



# Developing an evaluation framework for teachers' professional learning in Ireland:

**Phase 3b Small-scale consultation with children  
and young people**

Caroline Rawdon  
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# Preface

This report represents one of two outputs from the third strand of this project which has the overall aim of developing a framework for the evaluation of Teachers' Professional Learning (TPL). The project consists of detailed desk-based research, including a literature review (Rawdon, Sampson, Gilleece, & Cosgrove, 2020); a survey of teachers and principals in primary, post-primary, and special schools (Rawdon, Gilleece, Denner, Sampson, & Cosgrove, 2021); consultation with TPL providers (Rawdon & Gilleece, 2022); consultation with children and young people; and a case-study focusing on an evaluation of a specific TPL opportunity (in the area of student wellbeing). The various strands of the research project will ultimately lead to the publication of a research-based framework for the evaluation of TPL. The term TPL was selected for use in the current project in order to acknowledge the full range of learning activities undertaken by teachers.

# Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks to members of the Steering Committee (listed overleaf), appointed to oversee the development of a framework for the evaluation of TPL. We appreciate the considerable help of members of the Steering Committee in reviewing the current report.

We gratefully acknowledge the support provided by ERC colleagues, including Aidan Clerkin (interim CEO of the ERC), Jude Cosgrove (former CEO of the ERC), and the ERC's administrative team. We are also grateful to Kara Sampson who worked as a Research Assistant on the project during the administration of the consultation with children and young people. We thank Marie Jennings for providing the final cataloguing information for this report.

We acknowledge the key contribution of staff at the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY), Hub na nÓg, and Foróige. In particular, we thank Anne O'Donnell (Consultant Manager to Hub na nÓg) and Linda O'Sullivan (DCEDIY), as well as Renagh Hayden (Manager, National Participation Office), Suzanne Byrne (Participation Officer), Mark O'Dwyer (Participation Officer), Alexis Carey (Participation Officer), Karyn Farrell (Participation Coordinator), Aoife McKenna (DCEDIY), and Stephanie Graham (DCEDIY).

Most importantly, we thank the principals, teachers, children, and young people who participated in this consultation. The consultation took place during a difficult time for school communities as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and we greatly appreciate their contributions to this research.

# Membership of the Steering Committee

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| Kevin Lohan        | Chairperson, APO, Teacher Education, ITE & Professional Development, DoE   |
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| Jude Cosgrove      | CEO, Educational Research Centre (ERC) ( <i>until April 2022</i> )   |
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| Nuala Taaffe       | National Director, Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) ( <i>from February 2022</i> )                              |

# Glossary of Acronyms/Abbreviations

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| <b>BEACONS</b> | Bringing Education Alive for our Communities on a National Scale    |
| <b>CAP</b>     | Curriculum and Assessment Policy Unit                               |
| <b>CPD</b>     | Continuing Professional Development                                 |
| <b>CSL</b>     | Centre for School Leadership  |
| <b>CSPE</b>    | Civic, Social, and Political Education                              |
| <b>DCEDIY</b>  | Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth |
| <b>DCYA</b>    | Department of Children and Youth Affairs                            |
| <b>DEIS</b>    | Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools                       |
| <b>DES</b>     | Department of Education and Skills ( <i>from 2010 to 2020</i> )     |
| <b>DoE</b>     | Department of Education ( <i>renamed October 2020</i> )             |
| <b>EAL</b>     | English as an Additional Language                                   |
| <b>ERC</b>     | Educational Research Centre   |
| <b>ESCI</b>    | Education Support Centres Ireland                                   |
| <b>ETBI</b>    | Education and Training Boards Ireland                               |
| <b>HBSC</b>    | Health Behaviour in School-aged Children                            |
| <b>HSE</b>     | Health Service Executive  |
| <b>JCT</b>     | Junior Cycle for Teachers   |
| <b>LAOS</b>    | Looking at Our School   |
| <b>NCCA</b>    | National Council for Curriculum and Assessment                      |
| <b>NCGE</b>    | National Council for Guidance in Education                          |
| <b>NCSE</b>    | National Council for Special Education                              |
| <b>NEPS</b>    | National Educational Psychological Service                          |
| <b>NIPT</b>    | National Induction Programme for Teachers                           |
| <b>OECD</b>    | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development              |
| <b>PDST</b>    | Professional Development Service for Teachers                       |
| <b>SEN</b>     | Special Educational Needs   |
| <b>SPHE</b>    | Social, Personal, and Health Education                              |
| <b>TES</b>     | Teacher Education (ITE and Professional Development) Section        |
| <b>TPL</b>     | Teachers' Professional Learning                                     |
| <b>UNCRC</b>   | United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child                |

# Executive Summary

## Introduction and aims

This report is the fourth in a series of publications arising from a project which aims to develop a framework for the evaluation of Teachers' Professional Learning (TPL) in Ireland. The project arose from a commitment made in the *Action Plan for Education 2018* (DES, 2018a). The current report represents one of two strands of the third phase of this research. Previous reports from this project outline the findings from detailed desk-based research, including a literature review (Rawdon, Sampson, Gilleece, & Cosgrove, 2020); a survey of teachers and principals in primary, post-primary, and special schools (Rawdon, Gilleece, Denner, Sampson, & Cosgrove, 2021); and a consultation with TPL providers (Rawdon & Gilleece, 2022). The final phase of the project (Phase 4) comprises an in-depth case-study focusing on an evaluation of a specific TPL opportunity in the area of student wellbeing.

The aim of the third strand of this research was to consult with key groups, namely TPL providers (Phase 3a) and children and young people (Phase 3b). The current report presents the findings from the consultation with children and young people.<sup>1</sup> The consultation described in the current report, carried out in collaboration with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) and Hub na nÓg, is informed by Lundy's rights-based model of child participation (Lundy, 2007) and recent policy developments in Ireland in relation to participation, e.g., DCEDIY's *National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making* (2021).

## Methodology

At primary level, the consultation was led by Hub na nÓg. Hub na nÓg contacted schools and facilitated the administration of a pen and paper consultation task by teachers in eight primary schools selected for convenience. A total of 427 consultation sheets were available for analysis. The Educational Research Centre (ERC) supported the development of the consultation questions and analysed the data. In line with the *National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making* (DCEDIY, 2021), the final wording of the primary consultation questions was intended to seek children's and young people's 'blue-sky thinking' rather than asking them to respond to issues determined by adults. The questions were worded as follows:

1. How can teachers make learning easier?
2. How can teachers make learning more fun?

At post-primary level, the consultation was held online and led by DCEDIY and Foróige (Comhairle na nÓg). Twenty-five young people participated in the consultation. Minor edits were made to the consultation questions for use with post-primary-aged young people.

The final wording of the online consultation questions was:

1. How can teachers make learning more engaging?
2. How can teachers make learning easier?

<sup>1</sup> In this report, the terms 'pupils' or 'children' are used to refer to learners at primary level. The terms 'students' or 'young people' are used for learners at post-primary level. To avoid 'pupil/student', the term 'student' is used occasionally in this report to refer to learners across levels.

At both primary and post-primary level, thematic analysis was carried out on the consultation data. A top-down approach was applied to responses at primary level, informed by the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023* (DES, 2018b) and an adapted version of the general model from Compen, De Witte, and Schelfhout (2019; presented in Chapter 8 of Rawdon et al., 2021).

## Key findings

### Primary

Primary level responses to both questions were categorised under the following themes:

- Theme one: Curriculum, teaching and learning
- Theme two: Culture and learning environment
- Theme three: Relationships and partnerships
- Theme four: Play, recreation, and stress reduction.

For each theme, some of the key suggestions regarding how learning can be made more fun are as follows:<sup>2</sup>

- Theme one: Curriculum, teaching and learning

This theme incorporates the largest number of pupil responses and represents a key focus for children participating in the consultation.

- » Clear explanation/simplify: Children's responses highlight a need for some teachers to give clearer explanations, provide more examples, give demonstrations, and go slower when they are explaining something in class. Some children also said that they need more time to learn things in class.
- » Educational games: Children's recommendations suggest that learning is easier when it is turned into a fun activity. Children suggest that games provide an incentive for them to engage more fully in their lessons. Children's responses show that they find learning through games to be more fun and they reported that when they play educational games, they don't realise they are 'learning'. Some children referred to this as being 'tricked' into learning.
- » One-to-one-support: Examples included having more time to talk with the teacher on a one-to-one basis about difficulties.
- » Use of technology: Findings also suggest that a number of children would rather have tablet devices and mini-whiteboards instead of copy books.

- Theme two: Culture and learning environment

- » Lessons outdoors: Children reported that lessons outdoors can support concentration and make school more fun.
- » More classroom support: Some children mentioned that they would like more support (help) at school, for example to help pupils who 'find a subject hard'.

---

<sup>2</sup> Items presented here under each theme relate to the codes with the highest frequencies. It is recognised that good practice guidelines recommend documenting and reporting on the views of children and young people in a way that avoids adult interpretation (DCEDIY, 2021). For this reason, Chapter 3 of this report details all codes and not only those with the highest frequencies.

- Theme three: Relationships and partnerships

A smaller number of responses related to this theme. Some responses under this theme referred to the relationship dynamic between pupils and teachers in the classroom with some children asking for 'more of a say' on issues that matter to them.

- Theme four: Play, recreation, and stress reduction

- » More playtime, yard time, less work: Suggestions included greater use of 'brain breaks' and 'golden time'.
- » Student comfort aids: Examples included bringing toys, teddies, or pets to school. It was suggested that these may be of particular use during tests or stressful times.

There was considerable overlap between suggestions for how learning can be made easier and how it can be made more fun.

## Post-primary

Similar to the themes identified at primary level, broadly similar issues were identified by post-primary students who participated in the online consultation. In relation to what teachers can do to make learning more engaging at post-primary level, young people's responses were categorised under the following broad headings:

- Teaching methods: Responses highlighted a preference for variety in teaching modes; a need for increased opportunities for class discussions; a need to encourage greater participation and critical thinking; a desire for more independent learning; and a need to focus on stress associated with examinations.
- Student-teacher relationships: Students referred to the important influence of teachers' behaviour/attitude (e.g., being respectful of student opinions and the need to be friendly and approachable). Students emphasised the importance of teachers fostering or encouraging positive relationships with students.
- Learning environment: e.g., classroom management and the classroom environment.
- Other: e.g., make learning more fun and relate learning/content to real life.

Young people's suggestions for how teachers can make learning easier were categorised in a similar way and, as at primary level, there was considerable overlap between responses to the two questions.

## Using the consultation findings to inform the development of a TPL evaluation framework in Ireland

A conceptual model of evaluation for TPL was presented in Chapter 8 of Rawdon et al. (2021). Findings from the current consultation link to areas of the conceptual model including *teaching behaviour* and *teacher competencies*. Responses from children and young people relate to areas of teaching behaviour, such as instruction patterns and interaction patterns which influence learning experiences. These areas of the conceptual model should be considered in the design of TPL as they may influence learner experience, outcomes and potentially wellbeing for students, teachers and school leaders. Responses from children and young people also highlight the importance of teacher competencies, e.g., skills, affective, and cognitive aspects of teacher competencies which may influence learner experience, outcomes and potentially wellbeing for students.

## Conclusions and next steps

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the consultation as follows:

- 1) Children and young people can provide useful insights into issues that affect them, including issues relating to their preferences for teaching and learning.
  - a. Children and young people place a high value on certain aspects of the curriculum and active teaching methods. For example, primary school pupils made references to *Aistear*; curriculum focused games for subjects such as Maths, English, and Irish; and specific subjects such as Science and P.E. At post-primary level, young people stated that teachers should encourage discussion, participation, independent learning, and critical thinking.
  - b. Children and young people also value the learning environment in which teaching takes place, placing a particular emphasis on an environment that is comfortable, stimulating, and inviting at primary level. At post-primary level, students recognise the need for an orderly classroom environment that supports open discussion. Similarly, post-primary students referred to aspects of classroom management in their discussions.
  - c. Children and young people understand the importance of maintaining good relationships between students and school staff.
  - d. Children and young people also value considerations for wellbeing in the classroom.
- 2) The current report demonstrates two methods which can be used to elicit the views of children and young people.
  - a. In the context of TPL evaluation, these methods might usefully be employed by TPL providers gathering the opinion of/obtaining feedback from children and young people by directly administering consultation materials, such as questionnaires, worksheets etc. in schools. As an alternative, teachers or school leaders may act on the part of the TPL provider.
  - b. The different methods outlined at primary and post-primary level have both advantages and disadvantages. While the pen and paper task used at primary level gathered responses from a larger number of pupils, detailed discussion was not possible. On the other hand, the online consultation method provided time for in-depth discussion but it is possible that the voices of seldom-heard young people<sup>3</sup> were not included in this consultation given that young people who volunteer to participate in consultation outside of school time are more likely to be highly engaged, e.g., involved in groups such as Comhairle na nÓg.

Findings from the current report and the consultation with TPL providers will be used to further develop the conceptual model for TPL evaluation (see Chapter 8, Rawdon et al., 2021). The final applied phase of the current project (Phase 4) involves the application of elements of the conceptual model to a specific TPL opportunity in the area of student wellbeing. Learning from the evaluation of this TPL for Restorative Practice will make a further contribution to the development of an applied and practical framework for the evaluation of TPL in Ireland.

The final output from this project will be a general framework for the evaluation of TPL which is intended to be applicable to any aspect of TPL. Publication of the framework is anticipated in early 2023.

<sup>3</sup> The term 'seldom-heard' young people is defined and discussed in further detail in Chapter 1 of the current report.

# Chapter 1: Introduction and background on children and young people's participation

## 1.1 BACKGROUND

This report outlines a small-scale consultation carried out in June-July 2021 with approximately 420 primary school pupils and 25 post-primary school students. Despite the limitations imposed by COVID-19 restrictions and the timing of the consultation at the end of the school year, it offered an opportunity to trial two approaches to eliciting student views on their experiences of learning. Although the number of participants was comparatively low, responses offer some insights into the priorities of children and young people and highlight some areas which may warrant further consideration in the evaluation of Teachers' Professional Learning (TPL). In providing children and young people with the opportunity to support the identification of themes that may represent valuable outcomes in the evaluation of TPL, the development of the framework is in line with best practice regarding the inclusion of children and young people's voices.

The remainder of this chapter provides some context for children and young people's participation in research. It then briefly introduces key national policy and research developments related to the participation of children and young people. Further detail on many of these policy and research developments is provided in Rawdon, Sampson, Gilteece, and Cosgrove (2020). In particular, the national policy context for student wellbeing is provided in Chapter 7 of Rawdon et al. (2020). More in-depth information on the participation of young people in the design of the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study is provided in Chapter 6 of Rawdon et al. (2020). The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) *National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making* (2021) described in this chapter has been published since the completion of the work by Rawdon et al. (2020).

### The UNCRC paving the way for children's participation in research

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) serves as an international benchmark for the protection of children's rights, including their participatory rights to contribute towards society in age-appropriate ways (Lundy, 2007; Wyness, Harrison, & Buchanan, 2004). A positive consequence of the UNCRC is that children and young people's voices have become an increasingly important component of research that explores their lives from *their* perspectives.

Recent international research from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2021) provides evidence of the capacity of young children to give clear responses to questions about their learning environments. Findings from research involving a representative sample of five-year-olds from Early Childhood Education and Care centres and schools in England and Estonia found that three-quarters of children listed one thing that they liked about their school or centre, while one quarter listed multiple things. The authors note that children often gave specific answers to the research question and that children are the best judges of their learning environment. They conclude that children can and should be allowed to express their views on their learning and the learning environment.

Ireland, too, has seen an increase in the participation of children and young people in the design of studies that focus on their overall wellbeing and educational outcomes. Consultation with children and young people on the design of survey instruments has been carried out in large-scale national studies, e.g., the *My World Survey* (see Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012) and *My World Survey 2* (see Dooley, O' Connor, Fitzgerald, & O' Reilly, 2019), and international studies, e.g., *Health Behaviour in School-aged Children* (see Daniels et al., 2014; Kelly et al., 2020). Smaller studies and consultations with children and young people (e.g., see Horgan, Forde, Parkes, & Martin, 2015<sup>4</sup>) also demonstrate how children and young people's voices are included in research in Ireland.

In the policy arena, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has been undertaking a 'child's voice' consultation as part of the development of the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* in 2020. On behalf of the NCCA, researchers from the Marino Institute of Education are in the process of conducting consultations with children on the proposals set out in the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*. Children's voices from this consultation will inform and shape the framework due to be finalised in 2022.<sup>5</sup>

## Governmental commitments to develop children and young people's participation

Children and young people's participatory rights are supported by the Irish Government's commitment to promote their right to participate as social actors in issues which affect them/their lives. Key framework and policy documents, such as the Department of Children and Youth Affairs' *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People* (DCYA, 2014) and the *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020* (DCYA, 2015), advocate for the voices of children and young people to be heard and included in decision making across a variety of social contexts. Furthermore, the DCEDIY set up Hub na nÓg (2015) to support the implementation of the national strategy (2015-2020). Since its establishment, Hub na nÓg has developed a *Participation Framework* (DCEDIY, 2021) to guide organisations and researchers to improve their practice in listening to children and young people and giving them a voice in decision-making. Hub na nÓg has also collaborated with organisations focused on children and young people's welfare as well as facilitating numerous consultations with children and young people.<sup>6</sup>

Lundy's *Model of Child Participation* (2007) offers a solid framework on which to build participatory practices that provide children the 'Space', 'Voice', 'Audience', and ability to exert their 'Influence' on issues that matter most to them. Lundy's participation model has been influential in informing the DCYA's national policy framework for children and young people (2014) and the national strategy (2015) as well as the subsequent DCEDIY *National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making* (2021).<sup>7</sup> A core aim of the Framework is to support government departments, organisations, and agencies to develop and improve their practice in listening to children and young people and in giving them a voice in decision-making and consultation processes. The Framework also provides a way to enable the implementation of the national participation strategy across sectors and professional groups with a shared understanding and approach (DCEDIY, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> Horgan et al. (2015) provide an example of a consultation relating to children and young people's experiences of participation in decision-making at home, in schools, and in their communities.

<sup>5</sup> The framework was originally scheduled to be finalised in early 2021, but this date has been extended due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

<sup>6</sup> For further information about Hub na nÓg's *Participation Framework*, visit: <https://hubnanog.ie/participation-framework/>

<sup>7</sup> The DCEDIY Framework was developed in collaboration with Professor Laura Lundy of Queen's University, Belfast. It is also underpinned by the UNCRC, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making* (DCYA, 2015).

