which indicates that the Irish education system is not a meritocracy, indeed the provision of education and schooling in itself is within a class-based schooling model which provides funding for private fee-paying schooling on one side of the spectrum and DEIS schools for *disadvantage* on the opposite end of the spectrum. The spectrum of provision is discussed further in chapter four.

The Neo-Marxists critique argues for critical pedagogy to enable the student to dissect power relations and understand the process of economic reproduction. Giroux (1994, p.30) argues that '*Pedagogy in the critical sense illuminates the relationship among knowledge, authority and power*'. Gramsci (1971) argues that the function of schooling was to prepare the student for their choice of career but also ensure the capability to study and think critically and independently. This section explores the role of pedagogy in either creating critical consciousness or reproducing the economy through hegemony.

Pedagogy as praxis is underpinned by a constructivist methodology whereby knowledge is sought by both the teacher and the student and constructed in partnership. The freedom required for a praxis model is identified by Warnock (1986, p. 182) when the praxis model as a dialogical form of education rather than a curricula form, is illustrated. Grundy (1987) argues that it requires teachers to be critically aware and conscious of their surroundings, thus enabling the student and teacher to negotiate the world around them together and learn from each other.

In relation to the Irish post-primary curriculum, Lynch (1998) maintains that equality theorists must realise the role of curriculum in promoting cultural inequality. She argues that curriculum is not neutral but biased in terms of class, gender and race and that education through current schooling systems can create a sense of inferiority in students irrespective of their academic success. Lynch argues that the system fails to respect all participants by projecting certain cultures and traditions as more valuable than others in society. Lynch (1989) argues the existence of a parallel, or covert or hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum of education was first referred to it as

*collateral learning* by Dewey (1916). Lynch (1989) explains it as intended or unintended messages transmitted in schools and decoded by the learner. This concept of a hidden curriculum is evident in the schooling system which is governed by *the Education Act* (1998) which speaks of inclusion and equality yet allows stratification and segregation to occur in practice. It is also discussed in chapter four in relation to the *Framework for Junior Cycle* (2015) which allows schools to opt into the provision of L2LPs (Level Two Learning Programmes) for students with SEN. It is further demonstrated in chapter four where DEIS schools are catering for higher levels of SEN in areas of high inter-school competition sampled. Again, compounding discrimination and stratification of students with a SEN.

The Irish post-primary educational system operates a product model of curriculum and assessment which originates from a behavioural objective paradigm. This paradigm views curriculum as knowledge to be imparted, teachers as all-knowing and students as knowing little or nothing. Within the product model, the curriculum (knowledge worth knowing) is transmitted by the teacher, and subsequently received, processed and stored by the students. Freire (1972) has referred to this process as '*the banking concept*'. He argues that the banking system can place certain students at a disadvantage, mainly because the message of the lesson is transmitted from a different cultural perspective. Indeed, Fromm (1976, p.37-38) argues that education as product turns students into '*passive receptors*' in a '*having mode*' unlike pedagogy as praxis which creates a '*being mode*' where students can '*...listen, they hear, and most important, they receive, and they respond in an active, productive way*'. A praxis model of educational curriculum and practice has been supported by Gramsci (1971, p. 42) who stressed that learning needs to be active and relevant '*active and creative, just as the relation of the workers to his tools is active and creative*'. This is particularly relevant to the discussion regarding the implementation of the *Framework for Junior Cycle* (2015) as the terminal end of cycle State examination is valued at 90% which is a retrogressive outcome.

In addition to the adoption of a product model of education, the Irish educational model has relied on a limited view of intelligences: the logical mathematical and the verbal-reasoning. Lynch (1999) and Baker, Lynch *et al.* (2004) argue that this created an unequal system where participation, attainment and assessment was more difficult for

learners with alternative intelligences. Many such learners have been viewed through a 'deficit' lens as outlined by Brooks and Grennon (1993). The Leaving Certificate has created a deficit view of students who do not compete for HEI places as discussed in chapter six. Gardner (1983, p.12) argues that '*logical thinking, for example, is important; rationality is important; but they are not the only virtues*'. He identified eight intelligences: verbal linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic, musical, naturalist, interpersonal and intrapersonal and argued that these forms of intelligence should be recognised and celebrated within educational systems. The inequality created by this binary view of intelligence is perpetuated by product orientated pedagogical practices within the post-primary educational system and the restrictive entry requirements of some Higher Education Institutes (HEI), in some cases, which stipulate certain entry requirements which are not relevant for the course in question for instance, the requirement of a European language for certain courses. Inequality is also evident in the H-Path assessment which was originally introduced to soften the points race for third level university courses in Medicine. However, the assessment has created another market with many parents paying for supplementary private courses to assist their children to perform well and secure their University place.

### **2.6.3 Egalitarian Theory - Cultural Perspective**

#### **Pierre Bourdieu and Cultural Theory**

The cultural perspective in relation to egalitarian theory is discussed in this section by means of Bourdieusian theory. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) integrated the two main intellectual sociological traditions of structuralism and existentialism to develop a theory of practice or thinking tools. These tools were a hybrid of the structuralist perspective which proposed a socially shaped strategy and the existentialist perspective which was foregrounded by individual choice and personal freedom in decision making. Grenfell (2008; 2012) illustrates that Bourdieu's theory of practice recognised the coterminous nature of both perspectives in relation to the social behavioural patterns. Bourdieu (1998 p. 65) states '*all my thinking started from this point: how can behaviour be regulated without being the product of obedience to rules?*' The Bourdieusian thinking tools that followed, reconciled the agency of the individual (habitus and capital) and social structures (fields). Bourdieu (1986) argues

that these three tools must be used in tandem to be effective. He exemplified the relational interconnectivity of the tools through the following equation:

$$[(\mathbf{Habitus}) (\mathbf{Capital})] + \mathbf{Field} = \mathbf{Practice}$$

Bourdieu's thinking on the link between behaviour and rules is applied to this research study in chapter four. That chapter explores the reproduction of the political economy in and through our contemporary approaches to education and schooling. It is particularly evident in relation to the middle-classes parents who recognise the gatekeeping role of education in society and therefore seek to reproduce and perpetuate the cycle of middle-class culture and standing for their off-spring. This is achieved by going to great lengths to ensure that their children perform and succeed within the educational system. Further evidence of the regulation of economic reproduction through rules lies in the shift of blame from the system to the student and their parents. In this regard, poor educational outcomes and/or a continued cycle of disadvantage or poverty are viewed as the fault of the individual rather than the (See Reay and Ball 1997; Lynch and Crean 2008; Lynch 2016; Reay 2017). This phenomenon is also supported by the segregation of certain types of students through a class-based schooling system at post-primary. Studies indicate that student cohorts matter and that a concentration of middle-class students results in higher educational outcomes (see Berliner 2017; Smyth, Banks *et al.*, 2015). Yet, the structure of the educational system allows for high concentrations of the most vulnerable of students to be segregated into schools which are '*designated*' to cater for their needs.

### **The Concept of Habitus as a Thinking Tool**

Bourdieu (1986) identifies that there are two traditions in relation to cultural studies: the structuralist tradition and the functionalist tradition. The structuralist tradition views culture as the communication of a set of shared beliefs and values grounded in a shared worldview. The functionalist tradition views human knowledge in terms of the social organisation. Bourdieu (1998, p.170) theory of habitus attempts to reconcile these traditions to create a theory of structure. Bourdieu (1993a, p. 86) explains that the term '*habitus*' was coined from the term '*habit*' as they are closely aligned. However, rather than a recurring action, habitus indicates a historical '*genetic mode of thought*'.

Bourdieu (1998, p.170) defines '*habitus*' as a '*structured and structuring structure*' for social actors on an individual level, group level or institutional level. It is '*structured*' as it is founded in the past experiences of the actor for instance his/her socialisation, domestic life etc. and it is '*structuring*' in both the present and future as the '*disposition*' acquired from past experiences will influence the structure of the present and future. The researcher's personal contemplative journey and reflexivity regarding her own sense of self, values and habitus are discussed in chapter eight. Maton (2012, p. 48) explains that '*Habitus is intended to transcend a series of deep-seated dichotomies that shape ways of thinking about the social world*'. He views it as a tool through which empirical explorations can analyse the '*workings of the social world*'.

Habitus is relevant to this study and arises in the context of the students' attitudes to the Leaving Certificate in chapter six. In this chapter it is clear that the habitus of the majority of the stakeholders was structured from their primary socialisation (home/family) which appeared to value the Leaving certificate as a gatekeeper to higher education and economic status. The majority of stakeholders were guided by this understanding. However, many of the DEIS-based principals, teachers and career guidance counsellors displayed evidence that habitus was a structuring structure for them. Much of their narrative demonstrated that they had come from a middle-class habitus and therefore a structured position regarding the importance of the Leaving Certificate assessment as a gatekeeper in Irish society. However, they were structuring in that their own education experiences and practice as educators, operating at the coalface, had prompted reflexivity. This reflexivity is evidenced by comments which reflected the inner conflict between the '*authentic*' self (*care about*) and the '*plastic*' self which is *performance* orientated (see Ball, 2001). This reflexivity is explored in chapter six in relation to the impact of a product model of education measured by a terminal assessment.

### **2.6.3.1 Bourdieu and Cultural Capital Theory**

Bourdieu (1986, p.90) analysed social inequality identifying human networks of privilege and power. He argues that these networks of connections must be constantly worked upon to ensure long lasting relationships which can be used to yield '*material or symbolic profits*'. Bourdieu (1986) proposes a theory of cultural capital identifying

it as the currency needed to succeed within these networks. Bourdieu (1984) examines the way in which cultural signifiers are encoded and decoded to ensure position in society is maintained. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p.119) define social capital as: ‘...the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition’.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977, p 487) argued that cultural capital is underpinned by family socialisation and a schooling system which maintain the power structures between the socioeconomic classes. The power structure is reproduced through the structure of distribution of cultural capital among these classes. Bourdieu (1991) focuses on the significance of education, language and symbolic power in the maintenance of social inequality. Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital recognises that academic success within a class-based schooling system depends on the acquisition of domestic cultural capital ‘in its earliest conditions of acquisition ...through more or less visible marks they leave’ (Bourdieu, 2004, p.18). Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital refers to a combination of symbolic signifiers of social class belonging such as: tastes in clothes, music, food, beverages, customs and mannerisms, posture and credentials as outlined by Longhofer and Winchester (2016). This sharing and appreciation of similar elements creates and sustains a sense of group identity and position in the social landscape. Bourdieu argues the potential of cultural capital to positively influence a person’s social status and mobility. Conversely, he argues that a deficit in cultural capital can potentially hinder social mobility. This is evident in cases where students and their parents encountered *soft barriers* to their enrolment in post-primary.

Bourdieu (1986) classified *cultural capital* into three forms embodied, objectified and institutionalised. The concept of habitus refers to embodiment of cultural capital or as Bourdieu (1986) metaphorically explained it ‘a feel for the game’. The concept embodies our way of thinking, behaving and being because of our lived experiences and the transfer of cultural capital in our formative years. Bourdieu appreciated that habitus was culturally imbued in a person’s psyche and that it could be mistakenly interpreted as a natural disposition rather than a culturally constructed one. Maton (2012, p. 61-63) states that ‘*habitus* cannot be viewed empirically but instead the

resultant *'practices and beliefs'* which it generates. He argues that if the concept of habitus is cognised as Bourdieu intended, then *'thinking in terms of habitus becomes part of one's habitus. When the concept is in one's intellectual marrow in this way it achieves the 'metanoia' Bourdieu hoped to enable'*.

The habitus can be matched or ill matched with different social settings for example, Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) exploration of the educational system in France at that time suggested that it perpetuated middle-class culture. Canny and Hamilton (2018) suggest that the work of Bourdieu and Passeron provides a lens through which patterns in the Irish education system can be understood.

Bourdieu aligned potential educational success to the transfer of economic, social and cultural capital within families. This is evident in the Irish context where middle-class students outperform working-class students consistently in State examinations. Canny and Hamilton (2018) illustrate the gatekeeping role of the Leaving Certificate points system for access to higher education. In a competitive class-based schooling system this results in Leaving certificate points becoming foremost socially accepted school success criteria. Canny and Hamilton (2018, p.5) argue that that economic reproduction is evident in the Irish context. They illustrate that schools with a propitious orientation towards middle-class service will achieve greater success in the competitive education and schooling market, *'Success is most powerful when both are successfully reproduced'*.

Brooks and Waters (2009) argue that middle-class families and their offspring constantly seek and discover new methods to maintain their advantage over the poorer socio-economic classes. Findlay and King *et al.* (2006) argue that mobility of students in relation to education was the domain of socio-economically advantaged students to the exclusion of students who were less socially, economically and linguistically advantaged. Bourdieu (1997, p.47) illustrates the correlation between social class and educational achievement, he argued the existence of *'specific profits which children from the different classes and class fractions can obtain from the academic market'*. Kingston (2001, p.88) argues that the socially privileged achieve better in their schooling which leads to higher status educational progression and in turn increases the likelihood of economic success. A similar finding was outlined by Smyth and

Banks (2012b) who indicate that there is a strong link between social class and attainment in Ireland. Chapter four argues that many students from disadvantaged backgrounds are subjected to inequality in the educational system and also the health system and this has implications for mental health promotion. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992 a, p.127) illustrate the complex interdependency of habitus and field. They argue that habitus influences interpretation and perception of the field, yet the field or fields structure the habitus. They argue that habitus and fields are in a state of evolution and are therefore continually *structuring* over time. They reason that as our human dispositions or habitus evolve over time, so too do the social fields in accordance with prevailing logic and perspectives over time. They conclude that the habitus therefore unifies the inner (personal) and the outer (social).

### **2.6.3.2 The Concept of ‘Fields’ as a Thinking Tool**

Bourdieu (1971a) proposed the concept of social fields whereby he identified that the social world could be classified into a series of autonomous, but sometimes converging areas of practice or fields. Bourdieu frequently used football as an analogy through which he could easily convey his thinking tools. He identifies the field as the social space or area where the game occurs, the players as actors, the rules or regularities of the game as doxa and the players’ individual or collective habitus as the practical logic or *‘feel for the game’*. Bourdieu (1998, p.63) stated that habitus *‘is the social game embodied and turned into second nature’*. The doxa of school enrolment practices is explored in chapter four which outlines that many parents and teachers followed an unwritten role in relation to school enrolments of students with SEN. The data discussed in chapter four indicates that some parents appeared to be party to practices of collusion or informed discrimination. Meanwhile, there was empirical evidence of some primary school teachers and principals tracking and steering students to particular post-primary schools.

In the application of the concept of fields to education, Bourdieu (1998) recognised the exploration of schools as social spaces as challenging arguing that such explorations must include multi-layered perspectives to comprehensively examine the complexities of the subject. He suggests the use of his *‘thinking tools’* as an appropriate lens through which the cultural aspects of social fields can be analysed empirically. Bourdieu’s theories allow inequality to be explored from a social and



cultural perspective. The fourth dimension of equality outlined by Baker, Lynch *et al.* (2004; 2009) is the affective dimension which is detailed in the next section of this chapter.

#### **2.6.4 Egalitarian Theory – *Affective Perspective***

The neglect of the affective dimension in relation to Irish education research has been argued by Baker, Lynch *et al.* (2004) and Noddings (2003). Lynch (2009) argues that in the Irish context and the wider European context, a '*full citizen*' is defined as an autonomous person and that special emphasis is placed on financial autonomy. Therefore, citizenship has become synonymous with paid employment and contributions to the State. She argues that dependency is questioned and increasingly caring or being cared for are not viewed as citizenship despite dependency and interdependency being pervasive to human existence. This research study analyses the intersectionality of the political, economic and cultural and affective systems within the '*field*' of a class-based, non-meritocratic post-primary schooling system.

In more recent decades the significance of the affective perspective in relation to inequality and social justice has come to the fore. Frijters (2013, p.27) provides a relevant body of work which relates the affective domain to economic perspectives and practices. He considers the principles of mainstream economics at '*face value*' and relates this to the affective domain. Frijters (2013, p.28) explains that the dominant capitalist economic policy perspective encourages competition so as to '*produce an optimal outcome for society as a whole in terms of productivity and efficiency and therefore should be encouraged on the grounds of social surplus*'. He reasons that this economic principle is logical in an economic context, but this does not necessarily translate to an affective context particularly in relation to public service provision of human rights such as education. Indeed, he argues that a balance must be struck between the benefit to society and individual material benefit. The application of market principles and values via policies and practices is evident, in Ireland's public service provision, over the past two decades as outlined by Barrett (2004). Ball and Junemann (2012) illustrate that private companies are increasingly assuming contract for heretofore State-run public services, shifting the government role from governing to governance. Frijters (2013) highlights that this creates a dilemma for the affective domain, in terms of equality. He argues that private monopolies will claim that they

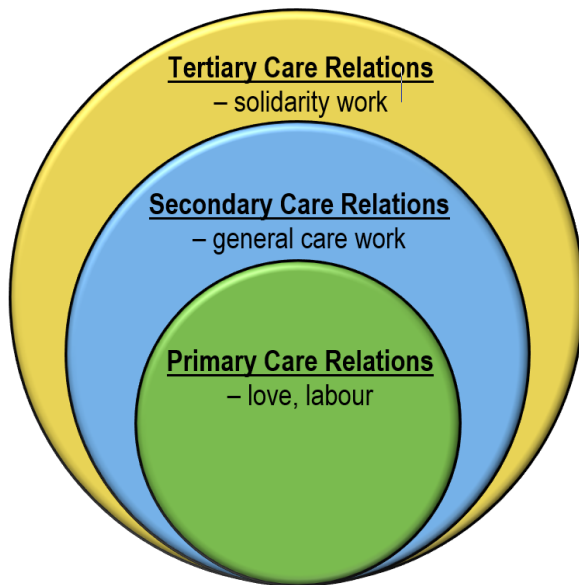
are positive for society, but due to a lack of transparency, this continues to be questionable. He argues that to counteract this anomaly governments have shifted to governance by established regulators, but Frijters (2013) asks who are these regulators and can they be trusted? In other words, can private business and enterprise be trusted to put the affective needs of society before profit?

Nationally, where services cannot be fully outsourced such as education and health, partial outsourcing has occurred. These public services have been transitioned to a performance-related form of governance under New Managerial practices as detailed by Ball (2008) and Lynch, Grummell *et al.* (2012). This study discusses the application of economic principles to the Irish post-primary education system and explores the impact on the schools' role within the affective domain. These negative consequences to date involve the stratification and exclusion of certain students and are outlined in chapter four. Mooney Simmie (2014) argues that education reform at Junior Cycle is a structural shift from a government-led model to a governance model of education. She also argues that it is a curricular shift what will reinforce inequality in the schooling system. It is the researchers contention that this will see DEIS schools offering *Level Two Learning Programmes* (L2LP) in conjunction with Level three (see NFQ) programmes whereas non-DEIS schools will hesitate or refuse to opt in to the L2LP provision. The tension between the affective domain and the competitive market model is particularly relevant to this study and is illustrated in figure 2.1 using two distinct yet converging circles. The tensions between both circles, particularly as they overlap in the mesosystemic and microsystemic systems, is explored in chapters four, five and six. The educative function of the education and schooling system has come to be measured in measurable performance indicators such as examination points and progression rates to HEIs, whereas the affective model is less easily measured. The affective model is more concerned with the concept of *distance travelled* over destination or praxis over product. Turunen and Sormunen *et al.* (2017, p.182) illustrate that an overfocus on quantitative measurable outcomes over qualitative has become a challenge in existing mental health related literature, methods and frameworks developed to evaluate school-based programmes and strategies. They argue that two options exist '(i) either the programme is delivered as planned or not and (ii) either it delivers expected outcomes, or not'. They call for a move away from linear thinking towards a multi-layer and nuanced evaluative perspective.

Baker, Lynch *et al.* (2004) explain that *affective equality* means equal access to love, care and solidarity and an equal sharing of the burdens and benefits of love and care work. They argue that affective equality challenges the contemporary thinking in relation to social justice by viewing citizens as relational human beings in need of love and care. Baker, Lynch *et al.* (2004) argue that most egalitarian political theory equates citizenship with the public sphere rather than the private sphere by focusing on equality and inequality in economic, socio-cultural or political terms. The affective perspective enables analysis and discussion on the challenges experienced by leaders and teachers across the sample schools as they move to a settings-based approach to mental health promotion within a marketised competitive model of post-primary education.

Noddings (2002(a), p.283) has written extensively on the role of education in caring for and nurturing learners. She defines 'education' as '*a constellation of encounters, both planned and unplanned, that promote growth through the acquisition of knowledge, skills, understandings and appreciation*'. Noddings' (2002) definition recognises the role of the home environment as the primary location for education and the primary caregiver as the primary educator. She argues that care is the foundation of education as it is a basic requirement for humanity and that all humans desire care. Baker, Lynch *et al.* (2004) also argue that affective inequality is evident when people are deprived of the love, care and solidarity (LCS) they need to survive. This perspective is particularly relevant to this research study and figure 2.4 outlines the interrelated dynamic between the primary, secondary and tertiary care relations in providing support for young people. This study suggests that in circumstances where there is disruption to the primary care relation in the home, the secondary care relations provided by the school become instrumental in supporting the young person. However, as chapter five outlines, there is a dearth of services available to the overburdened DEIS post-primary system. Equally there is a lack of services to all DEIS profile students whether they attend a DEIS or non-DEIS school.

**Figure 2.4 The Interrelated Dynamic of Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Care Relations**



Source: Lynch (2007, p 550-570).

Baker, Lynch *et al.* (2009) argue that love, care and solidarity are equality issues because humans are relational beings that depend on LCS for survival. They argue that human flourishing depends on LCS and that true LCS provides positive outcomes. Lynch argues that caring is work and the ethics of care needs to be aligned to a rights-based approach to justice. She argues that the Rational Economic Actor (REA) model of the ideal citizen, which commenced as an analytical framework, now prevails in contemporary neoliberal economies and involves getting maximum advantage for minimum cost irrespective of the moral character of the goal.

Noddings (2002(b), p.13) explores the phenomenological nature of 'caring' arguing a reciprocity in the caring process between the person offering the care who is 'receptive and attentive in a special way' and the recipient of the care recognises that the other person cares about them. She argues that these care abilities must be developed in the home progressing outward to affect our context rather than the reverse view. Noddings (2002, p.22-31) differentiates between 'caring-for' and 'caring-about' arguing that one must experience and learn what it means to be cared-for, before the skills to care about others can be developed. 'Learning first what it means to be cared for, then to care for intimate others, and finally to care about those we cannot care for directly'. Noddings (2002, p. 23) argues that the capacity for 'caring about' others is the

foundation for social justice if it converts to ‘care’ and caring actions. She argues that *‘those who care about others in the justice sense must keep in mind that the objective is to ensure that caring actually occurs’*. Her argument illustrates that the objective of caring in relation to social justice is to ensure that the sentiment converts to real action or using Ball’s (1993) policy tools, that policy as text converts to policy as effects. hooks (1994, p.13) describes how true teaching must be underpinned by care, *‘to teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin’*. This study questions if teachers can really care for the souls of students when they are being measured against the points system which is underpinned by Freire’s (1972) banking concept and the product system. Noddings suggests a more spiritual rationale and mission for teachers’ role in the learning process which ties in with a constructivist, reflexive model of learning and facilitating learning.

Noddings (1992; 2003) is concerned with the connection between happiness as a construct and education which can be overlooked by many in contemporary education. She argues that school systems have become over-focused on assessments and performance indicators to the exclusion of an ethic of care and therefore it is arguably not truly focused on mental health and wellbeing. Noddings (2003) argues that such an outcome-orientated, utilitarian education system creates a context which is not conducive to seeking and finding meaning, which is a central component of wellbeing.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

This chapter sets out the theoretical framework for this research study which aims to explore the experiences of post-primary school communities transitioning to a settings-base for mental health and wellbeing promotion. The research study explores the impact of Irish post-primary educational policy on the operational context of schools using Ball’s (1993) policy tools: policy as text, policy as discourse and policy as effects. The chapter highlights that educational policy over the past few decades has served two distinct educational paradigms. These paradigms view education from two opposing perspectives: one viewing education as a human right and an instrument for social justice; the second perspective views education as a means of economic reproduction which is heavily influenced by the political economy. The conflicting perspectives regarding education and their respective influences on policy

development is central to this research study. In order to illustrate the position of the study, the researcher constructed a visual theoretical framework which maps the two policy trajectories separately. To illustrate this the researcher created figure 2.1 which tracks the policy trajectory of these two separate educational paradigms on a chronosystemic, macrosystemic and exosystemic level.

The first educational paradigm is represented in the left circle in figure 2.1. It begins at the outer layer with the *chronosystem* which encompasses the political and economic progression of capitalism over the past century. It discusses the catalysation of free-market principles and international trade which have evolved capitalism across the globe since the 1970s. The *macrosystemic* level notes the political and social influences which create the impetus for policy creation or renewal. In this case, the macrosystem examines the shift to a neoliberal economic policy agenda and the role of education in supporting this shift. The influence of the OECD in the evolution of the Irish education system is explored by examining educational reports since the 1960s. These reports include: ‘*The Investment in Education*’ (1965) report and ‘*Reviews of National Policies for Education: Ireland*’ (1991) cites theories and concepts such as *Human Capital Theory* and the *Knowledge Economy*. The *exosystemic* level explores the impact of *Parental Choice* on the reform of education to a marketised model. The introduction of the construct of choice in ‘*The Education Act*’ (1998) is identified as a watershed and examined in terms of its impact on the post-primary education system. Indeed, the ideology of choice emerged as a cornerstone of the reform of education systems within neoliberal capitalist economies, resulting in a trend of moving further away from community education and into a market-led, utilitarian and individualistic model.

The second educational paradigm is represented in the right circle in figure 2.1. Again, the outer layer represents the *chronosystem* which explores the development of societal understandings of mental health over the past three decades. On a *macrosystemic* level the significance of the European movement towards schools as a settings-base for mental health and wellbeing promotion is examined and discussed. This discussion takes cognisance of the social determinants which have been identified as causative factors in mental health issues. To this end, the chapter recognises and explores the impact of recession on Irish adolescents who were infants and toddlers during

austerity. The *exosystemic* level examines policy developments which envisage a school settings-based approach to mental health and wellbeing promotion in Ireland. It identifies the significance of *the HPS framework* (1995) in underpinning the '*Framework for Junior Cycle*' (2015) and *the Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines* (2017). The HPS framework is identified as the accepted framework for health promotion in schools across the globe as outlined by Schulz (2019).

The visual frame (figure 2.1) illustrates the convergence of both paradigms at a mesosystemic and microsystemic level. This convergence represents the operational context of schools in the sample and this is the site for data collection across a range of stakeholders. The analysis of experiences of those at the coalface is conducted using a '*Policy Sociology Approach*' as proposed by Ball (2008, p.4). The '*Policy Sociology Approach*' allows a series of analytical devices to be used to explore findings as they emerge. In the case of this research study it is formed using multiple theories from an egalitarian perspective. The variety of egalitarian-based theories are framed using the four key dimensions of equality/inequality: the political, economic, cultural and affective systems as outlined by Baker, Lynch *et al.* (2004).

The '*Policy Sociology Approach*' merges the political and economic dimensions into one. It employs key elements of the Neo-Marxist critique of education and schooling such as *Economic Reproduction Theory* and hegemony, in order to analyse data collected. The researcher selected these theories as they provide a perspective through which the construct of education and the arrangement of schooling can be critically observed and discussed. *Economic Reproduction Theory* is relevant to this research study as chapter four identifies that the organisation of the Irish post-primary schooling system is class-based and that this has implications for equality within a competitive market model. These implications manifest as a hidden culture of stratification, segregation and relegation of students in accordance with their perceived value in the market place. *Economic Reproduction Theory* is also used as an analytical device in chapter six, where the over-focus on the Leaving Certificate points system is discussed along with the implications this has for the provision of care in post-primary schools.

The cultural dimension centres on the work of Pierre Bourdieu regarding habitus and cultural capital theory. It outlines Bourdieu's (1986) thinking tools which reconcile

the agency of the individual (habitus and capital) and the social structures (fields). Bourdieu's theories are used to analyse chapter four where perceptions of *soft barriers* to enrolments are discussed. The concept of habitus and cultural capital are used to explain why such a phenomenon occurs and is allowed to reoccur. Additionally, the role of some of the stakeholders in upholding the '*rules of the game*' by contributing to segregation and stratification, are analysed using Bourdieu's concept of fields.

The affective dimension is broadly explored in terms of the significance of providing love, care and solidarity to citizens in order to ensure equality. Here, the work of Baker, Lynch *et al.* (2004) is employed as an analytical tool. They argue that affective equality challenges contemporary thinking in relation to social justice by viewing citizens as relational human beings in need of love and care. This has particular relevance to schools transitioning to a settings-base for mental health promotion. The affective perspective discusses observations and arguments made by Baker, Lynch *et al.* (2004), hooks (1994), and Noddings (1984; 1992; 2002; 2003; 2005). The affective perspective enables analysis and discussion on the challenges experienced by leaders and teachers across the sample schools, as they move to a settings-based approach to mental health promotion within a marketised competitive model of post-primary education.



## **Chapter Three**

### **Methodology Chapter**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter commences by discussing the research design as a multi-case case-study consisting of eight cases. The perspectives of Bassey (1999), Stake (2006) and Yin (2003) are included. The considerations of the researcher from a position of insider and outsider in the research process are also included. The chapter discussed the selections of the sample stakeholders which include principals, parents, teachers, students and career guidance counsellors. The eight sample cases are profiled, and a methodology timeline is outlined. This chapter highlights and discusses the ethical considerations of the researcher. These included sampling deliberations, informed consent and assent, confidentiality and anonymity, gender sensitivity and the minimisation of risks, particularly regarding the inclusion of young people.

The data collection phase is grouped into two stages and the logistics of each are explained. The process relating to the data analysis phase is outlined with reference to the identification of thematic patterns and trends. These themes are then used to illuminate the quintain. The chapter concludes by briefly outlining the ongoing dissemination process as a reflective tool throughout the research study.

#### **3.1 Research Design - Multi-case Case-study**

The central objective of this research study is to capture the voices of education stakeholders in relation to mental health promotion within the Irish post-primary system. The acquisition by the researcher of an Irish Research Council scholarship and an associative agreement with her employer provided access to eight ETB post-primary school communities in a specific region in Ireland. The researcher's desire to capture the range of stakeholders' views from a variety of samples at a microsystemic level was suited to a case-study design. Gall and Borg *et al.* (1996) argue that the case-study design is most suitable to capture perspectives of subjects at a microsystemic level. Bassey (1999, p.62-68) highlights that the case-study design is a comprehensive frame for the study of education systems or institutions as it allows the 'how' and 'why' research questions to be answered. Cresswell (2013)

identifies case-study design as existing in singular and multi-case format where detailed multifaceted perspectives and data are gathered and reported thematically.

The researcher considered whether to conduct a singular case case-study to explore the ETB scheme as an independent case in its own right or to conduct a multi-case case-study encompassing each of the eight post-primary schools as cases. Stake (2006) critiques the singular case study arguing that it fails to offer the same level of detail and depth of a multi-case case study. He contends that the exploration of a '*functioning or a policy*' is best achieved by a multi-case case-study design as it explores how the case interacts with other cases. Yin (2003) supports this argument, advising that combined cases can explore and describe a phenomenon, examine and explore questions, and illuminate the reasons or causes of a phenomenon. The researcher's insider status and experience of the ETB scheme also influenced her decision to pursue a multi-case case-study. The researcher identified that a multi-case case-study would enable a comprehensive examination of the contextual influences and perspectives and understandings of mental health promotion in line the Ball (2008) policy trajectory. Yin (1993), Baxter and Jack (2008) argue that multiple case studies can increase the validity of the emerging trends and patterns by using more than one case. The conditions of the IRC scholarship and the associative agreement with the employer resulted in the sample cases being situated in the one ETB scheme. Therefore, the researcher acknowledges that the findings are specific to the schools of this ETB scheme in this particular region and this is reflected clearly in the title and research questions. The sample does not draw on schools from the community and comprehensive or voluntary secondary sector. While the researcher envisages that many of the findings and themes may be relevant to other sectors, it is an area which would require further exploration.

Stake (2006) explains the concept of a quintain as an overarching subject matter to illustrate how multiple cases can feed into one comprehensive body of work. He explains that emphasis on the quintain changes the researchers' focus from seeking an individualised understanding of each case to an appreciation of how each case contributes to understanding the quintain. Therefore, Stake (2006) explains that the emergence of several research questions feeding into the quintain is expected in a multi-case research study. The quintain for this research study was identified as the attitudes and

experiences of school communities transitioning to a mental health and wellbeing promoting school. The following embedded questions emerged under the quintain:

1. How has the post-primary schooling system affected the operational context of schools in the sample?
2. Does the socio-economic profile of the school/catchment influence the scale of need in terms of mental health promotion and mental health supports?
3. What is the impact of a performance-orientated product system of assessment on the context of mental health and wellbeing promotion at post-primary level?
4. What impact has new managerialism had on the principals and teachers' context and ability to champion mental health and wellbeing promotion?
5. How can policy makers ensure mental health promotion is meaningful for all post-primary students?

Yin (1993) identifies that the validity and reliability of the multi-case case-study is dependent on the ability of the researcher to appreciate the interaction between cases. He proposes that case selection is underpinned by replication logic which comprises of two elements: literal and theoretical replication. Literal replication involves the selection of cases which the researcher predicts will produce similar results. Theoretical replication allows the researcher to anticipate conflicting results but for anticipated reasons. He illustrates that replication logic assists by providing external validation to the case study findings which are largely analytical. Therefore, cases can be used to confirm conclusions or illuminate reasons for variations across cases. Miles and Huberman (1994) support this argument and propose that researchers ensure they bind their cases in order to avoid setting the scope of the study too wide.

Replication theory was a factor in the selection and analysis of cases for this study. The DEIS designated schools are the literal replication where similar results were expected whereas the non-DEIS schools were included as a theoretical replication. The researcher noted that the management of the DEIS (urban) schools in particular felt they were catering for a greater number of students from socioeconomic disadvantage and those with a SEN than the other schools in their catchment area. The school management felt that the historical provision of

technical education by its ETB school (formerly VEC) played a role in the psyche of the community to this day where the ETB school was associated with less academic education and the voluntary secondary schools were associated with a more academic education. The inclusion of the DEIS and non-DEIS schools in ensured the researcher was mindful of the potential for theoretical replication, in this case the lesser scale of mental health issues across the non-DEIS student body. The researcher was mindful to allow the data to emerge in an organic fashion, in order to ensure a comprehensive and robust exploration of the subject matter.

Yin (2003) explains that case-study design is the most suitable design frame when context is included in the study. This research study is heterogeneous in its design in that it explores the development of capitalism as a *'holistic'* macrosystemic global phenomenon while also exploring *'embedded'* Irish phenomena within the mesosystemic and microsystemic levels of the educational system. The inclusion of a variety of multi-layered contexts within this research study enables the researcher to explore the political, economic, social and affective context that shape the existential and operational contexts of Irish schooling and education. This research study is an *'instrumental'* multi-case case-study as it goes beyond individual cases as outlined by Yin (1993). It seeks to explore the nexus between cause and effect in relation to the experiences of mental health promotion in post-primary education.

### **3.2 Employment of Mixed Methods (Methodological Triangulation)**

#### **Approach**

Yin (1993) argues that case study researchers should be conversant with multiple data collection techniques in order to yield robust and reliable data. The work of Merriam and Kim (2012) illustrates the need for the philosophical perspective, arising research questions and the nature of the phenomenon to be considered when deciding on research methods. This research study examines a complex quintain, constructed through a range of research questions and deconstructed using multiple perspectives from various stakeholders. The researcher considered arguments for a mixed method approach to data collection underpinned by methodological triangulation. Proponents of methodological triangulation have argued its ability to provide depth and scope to research rendering it more comprehensive and robust (Cohen, Mannion *et al.*, 2000; O'Donoghue and Punch, 2003). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) and Knafl and Breitmayer

(1989) illustrate that triangulation is an effective tool which allows data to be verified using more than one source.

Heale and Forbes (2013) cite the origins of *triangulation* in navigational lexicon where a physical position can be established and verified from two or more known reference points. Theoretical triangulation transfers this principle to sociological research. Thurmond (2001, p.254) illustrates the power of triangulation to '*increase confidence in research data, creating innovative ways of understanding a phenomenon, revealing unique findings, challenging or integrating theories, and providing a clearer understanding of the problem*'. This is supported by Tashakkori and Teddle (2003), Thurmond (2001) and Denzin (2006). Olsen (2004) argues that triangulation assists the researcher to deepen their understanding of the subject matter and supports interdisciplinary research particularly well by creating a dialectic of learning.

Olsen (2004) cites the historical tensions between some proponents of qualitative and quantitative research methods. Pole and Lampard (2002, p.4) explain that quantitative data is numerical in nature, whereas qualitative data refers to the '*quality of the experience*'. Dey (1993, p.14) outlines that qualitative data collection techniques are more language focused. The researcher's natural orientation was to engage in a constructivist qualitative research methodology to capture the '*attitudes and experiences*' of the school community regarding mental health promotion. Crabtree and Miller (1999) argue that an advantage of this approach is the development of a collaborative relationship between the researcher and the participant as the participant can illustrate their reality allowing the researcher to appreciate the circumstance and rationale for their actions. However, considering the depth and scope of the theoretical framework, which includes the impact of macro level sociological happenings on the mesosystemic and microsystemic levels in education and schooling, it became clear that qualitative methods alone would be inadequate. The researcher felt that to include quantitative surveys would gather additional data in a time effective manner. It was also felt that a mixed methods approach would provide scale and depth to the research which could not be achieved by one method alone. The combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods also enabled the collection and collation of what Sahlberg (2018) refers to a small and large data. He argues that small data refers to the teachers' professional experiences and opinions which may not be the subject of

large-scale scientific research. Large data refers to the latter. Sahlberg (2018) argues that in order to enhance, improve and regenerate teaching the divide between these positions needs to be addressed. Walby (2001) supports a mixed methods approach to data collection and methodological triangulation arguing that it eliminates the emergence of an '*epistemological chasm*' between the disciplines.

Tashakkori and Teddle's (2003) argument that combining mixed methods leads to three possible outcomes, these are: results which converge (represented by the fixation point triangle), results which diverge (the yellow and blue perspectives minus the fixation triangle) and results which are complementary to each other (represented by the green area). Therefore, the researcher concluded that the use of triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques would fully capture a diverse range of data leading to a greater understanding of the subject matter.

### **3.3 Considerations of a Researcher as an Insider and an Outsider**

This research study has been grant-aided by an Irish Research Council scholarship under the Employment-based Programme. Therefore, the scholar had an associative agreement with her employer that she would investigate her research topic across their post-primary schools. The researcher is a researcher-practitioner who has worked as a teacher for seventeen years and more recently as an Assistant Principal in one of the sample schools. Therefore, given the context of this research study the researcher initially considered herself to be an 'insider researcher' in the research process. Kanuha (2000) defines the insider researcher as a researcher who engages in research pertaining to a grouping of which she is a member. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) argue that this provides the researcher with the advantage of acceptance among the group being studied. They argue that the commonality between researcher and participants provides access that might otherwise have been denied to those from outside the organisation or group. Asselin (2003) illustrates that this can result in a shared set of experiences, language and identity between the researcher and the participants. Moreover, Stake (2006, p. 31) highlights the advantage of experiential knowledge has been highlighted by '*The qualitative researcher relies partly on coming to know personally the activity and experience of the case*'.

Indeed, the advantages of being an insider researcher proved beneficial especially in terms of initial access to the sampled stakeholders. However, as the research process

progressed the researcher began to self-reflect on her experiences of being an insider researcher and realised that her experience was not as simplistic as the insider researcher perspective might suggest. She began to view her research position as a fluid one.

This realisation prompted her to consider an emerging body of work that suggests the roles of insider researcher and outsider researcher are fluid and overlapping rather than entirely separate entities. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) support this argument suggesting that instead of a dichotomous perspective regarding researchers as insiders or outsiders, researchers can alternate between the two research positions. Indeed, multiple researchers argue a more complex fluidity between insider and outsider research roles (Fayard and Van Maanen (2015); Westney and Van Maanen (2011)). The researcher could relate to the experiences of Fayard and Van Maanen (2015, p.18) regarding the fluidity of their research position, they explain: *'None of these roles were fixed or static but were rather fluid, continually being restructured, retained and abandoned in the course of our interactions with those in the company'*. In the course of this research study, the researcher grew in her appreciation and understanding of the interchangeability of the insider/outsider positions. This growth resulted from the experience of conducting the research study in this complex multi-case context which included a range of eight separate cases and five distinct stakeholders' perspectives. In navigating this context, the researcher alternated between a position of insider and outsider throughout the process.

Initially, the researcher identified as an insider researcher given that she was employed by the organisation for which she was conducting the research. Additionally, as an ETB Board member, the researcher was nominated as an ETB representative on the Board of Management on three of the eight schools. This enabled a positive working relationship with the principals in the three schools prior to the commencement of the research project. A fourth Principal was also known to the researcher through membership of the same trade union and mutual attendance at monthly meetings and annual congress. Additionally, the researcher attended regular Information and Communications Technology training (ICT) training and Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) training in 2015 and 2016 which was attended by all principals and deputy principals in the scheme. Therefore, there were many opportunities to

establish trust and good working relationships prior to the commencement of the research and while the research was underway. However, as the research progressed the researcher experienced an alternation between the role of insider and outsider researcher when dealing with each of the stakeholders including the principals.

The alternating role of insider/outsider researcher can be explained using Alder and Alder's (1987) theory of membership roles. They propose three 'membership roles' for researchers studying an organisation or a group: researchers who remain on the periphery and are not directly involved in group activities; researchers who are actively involved in the activity of the sample; researchers who are already members of the grouping under study. The position of the researcher in this study embodied each of the three types of membership roles identified by Adler and Adler (1987) and a focus on this enables a greater understanding of how the roles of insider and outsider researcher became fluid during the research process.

The first experience of an alternation from insider to outsider researcher was experienced early in the study when permission was sought to engage with each of the eight sample schools. The layered permissions required, on a macro and meso level from within the ETB, to commence the field work is significant in that it demonstrates the interchanging insider/outsider status of the researcher. The researcher's position on the board of the ETB was an insider position given that the ETB is the patron of each of the sample schools and was therefore identified as holding the gatekeeper function. Therefore, in addition to the associative agreement, the researcher sought official permission to access the required school personnel. The Chief Executive and Director of Schools of the ETB were identified as the absolute gatekeepers and permission was sought from them directly. This was granted verbally on the understanding that each principal's permission, as the legitimate gatekeeper, would be secured directly by the researcher. On reflection the macro level permission was secured with much greater ease than the meso level permission to enter each school. This is arguably due to the researcher's insider status on the ETB board but her outsider status in relation to seven of the eight individual schools. In order to secure access to the individual schools or the mesosystemic level, the researcher had to approach the schools and present her case. It was in this context, she realised she was in the position



of an outsider. She presented an explanation and overview of the proposed study to the ETB's monthly meeting of principals early in the 2015/2016 academic year. A formal information document reiterating the purpose of the study and other relevant information followed this initial contact. The formal document aimed to put the principals' minds at ease regarding ethical considerations and explained in writing the role of the participants and participating schools. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed to the school and its participants.

In phase two of the data collection, the researcher experienced what Adler and Alder (1987) described as being a peripheral member researcher. She experienced this when she interviewed ETB principals as she was outside the grouping, given that she had never been a principal. In recognition of this the researcher decided to use a semi-structured interview as a data collection tool. This allowed the interview process the freedom to move and be guided by the answers elicited rather than the questions. This process of interviewing principals displays the phenomenon of being an insider in terms of membership of the ETB organisation but in reality being an outsider in the context of understanding the role of principal. In effect the researcher benefitted from being an insider in terms of access to the principals for interviews, however once in the interview process the experience was arguably that of an outsider researcher. For instance, when principals spoke of the pressures and stresses associated with their roles. However, the researcher found that her lack of experience in the area under exploration resulted in her asking more questions in order to ensure she fully understood the principals' responses. Similarly, Fay (1996, p.20) argues that being a member of the group being studied is not necessary in order to 'know' the group's experiences. He argues that having had an experience is not enough but that one must be able to identify, detail and explain that experience to others.

The researcher also experienced the second membership role outlined by Adler and Adler (1987) which is a researcher who is actively involved in the activity of the sample. The researcher experienced this concept when she conducted the focus group session with parents. This session again provided the researcher with the experience of a combined insider-outsider role. For instance, the researcher is a parent and therefore could appreciate the experiences of the parents as they spoke of their children

and the schooling system. However, the researcher did not have children of post-primary schooling-going age and therefore was aware that she was an outsider to this experience. The researcher benefitted from an outsider position with many of the stakeholders as it ensured that she listened carefully to their perspectives in order to represent them accurately.

The third membership role identified by Adler and Adler (1987) outlines the experience of the researcher as she conducted the focus group with teachers. The researcher was also a teacher within the organisation and therefore she assumed she would feel like an insider in this context. However, her positioning was not as simple as this in reality. Indeed, the scale of the cases and the variety of case contexts meant that the researcher became aware as the process unfolded that she was alternating between insider and outsider researcher. For example, teachers engaged in Transition Year subjects or the teaching of practical subjects shared their experiences that were completely different to those of the researcher and thus opened up entirely new perspectives to the researcher as to the experiences of teachers within the context of the research study.

The experiences of the researcher support the central argument by Dwyer and Buckle (2009, p.5) that insider/outsider status is less important than their ethical underpinnings and an ability to self-reflect in an open and honest manner. They suggest: *'..the core ingredient is not insider or outsider status but an ability to be open, authentic, honest, deeply interested in the experiences of one's research participants, and committed to accurately and adequately representing their experience'*. In keeping with Dwyer and Buckle's (2009) argument, the researcher was mindful to ensure she ensured that she addressed any challenges she encountered which could have affected the integrity of the research process. In this regard the researcher was also mindful of the power dynamic which was at play in relation to her research within the organisation. Anderson (2013) argues that the researcher must consider political issues which may emerge in the course of the research process. This matter was considered at length and particularly in the context of the role that the Director of Schools had as the researcher's Employment Mentor. It was felt that the raw data should not be shared

during the data collection or analysis process so as to preserve the anonymity of the sources. This was agreed between the researcher and Employment Mentor and was respected by both parties throughout the process.

The recognition of the alternating role of being an insider and an outsider in this research endeavour placed an onus on the researcher to ensure that her position did not compromise the integrity of the research. It was important that she maintain a position of impartiality and openness throughout the process. In order to achieve this, the researcher employed the support of a critical friend with whom she would share her experiences and thoughts throughout the process. This was beneficial in that it caused the researcher to think about her own biases and how her experiences might influence her interpretation of raw data collected. Additionally, the researcher's academic supervisor provided a similar support as the critical friend but from a different perspective. In hindsight, it would have been beneficial and useful if the researcher had kept a written diary of her experiences throughout the process. This process would have assisted her in further analysing her own thoughts as she progressed her research study. It would also have supported the self-reflection process further.

This level of insider status ensured a number of positive factors for the researcher. These factors related to the pre-established experiential knowledge of the case and to building trusting relationships with gatekeepers, participants and stakeholders. However, it also presented challenges to the researcher. For instance, the researcher's seat at ETB Board level was advantageous in relation to making contacts and disseminating information to the absolute gatekeepers (Board executive) and the Board members. However, from the outset, the researcher was mindful of a potential conflict of interest and was careful not to let her position on the Board of the ETB place pressure on the interviewees in this regard. The assurance of confidentiality and anonymity was imperative as too was building trust between herself and the interviewees and focus group participants. The main issue for the researcher as an insider was the creation and maintenance of relationships with gatekeepers, participants and stakeholders. The researcher realised the imperative to protect the identity of the sources of the qualitative data which was collected particularly in

relation to school personnel. This involved using an encrypted identifying code for participants and also ensuring that the final draft of the thesis was reviewed for identifying factors. The researcher spent a minimum of twelve months establishing links with each Principal and creating a trusting relationship with them, this was particularly important for the four principals that were not as well known to the researcher. This was imperative given the insider status of the researcher and the fact that the ETB were open to considering the implementation of the research recommendations. This process commenced when the researcher contacted each of the principals in October 2015, following the official commencement of her research study, and explained the stakeholder samples required from their school. The researcher outlined that phase one of data collection would not take place until October/November of 2016 but that she would endeavour to build up a rapport with each of the principals and career guidance counsellors (CGC) and Social, Personal, Health Education (SPHE) teachers over the coming year.

The insider knowledge held by the researcher assisted the honesty and openness of the process, as the principals were aware that she could appreciate the context of each individual case and the overall ETB scheme. This eliminated the need for principals to overexplain minor points or practices as they were already known and understood. The researcher's insider understanding of the ETB scheme and the mental health support services available in the region, enabled her to bore deeper into the experiences of each Principal and elicit significant information. An example of this is contained in chapter five, where a Principal recounted a case of a student admitted to an adult psychiatric ward due to a dearth of appropriate resources.

The researcher's personal experiences of the education system and her position as a teacher and a member of three Boards of Management, ranging from DEIS contexts to more affluent middle-class catchments, meant that she was practiced in viewing policy from a class-based perspective. While this was a strength, it was also a challenge, particularly throughout the interview process. From the outset the researcher was mindful of the selection and phrasing of her questions and therefore she took feedback from her Academic Supervisor and a critical friend<sup>6</sup> to ensure the questions were

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<sup>6</sup> The critical friend was an experienced teacher from a voluntary secondary school in another catchment area.

neutral and appropriate. When the questions were finalised, the researcher had to be careful during the interview not to let her own views and perspectives influence the tone of the questions, her behaviour and body language. It was imperative that the researcher maintained a distance when key issues were being discussed, particularly where the researcher had an opposing view or experience of the subject matter. In such cases, the researcher was mindful to maintain her composure, allow the interviewee to voice their opinions and not to indicate her dissention by word or gesture. While this practice is challenging, the researcher's insider status allowed her to anticipate where such issues might arise and ensure she was composed and in a peaceable, diplomatic frame of mind going into each interview process. The researcher had also engaged in much critical self-reflection in the first year of the research study (October 2015-2016), commencing engagement in mindfulness practice and yoga, which augmented her innate ability to listen without judgement and immediate reaction.

The researcher had concerns that principals might try to filter their attitudes and opinions on the education system, in which they operated, given her position on the Board. She confronted this issue directly by acknowledging to the interviewee that firstly she had been elected to the position as a staff representative and that she was committed to staff welfare and wellbeing. The researcher also thought it best to name the concern and ask the principals if they felt assured of their confidentiality and anonymity prior to commencing the process. All indicated that they felt assured by this and that they trusted the researcher in the process particularly in light of her position as a staff representative on the ETB. In the process of certain interviews, and at particular moments of disclosure, the interviewee reiterated that she was the only person who would listen to the recordings, for instance when a Principal spoke about what he perceived as unethical enrolment practices in a particular town.

The student surveys were less challenging as the researcher was not known to the students in seven of the eight schools. Therefore, the researcher was viewed by the students as an outsider coming in to conduct a survey. A challenge relating to '*insider status*' also arose in one school where the researcher needed to survey students she had taught in the past. Nevertheless, the researcher anticipated that a teacher/student dynamic could affect the survey process and therefore precautionary efforts were made

to ensure these respondents did not feel obligated to participate. For instance, a colleague from the ETB who had not taught the students in a formal manner but had engaged with them on a pastoral level was present to explain the survey process and issues of confidentiality and anonymity; and to ensure that the students did not feel obligated to participate. The researcher was mindful of the potential sensitivities of the areas explored through the student survey and therefore she established herself as a neutral third party who was there to listen and record but was not there to make judgement or influence. The importance of establishing this type of role in such delicate circumstances is outlined by Schwarz (2002, p.42).

In order to ensure a student perspective, the issue had been a subject of discussion with the YAP prior to conducting the survey. The YAP was of the opinion that the students would not feel compelled to participate in the survey and would understand their right to opt out if desired. The YAP outlined that a culture of student voice and student autonomy had existed in the school over many years and that students were well-accustomed to participation in surveys and questionnaires such as the My World Survey, Drinkaware Alcohol Awareness Programme pilot and various other local studies. The YAP expressed the view that the majority of students either understood it was a voluntary process or were capable of coming to this understanding. The YAPs view proved true as 100% of the student cohort opted to participate in the survey process.

In addition, the researcher understood that establishing positive working relationships with teachers was also critical to the progression of the research study. The researcher's experience in the field had informed her of a tendency by many teachers to be guarded about their opinions. The researcher felt that the teachers and the CGCs' attitudes, opinions and experiences were central to the research study and therefore worked significantly on building up a rapport with these stakeholders prior to the commencement of the research study and data collection. Given the researcher's role in her own setting as a Year Head and School Development Planner, the researcher had built up positive working relationships with many CGCs across the ETB scheme. For instance, in 2014, the researcher had voluntarily met with a number of CGCs to draft a template for a whole school guidance plan across the eight schools. In order to bring the plan to fruition, the researcher along with a team of Guidance Counsellors

and teachers established a working group to develop the plan within a specified timeframe. This opportunity allowed the researcher to establish a positive working relationship and a trust-basis with teaching staff relevant to her desired teacher sample.

The parents/guardians from the focus group did not know the researcher previously which eliminated any issues which may have arisen from the researcher as a teacher. However, they were aware of the researcher's position on the ETB as a Board member. Therefore, time was spent discussing the motivation for the research, the concepts of anonymity and confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any time. The parents/guardians were reassured that they would not be identified, and all consented after reading the information sheet provided at the time of the meeting. The focus group was organised around a pre-scheduled parents' forum meeting which ensured representation from each of the eight sample schools.

The researcher's insider status proved critical to appreciating and understanding the quintain. Once the researcher had established positive, working relationships with the principals, teachers, students and parents/guardians and they came to understand that this research was not motivated by a desire to collect data on them personally but to listen and hear their voices in relation to their experiences regarding their school communities transition to a settings-base for mental health promotion.

Additionally, in 2019 the researcher took on the role as a Junior Cycle for Teachers Associate. Although this was after the data collection phase it assisted her in her understanding of the policy as text phase (exosystemic level) of Junior Cycle reform and more insightfully the policy as discourse (mesosystemic level) phase and the policy as effects (microsystemic level) at the coalface. These insights assisted the analysis of chapter seven in relation to teachers experiences of *the Framework for Junior Cycle (2015)*.

### **3.4 Selection of the Sample**

The researcher identified the stakeholders for each case as: the principals, students, teachers and parents/guardians. She commenced the fieldwork by conducting interviews with each of the eight principals. She conducted quantitative surveys with all of the fifth-

year students across the eight sample schools as well as a sample of teachers, parents/guardians and students from all schools in the qualitative focus group sessions.

**3.4.1 Sample of Principals**

All principals in the sample ETB schools (n=8) were included in the data collection phase. In terms of gender, there were six male principals to two female principals. The principals’ teaching and management experience is illustrated in table 3.1. All the principals had ten years or more teaching experience; five had over twenty years teaching experience. Three of the principals led non -DEIS schools and five led DEIS schools.

**Table 3.1 Principals’ Teaching and Management Experience Across the Eight Schools<sup>7</sup>**

YEARS	0	0-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40
Teaching Experience				1	2	4			1
Prior Senior Management Experience		1	6	1					
Prior Experience as a Deputy Principal	4	3	1						
Years of Experience as a Principal		4	4						

The interviews commenced in September 2015 and concluded in December 2015. The broad areas of focus for the principals’ interviews included: the role and function of principals and schools in contemporary communities; the scale of mental health issues presenting in schools; the existence of interschool competition and a need for public relations and marketing; issues around enrolment and progression of students and the Framework for Junior Cycle in schools.

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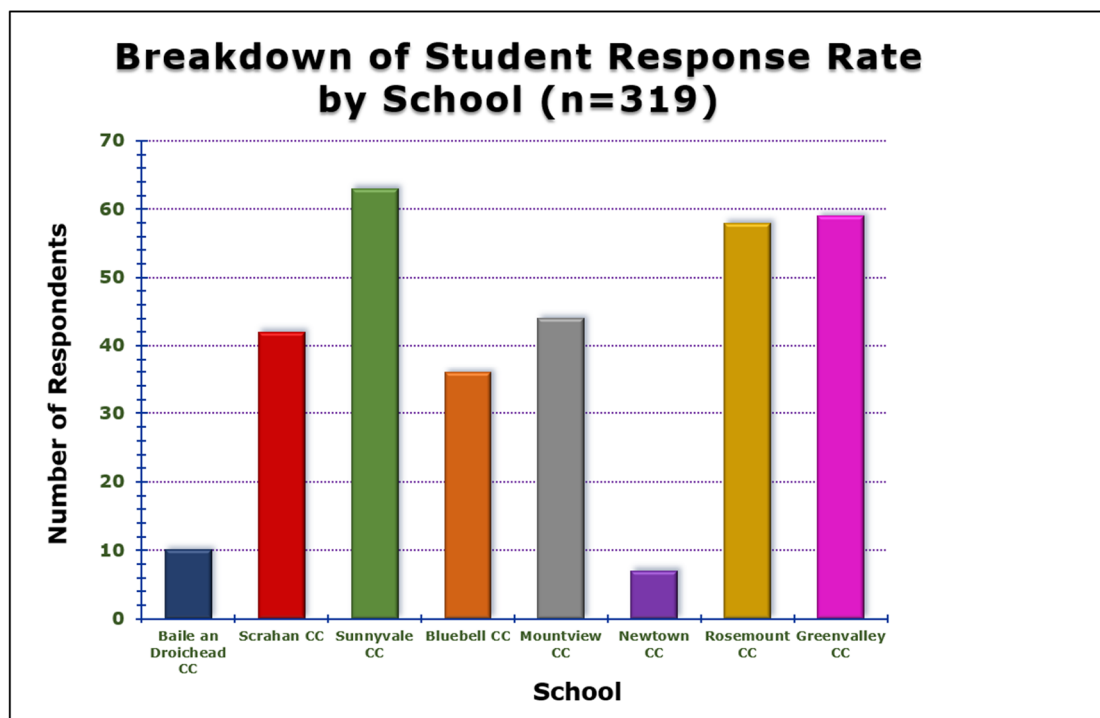
<sup>7</sup> The survey was conducted in the academic year 2016/2017



### 3.4.2 Sample of Students

The researcher considered the most appropriate cohort of students to sample and decided to concentrate on Senior Cycle students due to the sensitive nature of some of the questions and the need for the sample to have experienced state examination pressure in order to answer a selection of the questions. The researcher felt that a sixth-year sample would be distracted from the data collection phase by their Leaving Certificate examinations, particularly as the collection of data was scheduled for March and April (2017) which would coincide with pre-examinations, language orals and practical examinations. It was decided that to conduct the survey with fifth year students at that point in the academic year meant they had completed almost half of Senior Cycle but were in a less stressful place which would allow for a more measured and meaningful engagement with the survey. Additionally, as the fifth-year sample included students that had recently completed the Transition Year programme, it was felt that this would enhance the scope of the sample as these students may have a more considered opinion on teaching and learning within schooling, having experienced this holistic programme. The student sample included the entire fifth-year population of each of the eight sample schools. The average age profile of the sample was 16 years of age.

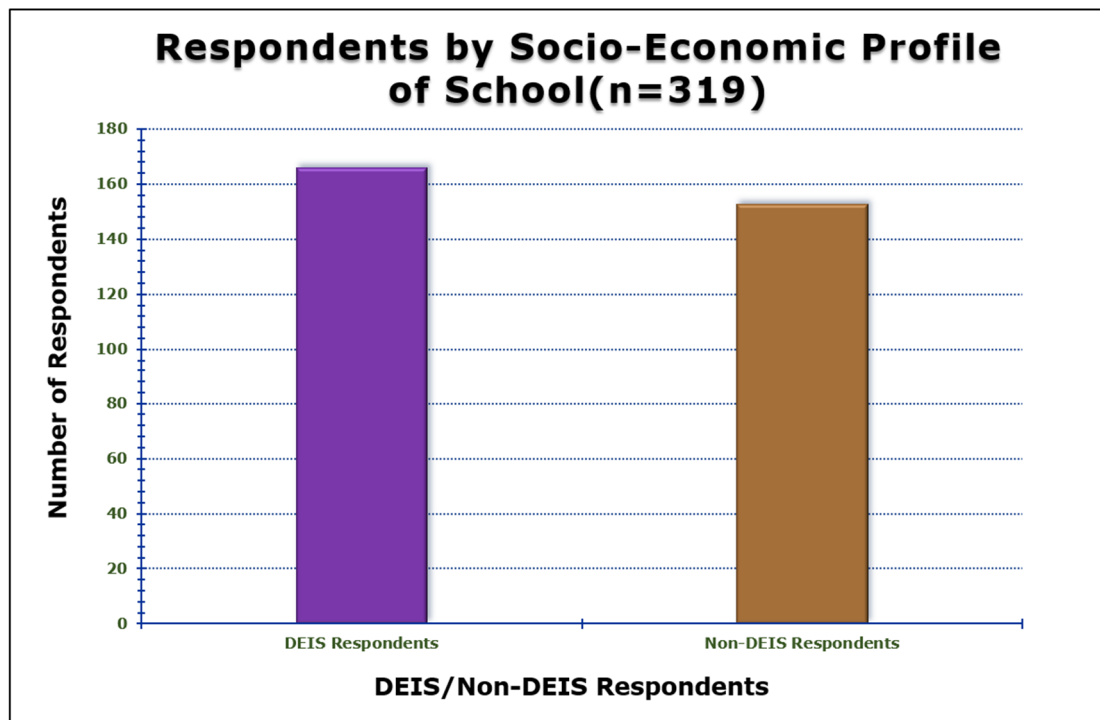
**Figure 3.2 Breakdown of Student Response Rate by Sample School (case)**



The entire sample was randomised based on attendance on the scheduled date which was decided by the researcher in consultation with school Principals and CGCs. The inclusion of all students in the fifth-year groups ensured a spread of socio-economic backgrounds and cognitive ability. In some cases, the sample size was relatively small for instance, Baile an Droichead and Newtown Community Colleges. These samples were reflective of the smaller size of these schools and as the data is predominantly presented scheme-wide this was considered appropriate.