In the educational context, the Department of Education and Skills' (DES, 2018b) *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023* includes student voice as a key principle of wellbeing promotion in a whole-school approach. BEACONS (i.e., *Bringing Education Alive for our Communities on a National Scale*), an initiative of the Teaching Council, also aims to support better communication and conversation between school stakeholders including teachers, students, and parents, at the level of the local community.<sup>8</sup>

## Challenges with facilitating children and young people's participation

Efforts have been made in Ireland and elsewhere to promote the formal participation of 'seldom-heard' children and young people (e.g., DCYA & Barnardos, 2015; Feely, Fleming, & Greene, 2021), although it is recognised that there is a persistent challenge in this regard. The term 'seldom-heard' is used to describe children and young people "who have fewer opportunities to participate and/or who encounter more obstacles when attempting to participate" (DCYA & Barnardos, 2015, p. 7). Drawing on DCYA and Barnardos (2015, p. 7) with some additional groups identified, 'seldom-heard' children and young people are likely to include (but are not limited to):

- bullied;
- living in care;
- experiencing domestic violence;
- from a minority ethnic background;
- of Traveller or Roma ethnicity;
- homeless or at risk of losing their home/living in temporary/unsuitable accommodation;
- in hospital or living with chronic health conditions (including those with mental health issues);
- lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex (LGBTQI+);
- living in poverty;
- living in rural isolation;
- living with parental addiction;
- living with strained family relationships;
- not in education or employment;
- have physical or intellectual disabilities;
- refugees or asylum-seekers;
- those displaced by war or persecution; or
- young carers.

Kelleher, Seymour, and Halpenny (2014) note that seldom-heard young people are not a homogenous group and suggest that the term is best used as an umbrella term to encompass diverse groups. For a fuller discussion, see Kelleher et al. (2014) and DCYA and Barnardos (2015).

8

For more information on BEACONS, visit: <https://www.teachingcouncil.ie/website/en/about-us1/beacons/>

One example of an Irish consultation focusing specifically on seldom-heard young people is the DCYA study *Listen to Our Voices: Hearing Children and Young People Living in the Care of the State* (2011). This consultation sought the views of children and young people in the care of the State, in detention, and in residential services for children with a disability. Difficulties in accessing children and young people in foster care were acknowledged.

Kelleher et al.'s (2014) review notes that impediments to children and young people's participation remain. Likewise, the UNCRC illustrates tensions between competing values and practices in relation to upholding children's interests and needs (Lundy, 2007; Wyness et al., 2004). For example, Wyness et al. (2004) point out that discourses which locate children as purely vulnerable beings firmly place the responsibility on adults to protect and provide for them. This social dynamic can make it challenging for adults to take children's forms of participation in decision-making processes seriously. Several authors also highlight that children's opportunities to participate in decision-making and consultative processes are dictated by the context of the social situation and, that children and young people "*have varying levels of space, voice, audience and influence from one sphere of their lives to another*" (Horgan et al., 2015, p. 3; see also Bjerke, 2011; de Róiste, Kelly, Molcho, Gavin, & Nic Gabhainn, 2012; Horgan, 2017; Lundy, 2007; Quinn & Owen, 2014).

Horgan et al.'s (2015) Irish-based research, for example, finds that the school is a place which is "*least conducive to listening to children and young people*" (p. 3). Findings from other Irish studies also raise issues concerning children's participation at school as well as their sense of injustice, frustration, and dissatisfaction with the lack of opportunity to participate in decision-making processes (Devine, 2002, 2009; Horgan et al., 2015; Horgan, 2017; Kelleher et al., 2014; Martin, Forde, Dunn, Galvin, & O'Connell, 2015; McSharry, 2008). Some authors also advise against using 'tokenistic' attempts to include children in decision-making and consultative processes, as tokenistic forms of participation are recognised as a form of "*non-participation whereby agendas are limited to peripheral issues prescribed by adults*" (Wyness et al., 2004, p. 87; Hart, 1992).

Lundy (2018) revisits the negative associations between tokenism and children's participation. She suggests that tokenism plays some part in furthering children's participation and she argues there is research to support that the consequences of children's experiences of tokenistic participation "*are not always permanently or necessarily negative*" (p. 12). Rather, there is evidence to suggest it provides learning experiences for children who "*can be galvanized into further action and claim recognition in other ways*" and, how they may even use "*the opportunity for their own individual ends*" (p. 12). Lundy (2018) asserts that if we "*classify less than perfect participation as tokenistic*" (p. 13), we could risk both closing off children's access to engaging in issues that affect them most, as well as inadvertently dissuading decision-makers from attempting to engage with children directly or even at all.

## 1.2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE CONSULTATION

Phase 3b of the current project aimed to include the voices of children and young people in the development of an evaluation framework for TPL in Ireland. In line with national and international policy and guidelines, e.g., *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People* (DCYA, 2014); the *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020* (DCYA, 2015); and the UNCRC (1989), the voice of children and young people is included at an early stage in the development of the framework for evaluation of TPL, given that a central aim of TPL is to improve learner experience, outcomes, and potentially wellbeing for students. The consultation was intended to give high-level insights into the priorities of children and young people in the school setting. The alignment between children's

priorities and the intended outcomes of TPL is worthy of consideration in the evaluation of TPL. The initial application of the TPL framework in Phase 4 of the current project is intended to be to TPL for student wellbeing and some consideration is given in the current report to how student answers are aligned with the areas of the wellbeing framework (DES, 2018b). It is intended that the final TPL evaluation framework will be applied to all TPL and as such, evaluation of a particular TPL should take into account views of children and young people regarding the content area of the TPL under evaluation.

The consultation described in the current report, carried out in collaboration with DCEDIY and Hub na nÓg, is informed by Lundy's model as discussed above. The next chapter describes in detail the methodology used in the current consultation.



# Chapter 2: Methodology

## 2.1 OVERVIEW

Phase 3b in the process of developing an evaluation framework for TPL in Ireland involved consultation with children and young people. At primary level, the consultation was led by Hub na nÓg, which took responsibility for securing school participation, finalising the consultation questions, and dispatching consultation materials to participating schools. The Educational Research Centre (ERC) supported the development of the consultation questions and had responsibility for data analysis of written responses gathered in the primary consultation.

At post-primary level, the consultation was led by DCEDIY and was held online with two groups of young people, aged between 12 and 17 years. The consultation questions used at primary level were adapted slightly for use with post-primary students and for the online consultation setting. Again, the ERC supported the development of the consultation questions and had responsibility for producing a written report on the outcomes of the consultation. The following sections describe in more detail the process for developing the consultation materials, the selection of participants, and the administration of the consultation and methods of data analysis.

## 2.2 DEVELOPMENT AND DESIGN OF CONSULTATION MATERIALS

Two initial consultation questions were developed during a preliminary meeting between ERC research staff and staff at Hub na nÓg and the DCEDIY. The Teacher Education Section (TES) of the Department of Education (DoE) subsequently approached the DCEDIY to formally request the facilitation of consultations at primary and post-primary level and approved the approach whereby Hub na nÓg would administer the consultation and the ERC would provide support as required. ERC research staff then worked directly with staff at Hub na nÓg and DCEDIY to further develop the consultation methodology at primary level. Consultation at post-primary level was led by DCEDIY and Foróige (Comhairle na nÓg).

### Primary

The initial consultation questions were refined based on input from a teacher advisory group – a small number of primary teachers enlisted to support Hub na nÓg with developing and trialling consultation materials. Teachers provided suggestions on child-friendly wording and piloted materials in their own classrooms to ensure that instructions were sufficiently clear. The final consultation materials at primary level included a letter to the school principal (see Appendix 1), a pupil consultation sheet (see Appendix 2), teacher guidelines (see Appendix 3), and a teacher questionnaire (see Appendix 4).

The final wording of the primary consultation questions was:

1. How can teachers make learning easier?
2. How can teachers make learning more fun?

Once finalised, a graphic design company produced the consultation materials.

## Post-primary

For young people of post-primary age, the consultation was held online, with minor edits made to the consultation questions.

The final wording of the online consultation questions was:

1. How can teachers make learning more engaging?
2. How can teachers make learning easier?

## 2.3 SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

### Primary

At primary level, a convenience sample of schools was recruited by Hub na nÓg and via the teacher advisory group. Hub na nÓg indicated that efforts were made to ensure representation of schools across a range of characteristics, including urban/rural location and DEIS/non-DEIS status. In total, 15 primary schools agreed to participate and were sent consultation packs. Of these, eight schools returned consultation responses. The sample achieved is further described in Section 3.1.

### Post-primary

At post-primary level, 25 young people were recruited through an open call via Foróige's Comhairle na nÓg network for participation in online consultations. The potential for bias in the group of young people who volunteered is recognised as a limitation of the consultation.

## 2.4 ADMINISTRATION OF THE CONSULTATION

### Primary

Data collection at primary level took place in June 2021. Each school received a consultation pack containing a letter to schools and four packs containing pupil consultation sheets, teacher guidelines, and teacher questionnaires. The consultation packs were posted to schools by a member of staff at DCEDIY. The accompanying letter (Appendix 1) advised schools that:

In schools with junior and senior pupils, three mainstream classes should be identified to take part in the consultation, as follows:

- 1 class from either Junior or Senior Infants
- 1 class from 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, or 3<sup>rd</sup>
- 1 class from 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, or 6<sup>th</sup>.

In schools with junior pupils only, two mainstream classes should be identified to take part in the consultation, as follows:

- 2 classes from Junior Infants, Senior Infants, 1<sup>st</sup>, or 2<sup>nd</sup> class.

In schools with senior pupils only, two mainstream classes should be identified to take part in the consultation, as follows:

- 2 classes from 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, or 6<sup>th</sup> class.

In all types of schools, all Special Classes or Units were invited to take part.

The teacher guidelines sheet (see Appendix 3) outlined the background to the consultation and full instructions for teachers to follow when conducting the consultation. Teachers were advised that the consultation aligned with the SPHE strand *Myself* and that the consultation could form part of the child's self-assessment and/or learning portfolio. In addition to the main consultation questions, prompts were outlined as follows:

- Can you remember a lesson/activity you enjoyed?
  - » Why did you enjoy it?
- Can you remember a lesson/activity you found tricky?
  - » What did the teacher do to make it easier?

Teachers were advised to:

- explain to the children what the consultation was about and why their opinions are important to the DoE;
- read through the two questions with the children;
- emphasise that there are no right or wrong answers and that each child should fill in the consultation sheet with their own opinions;
- use the prompt questions for pupils who need support;
- avoid suggesting ideas or influencing responses; and
- ask the children to write, draw, or write and draw their answers in the spaces provided.

The teacher guidelines also advised that:

- All children's opinions are valid and we welcome everything they want to say or draw.
- If a child responds with drawings and no writing, please ask the child to explain their drawings to you and write the explanation on the sheet in the child's own words. The ERC cannot analyse drawings, but can analyse written descriptions of the meaning of drawings.
- Scribing can be done by the class teacher, Special Needs Assistant, Special Education Teacher, or other appropriate adult (e.g., Home School Community Liaison Co-ordinator).
- For children who are writing their own words, stress that spelling or punctuation does not matter.

A statement was included in the teacher guidelines about confidentiality, data protection, and safeguarding, and teachers were reminded that pupils could opt out of participation if they so wished. Teachers were also provided with information on how the consultation responses would be analysed and reported and how feedback would be provided to participants.

The teacher questionnaire (see Appendix 4) gathered data on the DEIS status, language of instruction, school gender composition, special school status, and location of schools. Teachers were also asked to state the number of students that had participated in the consultation, as well as the number of students in each class with a School Support Plan, a School Support Plus Plan, or in receipt of English as an Additional Language (EAL) support.

Reminders to complete the consultation were issued by a member of staff at DCEDIY. Consultation responses were posted back directly to staff at the ERC who did not know the identity of schools.

## Post-primary

Two online consultation sessions were held with the aim of including up to 15 young people<sup>9</sup> in each group. The consultation sessions were held in the morning and lasted two hours. Both consultation sessions were facilitated by DCEDIY staff with expertise in consulting with young people.<sup>10</sup> ERC researchers attended the consultation sessions to observe and take notes. DCEDIY facilitators and ERC research staff held a briefing session immediately prior to each online consultation. A number of icebreaker activities were used throughout the consultation sessions to promote participation and discussion (e.g., a scavenger hunt in which participants were asked to find one object in their house which represented their favourite subject in school and discuss this with the group<sup>11,12</sup>).

The methodology of the online consultation is outlined in full detail in Appendix 5. In summary, each consultation included:

- A briefing on the purpose of the consultation which was led by a DCEDIY facilitator and an ERC researcher. The briefing emphasised who was carrying out the consultation (i.e., the DoE) and why the voice of young people should be included. A brief presentation was given by an ERC researcher (see Appendix 6) which explained some of the key concepts in the research.
- A summary of the Child Safeguarding Statement (led by a DCEDIY facilitator).
- Tasks in which young people were asked to describe their experiences of school.
  - » The first task involved the completion of a word cloud using Mentimeter<sup>13</sup> in which participants were asked to submit words in response to the question: *what thoughts pop into your head when you think about your experiences of school?*
  - » The second task involved the development of individual lifelines of their journey through school which was designed to explore and prompt discussion on *young people's everyday experiences of school*.
- A task in which the overall group was split into smaller groups to discuss the key consultation questions in separate breakout rooms.
- A final discussion between the overall group on issues which arose in the breakout rooms and key points of importance to the consultation questions.

Each of the tasks resulted in a number of outputs which are described in further detail below. The outputs were collated by DCEDIY staff and shared with ERC staff, along with notes taken by DCEDIY staff.

9 Although this is a small number of participants overall, it is common for consultation to involve much smaller numbers of participants than might be involved in large-scale surveys or research projects. For example, in describing the lived experiences of children living in Direct Provision during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ombudsman for Children draws on data from six children gathered in online or telephone interviews. Some recent in-person consultations with children and young people have involved higher numbers of participants, e.g., Daniels et al. (2014) included 67 young people in in-person workshops while 73 children from nine accommodation centres took part in a consultation on living in direct provision (Ombudsman for Children, 2020).

10 The consultation took place in July 2021, over a year after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff at DCEDIY had adapted their in-person consultation activities for online consultations within this time.

11 Consultation participants were also given the option to pick an item and write it in the group chat if they did not want to leave the room.

12 Examples of items included books to represent English; a novel to represent French; a maths set, dice, ruler and pencil, and playing cards to represent Mathematics; a test tube to represent Science; computer wires, cables, and connections to represent Computer Science; coloured pencils to represent Technical Graphics and Art; a piano to represent Music; a copy of the Irish Constitution to represent History; and a Cabinet Handbook to represent Civic, Social, and Political Education (CSPE).

13 <https://www.mentimeter.com>

Padlet<sup>14</sup> was used during the breakout room discussions to collect responses from young people. Participants had the option to type in their responses to the consultation questions on Padlet themselves, or discuss their points and let the facilitator enter their response on Padlet.

## 2.5 DATA ANALYSIS

### Primary

Thematic analysis was conducted on pupils' written responses.<sup>15</sup> While participants were provided with space to draw pictures to depict their responses, drawings are not analysed in this report (examples of drawings submitted are included in Appendix 7).

Children's responses were data-entered into Microsoft Excel. Each response was assigned to one or more codes, developed in an iterative process by researchers working on the project. Codes were grouped into four overarching themes: **1.** Curriculum, teaching and learning<sup>16</sup>, **2.** Culture and learning environment, **3.** Relationships and partnerships, **4.** Play, recreation, and stress reduction.<sup>17</sup> Selection of the higher level themes was informed by the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023* (DES, 2018b), by an adapted version of the general model from Compen, De Witte, and Schelfhout (2019; see Rawdon, Gilleece, Denner, Sampson, & Cosgrove, 2021), and by the codes developed through analysis of the data.

A descriptive analysis of the codes generated from children's responses to these questions is presented in this report and in some instances, a breakdown is provided by grade and gender. Analysis by school type is not reported, given the very small number of schools involved. No statistical inferences can be made from the data, given the small sample size which was not designed to be representative. Rather, this consultation provides an initial test of an approach which involved using open-ended written questions with young children for the purposes of eliciting broad responses. Secondly, the responses provide an indication of children's priorities and preferences for teaching and learning in school. The authors acknowledge that reflexive thematic analysis is “*considered a reflection of the researcher's interpretive analysis of the data conducted at the intersection of: (1) the dataset; (2) the theoretical assumptions of the analysis; and (3) the analytical skills/resources of the researcher (Braun and Clarke, 2019)*”, (Byrne, 2022). Therefore, the researcher's subjective role in the data analysis process is acknowledged by the authors and alternative coding may be equally valid.

The codes developed from qualitative analysis of children's responses are represented using treemaps. Each rectangle in the treemap represents a code. Within each theme, the size of each rectangle is proportional to the number of times a code is represented in children's responses. Comparisons of the sizes of rectangles across themes is not possible as different numbers of responses are represented by each theme. To ensure that children's voices remain to the fore of this report, and to minimise the risk of misinterpretation, direct quotes from children are included for further insights into their feelings and opinions.

14 <https://www.padlet.com>

15 Pupils' responses were edited for spelling but not for grammar.

16 This theme refers to instruction practices and forms of interactive learning, as well as teacher and student learning aids.

17 While three of the key themes identified link to elements of the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023* (DES, 2018b), the fourth element of the framework ('Policy & Planning') is not included as analysis did not suggest that it would be appropriate to group responses under this heading. Rather, codes that did not fit under the headings **1.** Curriculum, teaching and learning, **2.** Culture and learning environment, or **3.** Relationships and partnerships are grouped under the theme 'Play, recreation, and stress reduction'.

## Post-primary

The key outputs analysed were:

- Mentimeter outputs from the task in which participants described their *thoughts about their experiences of school*,
- Lifeline drawings of *young people's everyday experiences of school*,
- Padlet outputs from breakout room discussions on the consultation questions,
- DCEDIY facilitators' notes, and
- ERC researchers' notes.

These outputs were examined for overarching themes by an ERC researcher following the consultation sessions. Information from both consultation sessions was collated for analysis in some instances. When discussing the key consultation questions, participants were split into two groups and directed to online breakout rooms. In each group, suggestions for how teachers can make learning more engaging and easier were noted on Padlet. In addition, the researchers' notes and the DCEDIY facilitators' notes were included in analysis.

Given the different consultation approach for post-primary students, i.e., online discussion rather than a written task, a bottom-up approach was used to code key discussion points. These were then grouped into themes. Efforts are made in Chapter 3 to map these discussion points to the four key areas of wellbeing promotion in the whole-school approach outlined in the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023* (DES, 2018b) and the adapted version of the general model from Compen et al. (2019; see Rawdon et al., 2021).