The researcher recognises that a significant number of students with lower SES profiles attend non-DEIS schools as outlined by Smyth (2004). The practice of students from a more affluent background attending DEIS schools is less common as schools maintain their DEIS status based on the percentage of students who qualify for a medical card. However, the study acknowledges that it can occur in a minority of cases usually pertaining to students with a special educational need. This study seeks to explore the responses of school communities in the sample. The analysis of responses yields data which suggests that in relation to the more serious mental health issues, there is a greater level of need in DEIS contexts. It is acknowledged that the scale of more serious mental health issues such as suicidal ideation and self-harm are also significant among students sampled in non-DEIS schools and that therefore the system fails to provide additional supports for students from lower socioeconomic profiles that choose to attend non-DEIS schools.

**Figure 3.3**    **Categorisation of Respondents by Socio-Economic Profile of School**



The fact that each of the eight sample schools are co-educational ensured a gender sensitivity. The selection was equitably recruited in that it was voluntary with no incentives given. The sample was motivated to take part as it was explained that a summary of their schools' individual sample would be shared with school management to assist SDP and therefore younger students and future students would benefit from their insights. Three hundred and nineteen students took part in the survey which was 100% of those present on the scheduled dates and 93% of the potential sample as 7% were absent on the data sampling dates.

### **3.4.3    Samples for Adult Focus Groups**

The researcher established four stakeholder focus groups in total, the adult stakeholders included: parents/guardians, teachers and CGCs. This was achieved by identifying the focus groups and liaising with the appropriate personnel in the ETB in charge of scheduling each of the stakeholder groups' multiannual meetings. Once the schedule had been established, the researcher arranged a meeting with the coordinators of each group and sought permission/assistance to arrange a focus group with members of the preestablished groups. This was forthcoming in all cases and the

researcher viewed the annual schedule of meetings and identified an appropriate date to meet the potential participants, for each focus group session, in advance.

The researcher contacted all groups and outlined her research and the purpose of the study. She distributed information sheets and consent forms and requested that the potential participants read them and take the time necessary to decide whether or not they were willing to participate. The focus group date and time was agreed with each group and an arrangement was made whereby potential participants could make direct contact with the researcher in the event of any issues or queries arising. The researcher indicated that the consent forms would be collected prior to the commencement of the focus group proper. Any potential focus group participants that were not in attendance at those pre-meetings were emailed the information sheet and consent forms in advance of the proposed focus group date. Additionally, all focus group members were reminded of the impending focus group, one week in advance, by the researcher and/or the co-ordinator. The information sheets and consent forms were reissued via email one week in advance also.

#### **3.4.3.1 Sample of Parents/Guardians (n= 15)**

The inclusion of parents/guardians in the stakeholder sample yielded rich data in relation to the parents/guardians' perspective on the impact of the education and schooling system on their children. The parents/guardians were accessed using the structures in existence in the ETB, for instance, each post-primary school has an established Board of Management and Parents' Council. Each year two or more representatives from the Parents' Council of each school are invited to attend and contribute to the ETB Parents' Forum on issues relating to school matters. There is a gender balance in that each of the eight Parents' Councils must nominate one male and one female and additional representation must be gender proportionate. The Parents' Forum therefore comprises of a minimum of 16 parents/guardians, at least two from each school in the scheme. The researcher used this established forum of parents/guardians as the focus group sample. The focus group lasted for ninety minutes. The main objective of the parents/guardians' focus group was to establish the opinions of parents/guardians in relation to the findings from the principals' interviews and student survey data. Aspects of the phase one data findings were presented in pictorial format on an overhead projector and the parents/guardians were asked to offer their perspectives. This method successfully gathered alternative

opinions on issues such as pressure on students, parents/guardians' attitudes to progression and the teaching of, and for, wellbeing. The parents/guardians' perspectives added a richness to the data collection phases and gave an adult perspective from outside the school setting which became important in the data analysis phase.

#### **3.4.3.2 Sample of Teachers**

This research study focused on the attitudes and experiences of a cross section of teachers. The existing structures within the ETB yielded a number of teacher-led communities of practice to choose from. However, many of these were bound in terms of subject area, gender and teaching experience. Therefore, the researcher chose two specific teacher-led communities of practices as suitable focus groups; these were the Transition Year teachers and a group of teachers that were newly appointed to the ETB scheme. Both communities of practice were selected because they had a variety of participants in terms of age, gender and teaching experience and the groups of teachers were not bound by subject area. The focus group session also explored teachers' attitudes to wellbeing as a curricular area in the New Junior Cycle. These groups were already formed in Community of Practices and the researcher approached the coordinating teacher of each group in January 2018 to request that she could access the group at their next meeting to recruit interested parties to take part in a focus group. The coordinators were positive to the request and permitted the researcher to address the group. The researcher outlined the nature of the study and provided the teachers with an information sheet and consent form. The teachers present indicated their willingness to take part and the focus group was scheduled for their next meeting. The teachers were mixed from different subject areas which added a breadth of perspectives in relation to the new Junior Certificate in particular. The teacher focus group explored teachers' perspectives regarding the educational system's ability to ensure meaningful mental health for students. Analysed data collection during phase one with the principals and students was presented to set the focus from discussion. Teachers focused their attention on several significant issues such as the structure and implementation of the new Junior Cycle model with reference to wellbeing as a curricular area. The teachers also focused on the lack of space on the timetable and the tensions which were emerging between subjects. The orientation of the educational system towards viewing points as 'success criteria' was identified and

explored in relation to the effects on teaching and learning at the coalface. The teachers' focus groups added an insider perspective on the ability of the current system to support students' mental health and wellbeing. It also raised several significant questions in relation to the meaning and constitution of wellbeing.

### **3.4.3.3 Sample of Career Guidance Counsellors (CGC)**

The career guidance counsellor focus group was established by contacting the CGCs network in the region where the study was conducted. The researcher held a meeting with the coordinator of this network and outlined the nature of the research. She requested that members would be favourable to take part in a focus group prior to their next meeting as a group. This request was supported by the coordinator and all members were invited to attend the focus group via email, they were also provided with an information sheet and consent form and the contact details of the researcher. The focus group was scheduled for April 2018 and eight CGCs were present, and half of these were from ETB schools with the remaining based in voluntary secondary schools, this added an interesting dimension and depth to the focus group particularly in relation to progression and what was deemed as progression in different types of schools. The purpose of the career guidance counsellor focus group session was to focus on their experiences of mental health promotion at the coalface. It explored the types of mental health related issues presenting in their offices as the 'go to' person within the school. The focus group lasted one hour in total.

### **3.4.3.4 Sample of Students**

The student focus group sample were selected in consultation with the Employment Mentor. The researcher was made aware of the annual calendar for meetings of the student forum. The author acknowledges that the student forum representatives presented as students who were relatively interested in their studies and in progression to third level or further study and that this may be at the expense of students who were less engaged. This reality could be considered as a potential limitation to the study. The student forum was scheduled to meet three times during the academic year 2017/2018 and hosted students from each of the sample schools at each meeting. It was decided that the researcher would attend the second student forum meeting of the year and request participation from those present. The study was explained to the students and information and consent sheets were distributed. The interested students

were asked to provide their email addresses and the researcher provided hers in return. The researcher then followed-up a week later and reminded students that there was no compulsion on them to participate but if they were willing that they should have their Parental consent forms signed and return them to the researcher via their Student Council Liaison teacher.

The student focus groups aimed to ascertain the students' reactions to the data collected during the student surveys in phase one. The students' interpretation of a number of terms was explored, for instance, self-harm. Additionally, the students' reaction to the quantitative data was interesting during the focus group. The statistics in relation to self-harm and suicidal ideation appeared to be generally accepted by the students. The students' perspectives on '*success*' within the post-primary system provided greater depth to the quantitative data. The combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods in relation to the student voice, led to a broad and comprehensive understanding of the student voice.

### **3.5 Overview of the Eight Cases (Samples)**

This section details the eight cases included in this multi-case research study, providing an overview of their status, catchment and position in relation to progression to Higher Education<sup>8</sup>. A comprehensive overview of each of the eight cases (schools) are outlined in Table 3.2. The sample consisted of eight individual post-primary schools operating under the aegis of the ETB; five of the eight schools are designated DEIS (cases 1,2,3,6,7). The eight individual cases sampled span a diverse geographical and socio-economic region. Geographically, the sample traverses the entire county sampled, encompassing rural and urban areas. While six of the eight schools sampled are multidenominational (cases 1-6), it is noteworthy that two of the schools operate under the joint trusteeship of the ETB and a religious trustee. In both cases this was due to an amalgamation process which occurred in the 1980s. The schools were given pseudonyms in order to encourage the stakeholders to disclose fully their attitudes and experiences of attempting to create a mental health promoting school. Additionally, the researcher felt that the data provided from some of the sample schools could have the potential to negatively affect enrolments and therefore pseudonyms were used to protect the school's identity.

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<sup>8</sup> Overt league tables are technically banned in Ireland. However, a defacto league table system exists based on HEI progression rates and these progression figures are detailed in The Irish Times annually

**Table 3.2 Detailed Overview of the Eight Coeducational Sample Cases**

Name <sup>9</sup>	Location/ Designation	Religious affiliation	Special Classes	HE progression ratings <sup>10</sup>	SNA ratio
<b>Baile an Droichead CC</b>	DEIS	Non-denominational	2	Not ranked	13.5
<b>Newtown CC</b>	DEIS	Non-denom.	3	Not ranked	8
<b>Scrahan CC</b>	DEIS	Non-denom.	1	22 <sup>nd</sup> of 24	6
<b>Bluebell CC</b>	Non-DEIS	Non-denom.	0	9 <sup>th</sup> of 24	3
<b>Greenvalley CC</b>	Non-DEIS (Gael-choláiste)	Non-denom.	0	6 <sup>th</sup> of 24	0
<b>Mountview CC</b>	DEIS	Non-denom.	0	14 <sup>th</sup> of 24	9.5
<b>Sunnyvale CC</b>	DEIS	Non-denom.	0	24 <sup>th</sup> of 24	2
<b>Rosemount CC</b>	Non- DEIS	Non-denom.	2	14 <sup>th</sup> of 24	5.5

Statistics as per DES  
2018/2019 database;  
NCSE database  
2018/2019

<sup>9</sup> Sobriquets have been used in order to safeguard the anonymity of the sample schools where possible

<sup>10</sup> Statistics based on data from the Central Applications Office (CAO) and State Examinations Commission (SEC) under Freedom of Information request and are defacto league tables. The rankings represent the measurable data in the public domain. A total of 24 post-primary schools are ranked in order of merit in accordance with the scale of students progressing to recognised Higher Education Institutions in the geographical area of the sample. Please note: only the top 24 are listed out of a possible 26 post-primary schools



### **3.5.1 Case One - Baile an Droichead**

Baile an Droichead Community College is a co-educational post-primary school located in an urban centre. The school has a population of one hundred and ninety-eight students; 46% are female and 54% are male. The school is designated DEIS (urban, band one) and serves a catchment area which is categorised as disadvantaged to very disadvantaged on the 'All-Island HP Deprivation Index'<sup>11</sup>. Baile an Droichead Community College opened two special classrooms for students with ASD in the academic year 2014/2015 and it employs 13.5 Special Needs Assistants (SNA). The school did not feature on the Irish Times list of feeder schools in 2018<sup>12</sup>.

### **3.5.2 Case Two - Newtown Community College**

Newtown Community College is a co-educational post-primary school located in an urban centre. The school has a population of sixty-four students; 34% are female and 66% are male. The school is designated DEIS (urban, band one) and serves a catchment area which is categorised as disadvantaged to very disadvantaged on the 'All-Island HP Deprivation Index'. Newtown Community College opened three special classrooms, two for students with ASD and one for students with an emotional disturbance in the past decade. The school employs 8 SNAs. The school did not feature on the Irish Times list of feeder schools in 2018.

### **3.5.3 Case Three - Scrahan Community College**

Scrahan Community College is a co-educational post-primary school located in an urban centre in the county. The school has a population of three hundred and sixty-nine students; 54% are female and 46% are male. The school is designated DEIS (urban, band one) and serves a catchment area which has a mixed profile with the majority of the catchment area ranging from marginally above average to marginally below average with significant pockets of disadvantage interspersed according to data provided by the 'All-Island HP Deprivation Index'. Scrahan Community College opened one special class for students with ASD in 2016 and employs 6 SNAs.

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<sup>11</sup> (Source: The All-Island HP Deprivation index is compiled by the All-Island Research Observatory (AIRO) in association with NUI, Maynooth.)

<sup>12</sup> The Irish Times list of feeder schools is relevant to this research study and to the description of schools as it has become a defacto league table in the Irish context. This is further discussed in chapter five.

### **3.5.4 Case Four – Bluebell Community College**

Bluebell Community College is a co-educational post-primary school located in an urban centre in the county. The school has a population of two hundred and thirteen students; 50% are female and 50% are male. The school is a non-DEIS and serves a catchment area which is categorised as disadvantaged to marginally below average with a significant proportion of the catchment classified as very disadvantaged according to the ‘All-Island HP Deprivation Index’. Bluebell Community College has no special class and employs 3 SNAs.

### **3.5.5 Case Five - Greenvalley Community College**

Greenvalley Community College is a co-educational post-primary school, operating through the medium of Irish in an urban centre in the region where the study is located. The school has a population of three hundred and twenty students; 51% are female and 49% are male. The school is a non-DEIS and serves the same immediate catchment area as Baile an Droichead Community College (case one). This data is previously represented in figure 3.2. However, it must be noted that the actual catchment spans the majority of the county where prospective students are not within the proximity of an Irish medium school or Aonad<sup>13</sup> but wish to attend an Irish-medium school. Greenvalley Community College has no special class and does not employ an SNA. The school was ranked 6th of 24 schools in the location of the study according to the Irish Times list of top feeder schools in 2018.

### **3.5.6 Case Six - Mountview Community College**

Mountview Community College is a co-educational rural post-primary school located near a small urban centre in the county. The school has a population of two hundred and seventy-seven students, 46% are female and 54% are male. The school is designated DEIS (rural, band two) and serves a catchment area which is categorised as disadvantaged to very disadvantaged on the ‘All-Island HP Deprivation Index’. Mountview Community College has no special classes for students with SEN and it employs 9.5 SNAs.

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<sup>13</sup> Aonad is the Irish word for unit. This describes an Irish-medium provision within an English-medium school

### **3.5.7 Case Seven - Sunnyvale Community College**

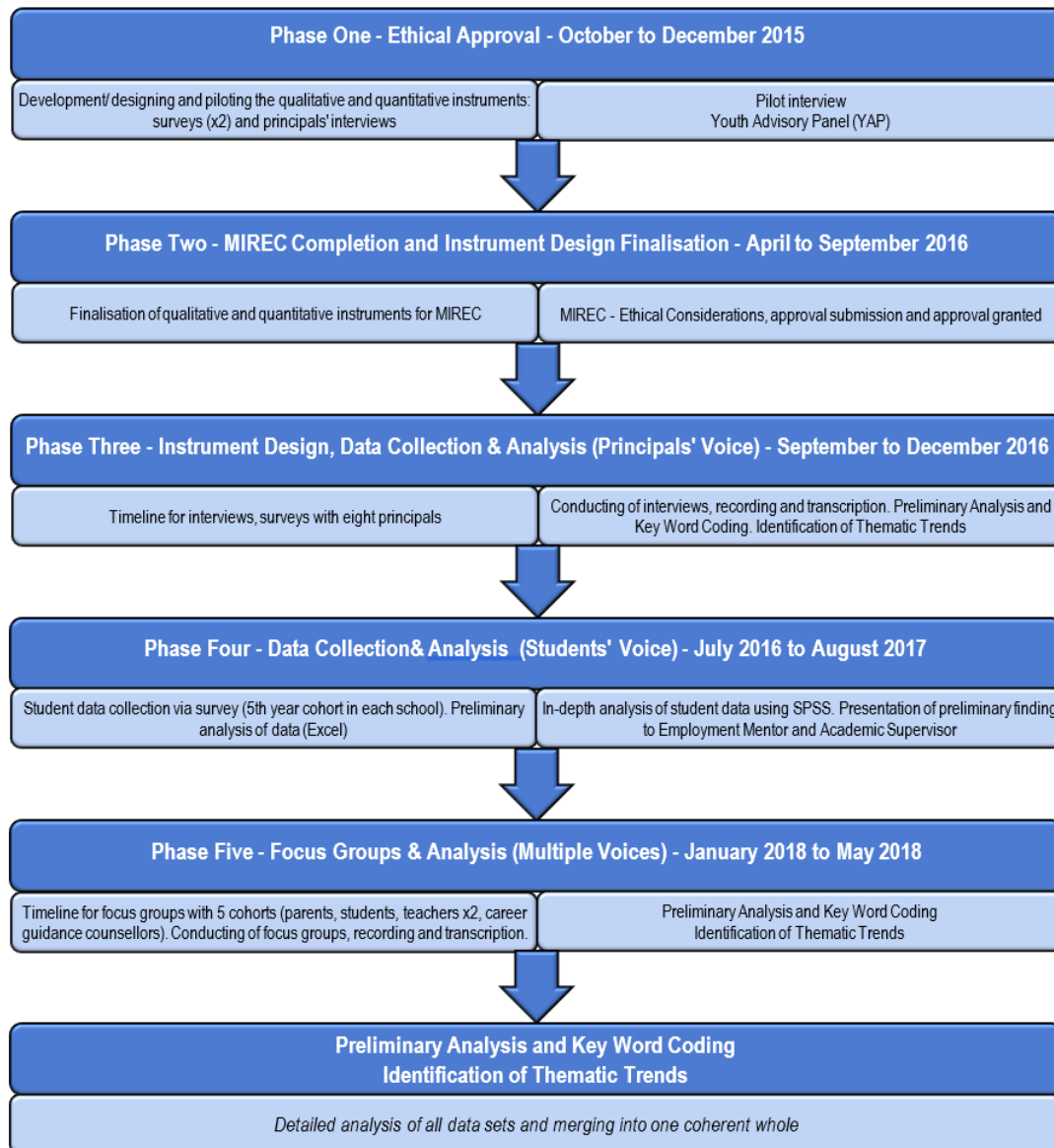
Sunnyvale Community College is a co-educational post-primary school located in a rural catchment area in the county. The school has a population of four hundred and sixty-eight students, 48% are female and 52% are male. The school is designated DEIS (rural, band two) and serves a catchment area which is categorised as disadvantaged to very disadvantaged on the 'All-Island HP Deprivation Index'. Sunnyvale Community College has no special classes for students with SEN and it employs 2 SNAs.

### **3.5.8 Case Eight - Rosemount Community College**

Rosemount Community College is a co-educational post-primary school located in an isolated, stand-alone rural catchment area in the county. The school has a population of four hundred and sixty-nine students; 46% are female and 54% are male. The school is a non-DEIS school and serves a catchment area which is categorised as disadvantaged on the 'All-Island HP Deprivation Index'. Rosemount Community College has two special classes for students with SEN and it employs 5.5 SNAs. The school was ranked 14<sup>th</sup> out of 24 schools in the location of the study according to the Irish Times list of top feeder schools in 2018.

### 3.6 Methodology Timeline

**Table 3.3 Visual Timeline for Methodology<sup>14</sup>**



### 3.7 Ethical Considerations

The research study involves human subjects and therefore it required ethical approval from the Mary Immaculate Research Ethic Committee (MIREC). The terms of the IRC scholarship funding dictated that ethical approval from the MIREC had to be secured within three months of the commencement of the research study. The researcher was committed to observing ethical standards set out in legislation and by MIREC. To this end, the researcher engaged in training and learning opportunities

<sup>14</sup> The overarching timeline for the entire project in the form of a Ghant Chart is attached - Appendix 2

presented by the employer and the HEI in conjunction with her own research into the area. For instance, the HEI offered an ethical research training programme offered by the Epigeum online platform. The Employment Partner provided training in relation to *the Data Protection Acts* (1998-2003), the *General Data Protection Acts* (1998-2018), *the Freedom of Information Acts* (1997-2003) and *Child Protection Procedures* (2011; 2017).

The researcher was guided by several documents such as *the Nuremburg Code* (1947) which indicates fundamental principles such as consent, proportionality, necessity and the right to withdraw. The Nuremburg Code emerged in the post WW2 era and challenged historical rights perspective by conferring rights directly to the subjects rather than solely concentrated on the obligations of the researcher. *The Declaration of Helsinki* (1964; 1989; 1996) underscored the concept of informed consent in relation to children as research subjects. *The European Charter of Fundamental Rights* (2013) recognises a range of personal, civil, political, economic and social and was enshrined into law under the Lisbon Treaty (2007). The charter contains several principles which impact on research: Article 3 protects the right to integrity of the person; Article 7 respects private and family life; Article 8 protects personal data and Article 13 protects the freedom of the arts and sciences. The protection of human rights provided by *the Constitution of Ireland* (1937) and *the European Convention on Human Rights* (1953) and *the European Convention on Human Rights Act* (2003) were observed throughout the research study.

### **3.7.1 Sampling Deliberations**

It was imperative that the application for ethical approval recognised the vulnerabilities and risks associated with sampling young people but also focused on the benefits for mental health promotion. An assessment of risk and benefit were key considerations for the researcher particularly in the case of the student survey and focus group. Similar to Daley (2013) and Carter (2009), the researcher found that calculating and balancing risk and benefit of including young people in the sample as challenging. However, after careful consideration she felt the inclusion of the student voice would greatly enhance the research Daley (2013) argues that there is an over-focus on reducing risk to young people which can act as a barrier or restriction to their participation in research. Carter (2009) argues that such practices are silencing and

excluding the voices of young people and children which need to be included and heard. Additionally, the development of the theoretical framework reinforced the imperative to examine experiences and attitudes of all stakeholders. Therefore, to exclude the student voice would exclude a key microsystemic level player. This point has been highlighted by Kellett (2011) who argues that young people should be recognised for their potential to produce valuable insights and knowledge in their own lives and context. Subsequently, the student voice was included through qualitative focus groups and a quantitative survey (n=319) and this data considerably widened the scope and depth of the research study. Similarly, the exclusion of parents/guardians was reconsidered as it was felt that the inclusion of parents/guardians ensured the research accurately reflected the entire school community. In the final plan, all stakeholders were included to ensure a fully inclusive voice of the school community.

The researcher considered Article 12 of *the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) which recognised the right of children and young people to have their views heard on matters which relate to them and for their views to be afforded appropriate weight in proportion with their age and level of maturity.

### **3.7.2 Informed Consent and Assent**

The researcher created information documents and consent forms for each of the adult participating groups such as principals, parents/guardians and teachers. All adult participants were presented with the information documents in advance of the data collection phases and were asked to return the signed consent forms should they wish to participate in the study. The proposed dates for the data collection phases were made known to the participants and they returned the signed consent forms at these sessions.

In relation to young people, the acquisition of informed consent or/and assent of a young person in conjunction with the consent of their Parent/Guardian where appropriate, is an acknowledged ethical standard. Alderson and Morrow (2011, p.23) define consent as '*the legal means of transferring responsibility for risk-taking from the researcher to the participant*'. The fifth-year student sample consisted of students aged from 15 to 17-years. Parental/Guardian consent was required for any students in the sample under eighteen years of age. Written informed consent was obtained from

a Parent/Guardian of each student/minor along with the assent of the student. This was introduced as a safeguard to ensure that the students did not feel obligated to take part because their Parent/Guardian had consented. The consent process involved creating information sheets and consent forms for parents/guardians (see Appendix 3&4) and students.

The need for appropriately worded and reading-age appropriate information sheets for minors (students) was imperative (Appendix 5). The researcher devised information sheets and consent forms at an appropriate reading age and level for the age of the target audience (approximate reading age of ten to twelve years). This was confirmed through the feedback from the researcher's Youth Advisory Panel (YAP)<sup>15</sup>. The researcher arranged a pre-meeting with each school and the student information sheets and consent forms were read and explained to the students who were also asked to bring a Parental/Guardian information and consent form home for discussion with their parent/guardian. It was felt that this would ensure greater engagement from parents/guardians and their child would be fully briefed and aware of the rationale for the study and the data collection process. This process was repeated in each of the eight schools involved. The consent forms outlined clearly to students and their parents/guardians that they could '*opt out*' at any time without reproach or penalty and no reason or explanation would be required. Contact details for the researcher were also contained on the information sheets and consent forms. The collection of the signed consent forms took up to two weeks in each non-DEIS school, delays were experienced with a minority due to forgetfulness, absenteeism and misplacement of forms. This challenge was successfully overcome by having the link teacher in each school to collect forms and support students who needed supplementary forms etc. In a minority of cases, the teacher contacted the Parent/Guardian by telephone to remind them of the form and to ensure they would return it, indicating whether they consented or not. Additionally, the researcher was mindful of the additional challenges, that conducting research with young people in a DEIS context, could create in relation to Parental/Guardian consent. Five of eight schools were designated DEIS and there were cases where parents/guardians did not readily engage in the consent process due to having English as an additional language and/or severe literacy deficits. In

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<sup>15</sup> YAP refers to a Youth Advisory Panel. The YAP for this study is explained on page 42.

anticipation of this challenge, the researcher had enlisted the support of the career guidance counsellor in each school. The CGCs had agreed to follow up with the parents/guardians of any students under sixteen years of age with a telephone call to explain the researcher study information document and request consent. The CGCs had to follow up on about 5% of cases in the DEIS (urban) schools. The CGCs reported that on contacting the parents/guardians and reading the research information over the phone, the parents/guardians indicated that they would consent. The information sheet and consent form were resent in hard copy and in all cases was returned by the student.

The researcher consulted the YAP prior to the survey administration days. The YAP suggested that the researcher explain the concepts of consent verbally to students at the beginning of each survey session and check for understanding. The YAP felt that some students would not properly read the information sheet or consent form, others may not fully comprehend the terms ‘confidentially’ and ‘anonymity’ and more would still be sceptical unless they heard it directly from the researcher on the day of the survey. Additionally, the YAP were of the opinion that some students might feel obligated to complete the survey if their school management were present. This point has also been argued by Anderson (2010). The researcher ensured that no management were present during the survey process in each of the eight schools. All the points raised by the YAP were acted upon by the researcher in the survey process.

### **3.7.3 Confidentiality and Anonymity**

Confidentiality is connected to a participants’ consent or assent and is underpinned by a participant’s right to privacy. The right to privacy refers to the basic human right of protecting an individual’s worth, dignity and self-determination. Anonymity in the context of this research study refers to the concealment of a participant’s identity to all parties, with the exception of the researcher. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed by the researcher, verbally and in writing, using the information sheet and consent form. Respondents’ confidentiality and anonymity were respected, and the identity of the schools was protected using sobriquets in place of the real names.

The principals’ pro forma or interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis in their own offices and therefore issues relating to privacy did not emerge. Great care was



taken throughout the transcription process. The audio tapes were transcribed by the researcher and were identifiable only by number and initials; they were stored in a secure locker in the researcher's own home. Similarly, in transcription of data, care was taken so that participants could not be identified. In the case of principals and CGCs, the number was finite and therefore codification was used to remove the most obvious identifiers such as the name and school location. Whereas for parents/guardians, students and teacher participants anonymisation was used. A coded, encrypted system for respondent identification was created and all data was and continues to be stored securely. The transcripts will be destroyed once the study and retention of records period is completed.

In relation to the focus groups with adult stakeholders, participants' requests for focus-group contributions to be anonymous and confidential were met with a reiterated guarantee by the researcher. It was made clear that views ascertained as part of a focus group would not identify any one contributor personally. It was also agreed by all contributing teachers that the content of the focus group sessions would remain confidential and that individual's comments would remain confidential outside of the focus group setting. All participants in the focus group sessions were offered an opportunity to opt out at any point in the process.

Student group online interviews were conducted in pre-booked school-based computer rooms where each student had access to a private computer space to protect the students' privacy and anonymity. All the data collected was submitted through Microsoft forms anonymously. The researcher ensured the privacy of the participants was protected by encrypting the data collection instrument and ensuring anonymity and privacy was respected, no unique information was recorded such as names and addresses. On completion of the survey the researcher ensured that all students logged off the computer and closed the computer down completely to ensure a third party could not access their submission.

### **3.7.4 Minimising the Risk of Harm (Wellbeing) – Young people and Vulnerability**

This research study was guided by the principle that *'the greater the vulnerability of the community, the greater the obligation of the researcher to protect it'* as outlined in AOIR (2012, p.1). The researcher considered how she might minimise risks to student participants, she was mindful that given the sensitive nature of the subject matter particularly the questions relating to self-harm and suicidal ideation that it would minimise the risk if the student sample was selected from the Senior Cycle classes rather than Junior Cycle classes. The researcher decided to sample the fifth-year cohort as these students were Senior Cycle student but did not have the pressure of the Leaving Certificate until the following year. The range of ages was broadened by the amalgamation in 5<sup>th</sup> year of students who had progressed directly from Junior Cycle and those that had completed the Transition Year Programme.

This raised the age-profile of participants to 15-17 years of age. While this reduced an element of the risk, it did not eliminate it. The risk associated with surveying 15-17 years olds about issues of concern to them in their lives was considered on probability and scale. Given the sensitive nature of the research topic, the researcher was mindful of the potential vulnerabilities which could not exist with the student sample participating in the study. For this reason, the researcher entered dialogue and consultation with the career guidance counsellor in each school well in advance of the data collection phase. Therefore, the researcher was aware of the vulnerabilities of the student cohort pertaining to each case prior to the survey process. A spectrum of mental health issues from low level anxiety to self-harm and suicidal ideation existed among some cohorts. As well as the contextual challenges such as single-parent families, households in poverty, living with parents/guardians and/or siblings with substance misuse issues, self-harm and/or suicidal ideation of family members, occurrences of death by suicide of family members or close friends etc. Barriers relating to culture and language were evident in some cases particularly in relation to asylum seekers and migrants. This was encountered in the administration of the survey in two of the DEIS urban schools. On each occasion there were two students with language deficits. In those cases, the students were permitted to use an online dictionary on their mobile phones. The researcher also made herself available to them throughout the survey process and allocated them additional time to complete the survey.

The data collection phase of this research study adhered fully to the nationally agreed Child Protection Guidelines<sup>16</sup>. In line with arguments by Alderson and Morrow (2011) the researcher was mindful that research of this nature could pose a significant intrusion into the personal or private lives of individual student participants thus it had the potential to cause distress. Therefore, full consideration was given to the guidelines, arrangements were made in advance to ensure that in the event of a student disclosure during the process the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) or Deputy DLP would be on-site in accordance with the guidelines. The presence of the career guidance counsellor provided support to students.

The researcher ensured that adequate provision was made for the monitoring and support of the participants as they engaged in data collection. The researcher had ensured that the career guidance counsellor was present for the survey as a familiar face for the students to offer support to them. The students were informed that the career guidance counsellor was present should they wish to discuss any issues or concerns which arose for them during the course of the survey or afterwards. The career guidance counsellor also reiterated the voluntary nature of the survey process and that there was another teacher present in another classroom to supervise those who wished to opt out. The students were repeatedly reassured that to opt out was fully acceptable. The students were also reminded of the researcher's contact details should they or their Parent or Guardian wish to make contact in the future. The students were advised that these contact details were also in the possession of the Principal for future reference. It is noteworthy that no student reported feeling distressed or upset by the survey in the short, medium or long-term aftermath.

The focus group session with students took place in a neutral venue away from the school settings. It was felt that students might speak more freely in this environment and this is what transpired. The focus groups were an effective method of revisiting any response trends which arose in the surveys in order to explore what the students' interpretations might be. It also created an opportunity to explore what students felt were the meanings of concepts such as '*self-harm and suicidal ideation*'. The focus group added a qualitative perspective to much of the patterns which emerged following

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<sup>16</sup> The *Child Protection Guidelines* were updated in 2017 after the data collection phase was conducted therefore the earlier guidelines were followed.

analysis of the raw quantitative data. However, given the nature of some of the topics discussed the researcher ensured that there were appropriate personnel from each school on site to ensure that students could exercise their right to opt out or in the event of a student becoming upset or making a disclosure. Each of the school personnel were briefed prior to the focus group session and were aware of their roles. In addition, the ETB Youth Officer was present on the day in order to further support the students and reiterate and reassure them of their right to withdraw without question or penalty.

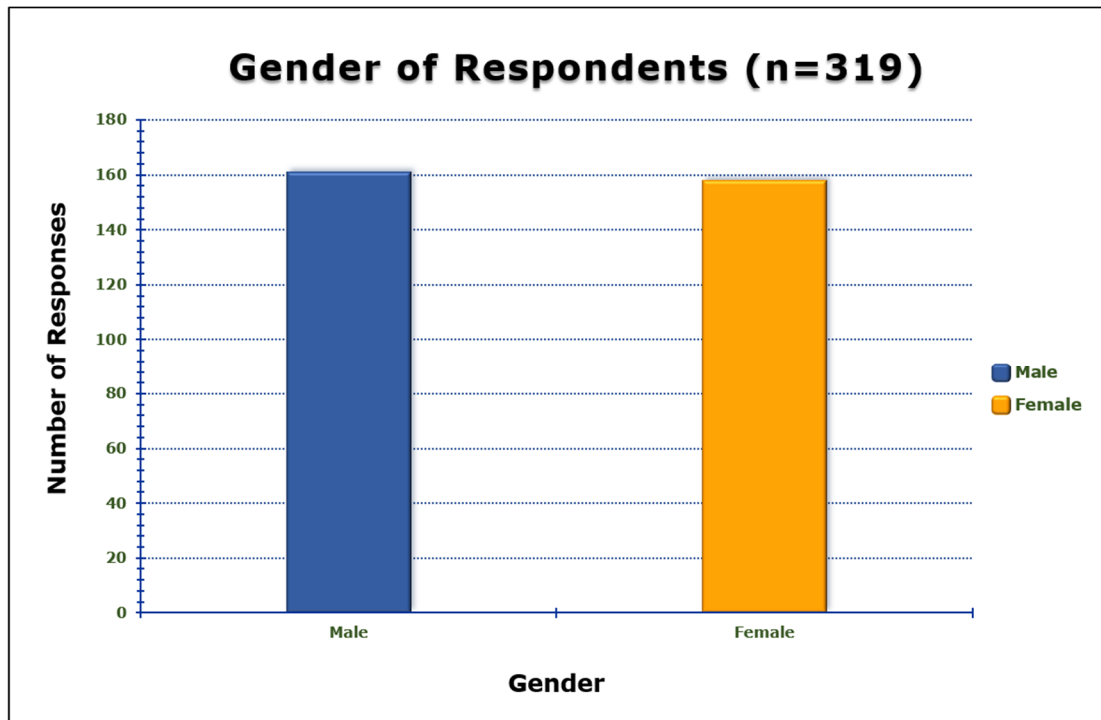
### **3.7.5 Gender Considerations**

Gender sensitivity is a key consideration for the entire research study process. The researcher sought to include male and female perspectives across all samples and data collection modes. The perspectives of both sexes were sought, treated equally and without prejudice. The sample schools have male and female managers, teachers, students and parents/guardians. The gender profile of each sample is presented in table 3.4. The researcher was mindful to ensure gender balance where possible. However, it must be noted that there is an unintended gender imbalance in the sample of school principals, parents/guardians and CGCs. While males represented the majority (6:2) of the sample of principals. While this is not balanced it reflects the national ratio of more males to females in senior management roles relating to education<sup>17</sup>. In total 319 students completed the online survey, representing 92% of the entire population of the potential sample of 347 students. Interestingly, 50.4% (161) of the sample were male and 49.5% (158) were female.

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<sup>17</sup> Lynch, Grummell *et al.* (2012) argue the challenge the 'care ceiling' presents to gender equality in senior management positions in higher education institutions. While their research is concerned with HE, it is noteworthy that this post-primary based research yielded a sample of 8 principals and within that sample, a gender ratio of 6 males to 2 females.

**Figure 3.4 Gender Profile of Student Survey Respondents**



The composition of the student focus groups was formulated using the pre-established and operational Education and Training Board Student Forum comprising of up to thirty-two students, four from each school in the scheme. There is a gender balance in that Students' Council must send forth two male and two female representatives to attend student forum meetings. The student focus group was composed of thirteen male and fifteen female participants as four students were absent on the day.

**Table 3.4 Gender breakdown of all stakeholder samples**

Profile type	Male	Female	Data collection tool
Principals	6	2	Interviews/pro forma
Students	161	158	Survey
Students	13	15	Focus groups
Teachers (TY)	8	9	Focus Group 1
Teachers (NQ)	4	5	Focus Group 2
Career Guidance Counsellors	0	8	Focus Group
Parents/guardians	5	10	Focus groups

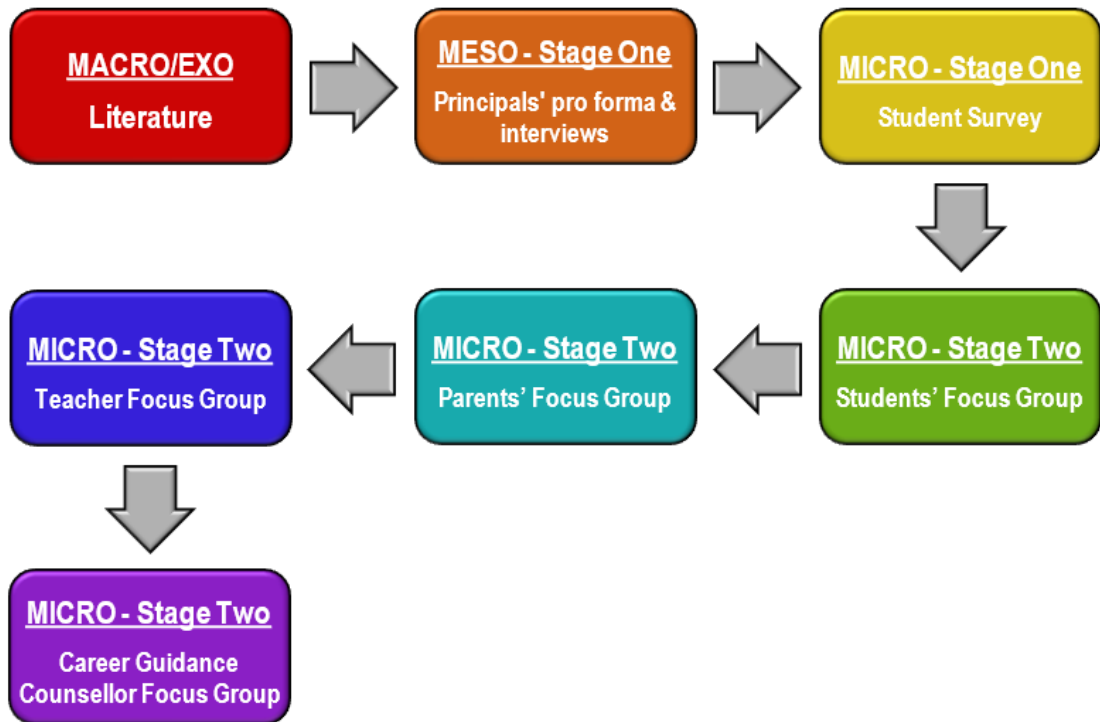
The two teacher-based focus groups observed a relative gender balance with a ratio of eight males to nine females in focus group one and four males to five females in focus group two. The sample of CGCs was entirely female. This reflects national trends where more women than men engage in soft skill orientated post-primary qualifications. The parents/guardians were two-thirds female to one-third male despite a gender balanced Parents' Forum as previously outlined. Care was taken to ensure that interview and focus group questions were gender sensitive to elicit required information from all respondents. This research considers the similarities and differences of male and female perspectives and attributes equal value to both. The write-up phase of the research study was constantly monitored for gender sensitivity in the data presented.

The researcher approached the student focus group session with a sense that the male students may be less comfortable airing their feelings in relation to issues of a sensitive nature. In the early stages of the focus group session the female students were more vocal, and the researcher had to invite a male perspective. However, the male voice quickly became as strong as the female voice once all participants had fully relaxed into the process. As the focus group progressed the researcher found the male students were uninhibited about offering their opinions and this is reflected in the findings chapter where the male and female voices are equally represented.

### **3.8 Data Collection**

Given that multiple stakeholders from the eight cases were to be included in the data collection phase. It was decided that it should be divided into two stages. Stage one involved the in-depth interviews with principals and student surveys conducted across the fifth-year population of each of the eight schools (n=319). This data was analysed and used to focus stage two of the data collection process. Phase two of the data collection process involved the establishment of a number of focus groups to capture the voices of the remaining stakeholders, namely teachers, parents/guardians, students and CGCs. The sample stakeholder groups and the order in which they were sampled are outlined in the flowchart in figure 3.5

**Figure 3.5 Flowchart Detailing Sequential Order of Data Collection Instruments and Sampling**



### 3.8.1 Data Collection – Principals

A pro forma was issued to the principals prior to the interview. This document aimed to gather data in relation to the participants' years of previous experience and to ascertain their qualifications. The pro forma also gathered numerical data around the level and frequency of mental health related issues among the student populations within each case. The pro forma assisted the researcher in appreciating fully the scale of mental health issues in each school. The principals were offered the option to complete the pro forma online or on paper, prior to the interview. All eight principals in the sample, opted to complete the paper version of the pro forma immediately prior to the interview proper.

#### 3.8.1.1 Interviews with Principals

Interviews are conversations with a specific purpose, which can vary from highly to loosely structure. Silverman (1997, p.141) argues that interview need to be recognised as a social instrument *'in which knowledge is actively constructed suggests the possibility that the interview is not so much a neutral conduit or source of distortion, but rather a site of, and occasion for, producing reportable knowledge'*. Seidman

(1998) argues the efficacy of interviews at a microsystemic level to elicit qualitative data from people who are directly experiencing the matter under investigation. Creswell (2013) supports the argument noting the capacity of the qualitative interview to enable interviewees to use their own words to share their stories, perspectives and experiences. The researcher considered these arguments and understood the need to pose well-structured, appropriate and suitable questions in order to elicit accurate information. Equally she comprehended that to view the interview process as a linear process of questions and answers would oversimplify the task.

In preparation for the interview process questions were developed regarding mental health promotion and the role of education and schooling in mental health promotion in recent decades. The interview questions were semi-structured with potentially suitable questions grouped under specific themes. The flexibility of a semi-structured designed allowed specific answers to be explored further through open conversation. Silverman (1997) outlines that the real challenge for the interviewer is the elicitation of information without interfering with the purity of the participants' answers. The researcher responded to this challenge by constructing open questions and using neutral language. In addition, the researcher's professional experiences in a management role, assisted the composition of questions that captured the principals' experiences of their role and explore their attitudes and experiences of mental health promotion at post-primary level (see Appendix 6).

### **3.8.1.2 The Pilot Interview**

The researcher adhered to advice regarding piloting aspects of the data collection proffered by Yin (1993). The pilot was conducted to detect flaws and/or ensure unforeseen issues were discovered and addressed in time. The pilot interview was conducted at the end of January (2016) with a critical friend employed as a Principal outside the ETB scheme. It allowed for assessment of the interviewing questions and pace and style of the interview. Arising from the pilot process various amendments were made to the structure and pace of the interview. A number of questions required modification before the interview process began, for instance one of the original questions was leading and hence the language of the question was neutralised. The researcher realised during the pilot interview that it was too rigid, and more flexibility was required. The pilot interview identified the need for familiarity with the process



and ability to be flexible in questioning. For instance, the researcher noticed that interviewees responses could address more than one issue at a time and not necessarily in the expected order. Therefore, greater familiarity with the questions was needed and a check system to avoid repetition in tandem with greater flexibility was required. Pole and Lampard (2002) illustrate that less rigidly structured interviews can often result in greater disclosure as the interviewee and interviewer develop a closer relationship through conversation.

The researcher reflected on the pace of the pilot interview which was too lengthy due to question repetition. The pilot interview lasted over an hour but on analysis and reflection it was anticipated that the modifications to the questions would result in the interview duration reducing to between 40 and 60-minutes. This also shortened the transcription process considerably without reducing the quality of the elicited data. After the pilot interview schedule was received, and interviews were initiated in September 2016 and completed by December 2016.

### **3.8.2 Data Collection - Students**

#### **3.8.2.1 The Student Survey**

The development of the student survey was challenging given the sensitive nature of the subject matter and the wide range of areas the researcher wanted to explore with the sample. The researcher began constructing the student survey in July 2016 and completed the first draft by late September 2016.

The student survey aimed to capture students' views in relation to an extensive range of areas which rendered it a complex survey to devise effectively. The survey was conducted under broad thematic areas guided by the literature review, the principals' interviews and surveys and *the Health Promoting Schools (HPS) Framework* developed by the WHO (1995). The *HPS Framework* provides a continuum of care around three central pillars of support for all, some and few. The student surveys were lengthy in order to capture a holistic sense of the cohort's attitudes and experiences of mental health promotion within their personal contexts and within the school context. In order to ascertain the students' personal contexts a series of questions in relation to their socioeconomic, familial and socio-cultural profiles were posed. The questions used were devised to be focused on particular areas but were posed in an open fashion.

The student survey was subdivided into ten key areas of focus illustrated in (Appendix 7). The survey commenced with a section which explored the respondents' personal context in terms of their familial circumstances, ambitions and religious and cultural orientation. The second section explored the supports available to the students in their personal lives in relation to mental health and/or issues and concerns they might have. The third section explored students' attitudes and experiences of counselling and the areas of self-harm and suicide. The fourth area of focus centred on the school supports for mental health and explored *the HPS Framework's (1995)* continuum of supports for all, some and few. The fifth area of focus explored the students' experiences of student voice within their school settings. The sixth area examined student worries and sources of stress in their lives. The area of curricular supports for mental health promotion was also investigated as well as the impact of certain external factors such as social media, sleeping habits and exercise. The survey examined the students' attitudes and experiences of the support services available to them and concluded on their hopes and aspirations for the future.

The researcher recognised the key role principals would play in requesting and motivating the school community to participate in the research study. Therefore, a system to alleviate the potential ongoing burden of responsibility on the Principal was devised. The system included the Principal in the initial stages and enabled the researcher to continue her work with the school community independently. The researcher and the Employment Mentor discussed the issue and decided that the career guidance counsellor could play a key role as an anchor-person in each school for the student survey process. The researcher felt that the career guidance counsellor would be the most appropriate person to assist as the Guidance Counsellors have weekly class contact time with 5<sup>th</sup> year students and would also be used in the distributing and collecting consent forms, as it is a requirement for the RSE element of the Senior Cycle in all schools. The researcher made contact directly with each of the CGCs requesting them to act as an anchor-person on-site with whom the researcher could liaise and progress the process. Once contact was established with the anchor-person, information and Parent/Guardian consent forms were distributed to them in each school. This ensured that all students and their parents/guardians were aware of the requirements of the study and what it would entail for the participants. These consent

forms were later gathered by the in-school anchor-person and collected by the researcher.

Mindful of the risk involved with including minors in the research, the researcher established a Youth Advisory Panel (YAP) within her own school and recruited a group of 10 students (5 male and 5 female) to participate. Their function was to review the initial draft of the survey and offer feedback on how it might be improved in terms of language, clarity and suitability of questions. The YAP consisted of a group of sixth year students who slightly older than the age profile of the target sample group of 5<sup>th</sup> years and were separate to the sample proper. The researcher requested the YAP to complete the survey in December 2016 and welcomed their feedback. The main issues which arose from this pilot were the continuity of the questions and ease of navigation through the questions. A number of words in the original survey caused confusion for respondents and these were replaced with simpler forms or explanatory notes. It was noted that repetition had occurred in two separate questions, so these were condensed into one. The students on the YAP expressed satisfaction with the questions and all agreed that the questions were relevant to their lives and the lives of their friends. The YAP indicated that they were more comfortable filling out an anonymous survey online than a verbal discussion or a paper survey which many indicated would make them feel uncomfortable and fearful that they would be identified or ridiculed by their peers. This feedback was helpful and greatly assisted the researcher in ensuring that students were comfortable participating, given the sensitivity of the subject matter. The inclusion of the feedback from the YAP assisted the data collection process greatly and there was a 100% completion rate with all 319-student present opting to participate and completing the survey. The online survey was conducted on-site in each of the eight schools in March and April 2017 (see Appendix 2).

### **3.8.3 Data Collection - Parents/guardians, Teachers, Career Guidance Counsellors and Students' Focus Groups**

Focus groups are a discursive form of group interview and this data collection method was used to gather qualitative data from parents, teachers, career guidance counsellors and students. The five individual focus groups were conducted in the first five months of 2018 (January to May). Each group was session was allocated a month for completion, transcription and analysis purposes (see Appendix 2). Krueger and Casey

(2009, p.1) define focus groups as a series of '*carefully planned*' discursive episodes designed to elicit participants' perceptions on a specified subject matter '*in a permissive, non-threatening environment*'. Cohen, Manion *et al.* (2000) illustrate the advantageousness of focus groups as a qualitative data collection tool. They cite focus groups as effective for getting feedback, developing themes or areas for further exploration, generating and evaluating data from a group or community. Cohen, Manion *et al.* (2000) highlight that focus groups greatly assist methodological triangulation when used in tandem with other techniques. The ability of the focus group to complement other data collection methods such as interviews and surveys made it an attractive option for this research study.

The direction of the focus group session was framed using the data elicited in the students' surveys (n=319) and principals' pro forma interviews. This ensured that the student voice was a central force influencing the examination at a microsystemic level. The researcher was mindful of the time constraints associated with focus groups and that a session of 90 minutes was the upper time allocation she could achieve in consultations with the co-coordinators. The researcher was cognisant of the three focus group progression strategies proposed by Smith (2011), these are: encouraging exploration, engaging with the subject matter and enabling a conclusion. The need for progression stages one and two to be achieved within a limited timeframe led the researcher to create an outline, in order to set the scene and focus participant on the main topics for exploration. The key data from the student surveys was prepared in statistical pictorial format on slides suited to overhead projection. In an effort to include all student participants equally, the researcher augmented the focus group sessions using visual slides in order to cater for the varying learning styles of participants. The slides were presented to ensure key topics would be explored from the perspective of the cohort (parents/guardians, teachers, career guidance counsellors and students) participating in the focus group. It would also ensure that focus groups were following similar thematic areas while allowing scope for individual and groups perspectives and interpretations of the data.

The location of the focus group session was devised in consultation with the co-ordinators of each group. The logistics of organising an appropriate venue was simplified by the researcher's Employment Partner as there was ready access to

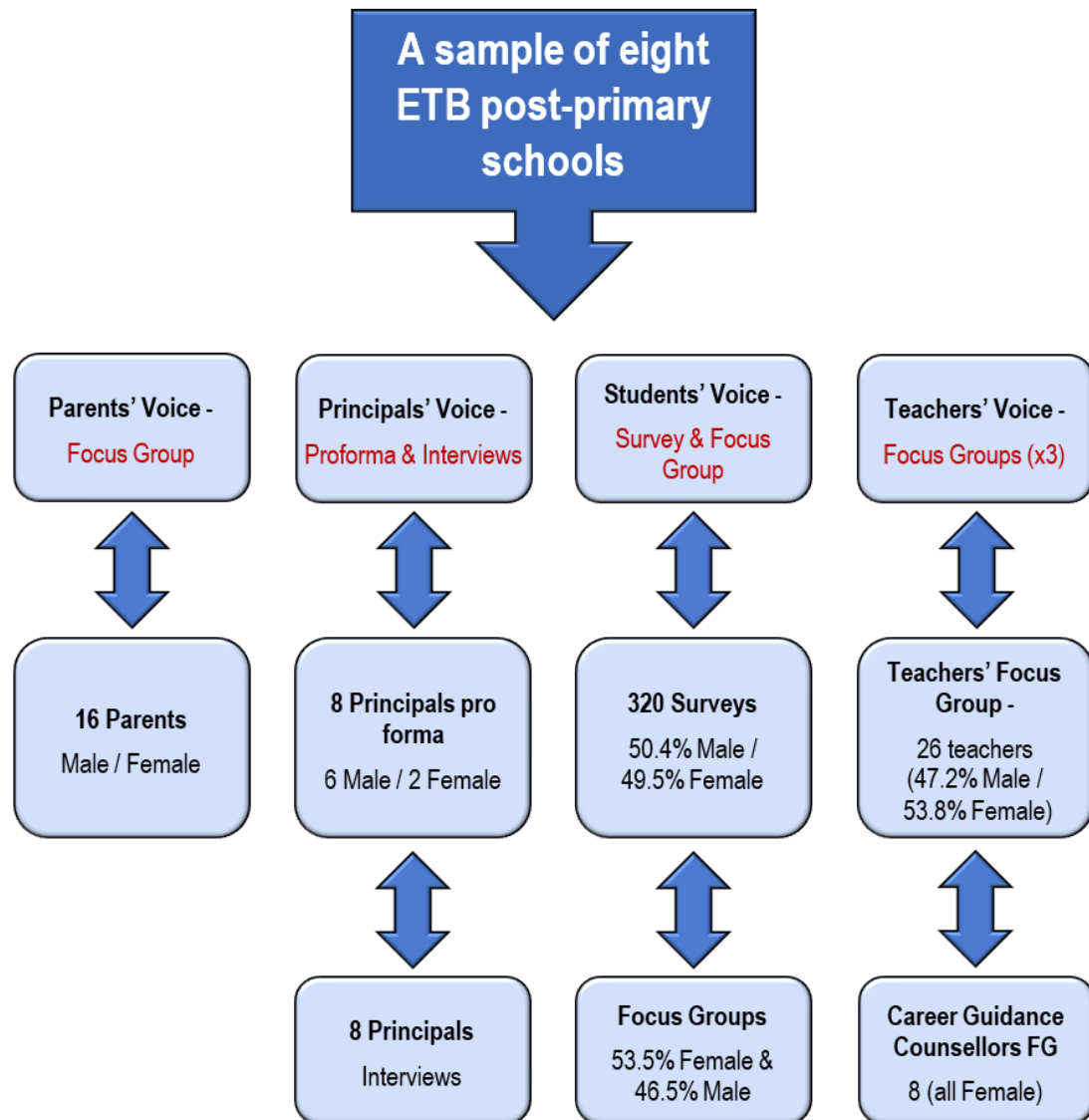
regional locations such as the Education Centre, the regional College of Further Education and the Institute of Technology, Tralee. The career guidance counsellor focus group was the only focus group to be conducted in a non-educational setting as the participants of the focus group encompassed career guidance counsellors from across the county. This focus group took place in a local hotel. In preparation for the focus groups the researcher also ensured that there were appropriate resources for each focus group irrespective of the venue; these included: flip charts, overhead projection, markers, audio recorders and pens and paper. The participants were again informed that the session would be recorded on an audio only device. The confidentiality and anonymity guarantee in relation to the audio recordings was reiterated, along with ethical transcription and storage arrangements.

Each of the venues were examined in advance by the researcher to ensure the rooms offered were conducive to a relaxed, non-threatening, cordial atmosphere. This was achieved by placing seating in a circular frame where possible and positioning participants beside one another in a collegial fashion. Additionally, the researcher ensured that all participants were provided with refreshments prior to the focus group. All participants were encouraged to enjoy the refreshments and were afforded an opportunity to introduce themselves in a relaxed atmosphere prior to the focus group commencement this ensured an informal, non-threatening atmosphere prevailed throughout. The focus groups were sixty to ninety minutes long as the researcher used the initial fifteen minutes for introductions and to explain the nature and objectives of the research study. The researcher also collected the consent forms and ensured that the ethical principles of anonymity, confidentiality and the right to withdraw were reiterated verbally and understood by all participants. To this end, the focus group participants were asked to sign an agreement that the discussions of the group were not to be reiterated or discussed with third parties.

The researcher ensured that each group felt free to offer their views and experiences in a confidential, non-judgmental setting. The researcher stressed the importance of all participants' views and opinions and established ground rules with participants prior to engagement in the focus group. These rules included: one voice at a time, respect for all views and attitudes and that the matters discussed were confidential to the group. The researcher sought permission to record the focus group and guaranteed

that she and her supervisor would be the only persons to listen to the content and that no participants would be identified in the write up process or thereafter. The researcher was mindful of the role and function of a focus group facilitator as argued by Schwarz (2002, p.42). He argued that facilitators need to be viewed as a neutral, third party with a mediation function and not a judgmental or authoritarian function. The researcher was also mindful of the potential of some strong personalities to dominate the feedback in group sessions. The vocalisation of their views can sometimes influence the others to agree where they might not if questioned individually. This issue was considered in the focus group design phase. Opportunities for less vocal individuals were created where they were asked if they agreed with the sentiments particularly where conflicting opinions had been elicited. This created an opportunity for all participants to be heard. The researcher also employed a '*think, pair, share*' strategy to create a relaxed and equal opportunity for all participants to have their voices heard. One issue which arose in the parents' focus group session was the reluctance of the group members to respond to a small number of questions. The researcher felt that the parents were disinclined to engage on issues specifically related to mental health as they did not wish to suggest or disclose their child's personal information or medical history. This is a limitation of the study. It is worth noting that one student approached the researcher after the focus group to discuss his interest in the content discussed. Two of the points he raised in this post-focus group discussion were noted by the researcher as of interest. One related to his perception of one of the DEIS schools which had been included in the sample. This occurrence is noted here as it pertains to the methodology, but the content of his comments is included later in the research study in relation to stratification (chapter 4).

**Figure 3.6 Visual Summary of Qualitative and Quantitative Data Collection Methods in Relation to the Sample**



### 3.9 Data Analysis

The use of a mixed methods approach allowed the qualitative and quantitative data to be integrated to ensure that the participants voices were grounded in their experiences. The integration of the qualitative and quantitative data during the analysis phase was particularly challenging give the scale and scope of the sample. The process of analysis was informed by Guest, MacQueen et al. (2012) and Thomas (2003) who suggest the effectiveness of an inductive thematic approach to data analysis whereby the researcher interprets and constructs the emerging themes from the raw data.

### **3.9.1 The Principals' Interviews - Analysis**

The data analysis methods used were *Open Coding* and the *Constant Comparison Method* (CCM) which supported the development of a grounded theory. Strauss (1987, p.22-23) argues that '*the focus of analysis is not merely on collecting or ordering a mass of data, but on organising many ideas which have emerged from analysis of the data*'. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) support the CCM of analysis reasoning that the majority of people make sense of their world using words. Creswell (2013); Yin (2009) argue that such analysis yields broad patterns in terms of similarities and differences between cases. Glaser and Strauss (1967) detail the use of '*coding*' which prompts the researcher to hypotheses in relation to emerging categories.

In line with the Constant Comparative Method of data analysis in the development of a grounded theory, the researcher first transcribed each of the eight interviews with the principals within two days of the recording of each interview. This involved the researcher listening back and transcribing the data line by line. This took approximately 6-8 hours per interview. This ensured that the researcher was fully reminded of the contents of each interview she had previously conducted, and it provided a second opportunity to become fully familiar with the views of each principal. Although it was a time-consuming method of analysis, it enabled the researcher to construct a detailed model of conceptual data. Thematic analysis is a multi-step process involving the interpretation and grouping of raw data in order to develop themes from the data collected (Braun and Clarke 2006). Given that the interviews were semi-structured they were framed using broad, overarching response areas. The first three interviews were conducted with principals operating in a DEIS context which accounted for some similarities in their experiences. Immediately after each interview was transcribed, memos were identified and added. These memos were cross compared with previous interviews. During the review and analysis of the interviews a number of general themes began to emerge for the researcher. The principals spoke of the changes to their role over the past few years and they highlighted repeatedly a sense that they were conflicted by elements of their role within a competitive model of education. This prompted the researcher to explore existing research relating to the role of contemporary educational managers by Ball and Lynch, Grummell et al. (2012) and Ball (2001). This theme was further explored



in the data collection that followed. The principals' interviews also illustrated the challenges associated with the provision of in-school mental health supports for students, particularly those in the 'some' and 'few' category identified by the HPS Framework (1995). This was to become another general thematic area for further exploration during the data collection phase. The impact of the performance-orientated points system was identified as a further theme when the principals' responses were analysed, and this ensured that the data collection phases gathered stakeholders' experiences and views in relation to the system. Finally, the interviews with the principals illustrated a sense of exasperation with their role and the changed perception of the teaching profession in general. This theme was unanticipated by the researcher and warranted large scale exploration of literature in order to appreciate the phenomenon they described. The attendance of various conferences and particularly presentations by Kathleen Lynch (2016) and Diane Reay (2018) guided the researcher in her appreciation for existing literature in the area.