# Chapter 3: Findings

## 3.1 RESPONSES

### Primary

A total of 471 consultation sheets were returned from pupils, with an approximately equal split by gender (girl n=202; boy n=229; other n=1; missing gender n=39). The number of valid responses (i.e., excluding blank responses, drawing only responses, or invalid responses) available for analysis was 427. Further detail on missing or invalid data is as follows:

- Blank/missing responses (n=11)
- Drawing only responses (n=24) – the majority of these (n=23) were collected from children in Senior Infants
- Invalid responses (i.e., vague or difficult to interpret) (n=9).

Table 1 provides information about participating pupils' grade and age.

**Table 1: Cross tabulation of the numbers of primary pupil responses by grade and age**

| Pupil Age                   | Snr. Infants (n) | First class (n) | Second class (n) | Third class (n) | Fourth class (n) | Fifth class (n) | Sixth class (n) | Special Class | Total for Each Age |
|-----------------------------|------------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------|--------------------|
| 6                           | 71               |                 |                  |                 |                  |                 |                 |               | 71                 |
| 7                           | 49               | 44              |                  |                 |                  |                 |                 |               | 93                 |
| 8                           |                  | 8               | 19               | 1               |                  |                 |                 |               | 28                 |
| 9                           |                  |                 | 5                | 44              |                  |                 |                 |               | 49                 |
| 10                          |                  |                 |                  | 18              | 35               | 2               |                 |               | 55                 |
| 11                          |                  |                 |                  |                 | 2                | 49              |                 |               | 51                 |
| 12                          |                  |                 |                  |                 |                  | 6               | 60              |               | 66                 |
| 13                          |                  |                 |                  |                 |                  |                 | 22              |               | 22                 |
| <b>Total for Each Grade</b> | 120              | 52              | 24               | 63              | 37               | 57              | 82              | 0             | 435                |

Note. Grade level is missing for 36 responses. Pupils in special classes are not represented in the current consultation and it is not known if special classes declined to participate or if the participating schools did not have special classes.

Table 2 provides some information about the characteristics of participating primary schools.

**Table 2: Characteristics of primary schools participating in pupil consultation**

| School No.     | School Location<br>Urban/<br>Rural | School Gender<br>Mix<br>Girls (G),<br>Boys (B),<br>Mixed (M) | Language of<br>instruction<br>English/<br>Irish | School<br>DEIS status<br>DEIS/non-<br>DEIS | No. of<br>participating<br>students in<br>the school <sup>a</sup> | No. of Pupils<br>with a Support<br>Plan (SP)/<br>Support Plan<br>Plus (SP+) <sup>a</sup> | No. of<br>Pupils<br>with EAL<br>Support <sup>a</sup> |
|----------------|------------------------------------|--|---|--|---|--|--|
| 1              | Rural                              | M  | English   | non-DEIS                                   | 65  | 5 (SP) 9 (SP+)   | 1  |
| 2              | Urban                              | M  | English   | non-DEIS                                   | 73  | 22(SP) 9 (SP+)   | 0  |
| 3              | Urban                              | M  | English   | non-DEIS                                   | 68  | 27(SP) 2 (SP+)   | 6  |
| 4              | Urban                              | M  | English   | non-DEIS                                   | 94  | 2 (SP) 7 (SP+)   | 0  |
| 5 <sup>b</sup> | Urban                              | M  | English   | DEIS band<br>1                             | 35  | 15(SP) 0 (SP+)   | 2  |
| 6              | Urban                              | M  | English   | non-DEIS                                   | 57  | 13(SP) 5 (SP+)   | 2  |
| 7              | Urban                              | B  | English   | DEIS band<br>1                             | 24  | 11(SP) 5 (SP+)   | 0  |
| 8              | Urban                              | M  | English   | non-DEIS                                   | 41  | 2 (SP) 4 (SP+)   | 5  |

Note. <sup>a</sup>Data were provided by the class teacher of each participating class and numbers were collated for each school. <sup>b</sup>Three classes participated from this school; however, data were not provided for one participating class group. Number of participating students in the school, number of pupils with a School Support Plan/School Support Plan Plus, and number of pupils with EAL support are based on data returned by two teachers.

## Post-primary

A total of 25 young people participated in the online consultation sessions. The mean age of participants was 15.6 years (see Table 3 for a full breakdown of participants' ages). For session 1, seven girls and five boys participated. For session 2, seven girls and six boys participated. The young people were participants in Comhairle na nÓg and represented Comhairlí from around Ireland (see Table 4 for a breakdown based on young people's self-reports; see also Appendix 8 for further detail). Participants were from a mix of city (n=6), town (n=12), and rural (n=7) locations throughout Ireland, with 15 counties represented.

**Table 3: Age of participants in online consultation sessions**

| Age in years | Session 1 (n=12) | Session 2 (n=13) | Overall (n=25) |
|--------------|------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 12           | 0                | 1                | 1              |
| 13           | 0                | 1                | 1              |
| 14           | 1                | 3                | 4              |
| 15           | 3                | 1                | 4              |
| 16           | 2                | 3                | 5              |
| 17           | 6                | 4                | 10             |

**Table 4: Areas that participants in online consultation were from**

| Province | City | Town | Rural |
|----------|------|------|-------|
| Leinster | 3    | 9    | 2     |
| Connacht | 0    | 1    | 4     |
| Munster  | 3    | 2    | 1     |

## 3.2 FINDINGS

### Primary

#### Consultation question 1: How can teachers make learning easier?

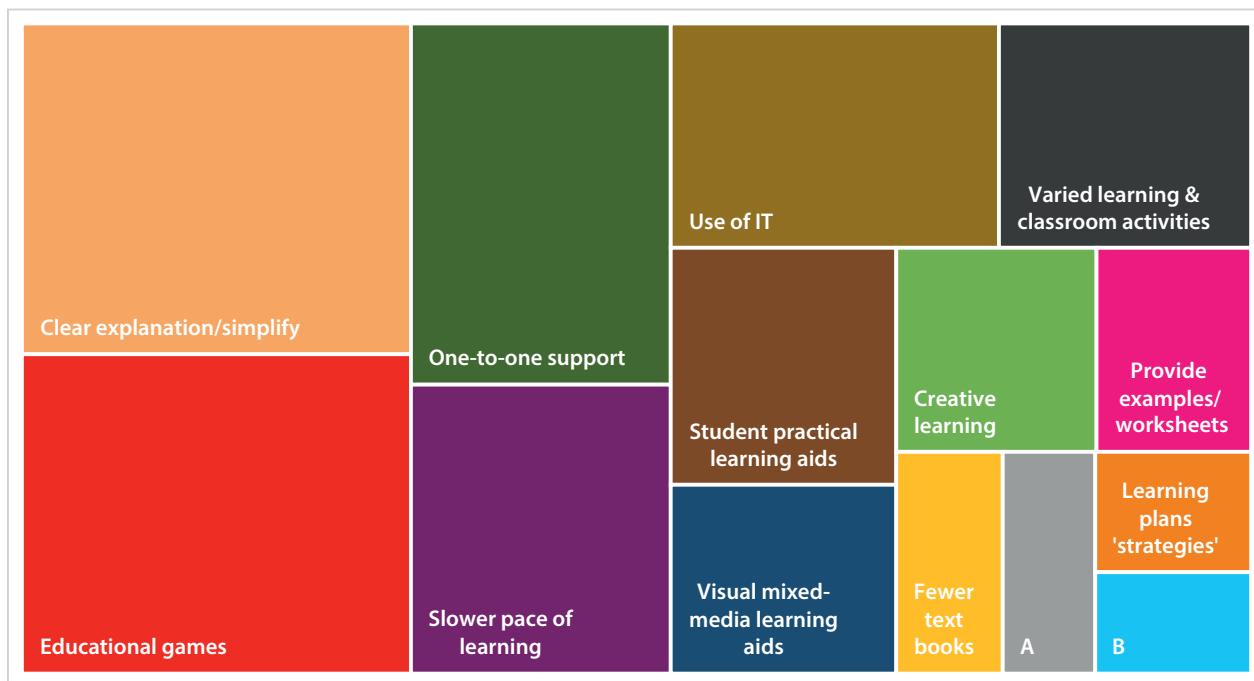
A total of 25 codes were identified through qualitative analysis of primary school children's written responses to the question: *How can teachers make learning easier?* These codes were grouped into four overarching themes, with each code assigned to one theme. The themes are discussed in turn.

#### Theme one: Curriculum, teaching and learning

Fourteen codes were grouped under the heading of 'Curriculum, teaching and learning' (see Figure 1). The codes with the largest frequencies under this theme are 'clear explanations/simplify' (n=82)<sup>18</sup>, 'educational games' (n=79), and 'one-to-one support' (n=60).

Responses coded under 'clear explanation/simplify' included children's recommendations for teachers to speak and write more clearly and to give more (as well as simplified) explanations in class to help them understand better. Children also suggested that teachers could use different ways to explain things in class, either by turning it into a game, or by giving some clues or tips on how to understand a subject they find difficult.

**Figure 1: 'Curriculum, teaching and learning' – A treemap of children's responses**



Note. A = Active teacher participation, B = Peer-to-peer learning and support

Another key area identified under this theme relates to the use of games, competitions, quizzes, and/or challenges as a way to make learning easier at school. The code 'educational games' was developed from children's responses that directly referred to games as a way to make learning easier in class. The majority of pupils referred to offline (physical/classroom) games while some referred to gamified learning tools on digital devices.

Educational games can be sub-divided into games that focus on activity/movement, the curriculum, and motivation/behaviour. Activity-focused games are those which give children the chance to move around in class (e.g., Go Noodle). Curriculum-focused games were those that children proposed may help them to better understand specific subjects (e.g., Maths or Irish). Examples of curriculum-focused games include Birds Vs Robots (Maths game), Smart Moves (Nintendo Switch®), Daily 10 (Maths game), and Irish Bingo. Motivation/behaviour-focused games were those that offer incentives to encourage children's participation. These included Dojo Points, Tables Champions, and Kahoot Quizzes.

Children also identified more 'one-to-one support' in class as a means to make learning easier. This code incorporates responses from children that referred to more opportunities to talk with their teacher alone (up at their desk) about difficulties they were having in class or to do work in smaller groups.

Some children referred to a need for a slower pace of learning while a similar number referred to IT or digital learning aids. Responses coded as 'use of IT' included recommendations to use tablet devices and computers instead of text books and/or workbooks. The vast majority of responses referring to the use of IT were positive. Children cited different reasons for suggestions related to IT, e.g., some want to reduce the number of books they have to carry home; others want to make it easier for their teachers to check their homework; and some felt it was better for the environment to use less paper and fewer books.

Responses coded as 'varied learning & classroom activities' included suggestions for more varied activities (e.g., field trips, excursions, watching films in class, learning about new places and food, as well as learning about new topics/things in general).

Children's responses also suggest that they would like more hands-on and practical lessons (such as arts and crafts, music, and role-play) which give them the chance to learn-through-doing. These responses were coded as 'creative learning'.

## **Theme two: Culture and learning environment**

The five codes assigned to the theme 'Culture and learning environment' reflect children's responses about changes or additions to their immediate learning environment in class and the wider school environment that would make learning easier for them at school. Figure 2 shows the codes included under this theme.

The code 'lessons outdoors' (n=24) reflects children's responses that stated that they would like to have more lessons outdoors. Some children suggested that lessons outdoors "*feel relaxing and calm*" (Boy, 10, Fourth class); others suggest that "*it could help us focus*" (Girl, 9, Third class). Some children also wrote about "*learning about nature*" (Girl, 8, Second class) during lessons outdoors.

'More classroom support' (n=12) incorporates children's suggestions to have more than one teacher in the classroom to "*help out*" (Girl, 7, Senior Infants). Others indicated that more support in class would mean that one teacher could help pupils who are finding a "*subject hard*" and the other could "*be there to watch the other students that don't find the subject hard*" (Boy, 10, Fourth class).

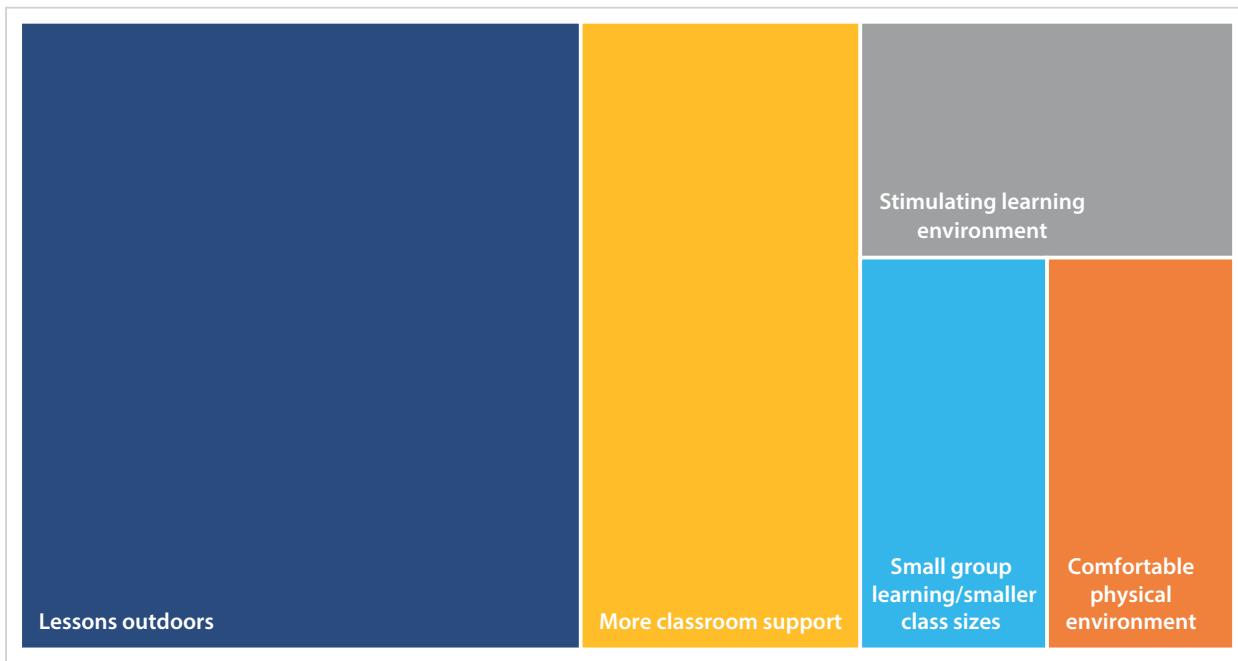
Some children also indicated that a more visually 'stimulating learning environment' (e.g., more educational posters/pictures/diagrams around the school or in the classroom) would make learning easier as they could refer to these if they needed to jog their memory about something they forgot from their lessons. This is illustrated by the response: "*Little posters around the wall so we remember what we are learning...*" (Boy, 11, Fifth class). A small number of children also suggested that smaller class sizes/learning groups would make learning easier. Comfortable seating arrangements were

highlighted by a small number of children who explained why this would make learning easier for them:

*“...chairs like yoga balls or bean bags or something like that. In my opinion yoga balls would be most suitable. First of all there is more chance of people paying attention in class because people’s heads will be fairly high above the tables.*

*Second, it is better for concentration somehow.”* (Girl, 11, Fifth class)

**Figure 2: Treemap of codes assigned to ‘culture and learning environment’**



### Theme three: Relationships and partnerships

‘Student choice/voice’ (n=10) is included under ‘Relationships and partnerships’ as it incorporates the relationship dynamic between children and teachers in class.<sup>19</sup> Some children expressed the desire to have more of a say (or choice) when it comes to seating arrangements, timetables, lessons and/or activities. The following examples illustrate this theme:

*“Teachers can make things easier by giving us a choice of chairs...”*

(Girl, 11, Fifth class)

*“...It can also be easier if kids have a choice on what topic they work on...”*

(Girl, 11, Fifth class)

This issue of an unequal power dynamic in children’s and teachers’ relationships was noted by a small number of children and is illustrated by the following response:

*“I have heard some teachers explaining things to their class. Then someone will put up their hand. The teacher will say no questions asked. I personally do not think this is fair.”* (Girl, 9, Third class)

These quotes demonstrate that some children would like more opportunity to voice their needs/ opinions about things that matter to them in class. Girls were somewhat more likely than boys to express a desire to have more of a say on things at school. Also, responses of this nature were more common among older students.

19

A treemap is not presented for this theme as it contains too few codes.

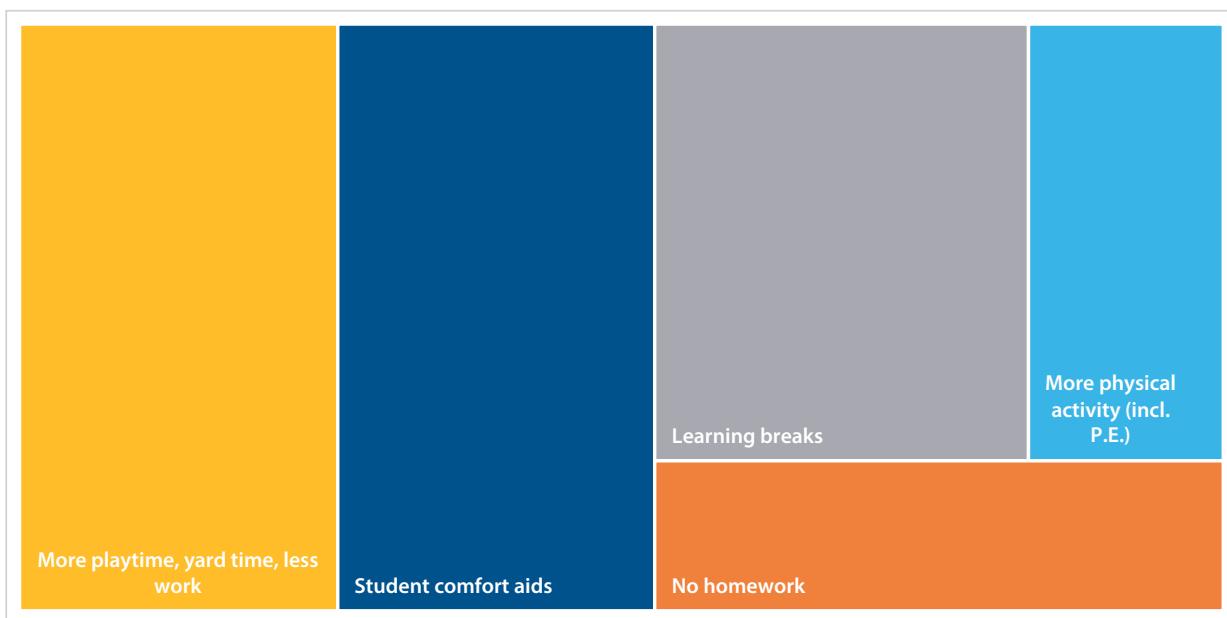
### Theme four: Play, recreation, and stress reduction

The fourth theme encompasses issues related to 'Play, recreation, and stress reduction' (Figure 3). The two codes which describe responses under this theme most commonly given by children are 'more playtime, yard time, less work' (n=24) and 'student comfort aids' (n=24).