The emerging pattern of responses in relation to the structured questions were re-coded using a key word or phrase. These three interviews were analysed together and a memo using a keyword or phrase was used to code the researcher's initial thoughts. This phase forms the first part of data analysis as outlined by Corbin and Strauss (2008). Hatch (2002) argues that establishing patterns from codes and memos is an intuitive process and this was the experience of the researcher in this study. Key themes arising from the qualitative transcripts were identified and refined to ensure they were subdivided so that each subtheme was explored to the point of theoretical saturation; namely the point where no fresh information was forthcoming. These themes and subthemes were then categorised using a focus on quotations to formulate a narrative coding system. The researcher used the CCM to observe the codes and to collapse the codes into robust thematic concepts. From emerging patterns colour codes were created to group ideas and concepts under emerging themes, this process developed organically and with relative ease as the researcher had become familiar with the data. Strauss (1987) argues that the greatest challenge is how to correlate all data sets and analysis and to ensure it culminates in a coherent piece. Within each colour-coded pattern a series of representational quotations were selected and copied, retaining the colour codes) to a new document. Having recorded and transcribed the data from the principals' sample, the data that emerged was coded in accordance with

the emerging themes which were directly related to the semi structured areas of questioning.

The insights provided by the principals provided a broad context in terms of information and issues pertaining to each school and were used to shape and guide the formation of the survey questions for the student sample.

### **3.9.2 Student Survey and Focus Group Data - Analysis**

The student surveys (n=319) collected on Microsoft forms were analysed using SPSS. The raw data was first transferred from the original format to an Excel spreadsheet and from there to SPSS. This process of transferal was challenging to complete as ten of the original questions had offered multiple choice answers on a dropdown menu where more than one answer could be selected. The researcher recognised that this enriched the collected data, however it also complicated the transferral process from Microsoft forms to Excel. To facilitate the transferral separate columns had to be created for each answer, whether it had been selected or not, with a yes/no provision. To ensure the cumulated data could be separated out into distinct usable answers, a formula had to be designed and applied in Excel. Once this was achieved, and the information separated and treated as individual answers, the file had almost doubled in size. It was necessary therefore to create a system of colour coding to enable the researcher to distinguish data more easily. The importation of the Excel file to SPSS was conducted manually and therefore all data could be labelled appropriately to ensure clarity going forward. This also offered an opportunity for raw data to be refined in terms of grouping similar or duplicate answers into one and eliminating superfluous data. This process assisted the researcher to familiarise herself with the yielded data. Once the data was transferred and appropriately labelled, the process of analysis proper could commence.

In order to ensure familiarity with the data, the researcher conducted each focus group session at least one week apart allowing adequate time to transcribe the data from each session. This enabled data trends to be identified and coded accordingly and later merged with similar points from other data sets. It also enabled observations and opinions which were contradictory or less commonly offered to be highlighted for further consideration.

### **3.10 Merging the Data Analysis and Findings to Illuminate the Quintain**

The merging of data analysis in order to guide the write-up phase of this researcher study was a complex undertaking due to the multiple cases and multiple stakeholders in the sample. Stake (2006) identifies a key challenge as a '*case-quintain dilemma*'. This concept refers to the challenge for the researcher of keeping a balance between the case of focus at any given time and the remaining cases which continue to vie for the researcher's attention. This necessity for delicate balancing was experienced consistently by the researcher throughout the research study from the planning phase, to the data collection phase and on to the analysis phase. The researcher considered the most effective method to deliver the data and findings from each case, would be to combine the literature review at a mesosystemic and microsystemic level throughout chapters four, five, six and seven.

This style of written delivery of combining data and literature supported the concept of delivering the qualitative data as a narrative. Baxter and Jack (2008) support the use of narrative to deliver data. The author echoed the argument by Well (2004, p. iv) that '*everyone, even a scientist, thinks in narrative*' and therefore she interspersed quotations from the qualitative interviews and focus groups to frame relevant sections. They illustrate that comparative analysis of existing literature is necessary in order to ensure linkages between existing knowledge and new knowledge generated by the research are established and discussed.

### **3.11 Dissemination as a Reflective Process**

This research study explores how economic, political, social and affective contextual elements surrounding the school community can impact on the school stakeholders' views regarding mental health promotion at post-primary level. For this research study to be of benefit to society it must be disseminated effectively. Dissemination must take place on a multitude of levels for this research to become a force for positive change. Through the dissemination process the challenges and experiences of post-primary school communities in promoting positive mental health is explored. Additionally, recommendations for enhancement of provision based on experiences on a micro systemic level. This research study will be disseminated to all educational stakeholders: policy makers, academics, teacher educators, school leaders, teachers, students, parents/guardians and the wider community; on a local, regional and national level.

The local level involved circulating findings among school communities starting with the eight principals as part of the ETB's *Developing Schools Enriching Learning* (DSEL) initiative. This process invited feedback and consultation regarding recommendations arising from the data. The current strategies for school-based Mental Health Promotion can vary from school to school. Therefore, the dissemination of research was a two-way process using the concept of a '*knowledge exchange*'. Successful practices and outcomes are synthesized and detailed in the study. Free and open discussion about mental health and MHPS strategies developed a co-operative approach throughout the school community and between schools. The findings and recommendations were distributed to staff in an in-service format. The information was disseminated to parents/guardians and students via the ETB Student and Parents' Forums. The relevant findings were disseminated to students' and parents' representatives at these meetings and allow for feedback and discussion in relation to the themes which had arisen in the data analysis process. This process of feedback and discussion guided the research considerably in that it offered an opportunity for the emerging themes and findings to be presented to stakeholders and a measure of their responses to be considered.

The regional level of dissemination involved the dissemination of data, findings and recommendations to the board members of the ETB. The national/international level involved disseminating the research and findings at various national conferences. The process of dissemination throughout the research study was symbiotic in that it propelled the research forward.

### **3.12 Reflections on the Methodological Process**

The methodological process for this research study yielded a number of challenges which had to be overcome in order to bring the study to fruition. The subject matter for this research study proved to be expansive in terms of its reach as it elicited an extensive range of views from the different stakeholders concerned. The researcher's desire to include all stakeholders was complicated by the inclusion of eight sample schools operating under the auspices of the Education and Training Board. However, as this was included in the terms of the associative agreement between the Researcher and the Employment Partner it was unavoidable. The scale of data from stakeholders across such as broad geographical spread of schools meant that the data collection

process was very labour intensive. Additionally, once the data was collected, the thematic analysis of the data required more time than the researcher had originally planned for (approximately one year). Indeed, while the range and scale of views expressed provided a comprehensive exploration of the stakeholders' experiences, it was at times challenging to navigate the direction of the study. In future studies the researcher would be minded to either reduce the reach and scale of the subject matter or the size of the sample, unless she had either assistance from another researcher and/or access to greater administrative facilities.

The sample of eight principals included in the study is noteworthy as three of the principals led non-DEIS schools and five led DEIS schools. During the data collection phase many of the DEIS principals made similar observations in relation to *soft barriers* used by other non-DEIS schools within competitive catchment areas. However, it is a limitation of this study that the three non-DEIS principals were not in a position to provide counter data from a non-DEIS perspective as they were not operating in the catchment area of a DEIS school due to their geographical or linguistic profiles. Therefore, there is scope for a further study to explore the experiences of non-DEIS principals operating within close proximity of a DEIS school.

A limitation of this research study relates to the fact that the Framework for Junior Cycle (2015) is not fully on stream in terms of subjects and assessments until 2022. Therefore, while midway experiences of the framework are discussed in chapter seven, the researcher is conscious that the future cannot be predicted with absolute certainty. A further study would be warranted in this regard.

### 3.13 Conclusion

Chapter three outlines the methodological journey travelled by the researcher, it illustrates the reflexivity of the researcher as aspects of the research were considered and key decisions were made. The chapter explores the selection of the research design and the rationale for following a mixed methods approach. It also explores the selection of the sample and highlights that the associative agreement with the ETB as Employment partner bound the researcher to include eight sample schools. This coupled with the researcher's alternating insider/outsider position, influenced her decision to explore a case study approach to the methodological design. On reflection, this greatly influenced the selection of a multi-case case study design which would not have been the researcher's natural research orientation. Indeed, prior to the allocation of the scholarship the teacher was considering an ethnographical research design. However, the need to facilitate the Employment Partner and provide a comprehensive exploration of the subject matter led the researcher to consider and adopt a case study methodology.

The researcher's understandings of the merits of adopting a case-study design was informed by an exploration of the work of Bassey (1999). He highlights the suitability of a case study design for education systems or institutions. Bassey (1999, p.62-68) outlines that this methodology allows the '*how*' and '*why*' research questions to be explored. This was particularly relevant to the researcher as she had a methodological choice to consider. She could conduct a singular case study which would centre on the ETB scheme as an independent case or she could conduct a multi-case case study, encompassing each of the eight post-primary schools as separate yet complementary cases. The latter option was selected as it was also complementary to the researcher's desire to capture the enactment of policy at the coalface. On reflection, this was a positive decision as to examine the transition to a mental health and wellbeing promotion model from the ETB perspective would not have allowed for investigation at the coalface and would in fact have placed the researcher at the mesosystemic level.

The researcher's decision to pursue a multi-case case study supports Stake's (2006) critique of the singular case study. He argues that it fails to offer the depth of exploration offered by the multi-case case study. The researcher's desire for depth of exploration prompted discussions between the researcher and the ETB regarding the

scale of the sample. The researcher and the ETB were interested capturing a range of stakeholders' views across all schools. This bilateral decision to conduct a multi-case case study led the researcher to consider Stake's (2006) concept of a '*quintain*' or an overarching subject matter which illustrates how multiple cases can feed into one comprehensive body of work. The concept of a quintain enabled the researcher to include several embedded research questions which combine to illuminate the subject matter. The rationale for the inclusion of qualitative and quantitative research data is also explored in this chapter. The ability of a mixed methods approach to provide scale and depth to the data collection phase is outlined.

This chapter discusses the considerations presented by the researcher's alternating insider/outsider position. Indeed, throughout the course of the research the researcher's alternating status posed challenges and opportunities. The researcher had support from the absolute gatekeepers in the ETB and therefore access to the sample schools. However, the researcher was conscious that this access would be figurative if the legitimate gatekeeper (the Principal) and the staff did not see the value in engagement with the process. In other words, that the school-based respondents would give 'the party line' instead of their actual experiences of the transition to a mental health and wellbeing promotion model in line with *the HPS Framework (1995)*. It was the development of professional relationships built on trust that ensured the engagement and participation of stakeholders. Trusting relationships between the researcher and stakeholders were underpinned by a promise of confidentiality and anonymity.

Chapter three profiles each of the eight sample cases and outlines the categories of stakeholders. The scale and reach of the sample and cases created challenges for the researcher in the data analysis phase. The data collection process across the stakeholder samples was satisfactory for the most part. However, critical ethical considerations and decisions arose, particularly in terms of the inclusion of young people. Indeed, the student sample presented the most challenges due to the age profile involved and the sensitivity of the subject matter. Challenges arose around ensuring that the students understood the subject matter under investigation and their role in the data gathering process. There was a need for parental consent and for additional therapeutic supports to be made available before, during and after the data collection

phases. Additionally, the researcher had to be fully aware of ethical considerations and particularly her duties and obligations under Child Protection legislation. This chapter discusses the creation of a Youth Advisory Panel (YAP) in order to circumvent many of the potential issues around student understanding. Indeed, the YAP were involved in the process of drafting the information sheets and consent/assent forms. They were also consulted in the design of the student survey and focus group questions.

This chapter explores the data collection and analysis phases in detail, noting in particular the efforts made to ensure gender balance throughout the data collection and analysis process. This was largely accommodated by the fact that the researcher used existing ETB structures which are already constructed with gender sensitivity in mind. The instances where a gender imbalance arose were considered and tended to reflect previously identified national trends.

The researcher decided to include a range of voices in order to give a holistic overview of the realities of transitioning to a HPS Framework within a neoliberal capitalist context. The voices of principals within the ETB system are included to demonstrate the impact of inequality within the schooling system and the resulting implications for mental health and wellbeing promotion and support at the coalface. The teacher and career guidance counsellor's voices support much of the data provided by the principals and raise additional points of concern. The voice of the students is central to this research and is represented qualitatively and quantitatively via the survey (n=319) and the focus groups session. The qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques chosen to play a complementary role in gathering a student voice which has scale and depth. The parents' voice gives the perspective of stakeholders who are invested in the system but operate outside it, therefore holding a varying perspective.



## Chapter Four

### **The Influence of the Political Economy on the Operational Context of Post-primary Schools: A Hidden Curriculum of Stratification.**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter explores the influence of the political economy on the operational context of schools and the effect that this has on the provision of mental health and wellbeing promotion. The author commences the chapter by arguing that reproduction of the political economy is ensured via an unequal class-based schooling system. Following this the author presents and discusses the related findings. The analysis of stakeholders' data has yielded a number of points which are presented and explored systematically. The points relate to the following: evidence in the sampled schools to suggest that enrolment patterns in some instances support economic reproduction in the location of the study. A perspective among certain stakeholders in the sample that DEIS schools are sites of stratification, segregation and relegation. The role of informed discrimination in the process of unequal schooling and economic reproduction and the stratification of students with certain behavioural difficulties and special or additional educational needs.

The movement toward educational policy which seeks to incorporate mental health and wellbeing promotion in the Irish post-primary schooling system is commendable. The historic chronosystemic and macrosystemic developments at a European level shifted the focus from cure to prevention and has ensured a commendable series of policy as text documents such as the *Health Promoting Schools Framework* (2013) and the *Guidelines for Wellbeing in Junior Cycle* (2017) which are underpinned by the *HPS Framework* (1995). In this chapter the author argues that the operational context of schooling is a critical consideration in the interpretation and implementation of mental health and wellbeing policy. The author argues that policy makers have not robustly explored the challenges that our current class-based education model creates for the mental health and wellbeing policy continuum. It argues that the transition to a settings-based approach to mental health and wellbeing promotion at post-primary must consider the political/economic, social/cultural and affective inequalities that

exists in the system. The recognition of the social determinants which contribute to mental health and wellbeing decline is especially relevant to this research study.

There is a strong body of evidence which indicates that positive adolescent mental health and wellbeing correlates with inclusion, participation and equality in schooling. Indeed, the '*Schools for Health in Ireland Framework*' (HSE, 2013) cites its core values as: equity, sustainability, inclusion, empowerment and democracy. The Framework (2013, p.7-8) explains '*equity*' as follows, '*The HPS seeks to ensure equal access to, and participation in, the full range of educational and health opportunities. In this way, schools have the potential to reduce health inequalities.*' Inclusion as a core value is explained as follows in the document, '*Health Promoting Schools celebrate diversity and ensure that schools are communities of learning, where all members of the community feel trusted and respected*'. These documents (policy as text) identify the critical importance of equity and inclusion in Health Promoting Schools (HPS).

However, the context of stratification within the Irish post-primary schooling system is outlined by Cahill (2015) and therefore it is at odds with the core values of inclusion, participation and equality cited in educational policy documents such as *the Education Act* (1998), *the Framework for Junior Cycle* (2015) and *the EPSEN Act* (2004). The chapter argues that this failure to acknowledge this contextual reality renders the shift to a mental health and wellbeing promotion model a façade which serves to perpetuate inequality as Bowles and Gintis (1976, p.104) argue. It takes a realist perspective recognising the difficulty in rectifying inequality in the short term; it suggests that the implementation of *the HPS Framework* (1995) must be appropriately resourced in the context of the inequality of which prevails in the schooling system. O'Brien (2018, p.155) also argues against basing a universal mental health and wellbeing approach in schools on false assumptions of economic and social and cultural equality.

The chapter argues that the context of inequality thwarts the intentions of social justice related policy. Therefore, it explores the impact of a competitive marketised model of schooling on the interpretation and enactment of previous policies rooted in social justice and egalitarianism. It draws on the DEIS (2005) programme and the *EPSEN Act* (2004) to demonstrate the distortion of intentions of policy as text by context of

the policy as discourse phase and how this can result in compromised effects at the microsystemic level. These examples combine to show a distorted interpretation and implementation of social justice and care-related policy at a mesosystemic and microsystemic level. Indeed, DEIS and EPSEN have resulted in the stratification of students within certain urban area of the sample location, leading to a perpetuation of inequality and discrimination at post-primary level.

This chapter uses the concept of a '*Policy Sociology Approach*', as outlined by Ball (2008) to discuss the key issues and findings as they arise. The *Policy Sociology Approach* draws on a range of egalitarian theorists outlined in the latter half of chapter two. In particular, it supports the Bourdieu's (1986) thinking tools which reconcile the agency of the individual (habitus and capital) and social structures (fields). This chapter argues that the habitus and social capital, of post-primary students, combined with a class-based schooling model results in a schooling context which is subject to inequality. This research study explores the ability of an unequal schooling context to meaningfully support mental health and wellbeing promotion at post-primary level.

#### **4.1 The Existence of a Class-based Schooling System in the Irish Post-primary Schooling System**

The class-based schooling system at post-primary is central to this research study. The class-based model offers a spectrum of school types: the private fee-paying school, the non-DEIS schools and the DEIS school and they generally correspond with three broad socioeconomic profiles; namely the upper, middle and lower classes. The schooling spectrum in Ireland is further nuanced by a large proportion of denominational status schools operating in a quasi-private-public capacity, run by religious orders, yet funded by the State.

The schooling spectrum offers private affluent fee-paying schools on one side with disadvantaged DEIS schools on the opposite end. Private fee-paying schools account for 7% of post-primary school and exclude the majority of the general population with fees averaging three to seven thousand euro per year. When examining private fee-paying denominational and non-denominational schools as a collective, the rate of third level college progression is higher per capita than from non-fee-paying schools. Indeed, fee-paying schools sent four times as many students to Trinity College than non-fee-paying schools in the academic year 2016/2017 and fee-paying students were

twice as likely as non-fee-paying students to attend Ireland's seven universities. Mooney (2018) analysed the progression figures in relation to higher points courses, defined as programmes in universities, colleges of education, the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) or the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT). He argued that eighty per cent of school leavers in affluent Dublin 6 went on to one of these institutions, compared with four per cent in disadvantaged areas such as Dublin 17. His observations are supported by Courtois (2018) who argues that a small number of private schools assist in reproducing social inequalities by maintaining and enhancing the privilege enjoyed by the 'elites'. These trends are comparable to those identified by Reay (2017, p.44) in the UK. She argues that private schools are centres of power which prepare the upper- middle and upper-class students for positions of power and influence. Courtois (2015, p. 70) argues a particular irony in the Irish context, in that private fee-paying schools *'claim to instil moral values and principles, which will prevent their students from adopting arrogant, greedy or corrupt behaviours. Their discourse distances the schools and their students from the turpitude of the wealthy and from the immorality of global capitalism, which resonates with the Catholic ethos they promote. They are even legitimated as potential agents of social change. This is highly problematic given the role they continue to play in the preservation and reproduction of privilege'*

The issue of fee-paying schools did not emerge within the parents' focus group which was anticipated given that the sample schools are located within the ETB sector, and the impact of fee-paying schools would be low in this region as outlined by Smyth (2009). The general popularity of private schooling in the location of the sample, similar to the rest of the country, remains relatively low with the majority of students and their parents opting for non-private second level schooling. Doris, O'Neill *et al.* (2019, p.22) illustrate that this has intensified competition among parents and students, for schools which secure high average raw scores on State examinations and that these schools are *'significantly more likely to be oversubscribed'*. Indeed, Mooney (2018) indicates that the progression figures for DEIS schools in relation to the aforementioned higher points courses, have remained stagnant at fifty-seven percent since 2012.

Non-DEIS, non-fee-paying schools are positioned in the middle of the spectrum of Irish schooling provision. It is among these non-DEIS, non-fee-paying schools that competition has intensified under the market model. In order to attract enrolments, schools publicise their performance rates in the Leaving Certificate examination and progression rates to Higher Education. Sustained favourable statistics enable schools, in direct competition with others, to maintain and augment their market share of enrolments. Evidence suggests that the maintenance of high-performance statistics is achieved in some cases by attracting students with high levels of cultural capital (middle-class) and limiting students with low levels of cultural capital (working-class). Indeed, this symbiotic relationship between the student and the school is reflected in work by Smyth and Banks (2012b) illustrate that cultural capital and school context can play a major role in students' educational aspirations and indeed, their choice of Higher Educational Institution. This has ensured that non-DEIS schools can vary greatly in terms of their socio-economic profile in accordance with the level of social capital schools can attract among their enrolments.

Lareau (2003) using Bourdieu's theoretical framework argues that middle-class children are '*cultivated*' to attain and achieve in the education system from the earliest age. This cultivation involves the intrinsic development of a habitus which matches the middle-class doxa of the educational system. Numerous studies have shown how the middle-class culture is synonymous with educational attainment and achievement. Reay (2017, p.67) argues that the responsibility for educational attainment, performance and success has been '*recast*' as a parental role, predominantly relating to mothers rather than an '*collective social responsibility*' (See also Ball and Reay 1997; Reay 2017; Lynch 2014; Lynch 2016; Lynch and Crean 2008). The *Growing Up in Ireland* survey key findings for 13-year-olds (2018) indicates that 34% of 13-year-olds whose primary caregivers had degrees reported liking school 'very much'. In contrast, to 24% of students with primary caregivers who had a lower secondary education. In earlier research, Smyth and McCoy (2009) illustrate that mean literacy scores (calculated out of 50) are higher for students from higher professional backgrounds. They found that at the end of primary school children from higher professional backgrounds had a mean literacy score of 43, those from semi or unskilled manual backgrounds had a score of 28, and those in households where parent(s) were unemployed had a mean score of 25. The *Growing Up in Ireland* survey key

findings for 13-year-olds (2018) shows that 67% of those whose primary caregiver had obtained a degree expected to follow suit, in contrast to 34% of the cohort whose primary caregiver had a lower secondary education or less. Cahill (2015, p.302) argues that the class-based system post-primary system of schooling in Ireland yields outcomes *'tipped heavily in the favour of the middle-classes'*. Additionally, Doris, O' Neill *et al.* (2019, p.7) argue that schools are permitted to seek *'voluntary contributions'* from parents and guardians *'schools with better off students can request and are more likely to receive voluntary contributions'*.

On the other end of the spectrum are 27% of schools with a DEIS designation, these schools predominantly cater for students from socio-economically disadvantaged profiles. The ability of the DEIS model to address societal disadvantage is questionable when one examines the available research data. The *'OECD Spotlight Report'* for Ireland (2012, p.6) highlights a notable variance in the PISA performance of 15-year-olds between DEIS and non-DEIS schools. It notes that disadvantaged schools tend to *'reinforce students' socioeconomic inequalities'*. Cahill (2015) supports this argument by noting that *the DEIS Action Plan for Educational Inclusion* (DES, 2005) referenced a *multiplier effect where disadvantage begets disadvantage*. Smyth, McCoy *et al.* (2015) highlight the complexity of need in DEIS (urban) band one settings given that the profile has a greater level of children from the Travelling Community, migrant children and those with a SEN.

In the most recent review of DEIS, Smyth, McCoy *et al.* (2015, ix) also highlight *'data gaps'* citing the lack of a control group as disabling in terms of definitively establishing the effectiveness of the DEIS programme. While there is evidence to suggest that DEIS designation and subsequent targeted resources may improve outcomes in Mathematics and English literacy. Smyth, McCoy *et al.* (2015) highlight that the DEIS model which designates schools as disadvantaged can also create a cycle of disadvantage resulting in *'saturation'* where the student profile is predominantly disadvantaged. McCoy, McGuinness *et al.* (2016) note that urban DEIS schools have a higher concentration of disadvantage and a greater scale of need due to an overrepresentation of students with an SEN, migrant children and members of the Travelling Community among the student cohort. Doris, O' Neill *et al.* (2019) reinforce this finding, they found that schools with students from areas of high

unemployment ranked lower in raw data scores (Junior Certificate scores) and value-added scores. The study outlines that students in DEIS schools have an increased likelihood of originating in a non-employed household with limited maternal education. Hargreaves (2000, p.812) argues that models, such as DEIS, can relegate *'disadvantaged'* and disenfranchised students by keeping them contained and occupied in *'a warm but welfarist culture, where immediate comfort that makes school a haven for children can easily occlude the long-term achievement goals and expectations that are essential if children are to make their escape permanent'*. Research by Cahill (2015) and the OECD (2012, p. 6) also supports this perspective.

In the US context, Berliner (2017) argues that *'cohorts matter'* and exposure to students from a lower socio-economic profile with lower than average aspirations, motivation, ability and means has a negative influence on students for the most part. His arguments are supported by Devine (2004) in the UK context who illustrates that positive peer pressure from academically able school friends and interactions with teachers with high expectations of their students, creates the desire for Higher Education in students. Findings from Smyth, McCoy *et al.* (2015) appear to support this argument. They note a decline in DEIS-profile students' engagement as they progress through the post-primary system. They highlight a notable difference between the numbers of students taking higher level subjects in schools of affluent socio-economic profiles in contrast to DEIS schools, irrespective of reading ability. Doris, O' Neill *et al.* (2019) indicate that students from affluent backgrounds have a greater likelihood of higher Junior Certificate results. Canny and Hamilton (2017) argue that the existence of a system of private tuition, to augment daily classes, has been prevalent for decades and results in an inequality among students based on financial means. This trend has long-term consequences for DEIS students as outlined by McGuinness, Bergin *et al.* (2018, p. 96) who argue the gatekeeping function of post-primary examination results which determine participation in progression pathways conducive to future fulfilment and achievement. One Principal commented in relation to the grinds culture which has emerged since the late 1990s.

*"The notion of getting grinds became really prevalent in the late 1990s and early noughties. It would be something that students with high ambitions would definitely consider, it is also common among student who would be*

*struggling with a particular subject. To say it isn't a major feature of non-DEIS schooling would be way off the mark"*

**(Principal, Non-DEIS)**

#### **4.2 Evidence of Trends of Economic Reproduction in School Enrolment Practices: Competition Versus Care**

This research study argues that the competitive context of schooling can alter the equality-based intentions of policy as text at the discourse and implementation phases. The ability of the policy intention to be manipulated has been argued by Noddings (2002, p.23) who cautions that the objective of caring in relation to social justice is to ensure that the sentiment converts to real action. Ball (1998) identifies the failure of social justice orientated policy to translate from policy as text to effects in the UK context. He refers to the philanthropic arm of government which is seen to attempt to address social justice or inequality issues, but these attempts fail to convert to meaningful policy enactment. In the Irish context, Tormey (2007, p.178) argues that efforts by the Irish State to address educational disadvantage have been '*politically conservative*'. This is the antithesis to a system of '*caring about*' others as Noddings (2002, p. 23) championed.

In the contemporary Irish post-primary schooling context, Lynch (2016) argues that market accountability in education overrides '*democratic accountability*' and this leads to the prioritisation of certain people over others. A market model of education creates competition among citizens for entry into the education marketplace. Peters (1994, p.66) captures the inequality of this situation in his argument that '*... the plight of the individual under Neoliberalism: the individual is free, free to compete in the marketplace*'. In this situation, a lesser value is placed on students who come from disadvantage for cultural, economic or cognitive reasons and reproduces the political economy. Statistics from the DES (2013-2014) illustrate a pattern of segregation with 80% of immigrant children attending 23% of schools, the majority of which are DEIS schools. Darmody, Smyth *et al.* (2012) report that 44% of primary schools had no enrolments from an ethnic minority status in contrast to 9% of schools which had one fifth of the student body from an ethnic minority status. Doris, O' Neill indicate that students with a Principal carer from Ireland scored higher (.08 standard deviations)



than students without. Duncan and Humphreys (2015) reported that two schools located in the same town had contrasting enrolment profiles: 86.1% of the population of one school was of non-Irish origin in contrast to 1.1% of the other. These patterns support Bourdieu's thinking tools by clearly display the role of cultural capital and habitus in enrolment polices at post-primary level. It captures Bourdieu's (1993, p. 8) central argument in relation to habitus, cultural capital and field. He states '*to enter the field one must possess the habitus which pre-disposes you to enter that field and not another, that game, not another. One must possess at least the minimum amount of knowledge, or skill or 'talent' to be accepted as a legitimate player*'. It also suggests that the habitus of the middle-class students, in terms of their nurtured desire to succeed in the competitive market model of education, matches the needs of post-primary schools which are also competing within the competitive market model. This study argues that this has compounded inequality at post-primary level in a system of segregation and stratification where the principles proposed by Baker, Lynch *et al.* (2004) of love, care and solidarity are relegated to second place.

A qualitative interaction of significance followed the student focus group when a student participant from a non-DEIS school commented to the researcher that he was surprised at how '*nice*' the students from the other ETB school in the town were as he had '*heard some awful things about it [that school] and the kind of people that went there*'. When asked what '*kind of people*' he meant. He explained that the perception of the students that attended the DEIS school was that they were '*all foreign or paves* [derogatory term for members of the Travelling Community]' or '*not very good at school*'. When asked where he got that perception, he explained that the students from his primary [a large urban primary with a behavioural unit] that were '*not very bright or always causing trouble*' had applied for that school and that his friends from other primary schools in the town had the same views.

The cultural capital evident in his comments indicated that he was aware of the class division of post-primary schooling in the town where he lived. It also indicated that he had perceived a shared middle-class habitus with the researcher and therefore had not realised that he had '*othered*' the types of students he perceived to be the catchment of the DEIS schools.

A recognition of exclusionary enrolment practices is the current focus on Admissions to Schools aspect of *the Education (Admission to Schools) Act* (2018). This has attempted to create a more open and fair system by requiring schools to create fair and transparent admission policies which includes an antidiscrimination statement. The market model in itself creates the challenge to an equality-based post-primary enrolment system. The fact that 33% of post-primary schools are oversubscribed undermines certain efforts to combat inequality to equalise the enrolment system. It is noteworthy that of the 33% of oversubscribed post-primary schools in the State, over 50% are voluntary secondary schools (church-run) and a further 20% are fee-paying (Darmody, Smyth *et al.*, 2013). Reay (2017) argues that church-run schools in the UK have placed enrolment restrictions which have favoured the middle-class students over working-class students. Similarly, the large proportion of denominational *voluntary* secondary schools in Ireland enjoy a degree of separation from the State which enables them to apply selection criteria particularly where schools are oversubscribed (see Doris, O' Neill *et al.*, 2019). In the Irish context, Hamilton (2014) captures certain facets of school enrolment policies and cultures that may increase segregation such as elitist sporting culture, the expectation of a high Parental '*voluntary*' contribution as well as expensive uniforms and equipment. She also cites the application of waiting lists and selection criteria in some oversubscribed schools. Pavee Point (TRC, 2011) argue that adding a past pupil clause, favouring students whose parents/guardians or close relatives historically attended the school, are examples of institutional discrimination.

The issue of *soft barriers* being used by schools has been further evidenced since the introduction of *the Education Act* (1998) despite the social justice underpinnings relating to the Act. In Limerick city, in the mid-2000s the issue of *soft barriers* for less desirable students became politically charged with Councillor John Ryan stating in the *Limerick Leader* (May 15th, 2004, p. 2) that the term '*educational apartheid*' characterised the selection policies of some post primary schools. He referred to the selection process as a '*cherry picking*' exercise which discriminated against applicants from socially and economically disadvantaged areas of the city. More recently, in August 2016, RTÉ News reported a case where a child from the Travelling Community was refused enrolment in De La Salle Secondary School in Ballyfermot. The child had attended St. John's De La Salle primary school which is a feeder school to the

secondary. The case centred on the child's enrolment application having missed the deadline for receipt of applications. The Board of Management of the secondary school had refused to accept his late application, stating that it was his parents/guardians' responsibility to ensure that their child receives an education, and on the grounds that the school was now full. The DES responded that schools may only refuse such an application when they are oversubscribed. RTÉ News carried a further story later that week which outlined that the school had catered for 77 first year enrolments in 2014, 67 in 2015 and 38 in 2016. The decision to refuse enrolment was subsequently reversed by the school management and the boy transferred from primary to second level. The case illustrated that despite being undersubscribed; the school management employed a barrier to enrolment. Using a Bourdieusian perspective to view the school as a field within the field of education, it is arguable that the management did not wish to enrol a student from a Traveller background as their habitus might be perceived to be incompatible with the doxa of the competitive system. It also indicates that under-subscribed schools, in the marketplace, are open to saturation of students deemed less desirable in the competitive schooling system which has the potential to create a downward spiral in terms of enrolment numbers from middle-class profiles. This suggests that in the market model of education, the business principles of supply and demand prevail because performing and doing well in the Leaving Certificate points system is what is measured and projected through the school's public relations system.

One DEIS Principal in this study detailed similar cases where the Parent of a student, who originated from the Travelling Community, was informed that her child was placed on a waiting list for a voluntary secondary school despite having attended the feeder primary school for the school in question. The Principal was guarded in his recorded response regarding his opinion on the reasons why this may have happened. He commented:

*“It has happened and they [the parents/guardians] invariably would be offering information that you'd prefer you didn't hear because of approaches of other schools to enrolment, even though that child would be from an official feeder school [for the school he was on the waiting list for], there would be some reason why...In some of the cases it would be a history of poor*

*behaviour in the primary school...in some of the cases it might be a diagnosis of EBD”.*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

In this research study, five of the principals, located in areas of competition, gave examples of a reluctance by other competing schools to accept ‘*less desirable*’ students seeking to enrol. Within the sample, principals recounted verbal reports from parents/guardians and detailed examples of what they perceived as ‘*soft barriers*’ placed in the way of some students, but all noted the difficulty proving such reports from their professional position.

*“I have encountered from communication with parents, they encounter barriers in some schools when they identify the fact that some students have special needs. Because what it means to schools is that it requires additional administration work to actually go through the process of making application for additional resources, making application for RACE [Reasonable Accommodation for Certificate Examinations]. So straight away there’s an element that it will ... [interviewee sighs] personally, I believe that is [extra administration work and accountability] one of the main drivers for encouraging parents to go elsewhere discreetly”.*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

Many principals and teachers referred to their sense that other schools were ‘*playing the system*’ regarding enrolments but there was a sense from the interviews that there was nothing that could be done to rectify it. The issue of *soft barriers* to accepting students with SEN has been argued by Banks, McCoy et al. (2016) and a subsequent concentration in DEIS schools suggested. The issue of SEN in relation to stratification emerged strongly in relation to this study. This issue of ethnicity did not arise as a significant factor within the research. The author attributes this to the fact that inward migration to the geographical location of the sample had reduced greatly since 2008 (CSO) and equally the students from ethnically different backgrounds identified as being part of the school communities involved. This is perhaps due to the fact that the majority had been born in Ireland or had moved here at a young age and had therefore

attended primary school in the region and had advanced to post-primary with their peers.

### **4.3 The DEIS School as a Site of Stratification, Segregation and Relegation**

This section illustrates that DEIS schools are regularly viewed as the school choice for students who are deemed *less desirable* by many non-DEIS schools in areas of high competition. However, there is also evidence to suggest that many students from disadvantaged socioeconomic profiles do not choose to attend DEIS schools. Indeed, the OECD (2012) noted a higher percentage of Irish students from a disadvantaged profile attending school with students from more affluent backgrounds, in contrast to the OECD average. This suggests that a significant number of parents/guardians from lower socioeconomic profiles are choosing a non-DEIS schooling context for their children, despite the fact that they do not qualify for additional DEIS supports subsequently. A report by Barnardos (2009, p.23) noted that: *‘the difference between DEIS and non-DEIS schools can be quite stark and imply an increasing ghettoization of those schools designated as disadvantaged’*. Doris, O’Neill *et al.* (2019) argue that DEIS schools do not rank highly in raw data scores provided by the Leaving Certificate examinations or HEI progression rates.

This perception of a stigma associated with DEIS schools was catering for a disproportionate number of students with behavioural difficulties was evident in the remarks of a DEIS Principal who explained that collectively, as a school community, they would keep their DEIS status secret so as not to affect the public image of their school. It was felt that to be overtly labelled *‘disadvantaged’* would reduce the middle-class or aspirational working-class intake. When asked if she felt the school’s DEIS status was a hindrance or a help, she commented:

*“It is funny you should ask that as we are a DEIS school, but we have never publicised it. If you ask one of our parents ‘are we a DEIS school?’ First of all, they might say, what is a DEIS school. Obviously, our parents on the BOM or the PC would be aware of it, but it’s just sort of something that we see as ‘we are DEIS and we will take advantage of the benefits of being DEIS*

*financially and in terms of support, but I am conscious of being in competition with other schools that are not DEIS, so I would not promote it”.*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

The suggestion that DEIS schools could become ghettoised or have a sense of stigma attached, was evident in responses from the DEIS principals. Indeed, all of the DEIS principals highlighted that they had a history of students misbehaving in voluntary secondary schools seeking to transfer into their school. One Principal captured the issue in the context of his school, which was one of three post-primary schools in a medium-sized town. He commented:

*“This school was always perceived as the third school in the town, the first two are the voluntary secondary schools whereas students with behavioural needs or SEN needs come here”*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

A critical factor relating to the inclusion of students with a SEN under *the EPSEN Act* (2004) is the categorisation of Emotional Behavioural Disturbance (EBD) as a SEN by the DES. Scanlon and Barnes-Holmes (2013) highlight that *the EPSEN Act* (2004) refers to students with SEN as a collective sense but that in reality this is not the case. They illustrate that the DES categorises SEN further based on educational and resource implications. Scanlon and Barnes-Holmes (2013) argue that the ‘*most demanding*’ sub-categories of SEN include Emotional Behavioural Disturbance (EBD), Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Oppositional Defiance Disorder (ODD) and Conduct Disorder (CD). The complexity of these sub-categories is that they are not solely defined or experienced as an impaired intellectual ability but by the presence of challenging and difficult behaviour. Banks and McCoy (2012) found that some social groups are over-represented categories of SEN. For instance, EBD was more prevalent in boys than girls and ‘*disproportionately*’ from one parent families and ‘*economically inactive*’ households. Banks and McCoy (2012) also noted that DEIS band 1 (Urban) schools had a significant proportion of students with EBD. The challenge that a concentration of EBD creates for DEIS schools is highlighted by a DEIS principal. He argued that classifying EBD as a SEN raised serious challenges for his DEIS school

particularly in light of the fact that the school was also catering for ASD with two specialist classrooms. He commented:

*“What is palpable, and I have discovered it on several occasions that it’s very difficult to match a child with EBD in the same classroom as other children with special needs where the child with EBD sets off a chain of events that other students can’t cope with. In a sense what I am saying is that children with EBD should not be placed in classrooms where other children with a particular diagnosis, such as ASD, are also present. Now it may not affect some children but in my experience, they shouldn’t be in the same classroom. Rest assured, I’m not the only school manager identifying that fact. I think every schoolteacher who has experience will identify that fact, they can see the children with SEN [non-EBD] being victims where students with EBD are placed alongside them. They are now compromised completely because they struggled to go into a mainstream classroom and then when a disturbance is caused by a student with EBD then that’s the straw that breaks the camel’s back”.*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

It also emerged that among the schools situated in areas of high competition, there is evidence of inter-school transfers from non-DEIS to DEIS schools for some students whose emotional or cognitive needs ‘*would be better catered for*’ in the DEIS school. A teacher in a DEIS school commented on this phenomenon from her experiences in her town. She added:

*“Yes, some schools that are more academically driven can be dismissive of students, they would be encouraged to move schools, so their needs would be better met”.*

**(Female teacher, DEIS school, Focus Group One)**

Another teacher from a different DEIS school agreed, he stated:

*“We get all the badly-behaved kids that other schools won’t or can’t deal with. Many of these kids don’t even chose our school first day, but invariably*

*they end up with us. If they are expelled from another school, they will get their second chance here, not at the school that expelled them. When you think about it, it is so unfair on our students. It's a cod"*

**(Male teacher, DEIS school, Focus Group Two)**

DEIS principals in this study argued that DEIS status can create a sense of a 'receptacle' school in an urban centre, for example in response to a question which asked principals if DEIS status had impacted to their school profile, principals agreed that it had in some cases if it was known. One Principal stated,

*"I think it has in the sense that some people think it's is a panacea in terms of looking after anyone with SEN and in the past, I know people have chosen our school from away outside our catchment because we have a DEIS school, as if that is going to solve problems which we can't solve"*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

The three non-DEIS principals in the sample were asked about the challenge of stratification which were highlighted by DEIS principals. Interestingly, the Principal of Bluebell Community College (see table 3.2) commented that in her opinion her school should have been designated DEIS status as they were dealing with a significant number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. While her assertion may have merit in terms of SES profile, it is interesting to compare this school with a DEIS school (Mountview) with a similar catchment and enrolment number. The comparison illustrates that the non-DEIS school had 213 students and 3 SNAs in contrast to the DEIS school which had 277 students and 9.5 SNAs. The second non-DEIS Principal in the sample explained that his school was serving a peninsula and therefore he felt that issue of stratification of enrolments did not apply as he was obliged to accept all applications from his jurisdiction. The third non-DEIS Principal was leading a school operating through the medium of Irish and therefore he argued that it had a unique catchment which was linguistically defined rather than geographically defined. He also agreed that attending an Irish-medium school required a particular cognitive ability which greatly reduced applications from students with certain SEN. This was reflected in the fact that the school has no SNA employed it also suggests that language could be viewed by parents as a barrier to enrolment in some schools.



The issue of language as a barrier to enrolment in some Irish-medium schools has been discussed by previous Education Minister Ruairí Quinn in Dáil Éireann in response to a parliamentary question (2013). The Minister stated his opposition to Irish-medium schools limiting enrolments to households that spoke Irish. The Minister raised his concerns regarding admission practices in some schools given that they are financed by the taxpayer, he stated: *"I am concerned that in some cases, Gaelcholaiste have indicated to some applicant parents that unless the language at home is 'as Gaeilge' that they would not be inclined to accept a pupil for a place in a Gaelcholaiste"*. This issue did not arise in the sampled school as it is undersubscribed and the practice was not to refuse enrolment to students based on their Irish language ability but to impress upon parents that the language might be a barrier to learning where students did not have adequate proficiency.

#### **4.4 The Role of Informed Discrimination: Obeying the 'Rules of the Game'**

The research data raises the role of soft barriers and informed discrimination which appears to exist in some cases. Data from the DEIS principals suggested that some parents of students with an SEN had not insisted on access to their school of choice for their child and had accepted the soft barriers which they encountered. It also illustrated that some teachers and principals played a role in disseminating misinformation which directed certain student profiles to the local DEIS school.

Schwalbe, Holden *et al.* (2000) explain that acceptance of discrimination often results from the creation and maintenance of dramaturgical facades by dominant groups through *identity work*. They argue that this identity enables the members to individually and collectively present themselves as worthy and superior to the oppressed group. The dramaturgical façade may be convincing to the point that the oppressed are admiring, trusting and sometimes fearful of the dominant group. This may explain why some parents/guardians in the sample were willing to accept the reluctance of certain schools to enrol their children. The researcher explored why the parents seemed to accept discriminatory practices in relation to enrolments. The principals were asked why more cases of soft barriers had not come to the attention of the DES or the media, one Principal of a DEIS school felt that parents/guardians from poorer socio-economic backgrounds, or of students with special educational needs,

were unsure of their rights or reluctant to ‘rock the boat’ regarding non-state schools. He detailed anecdotal examples of ‘soft barriers’ used by other schools in the area, by commenting:

*“Principals from neighbouring schools would refer parents that their needs would be better looked after in this [interviewees] school. In some cases, simply by not responding to an application, ignoring the application in other words. And I have had parents who’ve come into me and said ‘look we applied last May, and we’ve never heard but all the other kids in the child’s class have heard back and their place is secured’”*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

Non-DEIS principals in the sample were asked how they select their student intake, and all indicated that they were under subscribed so therefore were not legally entitled to turn applicants away. They did outline that they had to act in accordance with their enrolment policy and procedures. They did however feel that non-DEIS Voluntary Secondary schools in their catchment were playing a game regarding enrolments in some cases.

*“I don’t think that they [the non-DEIS schools] don’t always apply for the resources as they don’t want to be seen to be applying for additional resources, especially SNA support”.*

**(Principal, non-DEIS)**

Another Principal commented on the implications of such inaction. He explained:

*“If they don’t apply for the necessary support such as an SNA, what happens is the child starts getting over-whelmed in classes and socially and with the pressure of school and life and in many cases they lose the cool someday. Then the code of behaviour kicks in and the child ends up on a slippery slope and then they apply to transfer into our school. Sure, the first thing we do is get them the support they are entitled to. But major damage is done to the child’s confidence at that stage”*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

A DEIS Principal explained that usually parents/guardians accept the situation and do not tend to question the other schools which are often perceived as *more academic*. This can be theorised as the doxa of the post-primary educational field. Parents in most cases appeared misinformed in relation to *the EPSEN Act* (2004). There was a widespread perception at the parental focus group that voluntary secondary schools were not resourced to cater for SEN and therefore were not as welcoming to applicants with a SEN. At the parents/guardians' focus group session, a parent captured the sentiment of the group when she explained that the ETB school in her town was the school that would care for students with "*issues*". Her earlier comment captures the misinformation around the provision of SEN supports to schools, when she stated the following:

*"We have 3 schools in our town and the ETB school is the school of choice for all parents who have issues [SEN issues] and I would say as a parent, that the ethos is amazing. They are very welcoming of all students and very accommodating of all students, so I would say ETB schools are exceptional".*

**(Mother, (DEIS) Focus Group)**

When asked why the ETB school was the '*school of choice*' for students with SEN or additional needs, the parents/guardians' perceptions in relation to SEN was that the ETB schools got greater resources and funding than voluntary secondary schools to deal the student with SEN and that was the reasons why ETB school were so welcoming and successful in the area. One Parent explained the parents/guardians' perspective by stating:

*"It could be perceived as being the one [for students with SEN] because they have much better support. There is no question but that the support available to the ETB is far superior".*

**(Mother, (DEIS) Focus Group)**

However, the allocation model for SEN is applied equally across all schools under the current system administered by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) via the Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO). The anomaly is the confusion around resources which were made available via the DEIS model to schools catering

for students from a background of societal inequality which manifested in the school setting as educational disadvantage.

Much of the parents conversation around SEN and access to post-primary schooling suggest that a collusion exists regarding school choice where parents fail to recognise discrimination in the system towards children with a SEN. Gramsci (1971) argues that people appear blind to their support for and maintenance of an unfair system. When asked by the researcher if she felt the denominational schools were perceived by parents/guardians of students with SEN as unwelcoming, a parent stated:

*“All I’ll say is they [SEN] gravitate toward the ETB schools. I know primary principals that would be very pro the other schools and certain students would be encouraged to go to the ETB School”.*

**(Mother (DEIS))**

This parent’s view highlighted that the primary schools play a role in encouraging certain students to apply for particular schools which highlights a grapevine knowledge that exists among primary school teachers in relation to where a student with additional needs might be better served. In this regard, a resource teacher in teacher focus group one recounted a situation she had recently encountered. She stated:

*“I had a phone call lately, asking what our methods of assessing students SEN needs in first year? When I scratched the surface, I realised that they had a student that was presenting with possible dyslexia and basically, the long and the short of it was they didn’t want to use up an assessment on him and they wanted to know would he get assessed when he would come into us in a year and a half’s time... I was horrified. So, he will be left in the system with no diagnosis to plod along”.*

**(Female teacher, Focus Group One)**

The fact that the teacher telephoned the ETB secondary school regarding an assessment suggesting that the primary school was actively considering allowing the student to continue without an assessment while steering him/her to transition to a particular

secondary school. This supports the OECD (2012) report which found that early tracking and student selection to be a feature of the Irish Schooling System.

DEIS principals acknowledged that in some cases the parents/guardians realised they were not being welcomed or that soft barriers were used by some other schools in the area. However, many principals acknowledged a tendency by parents to accept their child might not be suitable for the voluntary secondary which was perceived as more academic and geared towards high Leaving Certificate points and HEI progression. Other parents/guardians were perceived by principals to be relieved to find a school that welcomed them which made the transition from primary to secondary easier. This point was echoed by parents/guardians at the focus group session. The parents/guardians were unanimous in their praise of ETB schools in the sample stating that the schools were ‘welcoming’ and ‘understanding’ of such students. In response to a question as to whether the non-ETB schools, in their catchment area, were not welcoming, one mother looked around and appeared uncomfortable. She stated,

*“Well, all I’m going to say is ... I find the ETB schools friendlier and no matter what the disability or need [the student has] they are more welcoming. They cater for all needs and offer a lot of support.”*

**(Mother, (DEIS) Focus Group)**

The three non-DEIS schools were asked about their policy regarding accepting students with a SEN. All were unanimous that they were very open and welcoming. It is noteworthy that one of these schools operated in an isolated geographical location and therefore not an area of high competition. Another Principal felt that despite being non-DEIS they were the only ETB school in the town which, she suggested would be more transparent and open than the voluntary secondary schools in the town. This was due to the fact that ETB schools are publicly managed. The third non-DEIS Principal commented that much of his enrolment policy was guided by the ability of students to access the curriculum through Irish. This he explained had to be a requirement in order to ensure the school was a functioning Irish-medium school. He commented:

*“I’ll put it to you like this, I had a mother in a few years ago and she said, ‘I’d love to send my youngest lad to you as you’ve had all my kids here, I*

*wonder could he come?’ I said sure why not? and that he had a right of entry when his siblings came here, and she said, ‘there’s only one thing now, he is exempt from Irish’. Could you credit that!”*

**(Principal, non-DEIS)**

The issue of informed discrimination was nuanced by the trend of middle-class parents/guardians segregating their own children in accordance with their perception of the schools. All DEIS principals, in the sample, in areas of high competition had experienced middle-class families that sent one or more children perceived to be ‘academic’ to the voluntary secondary school in their town and the child that they perceive as ‘less academically able’ or with a SEN difficulty to the DEIS school. The principals felt that there was a certain irony when some parents/guardians were mainstreaming their child with a SEN with other people’s neuro-typical children, but not their own children who did not have an SEN.

*“It happens a lot, that middle-class parents mainstream their child with SEN here and send the rest of their family (without SEN) off to the Voluntary Secondary down the road”*

**(Female teacher, DEIS)**

This could also be analysed as an adherence to what Bourdieu (1986) termed as ‘*Doxa*’ or the ‘*rules of the game*’.

The ratification of *the EPSEN Act* (2004) legislated for the inclusion of students with a SEN in mainstream schools. This study argues that a pattern of DEIS schools being the main provider of special classes in the location of the study which is contrary to the spirit of *the EPSEN Act* (2004) and *the Education Act* (1998) where all mainstream schools are expected to be inclusive of those with SEN. The National Council for Special Education (NCSE, 2016) statistical data indicates that denominational (voluntary secondary) schools were less likely to cater for students with SEN in comparison to Education and Training Board (ETB) and Community and Comprehensive Schools. State-run schools require 66% more Special Needs Assistant (SNA) hours and 40% more resource hours than the voluntary (denominational) sector. The data shows that the voluntary sector represents over half of the post-primary

schools nationally but only a quarter of the 100 schools with the highest numbers of SEN students. Conversely, of the 100 schools with the lowest levels of SEN, 70% were voluntary secondary schools. One non-DEIS Principal, located in a town without a DEIS school, made the point that applicants seeking a transfer into her school frequently had a diagnosis of a SEN but had not been in receipt of appropriate resources despite having an entitlement. She felt the voluntary secondary schools in the town were ‘*playing the system*’ by not being seen to cater for SEN. She explains her perspective:

*“I don’t think that they [the non-DEIS schools] always apply for the resources as they don’t want to be seen to be applying for additional resources, especially SNA support. As some principals, would see a stigma to having an SNA in the school. The public image issue again”*

**(Principal, non-DEIS)**

Many principals detailed a developing view among some educational managers, teachers and the wider public that diversity is a ‘*deficit*’ rather than a ‘*difference*’. One Principal made the following point:

*“If there is a student with a lot of SEN difficulties they may, and I know they do, say the school down the road [our school] is better equipped or better at that than we would be, they have more resources and I know that they do that”*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

Interestingly, Archbishop Diarmuid Martin (2015) acknowledged the issue of segregation and elitism in the Irish post-primary context. He referred to the ‘*temptation*’ to view students with diverse cultural, social or cognitive (SEN) backgrounds as a ‘*threat to success*’. He called on all Catholic schools’ managements to examine their collective conscience by conducting an ‘*elitist check*’ which reflects the earlier point made section 4.1 that there is a spectrum of non-DEIS schools in Ireland some of which host upper middle-class cohorts comparable to private fee-paying schools. If this were not the case, why would Archbishop Martin raise the issue publicly.

#### 4.5 The Stratification of Students with SEN and Behavioural Difficulties into DEIS Schools

The sample for this study contained three urban DEIS schools located in areas where there was high competition between schools. The stratification of the students with SEN to the DEIS schools is evident when DES and NCSE data is correlated.

**Table 4.1 Baile an Droichead Town – Evidence of Stratification in Relation to SEN Profile of Students in each School**

	Voluntary Secondary RC	Voluntary Secondary RC	Voluntary Secondary RC	Gael-Choláiste ETB (Multidenominal)	ETB-run Post-primary (Multidenominal)
<b>Socio-economic Designation</b>	Non-DEIS	Non-DEIS	Non-DEIS	Non-DEIS	DEIS
<b>Gender</b>	Girls	Boys	Co-educational	Co-educational	Co-educational
<b>Special Classes</b>	No special classes	No special classes	No special classes	No special classes	2 special classes
<b>Special Needs Assistants</b>	5**	4.5**	8**	0**	13.5**
<b>Total population</b>	584*	621*	1283*	320*	198*

(source: \*DES statistics AY (2018/2019) | \*\*NCSE 18/19 SNA Allocation Post Primary)

Table 4.1 illustrates that ‘Baile an Droichead’ town has one DEIS school which is under the patronage of the ETB. This school hosts the only two special classes for students with ASD in the town. Each of these classes has a capacity of six students which means that the host school for the special classes has a ratio of twelve mainstream students to each student with ASD.



The stratification of English-medium schools in the town, in relation to SEN, is evident when the scale and ratio of Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) is examined. In the ETB School, the ratio of SNA to student is 1 to 11.3 students. In contrast to the denominational co-educational school in the town which has a ratio of 1 to 154 students. The denominational boys' school has a ratio of 1 to 134.8 and the denominational girls' school has a ratio of 1 to 107. This highlights the dramatically higher level of students with SEN catered for by the ETB schools. It is noteworthy that the ETB-run, non-DEIS, Irish medium school had no SNA at the time of the data collection, which indicates that the percentage of the student-body with SEN is low this suggests that language may be used as a barrier in this regard.

In relation to the stratification illustrated by the DES statistics, the principals sampled were well aware of the situation. All principals sampled outlined that they had an obligation to provide for children with a SEN, however they argued that a balance had to be struck in everyone's interests. One Principal captured the sentiment of all when he said:

*It's about the image of the school, what is the image, what does the school stand for? What is the reputation of the school, is the school going to be known as being good for SEN? Is that a good thing? Or is it a bad thing? It is good that a school is known as being good for SEN but is it good when a school becomes known as a school for SEN? It's about getting that balance right, changing the perception and perception is probably one of the biggest things in a school or in a community and it can make or break the school and it can take for donkeys years to get rid of...*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

**Table 4.2 Newtown Town – Evidence of Stratification in Relation to SEN Profile of Students in each School**

	Voluntary Secondary RC	Voluntary Secondary RC	ETB-run Post-primary Multidenominational
<b>Socio-economic Designation</b>	Non-DEIS	Non-DEIS	DEIS
<b>Gender</b>	Girls	Boys	Co-educational
<b>Special Classes</b>	No special classes	No special classes	3 special classes
<b>Special Needs Assistants</b>	5**	2.5*	8**
<b>Total population</b>	331*	260*	64*

(source: \*DES statistics AY (2018/2019) | \*\*NCSE 18/19 SNA Allocation Post Primary)

In ‘Newtown’ the co-educational ETB school hosts all the special classrooms which amounts to three. Two of these classes are ASD classes with provision for up to 12 students. The third class is for mixed special educational needs. When the ratio of SNA to student is calculated, the ETB school has a ratio of 1 SNA to 8.8 students. The denominational non-DEIS boys’ school has a ratio of 1 SNA to 98.4 students and the denominational non-DEIS girls’ school has a ratio of 1 SNA to 77 students, illustrating the concentrating of students with SEN in ETB schools. It is also noteworthy that this school has a total of 12 spaces, for students with ASD, across two special classes as well as an additional special class for students with mixed special needs. In relation to mainstreaming, the ratio of students with ASD (12) to neurotypical student is  $(64 - (6 \times 3) = 46)$  approximately one to four (1:4). This raises questions as to whether this is in fact mainstreaming.

The majority of principals expressed a belief that all schools should cater for all types of students and that all school should have special classes under *the EPSEN Act* (2004). One SEN teacher captured the sentiment. He stated:

“All schools should cater and be supported and resourced to include and support students with SEN and additional needs within their schools. At the moment some schools are shouldering all the responsibility and its being allowed to happen”.

(Male teacher (DEIS), Focus Group Two)

**Table 4.3 Scrahan Town – Evidence of Stratification in Relation to SEN  
Profile of Students in each School**

	Voluntary Secondary RC	Voluntary Secondary RC	ETB-run Post-primary Multidenominational
<b>Socio-economic Designation</b>	Non-DEIS	Non-DEIS	DEIS
<b>Gender</b>	Girls	Boys	Co-educational
<b>Special Classes</b>	No special classes	1 special classes (multiple disabilities)	1 special class (ASD)
<b>Special Needs Assistants</b>	4**	9**	6**
<b>Total population</b>	606*	768*	369*

(source: \*DES statistics AY (2018/2019) | \*\*NCSE 18/19 SNA Allocation Post Primary)

In the ‘Scrahan’ area, Scrahan Community College provides one special class for ASD, the non-DEIS denominational school for boys has a special class for multiple disabilities. The ratio of SNA to student in the ETB school is 1 to 61.5. The ratio in the voluntary secondary denominational boys’ school is 1 to 85 and 1 to 151.5 in the denominational voluntary secondary girls’ school. Again, the repeated pattern of higher levels of SEN in the DEIS school is evident. In relation to including students with SEN, each of the principals expressed complete support for the sentiment of *the EPSEN Act* (2004) and the inclusion of students with SEN into the mainstream school community where it was in the student’s best interests and would not infringe on the rights of the existing school population. They felt that it was right and just, in a truly inclusive society, which was centred on social justice. However, the issue of

competition between schools in the marketplace arose as an obstacle to inclusion in areas of high competition between schools where being seen to be *'too good'* at dealing with SEN would ensure you become the school in the locality for SEN. Principals cautioned that a balance must be observed in the interests of mainstreaming and in the interests of sustaining school enrolments given the level of competition in the market model system.

#### **4.6 Special Educational Needs Provision and the Framework for Junior Cycle (2015)**

*The Framework for Junior Cycle (2015)* policy document is underpinned by wellbeing and inclusivity at a policy as text level. The policy explicitly states that it promotes choice and flexibility to schools regarding their curricular offerings. Noting Raffé's (2015) caution that schools may stratify their curriculum provision, with disadvantaged schools providing vocational subjects and advantaged schools providing academic subjects; Iannelli and Smyth (2017) query whether reform of lower second level (Junior Cycle) in Ireland, will further stratify because schools will offer the curriculum which best suits their cohort thus perpetuating the cycle of stratification. The researcher argues that this is will happen under *the Framework for Junior Cycle (2015)* and it will be the provision of SEN is the main driving force behind stratification. The framework creates a *Level One Learning Programme (L1LP)* and a *Level Two Learning Programme (L2LP)* mapped to the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) for Junior Cycle students. However, the provision of these programmes is optional. In other words, it is optional whether schools will provide for those with a SEN which renders them more suited to L2LP at Junior Cycle.

The new Junior Certificate policy in relation to the provision of L1LPs and L2LPs<sup>18</sup> suggests a disingenuous simulation of inclusion across all mainstream education under *the EPSEN Act (2004)*. Failure to act on this will ensure that the stratification of students with SEN (in areas of high interschool competition) will continue. This is contrary to the inclusive vision of *the Education Act (1998)* and *the EPSEN Act (2004)*. The researcher argues that it will create a new cycle of segregating students with a

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<sup>18</sup> Level One Learning Programme and Level Two Learning Programmes correspond with levels one and two on *the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)*.

SEN into DEIS schools. Doris, O'Neill *et al.* (2019, p.195) note that NCCA and DES documents indicate an understanding that the *Framework for Junior Cycle* (2015) would generate three types of schools: 'cautious, exploratory and adventurous' in relation to their willingness to engage in reform. The researcher suggests that based on the data from this research study, it is likely that the DEIS schools will be the 'adventurous' schools as they are already catering for a profile of learners who may benefit from L2LP. Therefore, they will have to opt in thus affording the remaining schools in their catchment an opportunity to opt out. The majority of the sample did not realise that the L1LP and L2LPs would be introduced on an opt in/opt out basis, this was discovered by the researcher after the data had been compiled. She made efforts to query it with bodies representing the relevant stakeholders and received no satisfaction.

The context in which the policies are interpreted has a critical bearing on the interpretation and implementation phases. This chapter illustrates that the provision for 'Parental choice' within *the Education Act* (1998) consolidated the schooling landscape in Ireland as marketplace where the measure of 'value' would become linked to performance and points obtained in the Leaving Certificate terminal examination. The ideology of *choice* progressed the neoliberal educational agenda in Ireland by establishing, and in some cases, augmenting competition among non-fee-paying schools, thus marketising the system.

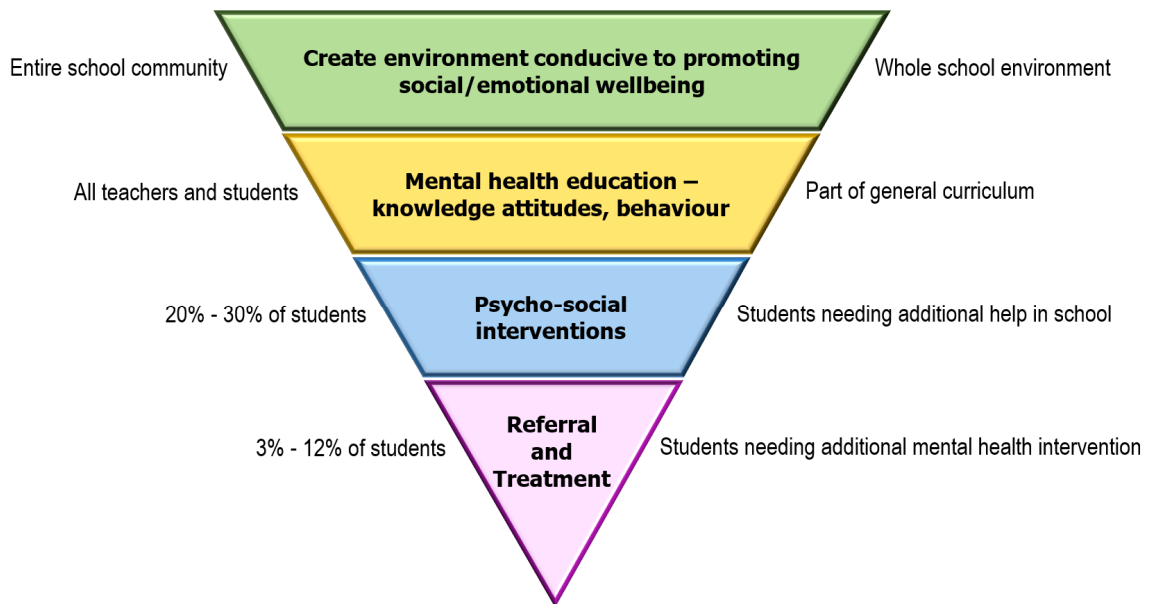
This research study found that among all the sample schools in competitive catchments, DEIS schools are catering for disproportionate levels of students with SEN in contrast to denominational voluntary secondary schools. The trend of DEIS schools hosting most of special classes leads to a question in relation to DEIS schools and their exact function in terms of disadvantage. It suggests that DEIS schools are becoming heavily subscribed by students with SEN in contrast to non-DEIS schools. These trends are contrary to the vision of *the EPSEN* (2004) and *the Education Act* (1998). Analysis of these trends using Ball (1993) policy analysis tools highlight how *the EPSEN Act* (2004) and DEIS strategy are altered in the 'discourse' and 'effects' phase from the social justice intentions in the 'policy as text' phase.

#### 4.7 Conclusion

This chapter examines the influence of the political economy on the operational context of post-primary schooling in Ireland. It illustrates the influence of the competitive market model of education on school choice and enrolment patterns across the sample. It argues that a competitive market model of schooling objectifies education reducing it to a product rather than a human right. The product model of education is dependent on the objectification of learning and the transmission of the curriculum. The measure of a good school or a successful student is equated to points achieved in the points system and progression to a HEI. It argues that education policy documents such as the *Education Act* (1998), '*The Schools for Health in Ireland Framework*' (HSE, 2013), *the EPSEN Act* (2004), the Framework for Junior Cycle (2015) and *The Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines* (2017) are underpinned by core values such as equity, sustainability, inclusion, empowerment and democracy in the exosystemic level (policy as text). The chapter argues that the negotiation (mesosystem) and implementation (microsystem) of these policies are compromised by the class-based context of schooling operating within a marketised system where State examination performance is currency. This chapter employs Bourdieu's (1986) thinking tools to support an argument that the current post-primary system can create a hidden culture of stratification, segregation and relegation of some students with an habitus ill-matched to the majority. The chapter illustrates that this type of post-primary schooling system challenges the realisation of equality and equity within education.

Therefore, when the *HPS Framework* (1995) is examined (see figure 4.1) it is evident that the school-based nature of the framework renders it powerless to address the stratification which may be a feature of the school catchment area.

**Figure 4.1 The Health Promoting School Framework (1995)**



The concept of Parental ‘*choice*’ and the provision for inclusion of all students with SEN in mainstream education is provided for in the *Education Act* (1998) and the *EPSEN Act* (2004) respectively. Yet the sample data from parents and principals indicates a lack of understanding among parents regarding their rights in terms of school selection. However, this is compounded by the quasi-private provision of schooling which is offered by denominational schools. In many cases parents and principals outlined that such schools were viewed as more ‘*academic*’ and less suitable for students with a SEN.

The data discussed in the chapter suggests that school with DEIS designation operating in areas of high competition enable economic reproduction by creating a receptacle school for students who are *less desirable* to other schools in many cases the less desirable students are these with behavioural needs such as Conduct Disorder, Oppositional Defiance Disorder, Emotional Behavioural Disturbance, and Attention Deficit Disorder and those with a moderate SEN or complex needs. It suggests that these students are often not permitted or encouraged to access (or in some cases are excluded) from other schools in the area for reasons of social, cultural, financial or cognitive currency. The chapter identifies how economic reproduction occurs through a system of grapevine knowledge, soft barriers and occasionally informed and accepted discrimination. The chapter uses a Bourdieusain lens to highlight the obedience of various stakeholders to the unwritten rules of the game. The adherence

to the unwritten rules of the game are identified as: the tracking and monitoring of students in the primary school; the creation of soft-barriers to enrolment by principals and senior management in some post-primary schools; the practice of parents segregating their own children in accordance with their perceived suitability for the DEIS/ non-DEIS contexts, sending the child with SEN to be mainstreamed in the DEIS school.

The chapter suggests that *the Education (Admissions to Schools) Act* (2018) will not remedy this situation unless the optional status of Level 2 Learning Programmes (L2LPs) under *the Framework for Junior Cycle* (2015). The fact that provision of the L2LP programme would be optional also suggests that this stratification of schools and students with SEN will increase going forward unless this is reversed. The current class-based schooling system, coupled with the trend of stratified enrolments of students with complex SEN or EBD needs ensured that some DEIS schools risk becoming 'sink' schools as Reay (2017, p.61) reports they have become labelled in the UK. These *sink* schools are fully adhering to *the Education Act* (1998), the DES guidelines and policies on open admissions, *the EPSEN Act* (2004) and *the Intercultural Guidelines* (2006) which has intensified their intake from disadvantage profiles, be they cognitive, economic or social.

The intensification of students with lower SES profiles and SEN (behavioural) issues into DEIS schools creates a school context with an increased population subjected to the social determinants associated with mental health and wellbeing decline. The next chapter examines the intensification of mental health and wellbeing challenges and issues in DEIS schools and discusses the challenges this creates for the implementation of a settings-base for mental health and wellbeing.



## Chapter Five

### The Context of Intensification of Mental Health and Wellbeing Needs in DEIS Schools

#### 5.0 Introduction

This chapter builds on the findings presented in chapter four which outlined factors that have contributed to the stratification of students in areas of high competition. An exploration of the stakeholders' attitudes and experiences of the impact of enrolment stratification are explored. The data suggests an intensification of students from lower socio-economic status (SES) profiles and/or those students with a Special Educational Need (SEN), particularly Emotional Behavioural Disturbance (EBD) in sampled DEIS schools (see Smyth, McCoy *et al.*, 2015). The data also suggests that the scale of students with mental health and wellbeing issues faced by sampled DEIS schools is greater than in non-DEIS contexts particularly in the 'some' and 'few' sections of the HPS Framework (1995). Self-harm and suicidal ideation are more complex and enduring mental health issues which are represented by the 'few' category of the HPS Framework (1995). Therefore, student survey data which related to the frequency of self-harm and suicidal ideation was gathered and analysed across DEIS and non-DEIS schools types. The data gathered from DEIS participants suggest that they are catering for a scale of 'at risk' students which is at the upper end of predictions outlined by *the HPS Framework (1995)*. The data indicates that the challenge for DEIS schools is compounded by circumstance, as the majority of their student cohort hold a medical card and are therefore reliant on an under-resourced public health system for support. The data suggests that this creates a substantial challenge for DEIS schools transitioning to the *the HPS Framework (1995)* in contrast to schools with more affluent student profiles where the scale of students encountering the social determinants for mental health decline is less and the percentage of students with the means to access private healthcare is greater.

The chapter argues that mental health related supports for DEIS schools and schools catering for a greater percentage of DEIS students are inadequate to meet the scale of needs. This chapter argues that the scale of students presenting with mental health issues warranting more specific and targeted supports ('some' and 'few' categories), is

creating a difficult operational context for the post-primary schools sampled. The chapter explores stakeholders' perceptions relating to contributory factors for mental health and wellbeing decline. The factors which emerged were as follows: the importance of the primary care location; schools as secondary care locations; the need for authentic student voice; and the dearth of public mental health services available. The chapter concludes that the trends of stratifying and intensifying students from lower SES backgrounds and those with additional and special educational needs is challenging DEIS schools and impacting on their ability to provide a setting for meaningful mental health promotion.

## **5.1 Evidence of Greater Need for Mental Health Supports in DEIS Schools**

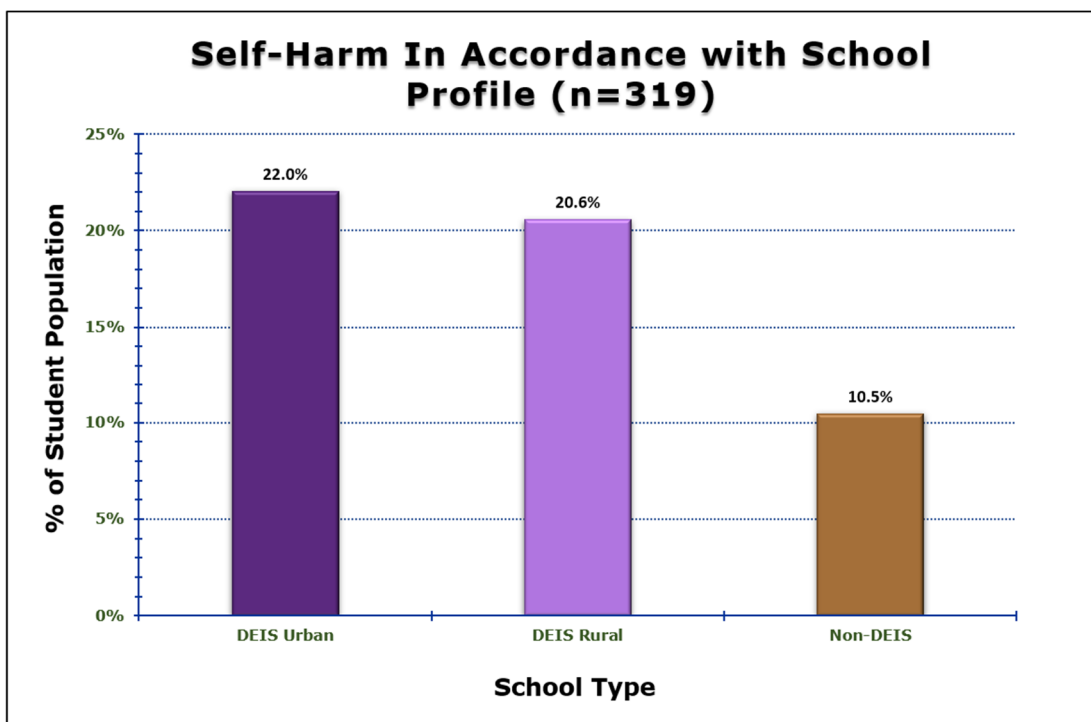
In line with *the HPS Framework (1995)*, the vast majority of students are predicted to be supported by the universal level of support in schools. This universal support for mental health promotion is primarily covered by relevant policy documents, the characteristic spirit, the physical environment and curriculum/assessment practices. *The HPS Framework (1995)* identifies that each school will have *some* students that need an intervention to support their mental health. It further predicts that a lesser percentage will present with more complex and enduring needs and these students fall into the '*supports for few*' category at the apex of the inverted pyramid. *The Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines (2017, p. 30)* states that these students '*may require support from external agencies, which support and compliment the work of the school*'. Additionally, *the HPS Framework (1995)* identifies that the support for the *some* and *few* necessitates targeted interventions offered internally and externally to the school. The principals and career guidance counsellors were aware of the relevance of the framework. One Principal commented:

*“It’s about trying to put structures in place to make up the deficit and trying to get people through the various levels of the continuum of support [the HPS Framework (1995)] with support for everybody, for the some and the few at the top of the pyramid that need acute support, so that’s the model that we look at in terms of support”.*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

In the proforma preceding the interview, principals were asked to quantify the frequency of their encounters with students in the ‘*supports for some*’ and ‘*few*’ categories. Two principals indicated that they dealt with such students issues once per month, one Principal dealt with such issues more than once per month, one dealt weekly and four indicated a daily occurrence of having to deal with students in the ‘*some*’ and ‘*few*’ category. These four principals were operating in a DEIS context. One of those principals (DEIS, urban) reported dealing with such issues multiple times daily. This finding supports Smyth (2015, p.3) finding that ‘*children from non-poor households, from two-parent families, and who did not have difficulties in learning were happier at school*’. The greater level of need in the some and few categories in DEIS designated schools was also evident in the student data. The three main urban DEIS schools ranked the highest of the eight cases. These schools had a cumulative average of 22% of their student population reporting engagement in self-harm. The two DEIS schools located in rural settings had a cumulative average of 21% of students reporting acts of self-harm. In contrast, the non DEIS schools had an average of 10% which was half the rate of students reporting self-harm in DEIS schools.

**Figure 5.1 Self-harm in Accordance with School Profile**



When the figures are further broken down on an individual school level there are variations in the rates across school types. The non-DEIS schools Rosemount CC and Greenvalley had rates of just over 8% per individual school sample. Bluebell CC had a higher rate of self-harm in its individual school sample at 16%. This variation may be explained by the location of the sample. Both Rosemount and Greenvalley have their own catchments and are therefore not impacted by the stratification of enrolments as outlined in chapter four. In contrast, Bluebell is located in an urban centre in which there are three post-primary schools competing for enrolments from a relatively small catchment area. Interestingly, the Principal of Bluebell Community College was highlighted in chapter four (page 145) for remarking that her school should have been designated DEIS status as they were dealing with a significant number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. This further highlights that DEIS profile students are attending non-DEIS schools and are not in receipt of any additional resources for disadvantaged students as outlined by McCoy and McGuinness et al. (2016).

The further breakdown of self-harm figures across DEIS rural schools shows that Sunnyvale CC and Mountview CC had a variation in rates of students reporting self-harm within their individual school contexts. 19% of Sunnyvale's sampled student population claimed to engage or had engaged in self-harm whereas 23% of Mountview CC's population reported this. The variation here may be attributed to greater level of additional and special educational needs catered for by Mountview CC which has no special classes but a ratio of 9.5 SNAs to a school population of 277. In contrast, Sunnyvale also has no special classes but has a much lesser level of additional students needs in terms of SEN given that it has been allocated a SNA ratio of 2 to 469. Additionally, Mountview is operating in a competitive context with two voluntary secondary schools in a nearby town whereas Sunnyvale services a more detached catchment area. This also suggests that Mountview is again experiencing an increase in enrolments from students with additional needs due to trends of stratification of enrolments in the area. In relation to the three urban DEIS schools, both Baile an Droichead CC and Newtown CC had small samples and rates of approximately 16% reporting engagement in self-harm across the populations. The third DEIS urban school, Scrahan CC had a rate of 26% which was the highest of all schools sampled.

This study found that self-harm rates within the sample of students were slightly higher among females than males which reflects a previous study conducted by Mc Mahon, Keeley *et al.* (2014). The variation between the sexes was not significant, of the 16% that indicated engagement in self-harm, almost 7% were male and 9% were female. However, discussion during the student focus group suggested that girls were perceived as more likely to report self-harm than boys. Participants in the focus group agreed with a male student who made the following comment:

*“I think that girls are more likely to tell each other that they are self-harming. You’d sometimes see girls put up stuff on social media about that kind of stuff. I don’t know any lads that would put stuff like that up”*

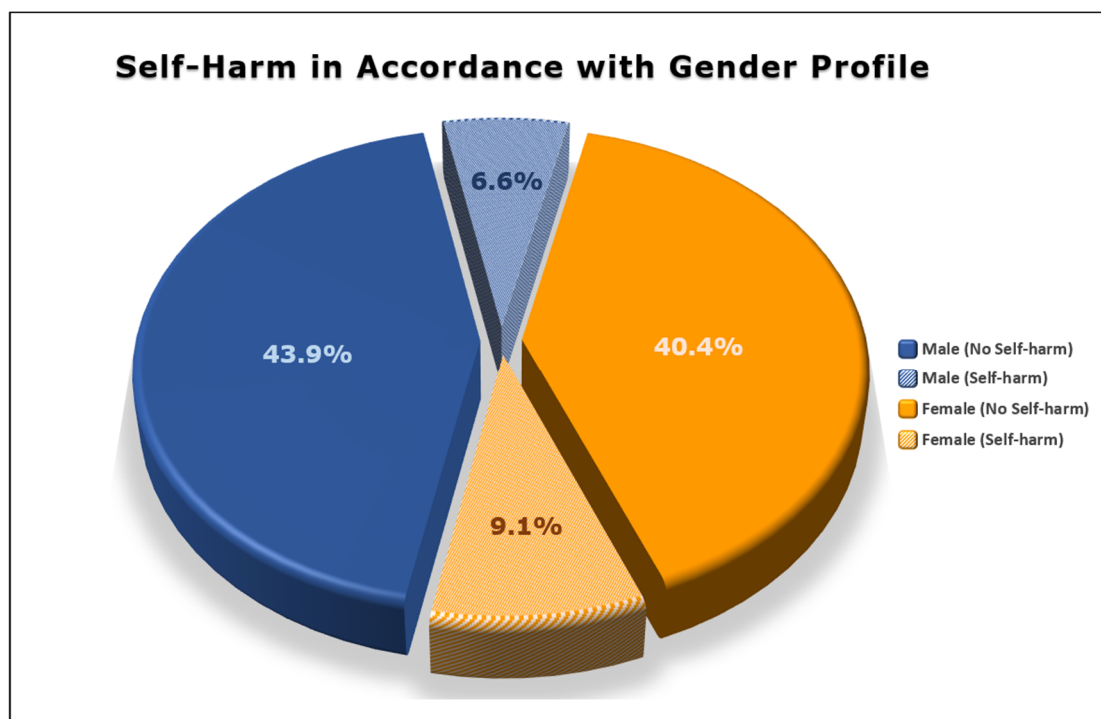
**(Male Student (DEIS))**

This was supported by a male Principal who stated:

*“Yes, I encounter girls who self-harm more, for some reason we seem to know about it or hear it either from the female student or her peer(s) whereas in my experience boys tend to keep that sort of thing tight [to themselves]”*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

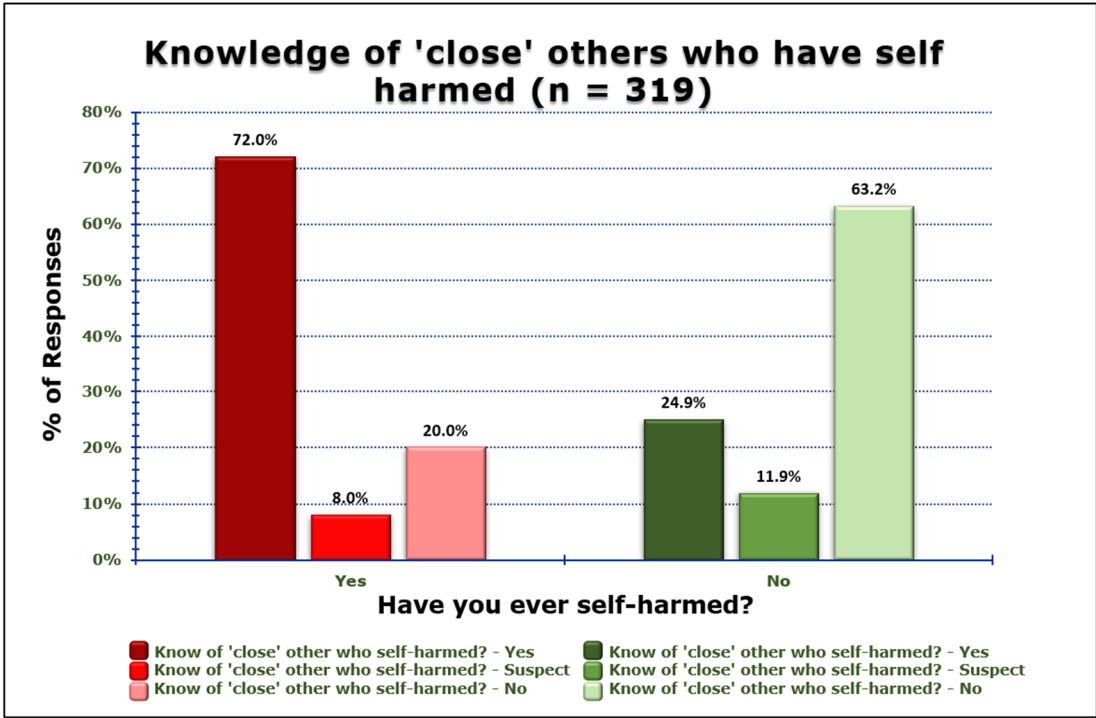
**Figure 5.2 Self-harm and Gender Profile Comparative**



Hawton and Saunders *et al.* (2012) demonstrate an elevated risk of death by suicide in male adolescents that have deliberately self-harmed as boys. They argue that while boys have a relatively lower rate of self-harm than girls, they have a higher rate of death by suicide and are a particularly high-risk category for suicide. They explain that this is explained by the higher likelihood of completion of suicidal acts by boys in comparison to girls who have a higher likelihood of a failed attempt at death by suicide. McMahon, Keeley *et al.* (2014, p.6) demonstrate that suicide rates are six times higher in boys than girls. In the student focus group, one male student commented that he knew of two young people in his area that had died by suicide. He identified that they were both male.

Another challenge exists for schools with a significant self-harming population. Research by Hawton, Saunders *et al.* (2012) suggests the clustering of self-harm and a self-harm contagion. Additionally, many researchers found a correlation between those that report self-harming and their exposure to self-harm of a family member or friend (see Hawton, Saunders *et al.* 2002; Bearman, Moody *et al.* 2004; De Leo and Heller 2004). McMahon *et al.* (2014) demonstrate that knowledge of a friend self-harming increases the likelihood of self-harm in both genders. This phenomenon is also supported by the data gathered in this study in relation to the sample.

**Figure 5.3 The Self-harm Contagion**



It was noteworthy that in the course of an interview with a DEIS principal, he outlined his experience regarding the clustering of self-harm among some ‘at risk/ students. He commented:

*“Self-harm is an issue, it’s insidious though. I had a case where a student disclosed that she was self-harming and when we explored her friendship group of five, it turned out that three of them were also engaging in self-harm. It really was an eye-opener for me”.*

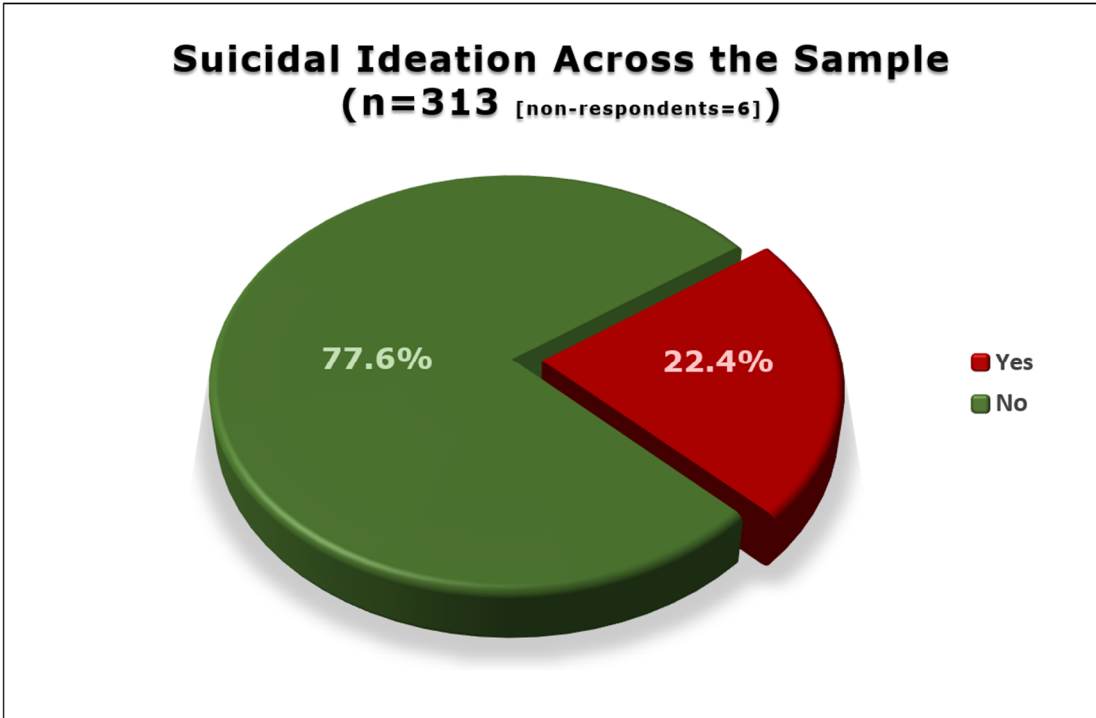
**(Principal, DEIS)**

The researcher therefore explored the concept of a self-harm contagion in the sample and Figure 5.3 shows that of the 16% of the students reporting engagement in self-harm, 72% knew of a ‘close’ other who had self-harmed and a further 8% suspected a close other of self-harm. The data from DEIS urban and rural schools is largely consistent, indicating that the higher levels of student engagement in self-harm may be attributed to their subjection to greater levels of *close others* who are engaging in self-harming behaviours. It is noteworthy that the non-DEIS schools reported a lower level of awareness of *close others* self-harming around them.

## **5.2 Evidence of a Significant Correlation Between Engagement in Self Harm Practices and Suicidal Ideation.**

Hawton, Saunders *et al.* (2012) argue that self-harming adolescents and those with a history of self-harm are a major risk factor for repeated self-harm and potential subsequent suicide. McAuliffe (2002) illustrates that suicidal ideation is the most common of all suicidal behaviours approximating that the ratio of intense suicidal ideation to attempted suicides to actual suicides is 100:10:1. Therefore, for every 100 people experiencing serious suicidal thoughts there is an effective suicide. This study asked the student sample if they had ever contemplated suicide and figure 5.4 shows that 22.4% of students sampled indicated that they had in the course of their lives to date.

Figure 5.4 Suicidal Ideation Across the Sample



This rate is higher than previous Irish-based longitudinal research conducted in 2013 by the Psychiatric Epidemiology Research across the Lifespan (PERL) group. Their research outlined that 19% of an adolescent sample had experienced suicidal ideation at some point in their lives. The higher rate of suicidal ideation among the sample, in this research, supports the identification of the location as a black spot for suicide. One Principal explained that schools had to be hyper-vigilant regarding suicidal ideation. He commented:

*“The way I look at it, you have two types of schools. One that’s had a suicide and one that might”.*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

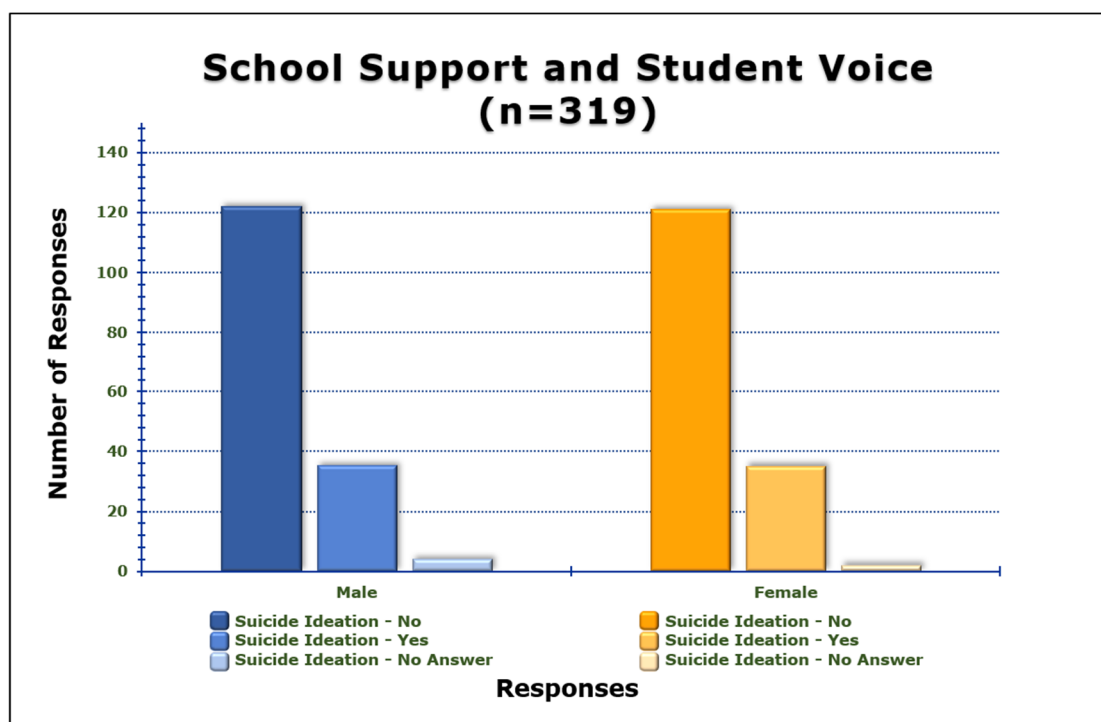
McAuliffe (2002, p.326) cautions comparative research analysis arguing that the inconsistency in the definition of suicidal ideation across studies has made comparative studies unsound. She explains that those experiencing suicidal ideation are a ‘heterogeneous’ cohort on a spectrum ranging from suicidal thoughts on one end, and actions on the other. ‘The challenge for clinicians is in identifying those at high risk’ (2002, p.326). A finding which reflects research by Brodie *et al.* (2011) who illustrate that the majority of young people who die by suicide were unregistered and



unknown to the mental health services. The rates of suicidal ideation and low levels of students confiding in a trusted adult poses a challenge for school personnel at the coalface. It supports research by Bada and Darlington (2019) who argue that school personnel need appropriate training in order to ensure meaningful implementation of the HPS Framework (1995). This study suggests that training for the identification of warning signs of suicidal ideation should be available to all teaching staff and school leaders in the sample schools.

The gender breakdown of the sample in relation to self-reported suicidal ideation indicates that suicidal ideation is almost equal across males and females in the sample (see figure 5.5).

**Figure 5.5 Suicidal Ideation Among Student Sample by Gender Profile**

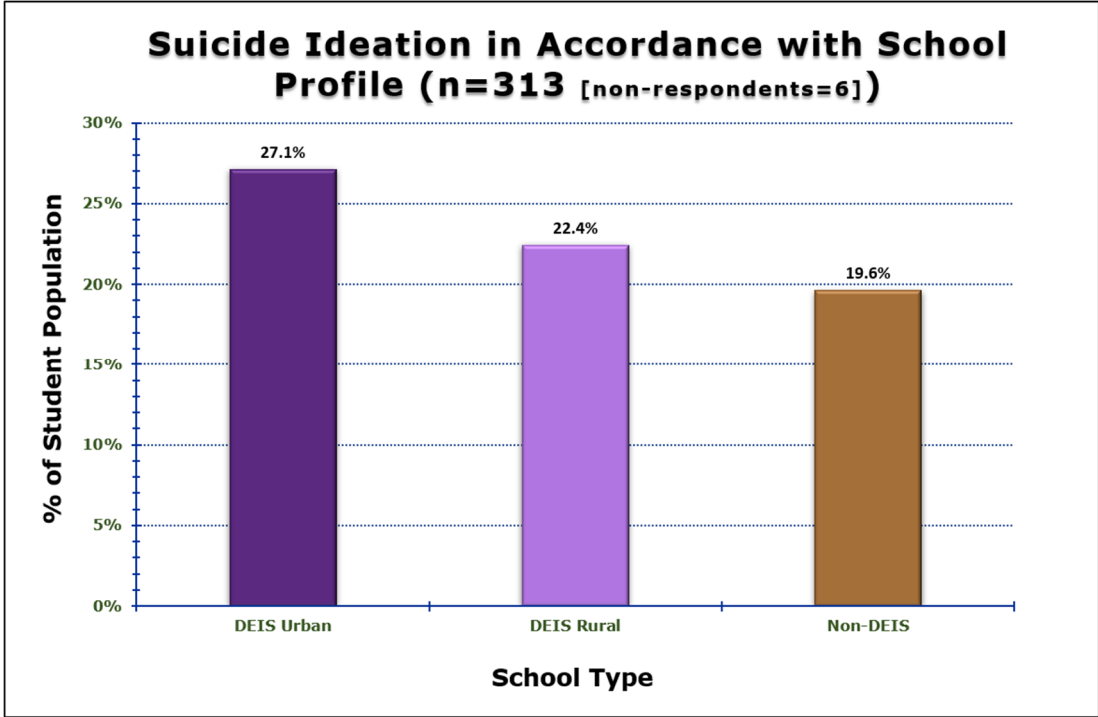


While the data analysis shows a correlation between those who had/have suicidal ideation and their knowledge of someone who attempted suicide (76%) it also shows that as many students with suicidal ideation did not know someone who attempted suicide in the past. This highlights the complexity of the issue and the challenges in identification of students who may be in this category. The challenge presented by the presence of students in this category was illustrated by all eight principals who

indicated that they had encountered students with suicidal ideation in the previous year, three reported one to two cases, and five had up to four cases the previous year.

McDaid (2017, p.14) argue that there is a greater risk of suicidal behaviour among socioeconomically disadvantaged profiles. Indeed, when the student sample are analysed in terms of DEIS status and non-DEIS status, it is evident that there is a higher rate of students reporting suicidal ideation in DEIS schools (see Figure 5.6). The three main urban DEIS schools had the highest rates of students reporting experiencing suicidal ideation which supports arguments made by Burrows and Laflamme (2010) that when viewed as a whole, the greater the level of socioeconomic disadvantage experienced, the greater the probability of higher suicide rates. These schools had a cumulative average of 27% of their student population reporting that they had contemplated suicide. This rate was followed closely by DEIS rural schools at 22% and non-DEIS schools at 20%. The high rate across all schools indicate the prevalence of suicidal ideation among young people and the challenge this poses for all schools transitioning to a mental health promotion school model.

**Figure 5.6 Suicidal Ideation Among Student Sample by School Profile**



The researcher acknowledges that the non-DEIS figure of 19% is disquieting even though it reflects previous longitudinal Irish-based research which outlined that 19%

of the adolescent respondents had experienced suicidal ideation at some point in their lives (RCSI, 2013). The existence of the issue across all schools indicate the scale of suicidal ideation among young people and the challenge this poses for all schools transitioning to a mental health promotion school model.

### **5.3 The Importance of Post-primary as a Secondary Care Location**

Noddings (2002) argues the importance of a foundation of care and love in the primary care location (home) for human development. Lynch, Grummell *et al.* (2012) supports this argument, relating it to the Irish context, arguing that love, care and solidarity relations are the essence of humanity and are vital to humans at all stages of life but particularly in the developmental stages. More recently, Stafford and Karim (2016) illustrated a correlation between high levels of emotional care and higher levels of life satisfaction across the lifespan. This creates a significant challenge for schools as they move into the affective domain under *the Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines* (2017) and the greater Framework for Junior Cycle (2015). In particular, schools catering for a greater percentage of students whose foundation of love and care may be compromised in the home. In this regard, one DEIS Principal highlighted that the role of the school had changed utterly in the past decade. He added:

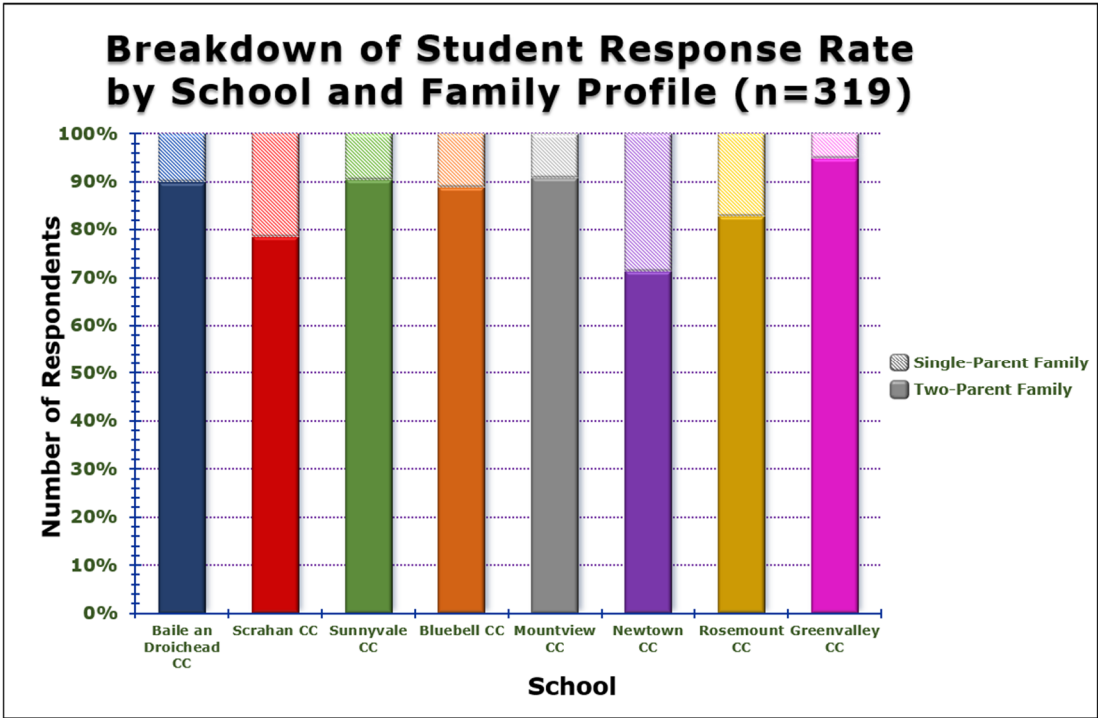
*“Schooling and teaching are completely different nowadays; the school has really supplanted the home in some cases. The amount of students showing distress and the amount of family breakdown and societal breakdown which is then influencing education and the way kids present themselves, families with a lot of problems. Really, it has increased a lot”*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

The challenges for single-parent families emerged in the qualitative aspects of the data collection phase. In the context of previously cited statistical data (CSO, 2016) that 97% of single-parent families are mother-led and that one-parent families have the highest consistent poverty rate. Williams, Nixon *et al.* (2016) report that the rate of lone mothers with child(ren) is 15.8% of the population of Ireland. The student survey explored the rates of single-parent families in relation to the schools sampled and therefore figure 5.7 shows that the largest number of single-parent families were attending two urban DEIS schools operating in areas of high interschool competition.

These were Scrahan Community College at 20% and Newtown Community College at almost 30%. It is noteworthy, that the third ranking school is a non-DEIS school with a standalone catchment area which is not subject to competition from other schools. (see Figure 5.7).

**Figure 5.7 Breakdown of Student Response Rate by School and Family Profile**



This point was expanded by another DEIS Principal who commented that in his experience parents, frequently single parents, were seeing the school as having a role in the resolution of family and/or community issues. He added:

*“And a Parent coming to the school expecting you to resolve things that have happened outside of school, on the media, or even when they are out at night-time”*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

The increased burden of work in DEIS schools in relation to parental separation and mother-led single parent families was evident in the conversations with principals, particularly those in a DEIS urban context. One Principal commented:

*“This is what I hear from my colleagues on the PDA [Principals and Deputy Principals Association] it is wholly inadequate [funding and supports] for what we are dealing with which is the fall out of years of recession, family breakdown, all these societal issues that are coming into the classroom that teachers are meeting at the coalface, every single day. We get parents in here, looking for us to resolve issues they have at home. Now that might seem surprising, but they don’t have the parenting skills as they are either too young themselves or they have never had access to the necessary parenting courses, even though we provide them here. So, they often come in here to resolve issues”*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

Outside of single parent families, the issue of parental separation arose in the course of the interviews with principals. A Principal of a DEIS (rural) school made the point that the increasing mental health and wellbeing role of the school necessitated that they become more aware of family-related issues within students’ lives. He recounted a case where issues relating to the home which were affecting a student had to be dealt with by the school:

*“I had a case recently where a parent complained to me that his son’s family situation [marriage breakdown] was none of my business, but I explained to him that when he put his son into my school that ‘in loco parentis’ applies and that I am dealing with the implication of what goes on [at home] and that we need to work together, and to be fair to the parent he got where I was coming from. He was a bit taken aback when I used the words ‘in loco parentis’ but when I explained it to him that we are essentially mommy and daddy in their absence, and as mommy and daddy do we simply ignore that the child is falling apart in front of us? No, we don’t as we have to work together, that is the promotion of mental health that matters”.*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

This point was also raised by the CGCs during their focus group session. One career guidance counsellor remarked,

*“Home issues are definitely on the increase. Nowadays, it’s a variety of stuff, family breakdown which is always there anyway. A lot of cases of older brothers and sisters with drink or drugs or suicide attempts or things like that and that’s impacting on the kids younger than them, health issues are a huge thing as well, parental sickness, brothers and sisters, sick families battling cancer and stuff like that, it appears to be more prevalent or is it just that it’s coming into schools more. I don’t know... it didn’t cross the gate before” [historically].*

**(Female career guidance counsellor, (non-DEIS) Focus Group)**

The above comment emphasises that it is not solely a DEIS issue, but the complexity of issues is more evident in DEIS schools. The settings-based approach to mental health promotion is underpinned by *the HPS Framework (1995)* within *the Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines (2017)*. The settings-based approach transitions the role and function of schools and teachers into the affective domain. Research by Droe (2012) and Kiuru, Aunola *et al.* (2015) indicate that positive interactions in schools featuring praise, warmth and connectedness are a protective factor for adolescent mental health and wellbeing, particularly in cases where there is a negative home environment. The role and function of teachers and senior management as agents of MHP is therefore critical to ensuring that the *school* is an effective secondary care location. Dooley and Fitzgerald (2013) argue that *one good adult* is essential in the promotion of positive adolescent mental health. Evidence-based research indicates that classroom teachers are often the most appropriate professionals to achieve progress in relation to mental health. The teacher as *one good adult* has the potential to affect the mental health of an adolescent positively by increasing self-efficacy and self-esteem through a supportive and encouraging teaching and learning environment promotion (see also WHO 2012; Clarke and Barry 2010). This is particularly relevant in relation to the *Framework for Junior Cycle (2015)* which promotes constructivist pedagogical classroom practices in order to enhance student wellbeing. Therefore, teachers of all subjects are required to become teachers who teach *for* wellbeing through their pedagogical approach and practices. The school-based adult stakeholders such as principals, Teachers, and career guidance counsellors referred to the importance of the primary care location for student mental health and wellbeing. Many indicated that a significant majority of students they encountered with mental

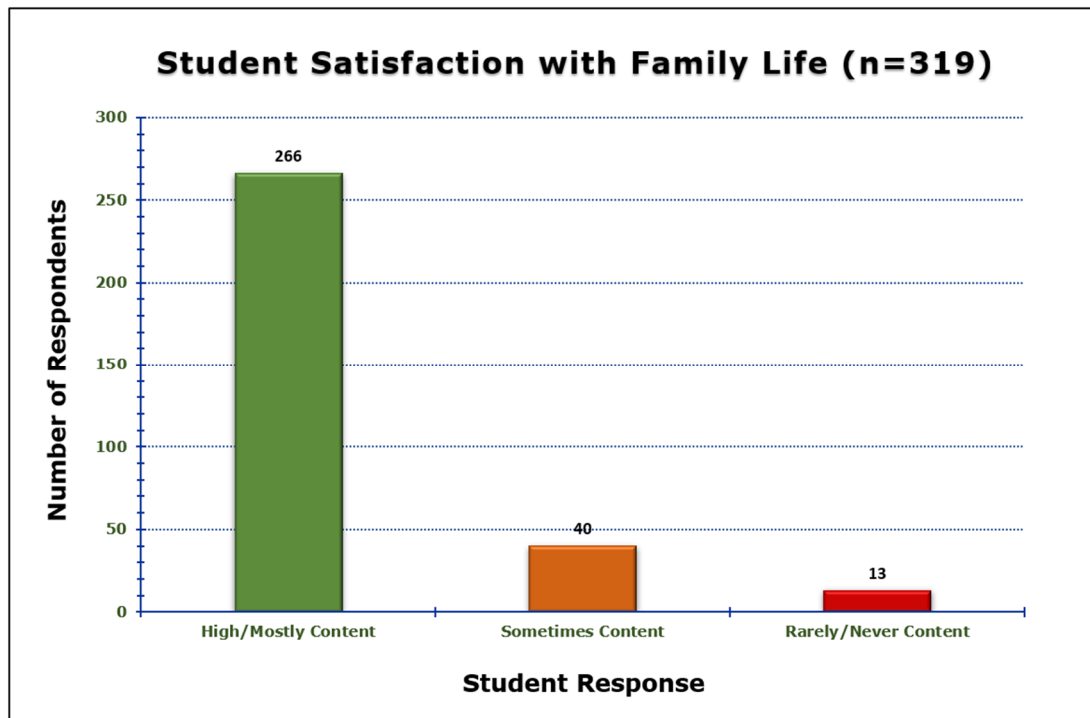
health issues had challenging home environments. They highlighted that this made supporting the students very difficult. One Year Head explained:

*“Sometimes when I have to deal with a student that has been repeatedly reported to me by teachers for misbehaviour, or where there is concerns for the students’ psychological state, I have to call in the mother or father or guardian. To be honest it’s a rarity if you get a dad in as it’s nearly always a mom on their own. Anyway, two minutes into the meeting I know exactly why the kid has issues. ‘Cause the mother has visible issues and/or the parents arrive separately, or contact the school separately, and fight over whose fault it is that the kid is messed up. I also get a lot of single mothers in that are struggling to raise their teenager and keep the show on the road financially. I’m a mother myself and when I show them understanding, I nearly always end up with them crying. These women are doing their best, but it’s a tough gig raising a teenager or teenagers alone and particularly if you are on the breadline”.*

**(Year Head (DEIS School))**

The data collection phase explored the role of the school when students are experiencing adversity in their primary care location. The students were asked to rate their general satisfaction with their primary care location (family). The results indicate that 83% were mostly content with their families which was classified as a *high* satisfaction rating. The remaining 17% indicated they were sometimes or rarely/never content, and this was classified as a *low* satisfaction rating (see figure 5.8).

**Figure 5.8 Student Sense of Satisfaction/Happiness with Family**



The concept of satisfaction/dissatisfaction within family units was explored further in the student focus group. One student explained that some of his peers were under pressure at home. He remarked:

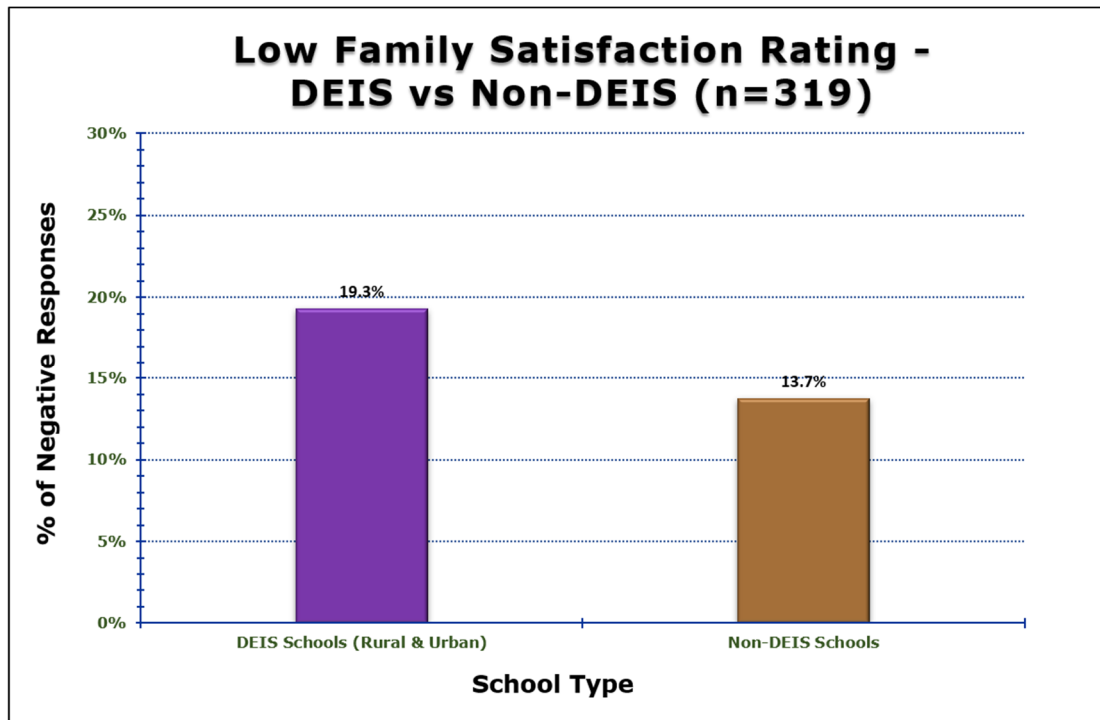
*“I know a good few lads that are struggling at home, their parents have split up, or they live with big problems at home, like a parent or older sister or brother with drug problems or an alcohol problem. The lads don’t talk about it, but everyone knows because we see them [family members] around”*

**(Male student (DEIS,) Focus Group)**

In relation to school types the data indicates that the reported family satisfaction ratings are lower in DEIS than non-DEIS schools (see figure 5.9).



**Figure 5.9 Analysis of Family Satisfaction Ratings in Accordance with School**



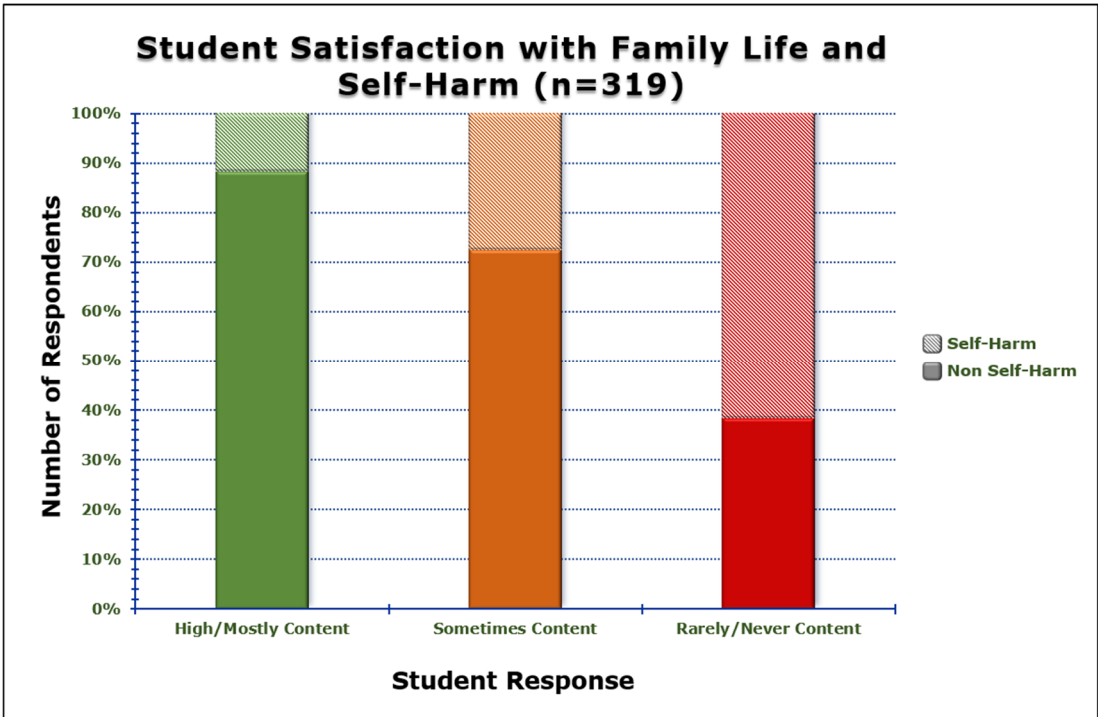
The data indicates that almost 1 in 5 students in DEIS schools rated their family satisfaction rating as low in contrast to 1 in 7 students in non-DEIS schools. The student survey data indicates that where the affective domain of the primary care location (home/family) is disrupted, the secondary care relations provided by the school are significant in supporting the young person. The data indicated that the percentage of students that expressed a ‘low’ satisfaction rating for their family life were twice as likely to trust and seek support from a teacher than those with a high satisfaction with their family units. This was discussed by the student focus group, one female student explained:

*“I think for those students having a hard time of it at home, that they would go to a teacher if they trusted the teacher. I think though, it’s still a really hard thing to do, like going to a teacher and telling them your problems and then seeing them the next day in class. But there are some teachers that make themselves available and you know they’d help you out. You just know they care”*

**(Female student (DEIS,) Focus Group)**

Another significant finding in relation to the sample is the correlation between students who had a low family satisfaction rating and the likelihood of self-harm. While the data indicates that self-harm features among some students who have a high or mostly high satisfaction rating with their family units. This likelihood increases as the rate of satisfaction with the family/family life decreases. Indeed, 4% of students that were extremely dissatisfied with their family life were five times more likely to self-harm than those who were satisfied with their family life (see figure 5.10).

**Figure 5.10 Students Satisfaction with Family Life and Self-harm**



Regarding this statistic, one female student remarked that this was unsurprising. She said:

*“That makes sense because if you don’t have your family, what do you have?”*  
**(Female Student (non-DEIS))**

**5.4 The Relationship Between Compromised Primary Care Locations and Suicidal Ideation**

McDaid (2017, p.14) indicates that low levels of social support from family and friends result in an increased risk of suicidal behaviour whereas high levels of social support act as a protective factor. The research study focused on whether there was a correlation between lower satisfaction ratings with the primary care setting and

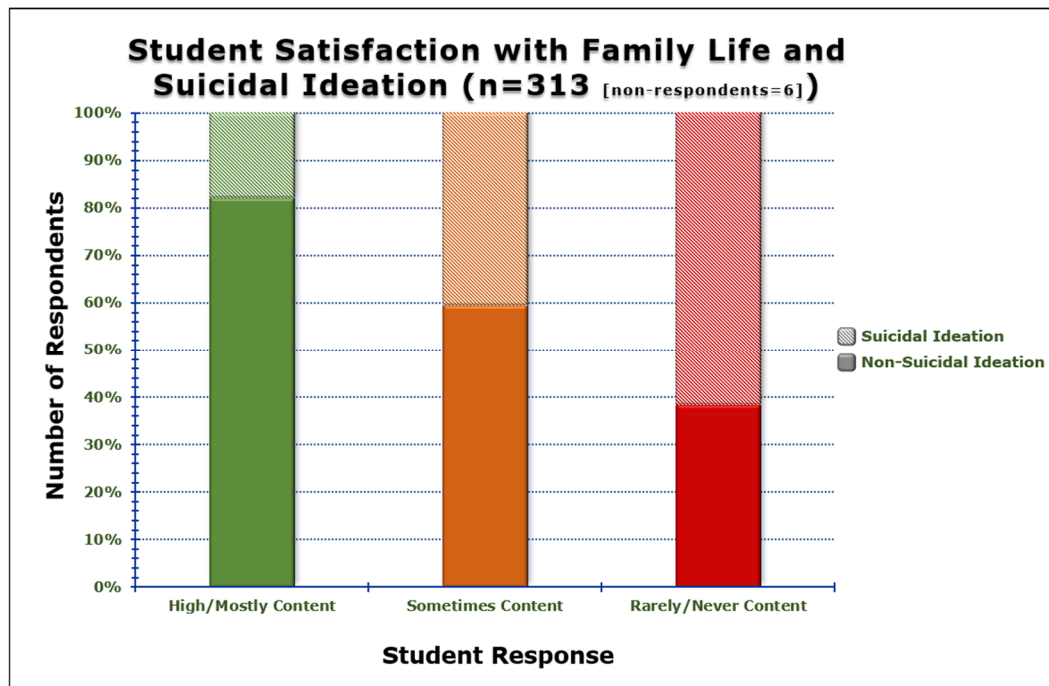
suicidal ideation. The crosstabulation of the respondents' satisfaction with family life and suicidal ideation demonstrated that suicidal ideation was three times more common in students with a low family satisfaction rating than those who rated their home-life highly (see figure 5.11). In relation to the importance of the primary care location as a protective factor for students. She commented:

*“Well the ‘My World Survey’ [published in 2013] talks about the importance of the one good adult but sure if you don’t have a good adult at home, that’s a huge problem because students spend 9am to 4pm here one hundred and sixty-seven days a year but the rest of the time they are at home. They are pretty snookered if they have a negative home life and a lack of support”.*

**(Teacher, Focus Group Two)**

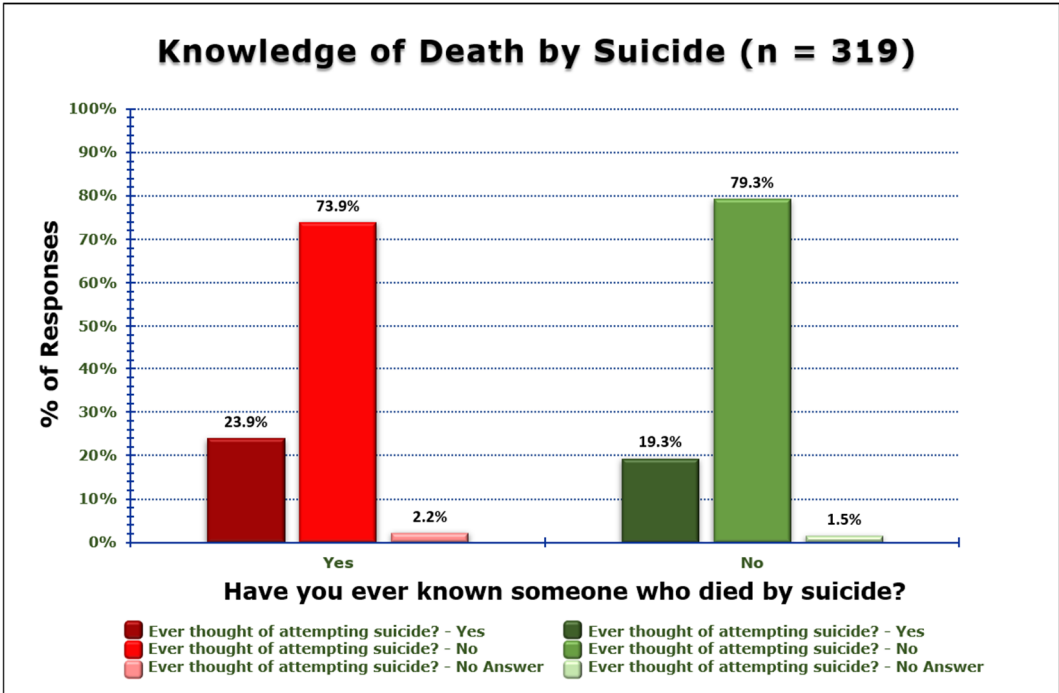
The researcher recognises that young people with depression may be more inclined to express negativity about elements of their lives including their family unit. The casual relationship between students' dissatisfaction with their family unit and mental health issues could be an area for further study.