Regarding 'student comfort aids', responses suggest that for some children, objects such as toys or teddies may provide useful supports in the classroom. Children suggest that these may be particularly useful during stressful times such as during a test. Children also reported feeling supported through activities such as bring your pet to school, walks in the yard at school, watching mindfulness videos, or learning about nature. These were reported to make the process of learning easier.

'Learning breaks' (e.g., 'brain breaks' and 'golden time'<sup>20</sup>) (n=21) were recommended by some children with somewhat smaller numbers of children suggesting 'no homework' or 'more physical activity (including PE)'.

**Figure 3: Treemap of codes assigned to 'play, recreation, and stress reduction'**



### Other recommendations

Codes that had fewer than five responses are combined under 'Other recommendations'. These are: 'later start time', 'teacher subject enjoyment/knowledge', 'practical demonstrations', 'paired learning', 'teamwork', 'linked learning', 'project work', and 'be kind to classmates'. These codes give a flavour of some of the other activities suggested by a smaller number of children that teachers could use in class to make learning easier. These codes relate to teaching methods (e.g., linked learning, i.e., "*integration between all subjects*" [Boy, 10, Fifth class]) as well as teaching approaches (e.g., paired learning, teamwork, practical demonstrations, and project work).

<sup>20</sup> Refers to a positive behaviour management strategy used in some primary schools. It is sometimes referred to as 'rainbow time' or 'reward time'. It can be a period of time (up to an hour) usually on a Friday afternoon, when children are allowed to stop 'work' and spend time doing enjoyable activities.

## Supplementary pupil responses under each of the four themes

The following quotes relate to each of the four overarching themes **1. Curriculum, teaching and learning, 2. Culture and learning environment, 3. Relationships and partnerships, 4. Play, recreation, and stress reduction**. Some quotes are assigned to more than one theme.

### Themes one (curriculum, teaching and learning) and four (play, recreation, and stress reduction)

“Teachers can make learning easier by turning them into games for example would you rather just stand up and skip count<sup>21</sup> or pass the ball around and skip count, see the second one sounds more fun but they’re the same.” (Male, 11, Fifth class)

“If the teacher asks everyone what they need help with and the teacher can help the child by making a lesson on what they need help with. And when the child understands they can ask the next child and do a lesson on that too.” (Female, 10, Fourth class)

“Be a little less mad. Help a little bit more.” (Female, 9, Third class)

“I think teachers should enjoy subjects [they] are teaching too.” (Female, 10, Third class)

“She/he can explain it more like spend a bit more time explaining it. She/he can answer more questions. Say it a bit slower.” (Male, 10, Fourth class)

### Themes two (culture and learning environment) and four (play, recreation, and stress reduction)

“There would be 2 teachers in the classroom one for the people that are finding the subject hard and the other one in there to watch the other students that don’t find the subject hard.” (Male, 10, Fourth class)

“Bringing learning outside is easier I think. It feels very relaxing and calm. I was more concentrated on my book than ever when our class got to do reading outside. Also no homework to relax your mind.” (Male, 10, Fourth class)

“Teachers could include games which make the subject we are learning easier because it feels like we are playing instead of being stressed out trying to cram everything into our heads.” (Female, 13, Sixth class)

### Theme three (relationships and partnerships)

“Sometimes I can’t focus because I am uncomfortable so if [I] had choice of chair I would be focused and comfortable.” (Female, 11, Fifth class)

21

Skip count means counting numbers by adding the same number each time, e.g., skip counting by 3 results in 3, 6, 9, 12 etc.

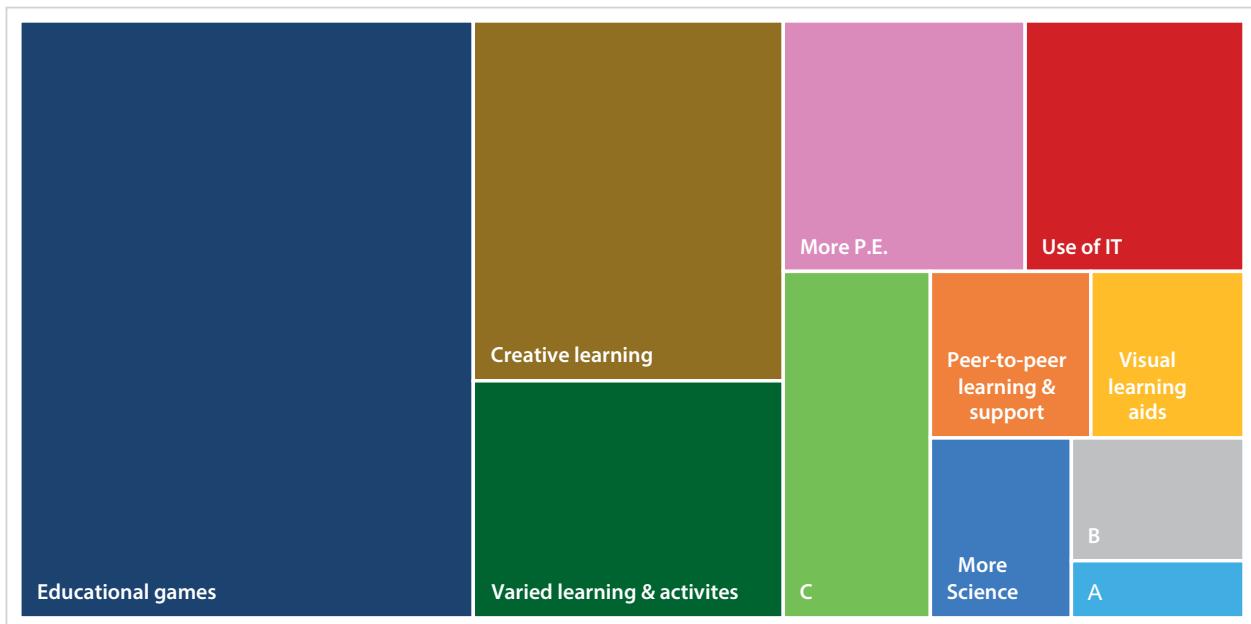
## Consultation question 2: How can teachers make learning more fun?

A total of 21 codes, grouped into four themes, were identified through qualitative analysis of primary school children's written responses to the question: *How can teachers make learning more fun?* As in the previous section, a treemap is used to illustrate the relative importance of each code within a theme.

### Theme one: Curriculum, teaching and learning

The codes with the highest frequency assigned to theme one are 'educational games' (n=192), 'creative learning' (n=79), 'varied learning & activities' (n=52), and 'more P.E.' (n=43). Figure 4 shows the relative importance of each of these within the theme.

**Figure 4: Treemap of codes assigned to 'curriculum, teaching and learning'**



Note. A = Active teacher participation, B = Visually appealing and fun worksheets, C = More interactive lessons

As with question one (*How can teachers make learning easier?*), 'educational games' were widely mentioned as a means of making learning more fun. A number of children referred to games as a way to make learning more fun in class. As previously, 'educational games' is sub-divided into games that focus on activity/movement (whereby games give children the chance to move around in class (e.g., Go Noodle), the curriculum (where games help children to better understand subjects such as Maths and Irish)<sup>22</sup>, and motivation/behaviour focused games (whereby children's participation is encouraged and incentivised through competitions and quizzes)<sup>23</sup>. The following children's responses illustrate their opinions about educational games as a method that teachers could use to make learning more fun in class.

*"The teacher made it more fun by playing games such as Verbs bingo, tables champion, stop the bus and headbands."* (Boy, 12, Sixth class)

<sup>22</sup> Examples of games provided by children include Birds Vs Robots (Maths game), Smart Moves (Nintendo Switch®), Daily 10 (Maths game), Irish Bingo, Verbs Bingo, and Spelling Bee.

<sup>23</sup> For instance, children referred to Dojo Points, Tables Champions, and Kahoot Quizzes.

*“Teachers can make learning more fun by playing games instead of writing in their copy. They will contribute in the learning more. Watching instead of reading because kids might wonder off in their imagination instead of taking in information.”* (Girl, 11, Fifth class)

*“Learning can be made more fun by hiding the boring parts in the fun parts! (e.g., making it fun). Or the teacher could take the class outside to do school work?! Or PE could be made longer? There’s tonnes of positives.”* (Boy, 10, Fourth class)

Games, competitions, quizzes, and/or challenges were commonly mentioned as a way to make learning fun at school. This suggests that learning through play is an important part of the learning process for children at school.

The code ‘varied learning & activities’ (n=52) reflects children’s recommendations/suggestions for more wide ranging learning activities in school. The following quotes show some children’s opinions about how a more varied approach to learning as well as incorporating different activities as part of their lessons would make learning more fun for them.

*“Teachers can make learning fun by playing games to do with the subject.”*

*“Teachers can make learning fun by teaching in an interesting way.”*

(Boy, 13, Sixth class)

*“Personally I believe that trips would be fun and better for learning. For fun I think the trip (walk/bus) for better learning you’re more likely to remember the trips out than sitting in the classroom. Going to different places will stand out in your mind and you will probably remember what you hear there.”* (Girl, 11, Fifth class)

*“By going to school trips and learning about them. And learn about the zoo and learn how to swim.”* (Girl, 7, First class)

In terms of ‘creative learning’ (n=79), children also referred to the use of stories, art and crafts, music, and role play. Younger children (e.g., Senior Infants) directly referred to *Aistear*<sup>24</sup> as a way of making learning more fun. One Fourth class boy suggested that “*in English stories you could act it out or do drama*” (Boy, 10, Fourth class). The following quotes provide further examples of how ‘creative’ forms of learning can make lesson more fun, according to pupils:

*“Teachers make learning more fun by doing the poems and the music.”*  
(Girl, 10 Fourth class)

*“Maybe you could play a game, write a poem, draw a picture, act it out or you could watch a video. All of these are to make it more fun to learn.”*  
(Girl, 10, Fourth class)

*“I would like more Aistear time.”* (Girl, 6, Senior Infants)

*“More cutting and stitching activities.”* (Boy, 6, Senior Infants)

In addition, a number of children referred to (more) P.E. as something that would make learning more fun for them at school. A somewhat higher number of boys (n=25) than girls (n=18) referred to P.E. as a way of making learning more fun. The following quotes show what some children thought about P.E.:

<sup>24</sup> This is the early childhood curriculum framework for all children from birth to 6 years in Ireland. The framework uses four interconnected themes to describe children’s learning and development: Well-being; Identity and Belonging; Communicating; and Exploring and Thinking (NCCA, 2021).

*“I think we do not have enough PE. We only have two days for PE. I think we should do PE every day because two days is not enough exercise.”*  
(Boy, 11, Fifth class)

*“I think teachers can make learning more fun by mixing it up with PE or art. That the learning is more fun and you get to do more of it in the day.”*  
(Boy, 10, Fourth class)

*“I think learning can be more fun if we spoke in another language when we did subjects like art, PE and drama.”* (Girl, 10, Fourth class)

Codes with lower frequencies include ‘use of IT’ (n=39) and ‘more interactive lessons’ (n=36). Some children advised that they would like to have more opportunity to use tablet devices or computers in class to support their learning.

*“I believe we should use iPads or tablets more often because I feel more students would rather use iPads because a lot of children go on their electronics for fun and I think they would find they are having fun in school.”*  
(Girl, 11, Fifth class)

Some children also recommended more interactive (i.e., practical/hands-on) lessons, for example:

*“The first thing that would make teaching more fun would be more interactive lessons.”* (Boy, 12, Fifth class)

*“Active learning like more science experiments.”* (Boy, 11, Fifth class)

*“Teachers can make learning fun by doing activities outside for example swimming and art and a few more things maybe we can also make a slime party.”* (Girl, 7, First class)

Codes with a frequency of less than 20 including ‘peer-to-peer learning & support’, ‘more Science’, ‘visual learning aids’ (e.g., the use of videos and pictures), and ‘visually appealing and fun worksheets’ also give an indication of other types of activities and methods teachers could incorporate into the pedagogical approach.

## **Theme two: Culture and learning environment**

The frequency of codes under themes two and three are presented in Figure 5 (combined, given the lower number of codes under each theme).

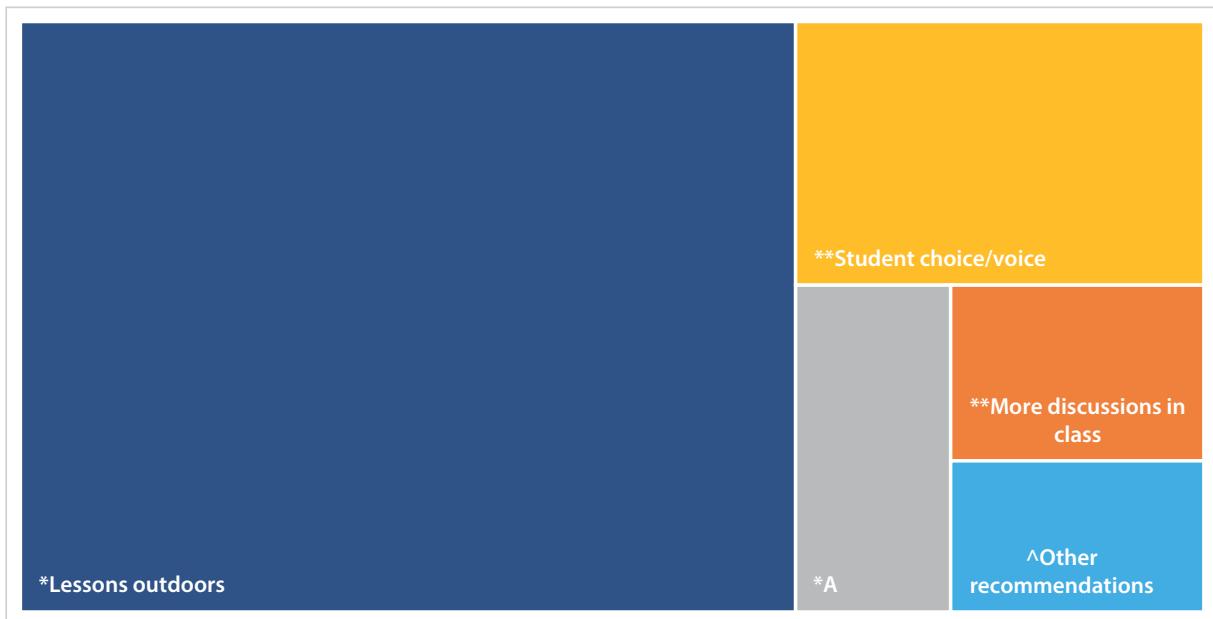
Starting with theme two, the code ‘lessons outdoors’ (n=72) has the highest frequency and it refers to children’s responses that request more opportunities to have lessons outdoors and to have more time (in general) to do more leisure activities outdoors on “nice days” (Boy, 11, Fifth class) and on “sunny days” (Girl, 7, First class). Children had different reasons for wanting more lessons outdoors. For some, they reported that they found it difficult to concentrate in class when it was hot and stuffy. For others, they suggested that it helped them feel more relaxed and calm outdoors in nature. Some children suggested that learning outdoors breaks the monotony of working inside all of the time. The following quotes capture some children’s rationale for having lessons outdoors:

*“They could also make learning more fun by not going by the books all the time and do it outside without any copies or anything.”* (Girl, 12, Sixth class)

*“Going out of school too walk around to see history around us.”*  
(Boy, 9, Third class)

*“Do work outside...Read outside in nice weather with friends...”*  
(Girl, 10, Fourth class)

**Figure 5: Treemap of codes assigned to 'culture and learning environment', 'relationships and partnerships', and 'other recommendations'**



Note. \* Indicates codes from Theme 2, \*\* Indicates codes from Theme 3

\*A= Comfortable physical environment ^ 'Other recommendations' includes codes with fewer than 5 responses: 'stimulating learning environment' and 'encourage creativity'

Some children also linked lessons outdoors to helping their overall wellbeing at school, for example:

*“...students can relax and focus if they do outdoor learning...”*  
(Girl, 11, Fifth class)

*“Teachers can make learning more fun by bringing us outside ...because of the stress and pressure to have it in on time.”* (Girl, 13, Sixth class)

Smaller numbers of students referred to how a 'comfortable physical environment' (n=8) (e.g., nice chairs) would help to make learning fun. In terms of 'other recommendations', a very small number of children suggested that having a more stimulating learning environment (e.g., more posters on the wall at school) and encouraging creativity would also make learning more fun.

### **Theme three: Relationships and partnerships**

Codes assigned to theme three refer to 'student choice/voice' (n=17) and 'more discussions in class' (n=7). Although frequencies for these codes are low, they nevertheless indicate important classroom practices that foster democratic participation in school. Children's comments suggest that learning would be more fun if they had more of a say on things (e.g., choice of chair, choice of 'favourite' lessons) as well as the chance to discuss issues that matter to them. The following quotes demonstrate some children's desire for more choice and voice in the classroom and how this relates to making learning more fun:

*“Chair choice would be fun so you can learn with who you want...”*

(Boy, 11, Fifth class)

*“Chairs: If we picked our own chair to sit in and the chairs will be more flexible and kids would be more happy/excited to sit in the chairs.”* (Girl, 12, Fifth class)

*“Teachers can make learning more fun by ...Letting children pick tasks and seats.”* (Boy, 11, Fifth class)

Some children asked for more chance to have discussions in class, children who referred to this were in Fifth and Sixth class.