**Figure 5.11 Student Satisfaction with Family Life and Suicidal Ideation**



Following on from the contagion identified in relation to self-harm, the issue of suicidal ideation was explored. In this regard, almost 24% of the students that outlined that they had experienced suicidal ideation also indicated that they knew of someone who had died by suicide. It is important to note that of those who did not know someone who died by suicide 19% reported having suicidal ideation (see figure 5.12). The limited variation between these figures does not support the phenomenon of a suicide contagion in relation to this sample. It does however highlight that the issue of suicidal ideation is an existential challenge among the adolescent population sampled.

**Figure 5.12 Suicidal Ideation and Knowledge of Someone Who Died by Suicide**



These statistics highlight the need for appropriate training for all teachers in this area and the need for appropriate therapeutic counselling services at post-primary level. This dearth of services is discussed in section 5.8.

**5.5 Schools as Secondary Care Locations Transitioning to a Mental Health and Wellbeing Promotion Model.**

The post-primary school transitioning to a secondary care location for mental health and wellbeing promotion and support requires structural supports. Therefore, post-primary schools are required to establish a Student Support Team under the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) ‘Continuum of Care’ (2007). The role and

function of a SST centres on directing the identification and application of internal (school-based) supports, the coordination of in-school and out-of-school supports; the briefing of staff on new policies and procedures and supporting management in developing and reviewing student support policies and structures. Student support teams have been established across the eight sample schools. Principals, teachers and CGCs outlined the critical role of the SST in supporting students in the school. One career guidance counsellor captured the sentiment in this comment:

*“The SST meeting is where information is shared and a plan to support student is formulated. It is a critical space where solutions are found and decisions to refer are made. It really is essential as in at second level there are so many needs in relation to examinations etc. that you have to have that slot in the week where care is made a priority”*

**(Female CGC, non-DEIS)**

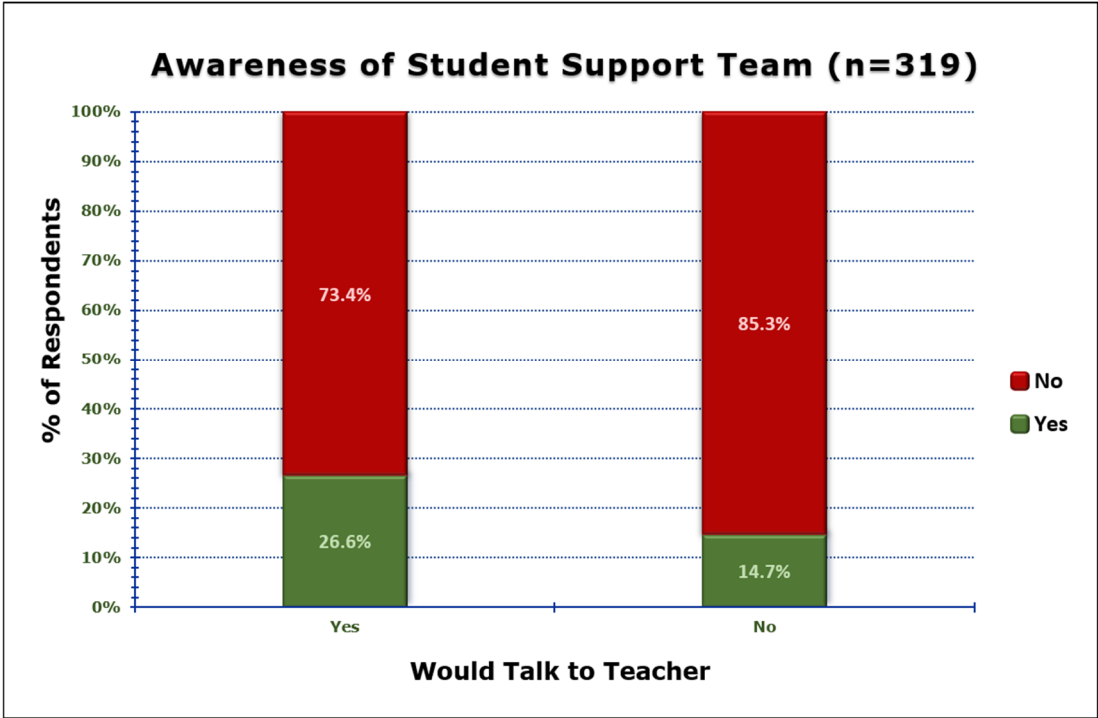
Some of the parents/guardians sampled indicated their awareness of the SST. The parents/guardians awareness was greater in cases where their child had experienced the SST. One Parent captured the positives of such an approach when she said,

*“In schools now with care teams, counsellors and pastoral care support, it’s now ok not to be ok and it’s not seen as it was, the counsellor is just part of the team now and part of the school. I think that’s wonderful for any student to know that there is always someone to talk to and I have seen it in the last four years [with my child]”.*

**(Mother, (DEIS) Focus Group)**

However, in relation to student awareness of the SST, the data indicated that a significant majority were unaware of the SST. While the student survey data indicated that 64% of students would be open to seeking support from a willing teacher, if they had a problem or concern, but only 27% of the sample were aware of the SST. This is represented in figure 5.13

**Figure 5.13 Student Samples’ Awareness of Student Support Team and Willingness to Seek Support from a Teacher**



The awareness of the SST was also low among those who were willing to speak to a teacher about an issue or a concern. Of the 36% of students that indicated they were not willing to seek support from a teacher, 85% did not realise that their school had a designated Student Support Team. At the student focus group, (n=27), 50% indicated that they would be willing to seek support from a teacher if they had a problem. Notably, only half of the eight schools represented at the student focus group (equal mix of DEIS and non-DEIS) were aware of their school’s SST. A discussion ensued where the researcher asked the students if perhaps the SST was known by another name such as the pastoral care team but the students in question indicated that they did not know of any team which existed in their school with the role of supporting students. One student stated,

*“We were never told that our school had this team. It sounds like a really good idea. But it’s the first I have heard of it.”*

**(Female student (DEIS,) Focus Group)**

The lack of student awareness of the SST across the schools is significant if a culture of help seeking behaviour is to be nurtured. The current lack of awareness may reduce

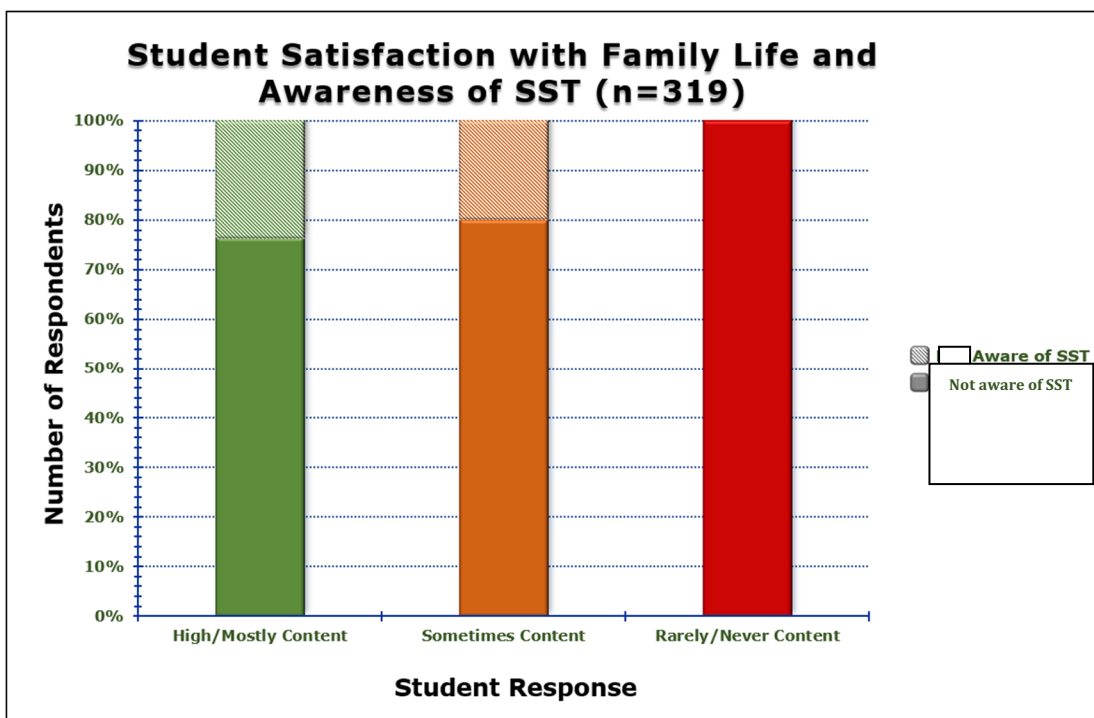
the number of students coming forward for support. Indeed, the students in the focus group argued that more students would seek assistance and support in schools if they knew about the SST. One student explained:

*“I think this message needs to be made known as it would make a great difference to students in that boat. To just know where to go and that these people are the people you can go to”*

**(Male student (DEIS,) Focus Group)**

It was a significant finding that principals and teachers referred to the SST as a support to the students. However, it was notable that many of the children were unaware of the support structure. It appears that the support is teacher initiated based on teachers’ observations and parental disclosures rather than student- initiated ones. This suggests a significant risk in that a significant number of at-risk students in the sample did not engage in help-seeking behaviour. Equally, the quantitative data in figure 5.14 which indicates that all students reporting a low satisfaction rating with their family life did not know that their school had a SST.

**Figure 5.14 Student Satisfaction with Family Life and Awareness of School/Student Support Team**



This finding is significant as the lack of student awareness regarding the SST may restrict or decrease the scale of students seeking help within the secondary care environment (school). This is a critical issue which needs to be addressed if the sample schools are to fully realise the potential of the SST. The findings are also significant when considered in conjunction with students' disinclination to seek adult help which is one of the major risk factors associated with self-harm and suicidal ideation. One career guidance counsellor commented:

*“A lot of the students who really need help and support don't ask or come to us. It's often a teacher that picks up on stuff or a Parent who contacts the school or is contacted by the school regarding concerns. We do have the ones that come to you with every little thing in their lives, but they are not the ones I worry about. I worry about the quiet ones that keep the head down in class and go under the radar”.*

**(Female career guidance counsellor, DEIS context)**

An interesting dimension to the lack of help seeking behaviour illustrated across the student population was the student data which indicated that a significant percentage of them felt they did not have a voice in their respective schools. This is a significant finding and one which will need to be addressed across the ETB scheme. The next section explores the findings in relation to student voice.

## **5.6 The Role of Student Voice in Creating a School Environment Conducive to Mental Health Promotion and Wellbeing**

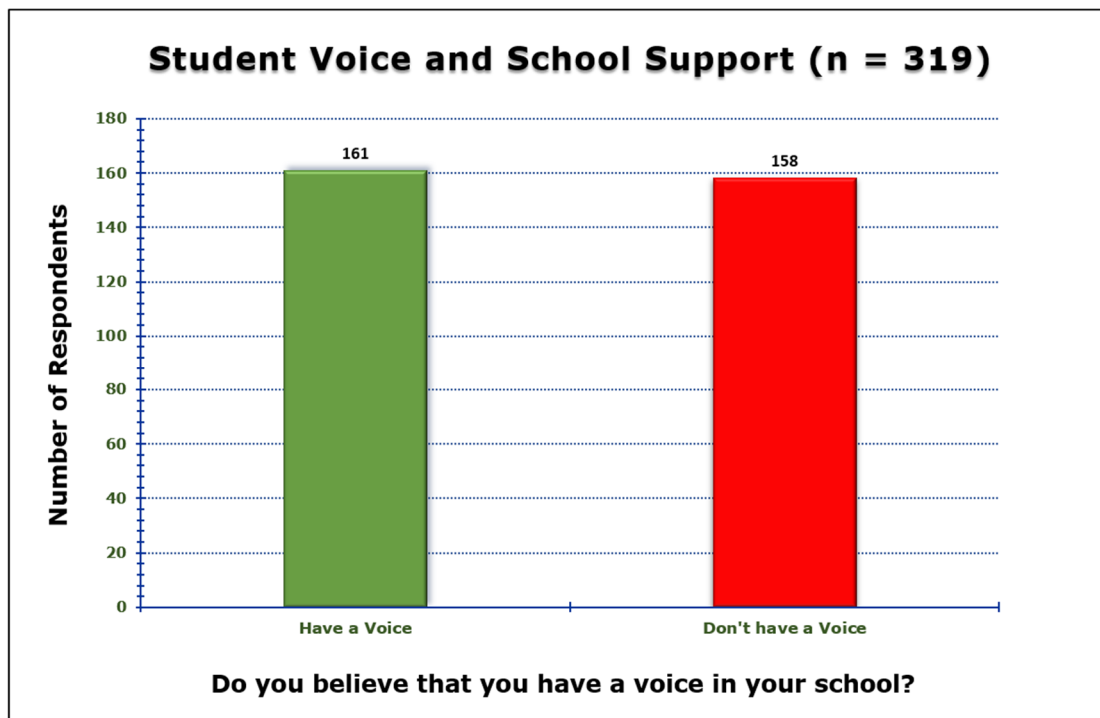
The study recognises the emerging body of work which argues the need for meaningful opportunities to elicit, listen to and hear student voice. In 1992 Ireland adopted the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UN, 1989) which resulted in an increasing awareness of the importance of student voice in policy formation. The convention requires that policy development reflects the rights of children and young people by consulting with them particularly in relation to educational matters (UN, 2003). This aim is particularly reflected in *the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision Making 2015-2020* (DCYA, 2015). Student voice in relation to policy encourages a collaborative approach to policy development



and is encouraged in the *Schools for Health in Ireland* document (2013) and *the framework for Junior Cycle* (2015) and *the Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines* (2017).

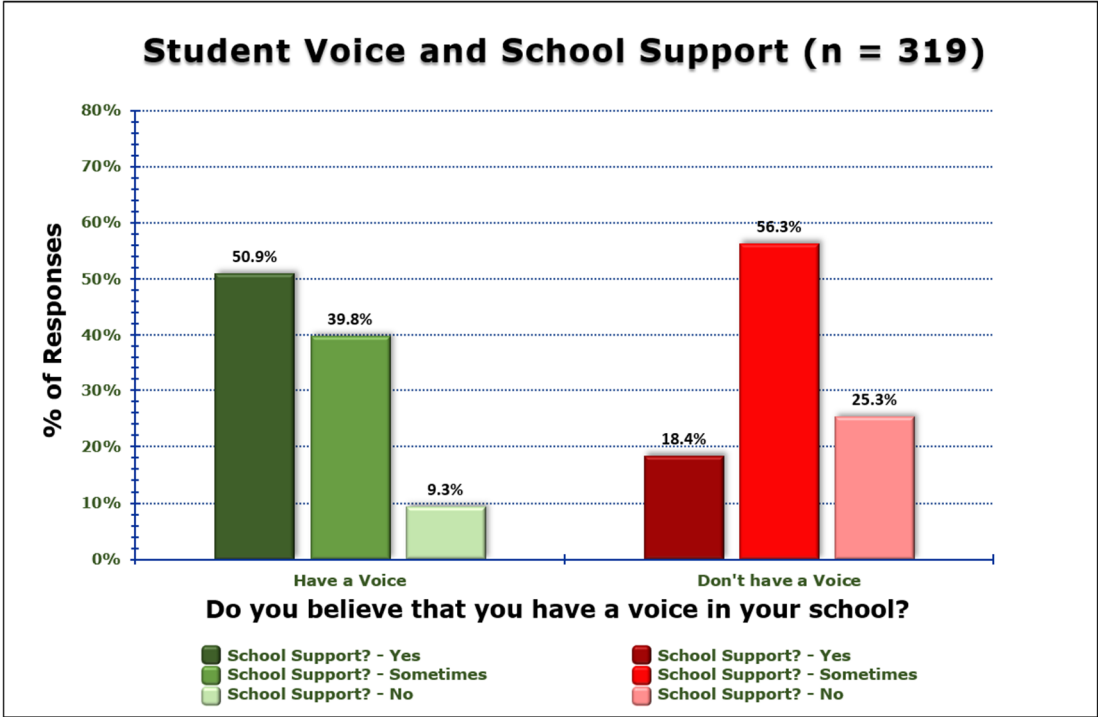
Flynn (2019) argues the need for student voice to be supported in a meaningful way. She cautions that as adults we can view children and their circumstances from an adult perspective, and this can lead to the exclusion of students. Noddings (2005) also supports the student voice as a mechanism to accurately express student needs rather than overreliance on adult perspectives. Cassidy (2018, p. 16) argues that the Aristotelian notion of potential and preparation for the ways of the adult world creates a ‘*deficit view of children*’. She argues that this deficit view impacts on educational provision and student autonomy, ‘*It situates children in positions where they have limited voice, power and influence and this is significant when speaking about children’s wellbeing*’. This is supported by Anderson and Graham (2016) illustrated that adolescents expressed disappointment regarding their lack of power in the organisation and running of the schools they attended. This research study explored students’ experiences in relation to student voice in the sample schools. The survey asked if the student body felt they had a voice in their school. 51% responded positively outlining that they felt their school afforded them a voice (see figure 5.15).

**Figure 5.15 Student Voice and Supportive School Environment**



The correlation between schools as effective settings for mental health supports and the meaningful elicitation of student voice are evident when the responses of two separate survey questions are crosstabulated (see figure 5.16). Of those who felt that the students in their school do have a voice regarding the promotion of mental health issues 51% feel that the school does support their mental health and 39% felt it sometimes supported their mental health. This illustrates that those who felt supported in schools were more likely to report feeling they had a voice. Just over 9% of students who agreed that they had a voice in school felt their mental health was unsupported in contrast to 25% of students who felt they had no voice in school. The data suggests that student voice is related to the level of support students feel in their schools. It also indicates that almost half of all students (158) felt they did not have a voice in their schools which is significant, give that all schools in the sample have an established Students' Council (SC) and run elections annually. It suggests that not all students engage in this process or feel this process is for them. This arose in the student focus group session where students indicated that many of the same students were interested in running for the Student Council annually and were therefore elected and reelected over and over.

**Figure 5.16 Student Voice and School Support- Breakdown**



Flynn (2017, p. 5-7) highlights that students are experts on their own experiences of learning and that teachers should be offered CPD to support and promote a culture of listening to students. He also argues that students must be empowered to develop and use their voice in schools. He argues that schools need to engage in ‘*authentic listening*’ to ascertain the needs and desires of students and respond appropriately to them.

### **5.7 Inadequate In-school Counselling Supports for the ‘Some’ and ‘Few’ and the Consequences for Help-seeking Behaviour**

*‘Help seeking is a process of translating the very personal domain of Psychological distress to the interpersonal domain of seeking help’.*

Rickwood, Deane *et al.* (2005, p. 13)

This research study found that the reluctance of young people to seek help for mental health and wellbeing related issues was a significant barrier. One student explained the reluctance by some students to seek help in school. She remarked:

*“It’s really hard to talk to a teacher or the career guidance counsellor when you see them every day and you’d be afraid that they would tell the other teachers what you said”*

**(Female student, DEIS)**

The challenge the students raised in terms of the career guidance counsellor engaging in the teaching of other subjects has been raised previously by the Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (2019), the Association argue the need for an independent therapeutic counselling service at post-primary level. The benefit of a dedicated and comprehensive professional therapeutic service is supported by research indicates that adolescence is a ‘*peak*’ period for mental health disorders, yet there is not a corresponding rate of help-seeking behaviour (see Slade, Johnston *et al.* 2007; Mauerhofer, Berchtold *et al.* 2009). Researchers have found that young people tend to under-report more serious mental health issues, for instance Dooley and Fitzgerald (2013) found that 20% of young adults and 10% of adolescents that report significant problems, warranting professional intervention, did not seek it. The My World Survey

(2013) outlined correlation between not seeking help and negative outcomes in relation to serious mental health issues. That research indicates that almost 66% of young people discussed their problems with another person and this practice was associated with lower mental distress and increased feeling of positive wellbeing. Conversely, it found that suicidal ideation, self-harm and suicide attempts were higher in those that did not seek help or disclose their problems.

A significant factor which was identified as potentially reducing help seeking behaviour from students was access to in-school career guidance services. Reilly (2011) argues the critical role of career guidance counsellor in the lives of young people who are experiencing increasing rates of mental health issues including depression, self-harm, neglect and anxiety. Hayes and Morgan (2011) illustrate that the Irish career guidance counselling system is an amalgam of the US approach to post-primary support which focuses on therapeutic counselling, and the European approach which focuses on career guidance alone. They argue that the role and function of CGCs in Ireland has become much greater than career guidance but includes emotional support in relation to the student and their family circumstances. The career guidance counsellor focus group argued that their ability to support student was reduced when their hours were redirected from in-quota to ex-quota. Under the current system the level of guidance/counselling provision is at the discretion of the Principal. While it can be argued that this does not preclude principals from maintaining guidance hours at pre-austerity levels, it has altered the status of guidance counselling provision. The CGCs made the point that the provision of counselling services was therefore dependent on the Principal seeing the value of the provision. The CGCs argue that while many principals saw the need and value, others were more concerned with measurable performance indicators in line with the market model. This ensured that many of the career guidance counsellors sampled were timetabled for career guidance rather than counselling which had implications for students. One career guidance counsellor stated:

*“In our school context we need Leaving Certificate points and high-status progressions. So, my hours are steered towards advising student on college pathways rather than delivering support for social and emotional issues”*

**(Career guidance counsellor non-DEIS)**

The data gathered from principals, teachers and CGCs indicates that the supports available to the sample schools are insufficient for dealing with students at risk. The principals' arguments about the lack of supports for their schools in relation to the *some* and *few* categories was reiterated by the CGCs' focus group when the participants explained that the cuts to their hours in schools had placed a pressure on the middle (school supports for some) section of the continuum of care outlined in *the HPS Framework (1995)* for mental health promotion. One career guidance counsellor reported having been cut from 22 hours to 4 hours career guidance counsellor per week for the entire school population. She explained that she had to cut or reduce support for some students, and this caused a backlash from some parents. She commented:

*"I was savaged at a PTM that year because I couldn't give time to certain students in need [the first year of the cuts to career guidance counsellor hours] they [parents] went through me for a shortcut. I was doing my best".*

**(Female career guidance counsellor, (non-DEIS) Voluntary  
Secondary School, Focus Group)**

She offered an example to create a sense of what it was like for her when the cuts came in her career guidance counselling hours.

*"I remember a child stuck to the basin of the toilet bawling and the bell went, and I had double Leaving Certificate [Higher Level] English next. I was torn thinking oh Jesus what am I going to do".*

**(Ibid)**

The career guidance counsellor focus group argued that the presence of a guidance counsellor created the opportunity for students to talk to someone about their problems and concerns and that reducing the CG hours did not mean the student need was lessened. One career guidance counsellor remarked:

*"... the kids aren't coming because there is not the same physical presence so there is a loss. The ring-fencing ensured the support was always there".*

**(Female career guidance counsellor, Focus Group)**

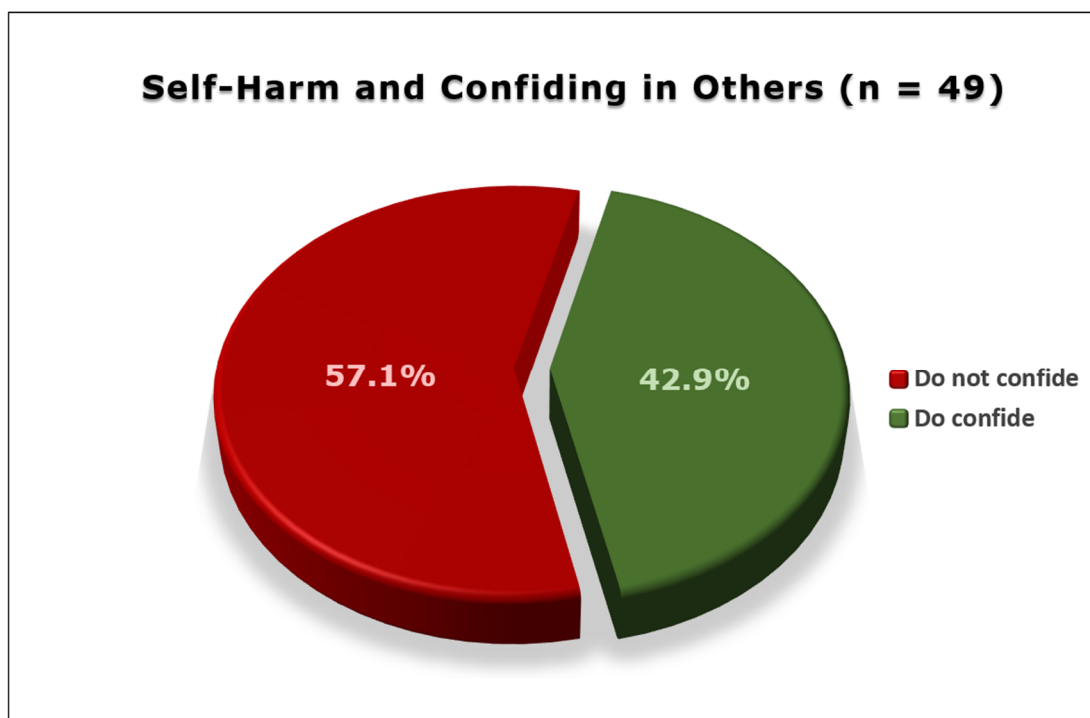
Equally, many of the principals noted the need for a counsellor within their schools. There noted a need for counselling and career guidance and that both were needed but that they often were entirely separate functions. In essence, the role and function of the career guidance counsellor is one which highlights the difficulties in trying to respond to both educational paradigms (see figure 2.1) at once. In relation to the need for a staff member to fulfil the therapeutic role within schools, one Principal remarked:

*“I would see the cuts to guidance and counselling hours as child protection [issue] as that’s another person that can’t be there to help, another stream of issues on my table, am I qualified to deal with these issues, no. The Principal who is not qualified ends up trying to deal with all that as well and its becomes firefighting by right it’s the guidance counsellor should be dealing with that”.*

**(Principal DEIS)**

This research study explored help-seeking behaviour in the sample in relation to self-harm and suicidal ideation. The students were asked if they had engaged or were engaging in self-harm. It is significant that of the almost 16% that indicated their engagement with practices of self-harm, figure 5.18 indicates that 57% had not confided in anyone about the issue.

**Figure 5.17 Students Engaged in Self-harm Practices and Confiding**



Interestingly, the student focus group also indicated a reluctance to speak about self-harm practices. In fact, the room fell silent when the topic was explored, suggesting that there is a stigma attached to such practices and that students speaking about the issue might suggest they engage in the practice. The students did, however, indicate that they were not surprised that 15% of the students surveyed reported engagement with self-harm. This indicates that the survey may have been their first and only time indicating their self-harm issue to a third party. This lack of help-seeking behaviour and underreporting of self-harm, among the sample, correlates with previous research findings which argue that an unreported or unseen *iceberg effect* exists in relation to self-harm.

*“I think the figure is high, but I’m not surprised at all by it. I don’t self-harm, but I do know of people in school that do or there’s rumours that they do”.*

**(Male student, non- DEIS context)**

When the entire focus group were asked if they thought the self-harm figure of 15% was higher than they would expect, all students present indicated that they thought it sounded about right to them that approximately one in seven students were engaged in self-harm practices.

The National Suicide Research Foundation (2018) indicate that adolescent self-harm rates in Ireland are increasing with one in every 131 girls aged between 15-19 engaging in self-harm in 2018. In 2018, the male rate of self-harm among 10-24-year-olds increased by 8%, worryingly, these figures are confined to hospital presentations. The iceberg metaphor illustrates that the cases of seen or reported self-harm are a fraction of the actual figure. The CGCs were aware of the iceberg effect of self-harm in their schools. All CGCs agreed that this phenomenon was a concern in their schools irrespective of socioeconomic profile. One career guidance counsellor made the following comment:

*“What we have is the tip of the iceberg, so putting a career guidance counsellor there is shedding a light on the issue and asking the questions”*

**(Female career guidance counsellor, (non-DEIS) Focus Group)**

The need for a therapeutic counsellor in schools to address students' needs at the 'some' category was outlined by stakeholders. All principals stated that there were not enough meaningful support structures in their schools to properly and fully implement mental health promotion in the way which they would like. All principals indicated that they had attempted to engage outside agencies in line with *the HPS Framework (1995)*. The DEIS principals explained that the supports available to them were deficient for reasons such as distance, time and availability. This view was shared by non-DEIS principals as well, one added:

*“We are not adequately funded, we use Jigsaw, but the local office is gone from our area so now the kids have to travel and often the ones that really need it don't have the parents to support them to get there. So, they used to just go themselves. The guidance hours are increased [since austerity] but not enough”.*

**(Principal, non- DEIS)**

The need for more in school support was highlighted by many principals throughout data collection. One such Principal highlighted the level of therapeutic supports his students needed on a regular basis. He stated:

*“We have doubled the counselling, we have gotten counselling outside of school and we engage with Pieta House then and all the other agencies one has to engage with...”*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

This argument for an appropriate therapeutic school-based service has also been made by the Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP). In 2019, IACP called on the government to prioritise mental health services, they cite that seventy children/adolescents of school-going age died by suicide in 2017 and that mental health services at post-primary be expanded to include school-based therapeutic counselling. Molloy (2019) argues that any mental health strategy should have a school-based therapeutic counselling service available to post-primary students in need of support. Additionally, the iceberg effect within the context of schools transitioning to the affective domain, highlights the need for school personnel to be



trained to spot the signs of self-harm. It also places an onus on students who feel they do not have a confidant, to find this support within the provisions of the schooling system. This reaffirms the importance of the Student Support Team in the lives of students in need of in-school supports for mental health and wellbeing issues. Richardson, Bergin *et al.* (2005, p.163) argue the importance of the role of teachers in self-harm and suicide prevention. They argue that teachers, in regular contact with students, are in a position to recognise students at risk. They suggest that students presenting with a combination of low self-esteem, feeling or perceptions of failure and low mood should be referred for clinical assessment. It also demonstrates the need for schools to be proactively seeking to support students who may be *at risk* rather than relying on the student to engage in help-seeking behaviour.

### **5.8 The Dearth of Capacity within Mental Health Services to Cater for School Referrals for the ‘Few’**

The lack of outside mental health services and capacity to support school referral was a significant finding. It contributed to the pressure felt by many principals, CGCs and teachers as on one hand they were tasked with creating an increasing culture of help seeking behaviour, but they were aware of the lack of services for students who may come forward. Figures released in September 2019 to the local radio station in the region indicate that 564 children and young people are awaiting an appointment with CAMHS in the region. The attitudes and experiences of some respondents demonstrated the pressure and stress and sense of helplessness that a lack of resources caused. Many principals, career guidance counsellors and teachers argued that there were inadequate supports across all schools, for students presenting in the ‘*some*’ and ‘*few*’ categories of *the HPS Framework (1995)*. One DEIS Principal stated:

*“There is a lot of promotional stuff [surface level promotion of mental health] going on but to actually look after people when they are in crisis after is where I feel the catch comes in. A lot of the work in schools is promotional rather than coalface working, in the form of therapeutic counselling, small group or one-to-one support, with people”*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

All DEIS principals indicated that the mental health and wellbeing supports available to them were insufficient to meet demand. DEIS principals in particular argued that the additional complexities of supporting a higher ratio of students in the *some* and *few* categories. The DEIS principals were vehement about the lack of supports for their at-risk students and the binary health system of public and private provision. They outlined that the majority of their students did not have access to private medical insurance and private mental health services. A *Health Insurance Authority Report* (2016) indicates that the cost of healthcare in Ireland is the fourth highest in the EU and 51% of young people have reported mental healthcare costs as a barrier for them in seeking services. They also indicate that 45% of Ireland's population or 2.15 million people have private health insurance with a combined €2.5 billion paid in premiums annually. One Principal of a DEIS school commented,

*“There is sporadic funding for campaigns and guidelines but it's not guidelines that schools need, schools need the financial resources or the staff capacity to deal with issues. A lot of these kids have inadequate support at home and are reliant on the public health service for support with their very serious mental issues. What is lamentable about that is that we, as a school, actually know the ones that need the help”*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

One Principal argued that his school's efforts to achieve an open culture of talking about mental health and wellbeing issues, had become a double-edged sword because the school personnel were inundated with issues and did not have the appropriate support from the Department of Education and Skills. His comment was supported by a career guidance counsellor who argued that the dearth of resources to implement *the HPS Framework (1995)* in schools resulted in teachers going over and above their role to support the students' mental health. She stated:

*“I think there is amazing work being done in classrooms, like counselling with a small ‘c’ and caring. It is amazing, the teachers are so nurturing, they are not therapists but really they are”*

**(Female career guidance counsellor, focus group One)**

He explained that he had prioritised mental health promotion in his school as per *the HPS Framework (1995)*, but that he was not adequately supported by the DES or the Department of Health. He argued that the mental health support organisation external to the school were operating in silos which made his role extremely frustrating. He outlined that, in the absence of a capable Parent, he and relevant school personnel, had become the *de facto* case-holder for the students regarding referrals to outside agencies. DEIS principals outlined that in such circumstances where parent(s) were not able or willing to co-ordinate referrals, triangulation emerged. The triangulation between parents, school and stakeholders was becoming a significant task, particularly in the DEIS context, which accrued no additional allocation.

*“We have a good talking culture in our school, I think sometimes it’s too much, we feel there is too much stuff coming for that reason, the downside of that is the huge amount of time then gone into that”*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

Each Principal expressed a desire to have greater links with outside agencies and to host a qualified professional from NEPS in their school on a regular basis. Reliance on NEPS was more frequent among DEIS schools and non-DEIS schools catering for a significant number of students from a lower socioeconomic profile. Overall, five of the principals reported engaging NEPS approximately four times annually. The Principal of Baile an Droichead Community College (DEIS-urban) had monthly engagement and the Principal of Newtown Community College (DEIS-urban) reported weekly contact. It is significant that Newtown Community College has the lowest enrolment figures at just 64 students and yet the highest level of engagement with NEPS. One such DEIS Principal stated,

*“Take NEPS for example who we would rely on significantly here. The amount of time they have for each individual school is miniscule. Like we would need someone from NEPS here, and this is a minimum level, at least one day per week”*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

Another Principal cited his frustrations in dealing with CAMHS. In relation to linking with outside support agencies, another Principal recounted a case where they had to play ‘*hard-ball*’ with CAMHS in order to ensure that one of his students would get appropriate

support. He detailed his decision to create a paper trail which he felt would result in the action he and his SST felt was needed. He stated:

*“I had a situation, about two years ago, where a case was closed, a madness decision. If I asked you for a textbook example of a case not to be closed this is it. I wrote a letter to an employee of CAMHS and in the last line I wrote ‘I am now telling you that this child will commit suicide and I will be blaming you personally as being responsible for it. In the letter, I had asked for a case conference, the letter went in and I’d say by the next day everything was organised, the case was open again, and everything [we had identified] was done and sorted out. The lady [recipient of the letter] said to me after that it was a very abrupt line to put in the letter, but I told her I wouldn’t be apologising as I had to do her job for her. Imagine, handing me a letter saying case closed and there’s a ticking time bomb down below [points to the main body of the school where classrooms are], we needed support. It is amazing when you put in a letter suddenly it became a situation where they were acknowledging oh, she does need this, and she does need that”*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

The dearth of mental health services for students at high risk was highlighted by DEIS principals. A national news report in relation to 16-year-old girl being admitted to the acute mental health unit of Waterford Regional Hospital coincided with the date of one Principal’s interview. It prompted him to raise the issue during the interview. He said:

*“It was on the news this morning where there are kids waiting in A&E for 23 hours to end up in an adult psychiatric ward when there should be age appropriate adolescent distress centres. Conor Cusack was on television last night talking about the needs for units where you can just go in and there are wellbeing units that are away from other extreme mental health issues, where adults are in a secure ward in a hospital, going into that ward is a bit scary, we don’t have an appropriate service at all when it comes to younger people and adolescents”.*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

He went on to detail his frustrations with the services for young people in crisis and at risk of suicide. He stated:

*“There is an adult psychiatric service and an A&E service but when a young person presents, especially out of hours, most of the problems, most of suicides happen on a Saturday. There should be a place where on a Saturday or a Sunday where people can go in a crisis, other than an A&E where you get lumped in and at the back of the queue with fifty others who need some stitching from the local hurling match or whatever and then you need a child psychiatrist to look after a child not someone who is doing a locum [service] and covering A&E for the day...”*

**(Ibid)**

The researcher noted that the interviewee was incensed as he spoke and asked if he was referring to a situation he had encountered as Principal? He gave a detailed account of his experiences of assisting a student who was at risk of suicide. He explained:

*“It was mid-week and I was in A&E [with a student] last year and A&E were doing their best, but they just weren’t equipped to do what they were supposed to be doing and then in a complete quandary about admitting a student, because admitting an adolescent into a psychiatric unit for adults isn’t a good outcome either”.*

**(Ibid)**

He was asked if that is what happened and silently nodded yes. He was asked if the parents/guardians were there?

*“No, they were uncontactable, so I was there with another member of staff”.*

**(Ibid)**

He was asked if he had voiced a concern that the student was admitted to an adult psychiatric ward?

*“I voiced concerns that they [the student] weren’t being admitted when I thought they really needed to be admitted. That was the best show in town because I thought there was an imminent danger of death by suicide, if the person was left out again, and the person stayed a considerable length of time in hospital so that turned out to be fairly accurate I think. But it was a balance right up to the end, to the time they were admitted, as to whether they were going to be admitted at all’.*

**(Ibid)**

He was asked if the student later returned to school and he replied:

*“They [he/she] are finished school now and made it through which was an achievement for them”.*

**(Ibid)**

Again, this comment indicates that variety of types of achievements in the DEIS context outside of college progression rates alone. The Principal’s comment highlights the need for the recognition of the concept of ‘*distance travelled*’ in relation to the achievements and progress of many students. The recognition of the *distance travelled* by the student would enable the system to celebrate their successes rather than focusing entirely on their performance in the points race and progression to a HEI. This would greatly enhance the schools’ ability to apply the *the HPS Framework (1995)* in a meaningful way and enhance the school’s ability to transition to a setting for mental health and wellbeing promotion at post-primary level.

## **5.9 Conclusion**

The chapter highlights that despite a good *HPS Framework* the post-primary schooling system has limited in-school supports for students in the ‘*some*’ and ‘*few*’ categories identified in *the HPS Framework (2015)*. This chapter builds on chapter four which details trends of stratification and segregation of students from lower socioeconomic profiles and young people with a SEN, within the competitive outcomes-based product system of education. The data illustrates that DEIS schools in the sample are experiencing greater challenges in this regard, as the percentage of their students in the ‘*some*’ and ‘*few*’ categories are higher in comparison to the non-DEIS schools in the sample. The student data indicates that the DEIS schools sampled are catering for a

greater number of students presenting with self-harm and suicidal ideation. The recognition of social determinants, as factors in mental health and wellbeing decline, suggests that a higher percentage of students in '*disadvantaged*' schools (DEIS) would present with or be at risk of mental health and wellbeing issues. The research data presented in this chapter supports this argument. It argues that the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Health need to provide greater co-ordinated services for students in the '*some*' and '*few*' categories. The ideal setting for these supports would be within the post-primary school as this is in keeping with *the HPS Framework (1995)*.

The chapter explores the reasons for the higher rates of students presenting in the '*some*' and '*few*' category in DEIS schools by employing the affective dimension of equality outlined by Baker, Lynch *et al.* (2004; 2009). This is achieved by exploring the impact of the primary care location on students. The chapter explores students' attitudes to, and experiences of, their primary care locations and demonstrates a correlation between a compromised primary care location and a greater level of mental health issues. The data also suggests that DEIS schools cater for a greater level of such students in comparison to non-DEIS schools in the sample. Further analysis of data from the sample illustrates a correlation between compromised primary care locations and sampled students' likelihood to report engagement in self-harm and /or suicidal ideation. This has repercussions for DEIS schools as they are not in receipt of extra resources to deal with the intensification of mental health and wellbeing related challenges. The existence of a binary healthcare system, of public and private patients, must be considered in this regard, given the fact that DEIS designation is partially calculated on the percentage of students with medical cards.

The data presented in this chapter supports the argument that a meaningful mental health and wellbeing promotion model at post-primary level, will only be achieved if the context of schooling is considered. It demonstrates the need for adequate resources for students presenting in the '*some*' and '*few*' categories of the HPS model. The chapter argues that schools are not resourced adequately to make the transition to a settings-base for mental health and wellbeing in line with *the HPS Framework (1995)*. This has the potential to ensure that the intentions of various policies, such as the *Health Promoting Schools Framework (2013)* and the *Junior Cycle Wellbeing*

*Guidelines* (2017) and may result in the effects of such policies being contrary to what was intended. The challenges for DEIS schools in relation to the scale and intensity of students' mental health and wellbeing issues and the demonstrated dearth of services, is compounded by the terminal Leaving Certificate assessment and the marketised school system. Chapter six examines the impact of a high-stakes assessment process which converts grades to points which allow students to be ranked in order of merit for progression. The gatekeeping role of this assessment is an instrumental component of economic reproduction. Therefore, the impact of the Leaving Certificate assessment cannot be underestimated in terms of its contribution to school culture. The next chapter therefore explores the stakeholders' attitudes and experiences of the product system of education. It discusses the influence of this gatekeeping terminal assessment on the ability of post-primary schools to transition to a settings-base for mental health and wellbeing promotion.



## **Chapter Six**

### **The Impact of a Performance-orientated Product System on the Context of Mental Health and Wellbeing at Post-primary Level**

#### **6.0 Introduction**

This chapter explores the impact of the product model of education on the operational context of schools and their ability to promote mental health and wellbeing in a meaningful way. The author builds on the arguments presented in chapter four argued that the competitive nature of the Irish post-primary education system and the role of the Leaving Certificate examination and points system in selection for third level progression has created an inherited and nurtured sense of competition for young people from middle-class or upwardly mobile working-class backgrounds. The chapter argues that the Leaving Certificate as a major influence on the internal happenings in schools around teaching and learning and discusses the central points which emerged from the sampled stakeholder. The discussions are underpinned by the following observations and experiences noted by the stakeholders: the impact of a performance-based product model of final assessment (Leaving Certificate) on student wellbeing; the pressure felt by the majority of stakeholders to ensure prestigious progression pathways for students; the initial perceptions of the stakeholders in relation to Junior Cycle reform; the impact of the product model of education on non-examination subjects and skills development.

The chapter supports Lynch (2016) when she argues that the market model of education recalibrates the measure of success to measurable outcomes such as points and college progression rates. An increase in the intensity of parentocracy among the middle-class is arguably an effort by middle-class parents/guardians to maintain their social status through educational achievement and progression (see Ball 1994; Crozier 2000; Lareau 2000; Reay 1998). Indeed, the belief that the majority of parents/guardians and society in general had developed a view that points and third level progression was the main function of education was outlined by many of the principals in their interviews, irrespective of whether they were DEIS or non-DEIS schools. One Principal captured this perspective when he said,

*“It’s all points, points, points. It’s all study, study, study”.*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

The author explores the points raised by the stakeholders and argues that the post-primary education system is generally overly focused on product model over a praxis model which can engage or disengage the learners with implications for mental health and wellbeing. Lareau (2000, p.151) suggests that the majority of young people conform to the expectations of their parents; however, the opposite can also be the case. Some young people can become demotivated, disengaged by the competitive nature of the education system which devalues their educational efforts by ranking their performance against their peers in the competition for points. McCoy, Byrne *et al.* (2019, p. iii) indicate this phenomenon in relation to the lowering of points for ordinary level grades and LCVP. They argue that this affected students in terms of their ‘*motivation and engagement and academic self-image*’. Additionally, Smyth, Banks *et al.* (2011) indicate a strong correlation between negative interactions with teachers and early school leaving. In this regard, the rate of inactive NEETS in Ireland (see figure 2.2) is noteworthy, given that 33% of these were early school leavers. This chapter considers the findings from stakeholders sampled, in relation to the impact of the current competitive, performance-based system of post-primary assessment. It explores the influence of the gatekeeping Leaving Certificate assessment on the post-primary school’s capacity to care for its students and transition meaningfully to a mental health and wellbeing promotion model.

## **6.1 The Impact of the Performance-based Leaving Certificate Examination on Student Mental Health and Wellbeing**

In the context of *the HPS Framework (1995)*, significant importance is attached to the provision of universal mental health supports for the ‘*all*’ category of students (see figure 2.3). This provision comprises of creating a whole school environment conducive to wellbeing and the provision of mental health and wellbeing education in the form of knowledge, attitudes and behaviours. A critical component of this provision is the Characteristic Spirit of the school. Soutter, Gilmore *et al.* (2011) outline that the Characteristic Spirit of a school is underpinned by the School Mission Statement. They argue that school Mission Statements usually are cognisant of the

importance of the holistic development of students and the development of the human character and spirit for the greater good. However, they argue that often the enactment of this mission is typically insufficiently explored. The mission statements of each school were explored in the course of the data collection process. The principals spoke of their school's mission in terms of the development of the students. The principals acknowledged the significant role of post-primary education in educating students for life's tribulations. One Principal of a DEIS school captured the sentiments of all principals regarding the necessity for the development of student social and emotional skills in tandem with performance-driven academic studies. In response to a question regarding the function of education she responded:

*“Preparing you for life and obviously getting an education but there are two strands, getting an education and education for life, to deal with life that isn't, not necessarily English, Irish or Maths but coping with different things such as life stresses and worries, dealing with people and managing things, it's a whole way of life”*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

The male and female teachers expressed a similar view regarding the function of education. One stated:

*“It is preparing kids for adult life and being able to fit in socially and all that. We are trying to provide a wide, broad education to our students”.*

**(Male teacher (DEIS), Focus Group Two)**

The parents focus group also considered this question and drew from a holistic sense of the function of education in their commentary. One mother stated,

*“Well, you want your child to be well-adjusted, confident and able to care for themselves and others. For me, I want my kids to contribute to their community and society and to be comfortable financially and happy as adults”*

**(Mother (non-DEIS))**

This statement met with widespread agreement from the Parents' Focus Group, meanwhile the Student Focus Group considered the same question. One male student stated the following to the satisfaction of the group.

*“You want to learn how to be independent, how to be able to stand on your own two feet and be able to live as an adult. You want to be given the skills to [pause], to live your best life, as they say!”*

**(Male Student (non-DEIS))**

However, it was widely recognised by the stakeholders that one of the challenges to realising the mission of schools was the mode of assessment used rather than the curriculum itself. For instance, all principals interviewed indicated dissatisfaction with the current Senior Cycle model of education which culminates in a terminal Leaving Certificate examination. Many remarked that the pressure to perform in terminal written examinations was impacting on their school's delivery of social and emotional or holistic elements of the curriculum. Bada and Darlington et al. (2019) support this point drawing on international research which shows that a lack of time and resources for mental health promotion within a product model of education is cited as a major barrier to the realisation of the HPS Framework (1995). The propensity for the Leaving Certificate and points system to dominate the students' experiences of the post-primary system was articulated by one teacher, she stated:

*“I think there is a risk that the pressure of points at the Leaving Certificate takes over”.*

**(Female teacher (non-DEIS), Focus Group Two)**

Teachers made the point that the current *product* system is catering for some students to a greater extent than others. There was a general consensus that middle-class students tended to perform better in the system. One male teacher commented:

*“It is [post-primary education system] catering for certain individuals, from certain backgrounds but then for others from different backgrounds and poorer socioeconomic situations, it might not be”.*

**(Male teacher (non-DEIS), Focus Group Two)**

This teacher's comment indicates an awareness of the inequality in the system and that the habitus and level of cultural capital associated with certain lower SES profiles was ill matched to the requirements of the system. The teacher was located in a non-DEIS context and explained that the majority of students in his school were seeking a progression to a HEI. However, the teacher did recognise that not all students had this objective. The teacher appeared unsure of his response and turned to his colleagues in the focus group and asked the following question:

*“Is there an expectation from us as teachers that everyone in Senior Cycle is looking for points? Do we recognise that some students are there [in schools] for other reasons?”*

**(Ibid)**

Another female teacher responded with the following comment:

*“I think we are catering for the majority and the majority want to be there for and are looking for points, but an alternative path is not as well catered for, they are probably in second place. They might not get as much attention or get made a priority”.*

**(Female teacher (non-DEIS), Focus Group Two)**

A similar point was made by a Principal in a non-DEIS school, he remarked that the attention was given to the students who were examination-focused at the expense of the students who were not. He identified these students as a distinct group that needed attention but were relegated within the competitive system. He outlined that the pressure of the system changes the focus of teachers towards the students and altering the relationship between the school and the home from encouragement to enforcement.

*“There is another group of students that exist too, and they need us too. Teachers will always. No matter how busy they will always ring home to complain a student but when I suggest that they ring home to praise a student, they say I'm too busy for that. As a society we don't give the time to these people, in fact, when you ring home, a parent will always assume that its bad news and that cracks me up”.*

**(Principal non-DEIS)**

This reinforces Bourdieu's cultural capital theory as the desires of the middle-class to perpetuate the system of economic reproduction is reflected in their dedication to the points system which reproduces the political economy. Lynch (1998) asserts that the situation is reinforced by the fact that teachers have gained well from the current product system. This has ensured that teachers are invested in the current system as it was their own educational experience. It also highlights that those students that apply themselves to the current performance-based competitive system of schooling are given more attention and prioritised over students who are less inclined to perform well in the competition.

In relation to the convergence of the two educational paradigms outlined in figure 2.1 in Chapter Two, male and female teachers argued that the Irish post-primary educational environment places more value on teachers who can achieve results and measurable outcomes rather than less tangible outcomes such as increases among those students at the base level of literacy and numeracy or increases in confidence and self-esteem. The pressure on teachers to perform within the points system was mentioned by many participants in the teachers' focus groups. However, there was a different focus depending on school type. Many teachers in DEIS schools indicated that there was considerable pressure on them to get the students with literacy and numeracy deficits through examinations. While teachers in non-DEIS schools felt there was pressure to maximise students' points in the Leaving Certificate examination. Career guidance counsellors discussed the definition of an effective teacher, a debate then ensued where a dichotomy of views was offered. It is noteworthy that females were overrepresented in the group of career guidance counsellors sampled as there were no males in the role in the ETB scheme. One guidance counsellor from a voluntary secondary school stated:

*“Definitely teachers want results because that's your measurable outcome, your results at the end of the year. When the letter comes home [to the teacher] and you are scanning it for As and Bs and then Cs and the league tables [Irish Times College Progression Rates] are doing the same thing and they are not cognisant of school background or personnel or clientele”.*

**(Female career guidance counsellor, (non-DEIS) Voluntary Secondary School,  
Focus Group)**

In response to the comment, another career guidance counsellor from a DEIS context, had a completely different perspective. She stated:

*“I would have to say it’s not for me. Success might mean holding on to them, it might be that they are alive. I measure my own success and I highlight that at the Student Support Team meetings, and it is acknowledged and valued. I have changed for my own self and for other teachers. I say to them, ‘do you realise what you have achieved for this person?’ They were hopeless at the start and now look at them, they have hope. So, I reframed it to align with my own values. If I wanted to get As, I’d be teaching in a grind school with a different cohort”.*

**(Female career guidance counsellor, DEIS context)**

Another career guidance counsellor who had experience of teaching in both ETB (DEIS) and a Voluntary Secondary (Non DEIS) gave her opinion as she felt she could see and appreciate both sides. She reasoned:

*“When I was in an ETB (DEIS) school, in the higher-level English class, it was getting them onto college. But one of my biggest successes was a Traveller student [student from the Traveller Community] who made it through to Leaving Certificate and did a Leaving Cert. and through blood, sweat and tears passed the English paper. That was a huge success, but that level of success would not be valued in an academic school’.*

**(Female career guidance counsellor,  
Voluntary Secondary School (non-DEIS), Focus Group)**

Her comment supports arguments by Doris, O’Neill *et al.* (2019) who found that high ranking schools on league tables were positioned using rank orders derived from raw scores (State examination results) rather than a high value-added score. On this point a DEIS Principal argued that the DES didn’t measure the ‘*distance travelled*’ by the student or consider the social impact of that journey in terms of reduced likelihood to become NEET or engage in deviant behaviour.

*“We’ve had kids come in here that have been functioning illiterate for eight years in primary school and these kids come through the system here with very intensive programmes like ‘Read-Write-Gold’ and ‘Catch-up Literacy’ and ‘Catch-up Numeracy’ and they have sat the Leaving Certificate and they’ve gone on to do a Post Leaving Certificate course. Now how is that measured? Who measures it? Who would listen to that information?”*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

The above quotes indicate that in many cases quantitative analysis of pass rates at Ordinary Level do not appropriate reflect distance travelled by the student or the level of investment of additional time and energy by the teacher in order to ensure the student achieves at Ordinary Level. It also supports arguments made by Apple (2006) and Lynch (2016) about the need to view and measure the real value of education qualitatively as well as quantitatively. Indeed, Lynch and Baker (2005, p.3) argue that *‘learning is more than a preparation for work: it, too, is important for its own sake. The objective is to ensure that everyone has engaging and satisfying learning – learning that develops themselves as people’*. The reflective comments from teachers also support Bourdieu’s (1998, p.170) argument, outlined in chapter two, that habitus is a *‘structured and structuring structure’*. The teachers comments indicate an internalised conflict where they had a ‘structured’ sense, from their own past experiences, that performance in the Leaving Certificate was a key facet to the role and function of education. However, their subsequent experiences as educators, within that same educational system, had challenged their structured belief system to some degree.

The general consensus among the majority of teachers within the teachers’ focus group was that they were prioritising the students that were focused on performing within the points system and competing in the points race. The teachers were forthcoming in their admission but there was a consensus that it was contrary to their underlying value system. However, they argued a sense of powerlessness in the system. This powerlessness felt by actors in the system has been argued by Reay (2017). She details the impact of the political economy on the understandings of many educational actors in terms of education. A system that has created on passive acceptance and a hegemonic control over many educational stakeholders. In fact, only one participant in the entire study openly challenged the marketised system of schooling. In her



response to a question regarding the role and function of schooling, the respondent detailed her sense of disillusionment with the current system. She explained that she couldn't understand how it was allowed to continue. She explained that the education system is created by citizens for citizens and therefore should seek to achieve equality and social justice. She stated:

*“So, everyone is under pressure [for points and progression] and I understand that it is the system that is driving that. But the system is only a system and we have to control the system and we have to measure the system ourselves and also change the system if we need to and be able to. Getting back to the values that we say we have”.*

**(Principal, non-DEIS)**

However, despite her view that the schools are reproducing the pressure for points among students she explained that the system as experienced by the students was not merely controlled by the individual school but that society and her local catchment at large measured success as high points in the points system and progression to higher education. She explained that this resulted in her school's failure to challenge this mindset and her school following suit and highlighting high Leaving Certificate points in the local media. She went on to argue that contemporary society has become extremely focused on the Leaving Certificate points race and progression to a HEI, particularly since the 1990s. She stated:

*“The expectation is explicit now, whereas in my time [approximately 30 years ago] it was up to you if you did or didn't want to do it [progress to third level]. You knew yourself if you did want to achieve at school or go on to college, whereas now it's more that you are an awful failure if you don't get that (third level), whereas in my time it wasn't like that if you went great, well done but it wouldn't be God, you have to go, you should go”*

**(Principal, non-DEIS)**

Her point reflects the changes in Ireland's economy since the 1990s previously outlined in chapter two and the increased economic reliance on FDI and the role of Human Capital Theory on advancing the Irish economy in this regard. The comments identify the influence of the REA model on societal attitudes towards education as

outlined by Lynch (2016) and the correlation between economic reproduction and measurable educational achievement. Indeed, the majority of students in the sample were aware of the importance of the Leaving Certificate and progression to Higher Education in order to maintain or augment socioeconomic status. This awareness was evident in the student survey where the Leaving Certificate emerged as the greatest source of stress for students in their lives. The majority of student respondents highlighted the negative impact of the point system and pressure to progress to higher education on their stress levels. For instance, 84% of the students surveyed indicated that the greatest worry for them was their examinations and getting the points for Third Level. 77% of the sample selected what they would do after leaving schools as their next greatest worry or concern. This pattern was equal across all sampled schools and there was not variation between DEIS and non-DEIS student samples.

**Table 6.1 Issues and Worries Ranked by Student Cohort**

<b>Greatest Issues and Worries Ranked by the Student Sample</b>	<b>Numbers</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Examinations and getting points for college</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>84%</b>
<b>What will I do after I leave school</b>	<b>246</b>	<b>77%</b>
<b>Boyfriend/ Girlfriend problems</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>I worry about my appearance</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>24%</b>
<b>Conflict issues at home between family members</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>23%</b>

This survey data was discussed in the student focus group and students were unanimously agreed that examinations, college points and progression were the greatest worry for them and sources of stress. The students across DEIS and non-DEIS schools at the focus group session indicated a wish to do well in school in equal measure. All indicated their desire to progress to third level, a significant number cited the local Institute of Technology (Tralee) for courses such as Nursing and Sport and

Recreation. Others spoke of their expectation to go to a University to study a variety of difference courses. All Student Council Representatives from each of the eight schools expressed a desire to progress and had high expectations of themselves in terms of their futures. This may have a bearing on the reason why they were selected for (or encouraged toward) the Student Council in the first place. It also reflects arguments by Reay (2017) that working-class students remain invested in education and schooling despite their disadvantage in the competitive process. She reasons that this is the result of a belief that the schooling system is a meritocracy and a realisation it's there is no alternative.

The student focus group were asked why they were not surprised that worries relating to examinations and progression were rated so highly among the surveyed students. One male student explained that schooling was about studying and examinations and that it was a largely a place of pressure.

*“Because we spend so much time in school and studying and being tested and a lot of it is pressure”.*

**(Male student, DEIS)**

All students agreed with the above statement and one male student added,

*“So, there is loads of pressure it's always college, college, college”.*

**(Male student, non-DEIS)**

The second greatest worry, chosen by 77% of the student sample, related to what they would do after their post-primary schooling. A male student articulated that a fear of not progressing to college was placing pressure on students. He felt that the pressure was coming from students' internal expectations of themselves and that progression to higher education was essentially the measure of success for post-primary students. He explained:

*“We are putting pressure on ourselves and it ties in with what's happening after school. We can't be sure, and we don't know what will happen to us after school”.*

**(Male student, non-DEIS)**

When asked if it was a fear of the unknown? He responded:

*“I think it’s a fear of not doing well more than a fear of the unknown”.*

**(Ibid)**

When asked to define what ‘*doing well*’ meant to him, he replied:

*“... to achieve what you want to achieve, so if you want to get a course in college...then to get that course and not to be let down or not to be disappointed.”*

**(Ibid)**

This comment reinforces arguments by Lynch (2016) and Reay (2017) that the system is presented as a meritocracy and that failure to progress is internalised by the citizen, rather than externalised in the form of an open questioning of the system. This suggestion by Lynch (2016) and Reay (2017) that the concept of failure or fear of failure has been internalised by citizens is supported by the data presented in table 6.1. The fears and worries of the student cohort in relation to educational progression was explored by the researcher during the student focus groups.

In an effort to explore the source and motivation for the *pressure* students felt to progress to Third Level, the researcher asked the students if they could identify the sources of the pressure. Two students, one male and one female highlighted the role that some parents/guardians played in adding to the pressure felt by students. The students felt in some cases parents/guardians were trying to live or relive their educational experience and progression vicariously through their children. The female student stated:

*“I see it with other students, I think it comes from what their parents had wanted to achieve, they try to achieve it for their child because they didn’t achieve it themselves. So, they put a higher standard and a higher expectation on the child.”*

**(Female student, (non-DEIS))**

This comment supports argument that middle-class parents, as a collective, desire their offspring to recreate the political economy thus maintaining or augmenting their social and economic status (see Ball, Bowe *et al.*, 1994; Lareau 2003; Lynch 1990; Reay

2017). The concept of some parents/guardians placing pressure on their children, to achieve Leaving Certificate points in the hope of achieving upward mobility, also arose. One Parent remarked:

*“There’s too much pressure on them, as parents we need to look at ourselves and where we failed, we can’t be pinning them to the wall saying you gotta do this. We need to chill out.”*

**(Male Parent, Focus Group, DEIS school)**

A female student also captured the role that parents/guardians can have in adding to the examination pressure. She explained that most children (students) love their parents/guardians and want to please their parents/guardians and for their parents/guardians to be happy with them.

*“I feel that parents would put pressure on their child to do well because like your parents really impact your life and if your parents say something and you do want to do your best to achieve it”.*

**(Female student, non-DEIS)**

This student’s perspective supports arguments by that the middle-class parents/guardians’ desire for economic reproduction is inherently embedded in the psyche of their offspring. The desire of parents/guardians, from lower socio-economic status, to be upwardly mobile can also become the inherent desire of their offspring, although this is less likely statistically to become a reality (see Reay 2017; Ball *et al.*, 2003). A male student supported this argument by detailing that the desires of parents/guardians and students to do well are often combined in a shared sense of what is best for the student. However, he cautioned that this can create an anger towards parents/guardians when examination pressure is mounting.

*“I think there is a mix of parents wanting kids to do well and the students themselves, a lot of the time when parents are encouraging you to study like they are trying to do good for you in a way but then because you are stressed anyway you might blow it out of proportion in your own mind and feel like oh my god everyone is on my back and its always when you have anger you will take it out on your parents because. I feel like, I don’t know, that’s just the*

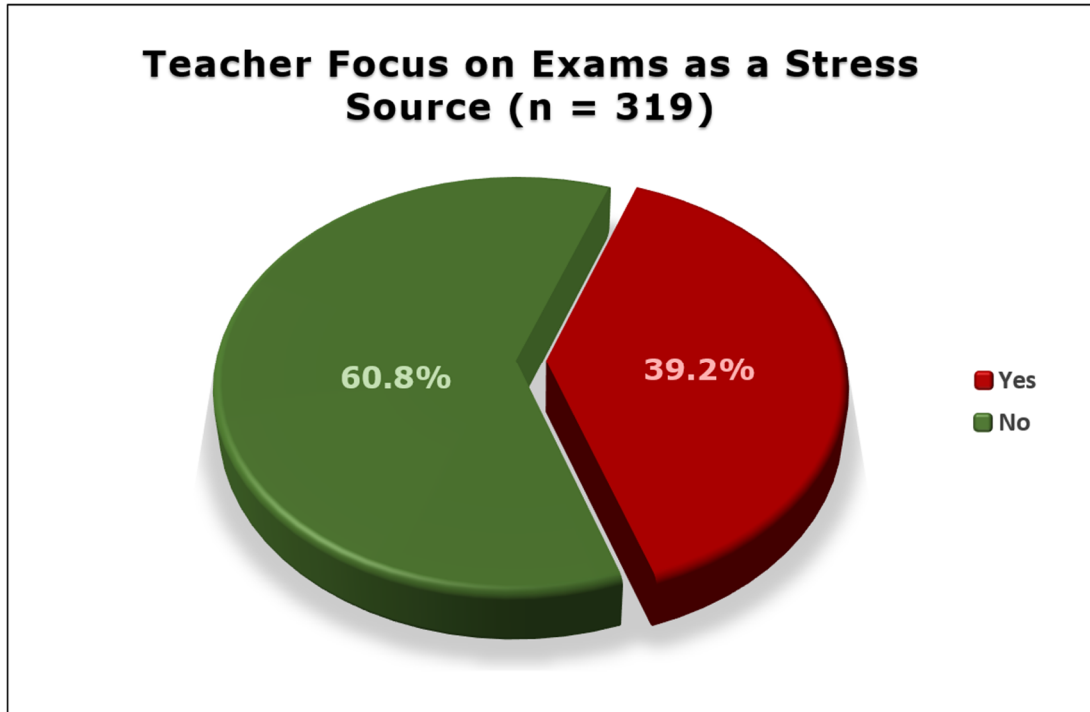
*way it is, I don't know why, so it's always a mix of pressure from the student and the parents"*

**(Male student, DEIS)**

Lareau (2003) and Devine (2004) argue that in recent decades parents have developed a sense that a college degree is necessary to maintain or augment socio-economic status. Research such as this highlights an inherited desire to ensure societal standing is maintained or improved upon.

The student data also indicated that the actions and behaviours of a significant proportion of teachers some teachers in relation to State examinations, were also contributing to student anxiety and stress levels. The student survey data illustrates that teachers also contributed to student stress levels in relation to examination performance. The study found that almost 40% of fifth year students had found the constant examination focus by many teachers as a source of stress.

**Figure 6.1 Teachers Focus on Examinations as a Cause of Stress for Students**



One female student, in the focus group, agreed that teachers' over-focus on examinations was a cause of stress and anxiety for many students. She explained,

*“I think from once you start secondary school, teachers are constantly talking about exams and reminding you to do your best and saying you have to study, you have to do better, you have to achieve this place [a third level place in a Higher Education Institution]”.*

**(Female student, DEIS-)**

The constant teacher focus on assessment can be attributed to two factors: teachers’ concerns regarding measurable outcomes and performance in the form of points; and teachers’ understandings of the broader system and how access to specific HEI courses will benefit students socially and economically. Bathmaker, Ingram *et al.* (2016) recognise that access to prestigious HEIs and courses will ensure an individual’s social standing is maintained or augmented. The significance of the Leaving Certificate assessment as a gatekeeper has ensured an environment which is focused more on performance than care which is contrary to *the HPS Framework* (1995).

The parents/guardians’ focus group discussed the issue of Parental and teacher over focus on examination performance. While they acknowledged that there can be pressure coming from parents/guardians and teachers they felt that this was natural to the roles. They argued that society played a role in examination pressure. A mother argued that communities are obsessed with the Leaving Certificate points and progression. She felt that there was a relentless societal pressure on young people particularly when they entered Senior Cycle.

*“It’s not always the pressure coming from home or teachers. It comes from extended family, neighbours, from anyone they [students] meet down the street or in town that they may not speak to from one end of the year to the next. They all feel they have the right to ask what subjects you are doing, the hours of study you do, what you are going to do [after the LC] and I think its widespread and people feel they are entitled to comment once they [the students] hit fifth year and it’s a huge pressure”.*

**(Mother, DEIS)**

This point met with widespread agreement from the group and another Parent interjected enthusiastically saying:

*“Yes, what subjects did you choose? What do you want to do, suddenly they are supposed to know what they are doing for the rest of their lives.”*

**(Mother, non-DEIS)**

The issue of societal pressure also arose in the student focus group. A male student, with a part-time weekend job, detailed that his weekly encounters with his community caused him stress. He stated:

*“I work in a bar and the amount of people that come in and mention school and turn to asking me about what job I want to do and what course, and my future... ” (he raised his eyes to the sky and shrugged)*

**(Male student, DEIS)**

Another male student supported this phenomenon, he commented that his community were very focused on what he would do next rather than the post-primary process he was currently engaged in.

*“I find that every time someone has a conversation with me since I went into 5<sup>th</sup> year, it’s like oh, what college are you going to go to? Or what course are you doing [next year] or what job will you do?”*

**(Male student, non-DEIS)**

A female student nodding enthusiastically added the following remark:

*“You are expected to know the subjects you are going to do and what job you are going to do and course. And you don’t know what you want to do or what subjects you are good at or what to do ... so you just do it because you enjoy it...”*

**(Female student, non-DEIS,)**

The stakeholders’ attitudes and experiences of the source of examination and progression pressure supports the theory of Economic Reproduction. The desire for successful performance in the Leaving Certificate and progression to a HEI is prioritised as higher education is perceived as a pathway to higher income and economic stability and means of social mobility. The ‘pressure’ exerted by students



on themselves, as outlined in the student focus group, indicates a shared sense of purpose and perception of successful schooling outcomes between the students and their parents/guardians. This relates to a shared habitus and cultural capital where the student perceives his/her parents/guardians' actions as in their best interests. The intersectionality of the dimensions of equality and inequality identified by Baker, Lynch *et al.* (2004) are arguably evident here as the students feel the stress and worry about their exam performance as they sense or understand its significance in maintaining or enhancing their social and/or economic status. The observations from many parents and students, that society also played a role in adding to the pressure, supports Lynch's (2012; 2014) argument that the REA model underpins the general, societal perspective on education. It suggests that actors in society are interested to know what role the student may play in contributing to the economy going forward. This has contributed to an education system which has become over-focused on assessment and performance indicators and outcomes. Noddings (2003) argues that this type of system is not a caring system in which the learner can find truth and meaning which is a central component of wellbeing.

The potential of an over-focus on examination performance to demotivate and disenfranchise some students emerged in the data collection phase. Currently, participation in the learning process is not appropriately recognised at senior cycle outside of the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) which operates a system of modules accessed by a combination of project work (continuous) and final examinations. However, an analysis of State Examinations Commission (SEC) figures indicate that there has been a steady decrease in the numbers opting for LCA since 2010. SEC provisional figures for 2019 show that of the 58,787 students who sat the Leaving Certificate less than 5% opted for the LCA. The LCA cannot be used as a direct access route to Higher Education courses through the Central Applications Office (CAO). Instead it can be followed by a Post Leaving Certificate (PLC)/ Further Education and Training (FET) course which may in turn yield progression to a HEI if desired and achieved.

In relation to the LCA, one teacher remarked:

*“To be straight up about it, LCA is often perceived as the poor relation to the Leaving Cert. Many schools in our area don’t offer it as they do not want to draw students who might bring down their results and progression ratings. Also, it is not all about ability, LCA can draw a less desirable type of student in terms of behaviour and interest but people are slow to admit that one”.*

**(Male Teacher, (non-DEIS))**

The comments of the teacher were not disputed by the other members of the focus group. The comment suggests that the education system has become the servant of the economy and therefore the worth of the individual within the system is measured similar to currency. This fails to value all students and can lead to student experiences of a system which arguably challenges the provision of education as a human right. The Leaving Certificate as a product orientated system of education and schooling does not formally recognise the concept of *distance travelled*. Arguably, failing to heed the concept of *distance travelled* by learners renders schooling more meaningful for students who can achieve success within the performance-based system. Currently, the post-primary system does not reward or recognise Senior Cycle students who do not perform well in the terminal examination. The current Leaving Certificate assessment and reporting system does not take cognisance of attendance, participation, perseverance and effort, nor does it reward the additional talents or attributes of the learner, for instance volunteering or community activism. It fails to recognise a distance travelled in terms of their educational journey. This system fails to recognise education and learning as a personal endeavour and journey. It fails to appreciate learners for the distance they have travelled on their educational journey. It turns learners into consumers of education but measures their consumption according to measurable objectives. Bathmaker, Ingram *et al.* (2016) identify the enduring issues which result from an educational system solely based on measurable outcomes. They argue that many working-class students continue to experience pressure on entering Higher Education Institutes; they offer accounts of fractured identities and as Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p. 127) explain *‘fish that feel the weight of the water around them’*.

## **6.2 The Pressure for Prestigious Progression Pathways**

In relation to the progression pathways available to students, stakeholders suggested that higher education was perceived as a more prestigious pathway and that Further Education and Training (FET) was a lesser progression. The prestige afforded to Higher Education centres on its correlation with greater income levels and increased life satisfaction as outlined by McGuinness, Bergin *et al.* (2019). The teachers in focus group one discussed the need for an enhancement of the perception and image of progression pathways offering an alternative to the HEI route. One comment summarised the general feeling among participants.

*“There are always alternative for them [students], but I think they probably see the alternatives as failure if they don’t get the points and they see that as a stigma or failure and that’s what’s adding to the pressure for them. They perceive that the alternative path is going to damn them and that is adding to the pressure for students, they don’t see that there is more than one way into careers nowadays. There are options for them, they don’t have to rule something out because they didn’t get the points for it. It’s not really a great system the way it’s set up for them”.*

**(Male teacher, (non-DEIS) Focus Group Two)**

Bathmaker, and Ingram *et al.* (2016) argue the role of prestige particularly in relation to higher education. They illustrate that in the UK, the increasing numbers attending HEIs has resulted in the stratification of HEIs which has had a knock-on effect on post-primary education. One Principal captured the need for greater understanding in society, including the teaching community, about the many ways for students to achieve their educational goals. He recounted his own personal experiences of achieving his desired area of occupation through the Further Education and Training (FET) route and transferring to the HEA route. He argued that many students and teachers see the Leaving Certificate Points System as *a make or break* gateway in terms of their future educational opportunities and subsequent career plans. He explained that this was not the case:

*“The only good thing is that you can do whatever you want to do. I often say to student, ok imagine you have 600 points in your back pocket, what do you want to be? So, they might say ‘a vet’ but they’ll say but I can’t because I*

*won't get the points, but I explain that if you want to be a vet you can. You might do a PLC course in animal care and transfer over to be a veterinary nurse and then you might transfer into a degree and onwards. There are ways there now that were never there before, so I try to instil in them to have a plan A and B. There is no point in students putting veterinary down first and then computers second [because they are putting courses down to suit their projected points level]. Nothing will stop them, it may delay them, but they can still follow their real interest..."*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

The Principal argued that the Leaving Certificate points race and direct access to higher education was one route, but not the only route, for students to achieve their choice of occupation. The principals argued that the narrow focus of the Leaving Certificate points system is causing students to narrow their progression pathways in anticipation of insufficient points. One Principal outlined that it was impacting on students' self-esteem and self-efficacy and focusing them on a fatalistic path rather than an ambitious path. He argued:

*"The message that needs to go from the Leaving Certificate is yes points are important, but you can do what you want to do. They don't research, and they don't think and then when they see the points, they think I won't make it. I think sometimes guidance counsellors don't see that either sometimes, there can be sometimes more benefit to the learner to go to PLC and the IT and transfer into University than to go straight in".*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

The critical role of the career guidance counsellor in the development and advancement of a positivity around alternative pathways was highlighted by teachers in the focus group session. The importance of grapevine knowledge of the educational system is imperative to navigate progression to tertiary education, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. McCoy, Smyth *et al.* (2014) argue that young people from disadvantaged profiles are more likely to depend on school-based guidance due to a lack of home-based knowledge on the educational system. Again, similar to the transition from primary to second level, grapevine knowledge has a significant bearing on choices made and outcomes achieved. In this regard, the

instrumental role of the career guidance counsellor is evidenced by (McGuinness, Bergin *et al.*, 2018, p. 88) when they illustrate that young people who were unsatisfied with the provision of guidance at post primary level were ‘*significantly more likely to regret their choices on leaving school*’. McCoy, McGuinness *et al.* (2016) argue that prior to the removal of ex-quota guidance hours, guidance provision was less than required as it was largely limited to Senior Cycle despite evidence that educational aspirations for Higher Education are formed as early as Junior Cycle. Within this research, the imperative for a comprehensive career guidance counselling service was outlined by stakeholders. One teacher detailed a recent case he had encountered as a case and point. He stated:

*“I think the career guidance counsellor in the school have an important role to play in that. I came across a 5<sup>th</sup> year student that is kinda reducing his options straight away as he feels he is not able for the university route, so I have already referred him to the career guidance counsellor to talk to him and see what his options are and now he’s very happy that he can still get there but just take a longer route”*

**(Male teacher, (DEIS) Focus Group One)**

The complexities of being a career guidance counsellor within the performance-based market model of education emerged in the CGCs’ focus group. The participants acknowledged an elitist perspective which prevailed in relation to HEIs. They cite the issue of negativity towards certain alternative pathways to progression, namely apprenticeships and post-Leaving Certificate courses. The participants were asked if they were free to promote apprenticeships to their students. One respondent from a voluntary secondary school commented:

*“We have parents that don’t want you to mention apprenticeships. It’s the notion of going to university. A lot of our generation [40s and 50s] who are parents, did not go and so they want their children to go, but it’s also coming from career guidance counsellors ...”*

**(Male teacher, (non-DEIS) Focus Group One)**

When asked why career guidance counsellors would not wish to discuss apprenticeships as a progression pathway with students, another career guidance counsellor explained:

*“Career guidance counsellors will have told students not to do an Apprenticeship or PLC, even in DEIS schools. It’s coming from career guidance counsellors a lot, I hate saying that, but I have to say it”.*

**(Female career guidance counsellor, (DEIS) Focus Group)**

Another career guidance counsellor agreed stating the following:

*“There’s an outside pressure to get the status-progression even when it’s not in the best interests of the students and works against them”*

**(Female career guidance counsellor, (non-DEIS) Focus Group)**

Another further respondent suggested that some parents/guardians will do anything for the college/university place, the career guidance counsellor spoke of the wastage of money that can often be involved in pursuit of the prestige of college.

*“The amount of money that is wasted [by going straight into university], for example a student could do a Level 5 and 6 in a PLC and then transfer to 2<sup>nd</sup> year of a degree course and that could save ten thousand euro”.*

**(Female career guidance counsellor, (DEIS) Focus Group)**

The career guidance counsellors spoke of the pressure of college progression tables on schools and that all schools, including DEIS schools, were seeking progression to university despite it perhaps not being in the best interests of the student at that time. One commented:

*“I suppose in the DEIS school the student that might get the 400 points but could benefit from the extra year in a PLC course [level 5 on the NFQ], even the DEIS school will encourage them to go on to university for progression figures”.*

**(Female career guidance counsellor, (DEIS) Focus Group)**

One father raised the question as to why a significant number of students were feeling compelled to progress to a HEI and higher education, given that the economic up-turn was presenting more opportunities for apprenticeships now. While the parents participating in the focus group recognised the pressure on students to progress to a HEI, and the merits of the Apprenticeship model, they did not all agree that alternative routes had equal merit. In recognition of this view among some parents/guardians, the father again addressed the group, this time with a sense of momentousness. He stated:

*“This thing years ago of oh, an Apprenticeship, you have to do the Leaving Certificate and go to college. I think that’s changing very rapidly and the sooner it does the better because they [trades people] are making more money in many cases. He went on to say; “apprenticeships get 200 euro per week, having a life, a car and friends rather than slogging away at college to say after two years, I don’t like this course, we [parents] need to chill out a hell of a lot more and not push them as hard [to go to a HEI] as we push them. We need to chill out.”.*

**(Male Parent, (DEIS) Focus Group)**

However, none of the other parents/guardians voiced this opinion or overtly agreed with it during the focus group session. Instead a mother commented:

*“I worry about my daughter, I have a degree in Office Administration Systems, and I wouldn’t want her to qualify in that area as the pay is not great. The old reliable jobs such as nursing, the guards and teaching are not great careers nowadays, not like they were. So, I am reliant on the school to guide me, so she succeeds and gets a good job with prospects”.*

**(Mother, Parents’ Focus Group)**

The overarching sense from parents that high Leaving Certificate achievement and subsequent progression to a HEI was desirable, for their children. Interestingly, the dual role of the career guidance counsellor reflects the tensions for them as the main professional advisor for progression within the competitive product-based educational system but equally as the provider of therapeutic-orientated emotional support to students at risk. The pressure created by the performance-based, gatekeeping model of assessment at the end of post-primary schooling also has an impact on educational

provision and practice at Junior Cycle. The next section explores the impact of the current performance-based product model on recent reforms at Junior Cycle which seek to embed a transition to a mental health and wellbeing promotion model of schooling. This section examines the impact using three central themes. These are: the impact of partially reformed assessment at Junior Cycle. The increased timetabling of wellbeing hours and the impact of the product system on the status of non-examination subjects among the sample.

### **6.3 Assessment in the Framework for Junior Cycle: An Opportunity Lost?**

In an effort to move away from high status examinations and rote learning, *the Framework for Junior Cycle* (2015) was devised. The Junior Cycle (2015) is built on eight key principles, one of which is wellbeing. *The Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines* (2017) which reflect the HPS Framework suggests that the central objective of wellbeing in schools is to ensure learning takes place in a climate focused on collective wellbeing of school, community and society. In terms of teaching and learning, one of eight key skills in the *Framework for Junior Cycle* (2015) is *staying well* was devised to prepare students to develop the knowledge, skills and understanding for contemporary society. The realisation of the principles and skills associated with wellbeing at Junior Cycle are targeted by two approaches. These are: teaching *for* wellbeing and the teaching *of* wellbeing.

In terms of teaching and assessing for wellbeing, the original intention of the new Junior Cycle was to create a system of continuous assessment, with a strong focus on formative assessment focus in tandem with summative, which would be valued at 40% or more of the subject examination. This was underpinned by a desire to move away from rote learning and high stakes terminal examinations. However, an impasse developed between the DES and the post-primary teachers' unions regarding the role of the teacher in assessment and grading. The DES proposed that teachers would assess their own students at Junior Cycle whereas this was unacceptable to Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland (ASTI) and the Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI). Following a change of Minister for Education and Skills<sup>19</sup> the impasse was resolved

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<sup>19</sup> Ruairí Quinn (TD) served as Minister for Education and Skills (2011- 2014) and was replaced by Jan O' Sullivan (TD) in 2014



by reducing the value of continuous assessment component to 10% to be externally assessed by the State Examinations Commission.

This section explores the experiences of stakeholders regarding *the Framework for Junior Cycle* (2015) are illustrated in this section. The attitudes and experiences of principals, teachers, CGCs are given greater focus than parents and students as the implementation of the Junior Cycle was in its infancy and had not greatly impacted on students at the time of data collection<sup>20</sup>. The role of continuous assessment and movement away from rote learning was discussed by principals, teachers, and career guidance counsellors particularly in the context of student wellbeing. All of the principals identified the Framework for Junior Cycle as progressive. One remarked:

*“It’s progressive, anything that gets people away from rote learning and gets people working together, the key skills of the new Junior Certificate are all on the button really”.*

**(Principal, non-DEIS)**

Many principals made similar points, one highlighted that curricular change and a change to assessment can positively impact on mental health. He commented:

*“What goes on in the classroom can be good for someone’s mental health or bad for mental health. If you want to an Irish class and you are learning off verbs and tenses every day, I think this is bad for your mental health and if you are being shouted at or given reams of stuff to parrot back to the teacher. So that is why I welcome the new Junior Certificate. I think they are forming into a good environment where their abilities are recognised. There are different types of smart as I always tell my students. I think that teaching itself can either build-up mental health or bring it down”.*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

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<sup>20</sup> The sample of fifth-year students had only experienced one subject area in the revised *Framework for Junior Cycle* (2015). A comprehensive analysis of the student experience of the new Junior Cycle and Junior Certificate examination process cannot take place until 2023 at the earliest as all subjects come on stream in 2020 for the first-year cohort and they will sit their Junior Certificate examinations in 2023.

In relation to the new model of continuous assessment, one Principal indicated that there is evidence of a successful transition. He explained what he had observed in relation to the new Junior Cycle. He said:

*“A lot of teachers would come back and say, they see an improvement in the students orally when they have to present orally in front of the class, in my head I’m saying, that must be a positive. The students now can be coaxed or encouraged to stand up in front of their peers something they felt they could never do. So, there are success stories”*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

The positivity held by many stakeholders in relation to the focus on the identification and cultivation of key skills at Junior Cycle level is also reflected in the preliminary data collated by Banks, McCoy *et al.*, 2018, p. 20-21<sup>21</sup>, in relation to Senior Cycle reform. They cite the views of many stakeholders who are expressing the need for a focus on key transferable skills over rote learning. Burns and Devitt *et al.* (2018) also cite the need for greater transferable skills and less rote learning in the orientation of the Leaving Certificate assessment. However, during the focus group sessions and interviews, it emerged that many teacher/management participants felt that amendments to the original intended *Framework for Junior Cycle* (2015) which reduced the value of the Assessment Task from 40% to 10%, had reduced the potential of the new model. The participants argued that external assessment of students was imperative for transparency and homogeneity and justified the position of the teachers’ unions’. However, they argued that the reduction by the DES to 10% for the continuous Assessment Task (AT) was non-sensical if the objective was to teach for wellbeing. School personnel expressed concerns that once the Framework for Junior Cycle is fully implemented, all subjects will have a Classroom Based Assessment component. The career guidance counsellors in this study highlighted their concerns that the CBAs had the potential to put pressure on the more diligent students. One teacher captured the widespread concern that reducing the marks/value of continuous assessment would increase the workload and stress for students encountering the new assessment system at JC.

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<sup>21</sup> Working paper

*“Sure, now we have the worst of both models. We have a load of Classroom-based assessments (CBA) and an Assessment task (AT) coming on stream for every subject but they are worth very little. The clued-in students are cute enough to take little notice of them, but the majority of students are anxious and stressed out. They have CBAs coming out their ears. The teachers are stressed out too for that matter as the parents will be assessing the teachers’ performance based on the results of CBAs”.*

**(Female teacher, (DEIS) Focus Group One)**

Additionally, there was widespread concern among teachers and some principals that teaching and assessment modes at Junior Cycle would not prepare the students for the points-orientated Leaving Certificate examinations. One English teacher remarked:

*“It doesn’t fit the Leaving Certificate at all, the English course is dumbed down!, as for those CBAs! ‘Couldn’t Be Arsed’ I call them because I have more notes from parents on my desk asking for their child to be left out of it, because they see it as too much pressure and work for no marks. They don’t see the point of it and neither do I, to be quite honest with you”.*

**(Male teacher, (non-DEIS) Focus Group One)**

Doris, O’ Neill *et al.* (2019) argue that the Junior Certificate has traditionally been viewed as ‘*providing practice*’ for the Leaving Certificate. Indeed, research data supports this by noting that Junior Certificate performance is generally indicative of Leaving Certificate performance (See Smyth, 1999). A Principal made a similar observation regarding the mismatch between the two programmes. He stated:

*“At the moment it [the Junior Certificate] doesn’t fit [Senior Cycle model] as there is a complete drop of all those wonderful things [in the new JC] to get back to. It [new model of teaching and learning and assessment] needs to move onto Senior Cycle”.*

**(Principal, non-DEIS)**

The DEIS principals were more positive in their outlook *regarding the Framework for Junior Cycle* (2015). However, they too expressed concerns about how their students

would navigate Senior Cycle and the Leaving Certificate afterwards. One DEIS Principal explained:

*“I think it [the Framework for Junior Cycle (2015)] is progressive in the sense that it will meet the needs of the student cohort that we have here [DEIS] and aligns itself more closely to the primary school curriculum as well so now it’s more a staged process. The only concern I would have is that parallel to the new Junior Certificate the Leaving certificate needs to change in line with that again. For new groups of students coming through there will be a dichotomy; there are some students who will find the jump from JC to LC even greater than they do already”*

**(Principal DEIS)**

While this sample is confined to the ETB post-primary schools sampled, the mismatch between the Framework for Junior Cycle and the current Senior Cycle model is supported by data collected by (Banks, McCoy *et al.*, 2018, p.26) across a range of post-primary schools. They include qualitative data which refers to the incongruity of the reformed Junior Cycle and the current Senior Cycle provision. Many stakeholders expressed concerns that common Junior Cycle papers would ensure a significant challenge for students wishing to pursue a Higher-Level paper at Senior Cycle. Banks, McCoy *et al.* (2018, p.26) recorded the comment of a teacher from a coeducational, non-DEIS school, ‘... not sure how students are going to go from a common level Junior Certificate Science and jump to the level of knowledge required for Leaving Certificate Higher Level Chemistry/Biology/Physics’. Previous studies by (Smyth and Banks 2011; McCoy, Smyth *et al.*, 2014) indicate that Senior Cycle is driven by the preparation for the terminal State examinations which has augmented stress levels and created a style of learning which is out of synchronisation with third level. The commencement of post-primary reform at Junior Cycle has ensured that the Senior Cycle mode of assessment is not in harmony with the primary school curriculum and assessment, Junior Cycle or third level.

It is noteworthy that many teachers in this study referred to the new Junior Cycle assessments being simplified in contrast to the previous Junior Certificate assessments. The majority of teachers expressed the opinion that the previous system was more intellectually challenging. The teacher focus groups argued that the Junior Cycle curriculum had been ‘*dumbed down*’. It was also noted, in the course of the data

collection, that school personnel consistently referred to the new Junior Cycle as the Junior Certificate which illustrates that the assessment and certificate component or product had superseded the process. There was a reluctance or inability for some teacher participants to separate the process of teaching and learning from the product (assessment). It suggests that in some cases classroom practice has been prescribed and moulded by assessment practices. It is important to remember that the format and style of these terminal written examinations favour certain types of learning styles and skill sets over others.

#### **6.4 The Impact of the Performance-based Leaving Certificate Assessment on the Development of Wellbeing as a Curricular Area for Junior Cycle.**

The teaching of Wellbeing is a significant component of *the Framework for Junior Cycle* (2015) has introduced a dedicated Wellbeing curriculum with 300 hours of timetabled instruction in 2017 rising to the full complement of 400 timetabled hours by 2020. The introduction of Wellbeing as a mandatory curricular area has reduced timetabled engagement in the core subjects; English, Maths and Gaeilge to 240 hours and non-core subjects to 200 hours. Issues around the augmentation of Wellbeing on the timetable were analysed and grouped into three main findings: the impact on the time allocated to academic subject at Junior Cycle; the impact of the product system on non-examination subjects and finally teachers attitudes and experiences of the teaching of and for Wellbeing. These three findings are discussed in this section.

In relation to the augmentation of Wellbeing as a curricular area on the timetable at Junior Cycle, the prevailing concern amongst all adult stakeholders<sup>22</sup>, in relation to the increase was the pressure it would place on the timetable. While all stakeholders recognised the importance of wellbeing and the majority indicated that they felt that the current 300 hours was sufficient in tandem with a focus on teaching *for* wellbeing by all teachers. One Principal argued that the ringfencing of Wellbeing hours had

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<sup>22</sup> Please note the student focus group did not express any opinion on this as the full complement of Wellbeing hours did not take effect until the AY 2019/2020 and the student data was collected in the AY 2016/2017.

resulted in cuts to non-core subjects by up to 40 minutes per week which he felt was reducing the scope and depth in optional subjects. He explained:

*“It is obvious that the less time you have in a subject, the less content you can cover. So ringfencing Wellbeing, I think there should have been more flexibility around the design of the Wellbeing programme. Schools should have been given the opportunity to incorporate wellbeing into individual subjects along as the subject was being taught and maybe introduce little modules that could be included in each subject group rather than having a Wellbeing class or classes”*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

Teachers were concerned that the teaching *of* wellbeing is taking the time needed to expose Junior Cycle students to subject disciplines which may shape their progression pathway at Senior Cycle. This concern demonstrates the teachers’ microsystemic level experiences of the macrosystemic level reform of education globally which Sahlberg (2007) terms as GERM. The GERM promotes curricular reduction among other reforms and is further discussed in chapter seven. Many teachers and CGCs felt that issues relating to wellbeing naturally arise in all subject areas either implicitly or explicitly and that these valuable opportunities would be reduced or compromised if such subjects were reduced in time on the timetable or eliminated altogether due to time constraints. Within the focus group sessions, teachers and parents/guardians expressed concern that the inclusion of Wellbeing at 400 hours for Junior Cycle (2020) would reduce the time allocated to other subjects. Many stakeholders argued that if teaching *for* wellbeing was achieved across all subjects then the teaching *of* wellbeing would not need the level of ringfenced hours prescribed. It was felt that the increase to 400 hours would eliminate exposure to some subjects at Junior Cycle altogether. This argument has been made nationally by subject disciplines such as History and Geography particularly receiving media attention (RTÉ News 25/2/2019)<sup>23</sup>. The teachers argued that objectifying wellbeing and ringfencing it on the timetable does not take cognisance of the ability of every teacher and every subject to contribute to

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<sup>23</sup> Subsequently, the DES have reversed the earlier decision to make History optional and it is now mandatory for Junior Cycle

wellbeing. One male teacher argued that students experienced wellbeing by participating in subject they like and enjoy.

*“We [teaching colleagues] were only talking about this earlier today in relation to Wellbeing. I teach a practical subject and I might have the most troublesome kid in the school but when they like a subject, and enjoy it, they just get on with it. And their sense of achievement when they have finished something and do well. And what happens? Well, the next thing they [DES] bring in a new Junior Cycle and they reduce the number of classes they have in subjects they like, just to promote a Wellbeing Programme. Where they go in and sit in the classroom and its theoretically based. So, don’t tell me that a theoretical class sitting down is better for their wellbeing than a practical class. At least there [practical class] they are doing something and creating something which they enjoy doing, which they enjoy demonstrating, which they enjoy taking pictures of and showing to their parents and their grandparents and now it’s being cut [in terms of time on the timetable]”*

**(Male teacher, Focus Group One)**

The ringfencing of 400 Wellbeing hours also arose from discussions in the parents/guardians’ focus group with the majority of parents/guardians expressing reservations about the amount of curricular time ringfenced to facilitate wellbeing. A mother made the following point:

*“I am anxious about the number of hours that are supposed to be devoted to wellbeing and I am a little old fashioned in that it is marvellous and there should be mental health [promotion] but also studying. There is so much logging and casework and filling out things that to me is just so much time wasted ... instead of just studying and learning things”.*

**(Mother, Focus Group)**

Several parents/guardians agreed with the concerns expressed by teachers, commenting that specific classes under the umbrella of Wellbeing seems *artificial* rather than natural. This highlights the difference between the teaching *of* wellbeing and the teaching *for* wellbeing. One parent commented that in his time at school wellbeing was embedded in the daily practices.

*“You can get a lot of buzzwords now you know wellbeing and that kinda thing and you can go too far into it. But I think sometimes it is the simple things that make a difference, it should be natural”*

**(Male Parent, Focus Group)**

Another Parent agreed and gave an example of a simple strategy for wellbeing, he remembered from his own school days which he argued was very effective,

*“We had a teacher who used to give us 3 minutes at the end of class to talk to each other before the next class and it took the pressure off”*

**(Male Parent, Focus Group)**

The teachers expressed reservations around increasing Wellbeing hours for the teaching of wellbeing. They were unanimous that Wellbeing needed to be natural and organic and enshrined in the culture of the school community. The remarks of one female teacher appeared to capture the mood of the focus group in relation to the issue. She made the point that Wellbeing needs to be a natural occurrence:

*“Yeah, it should be natural it should not be something that’s partitioned, like we are now doing wellbeing. It shouldn’t be introduced in an artificial way, like this is wellbeing now”*

**(Female teacher, Focus Group Two)**

A teacher of Religion and English supported this point by explaining that she covers more wellbeing and mental health promotion in English class than Religion class because it arises organically. She said:

*“I almost do more in English around mental health and wellbeing because when you do it in Religion you are addressing an issue head on and they don’t want it whereas in English you are sneaking it in [in areas such as personal writing, poetry etc] and you have to get them to be reflective”*

**(Female teacher, Focus Group Two)**



The focus group session with career guidance counsellors was also critical of ring-fencing 400 hours of wellbeing on the Junior Cycle timetable. One career guidance counsellor outlined that in her opinion a scheduled Wellbeing class was not ideal.

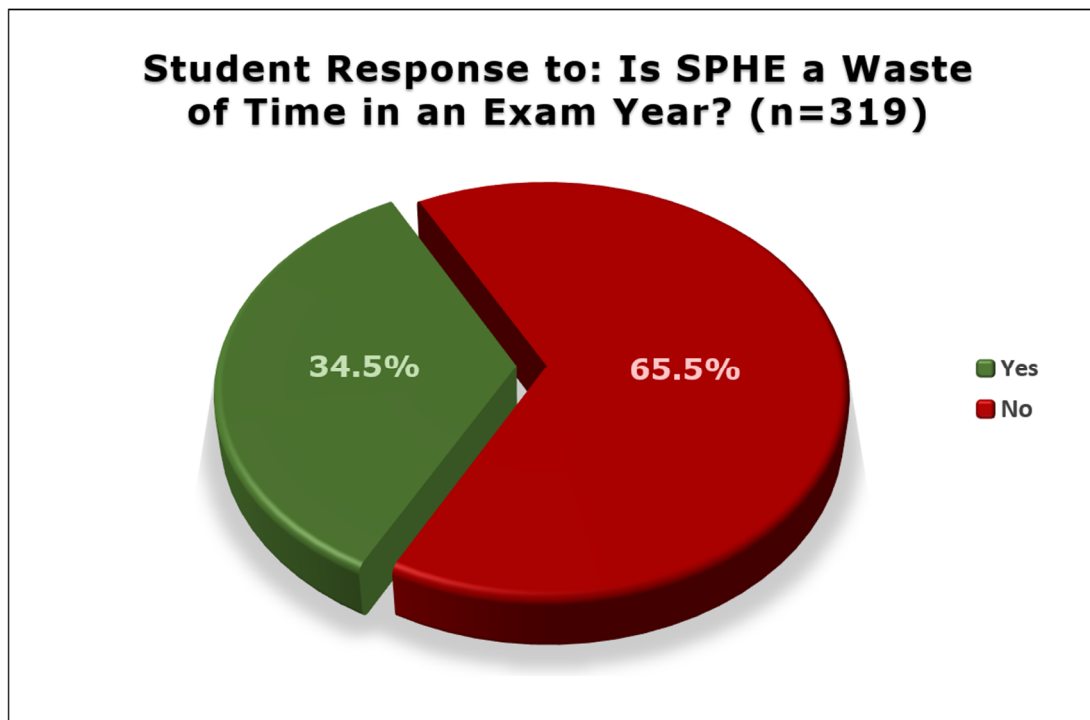
*“It can be counterproductive, so from 2pm to 2.40pm you’ve Wellbeing and then maths after that!” (This comment drew laughter from those present)*

**(Female career guidance counsellor, Focus Group)**

At the time of the data collection SPHE and PE were the only non-examination subjects offered across all schools. These two subjects along with CSPE were recognised as the prescribed curricular strands of Wellbeing as a subject domain. The researcher explored the stakeholders’ experiences of SPHE as a central strand of Wellbeing. Given that the SPHE curriculum aims to develop the individual holistically including the aesthetic, creative, cultural, emotional, intellectual, moral, physical, political, religious, social and spiritual development, for personal and family life, for living in the community, and for leisure (NCCA).

In relation to the second finding regarding the impact of the product system on non-examination Wellbeing Subjects (SPHE) stakeholders’ had concerns that there was a lack of value placed on non-examination subjects within the post-primary educational system. Therefore, the researcher explored the experiences and attitudes of the school-based stakeholders to non-examination subjects such as SPHE. The stakeholders argued that non-examination subjects such as SPHE were less valued at post-primary level. O’Sullivan (2012, p.10) argues that the implementation of SPHE at post-primary level is *‘less than satisfactory’*. The student survey data indicates that 66% of students in the sample felt SPHE was worthwhile in an examination year. However, 35% of students felt it was *‘a waste of time’* in an examination year (see figure 6.2)

**Figure 6.2 Student Perceptions of Social, Personal, Health Education**



The students discussed this finding in the focus group. The fact that it was a non-examination subject was highlighted by students. One male student explained:

*“Well a lot of people wouldn’t take SPHE seriously because it’s like one of the only classes that is not an exam subject so you would probably zone out of that class, even though the material is there to help you [the student] they might just not consider it and zone out in that class because it’s not examined? Ya, so then it’s down to the student’s attitude towards it rather than the subject. Because there is so much emphasis on exam subjects all the time it’s really down to the student, definitely, I think the material is there in the SPHE course to help you but [shakes his head]”*

**(Male student, non-DEIS)**

Another student supported this comment but made a distinction between the attitudes of students that may need help and support from the school or the teacher.

*“I agree but also, I think the SPHE class is just your class [class group] you know and perhaps Jimmy [a fictitious student] would not find it interesting*

*because he does not have a pressing mental health issue and then you might have someone [a student] who does, and they might feel differently”.*

**(Male student, non-DEIS)**

The student went on to make the point that class sizes for SPHE were at maximum capacity and that this was not always conducive to the aims of the subject.

*“But that environment would not be very great because you might have Jimmy [a fictitious student] making jokes and the other person might not feel comfortable. It is also seen as a doss subject. So, if students need SPHE as a support, they might also not find support because others [not taking it seriously] are in their class as well”*

**(Ibid)**

All principals indicated that they felt SPHE was relevant to their students but 75% of them indicated that they felt SPHE was viewed as unimportant by parents/guardians in the context of the points system. The parents’ focus group did not bear this out. Parents spoke of the need and value of SPHE.

*“I think of raising my daughter and I often think that it’s great that the SPHE teacher is also advising her and listening to her. Sometimes they will listen to the teacher and take on board what they say”*

**(Mother, non-DEIS)**

However, they did appreciate that in examination years (3<sup>rd</sup> year) they could see how students could be withdrawn from SPHE for additional tuition. One parent stated:

*“Who could really say that using non-exam subject time is wrong when you consider the pressure they are under. In a way is that not supporting their wellbeing?”*

**(Male Parent, DEIS)**

This sense that the points system was the measure of the importance of a subject area was echoed by the students’ perceptions of some teachers attitudes to SPHE. When this issue was discussed in the focus groups, one male student made the point that some teachers appear to also view SPHE as a doss class as it is not examined. He argued that the

teacher's attitude could precipitate a disinterested feeling among the students. He commented,

*"I think teachers can treat it as a doss class as well. Teachers also know it's not an exam subject, so it can be loose. In schools, students can also want it to be a doss as we have a lot of stress due to exam subjects".*

**(Male student, non-DEIS)**

This point was also made by a female teacher, who had many years' experience of teaching SPHE, when she commented,

*"It depends on how you teach it as well. I'd say a lot of teachers aren't teaching it as you should be teaching it and that's having an effect on the subject then. It is seen as a doss in some schools but in our school [DEIS, band 1], they like it".*

**(Female teacher, Focus Group 1)**

The point was made that SPHE was not respected by some teachers of subjects which were examined in the State examinations. A teacher of SPHE, made the point that because there was no formal assessment at the end of the course, the culture in her school was to withdraw students from SPHE to 'catch up' on other subjects.

*"They are taken out of my class for extra help in subjects; it's not seen as a free, but it is seen that you won't miss out on anything important".*

**(Female teacher, Focus Group 1)**

Teachers in the group agreed that this was a practice which they had encountered in all their schools from time to time. A teacher explained that it was not a reflection on SPHE as a subject but rather the product system in which they worked. He explained that teachers and students were short of time in many subjects and that there was a pressure to get high marks in examinations which sometimes resulted in tuition time being made up during non-examination subjects.

*"They [teachers and students] are being squeezed in other subjects because of the cut back to the time so they are pulling out of SPHE"*

**(Male teacher, Focus Group Two)**

These observational comments made by the teachers support commentary from Smyth and Banks 2011; Smyth and Banks 2012a that high-stakes testing often results in increased stress and pressure levels and an altered the teaching approach which reduces the student experience of education. The comments lend themselves to the argument that the designation of Wellbeing as an examination subject may remedy the current situation. However, this is currently not the practice in the Irish post-primary system and such arguments fail to recognise that the Leaving Certificate points system challenges the effective delivery of subjects underpinned by holistic development such as Wellbeing and SPHE. In the event of the continuation of the Leaving Certificate points system following the Senior Cycle Review process, the impact of introducing Wellbeing as an examinations subject is an area which will warrant further study.

Finally, analysis of the data indicated that teachers' had conflicting attitudes in relation to the provision of Wellbeing and made the distinction between their experiences of the teaching *of* and *for* Wellbeing. The shifting of the teachers' role to the teaching *of* and *for* wellbeing was discussed in the teachers' focus groups. There was a strong sense of confusion and ambiguity among teachers regarding their exact role and function, under *the Framework for Junior Cycle (2015)* and *the Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines (2017)*. Teachers generally accepted the official shift in their roles. However, many expressed worry and annoyance that the responsibility for mental health and wellbeing was being shifted to them without appropriate training or instruction. One teacher in focus group two argued that wellbeing promotion and the teaching *of* and *for* wellbeing needed to be taught to teachers. She argued that traditionally, wellbeing was not explicitly the role of the teacher although it was an assumed role. She argued that some teachers of CSPE and PE were incredibly uncomfortable with the transition because they felt it had a statutory footing and they had not been given sufficient guidance by the DES. She stated:

*“Wellbeing teachers need a lot more training than say a Business teacher or a Geography teacher. There’s an awful lot of this [mental health promotion/wellbeing] being put at the door of PE teacher too. It is an uncomfortable space to be in if you are unprepared and not naturally inclined towards teaching for wellbeing, whatever that is supposed to mean?!”*

**(Female teacher, Focus Group Two)**

This supports Ball's (1993) policy tools and indicates a failure to convert policy as text to meaningful action at the coalface. Her comments were supported by a PE teacher who agreed by stating:

*“Wellbeing takes in physical, social, mental and I'm not trained in that way and to have those types [mental health] of discussions with them so it's all of a sudden become part of PE and they are [students] looking at you saying this is PE class? I'm not comfortable doing that because it's not what I was trained to do”.*

**(Male teacher, Focus Group Two)**

The teachers' comments demonstrate the consensus of teachers regarding the changing landscape of the profession. Research by Graham, Phelps *et al.* (2011) and Bates (2017) found that despite teachers' positivity towards school-based mental health promotion there was a dearth of training, time, materials and confidence among many teachers. The sample data suggests a need for teacher education programmes to support teachers to transition to the role of supporting student mental health and wellbeing. One female teacher (Focus Group Two) explained that a focus on mental health and wellbeing in schools was welcome but that teachers were not trained, she stated:

*“But people have to be trained, you can't go in just on goodwill because you could land you size 5s into the middle of it and who will be blamed then? ... The teacher will”.*

**(Female teacher, Focus Group Two)**

This view has been supported by Dewhirst, Pickett *et al.* (2014, p. 467) and Thornburn (2018, p.3) who argue that not all teacher education programmes are appropriately preparing teachers for their role in supporting health and wellbeing within a school settings-base for mental health promotion. They found that generally school staff had insufficient knowledge and education around mental health challenges which was a barrier in schools seeking to address mental health issues. Bada and Darlington *et al.* (2019) argue that on a European-wide level, teacher education, advice and support was crucial to the success of developing meaningful mental health promotion in schools.

They argue that support for teachers as primary agents of mental health promotion in schools was paramount to the success of the framework.

The need for teacher education programmes which prepare prospective teachers to teach Wellbeing subjects emerged in focus groups involving teachers and interviews with principals. Currently, school principals have to ensure that teachers selected to deliver the SPHE and/or Wellbeing curriculum are suitably qualified and currently this is an anomaly in the system which is compounded by a dearth of undergraduate qualification in the areas of SPHE and Wellbeing as subjects for prospective teachers. Currently, principals indicated that they would try to secure a teacher whose qualification would be closely aligned with the demands of SPHE and Wellbeing delivery; the humanities was cited as an example. Indeed, *the Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines* (2017) state that teachers should be selected to bring a ‘*broad and balanced experience*’ to the more challenging and difficult areas. This is supported by research which indicates that life experience and teaching experience were necessary attributes for effective SPHE teachers.

In both teachers focus groups, the teachers acknowledged the complexities of teaching SPHE in the modern age. Previously, Formby and Wolstenholme (2012) found that sampled teachers regularly felt ‘*uncomfortable*’ when discussing their personal values and more sensitive topics. One female teacher commented that in her school (DEIS), teachers were not timetabled for SPHE without first agreeing to it. She discussed the fact that:

*“In our school I know some teachers who have refused to teach it [Wellbeing]. They are just not comfortable with it but they [the management] would ask you before they put you in there if that makes sense”*

**(Female teacher, Focus Group Two)**

The teachers argued that SPHE and Wellbeing are the most challenging subject areas in contemporary schooling. They argued that some teachers are fearful of a disclosure in relation to child protection under *the Child Protection Procedures* (2017). They identified this fear factor coupled with insufficient training, turned many teachers away from teaching SPHE. This was particularly relevant in the close-knit context of

communities represented by schools in the sample especially under the new legislation, where staff as mandated persons, are named on the referral form to Tusla and this can be accessed by a Parent or Guardian under Freedom of Information. One teacher stated:

*“Some teachers feared classes such as SPHE as you could have a disclosure and some teachers would try not to be in a position where they might get a disclosure to protect themselves in the locality”*

**(Female teacher, Focus Group Two)**

The teachers in all focus groups made the distinction between the type of teachers/subjects that would lend themselves more naturally to the teaching of wellbeing. They identified that certain teachers of certain subjects were ‘*identified*’ as the wellbeing people because they taught ‘*soft skills*’ or they were more open to students. One teacher remarked:

*“It’s the same teacher the kids gravitate towards, one teacher said to me one day, ‘I don’t know if I’ve something written on my forehead, but they are all coming to me’”.*

**(Female teacher, Focus Group Two)**

Another teacher highlighted that the focus on wellbeing and mental health in the new Junior Cycle appeared to be poorly constructed in terms of teachers’ CPD. She stated:

*“... and in every one of these courses [JCT Wellbeing] that we do for the new JC, we get these forms saying ‘how does wellness fit into your curriculum and how does your curriculum fit into wellness’. But that’s again, we are on the fly, on the hop trying to figure it out but we haven’t been specifically trained, like, what exactly do they want us to cover?”*

**(Female teacher, Focus Group Two)**

This comment, along with the aforementioned data provided by principals, career guidance counsellors and teachers as stakeholders supports and reinforces Noddings’ (1992) argument that the microsystem operates within the confines of a system that



values performance over care. In essence, her assertion underpins arguments made by Crozier, Lareau, Reay, Lynch, Ball. These academics argue that the role and function of education is changing in line with the needs of the competitive economy. This has resulted in the undervaluing of the care function in terms of employment conditions for teachers and in the meaningful support of their care function. This chapter argues that principals and teachers are struggling to balance competitive performance and care, which are contrasting functions, in the current educational system.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

This chapter commences with data which supports the fact that most stakeholders across the sample believe that the role and function of education is to develop the human being in a holistic fashion. These sentiments are expressed in the Mission Statement of each sample school. Indeed, throughout the study the stakeholders' indicated their support for the schooling system transitioning to a settings-base for the promotion of mental health and wellbeing in line with *the HPS Framework (1995)*. However, this chapter argues that this holistic view of education or a praxis model is not supported by the current Irish post-primary schooling model. It reaffirms the arguments made in chapter four that the marketised post-primary system where schools compete for a greater market share of students' enrolments. This is creating a contextual environment which is not conducive to care; in fact, it flies in the face of the very structure of universal supports outlined in the HPS Framework (1995). These universal supports are founded on two key layers of support: fostering an environment of inclusion, respect, democracy; and the provision of curricular support. This research study argues that the competitive post-primary system is not compatible with the provision of care at post-primary level. The expressed desire for a holistic education, within a competitive market model creates a split personality schooling system which purports an overt educational mission but in reality, delivers an examination focused, objectified educational product separating learners into winners and losers. Robertson (2016, p.22) argues the crux of the issue by stating '*An education system committed to social justice and not market justice would have a radical effect on policies. Only then might education become part of the solution and not the problem*'.

The chapter discusses the precipitous influence of the Leaving Certificate assessment process on the post-primary school environment. It argues that the Leaving Certificate has negatively impacted on the vision of the *Framework for Junior Cycle* (2015) to transition post-primary educational assessment to a less high-stakes model. The chapter outlines that the original reform envisaged up to 40% of the assessment process taking the format of continuous project-orientated assessment. However, this did not materialise due to opposition from teachers' unions which supports Lynch (1989) and Gleeson (2010) who recognise the power and influence of teachers in Irish education as stronger than in the US and UK. They also argue the desire by the establishment to maintain the status quo in terms of economic reproduction which they themselves have gained from. This resulted in schools preparing students for a 90% terminal examination which has ensured that the old system of terminal product assessment largely prevails. It argues that the new Junior Cycle assessment model as it stands could be viewed as a missed opportunity to transition Junior Cycle to a more formative and holistic experience. Under the current (reformed) Junior Cycle system of assessment the terminal examination now accounts for 90% and this has had implications for the introduction of Wellbeing as a key curricular element at Junior Cycle. The chapter illustrates that the current assessment model impacts on the schooling system's ability to transition to a mental health promotion model as non-examination subjects are less valued. The data collected illustrates that many parents and teachers in the sample are not in favour of the current focus on the teaching of wellbeing and increasing the wellbeing hours to 400. The stakeholders identified this increase in ringfenced Wellbeing hours as placing significant demands on the timetable at the expense of examination subjects.

The influence of the Leaving Certificate as a terminal assessment and the sole measure of educational achievement is also evident when one considers the stakeholders' attitudes and experiences of SPHE which is one of the key elements of care in terms of curricular provision. It is suggested that the failure by some stakeholders to value non-examination subjects is indicative of the negative influence of the current product system of education and schooling. The findings at a microsystemic level demonstrate that if a school is to transition becoming a settings-base for mental health promotion, the construct of *success* in the post-primary system needs to be revisited and

recalibrated at Senior Cycle which will in turn support the change process at Junior Cycle also.

This chapter highlights the negative impact of the current over-focus on the Leaving Certificate on student stress levels. It argues that the Leaving Certificate has the measure of the worth and value of all the teaching and learning which took place throughout second level. It discusses the gatekeeping role of the Leaving Certificate in terms of access to prestigious progression pathways associated with a higher standard of income and living as outlined by Lareau, 2003; Devine, 2004; Bathmaker, Ingram *et al.*, 2016. This in turn rationalises why parents, students and society are invested in this performance model of assessment for social mobility or maintenance of the status quo in many middle-class cases. This chapter highlights that the political and economic system has objectified education and that the current performance-based, product model of gatekeeping assessment impacts on the school's ability to champion mental health promotion. It argues that for the majority of society, performance and high-status progression to a HEI is viewed as the '*real*' measure of success and this has relegated a care orientated praxis model to second place.

## Chapter Seven

### Chapter Seven: The Impact of New Managerialism on Principals and Teachers' Collective Ability to Champion Mental Health and Wellbeing Promotion

#### 7.0 Introduction

In this chapter the author addresses a central finding which emerged from analysis of the data from school principals and teachers. This point related to the pressure and stress they identified in fulfilling their roles in more recent years. The analysis of data suggests that school personnel felt conditions of service and roles and functions had changed considerably over the past decade. This chapter examines the impact of a neoliberal capitalist agenda on the school teaching staff and draws on principals and teachers' reflections regarding how their terms and conditions and role and function have changed over time.

In order to ground the experiences and attitudes expressed by the principals and teachers, the author explores literature in relation to the emergence of new managerialism as a mode of governance within contemporary schooling systems. The author combines literature and the experiences of the sampled stakeholders to suggest the prominence of this market model of governance across Irish public services in contemporary Ireland. The chapter outlines the alignment of political and economic factors in 2009 which created a politically and socially receptive climate for this market-driven form of governance. The chapter argues that new managerialism, as a mode of governance, has imported operational strategies from a profit-orientated private enterprise sector and applied them to the management of the education sector. It argues that the quantifiable, performance-based output model that is associated with enterprise and markets is incompatible with a qualitative care-orientated provision of education as a human right. The inappropriate application of such market-driven principles in schools is indicative of what Kelly (2004, p.184) termed a '*category error*' as schools are, or ought to be, positioned in the affective domain as previously outlined in chapter two.

This chapter demonstrates the tension for actors at a microsystemic level as they strive to serve the competing demands of the two diverse educational paradigms, as outlined

in chapter two (see figure 2.1). The chapter draws on the data collected from sampled principals and teachers as they transition to a mental health and wellbeing promoting school model, while operating under a new managerial system. It explores their ability and struggle to be champions for mental health and wellbeing within an increasingly marketised performance-led operational context. The chapter cites numerous examples of where pressure to compete and '*perform*' takes precedence over care relegating the affective capacity of school to second place.

## **7.1 The Emergence of New Managerialism**

Chapter two established the theoretical context for this research study by outlining the economic context for the progression of neoliberal capitalism since the late 1960s and early 1970s. In an effort to explain the impact of the neoliberal capitalist agenda for education, Ball (2008, p.1) identifies a selection of hallmarks he observed across multiple jurisdictions and illustrates that the hallmarks of the neoliberal capitalist agenda such as parental choice, school-based management models, privatisation, efficiency and accountability modes are being '*exported*' to other jurisdictions by '*English education business*' and '*policy entrepreneurs*'. This chapter is concerned with one particular hallmark which was identified by Ball (2008) as New Organisational Ecologies. Ball (2008, p.41) argues that this refers to a managerial phenomenon that ensures market principles are embodied, at a managerial level, within public services. In the Irish context, Lynch, Grummell *et al.* (2012) refer to this phenomenon as *new managerialism*, citing it as an organisational instrument, which ensures that the logic of a neoliberal market approach is reinforced in public sector management and organisational practices. Lynch, Grummell *et al.* (2012) critique the New Managerialist mode of governance arguing that it has sought to import the modes of operation, efficiency and regulation from the private sector in order to rationalise the public services. Similarly, Reay (2017) recognises that central to the shift to New Managerialist governance practices was a political and economic desire to reduce trade unions power and influence.

Lynch (2012) explains the phenomenon of new managerialism in the context of Irish education. She argues that it is characterised by six key elements: a shift from inputs to outputs in education; the close monitoring of staff input via performance indicators; the casualisation of staff and increase on precarious working conditions such as

outsourcing and new-fangled contractual arrangements; the use of nomenclature around such new practices in order to grant them legitimacy; the decentralisation of budgets and personal authority; and the cataloguing of staff in terms of their performance. Lynch (2012) argues that new managerialism can be comprehended at a surface level using these elements, but that a comprehensive understanding needs interrogation on a social, political and economic level. In this regard, she argues that new managerialism is not merely a management strategy but a political project which alters the moral purpose for business and organisations. Lynch (2014, p.4) reasons that few citizens would support new managerialism if they could critically appraise it. She illustrates that the complexity lies in the nomenclature used by political and economic actors. For instance, she argues that few would argue against '*maximising efficiency*' in public services but that new managerialism does not merely augment efficiency but exalts quantitative measures of efficiency and effectiveness over '*moral and social values related to care, autonomy, tolerance, respect, trust and equality*'.

It is noteworthy, that the neoliberal capitalist agenda for education and educational governance, of which new managerialism is a component, has a global reach and therefore has been described in multiple jurisdictions using difference terminology. US-based Ritzer (1993), a Weberian scholar, describes his observations of the phenomenon as '*McDonaldisation*'. He argues that the four rationalisation-centred principles, employed by McDonald's fast food business are being transferred to the provision of public services. The four central rationalisation principles are: efficiency, calculability, predictability and control. Indeed, the key elements of new managerialism, outlined by Lynch, Grummell *et al.* (2012), mirror the four principles of Ritzer's McDonaldisation Theory (1993). (See Appendix 8 for more detailed information).

More recently, Sahlberg (2007) takes a transnational approach by using acronym GERM to illustrate his repeated observations of the same phenomenon, across many national education systems. He explains that educational systems, which have transitioned or are transitioning to GERM will introduce competition through an increase in school choice thus marketising the system. Indeed, chapter two has already outlined how competition and school choice were increased in the Irish education system following the enactment of *the Education Act* (1998). The Act introduced the

construct of parental choice in policy as text format. The negotiation of this text throughout the policy of discourse phase and its subsequent implementation in the policy as action phase were also discussed in chapter three.

Sahlberg (2007) explains the critical role played by standardised testing in transitioning national educational systems to the GERM. He argues that GERM is monitored closely by governments through measurable quantitative outcomes. This study argues that the convergence of GERM and new managerialist practices is unavoidable as education becomes increasingly viewed as a measurable product and teachers and principals are viewed as agents of product delivery. Conway (2013) supports the argument that neoliberal capitalism has sought to reform and transform education with varying levels of success dependent on the national context. The UK and US systems are examples of educational systems highly influenced by the neoliberal capitalist agenda for education. Apple (2005; 2006; 2013; 2014) consistently argues the negative impact of the scale of reform in the US system since the Reagan era. Lynch, Grummell *et al.* (2012) and Conway (2013) argue that Ireland is progressing the GERM at post-primary level.

The next section explores how the climate for the transition to the GERM arose in Ireland. The exploration of the climate is relevant as it illustrates the development of an appetite for system reform and a reduction in the status of the teaching profession in Ireland. The section illustrates the difficult environment within which leaders and principals operate; on one hand they need to perform within the system in terms of measurable outcomes and on the other they need to ensure the affective needs of students are met. It argues that this impacts on morale within the profession which has repercussions for the transition to a settings-base for mental health and wellbeing promotion.

## **7.2 The Emergence of the Optimal Context for the Progression of New Managerialism: The Perfect Storm**

Ball (2008) and Conway (2013) illustrate that governments globally seize opportunities to persuade the public of the need for an educational policy shift. As we discussed in Chapter two, this context for change emerged in the US and UK in the wake of the economic crises in the late 1970s. This context enabled certain policy intellectuals to persuade the public that the education system needed reform and that

teachers needed to be held accountable. Indeed, Ball (2008) details how Keith Joseph, Secretary of State for Education from 1981 to 1986 greatly advanced the neoliberal agenda in the UK by mentoring Thatcher from his neoliberal (or new right) economic and social policy position. Ambler (1987) argues Joseph, at that time, did not fully appreciate the complexities of attempting to reform an education system which is underpinned by inequality. In the US, Babones (2015) critiques the validity of the educational reform commission (1983) which comprised of eighteen members and twelve administrators with only one teacher and no academic expert.

The shift to neoliberal and New Managerial practices occurred later in the Irish educational system as Irish society has traditionally had a favourable view of teachers and the quality of the post-primary educational system. Additionally, teachers had a long history of political involvement and stronger unionisation than many other countries, as outlined by Gleeson (2010). Lynch, Grummell *et al.* (2012) support this argument by highlighting that the inclusion of teachers' unions on State bodies has enabled the unions to limit the influence of new managerialism to greater effect than teachers' unions in other countries such as the US and UK. However, Conway (2013) argues that the optimal setting for the progression of GERM emerged serendipitously late in the first decade of the new millennium. In 2009, this optimal setting was created by two factors: a decline in confidence in the Irish post-primary educational system and an economic downturn and austerity. Conway (2013) argues that Ireland's declining performance in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA, 2009) evaluation created an opportunity for the government to implement changes they desired. The OECD PISA (2009) data indicated that Ireland dropped from fifth rank in 2000, to twenty-first place in 2009, among 65 participating nations. Conway (2013) illustrates that the publication of the PISA results (2009) created a political and media-led questioning of educational standards in Ireland.