*“More science experiments!!! Or more debates, to voice our opinions.”*

(Girl, 12, Sixth class)

*“More movement in class. More competitions. Have more discussions...”*

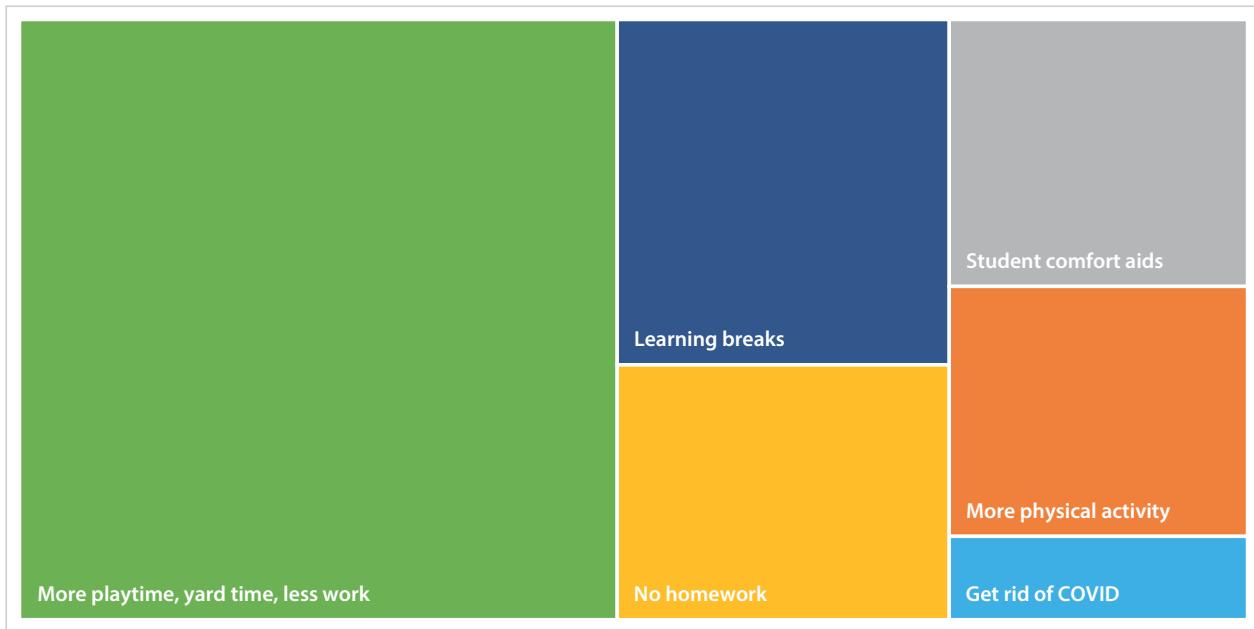
(Boy, 11, Fifth class)

*“...Discuss matches, movies etc. in a fun way.”* (Boy, 12, Fifth class)

#### **Theme four: Play, recreation, and stress reduction**

Under this theme, the code with the highest frequency is ‘more playtime, yard time, less work’ (n=72). Children accept that lessons and learning are central to school life. Yet they also display a nuanced understanding that the effectiveness of learning can be increased if it is turned into a fun endeavour. Figure 6 represents the proportion of codes assigned to theme four.

**Figure 6: Treemap of codes assigned to ‘play, recreation, and stress reduction’**



Children also recommend that ‘learning breaks’ (e.g. ‘brain breaks’ and ‘golden time’) (n=23) as well as ‘no homework’ (n=17) and ‘student comfort aids’ (e.g., music in class, teddy bears during tests, school bunny, fidget toys) would help to reduce stress levels and make learning fun. The following quotes demonstrate some children’s feelings or opinions about learning breaks, no homework, and comfort aids, with younger age groups more likely than their older counterparts to suggest using comfort aids:

*“Learning would be better if we had more activities and more work for bigger breaks and stuff it would be less stressful.”* (Girl, 11, Fifth class)

*“Let us draw or do a nice activity after we finish hard work.”*  
(Girl, 7, Senior Infants)

*“When I can have a break. My brain can rest.”* (Girl, 7, First class)

*“No homework because its stressing and people have things on.”*  
(Girl, 12, Sixth class)

*“...while we do our work maybe play some calming music.”*  
(Boy, 10, Fourth class)

Children’s responses suggest that more breaks at school (free time), less or ‘no’ homework, and the use of comforters could help children feel less pressured/stressed at school. Children’s comments also suggest that reduced stress levels may facilitate their ability and or willingness to engage more with lessons and learning as well as positively contributing to their overall experience of learning.

Lower numbers of children (n=15) referred to ‘more physical activity’ (i.e., other than P.E.) to help to make learning more fun. Examples included playing “soccer with other classes” (Boy, 11, Fifth class), “run more laps” (Boy, 6, Senior Infants), “just dance more” (Boy, 7, Senior Infants), “do some exercise” (Boy, 12, Fifth class), and “by keeping it active” (Girl, 12, Sixth class).

Some children in Senior Infants referred to learning being more fun when restrictions associated with COVID-19 are lifted. The following quotes demonstrate how some children felt about the impacts of COVID-19 on their learning experiences at school.

*“Corona virus is all over. After coronavirus we will have more art. Have more PE. Have more story time.”* (Boy, 6)

*“The teachers give us more play time and make corona go away.”* (Girl, 7)

### **Supplementary pupil responses under each of the four themes**

The following quotes relate to each of the four overarching themes **1**. Curriculum, teaching and learning, **2**. Culture and learning environment, **3**. Relationships and partnerships, **4**. Play, recreation, and stress reduction and they give a flavour of students’ overall opinions about what teachers can do to make learning more fun. Some quotes overlap more than one theme.

## Themes one (curriculum, teaching and learning), two (culture and learning environment), and four (play, recreation, and stress reduction)

“Teachers can make learning more fun by bringing us outside or using iPads and have no homework because of the stress and pressure to have it in on time.”  
(Female, 13, Sixth class)

“Extra play after very very very hard work.” (Male, 7, First class)

“More movement in class. More competitions. Have more discussions. Allow plenty of time between subjects. Handle real objects e.g. weights, rulers.” (Male, 11, Fifth class)

### Theme two (culture and learning environment)

“Teachers can make work more fun by outside learning. I think outside learning is really important for children and adults. It can boost the student’s confidence more and it can be a way to be more active!” (Female, 10, Fifth class)

“Give us food right on time be nicer do more games be able to pack on Friday and have a bit less work please.” (Female, 11, Fifth class)

### Theme three (relationships and partnerships)

“...more debates, to voice our opinions.” (Female, 12, Sixth class)

### Theme four (play, recreation, and stress reduction)

“Teachers can make learning more fun by not overloading students with too much work.”  
(Female, 13, Sixth class)

## Post-primary

### Initial activities

#### Young people’s thoughts on their experiences of school

Young people were asked to use Mentimeter to submit the thoughts that came to mind when they think about their experiences of school. The word clouds produced via Mentimeter in sessions 1 and 2 are presented in Figures 7 and 8, respectively. Key words identified in both groups included words relating to *teaching and learning* such as teachers, studying, learning, academics, knowledge, homework, PowerPoints, independence, debate, and discussion; words relating to *peer relationships* such as friends, friendship, and social; words relating to *positive aspects of school* such as possibilities, opportunity, interesting, fun, enjoyable, memorable, and safe space; and words relating to *negative aspects of school* such as stress, anxious, worry, pressure, and tiredness.

Figure 7: Mentimeter word cloud from session 1



Figure 8: Mentimeter word cloud from session 2



A group discussion was held following the completion of the Mentimeter task. Table 5 includes some of the points raised and discussed in more detail in sessions 1 and 2. In Table 5, the topic of *teaching and learning* maps to 'curriculum (teaching & learning)' within the four key elements of wellbeing promotion in a whole-school approach outlined in the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023* (DES, 2018b). The topic of *peer relationships* relates to the key element of 'relationships & partnerships' within the same framework.

**Table 5: Group discussions on participants' thoughts about their experiences of school**

| Topic                      | Comments  |
|----------------------------|---|
| Teaching and learning      | <i>Independence</i> – References were made to teachers giving students more independence.   |
|                            | <i>Discussion</i> – An example was given of a teacher who always encouraged class discussion. The participant stated that “this put us thinking”. The participant highlighted the importance of not just listening to someone or reading a textbook.              |
|                            | <i>Busy (comment links to time for reflection)</i> – One participant commented on moving from class to class for different subjects and the only break is at lunchtime. Some students need time to reflect and this isn't possible as there is no go over period. |
| Peer relationships         | See ‘positive aspects of school’ for an example of opportunities to talk to peers.  |
| Positive aspects of school | <i>Interesting</i> – Participants made references to “learning new stuff” and learning “fun stuff” that they wouldn't normally do, e.g., experiments in Science.  |
|                            | <i>Possibilities</i> – One participant stated “make the most of it”, i.e., making the most of opportunities for activities.   |
|                            | Another stated that certain activities “helps me get through it” i.e., participation in Comhairle na nÓg and music.   |
| Negative aspects of school | <i>Boring</i> – It was suggested that it is easy to “zone out” in school. One participant made reference to teachers talking at students rather than to students.   |
|                            | <i>Stress and time management</i> – Lots of things to do at the same time, e.g., essays.  |
|                            | Managing and balancing all subjects together is stressful.  |
|                            | Deadlines are stressful, especially if students do not know how to do homework.   |
|                            | Exams result in a build-up of stress, i.e., everything building up to a single day.   |
|                            | <i>Unhygienic (specific to COVID-19 context)</i> – Feeling unsafe due to COVID-19 and working in a small area.  |

### Young people's everyday experiences of school

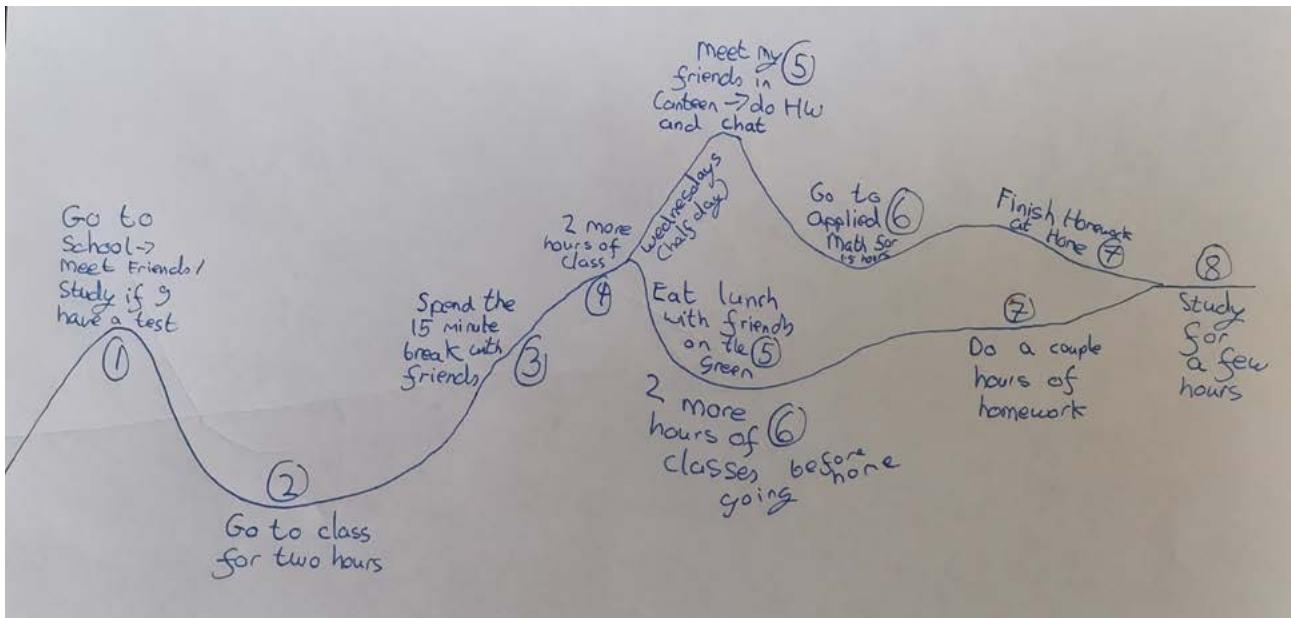
In the second task, young people were given time to consider their everyday experiences of school. Participants were asked to draw a lifeline<sup>25</sup> and add their experiences of school. While some participants focused on including the details for a full day at school, others focused on a lifeline of their experiences since the start of their primary or post-primary education.

Participants discussed their timelines and submitted the timeline to the DCEDIY facilitator at the end of their session. Examples of the lifelines produced by young people are included in Figures 9 and 10. In general, lifelines depicted information relating to daily routines; teaching and learning; positive and negative aspects of participants' school experiences including content about participants' feelings about school life; peer and student-teacher relationships; extra-curricular activities; curriculum and exams; and content relating to the impact of COVID-19 on school experiences. In each session, a group discussion followed this activity. Topics discussed are outlined in Table 6. Comments are presented under the headings: *teaching and learning*, *peer relationships*, *positive aspects of school*,

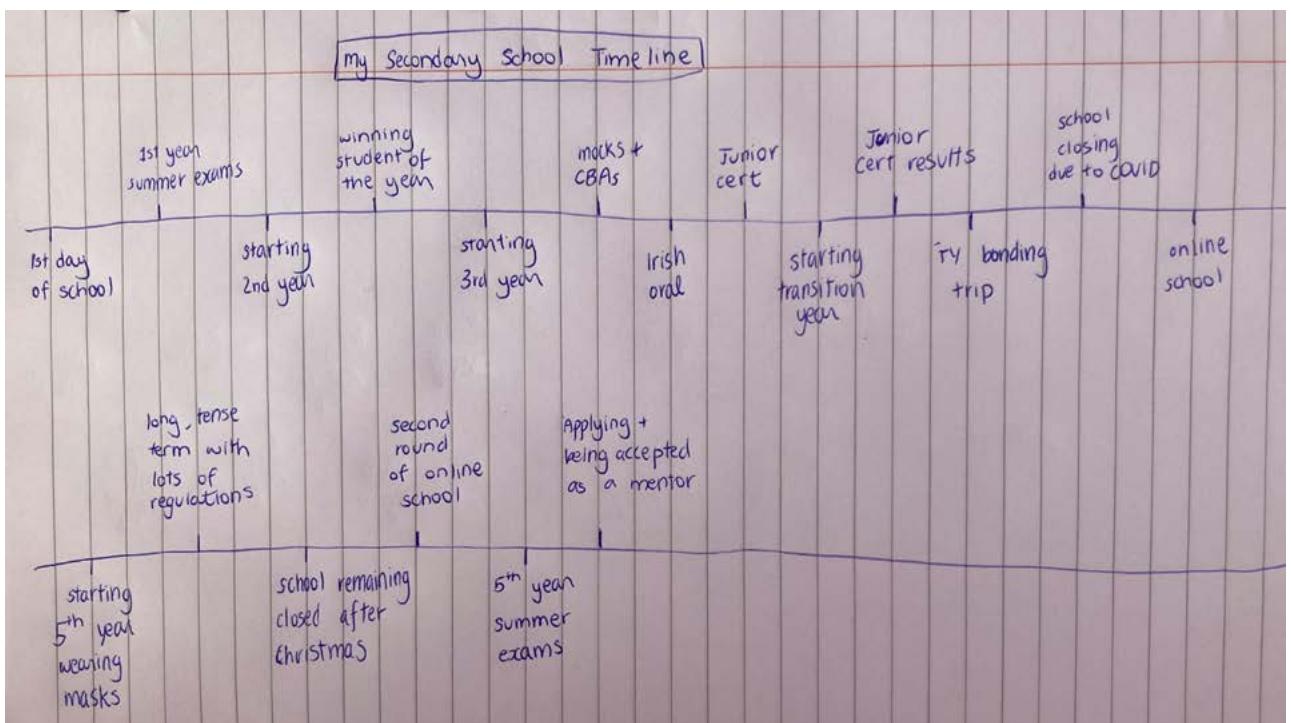
<sup>25</sup> A lifeline is a timeline of a student's journey through school (a school year, day, or overall school experience) with key events noted.

and negative aspects of school. Again, some of the topic discussed relate to the four key elements of the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023* (DES, 2018b), e.g., teaching and learning maps to 'curriculum (teaching & learning)' and peer relationships relates to 'relationships & partnerships'.

**Figure 9: Lifeline example 1**



**Figure 10: Lifeline example 2**



**Table 6: Group discussion on everyday experiences of school as depicted in lifelines**

| Topic                      | Comments  |
|----------------------------|---|
| Teaching and learning      | <i>Classroom management</i> – Participants recalled how disruptive classes were when teachers could not maintain control. This impacted negatively on the participant's learning.   |
| Peer relationships         | <i>Social opportunities</i> – A participant gave their school musical as an example of an opportunity to meet new people by taking part.  |
|                            | <i>Friends</i> – Participants noted that friendship and relationships are important in school.  |
| Positive aspects of school | <i>Opportunity</i> – To get involved in committees. Having committees available and school staff actively advertising them and making them open to everyone creates opportunities.  |
| Negative aspects of school | <i>General comment</i> – “More negative things come to mind”.   |
|                            | <i>COVID-19 context</i> – Students not wearing masks and teachers not doing anything about it.  |
|                            | Much less stressed “in a weird way” when COVID-19 hit. The participant stated that this allowed their family to be closer and to have time to wind down and stated that they had a busy schedule before COVID-19.   |
|                            | <i>Stress</i> – Lots of stress relates to homework rather than school during the day. Being in school is less stressful than homework. A second participant agreed with this point and stated that stress from a student's home situation could add to this and result in the student putting off work. |
|                            | Earlier years are more enjoyable as work and stress makes later years stressful.  |
|                            | Homework is more stressful than work in school as teachers are there in school to support work.   |

**Consultation question 1: How can teachers make learning more engaging?**

Suggestions for how teachers can make learning more engaging are outlined in Table 7. The content is collated across breakout groups and sessions. These suggestions were categorised under four broad headings (teaching methods; student-teacher relationships; learning environment; and other). The topic of *teaching methods* includes references to teaching modes; increasing opportunities for class discussions; encouraging participation and critical thinking; encouraging independent learning; and examinations. The topic *student-teacher relationships* includes references to teachers' own behaviour and fostering or encouraging positive relationships with students. References to classroom management and the classroom environment were categorised as learning environment. A small number of suggestions were categorised as other. These included suggestions to make learning more fun and relate learning/content to real life. Linking these themes to the four key elements of the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023* (DES, 2018b), *teaching methods* aligns with ‘curriculum (teaching & learning)’, *student-teacher relationships* maps to ‘relationships & partnerships’, while *learning environment* might be placed within ‘culture & environment’ in the wellbeing framework.