Ball (2008); Hursh (2000) argue that to progress the 'shift' certain 'policy intellectuals' become the public champions of a specific policy establishing "credibility and truthfulness" to quell the opposition (Ball 2008, p.5). Bourdieu (1998, p.29) argues that opposition to the acceleration of the neoliberalist stance is minimal. "... *this is as a result of a whole labor of symbolic inculcation in which journalists and ordinary citizens*



*participate passively and, above all, a certain number of intellectuals participate actively".*

The role of language as a persuasive technique for the advancement of neoliberal managerialism has been identified by Lynch (2014) and Ball (2008). This process of persuasion using nomenclature relates to semantics but also to the essence of the meaning in the words which are carefully chosen by politicians and repeated by the media. The selected words are signifiers that when denoted at face-value appear to suggest a progressive and reformist orientation which has persuasive potential when delivered by an effective advocate. Ball (2008) and Lynch (2014) illustrate the argument citing the decline in the use of the words synonymous with the traditional function of the public services in the welfare state such as ‘*citizen*’, ‘*rights*’. Terminology and nomenclature, prevalent in private industry, has intensified in the public service context. These are terms such as; ‘*service users*’, ‘*clients*’, ‘*customers*’, ‘*reform*’, ‘*transform*’ and ‘*modernise*’. McCann (1999) argues this point also highlighting the use of the terms ‘*budgets*’, ‘*quality assurance*’ and ‘*position in the market*’ (McCann, 1999, p. 34). Indeed, Conway (2013) identifies the role the Irish mass media played in projecting the perception of a ‘*teaching crisis*’ based on PISA (2009) which decreased satisfaction rating for the teachers and the post-primary education system. Conway’s critique of the mass-media involvement supports Cochran-Smith (2001) who argues the assistive role of the US-based mass-media in propagating the perception of a failing educational system. He outlines that the New York Times made over two thousand references to teaching quality and teachers’ effectiveness, in a five-year period between 1996 and 2001.

The sense of media over-reaction to PISA (2009) in the Irish context was captured by a teacher who argued that PISA seems to be used as a ‘*stick to beat*’ teachers rather than a means to proactively improve the education system. He commented:

*“Everyone harps on about the Finnish Model and I have looked at it and it’s brilliant ...but they got a set of PISA results, an outstanding set of PISA results and what do they do?...they tried to further improve their system ...and they do improve it further, whereas we [Irish policy-makers] seem to be reactive rather than proactive, and I think we need to be aware of it”.*

**(Male teacher, Focus Group 1)**

The male teacher went on to argue that these international modes of measurement (PISA) are dictating changes to our education system, he cited the following example:

*“The same year that our poor literacy and numeracy results came in, we actually faired averagely in Science but like we didn’t bat an eyelid at that whereas we get poor results in literacy and numeracy and we throw everything at that... because that might affect FDI, but why don’t we build on these average scientific results?”*

**(Ibid)**

While on one hand the teacher’s comment supports arguments by O’Connor (2014) that educational change within the Irish educational system has tended to be slow, piecemeal and incremental or subjected to ‘pragmatic gradualism’ as outlined Coolahan (2000). However, on the other hand the teacher suggests that government policy in relation to literacy and numeracy has been comprehensive.

The over reliance on standardised testing such as PISA as an accurate measure of progress or decline is a source of debate across nations. Many researchers and academics have dismissed the suitability of standardised instruments of measurement to assess teachers’ performance and students’ knowledge. An open letter to the OECD’s Director of the PISA, penned by eighty-three leading global academics was published in the Guardian (1/12/2013). The academics argued that PISA and resultant rankings of nations in order of results was beginning to ‘*deeply influence educational practices in many countries*’. They argued that the OECD has an economic outlook on the role and function of education and that the OECD has no mandate to improve education unlike the United Nations, UNESCO and UNICEF. They argue that PISA confines testing to the measurable aspects of education and ignores the ‘*immeasurable educational objectives such as physical, moral civic and artistic development*’. This is of central concern to this research study as student mental health and wellbeing is not measured by PISA. The data collected in this study reveals the scale of professional and personal effort that school staff can go to which cannot be measured.

The amalgam also cites issues around the formulation of question, the correlation of data and the ability of questions to translate linguistically and culturally from one

country to another. Indeed, one of the amalgam of academics, Berliner (2017) argues that Standardised Achievement Tests (SATs) used to evaluate teachers and schools in the US are based on *'invalid metrics'*. He argues that an average of 60% of a student's performance in a SAT is influenced by social variables outside of school. Berliner (2016) cites an example of Tennessee mountain children who achieved remarkable IQ-related improvements in the ten-year period from 1930 to 1940 when electrification took place in their region. Berliner (2016) argues the subjectivity of standardised testing citing the case of Cheri Letterman a New York-based teacher who was honoured for her students' standardised test results, only to be maligned a few years later for a decrease in results. Letterman took a judicial case and won in relation to the impact such standardised assessments had on her reputation and career prospects. Furthermore, Berliner (2016) points to the fact that in the US, corporate interests are involved in standardised educational testing and that there, private enterprise benefits form the obsession with standardised educational testing. Indeed, it could also be argued that in a similar way the entire grinds culture supports a market-led private enterprise in Ireland. Berlinger (2016) also highlights that in the US the 'opt-out' movement has further reduced the validity of already questionable tests and results. In Ireland, despite the growing body of global academics and researchers who caution against over-reliance on PISA, it continues to greatly influence the focus of policy makers as Conway (2013) outlines.

The lower PISA results coincided with a major crisis in the Irish economy which was created by a poorly regulated banking sector and overdependence on foreign money. Considine, Dukelow *et al.* (2009, p.2) highlight that the negative impact of the banking crisis on the country's economic stability was exacerbated by a government assured systemic guarantee for floundering banks. They argue that this guarantee ensured the socialisation of market debt and resulted in oversight by the Troika and necessitated austerity measures to ensure *'the sharpest of all corrections'*. They argue that the economic recession from 2007 onwards resulted in an *'obfuscation and hyper-attentiveness to public service cost...'*. Indeed, Mooney Simmie (2014) argues that the prevailing narrative in the media was that all public servants, including teachers, were a cost to the State rather than a public resource. He argued that reform proposals therefore centered on rationalising the public service and the need for greater performance and productivity. PISA (2009) and the economic downturn combined to

create the optimal setting for the progression of public service reform, using the New Managerialist policy agenda as outlined by Conway (2013).

### **7.3 Changes to the Role and Function of Principals and Teachers:**

#### **Existing at the Microsystemic Level**

It is evident that new managerialism in education creates challenges for both principals and teachers. The challenges emanate from the requirements of contemporary education to achieve both its technical function and its nurturing function. The application of marketisation and New Managerial practices to education has created a tension between competition and care, which principals and teachers must attempt to balance at a microsystemic level (Noddings 2003, 2005). This tension emanates from their authentic desire for the qualitative functions of care for learners but the confines they face regarding the demands of the quantitative modes of measuring performances (Baker, Lynch *et al.*, 2004; hooks 1994). Indeed, high stakes testing results in increased stress and pressure levels which alters the teaching approach and can result in a negative student learning experience (Smyth and Banks 2011; Smyth and Banks 2012a).

The chapter illustrates that the inner tensions exist due to the operational context of teachers in the post-primary education system. Lynch (2012) argues that the marketisation of education and new managerialism in the education system in Ireland creates a dichotomy between the '*educative*' function of teachers and managers and the '*care*' function. Indeed, Ecclestone (2012) argues that the effects of new managerialism and GERM are evidenced by the concentration of quantitative-based measurable outcomes across the post-primary schooling system. He argues that performance indicators such as student retention, progression and attainment are constantly measured. In contrast, qualitative evaluations of holistic development such as student wellbeing are given less weight for instance, how do you measure keeping a child in schools until the Junior Certificate or Leaving Certificate despite all the odds; even if they do not achieve points for a HEI?.

The section argues that the transition to meaningful mental health and wellbeing promotion at post-primary depends significantly, if not entirely, on principals and teachers as agents of change. Indeed, teachers have been recognised as critical to a

successful and effective learning environment for students (Cameron and Lovett, 2015; Mansfield, Beltman *et al.*, 2016; Day 2017). Yet there is a dearth of Irish research into the changes to the operational context of teachers and principals in contemporary society. Therefore, this section examines the attitudes and experiences of school principals and teachers as they navigate changes to their role and function at the coalface. It argues that new managerialism within a competitive product system has impacted on many stakeholder's capacity to fully engage with a care orientated model of mental health and wellbeing promotion.

This study argues that tensions exist for teachers and school leaders situated at the microsystemic level or coalface. It argues that this tension arises from an over-focus on competition over care in the schooling system. Therefore, this chapter explores tensions experienced by principals and teachers as they attempt to balance the competing demands of competition and care within a quantitatively measured performance model. It demonstrates that this tension has implications for the transition to a mental health and wellbeing promoting post-primary schooling system.

Ball (2001) argues that pressure to perform within the system creates a dichotomy of the *authentic* self and the *plastic* self. The authentic self is the response to the moral and professional desires of teachers and principals to care for their students. Lynch, Grummell *et al.* (2012) argue that the plastic self presents itself in response to the imperative to meet the targets of performance management. The conflict between the authentic self and the plastic self, required by the behavioural objectives model of a marketised product system was evident from principals' interviews and the discussions which took place within the career guidance counsellor and teachers' focus groups.

Lynch, Grummell *et al.* (2012, p. 221) discuss the concept of '*elasticity*' in relation to managers, irrespective of gender, by arguing that all managers must balance '*the caring function*' as well as the realisation of performance indicators. They highlight the caring professions' incompatibility with an entirely quantitative market model. They illustrate that education has changed rapidly and greatly under the neoliberal approach and market model creating a dichotomy between performance and care in the context of increasing student diversity and societal issues. Lynch, Grummell *et al.* (2012) argue that new managerialism places pressure on teachers and managers to

balance the demands of achieving measurable key performance indicators and their duty of care. Mansfield, Beltman *et al.* (2016) argue that this has a significant bearing on the mental health and wellbeing of students due to the imperative for teachers to model resilience in their classrooms. The need for resilience enhancing and supporting teacher education programmes has been supported by the '*Enhancing Resilience Through Teacher Education*' project (ENRETE, 2018) which outlines that teachers' resilience and wellbeing was critical in the support of young people' mental health and wellbeing. Hall and Conway *et al.* (2012) argue that the identification of challenges faced by teachers is crucial in order to develop meaningful teacher education programmes to enhance resilience and wellbeing.

The tensions between the authentic and plastic self and the need to create an elastic self, emerged throughout the data collection phase for principals and teachers. The responses given by school personnel in relation to their efforts to balance the educative function within the competitive market model and its care function within a settings-based approach to mental health promotion. This is particularly evident in DEIS schools where they face more complex needs. The next section explores these challenges identified by the samples of teachers (including career guidance counsellors) and principals. It examines the teachers and principals' attitudes and experiences in separate sections due to the diversity in their roles and functions at the microsystemic level.

#### **7.4 Principals' Experiences of Balancing the Care Function and the Performance Function of Their Roles**

The principals' interviews highlighted the pressure they feel to balance the measurable performance indicators for instance PR, results and enrolment numbers with the unmeasurable care function. The tensions between the plastic self and the authentic self were evident in their responses and a sense that the role and function of the Principal had changed fundamentally over the past two decades. Darmody and Smyth (2016) undertook the first exploration of its kind in the Irish context in relation to primary school principals' occupational stress and job satisfaction. They found that a significant number of principals were experiencing low satisfaction levels and high levels of occupational stress. In relation to this research study, the principals' experiences of increasing competition within the market model was frequently referred

to as source of occupational stress, in the course of the interviews. The disparity between the potential academic success rate of the different classes leads to many schools competing for students from the middle and upper classes. A large proportion of post-primary schools in Ireland now compete for *customers* and therefore managements tend to view the sharing of subject specialisations, staff or facilities as diminishing their market edge and therefore counter-productive to the school. Schools in geographical areas where post-primary schools compete for students find themselves in competition with each other and often seek to provide an exclusive element to their prospective students. Intense competition within the market model has arguably led to the polarisation and stratification of schools in some catchment areas. Jeffers (2013) highlighted the demerits of this phenomenon, arguing that collaboration between schools attempts to equalise inequality in contrast to inter-school competition, which enhances the advantage enjoyed by the already advantaged.

The interschool competition and the contemporary imperative for public relations to ensure sustained or increased enrolments was highlighted by DEIS and non-DEIS principals. Seven of the eight principals were managing schools that were undersubscribed and therefore spoke at length about their attempts to market and promote their school in the local community. The principals explained that the perceived success of their management was dependent on maintaining or augmenting their school enrolment figures. They detailed that they engage in marketing and public relations campaigns in order to ensure that they secure a good share of enrolments each year. The consequences of failing enrolments was identified as a reduction in student capitation figures, timetabled curricular offerings and the loss of teacher hours in some cases. One Principal commented:

*“We’d be worried that if the numbers fall, we’d face a reduction in teacher allocation next year. This would mean that we’d have less teachers or non-CID [permanent] teachers on less hours and that in turn means that I’d have to cut either hours allocated to certain subjects or maybe lose a subject that we were hoping to offer in order to compete with other larger schools. This can quickly become a vicious circle as enrolments can be determined largely by subjects offered on the curriculum, for instance a second modern foreign*

*language or the full complement of business and/or science subjects to leaving certificate”*

**(Principal, non-DEIS)**

There was a sense that public relations were becoming a measure of an effective Principal in the competitive realm the found themselves operating in, as one Principal alluded to:

*“It’s unreal. I’d have people telling me that we are not in the newspapers enough. I feel compelled and pressurised unbelievably so to keep getting articles out there. Keep ringing the newspapers, get them in, send them stuff, take photographs, record everything, put it up on Facebook, put it up everywhere. It has nearly become now where you want the event to end so you can finish recording and get it out there. The recording is nearly more important these days... it is creeping in”.*

**(Principal, non-DEIS)**

A school Principal that was not in direct local competition due to the geographical location of his school highlighted the pressure on principals to grow numbers outside their catchment area and the threat of schools, some distance away, taking numbers from stand-alone schools in rural locations.

*“Yes, we got a new website and we have identified it as a staff priority and we now have people on that, that is a big thing. Especially here where we are a rival school to [a large voluntary secondary school in a neighbouring town] in the area but they are in a massive, modern building and this school was built in the 1980s and so you are competing with the look of the place even. We are aware of PR, it’s a big thing, in schools it is massive”.*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

Five of the principals interviewed were in direct competition with two single sex denominational voluntary secondary schools in their catchment area. Principals in the schools in question demonstrated a frustration with trying to compete with other schools that had a perceived advantage in the competition due to their historical connections to the



middle and upper classes and the cultural habitus those classes have in the current system. While the sample for this study comprised of principals working in the ETB sector, it would be interesting to explore the stress levels among post-primary school principals from all post-primary sectors.

The level of marketing and public relations needed to try to compete with schools with a socioeconomically advantaged profile in the catchment was evident in the efforts outlined by the DEIS principals. One Principal made the comment:

*“There is pressure, we have rebranded in the last two years with a new school name, a new school uniform as well. This school was always perceived as the third school in the town. The first two are the vocational schools, whereas students with behavioural needs or SEN needs came here. Our numbers are small here, but we have worked significantly on behavioural issues, things that were there but I suppose as part of the community’s mind set now that these types of kids are our natural enrolment. It is very, very difficult as competition between the schools has engrained in people’s minds that there are only two secondary schools in the town not three.”*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

In terms of PR and marketing of their schools, all principals were completely focused on the message that parents and the wider community would respond positively to. In all cases even amongst the DEIS principals, Leaving Certificate points and prestigious progression was the message that would sustain and increase enrolments. For instance, a Principal of a DEIS school pointed out the following:

*“I was talking to a Principal in another school and one of his students got 600 points, one of the highest in the country and he told me that the amount of phone calls, the amount of media, the increase in enrolment he even said, the enquiries about the school all from one newspaper article ‘The Irish Independent’ and he said it was a year’s PR done. It’s part of the general public’s view of stats and quick information gathering ...6 As, 10As etc”.*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

This argument has been made in research by Banks, McCoy *et al.* (2018, p.28) who report the sentiment of stakeholders in relation to the competitive market model of post-primary education *'It must be admitted, however, that society views success purely in terms of points and a school is viewed as good if it is placed higher than a neighbouring school in a league table'* (Girls, non-DEIS). These findings highlight the dual role of schools, as the micro system, where the two education paradigms meet. It demonstrates that on one hand qualitative care and student-centred holistic development is outlined in mission statements yet on the other hand quantitative performance in State examinations is often more valued by parents/guardians and the general public. Another Principal indicated that the performance model placed pressure on school managers to relegate care to second place behind administrative performance particularly in the ETB sector where the administrative departments at HQ might judge a Principals' performance on their promptness regarding administrative tasks whereas the administration of care is more difficult to quantify. One Principal captured the sentiment of the principals interviewed in the following statement:

*"When the level of administration in a school confines you to a desk, where you are dealing with financial issues, building regulations, repair and maintenance of a building, then how can you divide those times appropriately? I would always err on the side of caution and say the health of the child is priority. Whatever has to be done has to wait, but that element of pressure is coming at you from other quarters to provide a spreadsheet".*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

The pressure on principals is related to their position between the two conflicting and competing educational paradigms outlined in figure 2.1. Additionally, it is the internal conflict which arises from their middle-class habitus as outlined by Bourdieu (1986). The middle-class habitus in these cases involves an internal programming for social and economic maintenance or enhancement.

*"I get about 50 to 60 emails a day. I have paperwork from the department, paperwork in from head office. I have to double check this, triple check that so the paperwork and the admin side is very difficult and trying to get the time. I come in on Saturday*

*mornings and even with coming in on Saturday mornings, I still don't get stuff done and everyone wants it in 2 days' time and you are in the middle of something to do with school, like yesterday it took me 45 minutes to get 4 lines typed out on the computer because people were constantly coming in looking for me. It was a simple email, I just wanted to pause them and say ok, let me get four lines done and sent off and then I can talk to you. It is constant and everyone's situation in their eyes is important and is vital and if you don't pay attention and listen to it, even if they say it's not, you know they will go out and say ...the Principal didn't listen to me....so the line I use is "my door is always open, even when it's closed"*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

His comments echoed the remarks made by Mulconry (2018, p. 148) that '*Principals ... are spending so much time proving they are doing the right things, that they are losing the focus on doing the right things*'. The increasing level of paperwork and administrative duties was outlined by a senior Principal, of a DEIS school who senior DEIS Principal who explained that the level of additional administration work in recent years such as GDPR regulations and Child Protection procedural change required a multitude of additional paperwork. He raised the issue of the increased sense of responsibility and consequence as many regulations had a legal basis in the contemporary schooling system. He commented:

*"The fact that a lot of the newer regulations have a statutory footing means that it is imperative to get the regulations correct and to keep copies of copies of everything"*.

**(Ibid)**

The increasing level of paperwork and responsibility was highlighted by all principals. So too, was the constant sense of foreboding felt by some principals. One Principal explained that the level of responsibility for a Principal had significantly increased over the past two decades. she stated,

*"I would be fierce conscious of it [responsibility]"*

**[Interviewer: "Does it keep you up at night?"]**

*“Sometimes yeah, or it could yeah, or you’d wake up worried and that comes with the job, I think. I think that when you take on the job that’s the kind of thing, there will be sleepless nights that’s the reality, it could be about other stuff too, it could be about finance, it could be about numbers [enrolments] collapsing, it could be about a teacher that’s about to lose their job, face redeployment or something you know”.*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

The principals spoke about the role of the contemporary post-primary school in promoting mental health among the student population. They highlighted that the traditional role of the school had changed in the past decade particularly since the recession which many felt had impacted negatively on students’ standard of living and quality of life. When asked how they perceived their role as Principal, in terms of mental health and wellbeing, they spoke of the pressure they felt to ensure the students in their care were safe and protected. One DEIS Principal outlined the change in his role as a leader within his school which was striving to provide a settings-based approach to mental health promotion. She added:

*“I would see it [the role of Principal] as a movement away from the concentration on educational issues to issues of student needs such as mental health issues, issues of self-harm and anxiety and distress which are largely caused by external events to the school”.*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

All the principals spoke about their duty of care to the students but interestingly their sense of duty of care to the staff was deeply felt in all cases. In cases of all principals irrespective of gender, staff had come and divulged deep personal worries and upsetting life events. A male Principal summarised this reality in his context:

*“Teachers are under pressure in their role, their working conditions have worsened in the last decade. I’ve had a couple of situations where it’s the staff that have come to me with an issue or a concern or situation in their lives, and they are talking to you and they are upset and crying and you are*

*dealing with that too, and that is really just between me and that person and that's the way it should be and no one else would know that... ”*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

The unquantifiable nature of a care-based role was highlighted by one DEIS Principal who argued that the role was no longer a position with regularised hours. They felt that they were ‘*on duty*’ and ‘*on alert*’ always. Some articulated that it was a societal role rather than a job. It was also felt that the school and wider community would expect the Principal to solve and resolve situations involving students outside of school. One DEIS Principal remarked:

*“Because this is a relatively small community, people in the community if they would see a child in distress in public or if they knew something, they would contact you. So, it is something that can move beyond the norm of eight to four or nine to five”*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

Another DEIS Principal also highlighted the movement of his role from the remit of the secondary care location (school) to a more primary care role (home/family). It was noteworthy that he used the term ‘*parent*’, in the quotation below, in relation to his role and responsibilities regarding the health and welfare of students. He argued that:

*“The biggest responsibilities on my shoulders includes the health and welfare of everybody, when I say everybody, I include staff members as well as students. The biggest responsibility would be ensuring that nothing is left unseen and not only do we respond to incidents that have been brought to our attention, but that I feel a responsibility to identify issues that haven’t been brought to my attention, that any good Parent would see in the course of their day-to day lives”.*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

All principals reported encountering family dysfunction when trying to address a student’s mental health issues. Again, the frequency ranged in accordance with the socio-economic profile of the school. It ranged from four times per year to multiple

times daily. One Principal captured the impact of his changing role on him personally, he stated the following:

*“The biggest worry as I would call it, is keeping people safe and making sure that you are not going to lose someone. So, you end up at the GP with someone or the psychiatric unit with some or Pieta House with people. [Interviewer: ‘and has that happened to you?’] ‘absolutely, that is the reality of life as a Principal, that you feel the buck stops with you and you have the responsibility and you know that something is not right, so you are referring people to child protection which I would have done on a number of occasions, at any given time there are one or two that you are referring and there is a case open on them”*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

The need for support for principals to deal with the stress of their roles was very evident in the course of the interviews with principals. The stress of their roles was outlined and attributed to the increase in responsibility for both quantitative education outcomes and care. It was also attributed to the increasing pressure felt by staff which was reported as a source of stress in some cases. One male Principal captured a sense of isolation felt when they had to make a difficult and perhaps unpopular decision.

*“It is a very lonely job. The ETB are good to be fair to them, other principals are good support. You have a DP and the wife at home and that’s it. It’s one of those jobs that no matter what you do, you can’t please everyone. You will be blamed for everything and even when you try to do something right, there is always a curve ball thrown in somewhere. You have to accept when you get the job that you are different and are seen different, you will be unpopular and you have to be comfortable with being unpopular and in a staff room, you can’t please everyone”*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

The idea of having a place to speak to other peers was outlined by all principals interviewed. It was noted that the ETB had introduced the Social and Health Education

Project (SHEP)<sup>24</sup> training for principals which was appreciated. However, the majority expressed a reluctance to really open up at ETB Principals' Meetings and SHEP training about the issues that were really *'keeping them up at night'* in relation to their schools. Many highlighted the need for a third party that they could open up to and discuss issues within a confidential manner. One Principal captured the group sentiment in the following statement:

*"I have used the Employee Assistance scheme once and that was good, but it wasn't enough, and when I went in they said 'you've four sessions'. It needs to be provided by someone in the field and on an ongoing basis. You get people coming to you on staff with personal problems and it then becomes complicated, especially if a Parent has issues with that teacher".*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

Each Principal referred to the ETB's Principals' Meetings and felt that this offered a platform where they could meet other principals and share experiences and best practice. However, it was expressed by most principals that they would only *'go so far'* at such meetings as they were all of the one organisation and therefore a professional boundary needed to be maintained.

*"Well, talking to colleagues. The PDA is a useful forum. We have our principals' meeting in the ETB. It's helpful but not helpful to discuss issues that upset me. You talk to someone that you can talk to, but you wouldn't bring it up at a forum".*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

The reported levels of stress experienced by the principals in their role is noteworthy in the context of the implementation of the *HPS Framework* (1995) as it is imperative that the Principal as leader of the school is in a psychological position, personally and professionally, to embed wellbeing and mental health promotion among the school community.

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<sup>24</sup> SHEP was established in 1974, it is an Irish, community-based, not-for-profit, training and development organisation dedicated to the promotion of personal, community and social well-being.

All principals detailed how they had journeyed to a place where they could now cope better with the pressures of the position and the role. One Principal captured the challenges of being the school leader in contemporary education. She explained:

*“I have become more resilient, I do talk to my DP, but you still don’t go there, you have to hold your own. I suppose it’s like trial-and-error, it’s a bit like sink or swim some days, you think can I do this... It [the role of Principal] causes you to question your philosophy of life and your own way of being and so you do. More reflective about what it means to be living, and life, and the good life. I would be spiritual, not religious, and values would be strong for me, so I draw on that to make myself more resilient”.*

**(Principal, non-DEIS)**

The qualitative data collected from principals demonstrates the tensions they experienced as they attempted to balance their care and competition functions. The chapter demonstrates that both functions are competing with one another and that competition is winning out over care in some cases. The next section explores the experiences of teachers as they balance the duality of their roles.

## **7.5 The Effects of ‘the Perfect Storm’ on the Terms and Conditions of Teachers and Principals.**

Section 7.2 illustrates that the decline in PISA performance and an economic downturn converged to enable the neoliberal capitalist governance agenda to gather support and momentum across the public services. However, prior to this there was an alignment with a neoliberal capitalist agenda for education, for instance, a social partnership approach, between government and the unions, was initiated in the late 1990s and into the new millennium. Reports issued at that time such as the ‘*Delivering Better Government Report*’ (1996) were orientated towards public sector reform. O’Sullivan (1999) points out that benchmarking was identified as a strategy employed to ‘modernise’ the public services. He points out that benchmarking was in fact a strategy to modify the role and conditions of public and civil servants by introducing market principles.

Lynch, Grummell *et al.* (2012) also details the Public Service Benchmarking Body (PSBB) which was established in 2000 under the ‘*Programme for Prosperity and*



*Fairness*' (PPF). The PPF was a partnership approach between government and unions. The PSBB was given the task of comparing the public and private sectors in terms of employment criteria, responsibilities, productivity, pay, pensions and conditions of service. The PSBB published its findings in June 2002 recommending a range of increases for public and civil servants averaging at 8.9%. These pay increases were contingent on two factors: that new payment terms under benchmarking would nullify all previous pay links; and that pay increases were contingent on modernisation and reform. Lynch, Grummell *et al.* (2012) and Gleeson (2010) outline that senior civil servants gained greatly from this process which ensured agreements were reached and progressed in relation to benchmarking and public service reform.

However, it was the context of recession and austerity that provided the climate and rationale for making severe labour adjustments to the remuneration and conditions of public sector workers and in the process, challenged the trade unions. Fraser, Murphy *et al.* (2013, p.44) indicate that a pension levy and pay cut for public sector workers amounting to a 14% reduction of net pay was the initial labour adjustment in 2008. A range of public service agreements followed from 2010. For instance, a Public Service Agreement (PSA) known as *Croke Park Agreement* was agreed with the trade unions in 2010 this resulted in a pay freeze for public sector workers until 2014. The agreement set out an *Employment Control Framework* (ECF) placed a moratorium on recruitment and promotions as outlined by Fraser, Murphy *et al.* (2013, p.45) across the public service. This had particular implications for schools and their ability to obtain posts of responsibility. This moratorium on posts of responsibility since 2010 was outlined repeatedly by the principals. It particularly affected DEIS schools as they have little opportunity to seek extra financial support from parents unlike some non-DEIS schools.

*“Ever since the moratorium, retirements etc., there has been no parallel cognisance that school have become busier places. The impact of the recession on families, the impact of recession on young people there hasn't been a cost-benefit analysis by the DES towards the needs that the schools would have”*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

Despite the partnership approach between governments and unions, a trend of casualisation of teaching staff, developed at second and third level around that time. Contracts of Indefinite Duration (CID) were introduced at post-primary and replaced permanent contracts despite insistence from teachers' unions, that permanent contracts can still be granted in many cases. Under the terms of the CID, teachers were granted such contracts in the fourth year after three years' continuous service. The CID contract in the fourth year would be for the number of hours the teacher was contracted for in the third year. Lynch, Grummell *et al.* (2012) argue that the purpose of such contracts was to diminish the power of public sector professionals and their union. Indeed, the casualisation of teachers and lecturers<sup>25</sup> has remained a concern and has been an annual congressional issue for the TUI. Indeed, the TUI Annual Congress (2016) heard a motion relating to the casualisation of teaching contracts where the proposer recounted a situation in Institute of Technology, Tralee where one fulltime permanent position had become seventeen separate positions since it was vacated a few years previously.

Lynch, Grummell *et al.* (2012) outline that the ECF reduced public service employees by over 17,000 and implemented contracts of short duration. Teaching staff were reduced by decreasing the time allocation to schools, cutting certain positions such as the visiting teacher for children from the Travelling Community, and transferring career guidance counsellors from ex-quota to in quota. The agreement also introduced voluntary and compulsory redeployment for schools over the teacher quota or in cases where a teacher was viewed as surplus to the curricular needs of the school. These cuts were requirements demanded by the IMF and ECB loan mechanisms. In relation to teachers, allowances for additional qualifications at Level 9 or 10 of the NFQ were abolished for new entrants or for existing staff. This emerged as a contentious issue in the course of the teachers' focus groups. One teacher stated:

*“Well, what is the point in pushing up-skilling and enhancing our skills on one hand and then taking away the incentive on the other hand. The allowance before were not massive and you had to pay for your own fees to*

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<sup>25</sup> Lecturers based in the Institutes of Technology are represented by the Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI).

*do a masters or post-graduate course. There is no incentive now, it's really counter-productive".*

**(Female Teacher, Focus Group One)**

The *Croke Park Agreement* included an additional thirty-three hours per week for post-primary teachers. The hours were to be delivered outside of teacher timetabled hours for class contact and supervision/substitution. Many teachers referred to this time and highlighted the sense of public pressure and anti-public service sentiment which prevailed, one teacher commented:

*"We paid for the banks and the public was down on us. We were made out to be on the take with 'gold plated pensions', that was the term the media were using. We were paying for well for our pensions and we took the pension levy, but we still got the flak from the media and the angry mob mentality. It was a dreadful time and I know many public servants including teachers whose husbands or wives had been self-employed or working in the private sector and lost their jobs. So, it was wrong to try to pit middle to low paid public sector workers against private sector workers as none of us were the cause of the chaos"*

**(Male Teacher, Focus Group One)**

The *Public Service Agreement* (2013-2016) also known as '*The Haddington Road Agreement*' superseded the *Croke Park Agreement*. This agreement introduced pay reductions of 5% to 10% for those earning over 65,000 per annum. The agreement created a new pay scale for newly qualified teachers resulting in a three-tiered pay scale for teachers, the first was for teachers employed prior to January 2011, the second from January 2011 to January 2012 and the third for new entrants after January 2012. This agreement was later extended, following discussions facilitated by the Labour Relations Commission (LRC), by a *Public Service Stability Agreement* (2013 - 2018) also known as '*The Lansdowne Road Agreement*'. The terms of the Lansdowne Road Agreement changed the criteria for CID eligibility reducing it to two years for new entrants to the profession, but it maintained the three-tiered pay system. This issue arose in one of the teachers' focus groups which consisted of a number of newly qualified teachers. One male teacher stated:

*“We were shafted by the government and the Union. We get paid less than our colleagues for the same work and when you think, that we now have to do a degree and a master’s in education and then we are probated [probation in the first year by NIPT in line with Teaching Council regulation]. So, in effect, we are more qualified and paid less. It’s really a source of anger for the young teachers”.*

**(Male teacher Focus Group One)**

His comments were met with verbal consensus from those present including teachers who were unaffected by the lower rate of pay for new entrants. One such teacher expressed dissatisfaction that the two major teachers’ unions did not converge on the issue. She stated:

*“The TUI went one way and the ASTI the other on the issue of teacher pay. The TUI took the lower rate of pay for the lesser wait period for a CID whereas the ASTI rejected the lower rate of pay for members. It is the obvious ‘divide and conquer strategy’ that is always used. The ASTI members would see the TUI as a soft touch now and eventually they [the ASTI] had to accept it too”.*

**(Female Teacher, Focus Group One)**

The *Lansdowne Road Agreement* was accepted by the TUI members in 2015 but rejected by the ASTI. ASTI members who voted to reject the agreement remained under the old system of four-year continuous service criteria for a CID contract. However, in 2017 the ASTI voted to accept the *Lansdowne Road* bringing all the teachers’ unions on board.

The *Lansdowne Road Agreement* proposed ‘*workforce planning*’ and ‘*workforce action plans*’ which allowed management to restructure and rationalise staff. The Agreement also increased performance management systems introduced under the first PSA by introducing a ‘*performance improvement action plan*’ for individuals who were identified as underperforming as outlined by (Fraser, Murphy *et al.* 2013, p.45). Additionally, recourse for complaints about teachers’ performance or behaviour was

provided for under part five of *the Teaching Council Act* (2011-2015) which was formally commenced by the Minister for Education and Skills in 2016. While some of these initiatives were to be welcomed in the climate of the time, they did have a significant impact on principals and teachers in the sample. Some detailed that they felt it affected them in terms of their motivation and sense of *'being valued'* in the system. This is relevant to this study as it has implications for the collective ability of principals and teachers to be fully motivated to be agents for mental health and wellbeing promotion within their schools.

Sahlberg (2007) argues that educational systems which are party to the GERM, experience a reduction in interest in the teaching profession. In the Irish context, teachers' unions have made the point that graduates with certain degrees such as science can earn more money in the private sector with a lesser degree of stress. Indeed, the President of the TUI (Lahart, 2018) has argued that the real cause of the teacher supply issues was a denigration of teachers' working conditions. He cites pay inequality and the continuing casualisation and absence of promotional opportunities. His arguments are supported by data collected in a TUI Teacher Workload Survey (2017) which surveyed a sample of over 800 teachers. In that survey, 96% of respondents agreed with the statement *'Bureaucratic duties regularly deflect from my core role of teaching'*. A further 96% agreed that *'My workload has increased significantly in recent years'*. While 95% agreed that *'the morale of teachers has fallen in recent years'* and 81% reported that differentiated pay scales had a *'negative'* or *'very negative'* effect on morale in their school (TUI, 2017). During the data collection phase of the present study, principals and teachers repeatedly outlined their desire to help, support and care for students but also cited increased stress levels and a perceived decline in their working conditions. This supports research findings that the primary motivation for citizens to pursue quality in teaching is to make a difference or positively impact society (Cameron and Lovett, 2015; Day and Gu *et al.*, 2014). However, some teachers believed that many members of the public failed to appreciate the level of work involved in teaching in contemporary Ireland.

*"I find that the public can be very negative about us. It is always a low dig, like oh teachers only work half days or all the holidays you get or sure all you do is get them to open the book. It's really annoying as teaching is only a*

*fraction of what we do now. To be honest we are mini counsellors, carers, confidence builders, watchdogs for abuse and neglect, as well as everything else”.*

**(Female Teacher, Focus Group Two)**

This comment reflects arguments by Noddings (1992) where she suggests a more spiritual rationale and mission for the teachers’ role in the learning process. Noddings (2003) argues that the over focus on performance and results has reduced the teachers’ role to that of an instructor. Equally, the comments of teachers in this research study indicates that some factions of society have also developed an expectation that teachers’ roles and effectiveness should be measurable. This type of teaching climate is the antithesis to hook’s (1994, p. 13) ideal for education ‘*To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin*’.

It was noteworthy that despite the scale of adjustments to teachers’ terms and conditions since 2009, the main grievance expressed by the sample of teachers and principals was the issue of compulsory Croke Park hours. Teachers reported feeling aggrieved that the voluntary work they had engaged in prior to the inclusion of the compulsory Croke Park hours, was not appreciated and was taken for granted. Teachers expressed a sense that they and most of their colleagues had always engaged in a significant number of voluntary hours over above the requirements of their employment. The teachers recounted various examples, but one teacher captured the sentiment:

*“For God’s sake, we have multiple sporting teams here, clubs for this and that after school and at lunchtimes, we bring the kids to everything and anything we can to enhance their educational experience and this is all outside the classroom. I spend so much time helping kids and talking to them about issues and concerns they have, and I never minded one bit. But now we’ve to work 33 additional hours, as in they [the DES] are counting 33 hours. In the media it was made out that we only did the minimum. A few of my colleagues have stopped doing the voluntary work now and it’s the kids*

*lose out then. Still many of us are still doing the voluntary work but it leaves a bad taste in the mouth”.*

**(Male Teacher, DEIS School)**

The lack of policy recognition for care is illustrated in the following comment.

*“You just cannot quantify care like you can other things, I spend so much time doing unquantifiable care-related work with and for my students. So, this whole extra hour lark was a real kick in the face for teachers, it actually said to us all your voluntary work is unseen and not valued. It’s the greatest load of rubbish they’ve [the Government] come up with yet”*

**(Female Teacher, DEIS School)**

Meanwhile, a Principal’s comment captured the sentiment of many principals in the sample. He stated:

*“Without a shadow of a doubt. I think that [compulsory Croke Park hours] is one of the main inhibitors that school managers would be encountering. There was always a sense of togetherness and volunteerism prior to the introduction of the compulsory Croke Park hours because it’s a natural reaction that when you are compelled to do something it reduces your inclination to volunteer so there’s no doubt but that it is evident that that its present in the modern-day school”.*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

Another Principal made a similar comment:

*“Rapidly. It’s the biggest problem that I have, people will now say no, I’ve 22 hours contact time, I don’t have time. Or can you give me a Croke Park (CP) hour for this or can you give me a CP hour for that, what will I get here. Volunteerism is completely gone, a dead duck. They want something in return now.... whereas in my time it was different... now you will get your couple all the time that will help out and but even with that it needs to be during class time and during school time, not after 4 o clock or not on a Saturday, you*

*know. It's [volunteerism] gone...it was the biggest disaster ever that CP hours idea"*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

The culture created by engaging in New Managerialist practices over the past decade has attempted to apply quantitative measures of performance to a public service position which historically was largely approached as a vocation in the Irish context. This is arguably a legacy of the dominance of the religious orders (vocations) in Irish schooling. The difficulty with applying questionable quantitative measurements to the work of teachers and principals is that the natural orientation for their role and function lies in the affective domain as discussed by Noddings (1984; 1992; 2002; 2003; 2005). One Principal captured the crux of the issue:

*"Teachers always had a sense of vocationalism prior to the Croke Park hours where they gave willingly to students for extracurricular activities, to drama and music etc. Now since the Croke Park hours, everything is measured against getting hours reduced from Croke Park. It has destroyed the good sense of volunteerism and camaraderie that I feel was a hallmark of education ten or maybe fifteen years ago"*

**(Principal, DEIS)**

Conway (2013) outlines that the recession justified the need to cut teachers' pay and entitlements but that the PISA (2009) results justified the demands for increased productivity. The next section argues that the economic agenda around educational reform, failed to fully appreciate or understand the holistic role of teachers and principals in the life of a school-going child. The next section explores the challenges for principals and teachers as they attempt to balance their measurable performance role and their care role.

## **7.6 Teachers' Experiences of Balancing the Care Function and the Performance Function of Their Roles**

Noddings (2002, p. 13) argues the energy and genuineness necessary to provide care for students as teachers must be *'receptive and attentive in a special way'*. hooks



(1994, p.13) argues that true teaching is underpinned by an ethic of care which ‘*respects and cares for the goals of students*’. An appreciation of the existential context of teachers is necessary in order to fully comprehend teachers’ experiences of balancing the care function and the performance function of their roles. However, there are many quantitatively orientated arguments and supporting research studies as to what make a *good* and *effective* teacher. Similar to the definition of education, the definition of an effective teacher somewhat reflects the two educational paradigms of care and competition, outlined in chapter two. It is not surprising therefore that few converge to form a definitive agreement as outlined by Casey and Childs (2007). Many researchers therefore have adopted an outcomes approach to measuring the *effectiveness* of teachers and used primarily quantitative measurements (see Nye, Konstantopoulos *et al.*, 2004; Chetty, Friedman *et al.*, 2011). Chetty, Friedman *et al.* (2011) argue that effective teachers are high value-added (VA) and measure their effectiveness in test scores, progression, social and cultural capital and outcomes. On the other hand, researchers such as Goe (2010) take a more care-orientated focus and argue that teachers’ effectiveness is influenced by the ability of a teacher to connect with their students. O’Brien (2018) argues that the ability of teachers to connect depends greatly on their understanding of the context of the students. In a similar vein, Fernet, Guay *et al.* (2012) argue that teaching requires a high level of emotional engagement and labour which is demanding on an affective level (see also Ferguson, Frost *et al.*, 2012; Spilt, Koomen *et al.*, 2011). The performance-based demands in addition to the affective demands of the role have led multiple studies to recognise teaching as a stressful occupation as outlined by (Foley and Murphy 2015; Chang 2009; Buk, Chan *et al.*, 2010). Indeed, in the Irish context, Smyth (2016) illustrates that young people had generally developed an increasingly instrumental perspective prior to State examinations, with an intensification of private tuition and greater value placed on teachers who focused on examination content and performance enhancing strategies. Apple (2006) argues that the comparison of teachers’ performance based on test results does not appreciate the intellectual or emotional nature of their work.

The application of Ball’s (1993) policy tools illustrates a disconnect between *policy as text* (intentions) in the *HPS Framework* (1995) and *policy as effects* (actions) on the ground in terms of the wellbeing of school-based stakeholders. The affective dimension of inequality outlined by Baker, Lynch *et al.* (2004) is especially relevant

as it allows the disconnect between policy and practice to be identified and explored in relation to the sample. Lynch (2016) argues that in the marketised system of education ‘*care for students becomes a secondary consideration as lower performing students are not valued in a highly competitive system*’. She argues that within such a target-driven model ‘*vulnerable students and staff become a nuisance*’. The concept of vulnerable staff becoming a nuisance in a performance-driven model was evidenced by a non-DEIS Principal who remarked that examination pressure and parental expectations can be a cause of major stress for teachers, she argued that teachers know when a student is not cognitively able to achieve at the level they or their parents are pushing for:

*“They are stressed out as they know that the kid in front of them is not going to get the points that they expect. And then you would have issues where parents might come into you often about a particular teacher, and you have to try to address the issue and move the process along. I would worry about teachers in this predicament as it can be very distressing but, yet I am trying to resolve it”*

**(Principal, non-DEIS)**

Both Mansfield, Beltman *et al.* (2016) and Morgan (2011) cite the challenges related to the teaching profession and argue the critical need for the promotion of teachers’ resilience. However, in the majority of pre-educational programmes, there is no explicit instruction, consideration or appreciation for reflexive practice around building or enhancing teachers’ resilience (see Day and Gu, 2013; Mansfield, Beltman *et al.*, 2016). The incompatibility of the current system with regards to care was highlighted by a career guidance counsellor who explained that, in her previous ‘*very academic*’ (voluntary secondary school), teachers that were ‘*under pressure*’ from management and parents for high marks and were subsequently selective about who they would teach. Meaning that some students who may require more help in the Honours class were ‘*put down*’ to the Pass class. She explained that in her capacity as career guidance counsellor, she could see this pattern. She stated:

*“I spot the teacher who do the whole thing of get them down to Pass [Ordinary Level] and they don’t care as long as they have so many As and Bs, so people end up doing Pass that shouldn’t be doing Pass”.*

**(Career guidance counsellor (Voluntary Secondary School) non-DEIS)**

This argument that school practices and processes can influence young people’s choices in terms of subject levels has been supported by the findings of Smyth (2018, p.2) which illustrate patterns of working-class students or students from non-employed households being less likely to opt for Higher Level subjects in State examinations. This was particularly explained by teachers’ lower levels of *‘expectations and encouragement’*. When asked if the students who ended up doing Pass were from working-class backgrounds. The Guidance Counsellor explained:

*“Often they are, or they would be from families that don’t expect high points in the Leaving Certificate and families that would not fully understand the competitive system. Parents ‘in the know’ are always looked after, as the teacher would not draw them on themselves and would know that the student will get grinds if struggling. So, it’s a win-win situation then.”*

**(Ibid)**

This comment from a career guidance counsellor based in a non-DEIS school indicates that the students and their parents/ guardians who are less aware of the competitive points system are not as well *‘looked after’* within the competitive context of a non-DEIS setting.

## **7.7 Conclusion**

This chapter further explores the context of post-primary schooling in which educational policies underpinned by *the HPS Framework (1995)* are negotiated and enacted. It focuses on the impact of neoliberal capitalism and new managerialism on principals and teachers’ ability to champion mental health and wellbeing promotion in post-primary schooling. The relevance of such an exploration lies in whether or not this impacts on teachers and principals’ ability to be agents of mental health and wellbeing promotion in line with *the HPS Framework (1995)*.

The chapter identifies that many teachers feel undervalued by the system and society at large. The changes to teachers' terms and conditions are relevant and significant in the context of the changes to their role and function which followed. To this end, the chapter explores the operational context of principals and teachers operating at the coalface, across the sample schools. The chapter offers a concise overview of some of the changes to teachers and principals' terms and conditions in recent years. It suggests that these changes were impending for educators among other public servants under the neoliberal capitalist agenda; just as they were preordained for educators and public servants in the US and UK. The chapter outlines the alignment of political and economic factors in Ireland in 2009 which created a socially receptive climate for a market-driven form of governance known as new managerialism and a reduction to the terms and conditions of public service workers. The scale of reduction to teachers' terms and conditions are explored through the experiences of stakeholders regarding their reduced remuneration, the moratorium on promotion and recruitment and additional hours (Croke Park hours). The chapter illustrates that a decline in PISA (2009) rankings created the opportunity to reform the post-primary curriculum. It illustrates that this reform, rather than being a unique solution, is so similar to many other neoliberal capitalist countries that it has been termed the GERM as outlined by Sahlberg (2007). The chapter also raises questions about the reliability of standardised testing especially PISA which is over-seen by the OECD.

The chapter reports the attitudes and opinions of teachers and principals to the scale of change in the profession. The chapter focuses particularly on their experiences of the changes to their working context and how that impacts on the transition to a school-based setting for mental health and wellbeing promotion. To this end, the chapter examined the attitudes and experiences of principals, teachers and career guidance counsellors seeking to implement *the HPS Framework (1995)* within new managerialism. It explores their efforts to balance their care function within a performance-based model of education with particular reference to DEIS contexts where the scale of mental health and wellbeing issues are intensified. It demonstrates the challenge for teachers and principals as they balance their care function within a performance-based model of education and schooling. The emergence of a sense of tension within principals and teachers, as they attempt to balance their dual role and function, is explored using the concept of the '*plastic-self*' and the '*authentic-self*'

proposed by Ball (2001). This tension emanates from their authentic desire for the qualitative functions of care for learners, but they are being confined by the demands of the quantitative modes of measuring performances (Baker, Lynch *et al.* 2004; hooks 1994). This chapter illustrates that new managerialism is impacting on stakeholders' capacity to fully engage with mental health and wellbeing promotion. For instance, the principals' interviews highlighted the pressure they feel to balance the measurable performance indicators such as PR with the immeasurable care function. They highlighted their frustrations with trying to run a public service as a business and competing therefore with other schools in their catchment areas. The teachers and principals' accounts suggest that they feel constantly torn between performance-related objectives and the objective of care provision which are not appropriately measured by the DES. Their accounts illuminate the difficulties they face in trying to balance these competing objectives within the current competitive post-primary system of education. Their comments suggest that the importance of competition is winning out over care. This is contrary to the underpinning of care environment outlined as the foundation for *the HPS Framework* (1995). Furthermore, teachers argued that they were not appropriately trained for their new mental health and wellbeing support roles for instance, SPHE and Wellbeing were identified as sites for disclosures which teachers felt comfortable reviving. This again supports Ball's (1993) policy tools and indicates a failure to convert policy as text to meaningful action at the coalface.

The chapter illustrates that principals are acutely aware of their duty to support mental health and wellbeing under recent policy developments. They cited that their role had changed considerably because now they had to deal with issues which may occur outside of school but impact on students' mental health and wellbeing within. They outline that this has increased the responsibility of their role and has resulted in an increase in pressure and stress. This is a relevant finding given that principals are the leaders of the implementation of *the HPS Framework* (1995), *the Health Promoting Schools Framework* (2013) and *the Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines* (2017). This chapter illustrates that the conversion of such policy as text into action and effects is compromised because of the operational context of teachers. This chapter, therefore, cautions that the transition to a mental health and wellbeing post-primary schooling model runs the risk of becoming a paper exercise rather than a meaningful change.

## Chapter Eight

### Discussion of Key Findings and Recommendations- Mapping a Way Forward

#### 8.0 Introduction

This research study examines the experiences of post-primary school communities as they transition to a settings-base for mental health and wellbeing promotion in line with *the HPS Framework (1995)*. It argues that meaningful movement to the framework requires an understanding of the context of schools; in order to progress policy from its text or intentional form (exosystemic level) to its effects form (meso and microsystemic level). Figure 2.1 illustrates a post-primary schooling context which is contradictory to the care-orientation which Noddings (1984; 2002) argues should underpin education as a human right. It demonstrates that the binary nature of the two competing contemporary paradigms of education (see figure 2.1) are difficult to reconcile. Therefore, this research study examines the operational context of a sample of post-primary schools within an ETB scheme and explores their experiences of supporting a care-orientated model of educational provision.

The operational context of schooling is explored using post-primary school communities' experiences of transiting to a settings-base for mental health and wellbeing promotion. The operational context is explored from a microsystemic level using a mixed methods research approach. This approach allows for the triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data gathered using an amalgam of qualitative interviews, focus groups and quantitative surveys across a range of stakeholders: parents, principals, teachers, career guidance counsellors and students. Data analysis was conducted using the constant comparison method of analysis and a colour coding system which yielded major thematic trends for further analysis and exploration. The collection and correlation of stakeholders' experiences from the coalface in schools (microsystem) allowed the *'policy as effects'* phase to be comprehensively explored. The discussion and findings which followed gave rise to a number of significant messages which serve to illuminate the quintain outlined at the outset. The quintain is an exploration of the impact of context, competition and care on the experiences of post-primary school communities transitioning to a settings-base for mental health and wellbeing promotion. This quintain was underpinned by five embedded research

questions outlined in chapter two. Each of these embedded questions were explored across the range of stakeholders located in the eight sample schools and the key conclusions are revisited in this chapter in order to conclude the quintain.

An exploration of the microsystemic level happenings across the eight cases enabled patterns and trends to be identified and these trends were interrogated using a theoretical approach proposed by Ball (1993) entitled the '*Policy Sociology Approach*'. The approach for this research study was created using a combination of the four dimensions of equality: political, economic, cultural and affective (see Baker, Lynch *et al.*, 2004). The analysis and discussion of the political and economic dimension is framed using Economic Reproduction Theory. It also explores concept such as parental choice, grapevine knowledge and hegemony in order to analyse the class-based schooling model. The cultural dimension uses Bourdieu's thinking tools of habitus, cultural capital, fields and doxa to explore stratification. The affective dimension is used to examine the impact of care and lack of care in both the primary care and secondary care locations (see Baker, Lynch *et al.*, 2004). The application of the '*Policy Sociology Approach*' to the patterns and trends enabled the researcher to draw conclusions regarding the happenings at the mesosystemic level.

Bada and Darlington *et al.* (2019) argue that it is difficult to accurately compare the findings in relation to health promoting school policy across international contexts as countries differ in terms of their organisational, structural and cultural backgrounds. They argue that different models of the HPS Framework are used in a variety of contexts and that many of the indicators used to evaluate HPS policy and practice are compromised where education and health are operated from separate departments or ministries.

## **8.2 Illuminating the Quintain Using the Key Findings**

The quintain for this research study has previously been identified as the impact of context, competition and care on the experiences of post-primary school communities transitioning to a settings-base for mental health and wellbeing promotion. Stake (2006) illustrates that emphasis on the quintain changes the researcher's focus, from seeking an individualised understanding of each case, to an appreciation of how each case

contributes to understanding the quintain. The span of eight separate cases enabled a comprehensive exploration of the quintain which is underpinned by five embedded research questions, which are: how has the post-primary schooling system affected the operational context of schools in the sample?. Does the socio-economic profile of the school/catchment influence the scale of need in terms of mental health promotion and mental health supports?. What is the impact of a performance-orientated product system of assessment on the context of mental health and wellbeing promotion at post-primary level?. What impact has new managerialism had on the principals and teachers' context and ability to champion mental health and wellbeing promotion? and how can policy makers ensure mental health promotion is meaningful for *all* post-primary students?

The experiences of stakeholders were gathered in response to these embedded questions and were organised into thematic findings which are discussed in chapters four, five, six and seven. The thematic findings outline significant contextual issues which challenge the ability of the post-primary schooling system to meaningfully implement *the HPS Framework (1995)* and transition to a settings-base for mental health and wellbeing promotion. The contextual issues highlighted by sampled stakeholders demonstrates the effectiveness of the theoretical framework which is underpinned by Ball's (1993) policy analysis tools. His tools illustrate that policy as text phase (exosystemic level) is often manipulated in the policy as discourse (mesosystemic level) phase and does not always translate into action (microsystemic level). The compromised translation of '*the HPS Framework*' (1996) into action is the central focus of this research. The researcher argues that in the current post-primary education system competition is winning out over care and that such a system creates citizens who are individualistically rather than collectively focused. This system runs the risk of producing young people who do not care about social justice issues or the provision of care to vulnerable citizens. It runs the risk of creating and nurturing citizens who cannot *see to care* because they are oblivious to their privilege. It perpetuates the segregation of citizens into winners and losers where losers are seen as responsible for their own failures as outlined by Lynch (2016) and Reay (2017).

In Ireland, educational performance and progression to third level is given high priority across the general population. This has been attributed to Ireland's post-colonial



context. Lynch (2016) and Canny and Hamilton (2017) argue that education is the main system of transferring capital in Ireland as a post-colonial nation previously unaccustomed to a tradition of inherited economic wealth. McCoy, Byrne *et al.* (2019, p. i) note the '*crucial role played by upper secondary grades in access to Higher Education (HE)*' and the more lucrative employment in Ireland. This has made examination performance and HEI progression a central objective and measure of educational success.

The research study argues that the contemporary political economy has objectified education and reinvented it as a commodity which can be packaged, delivered, bought and sold. This has implications for society as it fails to view education as an instrument for social justice and social change through the emancipation of the human being and spirit. It arguably creates an education system which fails to ensure learners can think critically about the world in which they live and therefore renders them unable to identify the hegemonic construct of education as a meritocracy. It creates an education system that promotes individualism and fails to develop or nurture an ability to *care about* others rather than merely *care for* oneself as argued by Noddings (2002). This failure of the market-driven product-orientated educational perspective has arguably led modern society to a crossroads nationally and internationally. Nationally, we live in a society where adolescent anxiety rates are increasing as illustrated by Dooley *et al.* (2019) and adolescent suicide and self-harm rates are amongst the highest in Europe and yet Irish young people have never received more '*education*'. Yet, unlike PISA, this is an international ranking that has not warranted the same reaction from government officials and policy makers. The lack of a coordinated and targeted mental health strategy and failure to fully implement the governments strategic document '*A Vision for Change*' (2006) indicates a series of governments that have failed to '*care about*' Irish citizens, as outlined by Mental Health Reform (2017). Indeed, more than a decade after '*A Vision for Change (2006)*' was launched '*Mental Health Reform (2017)*' argue this national mental health strategy has failed to progress at the required pace. In a similar vein, '*Reach Out*'- the National Suicide Prevention Strategy (2005-2014) has been criticised as failing to convert from *policy as text* to *effects*. In 2014, Joan Freeman, psychologist and Chief Executive of Pieta House [suicide prevention centres] argued that the (2005-2014) Reach Out Programme was concluding without having been fully implemented as a result of insufficient resources and funding. She

highlighted that 25% of all people attending Pieta House services were aged under 18, ‘*It’s all talk and there’s no action*’ (Irish Examiner, April 10th, 2014). In fact, successive Irish governments have prioritised countless reckless expenditures such as e-voting machines at a cost of over €58 million; €1million on an unpractical printer for the Oireachtas; a new children’s hospital estimated to cost €2bn instead of €800m; and rural broadband plan estimated at €500m in 2014 and costing €3bn in reality as outlined by Carroll (2019). Globally, we live in a society in which climate change threatens our very future, a society in which world leaders have failed to act with the urgency and resoluteness required and demonstrated an inability to ‘*care about*’ others. This is in contrast to *the HPS Framework (1995)* which has inclusion and care at its heart. Therefore, this research study recognises the merit of the application of a HPS to the Irish education system but argues that the current context of post-primary is not conducive to supporting its implementation appropriately. This argument can also be explored from an international perspective. The Schools for Health in Europe (SHE) network comprises of 43 member countries that have agreed to implement the HPS Framework (1995) across their education systems. However, as Turunen and Sormunen et al. (2017) argue implementation of the HPS Framework has been hindered in many countries by a dual-departmental approach between health and education which has complicated the process and has not adequately fostered a partnership approach between policy makers in both departments. In the Irish context this dual-departmental approach exists and arose among stakeholders as a source of challenge in addressing students in the ‘*some*’ and ‘*few*’ categories. The challenge related to a lack of resources in schools to make accurate, timely and appropriate referrals to supports such as CAMHS operated by the Department of Health and the underfunding of these outside services by successive governments. Conversely, the Scottish context is recognised by Lee and Young (2006) as a leader in the area of a successful national HPS model. They argue that Scotland is an example of effective partnership between the health and education sectors and that the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence (2016) is reflective of this.

The stakeholders’ experiences of the microsystemic level (policy as effects) combined to create four thematic findings which affect the context of education provision at the meso and microsystemic level. The *first* finding (see chapter four) illustrates that within the sample, the competitive market model of post-primary education stratifies

and segregates certain students in areas of high competition. It argues that this is contrary to the '*Health Promoting Schools (HPS) Framework*' (1996) as it produces a hidden curriculum of inequality. It also creates a sense of failure in students before they embark on their second level educational journey.

This study argues that within a marketised schooling model- where a terminal examination (Leaving Certificate) and corresponding points system filters students for progression pathways- there is a symbiotic relationship between the students and the school. This relationship is underpinned by the reality that a school benefits from a student performing well and the high-status progression achievements of students. Therefore, the non-fee-paying schools in areas of high interschool competition are not only competing for students they are competing for *good* students in terms of performance. Equally, parents are competing for *good* schools which have high performance test scores in State examinations and rank highly in HEI progression statistics. Doris, O'Neill *et al.* (2019) illustrate that the parental deductions regarding schools are sometimes misguided as the raw test scores data depended upon does not indicate the distance travelled but rather the end point which is a myopic measure of progress. Such a system runs the risk of fostering an exclusionary culture towards people who are identified as a '*nuisance*' as argued by Lynch (2016). It perpetuates the segregation of citizen into *winners* and *losers* where *losers* are seen as responsible for their own *failures* as outlined by Lynch (2016) and Reay (2017). The dominance of competition over care creates a challenge which threatens the realisation of education as a human right as argued by Noddings (1984; 2002). The role of the Leaving Certificate in filtering students for progression has in some cases identified in this study superseded its role as a measure of the 'distance travelled' by students during their post-primary schooling experience.

This study argues that the role of assessment practices in perpetuating inequality across the four dimensions. It argues that the gatekeeping role of the Leaving Certificate examination has impacted on the transition to a mental health and wellbeing promotion model of educational provision. It outlines that the Leaving Certificate has a precipitous impact over activities at Junior Cycle and this is supported by stakeholder data. The researcher outlines that affective inequality results from this individualistic and competitive educational paradigm. Chapters five, six and seven outline the

affective inequality in the system using the experiences proffered by the stakeholders across the sample.