**Table 7: Participants' suggestions for how teachers can make learning more engaging (Padlet entries)**

|                                      |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Teaching methods</b>              | <p><i>Modes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Audio, visual, and written approaches combined</li> <li>- Using alternative methods such as videos or documentaries</li> <li>- Using alternative media or methods such as OneNote or links to videos</li> <li>- Avoid reading from textbooks</li> <li>- Give people a choice to how they want to learn because some people prefer group work and some people prefer to work alone</li> <li>- In art class when we learned about ancient burial rituals he'd pretend a student was dead, and used to make us perform the rituals, and he'd reassemble the furniture to resemble the tombs and ancient burial graves or passages. It really stayed in my mind for ages after it happened!</li> <li>- Rather than teaching exclusively by the books we should also be promoting in class learning and learning by doing</li> <li>- Avoid reading out of text books – 'work with' the students 'not sit above them reading'</li> <li>- Activities need to be practical - learn by doing</li> <li>- Less tech</li> <li>- Varying the learning tools to reduce the sense of monotony, i.e., handouts, PowerPoints, the book etc.</li> </ul> |
|                                      | <p><i>Discussion:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Personalised approach – engaged in discussion</li> <li>- Teacher acting as a chair person – this means ensuring everyone has an input – not just the people who always speak – give shy or anxious people a chance too by calling on them</li> <li>- Calling on all students to input not just the students who always speak</li> <li>- Facilitating engaging and open discussions with the whole class</li> <li>- Combating boredom – as you can zone out and not pay attention especially when the teacher is talking at you rather than having two-way discussion</li> <li>- Ask students to try explain something for the rest of the class so it is explained in their own terms</li> <li>- Get class discussions going, e.g., in politics around an issue or in physics what everyone thinks the answer is and why.</li> <li>- Not such a rigid structure – especially noticed in less experienced teachers. Better if teachers go with the flow, incorporate discussion.</li> <li>- Opening the class up to group discussions</li> </ul>  |
|                                      | <p><i>Encouraging participation and critical thinking:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Explaining and encouraging students to get involved and expand learning, not just reading out of the text book</li> <li>- Tell more stories/allegories. This works really well at the start of the class – a story that relates to the topic gets discussion going. If left to the end of the topic students have zoned out.</li> <li>- 'Inevitable' approach – not boring, interesting and connecting with students</li> <li>- Doing activities that includes all the audience-not just 'binary learning'</li> <li>- Allow for different opinions instead of reinforcing that the popular and less controversial opinion is objectively right</li> </ul>   |
|                                      | <p><i>Independent learning:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Get students to research topics themselves, e.g., project</li> <li>- Allow more freedom/creativity in how students can make projects/work. Rather than just essay, essay, essay.</li> </ul>  |
|                                      | <p><i>Examinations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I think having more formative assessments tests is a good idea; however, this is an unpopular opinion. I just find more frequent tests more useful for me personally as I only study during tests.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Student-teacher relationships</b> | <p><i>Teacher behaviour:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Be friendly and approachable</li> <li>- Teachers sharing their personal stories</li> <li>- Teachers need to know how to deal with 'open conflict of their views' if they want to do class discussion</li> <li>- Teachers should be less rigid – they get distressed when they don't get everything done</li> </ul>  |
|                                      | <p><i>Fostering positive relationships:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Respectful – there needs to be a balance – not come in hard at the start of the year but also they are not your friend – neither works, needs to be a mixture</li> <li>- The teachers should be less condescending towards students, especially if the students are willing to learn and are being respectful.</li> </ul>  |

|                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| <b>Learning environment</b> | <p><i>Classroom management:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Class control disrupts learning</li> </ul> <p><i>Classroom environment:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Changing the environment in which you learn. For example maybe going outside! Learning in a classroom can get very monotonous.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Other</b>                | <p><i>Make learning fun:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Don't make it all about learning and add things that people our age would like</li> <li>- I find I can learn better when teachers make personal statements or jokes</li> <li>- Relate it back to people's interests</li> <li>- Use a 'surprise' activity in the day. Makes it more memorable.</li> </ul> <p><i>Relate to real life:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teachers should explain why the topic we are learning will help us in later life, so students trust that they're not just wasting their time learning something that won't help them in everyday life.</li> </ul> |

## Consultation question 2: How can teachers make learning easier?

Suggestions for how teachers can make learning easier are outlined in Table 8. The content is collated across breakout groups and sessions. Responses were categorised under the broad headings of teaching methods; student-teacher relationships; and learning environment. In relation to *teaching methods*, suggestions made reference to modes of teaching; links to curriculum and examinations; providing clear examples; encouraging discussion and critical thinking; use of examples and analogies; building on previous learning; providing additional resources; encouraging collaboration; independent learning; providing feedback; and offering support. Responses categorised as *student-teacher relationships* included listening to students' voices; understanding students' needs; fostering positive relationships; and avoiding judgement. *Learning environment* includes classroom management; classroom environment; and other. Again, these themes link to the key elements of the wellbeing framework (DES, 2018b) as follows: *teaching methods* maps to 'curriculum (teaching & learning)', *student-teacher relationships* relates to 'relationships & partnerships', while *learning environment* might be placed within 'culture & environment'.

### Group discussion

In each consultation session, the groups were brought back together for a final discussion and to decide on key points raised in the session. In session 1, the group discussed three key themes from the breakout groups which they highlighted as important aspects of making learning more engaging and easier. These included encouraging active participation; flexible methods/modes of teaching; and maintaining good student-teacher relationships.

In relation to *encouraging active participation*, one young person stated that getting students actively participating is "*more memorable*". Participants gave examples such as acting out ancient rituals for History. It was noted that class discussions should be managed well, e.g., by giving three minutes to make a point, then moving on as students might not know they're talking for too long. Participants also referred to *flexible methods/modes of teaching* such as the use of models in Chemistry. One young person advised that teachers should be flexible and read the class and adjust to whatever the class needs. Another respondent suggested that teachers should tailor their teaching to the class too. The effective use of real-life examples in teaching was also noted. Student-teacher relationships were discussed and classroom management was raised as an issue with participants stating that it is better if teachers are "*not so worried about losing control of the class*". An example was given of a music teacher who "*knew to allow a certain amount of noise, but was very clear about the rules*". The young person stated that if the teacher was disappointed in you, you "*felt it a lot more*". Another participant stated that, rather than "*giving out*", when the teacher is feeling disappointed this "*makes you think*". It was suggested that teachers should "*try to be relatable with students, not a friend but friendly, not someone you would avoid*". Participants also noted the impact that teachers can have on their students with one stating that perceptive teachers notice if someone is struggling. Another stated (in relation to behaviour management) that students might not like to be humiliated during a class and that it might be better to call the student out after class. A small number of references were made to the importance of examinations in learning.

In session 2, the group discussed similar key themes to the group in session 1. These included: flexible methods/modes of teaching; encouraging active participation; and maintaining good learning environment. The use of technology for teaching and learning was also raised by the group in session 2.

**Table 8: Participants' suggestions for how teachers can make learning easier (Padlet entries)**

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| <b>Teaching methods</b> | <p><i>Modes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teaching students different methods of learning to find one that suits them best</li> <li>- Important to adapt style of teaching to the class in front of you – know your students and what works for them</li> <li>- More visual aids from teachers such as documentaries, video clips</li> <li>- Learn a lot from role playing exercises in class</li> <li>- Variety in teaching, tailoring the lessons to each classroom's abilities. Getting the teachers to read the classroom.</li> <li>- More group work</li> <li>- Include a more interactive way of learning! Teachers should be enthusiastic about the subject that they're teaching, they should be very excited to teach us and should be allowed teach us in a medium that they enjoy and the student likes. Just reading a book or showing a PowerPoint it's the [note: 'the' is a typo, should state 'not'] going to teach students efficiently!</li> <li>- Keep different learning methods in mind as some are kinaesthetic, visual, etc.</li> <li>- Perhaps more interactive activities in the classroom. Some students learn much more efficiently when they are working with their hands or doing physical activity that is related to the topic that is being covered. For example, a student may remember more details about a certain chemistry experiment if they get to do the experiment rather than reading how to do it in the textbook.</li> <li>- Do something fun (interactive) especially in hard subjects</li> </ul> |
|                         | <p><i>Links to curriculum and examinations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Having their own notes and expressing how this information will come up in an exam</li> </ul>   |
|                         | <p><i>Provide clear explanations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use simpler terms when explaining, rather than making it really technical when it doesn't need to be</li> <li>- Have both technical words and simpler words to describe as some students prefer technicality while others prefer simplicity</li> </ul>  |
|                         | <p><i>Discussion and critical thinking:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Talking about something before you get stuck into the chapter helps you get curious about it – you can also learn from others in the class</li> <li>- Ask questions and create an environment where students can comfortably ask questions without thinking they're being judged</li> <li>- Once a student asks a question ask them things such as "Are you sure?" and "How do you know?" In my opinion this will encourage pupils to engage in some basic critical thinking to establish how confident they are in an answer.</li> <li>- More interactive learning – asking questions, using the board, fun sheets, discussion.</li> <li>- Interact with the people more</li> <li>- Stop the emphasis on rote learning</li> </ul>  |
|                         | <p><i>Use of examples and analogies:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use of models, e.g., in chemistry seeing how everything is put together, real world examples, e.g., thinking about what led Hitler coming to power – students have to consider all the factors – get an overview, analogies.</li> <li>- Using real life similarities to explain different topics to engage students and to help explain it easier for students</li> <li>- Make some analogies during lessons just to make it easier to compare or remember especially for struggling students</li> <li>- Try and make the subject relatable to the students, for example, if a teacher is talking about the 1918 flu in History, they could relate and compare that event to the COVID-19 because COVID-19 is familiar to the students and they may remember the details better.</li> <li>- Relating curriculum to personal experiences of class or teacher makes learning more 'efficient'</li> </ul>   |

|                                      |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Teaching methods cont.</b>        | <p><i>Build on previous learning:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not teaching in big blocks – building on previous learning rather than jumping around</li> <li>- Tests are good for student's long term memory</li> <li>- Compiling a summary of what you covered in class so that students can reflect on what they learned</li> <li>- Summary of lessons for those that are absent and for those who couldn't give their full attention for whatever reason</li> <li>- Summaries at the end of each class is helpful for students to recap on the lesson</li> <li>- Revision classes at the end of each topic/chapter</li> </ul> <p><i>Provide additional resources:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Having a list of additional resources (documentaries, YouTube, online reading)</li> <li>- Share the notes instead of getting the student to take the notes down</li> </ul> <p><i>Collaboration:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Collaborative teaching approach</li> <li>- Teachers collaborating with students asking them what they would like to learn, how best they can do that within school</li> <li>- Listening to our opinions and taking them into perspective</li> </ul> <p><i>Independent learning:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teachers giving you independent projects to go work on – amazing what you can do, (note: e.g., used was when students were asked to create a graduation video).</li> <li>- Stop being so strict on things such as how our copies look and allow us to just learn our own way</li> </ul> <p><i>Feedback:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Making time for 1:1 feedback on exams rather than 'just do better'</li> <li>- Teachers to go through tests with students in the class or (maybe 1 to 1) if a student is struggling</li> </ul> <p><i>Support:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Explaining from the start of the year how you can ask for support if you need it</li> </ul> |
| <b>Student-teacher relationships</b> | <p><i>Student voice:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students want to feel heard and felt understood</li> <li>- Communication – actually talking to students and learn from their feedback</li> </ul> <p><i>Understanding students' needs:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To note that each student has their own unique way of learning – teachers need to get to know their students – teachers need to be friendly</li> </ul> <p><i>Fostering positive relationships:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teacher being an ally – they support you and work with you rather than against you</li> <li>- Building relationships with the students, working with the student</li> </ul> <p><i>Avoiding judgement:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not having preconceived notions about students – girls will focus and work and boys won't try' or just because you are not doing well in class it doesn't mean that you don't want to learn</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Learning environment</b>          | <p><i>Classroom management:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Managing the class is important – disruptions stop everyone's learning and then teachers can 'write off the class' and not bother</li> <li>- Setting out expectations from the start – on the students to learn and if they don't want to not to disrupt it for the others</li> </ul> <p><i>Classroom environment:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creating a comfortable environment in the classroom makes it easier to take in the new information</li> </ul> <p><i>Other:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Controversially, maybe slightly longer terms? So the teachers have time to cover all the topics in each subject.</li> </ul>  |

In relation to *flexible methods/modes of teaching*, one young person stated that rigid lessons are not as productive and that teachers should set aside fifteen minutes for questions. Another stated that they agreed that it is not good for teachers to be too rigid but that classes do need some structure. Other participants stated that “*it’s ok not to stick to the lesson plan*”, if there’s a discussion “*we’re still learning stuff*” and “*nobody likes a closed minded teacher...who puts up notes and that’s what we’re going to do*”. Another participant stated that it is ok to be flexible with subjects open to interpretation, “*but key subjects like maths and language need more of a shape to class they have to follow or we won’t learn the language*”. Some participants also commented on the need for teachers to *encourage active participation* stating that teachers should allow more time for discussion and that teachers should rely less on PowerPoint with the teacher talking for the whole class and instead encourage interaction from the class. In relation to maintaining a good *learning environment* participants mentioned aspects of classroom/behaviour management such as managing hyperactive behaviour in class. A couple of participants mentioned *technology* with statements such as “*if it’s just PowerPoint or something where you already know exactly what you’re going to cover, instead of having a discussion. People zone out because they’re not really interested...just a screen up on a wall*”.

A summary of the consultation findings for children and young people is presented in Appendix 9.

# Chapter 4: Discussion and conclusions

## 4.1 SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

### Primary

The current report outlines four key areas that teachers can focus on in order to make learning easier or more fun, according to primary-school pupils.

Primary level responses to both questions were categorised under the following themes:

- Theme one: Curriculum, teaching and learning
- Theme two: Culture and learning environment
- Theme three: Relationships and partnerships
- Theme four: Play, recreation, and stress reduction.

For each theme, some of the key suggestions regarding how learning can be made more fun are as follows:

- Theme one: Curriculum, teaching and learning

This theme incorporates the largest number of pupil responses and represents a key focus for children participating in the consultation.

- » Clear explanation/simplify: Children's responses highlight a need for some teachers to give clearer explanations, provide more examples, give demonstrations, and go slower when they are explaining something in class. Some children also said that they need more time to learn things in class.
- » Educational games: Children's recommendations suggest that learning is easier when it is turned into a fun activity. Children suggest that games provide an incentive for them to engage more fully in their lessons. Children's responses show that they find learning through games to be more fun and they reported that when they play educational games, they don't realise they are 'learning'. Some children referred to this as being 'tricked' into learning.
- » One-to-one-support: Examples included having more time to talk with the teacher on a one-to-one basis about difficulties.
- » Use of technology: Findings also suggest that a number of children would rather have tablet devices and mini-whiteboards instead of copy books.

- Theme two: Culture and learning environment
  - » Lessons outdoors: Children reported that lessons outdoors can support concentration and make school more fun.
  - » More classroom support: Some children mentioned that they would like more support (help) at school, for example to help pupils who 'find a subject hard'.
- Theme three: Relationships and partnerships

A smaller number of responses related to this theme. Some responses under this theme referred to the relationship dynamic between pupils and teachers in the classroom with some children asking for 'more of a say' on issues that matter to them.

- Theme four: Play, recreation, and stress reduction
  - » More playtime, yard time, less work: Suggestions included greater use of 'brain breaks' and 'golden time'.
  - » Student comfort aids: Examples included bringing toys, teddies, or pets to school. It was suggested that these may be of particular use during tests or stressful times.

There was considerable overlap between suggestions for how learning can be made easier and how it can be made more fun.

## Post-primary

Similar to the themes identified at primary level, broadly comparable issues were identified by post-primary students who participated in the online consultation. In relation to what teachers can do to make learning more engaging at post-primary level, young people's responses were categorised under the following broad headings:

- Teaching methods: e.g., teaching modes; increasing opportunities for class discussions; encouraging participation and critical thinking; encouraging independent learning; and examinations.
- Student-teacher relationships: e.g., teachers' own behaviour and fostering or encouraging positive relationships with students.
- Learning environment: e.g., classroom management and the classroom environment.
- Other: e.g., make learning more fun and relate learning/content to real life.

In response to the second consultation question, young people's suggestions for how teachers can make learning more fun were categorised under the following headings:

- Teaching methods: e.g., modes of teaching; links to curriculum and examinations; providing clear examples; encouraging discussion and critical thinking; use of examples and analogies; building on previous learning; providing additional resources; encouraging collaboration; independent learning; providing feedback; and offering support.
- Student-teacher relationships: e.g., listening to students' voices; understanding students' needs; fostering positive relationships; and avoiding judgement.
- Learning environment: e.g., classroom management; classroom environment; and other.

## 4.2 LINKING THE CONSULTATION QUESTIONS TO POLICY AND PRACTICE

Children's responses to the questions *how can teachers make learning easier?* and, *how can teachers make learning more fun?* offer insights into how certain teaching practices and pedagogical approaches could make a positive difference towards children's overall learning experience at primary school. Children also mentioned how changes to the classroom space (such as having stimulating learning materials/posters and a choice of chair) could make a positive difference towards their learning.

Findings reflect aspects of the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023* (DES, 2018b). For example, a relatively small number of pupils in the current consultation provided responses related to ‘relationships and partnerships’, with some suggesting that there is a need for pupils to have more opportunities to influence decisions in the classroom and for their opinion to be taken into account to a greater extent. One example related to a desire on the part of children to be able to choose their own chair or type of chair at school. Theme four in the current research – ‘play, recreation, and stress reduction’ – relates to children’s suggestions of how their teacher could make more time for regular brain breaks, ‘golden time’, lessons outdoors, mindfulness videos, and comfort aids (e.g., toys, teddies, fidget toys). Children suggest that these kinds of activities would help to reduce their stress levels at school which would in turn have a positive impact on their learning experience (i.e., make it easier and more fun).

Findings from this research are relevant to a number of ongoing policy developments. The Teaching and Learning Dimension set out in *Looking at Our School* (LAOS; DES, 2016a, 2016b), consists of the four domains 1. Learner outcomes, 2. Learner experiences, 3. Teachers’ individual practice, and 4. Teachers’ collective/collaborative practice. Within each of the four domains, there is a set of standards, accompanied by statements of effective and highly effective practice. Similar domains are outlined in the *Digital Learning Framework* (DES, 2017a, 2017b).

In domain 1 of LAOS – ‘Learner outcomes’ – the first standard indicates that pupils “*enjoy their learning, are motivated to learn and expect to achieve as learners*” (DES, 2016a, p. 13). In the current consultation, pupils made recommendations regarding how increased use of IT might support further enjoyment of learning. Children suggested greater use of tablet devices or laptops to help make learning easier and more fun for them. Some children suggested that using these electronic devices would mean that they would have less writing in class and have fewer books to carry home from school. Others linked the use of technology to the environment and they suggested that it would reduce the use of books and paper. Some children suggested that it could make it easier for their teacher to correct their homework if it was done on an electronic device.

The *Digital Learning Framework* (DES, 2017a, 2017b) aims to assist schools in effectively embedding digital technologies in learning, teaching, and assessment. The *Digital Strategy for Schools* (DoE, 2022) is organised around three pillars: supporting the embedding of digital technologies in teaching, learning, and assessment; digital technology infrastructure; and looking to the future: policy, research, and digital leadership. Many of the themes identified by pupils and students in the current consultation relate to elements outlined in these policy documents. For example, the *Digital Strategy for Schools* emphasises the need for schools to consult with the wider school community in the development and review of digital learning plans. Results of the current consultation show that children and young people have an important perspective on this topic.

Another finding of this research is a strong desire on the part of children for more opportunities for art, music, and role play (reflected in the code ‘creative learning’). Younger children (e.g., Senior Infants) referred to ‘more *Aistear*’ as part of their recommendations and suggestions for how learning could be made easier and more fun by their teachers. Findings also show that primary school children (including those in older age groups) would like greater use of educational games or play as a way of making learning easier and more fun at school. This highlights the importance of making learning an enjoyable endeavour, already a strong focus of the new *Primary Language Curriculum* which introduces learning outcomes for Junior and Senior Infants with the phrase “*through appropriately playful learning experiences, children should be able to...*” (DES, 2019, p. 18). The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* also emphasises the role of play, referring to “*coherent and relevant rich learning experiences through playful and engaging approaches*” from Junior Infants to Second class

(NCCA, 2020, p. 11). It also indicates that from Third to Sixth class “*the curriculum areas continue to provide opportunities for playful and inquiry-based teaching and learning*” (p. 12). Consultation with children forms part of the consultation on the Draft Primary School Curriculum and findings are forthcoming.<sup>26</sup>

At post-primary level, findings of the current consultation show the strong emphasis placed on wellbeing by young people as well as their desire for active and varied methods of teaching and learning. Two of the principles underpinning the *Junior Cycle Framework* (DES, 2015) are *Wellbeing* and *Choice and Flexibility* so it is relevant to note that students in the current consultation emphasise these as priorities. Linked to the *Junior Cycle Framework* (DES, 2015), findings from the current consultation also link to the National Council for Guidance in Education’s (NCGE, 2017, p. 6) *Whole School Guidance Framework* in which guidance-related learning is identified as “*one of the key pillars of a school’s Wellbeing programme*”. It is not possible to examine findings of the current consultation separately for Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle students so it is not possible to determine if there may be any differences between the two in terms of experiences of active learning methods, student-teacher relationships, or wellbeing. Given recent Junior Cycle reform, some differences might be anticipated; however, further examination is not possible with the current dataset.

### 4.3 LINKING THE CONSULTATION FINDINGS TO THE CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF TPL EVALUATION

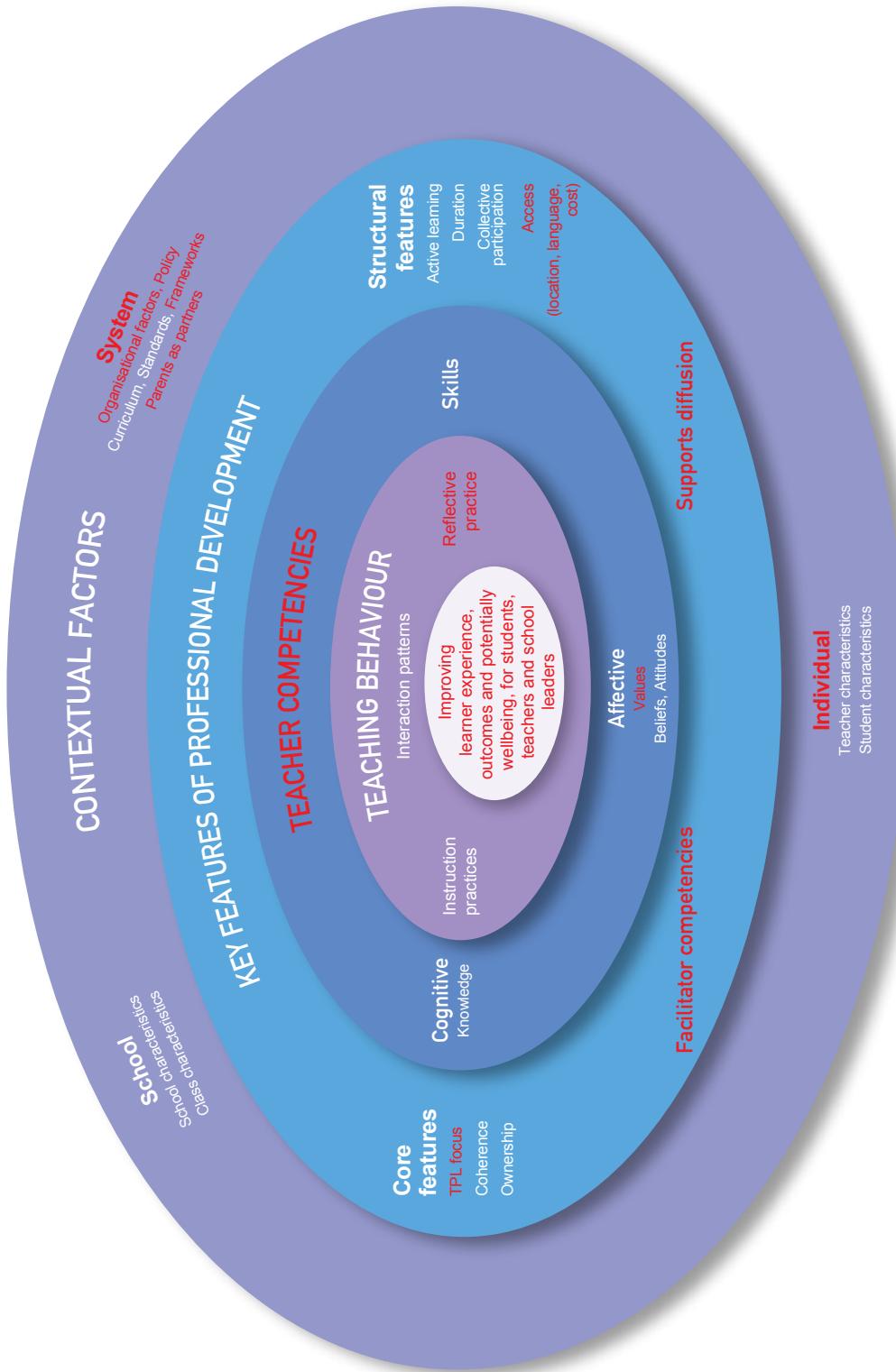
The overall aim of the current project is to develop a framework for the evaluation of Teachers’ Professional Learning (TPL). The consultation outlined in the current report is part of Phase 3 of this project. Phase 3 involved consultation with two key groups – children and young people, and TPL providers. The perspectives of TPL providers are published in a separate report (see Rawdon & Gilleece, 2022).

In an earlier phase of the project (Rawdon et al., 2021) a conceptual model for the evaluation of TPL was presented, based on research by Compen et al. (2019). The conceptual model to underpin the evaluation of TPL in Ireland continues to evolve as the project progresses and the current version is presented in Figure 11. Items presented in red text in Figure 11 were added to the Compen et al. (2019) framework. A small number of additional changes have been applied to the version presented in Figure 11 compared to the earlier version outlined in Rawdon et al. (2021). These changes reflect the iterative nature of the process to develop a TPL evaluation framework which aims to incrementally take into account learning from each phase of the project.

The conceptual model places ‘improving learner experience, outcomes and potentially wellbeing for students, teachers and school leaders’ at the centre of TPL. Improving outcomes for students is a key focus of the majority of TPL; therefore, the opinions of children and young people should be included in the development of an evaluation framework for TPL. This is in line with rights-based approaches for inclusion (e.g., the work of Lundy, 2007), as the outcomes and impact of TPL affects children and young people in their school lives. Children and young people are key stakeholders in their school environments and in the education system more generally and their views and opinions should be included along with input from other key stakeholders such as teachers and principals, TPL providers, and parents.

26

<https://ncca.ie/en/updates-and-events/latest-news/2022/march/next-steps-towards-a-redeveloped-primary-curriculum/>

**Figure 11: Draft conceptual model for the evaluation of TPL**

A conceptual model to underpin the TPL evaluation framework is in development. It will draw heavily on the elements presented in Figure 11. The conceptual model will not be finalised until the publication of the TPL evaluation framework. As such, Figure 11 should be considered as a provisional version of the conceptual model.

Findings from the current consultation link to the following areas of the conceptual model presented in Figure 11: *teaching behaviour* and *teacher competencies*. Responses from children and young people relate to areas of *teaching behaviour*, such as instruction patterns and interaction patterns which influence learning experiences. These areas of the conceptual model should be considered in the design of TPL as they may influence learner experience, outcomes and potentially wellbeing for students, teachers and school leaders. Responses from children and young people also highlight the importance of *teacher competencies*, e.g., skills, affective, and cognitive aspects of teacher competencies which may influence learning, outcomes, and potentially wellbeing for students.

## 4.4 LIMITATIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND NEXT STEPS

The consultation described in the current report was conducted by Hub na nÓg (at primary level) and DCEDIY (at post-primary level), with data analysis and report writing carried out by the ERC. Even under ‘ideal’ circumstances, research is challenging when it involves multiple organisations, data collection across a wide range of age groups, and different approaches to data collection with different groups of participants. The current consultation was carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic which created some additional challenges, such as researchers/facilitators being unable to attend schools for in-person data collection.

A number of limitations to the findings presented above should be noted before conclusions are drawn.

- 1) The consultation outlined in the current report includes findings from a convenience sample of children and young people. As a result, it is not possible to generalise findings to the population.
- 2) At primary level, the consultation was carried out in the children’s own classrooms. Due to the pandemic-related restrictions in schools, Hub na nÓg facilitators were unable to conduct the consultation directly with children. Rather, the process relied on teacher-administered consultation sheets. During the data analysis phase, it was evident that in a small number of classrooms, the task was completed by groups of pupils rather than on an individual basis. One consequence of this is there are some limitations in analysing the absolute number of responses under each theme; rather qualitative approaches were used to identify key priorities.
- 3) Linked to point 2 above, the administration of the consultation by class teachers may be a potential source of bias, resulting in children providing more positive responses than would otherwise have been the case. Given that the consultation relates to children’s views on teaching and learning, it would have been preferable for independent external facilitators to lead the consultation at a location other than the children’s classroom.
- 4) Again, linked to point 2 above, a DCEDIY facilitator was not available to answer questions relating to the consultation questions or to provide additional prompts, if required. Also, to maintain the anonymity of schools participating in the consultation, researchers at the ERC were not given the details of schools that had consented to participate. Consultation materials were posted back to the ERC directly by schools. As neither ERC researchers nor DCEDIY facilitators were on-site during the consultation, a small amount of information was missing from the packs returned and there was no opportunity to follow up. For example, one class questionnaire was missing. Also, in some cases, children did not provide responses relating to their gender and age and it was not possible to determine if these questions had been deliberately or inadvertently skipped.

- 5) At primary level, some duplication of responses was noted across the two consultation questions. It may have been possible for an external facilitator to encourage more distinct responses to each question had they been present during the consultation.
- 6) At primary level, there was no special class or special school participation in the consultation despite specific instructions for schools to invite all special classes to participate. Nonetheless, participants included some pupils in mainstream classes with School Support Plans, Support Plans Plus, and those in receipt of EAL supports.
- 7) For the online consultation with young people, the number of participants was small; however, this is in line with the sample size of other consultations carried out by the DCEDIY during COVID-19 related lockdowns/periods of restrictions.
- 8) The consultation with young people was carried out online. While DCEDIY carried out numerous online consultations and developed considerable expertise during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, it may have been preferable for this consultation to be carried out in a face-to-face setting with interactive consultation methods and materials provided by DCEDIY staff.
- 9) For the online consultation with young people, it is likely that participants did not represent the views of all young people. For example, it is unknown whether the views of young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN) were included in this consultation as there was no requirement for participants to identify if they had additional learning needs. No requests for additional supports or accommodations were received. It is also unknown whether or not the views of other groups such as Traveller or Roma students, students identifying as LGBTQI+, or other culturally or linguistically diverse groups were included in the post-primary consultation. The challenges of supporting the participation of 'seldom-heard' young people were addressed in the introduction to the report and remain relevant when considering how the voices of children and young people might best be included in the evaluation of TPL.

## Conclusions

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the consultation with children and young people as follows:

- 1) Children and young people can provide useful insights into issues that affect them, including issues relating to their preferences for teaching and learning.
  - a. Children and young people place a high value on aspects of the curriculum and active teaching methods. For example, primary school pupils made references to *Aistear*; curriculum focused games for subjects such as Maths, English, and Irish; and specific subjects such as Science and P.E. At post-primary level, young people stated that teachers should encourage discussion, participation, independent learning, and critical thinking.
  - b. Children and young people also value the learning environment in which teaching takes place, placing a particular emphasis on an environment that is comfortable, stimulating, and inviting at primary level. At post-primary level, students recognise the need for an orderly classroom environment that supports open discussion.
  - c. Children and young people understand the importance of maintaining good relationships between students and school staff.

- d. Children and young people also value considerations for wellbeing in the classroom and their responses highlight their understanding of the areas needed to promote wellbeing.

2) The current report demonstrates two methods which can be used to elicit the views of children and young people.

- a. In the context of TPL evaluation, these methods might usefully be employed by TPL providers gathering the opinion of/obtaining feedback from children and young people by directly administering consultation materials, such as questionnaires, worksheets etc., in schools or by teachers and school leaders acting on the part of the TPL provider. While teacher-administered consultation may reduce the time burden on the TPL provider it may increase the risk of socially-desirable responding, i.e., the tendency of pupils to respond in a manner viewed favourably by others. While the wording of the consultation questions for the current research was very general, it is likely that more specific wording would be appropriate for the purposes of TPL evaluation which might focus on a particular aspect of teaching and learning.
- b. The different methods outlined at primary and post-primary level have both advantages and disadvantages as outlined in the previous section of this report. While the pen and paper task used at primary level gathered responses from a larger number of pupils, detailed discussion was not possible. On the other hand, the online consultation method provided time for in-depth discussion but it is possible that the voices of seldom-heard young people were not included in this consultation given that young people who volunteer to participate in consultation outside of school time are more likely to be highly engaged. An advantage of carrying out consultations within schools is that efforts can be made to ensure that all students have the opportunity to participate, encouraging seldom-heard young people to be involved in conversations about their teaching and learning experiences.

## Next steps

Findings in the current report show that children's open-ended responses can provide one appropriate source of data for use in the evaluation of TPL. Open-ended responses may provide richer data in relation to outcomes for students than closed-response question format. They may also usefully triangulate other data sources, such as school records of student achievement, attendance records, and students' engagement in various aspects of school life. An alternative to the written methods used at primary level in the current consultation are the more interactive methods used at post-primary level.

The effective analysis of open-ended responses necessitates expertise in thematic analysis or other qualitative methods, pointing towards a possible need for the development of the TPL evaluation framework to be supported by capacity building amongst TPL providers. Furthermore, the need for a trained facilitator to effectively conduct focus groups underscores the need for the TPL evaluation framework to give detailed consideration to capacity building in research methods amongst TPL providers. The current project demonstrated successful interagency working, drawing on skills and expertise of Hub na nÓg, DCEDIY, and the ERC, with support from a small group of teachers to pilot the materials and inform the design. It is important that the TPL evaluation framework recognises the breadth of skills required to effectively collect and analyse data and to consider the occasional need for research support for TPL providers if large-scale evaluation of a specific project is required.

Along with publication of the current report, findings from TPL providers are also published.<sup>27</sup> Together, these represent important perspectives from two key stakeholder groups. While the current report outlines data which may be gathered from students, it is important for the evaluation framework to ultimately consider how TPL providers can make effective use of such data in TPL evaluation. The TPL provider report sheds further light on the potential need for capacity-building raised here (Rawdon & Gilleece, 2022).

The final applied phase of the current project involves the application of elements of the conceptual model to a specific TPL in the area of student wellbeing. Learning from the evaluation of TPL for Restorative Practice will make a further contribution to the development of an applied and practical framework for the evaluation of TPL in Ireland.

The final output from this project will be a general framework for the evaluation of TPL which is intended to be applicable to any aspect of TPL. Publication of the framework is anticipated in early 2023.

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27 See <https://www.erc.ie/TPLwellbeing/publications>



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# Appendix 1: Letter of invitation to primary schools



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland

Dear Principal,

We would like to invite children in your school to take part in a consultation to inform the development of an evaluation framework for teachers' professional learning (TPL). The development of this framework is a multi-strand project being implemented by the Educational Research Centre (ERC) on behalf of a Steering Committee chaired by the Department of Education (DoE). This consultation can be done anytime up to Friday, 18 June. The materials you need for the consultation are included with this letter, which is being conducted by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth on behalf of the DoE. We are inviting approximately 20 primary schools around the country to take part. With the help of a working group of teachers, we developed a colourful consultation sheet for children, a teacher guidance sheet outlining a lesson plan for the consultation and a cover sheet for completion by teachers. The lesson plan is based on the SPHE Strand *Myself* and as a contribution to children's self-assessment of learning. Once the children's responses are analysed by an ERC researcher, their views will be included in a published report, which will be available online. We would greatly appreciate if each school could support this consultation by doing the following:

**In schools with junior and senior students, please identify three mainstream classes to take part in the consultation, as follows:**

- 1 class from either Junior or Senior Infants
- 1 class from either 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup>
- 1 class from 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup>

**In schools with junior students only, please identify two mainstream classes to take part in the consultation, as follows:**

- 2 classes from Junior Infants, Senior Infants, 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> class

**In schools with senior students only, please identify two mainstream classes to take part in the consultation, as follows:**

- 2 classes from 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> class

**In all types of schools, ALL Special Classes or Units are invited to take part**

Enclosed with this letter are class packs for teachers consisting of:

- One cover sheet which seeks broad descriptive information (e.g., class level, number in class)
- One teacher guidance sheet – explaining how to work with the children and providing the basis of a lesson plan
- Pupil consultation sheets for every child in the class

If you are interested in taking part, or would like further information, please contact the teacher from our working group who approached you about the consultation.

You can also contact Anne O'Donnell, Consultant Manager, Hub na nÓg [anne.odonnell@dclediy.gov.ie](mailto:anne.odonnell@dclediy.gov.ie) or phone Anne on 086 XXXXXX. Your cooperation with this consultation would be most welcome and appreciated.