The *second* finding (chapter 5) illustrates an intensification of mental health and wellbeing challenges across all schools but a greater percentage of mental health issues which fall into the ‘some’ and ‘few’ in sampled DEIS schools. The recognition of social determinants for mental health and wellbeing decline suggests that a higher percentage of students in ‘disadvantaged’ schools (DEIS) would be at risk of mental health and wellbeing issues. Indeed, the sample data supports this by illustrating that the percentage of students in the ‘some’ and ‘few’ categories in DEIS schools are higher in comparison to the non-DEIS schools. The data indicates that the DEIS schools cater for a greater number of students presenting with self-harm and suicidal ideation. This has repercussions for DEIS schools as they are not in receipt of extra resources to deal with this intensification of mental health and wellbeing related challenges. McCoy, McGuinness *et al.* (2016) argue that there is a strong case for additional funding for DEIS schools (urban band one) serving the greatest level of need among disadvantaged groups. This research study argues that when the affective domain of inequality is considered in tandem with the economic and cultural, there is an *imperative* for this additional funding. The critical factor is the binary health system in Ireland and the lack of adequate resources for adolescent mental health which ‘*A Vision for Change (2006)*’ highlighted and sought to address. Given the fact that DEIS designation is partially calculated on the percentage of students with medical cards, the students attending DEIS schools are less likely to attend private mental health services. This highlights the imperative for DEIS schools to be resourced to support students in the ‘some’ and ‘few’ categories of *the HPS Framework (1995)*.

The *third* finding (chapter six) indicates that the curriculum offered in schools is heavily influenced by the current product-orientated mode of assessment at Leaving Certificate. It demonstrates the gatekeeping role of the Leaving Certificate Points System in terms of access to prestigious progression pathways thus allowing the maintenance or augmentation of an individual’s social status. Chapter six illustrates that this terminal gatekeeping examination influences the culture of post-primary schooling. It argues that the manifestation of this competitive performance-based model is often in conflict with the care-orientated educational paradigm. It uses the

provision of Wellbeing as a subject under *the framework for Junior Cycle* (2015) and *Guidelines for Wellbeing in Junior Cycle* (2017) as an example arguing that an overfocus on examinations for points and results can overshadow and reduce the perceived worth of non-examination subjects such as SPHE, particularly in the eyes of a significant number of students. This chapter allows the theoretical framework (represented in figure 2.1) to be demonstrated through practice at the microsystemic level in schools. It demonstrates the conflict between the right circle representing the performance-related product model and the left circle representing the care model. It argues that competition and performance are winning out over care provision within a market orientated system of post-primary schooling.

The *fourth* finding (chapter seven) discusses the operational context of teachers and principals at the coalface. It examines the affective dimension of principals and teachers' functions and roles. The principals and teachers noted a decreasing autonomy within the profession with a simultaneous increase in responsibility for the mental health and wellbeing of the students. This shifting role was the cause of internal tensions and stress for the majority of the sampled principals and teachers because of they operate in a competitive marketised context. Chapter seven explores the tensions felt by the principals and teachers and frames their experiences using the theoretical concepts of the '*authentic*' self and '*plastic*' self as outlined by Ball (2001). This arguably creates challenges for teacher morale and their collective ability to embrace the change in their roles under recent policy documents such as the *Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs* (2004), *the framework for Junior Cycle* (2015) and *Guidelines for Wellbeing in Junior Cycle* (2017).

This research argues that to truly enable principals and teachers to transition to a mental health and wellbeing promotion role, the educational system must be reformed to a model underpinned by an ethic of care. This can only be achieved within an educational paradigm rooted in integration theory and this is an impossibility with the high stakes terminal Leaving Certificate assessment which holds the key to the doorway to economic reproduction. The researcher argues that failure to alter the points-based selection at HEI level may alter the intentions of the reforms at post-primary level such as *the Framework for Junior Cycle* (2015) and the imminent Leaving Certificate reform.

The remainder of the chapter responds to the four thematic findings by making a series of recommendations which are aimed at ensuring the post-primary schooling system becomes conducive to meaningful mental health and wellbeing promotion.

## **8.2      Macrosystemic Level Recommendations**

### **8.2.1     Recommendation to Reconfigure the Role and Function of Post-primary Education**

In order to ensure the reform of Senior Cycle is conducive to mental health promotion and wellbeing, this research study makes three recommendations: the convergence of Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle reform; encompassing a *distance travelled* perspective in the form of a credit system at post-primary level; and ensuring appropriate progression for all learners via an appropriate career guidance provision.

The DES needs to continue and complete the review of Senior Cycle at post-primary and endeavour to implement reform the programme in an appropriate timeframe. The Senior Cycle needs to be reformed to a constructivist praxis model having learned from the Junior Certificate reform and implementation process. A process of reflective, evaluative discussion around the positives and negatives of Junior Cycle reform will ensure more constructive reform of Senior Cycle. Examples of issues which arose within this research study was a sense of dissatisfaction from stakeholders regarding the ringfencing of hours for Wellbeing at the expense of other subject areas. The impact of an increasing number of Classroom Based Assessments (CBA) on students' workloads and stress levels also arose<sup>26</sup>. Similar to (Smyth and Banks 2011; Smyth and Banks 2012a) this research study also suggests the negative impact of terminal high-stakes assessment on students' experiences of post-primary education. For instance, teachers' over-focus on examinations and students' stress and anxiety around examination performance (see chapter six). The study recommends that the reliance on terminal examinations needs to be reduced by at least 50% in all subjects and emphasis on the key skills of Junior Cycle need to be maintained and augmented in Senior Cycle. The continuation and advancement of the key skills identified in Junior

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<sup>26</sup> These issues arose during the course of this research but would need further exploration with a national sample for the purpose of achieving this recommendation

Cycle will ensure that post-primary schooling is focused on a holistic educational experience.

In order to encompass a *distance travelled* perspective into success criteria for post-primary education, this research study recommends that the standing of post-primary as a stand-alone achievement be enhanced. In other words that completion of post-primary education would be acknowledged and certified, independent of the Leaving Certificate and the points system, thus allowing all students to experience a level of success. This research study recommends that students should achieve a Certificate of Attendance and Participation (CAP)<sup>27</sup> and a Leaving Certificate Profile of Achievement (LCPA)<sup>28</sup>, in a graduation ceremony at the end of Senior Cycle, consideration could be given to conditions such as satisfactory attendance and behaviour<sup>29</sup>. All students will achieve relative to their ability at Senior Cycle and will be awarded a CAP and LCPA at the end of their studies. The post-primary graduation ceremony will celebrate achievement or partial achievement and the accessible nature of the graduation will ensure that it incentivises all students to aspire to graduation. This coupled with an effective career guidance service has the potential to ensure students, especially DEIS profile students, do not become disenfranchised and marginalised within the educational system. This has the potential to reduce the NEET and *inactive* NEET rate going forward and could reduce the level of students who fail to transition from Junior Cycle to Senior Cycle and/or Senior Cycle to Further Education and Training courses or employment.

This research study highlights that the current system results in stratification of students in accordance with ability to perform in the Leaving Certificate. A reformed model could reduce the desire to stratify students and encourage mixed ability settings which would ensure greater cohesion at Second Level. In order to ensure appropriate progression for all learners a number of modifications are recommended. The selection for HEIs should be reconfigured and could take place using a matriculation

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<sup>27</sup> The CAP could form an integral part of the entry requirements for FET, where attendance and participation will be weighted

<sup>28</sup> The LCPA refers to a Leaving Certificate Profile of Achievement similar to the JCPA which currently exists in the newly reformed Junior Cycle

<sup>29</sup> The term satisfactory will need to be established on a national level. It is reasonable to expect that any student who has unsatisfactory attendance and/or unsatisfactory behaviour should be known and monitored by the EWO and/or SCP well in advance of the end of their post-primary schooling

examination and/or the existing CAO system. This could be achieved by dividing Senior Cycle subjects into 50% project work (NFQ, Level 4) and 50% examination (NFQ, Level 5). The student seeking to apply for a HEI place would complete the project work and the terminal examination. The cohort that wish to apply to Further Education and Training could do so using the project work and work experience opportunities (over two years). The adoption of project work would ensure that students at risk of becoming disillusioned or NEET could engage in more meaningful tangible work throughout Senior Cycle and would essentially follow a LCA model. In cases where students were unsuccessful at immediate entry to HEI, they could pursue an additional year similar to a Post Leaving Certificate course at Level 5 on the NFQ and reapply to a HEI if desired. Equally those who did not wish to pursue HEI or further education courses, could progress to an Apprenticeship course directly linked to employment. Classes could be conducted on a mixed ability basis. This would ensure that all students are included and valued, and that no student would encounter marginalisation and segregation based on their academic ability. It would also allow for these students to pursue some subjects at level 4 (NFQ) via project work and completion of others at (NFQ, Level 5).

The data collected from stakeholders implied that schools were endeavouring to provide high quality universal supports for *all*, for instance, the provision of a positive physical environment, curricular supports and an emphasis on positive student-teacher interactions. However, the findings from this research indicates that a significant number of students and parents are unaware of the existence of the SST across the sample schools. This research study recommends that schools ensure students and parents are aware of the existence of Student Support Teams which augment the universal provision of *the HPS Framework (1995)* in schools.

The research suggests that the capacity for the school to appropriately identify and support students in the *some* and *few* categories must be developed urgently. The changing role of the school and its capacity to provide appropriate and timely intervention in supporting mental health promotion and wellbeing should be appropriately resourced by the DES. This study recognises that schools in the sample, generally provide good supports for *all* within their current allocation and resources.



However, it suggests that it is a challenge for many schools to provide meaningful support in the *some and few* categories especially in light of the reductions to the ex-quota career guidance counsellor hours. The study also recognises that having separate departments for education and health is presenting challenges for schools as a setting for mental health promotion. This is particularly evident regarding the provision of supports for the ‘*some*’ and ‘*few*’ categories of at-risk students where schools are referring students to outside agencies operated by the HSE or in the voluntary sector funded by the HSE. This complicates the referral process, creating duplication, GDPR issues and delays. Additionally, services such as CAMHS are stretched in many areas. The researcher feels that a greater convergence between the DES and the Department of Health would ameliorate this issue. In acceptance of the current context of separate government departments, the author recommends that the ability of schools to resource the implementation of the HPS Framework (1995) should be enhanced. The author recommends that the role and function of the career guidance counsellor should be appropriately divided and categorised into two domains: career guidance and therapeutic counselling. The role of the career guidance counsellor should be changed to a title which reflects the role and function for instance, a ‘Progression Advisor Placement Officer’ (PAPO) and the role of Progression Advisor Placement Officer and Therapeutic Counsellor should be separated. The provision of career guidance should be given appropriate time under the wellbeing umbrella with ringfenced hours for delivery to all students. The role of the Progression Advisor Placement Officer should be to guide progression appropriate to the students’ needs and desires rather than economic, social or parental pressures. The role of the Progression Advisor Placement Officer should be clearly outlined with a central focus on establishing and maintaining connections to alternative progression routes as well as HEIs. The Progression Advisor Placement Officer should be offered CPD to appreciate the merits of alternative progression routes and students who wish to choose these options. The Progression Advisor Placement Officer should continue to support students’ Mental Health and Wellbeing but through the lens of career/education progression and advancement. The Progression Advisor Placement Officer should be trained and aware of all placement opportunities for students and ensure that they are appropriately placed in consultation with the student and parents/guardians. This will ensure that all students are appropriately supported to make meaningful and appropriate progression choices. This should reduce the number of students being encouraged inappropriately

to attend HEIs for public relations-based reasons and should reduce the number of students dropping out of HEIs at undergraduate level.

This study found that the existence of the Department of Health and Education as separate entities was counterproductive to the realisation of an effective settings-based approach to MHP at post-primary level. This study argues the need for a centralised co-ordinated youth mental health provision which would work closely with both Departments, ensuring a shared-vision and agreed progression pathway. A central component of this will be the work of the school in supporting students and the personnel in the revised role of the career guidance counsellor. In revising the role of career guidance counsellor this research study recognises the role played by many career guidance counsellor in interacting students who are at risk, however, it is felt that in cases of ‘*some*’ the Progression Advisor Placement Officer should play a referral role to the school Therapeutic Counsellor. Both the Progression Advisor Placement Officer and the Therapeutic Counsellor should form part of the Student Support Team (SST). There is a need for resources to be filtered into Level two (school supports for ‘*some*’) in schools. This research study recommends that access to a Therapeutic Counsellor, preferably not a member of the teaching staff, be provided for the students in the ‘*some*’ category. This should enable schools to support students before their situation or mental health condition deteriorates to a more advanced stage.

This study recommends that the Therapeutic Counsellor would be in a position to refer upward should a case prove in need of more intensive intervention, additionally the TC could liaise with parents/guardians, Tusla, NEPS and the HSCL Officer on matters of concern. This would ensure that students in the ‘*some*’ category receive appropriate and timely intervention at the required time. It would also eliminate the expressed concerns of school principals as to whether or not a child is in receipt of appropriate intervention, particularly in complex cases where a contributory cause of the child’s distress is the parent/guardian. The principles of confidentiality would remain, but the school authorities would be reassured that the issue was receiving attention. Additionally, the Therapeutic Counsellor would be *au-fait* with the workings and

abilities of a school and therefore could make achievable recommendations for the student to the Student Support Team.

This recommendation could be achieved on a cost-conscious basis by creating a panel of Therapeutic Counsellors to service a particular region, the therapist could service one school or a cluster of schools depending on need. This will enable the government to streamline its funding for mental health promotion and wellbeing among young people. Currently the HSE is contributing annual funding to JIGSAW, a mid-level support service which offers free counselling to young people. This service could be attached to post-primary schools/Further Education Training (FET) centres as a provider of therapeutic counselling. At present JIGSAW are paying for premises in their locations around the country when large elements of the service could be hosted in schools, providing a greater spread of cover, access and reach to young people in need. This research suggests that if this system was properly implemented then it is plausible that the scale of students receiving little or no support, or inappropriate support, would reduce. Additionally, an increase in appropriate support at level two or the *'some'* category would reduce the need and scale of referral to the professional outside agencies such as CAMHS which are understaffed and oversubscribed in the County. (source: local radio station, 2019).

An in-school provision of Therapeutic Counselling by an appropriately trained professional would be positive for student wellbeing in the *'some'* and *'few'* categories as the counsellor would have sight of any psychological assessments and the scale of observational behaviour-related data compiled by teachers. Additionally, the student's positive attributes, skills and abilities would be known to the school personnel and a holistic profile of the student could be established rather than a presentational one alone. Additionally, the Therapeutic Counsellor would become aware of patterns and trends across student cohorts in the *'some'* category and could therefore ensure that the school provide an intervention for those students, for instance, if a trend of viewership of pornographic imagery came to light, the school could develop/provide an appropriate intervention/response for students within their school provision. Simultaneously, the present trend could be addressed in a more preventative way within SPHE/wellbeing for the *'all'* category of students. Trends such as these often

arise or increase in intensity, in school settings, in waves, for instance: negative eating patterns, near suffocation dares, social media fads etc.

The implementation of this recommendation would also ensure that the students that really need intervention are identified for greater intervention. The spectrum of need was identified by the students' survey responses when 57% identified SPHE as a doss, however it was explained by a student in the focus group that this view is inextricably linked to a students' needs at that time and therefore 43% of students that identified SPHE as important to them are perhaps negotiating a difficult time in their lives. It would be imperative that this tiered system of support provision would be conducted by subtle means and in a way that the students would not feel singled out into the 'some' category.

### **8.2.2 Recommendation to Increase the Status of Alternative Progression Pathways**

This study recommends that pathways, alternative to HEI courses, should be further developed. In relation to apprenticeships the study notes the arguments put forward by McCoy, McGuinness *et al.* (2016), that apprenticeships should not be employer dependent but should have verified employability value in the event of the employer's expiration. With this in mind, this research proposes that the system should allow fluidity between Higher Education Institutions and Further Education and Training (including apprenticeships). While this study suggests that raising the profile of apprenticeships and Further Education and Training courses it recognises that this is a challenging task in practice particularly as graduates from further education course can experience lesser outcomes in terms of employment status and societal status as illustrated by McCoy, McGuinness *et al.* (2016). This research recommends that the Further Education and Training sector and HEI sector should be operated on an intersecting model rather than two models independent of one another. In other words, a comprehensive system of Third Level education could be encouraged in certain areas, which could bolster Ireland's entrepreneurial competitiveness.

The researcher suggests that the dichotomic cycle of 'head or hands' needs to be broken. A fluid transfer system from Apprenticeship to HEI and HEI to Apprenticeship needs to be developed. For instance, a student who opts for an Apprentice Electrician

course can transfer into a HEI course, if desired, subject to certain performance criteria. This already exists in the Further Education sector where a student can re-enter the CAO system if they wish to reapply to a HEI after completion of their Further Education and Training course. Additionally, students who opt for practical subject-orientated courses in ETB training centres should be able to attend night/weekend/online module(s) in HEIs. For instance, under such a comprehensive model, a student could opt to qualify as an electrician with a diploma (or higher on the NQF) in Gaeilge or French or German etc. This creates a fluidity within the system, it recognises that humans are complex and multi-capable with life-long learning needs. It also would enable apprentices to travel to other jurisdictions for work purposes or to form businesses across linguistic and/or cultural divides. While this recommendation may be perceived as radical in the context of the current system, the researcher contends that it is befitting of a nation which operates an open economy highly dependent on FDI and entrepreneurial innovation. It is imperative given the Irish economic context that our policy makers are leaders and not followers of the US and UK models in relation to education policy.

### **8.2.3 Recommendation to Address the Stratification of Students**

The study outlines that an opportunity to remedy stratification in relation to the SEN profile, presents itself within *the Framework for Junior Cycle* (2015). The Junior Cycle culminates in a Level 3 qualification on the NFQ. Additionally, the framework creates provision for a Level 2 Learning Programme (L2LP) for students with a SEN. However, currently it is optional as to whether a school will offer the L2LP which could become another means of segregating those with SEN and perpetuating the unequal system. The concept of making the provision of a differentiated curriculum an option for schools flies in the face of the basic principles of inclusion and choice enshrined in *the Education Act* (1998) and *the EPSEN Act* (2004). Therefore, this research study recommends that the DES would ensure that all schools nationwide must provide an L2LP for students with SEN requiring such provision. All parents should be fully informed of their right to seek enrolment in the school of their choice under *the Education Act* (1998) and *the EPSEN Act* (2004) and cases whereby a child's application to enrol is refused or delayed unnecessarily, or cases where parents/guardians feel soft barriers are being imposed, should be comprehensively investigated. It is recognised that *the Education (Admission to Schools) Act* (2018)

seeks to address this, however if the optional status of L2LPs is not addressed the Act will not remedy the issue.

The study requires that in order for schools to provide the L2LPs they must be appropriately resourced to deal with the increase in paperwork, meetings, planning, delivery and care needs. Therefore, each school should have appropriate access to a NEPS psychologist to assist and monitor the preparation of IEPs and support programmes for vulnerable students. The universal provision of L2LPs would eliminate a situation where some parents/guardians are encountering soft barriers to access in some schools. It would reduce stratification based on cognitive ability and encourage cohesion regarding students with a SEN or an additional need. The researcher is aware that this is the most contentious recommendation made and one which will meet with most resistance. However, she believes that it will ensure that schools germinate mainstream students that recognise and *care about* the existence of students with additional needs. It will develop a generation of young people that have empathy for students with additional needs and support students with additional needs. It also argued that the inclusion of students with moderate SENs in schools provides holistic educational opportunities and experiences to all students.

#### **8.2.4 Recommendation to Qualitatively Evaluate the Effectiveness of the DEIS programme**

This research study suggests that there is insufficient qualitative evidence to prove that the DEIS approach to tackling disadvantage has translated effectively from policy as *text* (intention) to *effects*. O’Sullivan (2019) argues that improvements in literacy and numeracy in DEIS schools are in line with improvements recorded across all schools in Ireland. She argues that students in DEIS schools are still underperforming in comparison to those students in non-DEIS schools and therefore the gap in attainment outcomes remains constant. This research study argues that the effectiveness of DEIS, in terms of combatting inequality, needs to be established quantitatively and *qualitatively*. The concept of *distance travelled* is imperative in order to conduct this review rigorously. Additionally, in light of the significant number of DEIS profile students attending non-DEIS schools (OECD), it is recommended that consideration could be given to DEIS funding following the socioeconomically disadvantaged student rather than being allocated to the school. This supports McCoy and

McGuinness et al. (2016) who argue the need for dispersed supports for DEIS profile students who do not attend DEIS schools. A dispersed funding model would ensure such students receive financial support and are enabled to compete more effectively with students who enjoy greater cultural, social and financial capital.

### **8.3 Mesosystemic Level Recommendations (Education and Training Board Level).**

#### **8.3.1 Recommendations to Increase Targeted Supports in Accordance with the HPS Framework (1995).**

This study recognises *that the Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines (2017)* have been developed to support the implementation of *the HPS Framework (1995)* in Irish schools. The development of the role of post-primary schools in supporting students in line with the HPS model, is imperative. Therefore, it recommends that individual schools develop a Mental Health Promotion and Wellbeing Strategy which relates to their unique context. This research study recommends that a comprehensive whole-school planning tool for wellbeing in line with *the HPS Framework (1995)* be developed. This research study endorses the use of the HPS or three-tiered model of support by schools to develop a Wellbeing Strategy that supports mental health and wellbeing. It also recommends that the review and evaluation of such strategies must be systematically carried out to ensure continued improvement and enhancement of practice.

Chapter five of this study explores the reasons for the higher rates of students presenting in the ‘*some*’ and ‘*few*’ category in DEIS schools by exploring the impact of the primary care locations of students. The exploration of students’ attitudes to, and experiences of, their primary care locations demonstrates a correlation between a compromised primary care location and a greater level of mental health and wellbeing issues.

Of the 4% of students who reported a deep dissatisfaction with their home life, the data indicates that these students were twice as likely to seek help from a member of staff in the school. The role and function of the Student Support Team was highlighted and is recognised as a positive step in the school-setting based approach to mental health promotion. However, this study found that only half the students surveyed knew their

school had a Student Support Teams. Additionally, only half of the student participants in the focus groups were aware of the Student Support Team.

### **8.3.2 Recommendation to Increase awareness of the Student Support Teams and strengthen the role of the Student Support Teams**

This study recommends that Student Support Team members are identified and made known to students, this could be achieved by creating a poster to explain the Student Support Teams with teachers' names and photographs listed underneath. This poster or visual could be included on the school App/webpage and in the student diary. There could be a direct means of contacting the Student Support Team, for the student body, for instance the establishment of a designated email account. A direct means of contacting the Student Support Teams will ensure that students feel they can anonymously or non-verbally indicate to an appropriate member(s) of staff if they have a concern for themselves or another student, or if they wish to report an activity that they feel may be negative for the mental health of members of the student body. Greater student awareness and interaction with the Student Support Teams would empower students to engage in a meaningful way with the Student Support Teams.

Student ambassadors could ensure the student body is better supported in the *all* category by suggesting universal stratifies and activities. Consideration could be given to the creation of a network of student ambassadors to link with Student Support Teams and student body. This may assist in encouraging students to engage in help-seeking behaviour. This study suggests that information about referral pathways to outside agencies is made easily accessible to students via information sheets freely available in schools and via ambassadors. This would enable students to support themselves and access available services and supports via the Student Support Team or to self-refer in cases of older students.

### **8.3.3 Recommendation to Enhance Student Voice**

A key finding in this research study relates to capturing the authentic voice of the student body. The overall importance of student voice is recognised in all schools in the sample. It emerged that not all students felt they had a voice within their schools. The research data demonstrates a correlation between student support and student voice. Indeed, students that felt they had a voice, within the school structures, felt



better supported by their schools. The data analysis of data in relation to student voice raised a number of nuances around the elicitation of student voice within the sample schools. The existence of a Student Council within each of the sample schools and the opportunity for student collaboration, between councils on the student forum platform, is commendable. However, this form of student voice is representative of students who are enfranchised, which is a predictable commonality of a democratic system. Student Councils may not always represent minority groupings such as members of the Travelling Community or students from minority cultures or those with disabilities. It is imperative that all students feel valued and vocalised. It is noteworthy that a significant percentage (50%) of students surveyed still did not feel they had a voice within their schools.

This study recommends that schools and Senior Management Teams create opportunities for a fully inclusive student voice by including all students in the process of gathering student views and perspectives. It is recommended that sample schools enhance the existing mechanisms for student voice by encouraging schools to sample the student voice of all students through surveys and/or focus groups. This recommendation could be devised to support the existing processes of School Self Evaluation/School Development Planning/School Improvement Planning work already underway in schools. The resources and materials and rationale could be established centrally so as to reduce the repetition and replication of materials, by the ETB, in each school/centre. The measures would ensure improved student voice, efficacy, agency and *buy in* from students which will in turn enhance the students' sense that they are valued and supported. It would enhance the school environment for *all/some/few* students and create a greater sense of belonging for those who are in danger of feeling marginalised. The recommendation may gradually increase interest and participation on the Student Council/ Student Forum by marginalised groups. This would increase understanding of the democratic process and ensure a greater range of student-generated ideas.

#### **8.3.4 Recommendation to Increase Staff Empowerment**

In relation to the data regarding students' engagement in self-harm or suicidal ideation outlined in chapter five, two key findings emerged. Firstly, that students are reluctant to engage in help-seeking behaviour and secondly, that teacher education courses do

not prepare teachers to read the signs or to engage with students they have concerns about in this regard. A concerning finding of this study was that a significant number of students do not report self-harm and suicidal ideation. This is where complexities exist in tackling such issues in schools as a settings base. It is imperative that teachers are trained to recognise potential warning signs and that a member of staff is appropriately trained to speak with the student and make an appropriate referral. This could potentially reduce the shared influences associated with suicidal ideation and self-harm which was also demonstrated within the student sample. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers should be offered training in the Safe Talk programme run by the HSE and be supported to recognise the signs of distress and make appropriate referrals to the Therapeutic Counselling and/or Student Support Teams. This training should be mandatory for trainee teachers attending HEIs. This will improve reaction time to student issues and ensure that appropriate action is taken in a timely manner and may reduce the ripple effect of such actions among the student body. This will develop teacher agency and support teachers who find themselves in such a position with a student. This is in line with *the HPS Framework (1995)* in terms of empowering teachers to recognise students from the *some/few* category.

To conclude, the researcher argues the instrumental role which can be played by teacher-researchers in educational reform. This argument has been made previously by Apple (2010b) who called on teachers to '*come down from the balcony and research the real issues to make a difference*'. Sahlberg (2018) refers to small data as teachers' professional experiences and opinions which may not be the subject of large-scale scientific research (large data). Sahlberg (2018) argues that in order to enhance, improve and regenerate teaching '*the gulf between these positions needs to be closed*'. This research study applies Ball's (1993) policy trajectory to the Irish educational system. It demonstrates the ability of teacher-led research to explore the policy trajectory in reverse order by illuminating the *policy as effects* level and comparing it to the *policy as text* intentions which subsequently leads to a comprehensive exploration of the *policy as discourse* level. This research study has therefore explored the impact of policy on the context and subsequent experiences of post-primary school communities as they transition to a settings-base for mental health and wellbeing promotion. It is hoped that this exploration of the microsystemic level will enable a

greater contextual understanding of the post-primary education system in order to affect real change at a macro, meso and microsystemic level.

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## Appendix 1

<i>Source</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>School-related Outcome</i>
<b>A Vision for Change</b>	2006	<p>Key recommendations in the document which are particularly relevant to the post-primary school system are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental health promotion should be available for all age groups, to enhance protective factors and decrease risk factors for developing mental health problems</li> <li>• Well-trained, fully staffed community based, multidisciplinary CMHT (Community Mental Health Teams) should be put in place for all mental health services. These teams should provide mental health services across the individual's lifespan.</li> </ul> <p>The policy document also recommended that a range of specialist mental health services should be available such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, adult services and services for older people.</p> <p>Recommended extension of SPHE to Senior Cycle and the implementation of evidence-based mental health promotion programmes at primary and post primary levels.</p>
<b>Health Promotion Strategic Framework</b>	HSE, 2011	Cites schools as an appropriate setting for health promotion
<b>Mental Health Guidelines for post-primary schools</b>	DES, 2012	The guidelines are a school-based approach to mental health promotion. It is noteworthy that guidelines are not a binding policy document.
<b>School Self-Evaluation Guidelines for Post-Primary School</b>	DES, 2012	Outlined the principles of effective SSE processes incorporating the need for Mental Health Promotion

<b>Well-Being in Post-Primary Schools: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention</b>	DES/HSE (2013)	Guidelines for Wellbeing in Junior Cycle (2017) identifies that schools underpinned by a HPS framework are a key setting supporting the mental health of young people.
<b>Anti-Bullying Policy</b>	DES, 2013	Mandatory for all schools to develop and implement
<b>New Junior Cycle Framework</b>	2015	This document places a significant emphasis on the development of young people's wellbeing within a curriculum of wellbeing and a curriculum for wellbeing.
<b>Amber Flag for mental health promotion</b>	Suicide Aware Ireland	Voluntary school involvement
<b>Anti-Bullying Shield and Flag</b>	Irish Society of the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCCs)	Voluntary school involvement
<b>Active Flag</b>	DES	Voluntary school involvement (10% uptake) McGrath (2016, ETBI Conference)
<b>Healthy Ireland: A Framework for Health and Wellbeing</b>	Department of Health (2013)	Healthy Ireland is a framework which supports the creation of an Irish society where all citizens can enjoy health in physical and mental terms. Within this framework wellbeing is supported and valued on a multitude of interwoven levels.





## **Appendix 3**

An Investigation into Creating and Sustaining a Mental Health Promoting School: attitudes and experiences of post-primary school communities.

### **Participant Information Sheet for Parent(s)/ Guardian(s)**

#### **What is the project about?**

■■■■ Education and Training Board and the Mary Immaculate College in Limerick have recently converged to conduct an important research study which aims to investigate the issues and concerns which affect adolescent mental health in Ireland. The study will investigate the opinions of the entire school community: students, teachers, parents and management. The voice of the students will be a central strand to the research. The research study aims to assist schools, management and policy-makers to play a role in reducing the high level of young people nationally that are presenting with poor mental health.

#### **Who is undertaking it?**

My name is Maryanne Lowney Slattery and I am an employee of ■■■■ Education and Training Board and a Postgraduate student attending Mary Immaculate College. I am presently completing a PhD by research in the Department of Education under the supervision of Dr Angela Canny. The current study will form part of my thesis.

#### **Why is it being undertaken?**

The European Commission and WHO- Europe have identified the pivotal role of the school in promoting positive mental health. To date the contextual attitudes, opinions and actions of the school community with regard to creating and sustaining Mental Health Promoting Schools have never been studied in the Irish context. This study will look at policy implementation from a fresh perspective giving a voice to all stakeholders in the school community: students, staff, parents and management. The research study will look at implementation at the coalface and reflect the contextual realities back to policy makers and reformers. This research study looks at the issue of mental health promotion and explores the challenges for school leaders and staff charged with implementing a whole-school approach to becoming a MHPS.

#### **Exactly what is involved for the participant?**

The study will consist of a questionnaire which will have a series of questions based on your child's/the child in your care's experiences of the educational system in relation to a number of specific areas which relate to mental health promotion. They will be asked to answer these questions as honestly as possible.

As a follow up session, your child/the child in your care may be asked to participate in a focus group session where the specific areas will be discussed further in a group setting. Completion of the questionnaire does not automatically mean that your child/the child in your care will be selected for the focus group session. If he/she is later selected for the focus group session, he/she is not obliged to contribute to it should it go against your wishes or their wishes.

**Right to withdraw**

Your child's/ the child in your care's anonymity is assured and freedom to withdraw from the research at any time without giving a reason and without consequence is also assured.

**How will the information be used / disseminated?**

The data from the research will be combined with that of the other participants in this study and used to form the results section of the thesis. Summary data only will appear in the thesis; individual participant data will not be shown.

**How will confidentiality be kept?**

All information gathered will remain confidential and will not be released to any third party. A random ID number will be generated for each participant and it is this number rather than the participant's name which will be held with their data to maintain their anonymity. Each school's identity will not be shared and only a general contextual background will be used; individuals will not be identified.

**What will happen to the data after research has been completed?**

In accordance with the MIC Record Retention Schedule all research data will be stored for the duration of the project plus three years.

**Contact details:**

If at any time you have any queries/issues with regard to this study my contact details are as follows:

Name: Maryanne Lowney Slattery

Email: phdmaryanne@gmail.com

Contact number: 066 7122552 (please leave your contact details and I shall return your call)

**If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:**

MIREC Administrator

Mary Immaculate College

South Circular Road

Limerick

061-204515

mirec@mic.ul.ie

## Appendix 4

An Investigation into Creating and Sustaining a Mental Health Promoting School:  
attitudes and experiences of post-primary school communities.

### Informed Consent Form for Adult Participants

Dear Participant,

As outlined in the **participant information sheet** the current study will investigate the experiences of the entire school community in the creation and sustenance of a Mental Health Promoting School.

The participant information sheet should be read fully and carefully before consenting to take part in the research study. Your anonymity is assured and you are free to withdraw from the research at any time. All information gathered will remain confidential and will not be released to any third party. In accordance with the MIC Record Retention Schedule all participant data will be stored for the duration of the project plus three years at which time it will be destroyed.

Please read the following statements before signing the consent form.

- I have read and understood the **participant information sheet**.
- I understand what the project is about, and what the results will be used for.
- I am fully aware of **all** of the procedures involving myself, and of any **risks and benefits** associated with the study.
- I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason.
- I am aware that my results will be kept confidential.

Name (PRINTED):

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Name (Signature):

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Date:

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## Appendix 5

### An Investigation into Creating and Sustaining a Mental Health Promoting School: attitudes and experiences of post-primary school communities.

#### Participant Information Sheet for Minors

**■■■■■ Education and Training Board and the Mary Immaculate College in Limerick have recently converged to conduct an important research study which aims to investigate the issues and concerns which affect adolescent mental health in Ireland. The study will investigate the opinions of the entire school community: students, teachers, parents and management. The voice of the students will be a central strand to the research. The research study aims to assist schools, management and policy-makers to play a role in reducing the high level of young people nationally that are presenting with poor mental health.**

**You are being asked to take part in a focus group. It's not like a test - there are no right or wrong answers. The most important thing is that you give honest answers.**

**During the focus group session you decide that you don't want to take part, this is no problem and you won't get into trouble. Just let me know and you can leave the room and return after the focus group.**

**The information you give will only be seen by me and my supervisor. I will not let anyone else see the points from the focus groups because those are our University rules. I will use the information that students give me but I won't use your name so people won't know who you are. If you have any worries about the research you can arrange to talk to me or to your teacher or parents.**

***If at any time you have any questions about this study my contact details are as follows:***

Name: Maryanne Lowney Slattery

Email: [Maryanne.Slattery@mic.ul.ie](mailto:Maryanne.Slattery@mic.ul.ie)

Contact number: 066 7122552 (please leave your contact details and I shall return your call)

***If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:***

MIREC Administrator

Mary Immaculate College

South Circular Road

Limerick

061-204515 and/or [mirec@mic.ul.ie](mailto:mirec@mic.ul.ie)



## Appendix 6

### Questions for Qualitative interviews with Principal teachers 1.5 hours

#### **The Interviewee's Observations on the Role of Principal in the Context of their School (10 mins)**

1. What is the biggest change to the role of Principal in recent years?
2. What are the biggest responsibilities of your position as Principal as you see it?
3. Do you feel there is sufficient management posts to meet these responsibilities sufficiently?
4. What are the key priorities for you in terms of school provision and planning?
5. Has your school been affected by the moratorium on posts of responsibility and if so how exactly?
6. Has volunteerism for non-teaching activities reduced by the increased working hours for staff under the Croke Park Agreement and Haddington Road?

#### **Interschool Competition- Within the Market Model (10 mins)**

7. In this catchment area is there a pressure to market/PR the school and grow the numbers?
8. If so, do you see this as the role of educators?
9. Do you need to compete locally for students? Why?
10. Is there a financial pressure on school provision if numbers of enrolments decrease?
11. Is there an additional pressure on schools to compete for the 'higher achieving' - in terms of points-students? Why?
12. Is the higher academically achieving student more desirable?
13. In your opinion, does a high level of SEN student affect the schools public image and ultimately enrolment figures?
14. Do you agree with NCSE report last summer which suggested that some other schools may put up soft barriers to thwart applications from SEN students?
15. Why do you think schools publicise their highest achieving student in the papers? Do you agree with this practice?

#### **Role and Function of Post-primary Education System (overlap with questionnaire) (20 mins)**

16. Do you think the new Junior Certificate is a progressive or regressive move?
17. Why?
18. What do you believe the Leaving Certificate points system is a measure of?
19. What in your view is the main function of the post-primary education system?
20. In your opinion, does the current senior cycle with the terminal Leaving Certificate fully support a constructivist (process over product) approach to teaching?
21. What in your opinion are the current merits of the points system?
22. What are the demerits of the LC points system?
23. Does inequality exist in the Irish education system at post-primary level?
24. Is it being tackled appropriately in your opinion?
25. Why?
26. Does the DEIS label have any impact on the school's profile?

### **Support for Mental Health Promotion at Post-primary Level (40 mins)**

27. What is your understanding of mental health and wellbeing?
28. What is your understanding of mental health promotion?
29. Do you feel mental health promotion is adequately funded and resourced at post-primary level?
30. In what way is MHP catered for in the current system?
31. Do you see the school as an appropriate setting for mental health promotion?
32. Does your school have a whole school guidance plan? Is it fully developed and operational?
33. What are the blocks to the creation of a whole-school guidance (care) plan?
34. Does mental health promotion feature in your school plan?
35. Have you engaged with the Health Promoting School Framework and if so, did you find it worthwhile and appropriate?
36. Do you feel supported by the DES and the wider system to create and sustain a mental health promoting school? How?
37. What would you see as supportive for senior management in terms of creating and sustaining a mental health promoting school?
38. Do all staff members see it as their role to promote mental health and wellbeing?
39. How do the staff that actively promote mental health get selected or involved in the first instance?
40. Does mental health promotion feature in your school planning processes?
41. If yes, in what way?
42. What does a whole school approach to mental health promotion look like?
43. How is a whole school approach to mental health promotion supported and resourced?
44. If yes, how are you as a school leader supported?
45. In your experience what are the main MHP factors that can be supported by school management?
46. Is mental health promotion a key-priority for school management in terms of provision and planning duties?
47. In your opinion, is it given higher priority in schools which cater for a higher rate of students from disadvantage? Why? / Why not?
48. From your perspective and experience can you briefly describe the role and remit of NEPs?
49. How would you describe the role and remit of CAMHS?
50. From your experience, do you feel that CAMHS is being adequately resourced to function appropriately in your area?
51. In cases where parental consent is given, do you receive appropriate feedback from CAMHS?

### **The Restorative Approach to Behaviour Management (10 mins)**

52. Define the 'restorative approach' to behaviour management?
53. What has introducing and sustaining the restorative approach to behaviour meant for your school?
54. How has this impacted on the characteristic spirit of the school?
55. How has it impacted on the school environment from a management perspective?

56. Do you feel the restorative approach has made a meaningful difference to behaviour in your school? Please explain (use examples where appropriate)
57. What are the strengths of the restorative approach in a school setting?
58. What are the weaknesses of the restorative approach in a school setting?
59. What are the opportunities presented by the restorative approach in a school setting?
60. What are the threats to the restorative approach in a school setting?
61. Do you feel that your school has a sustained whole school approach to restorative practices?
62. How do you ensure that the restorative approach is understood and implemented by all staff?

## Appendix 7

### **Student Survey (converted from online format)**

Please answer the questions as honestly as possible. Your identity is **not** recorded and this survey is private and confidential

**1. What age are you? Please tick the appropriate box**

15	16	17	18

**2. Please tick the statements that best describe your ethnic background**

I was born in Ireland and my parents are Irish	
I was born in Ireland and my parents are not Irish	
I was born in Ireland and one of my parents is Irish	
I was born outside of Ireland and my parents are Irish	
I was born outside of Ireland and my parents are not Irish	
I was born outside of Ireland and one of my parents is Irish	
I am Irish and a member of the Travelling Community	

**3. If you were born outside of Ireland, what is your nationality?**

**Select your answer by placing a tick in the box**

English	
North American	
South American	
Canadian	
Polish	
Latvian	
Lithuanian	
Chinese	
Another Asian Country	
Nigerian	
Czech	
Welsh	
Scottish	
Other	

**4. If you answered other above, please state your nationality**

**5. Please select the statement that best describes your views regarding your ethnicity  
Required to answer**

- I am fully Irish
- I am not technically fully Irish, but I consider myself Irish
- I consider myself half Irish
- I consider myself a little bit Irish
- I do not consider myself Irish at all

**6. Please select the statement that best describes your religious (or non-religious) orientation.**

*You can place a tick beside the statement you agree with.*

I do not practice any religion and I do not believe in any form of religion or God	
I do not practice any religion but I do believe that there is a God	
I do not practice any religion but I do believe in good and evil	
I am an atheist	
I practice religion because my parents/guardian insist that I do	
I am a Christian	
I am a Roman Catholic	
I am a Buddhist	
I am a Jew	
I am a Muslim	
I am a Pentecostal	
I am a Protestant (Church of Ireland)	
I am a Protestant (Church of England)	
Other	

**7. If you answered 'other' above, please state your religion**

**8. If you indicated in question 6 that you have a religious faith, please indicate which statement best describes how you feel about your religious orientation**

My faith is extremely important to me	
My faith is sometimes important to me	
My faith is not at all important to me	

**9. Please tick the statement below that best describes your family Please note \*sibling means brother(s) and/or sister(s)**

*Select your answer by placing a tick in the box*

Father, mother and sibling or siblings	
--	--

Father, mother and no siblings	
Single parent family-father and I have a sibling or siblings	
Single parent family- father and I have no sibling or siblings	
Single parent family-mother and I have a sibling or siblings	
Single parent family- mother and I have no sibling or siblings	
Mother and step father and sibling or siblings	
Mother and step father and no sibling	
Father and step mother and sibling or siblings	
Father and step mother and no sibling	
Guardian- I am cared for by someone related to me	
Guardian- I am fostered	
My parents are a same-sex couple (2 fathers)	
My parents are a same-sex couple (2 mothers)	

**10. Are you happy with your family unit?**

- Always
- Mostly
- Sometimes
- Occasionally
- Rarely
- Never

**11. If you answered rarely or never, can you explain why?**

**12. Do you have an adult to confide in when you have a problem or a worry?**

*If you answer no to this question, please skip to question 16 below.*

- Yes
- No

**13. If you answered yes to question 12, please indicate how many adults you have that you can confide in with your problems or worries**

1 Adult	2 Adults	3 Adults	4 Adults	5 Adults
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--	--	--	--	--

**14. If you answered yes to question 12 above, please answer this question. The person I would trust most with my problems or worries is:**

Father		Grandfather		Teacher	
Mother		Grandmother		Family friend (adult)	
Aunt		Principal		Neighbour	
Uncle		School Counsellor		other	

**15. If you selected other for question 14 above, please state who the person is below**

**16. Have you ever attended counselling?**

Yes       No

**17. If you answered yes to question 16, who provided this counselling for you?**

It was privately paid for by my family (parents, foster parents or relatives)	
the school provided the counselling	
Jigsaw provided the counselling	
Adolescent Counselling	
CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service)	
Pieta House (or *Console as it was formerly known)	
Aware	
other	

**18. If you choose other above, please state what service provided the counselling**

**19. Do you confide in your friend(s) about daily worries or concerns**

Yes       No

**20. Have any of your close friends or siblings ever self-harmed (deliberately hurt themselves)?**

Yes       No       I suspect so, yes

**21. Have you ever deliberately harmed or hurt yourself? If your answer is NO below, please skip to question 25**

Yes       No

**22. If you have self-harmed (deliberately hurt yourself), does anyone know about it?**

Yes       No

**23. If you answered yes to question 22 above, please select the person(s) that know about it**

Mother	
Father	
Sibling	
Aunt/Uncle	
Neighbour	
Grandparent	
Teacher	
Counsellor	
Friend	
Other	

**24. How often has this self-harm occurred?**

only once	
twice	
a few times a year	
every month	
every week	
a couple of times a week	



daily	
only when I am stressed out or anxious	

**25. If you indicated that you self-harm, have you sought help from someone?**

Yes       No

**26. Have you ever known someone who has attempted suicide**

Yes       No

**27. Have you ever known someone who has died by suicide?**

Yes       No

**28. Have you ever thought about attempting suicide?**

Yes       No

**29. If you answered yes to question 26, please indicate how you knew this person**

Mother	
Father	
Step mother	
Step father	
Grandmother	
Grandfather	
Aunt	
Uncle	
Sister	
Brother	
Step-sister	
Step-brother	
Cousin (male)	
Cousin (female)	
Friend (male)	
Friend (female)	
Neighbour	
Someone in my neighbourhood but not someone very close to me	
Other	

**30. Does this school support your mental health? Required to answer**

- Yes
- No
- sometimes

**31. How does the school support your mental health; please select as many statements that you agree with.**

- The teachers care about me as a person
- I feel welcome in this school
- I feel important in this school
- I feel I have a voice in this school
- I feel I can talk to a teacher if I am upset
- I feel that this school values all students no matter what their academic ability is
- I feel that this school is giving me a good education
- I feel that this school shows me respect and values me as a person
- I do not feel afraid coming to school
- This school has helped me with problems (big or small) in the past
- I feel supported and cared for in this school
- This school organises activities and events to promote positive mental health
- I don't think this school supports my mental health in any way at all
- this school respects me as an individual
- this school is trying to develop me as a whole person
- this school supports my academic development
- The school supports me to make friendships
- The school supports my spiritual development
- The school tries to develop my social skills

- The Principal cares about me

**32. Please complete the following sentence. I am happy in school because.....Required**

**to answer**

**33. Which of the following statements are true in your opinion?**

- this school is not fair to all students
- this school favours certain types of students over others
- this school tries to develop students holistically and encourages us to talk about our feelings
- I cannot talk to any of the staff here about my worries or problems
- this school tries really hard to make students happy
- this school does not try to make students happy
- this school tries to develop a range of talents and is not all just about examination results
- my parents/guardian and I picked this school because it is welcoming to all students
- I think my school welcomes everybody no matter what background they come from and where they come from
- I think that my school is not welcoming towards every student
- There are a variety of extra-curricular activities for students to engage in

**34. In your opinion, is this school the best school in the area for academic results?**

- Yes       No       Not sure

**35. If you answered no in question 34 above, why do you think it is not the best school in the area?**

**36. Please tick the statements that are true of this school, in your opinion**

- treats all students as equal and with respect
- is really good to its students
- welcomes everybody as equals
- caters for me as I find it hard to learn in some subjects
- gets high results in the Junior Certificate
- gets high results in the Leaving Certificate
- It has excellent teachers
- the school and staff really care and value you as a student
- The school is obsessed with examinations and good results
- the teachers stress me out as they talk too much about the examinations
- staff can lack understanding for some students who may be suffering from stress and anxiety
- I feel bad about myself at school because I find my subjects too hard
- I often or always feel that I am not fully part of the school
- I feel that I don't fit in with the other students

**37. Do you feel safe in this school?**

- Yes       No

**38. Does this school values ethnic and cultural difference?**

Yes       No       sometimes

**39. Is bullying is dealt with quickly and appropriately in this school?**

yes       no       sometimes

**40. Do you feel that you can talk to a teacher or staff member if you have a problem?**

Yes       No

**41. Are you happy in this school most of the time?**

Yes       No

**42. Have you ever brought a problem you had to the attention of the school?**

Yes       No

**43. If you answered yes to question 42, who did you raise the problem with in the school?**

**Select your answer**

Principal	
Deputy Principal	
Year head	
Teacher	
Counsellor	
Guidance teacher	
Other	

**44. If you answered yes above for 43. Did the school try to help you with your problem?**

yes       no

**45. Please tick the statements that you agree with in terms of this school**

*You can tick more than one statement*

it has a good name in the community where I live

- it does not have a good name in the community
- it welcomes students with physical disabilities
- it is not welcoming to students with physical disabilities
- it is welcoming to students with mental disabilities
- it is not welcoming to students with mental disabilities
- it gives a 2nd chance to students expelled from other schools
- I have no issue with people who have been expelled/excluded from other schools coming here
- I do not like people who have been expelled/excluded from other schools coming here
- it gives you a chance when you get into serious trouble for misbehaviour
- this school does not give you a chance when you get into serious trouble for misbehaviour
- this school is too strict
- this school is not strict enough
- this school is fair and has the right level of strictness

**46. Below is a list of problems, worries and concerns for some young people.**

*Please tick the issues below that are a problem, worry or concern for you*

- examinations and getting the points for college
- my sexuality (knowing my orientation)
- sexual relationships
- boyfriend/girlfriend problems
- what I will do after I leave school
- conflict issues at home between family members
- relationship problems I have with my parent(s) or guardian(s)

- I feel ugly in appearance
- bullying behaviour by others towards me (not including cyber bullying)
- I experience cyber bullying towards me regularly
- I have physical health problems
- I suffered abuse in the past (emotional, physical, mental, sexual)
- I suffer (emotional, physical, mental, sexual) abuse at the moment
- I have mental health problems
- I have issues with alcohol
- I have issues with drugs
- I am in trouble with the police
- I have issues as my parent or parents are in a negative relationship with a partner or spouse
- My family and I are struggling financially
- I am neglected by my parent(s) or guardian(s) and generally fend for myself
- I am caring for younger siblings in the home as my parent(s)/guardian(s) is not in a position to
- I fear that someone close to me is dying of an illness/disease
- A member of my family is suffering from mental health issues
- other (please list other in box provided in next question)

**47. If you selected other in question 46, please briefly detail the other concern or worry that you have in the box provided below**

**48. Do you see school as a safe space for you?**

Yes

No

**49. Following on from your answer above, please give a reason why you feel it is or is not a safe**

**space for you?**

**50. Do you think that schools should exclude (expel) students for seriously bad behaviour?**

Yes

No

I do not know

**51. What would you consider to be seriously bad behaviour that would warrant exclusion from school** *(you may tick more than one box)*

continuous misbehaviour where classes were interrupted

assault (physical or sexual)

sale or supply of illegal substances

extortion of money

cyber-bullying

bullying and harassment of another student(s)

stealing

other

**52. If you selected 'other' for question 51 above, please explain in brief**



**53. Which of the following statements describes how you felt and acted over the past two weeks?** *You may select more than one statement*

- I felt happy and content most of the time
- I felt miserable and unhappy most of the time
- I found it hard to enjoy anything at all
- I found it easy to enjoy myself
- I felt tired and did not feel like doing anything
- I was restless and found it hard to sleep
- I felt that I was worthless in comparison to others
- I cried a lot
- I found it hard to think properly or concentrate
- I hated myself
- I was not a good person
- I felt alone and lonely
- I thought that nobody cared about me
- I thought that nobody loved me
- I felt that everything I did was wrong
- I felt anxious and worried and that something would go badly wrong for me
- I felt anxious and I know the reason why
- I felt anxious and I do not know the reason why

**54. Please select the issues below that are a concern or a worry for you in general?**

- I cannot study properly
- I am worried that I will not do a good Leaving Certificate

- I am worried about where I will go after the Leaving Certificate
- I feel that the school system is not suited to me
- I feel under pressure to try drugs
- I have tried drugs
- I have a drug addiction or I think I might have one
- I feel under pressure to drink alcohol
- I drink too much alcohol or I binge drink
- I feel that I have a bad reputation in the school and I cannot make things right to start over on a clean slate
- I have family problems and my home-life is not good
- I feel under pressure to support someone at home who is struggling
- I feel under pressure to support someone at school who is struggling
- I am not able to keep up in some subjects
- I am not able to keep up in one subject
- I am, not able to keep up in any subject
- I have no friends
- I find it difficult to make friends
- I do not have a nice body
- I do not have a boyfriend/ girlfriend
- Nobody finds me attractive
- I feel that there is pressure on me to be sexually active
- My friends/classmates talk about sexual acts that make me feel uncomfortable
- I am not the same as others my age
- I think differently to others my age

- I am not popular with the other students
- People make fun of me and treat me badly
- there is a pressure on me to view pornography
- I know other students that view pornography on their phones and devices
- viewing pornography is a big issue for young people my age
- I have received unwanted images or footage of naked people or pornography and it made me feel uncomfortable
- other

**55. If you answered other above for question 54, please give details below**

**56. In your opinion is SPHE important?**

Not Important at all	
A little important	
50% (sometimes) Important	
Very Important	
Extremely Important	

**57. Does SPHE support you as a young person?**

- yes
  no
  sometimes

**58. Which statements best depict your views of SPHE provision at second level?**

You may select more than one statement

- It is a doss class
- It is a waste of my time when I have exams to study for
- I do not see it as important
- My parent(s)/ guardian(s) do not see it as important

- It is out-of-date and behind the times we live in
- It is a very important subject and helps me to cope as a young person
- I learn important things in SPHE
- I discuss important things in SPHE
- I think it should be examined in some way
- My teacher is not very interested or enthusiastic about SPHE
- My teacher is very enthusiastic and does really important topics with us in SPHE
- If I were Minister of Education, I would get rid of SPHE
- If I were Minister of Education, I would give SPHE more time

**59. Do you use social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, What's app etc.)**

- Yes       No

**60. Do you use Facebook**

- Yes       No

**61. Do you feel under pressure to look attractive on your social media output (i.e. Facebook pictures and uploads)**

- Yes       No

**62. How much time do you spend on social media platforms on average per WEEKDAY (Facebook, Instagram, online gaming etc.) If you check it briefly and regularly, you should add up an approximate time for this also (e.g. if you check your account(s) 10 times a day for 2 minutes each time, include (10x2=20) minutes in the total time)**

I do not spend any time on social media during the week	
10 minutes or less per day/ night	
10-20 minutes per day/ night	
20-30 minutes per day / night	
30-60 minutes per day/ night	
1 hour -1.5 hours per day/night	
1.5 hours to 2 hours per day/night	
2-3 hours per day/night	
3-4 hours per day/night	
4-5 hours per day /night	
More than 5 hours per day/night	

**63. How much time do you spend on social media platforms on average per WEEKENDS (Facebook, Instagram, online gaming etc.) If you check it briefly and regularly, you should add up an approximate time for this also (e.g. if you check your account(s) 10 times a day for 2 minutes each time, include (10x2=20) minutes in the total time)**

Select your answer

I do not spend any time on social media during the weekend	
10 minutes or less per day/ night	
10-20 minutes per day/ night	
20-30 minutes per day / night	
30-60 minutes per day/ night	
1 hour -1.5 hours per day/night	
1.5 hours -2 hours per day/night	
2-3 hours per day/night	
3-4 hours per day/night	
4-5 hours per day /night	
More than 5 hours per day/night	

**64. Do you sometimes look at other people’s lives through Facebook and feel like they have a better life than you?**

Yes       No

**65. Do you ever stage pictures (making yourself look your best) for social media and pretend that they are randomly taken?**

Yes       No

**66. In your opinion is the RSE (Relationships and Sexual Education) programme relevant to young people in post-primary schools**

Yes       No

**67. Is there appropriate support for LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and/or Transgender) student in this school?**

Yes       No       I'm not sure

**68. If you answered 'no' to question 67, please detail the supports that you feel are**

**needed**

**69. Do you usually get 8 hours sleep or more per night?**

Yes  No

**70. Do you try to eat fruit and vegetables regularly?**

Yes  No

**71. How often do you exercise?**

- daily for 30 minutes or more
- once per week for 30 minutes or more
- 3 times per week for up to 30 minutes or more
- less than 3 times per week for up to 30 minutes or more
- between 3-6 times per week for 30 minutes or more
- I do not exercise regularly

**72. How do you relax? Please select as many statements as you wish.**

- bath or shower
- massage or other physical type of therapy
- sport and exercise
- socialising with friends (without alcohol)
- a dance, singing or drama class
- social media usage
- watching TV
- reading
- listening to music
- writing
- spending time talking with loved ones/friends
- walking

- time alone doing nothing
- gaming online or on a gaming device
- other

**73. If you selected other in question 72 above, please detail the activity here**

**74. Who is your main role model in life? Please select one below**

- Mother
- Father
- Stepmother or stepfather
- Grandparent
- Aunt or uncle
- Older sibling
- A celebrity
- A sports person
- Other

**75. If you answered 'other' above in question 74, please detail the role model**

**76. Thinking about your role model, what are the key characteristics you like about that person**

- personality

- physical appearance
- their style of dress
- their talent and skill
- their life seems perfect
- people adore the person (public affection)
- they are kind and genuine
- the person has taken an interest in me personally
- other

**77. Are you aware that your school has a Student Support Team?**

- Yes       No

**78. Do you think that students in this school have a voice regarding the promotion of mental health issues?**

- Yes       No

**79. Are you aware of mental health support services available to young people outside of school?**

- Yes       No

**80. Do you feel that there are a good number of mental health supports available to young people outside of school?**

- Yes       No

**81. Do you know how to go about accessing mental health support services outside of school?**

- Yes       No

**82. Would you like to be involved in supporting/mentoring younger students**

- Yes       No

**83. Does the school offer the opportunity to older students to get involved in supporting/mentoring younger students?**



- Yes     
 No     
 It is offered but it's not properly run in my opinion

**84. Please tick the statement that represents the most important function of your second level education**

Select your answer

Getting high Leaving Certificate points and progressing to third level	
Learning about coping with stress and life's issues	
Learning about friendships and how to form and maintain effective friendships	
Learning about active citizenship	
Teaching effective communication and interaction with others	
Learning how to interact with students who may have physical or mental disabilities	
Learning how to read and write well	
None of the above, 2nd level education is pointless for me	

**85. In your opinion, which of the profiles below is the most common for adolescents who opt to pursue a PLC course?**

- Adolescents that have completed the Leaving Certificate and are not sure what they want to do  
 adolescents that dropped out of second level with no Leaving Certificate  
 Adolescents who are not able for 3rd level  
 Adolescents who would like to get employment quickly  
 Adolescents who want to take a gap year before starting third level

**86. Would you like to do a PLC course before you progress to third level?**

- Yes     
 No

**87. If you answered No above, please select the statement that best explains why?**

- I will have enough points so I want to go straight to third level  
 I do not value the PLC courses  
 I think PLC courses are not as prestigious as going to an IT or University  
 My parents would not allow me to do a PLC  
 I want to leave home and go to another county

other

**88. Are there adequate facilities (sport, recreation, places to hang out) for young people in this community area?**

Yes       No       There are facilities but they cost too much money

**89. Have you ever attended Jigsaw?**

Yes       No

**90. If you answered yes above, please indicate how you found the service provided?**

Poor	
Fair	
Good	
Very Good	
Excellent	

**91. Have you ever been assessed or attended CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service)?**

Yes       No       Maybe, I am not sure but I have been assessed

**92. If you answered yes above, please indicate how you found the service provided?**

Poor	
Fair	
Good	
Very Good	
Excellent	

**93. If you have used the CAMHS service, did you have to wait for long?**

1-3 months

3-6 months

6-9 months

9-12 months

12-18 months

18-24 months

**94. Overall considering all the aspects of your life, how happy are you?**

Unhappy	
Occasionally happy	
Happy 50% of the time	
Often happy	
Always happy	

**95. Please rate how happy you are overall with the social element of your life (i.e. friends and social activities such as clubs and societies)**

Unhappy	
Occasionally happy	
Happy 50% of the time	
Often happy	
Always happy	

### **Appendix 8**

Weber (1964) used the term rationalisation to describe the process of increased control, monitoring and calculation in the bureaucratic governance of social interactions and institutions. Weber argued that this rationalisation process would be embraced by bureaucratic entities as a means for greater efficiency, accountability and transparency in the pursuit of desired outcomes. His research centred on his commitment to the 'why' in terms of the ultimacy of life and society and therefore he critically evaluated the emerging pressure to become solely concerned with the 'how'. Weber contended that an over focus on instrumental, calculable and scientific elements of society would erode the meanings, values and motivations that cannot be measured by deductive reasoning alone.

Ritzer (1993) proposed a contemporary theory of rationalisation that he termed the '*McDonaldisation of society*'. Ritzer argues that his paradigmatic analysis of society extends Weber's rationalisation theory into the domain of consumption. His theory of McDonaldisation centres on the way the principles of the McDonald's fast food

industry have emerged as a dominant force in many sectors of American and global society.

**A comparative of Ritzer (1993) elements of McDonaldisation of Society and (Lynch et al., 2012) 6 elements of New Managerialism**

<b>Ritzer (1993)</b> <b>4 Elements of McDonaldisation</b> <b>(Please note: The Control element is further broken down into two facets: staff and consumer control)</b>	<b>Lynch et al., 2012)</b> <b>6 Elements of New Managerialism</b>
Calculability	Shift form inputs to outputs
Control (of staff)	Close Monitoring of staff, extra hours, performance indicators
Control (of consumer)	Casualisation/ diminished contracts/Outsourcing/subcontracting like the private sector  Nomenclature
Predictability	Cataloguing of schools and staff in terms of performance
Efficiency	Decentralisation of budgets and personal authority