Kind regards,

Anne O'Donnell

(Consultant Manager, Hub na nÓg, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth)



# Appendix 2: Consultation sheet for primary school pupils





# Appendix 3: Teacher guidelines for consultation with primary school pupils




**BACKGROUND**

The Department of Education (DoE) is overseeing the development of an evaluation framework for teachers' professional learning (TPL, also called continuing professional development or CPD). The development of the evaluation framework is a four-year, multi-strand project, guided by a Steering Committee which is chaired by the DoE. The Steering Committee is composed of organisations involved in designing and delivering TPL activities. The project is implemented by the Educational Research Centre (ERC). To date, one major report has been released ([www.erc.ie/TPL\\_wellbeing/publications](http://www.erc.ie/TPL_wellbeing/publications)). The ERC has also conducted a survey of teachers and principals in primary, post-primary and special schools, the results of which will be published later in 2021.

The DoE and the ERC want to gather the views of pupils to inform the evaluation framework objectives and to contribute to all stages of its development. The DoE asked Hub na nÓg to work with the ERC in consulting with children to inform the development of the framework. Hub na nÓg is a centre of excellence on children's right to a voice in decision-making and is a service of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. Hub na nÓg is leading on this consultation and has invited approximately 20 primary schools to take part.

**WHAT WE ARE ASKING CHILDREN TO DO:**

We are asking children to fill out a short consultation sheet to gather their views on what teachers can do to make learning easier and more fun. The consultation sheet was developed with the help of teachers and children. The children's views will be analysed by ERC researchers. Findings will be reported to the project's Steering Committee in Autumn 2021 and will inform the development of the draft framework for the evaluation of TPL. Written findings from the consultation will be published by the end of 2021.

**CONSULTATION QUESTIONS FOR CHILDREN**

1. How can teachers make learning easier?
2. How can teachers make learning more fun?

**WHAT WE ARE ASKING TEACHERS TO DO:**

We are asking teachers to carry out the consultation with the children as one class task or lesson.

Each teacher who is conducting the consultation will receive a class pack consisting of:

- One cover sheet, which seeks broad descriptive information (e.g., class level, number in class).
- One teacher guidance sheet – explaining how to work with the children. This provides the basis of a lesson plan.
- A two-sided pupil consultation sheet for every child in the class.

**CLASS TASK**

- Explain to the children what the consultation is about and why their opinions are important to the Department of Education (DoE).
- Read through the two questions with the children.
- Emphasise that there are no right or wrong answers and that each child should fill in the consultation sheet with their own opinions.
- Some children will need support to fill out the consultation sheet with prompt questions such as:
  - Can you remember a lesson/activity you enjoyed?

**Ríaltas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland**

**Continues overleaf**

**CLASS TASK**  
*Continued*

- Why did you enjoy it?
- Can you remember a lesson/activity you found tricky?
- What did the teacher do to make it easier?

→ Please avoid suggesting ideas to children or influencing their answers.

→ All children's opinions are valid and we welcome everything they want to say or draw.

→ Ask the children to write, draw, or write and draw their answers in the spaces provided.

→ If a child responds with drawings and no writing, please ask the child to explain their drawings to you and write the explanation on the sheet in the child's own words. The ERC cannot analyse drawings, but can analyse written descriptions of the meaning of drawings. Scribing can be done by the class teacher, Special Needs Assistant, Special Education Teacher or other appropriate adult (e.g., Home School Liaison Co-ordinator).

→ For children who are writing their own words, stress that spelling or punctuation does not matter.

**LINKS WITH CURRICULUM**

This consultation process can be used as:

→ Part of the child's self-assessment and/or learning portfolio.

→ An SPHE lesson looking at the Strand *Myself*.

**CHILDREN ARE FREE TO OPT OUT OF THIS CONSULTATION**

Children are invited to participate but they can opt out of the activity without giving any reason. This is not a test and participation is voluntary.

**SEEK PERMISSION FROM CHILDREN FOR THEIR DRAWINGS TO BE USED IN THE EVALUATION REPORT**

Please ask the children to answer the question at the end of the consultation sheet by ticking the 'smiley' face if they want their drawings to be used in research reports, and by ticking the 'sad' face if they do not want their drawings to be used in research reports.

**CONFIDENTIALITY, DATA PROTECTION AND SAFEGUARDING**

The identities of participating schools, teachers and pupils will not be known to researchers at the ERC. The consultation sheet does not ask children for their names or other identifying information. The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) assigns a numeric ID to each school for administrative and child safeguarding purposes, which will be deleted no later than the end of 2021.

**ANALYSIS AND REPORTING**

Researchers from the ERC will analyse consultation sheets returned from schools and compile a report. The consultation methods and approaches will be used to draw up guidelines and examples of good practice in student consultation to inform the development of an evaluation framework for TPL.

**FEEDBACK TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

All participating schools will be sent a thank you letter with an overview of the children's views in the Autumn of 2021. The children's views will be included in feedback to the project's Steering Committee and summarised in a written report prior to the end of 2021. They will also inform the development of the draft evaluation framework for TPL. Publications from the TPL evaluation framework study are published on the ERC website: [www.erc.ie/TPLwellbeing/publications](http://www.erc.ie/TPLwellbeing/publications)

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP**

# Appendix 4: Teacher questionnaire for primary school teachers

## Consultation with primary school pupils on the development of an evaluation framework for teachers' professional learning

### Cover sheet for class teacher

Please answer the questions below and return your completed form along with pupil materials in the A4 envelope provided. Researchers at the Educational Research Centre will use the information to provide a broad context in which to interpret pupils' perspectives. The identity of the school (roll number or name) or class are not collected. Children's names or other identifying information are not collected.

|  | Band 1  | Band 2                   | Rural DEIS               | Non-DEIS                 |
|--|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. What level of supports does your school receive under DEIS?                       | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. What is the main language of instruction in your school?                          | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input type="checkbox"/> |                          |                          |
|  | <b>Irish</b>  | <b>English</b>           |                          |                          |
| 3. What is the gender mix of pupils in your school?                                  | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |                          |
|  | <b>All girls</b>  | <b>All boys</b>          | <b>Mixed</b>             |                          |
| 4. Is your school classified as a special school?                                    | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input type="checkbox"/> |                          |                          |
|  | <b>Yes</b>  | <b>No</b>                |                          |                          |
| 5. How many pupils in total in your classroom are participating in the consultation? | <b>Number</b><br><input type="text"/>   |                          |                          |                          |
| 6. Of pupils participating in the consultation, how many...                          | <b>Number</b><br><input type="text"/><br><input type="text"/><br><input type="text"/> |                          |                          |                          |
| (a) have a School Support plan?  | <input type="text"/>  |                          |                          |                          |
| (b) have a School Support Plus plan?   | <input type="text"/>  |                          |                          |                          |
| (c) are in receipt of English as an Additional Language (EAL) support?               | <input type="text"/>  |                          |                          |                          |
| 7. In what county is your school located?  | <input type="text"/>  |                          |                          |                          |
|  | <b>Rural</b><br><b>(Population less than 1,500 people)</b>                            |                          |                          |                          |
|  | <b>Urban</b>  |                          |                          |                          |
| 8. Is your school located in a rural or urban area?                                  | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input type="checkbox"/> |                          |                          |



# Appendix 5: Methodology for online consultation with post-primary aged young people

## Consultation with Comhairle na nÓg on the development of an evaluation framework for teachers' professional learning

### Purpose

The Department of Education (DoE) is overseeing the development of a framework for the evaluation of teachers' professional learning (TPL). This is a multi-strand project being implemented by the Educational Research Centre (ERC) on behalf of a Steering Committee chaired by the Department of Education (DoE). The DoE and the ERC want to gather the views of young people to inform the evaluation framework objectives and to contribute to its development. Views of primary-aged children have already been obtained; the current phase seeks the views of post-primary students. The project's Steering Committee is keen for the voices of all young people, including those with special educational needs, to be included.

A call out was made to all Comhairle na nÓg members for the recruitment of 30 young people to take part in this consultation. Our practice does not ask young people to self-declare learning disabilities, however the recruitment processes onto Comhairle na nÓg actively encourages the inclusion of seldom-heard young people, including those with disabilities.

Once the young people's responses are analysed by an ERC researcher, their views will be included in a published report, which will be available online.

### Aim of consultation

To seek young people's views in order to inform the evaluation framework objectives and to contribute to its development.

### Structure

Two online consultations with 15 young people per consultation.

### Consultation

Day 1 and Day 2

Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> July

Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> of July

11.00 am – 1.00pm both days

Briefing meeting prior to consultation 10.45 am

**11am Project charter:** Brief purpose of the consultation and who needs to know their views and why their voice is important.

**(DCEDIY Staff Member 1 re department's role)**

**(ERC Research Associate will present slides)**

**11.05am Introductions. Name, Comhairle, and What is your favourite ice-cream flavour?**

**(DCEDIY Staff Member 1)**

**11.10am Housekeeping (DCEDIY Staff Member 1)**

(5 minutes)

Child Safeguarding Statement and safeguarding statement provided in the chat.

A brief reference will be made to what has been covered within the consent forms:

1. Anonymised outputs produced in the consultation can be used in publication by ERC.
2. Students assent to have work included in publication and to have data included for analysis.
3. That it will not be possible to remove data at a subsequent stage because ERC will not have any means of identifying which student provided which data. Any student who is not in a position to provide this confirmation should be advised not to proceed with the consultation.
4. Confirm that any images shared will not have any identifying information and that location information has been removed.

**11.15am Icebreaker (DCEDIY Staff Member 2)**

Icebreaker

Scavenger hunt – Find one object in your house which represents your favourite subject in school or if you do not want to leave the room pick an item and write it in the chat.

**11.20am Blue Sky (Mentimeter word cloud) (DCEDIY Staff Member 3)**

7 minutes

<https://www.menti.com/shqc6gqb9h>

The purpose of this exercise is to explore young people's views on their own experiences of teaching and learning at school.

The Sky's the limit for this exercise so you can use your creativity to come up with any thoughts you have when you hear *your experiences of teaching and learning at school*. There are absolutely no limits, no judgements.

Analyse the word cloud and see if there are any further points young people want to discuss on the topic.

**11.27am Exploration of everyday lived experience (pen and paper) (DCEDIY Staff Member 2)**

15 minutes

The purpose of this exercise is to explore young people's everyday lived experience of their education.

Your education experiences on a page: Lifeline of school experiences.

Young people asked to draw a lifeline and add their experiences of schools.

**Photo or screenshot and send (Young people will be reminded to remove any location information from their phone before sharing)**

2 minutes

**11.45am Sharing Lifelines**

5 minutes

Asking young people to volunteer if they would like to share what they have done.

**11.50 am Consultation questions in breakout rooms (group split into 2 groups of 7 and 8) (DCEDIY Staff Member 3)**

The use of Padlet ensures young people have a range of ways of expressing their views: written, audio recording, drawing, assisted by the participation officer to complete, thus is accessible to young people with a range of literacy levels, and/or special educational needs or learning difficulties. It can also be used on phones, tablets, laptops enabling young people who may only have access to one device at home the ability to partake.

15 minutes to answer the 2 questions on Padlet and 15 minutes discussion time of the four questions

- 1. How can teachers make learning more engaging?**
- 2. How can teachers make learning easier?**

*Instructions:*

ERC Research Associate and ERC Research Assistant will both be in attendance in the breakout rooms. ERC Research Associate will share the link to the meeting with ERC Research Assistant and contact her regarding when to join the meeting. Suggested time 11.40am. DCEDIY Staff Member 4 will place ERC Research Assistant in her breakout room. They will introduce themselves on entry to the young people as note takers and then turn their video off. If young people have any questions regarding the research they will have the option to ask ERC Research Associate or ERC Research Assistant questions.

DCEDIY Staff Member 2 and DCEDIY Staff Member 3 will facilitate discussion in the breakout rooms and will be supported by DCEDIY Staff Member 5 and DCEDIY Staff Member 6.

*Prompts:*

1. Picture a teacher you really liked what did they do that you admired/found useful for your education?

2. Think of a time when you struggled to engage with learning. How did your teacher help you? Or, looking back, what could they have done differently?

**12.20pm Discussion of Padlet responses/headlines (DCEDIY Staff Member 3)**

7 minutes

**12.27 pm Group Discussion of what has been omitted or what needs to be highlighted (DCEDIY Staff Member 2 & DCEDIY Staff Member 3)**

20 minutes total

*Prompts:*

1. Which are the most important factors under each of the questions?
2. What has been left out?
3. If someone was new to teaching what would be the one tip you would give them to help make learning more engaging for students?
4. If someone was new to teaching what would be the one tip you would give them to help make learning easier for students?

**12:50pm**

**Evaluation and Closing**

Thank young people.

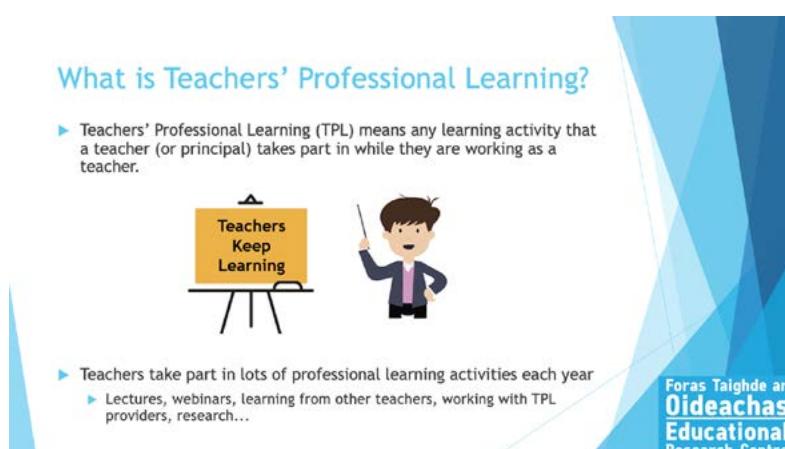
Inform young people where their views are going. (ERC Research Associate)

Give evaluation link. (DCEDIY Staff Member 4)

**Outputs to be sent to ERC:**

- Ages, gender, and location of young people involved in consultation
- Indication of general location from which young people were drawn (e.g., city/town/rural; province)
- Mentimeter word cloud (jpg or png)
- Padlet output file (PDF)
- Photos or screenshots of lifelines (jpg or png)

# Appendix 6: Presentation slides for project overview at online consultation



## What happens after TPL?

- After teachers take part in a professional learning activity, they will have learned something new which might mean that they will change how they teach and this might have an impact on their students.



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## What will the framework look like?

- We want to develop a framework to help the Department of Education, schools, and teachers to figure out if teachers' professional learning (TPL) activities are worthwhile (i.e., if they have *impact*).
- There are many ways that we can find out if TPL has had an *impact*:
  - We can examine teachers' learning and how they have used this learning in their classroom.
  - We can check if students' learning or some aspect of the classroom or school environment changes, after the TPL.
- We can do this by gathering information using questionnaires/interviews; by observing in the classroom; or by gathering other information in the school.

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- We want our framework to include guidelines and checklists to make it easy for teachers to use the framework to find out if a TPL activity has had an impact on:

- Teachers' learning
- Teaching practice in the classroom
- Students' learning and other outcomes
- Changes in the school or classroom environment.



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Thank you for taking part in this consultation  
and thank you to Comhairle na nÓg for  
facilitating this work

- Any questions before we begin?



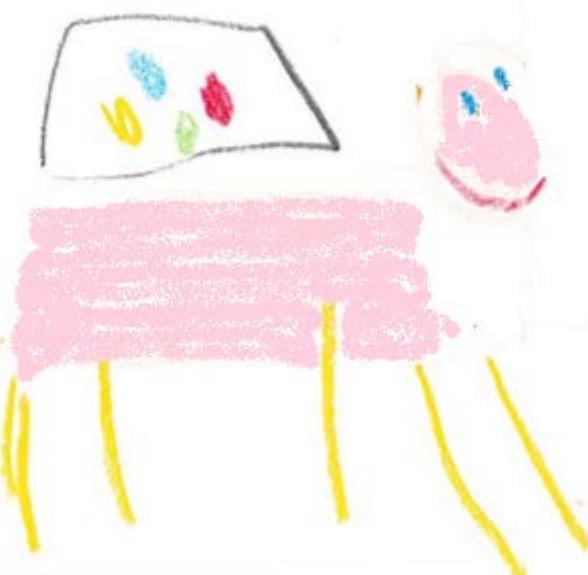
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# Appendix 7: Examples of drawings submitted by primary school pupils

## Example 1 – Boy, 6, Senior Infants

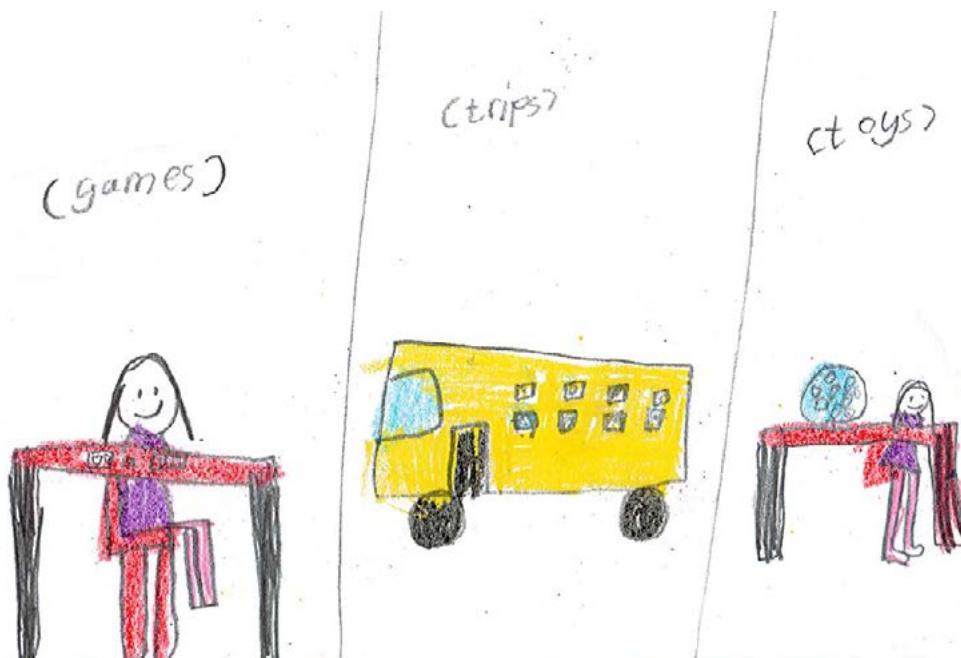


Text: "Teacher helps you."



Text: "More art."

**Example 2 – Girl, 7, First class**

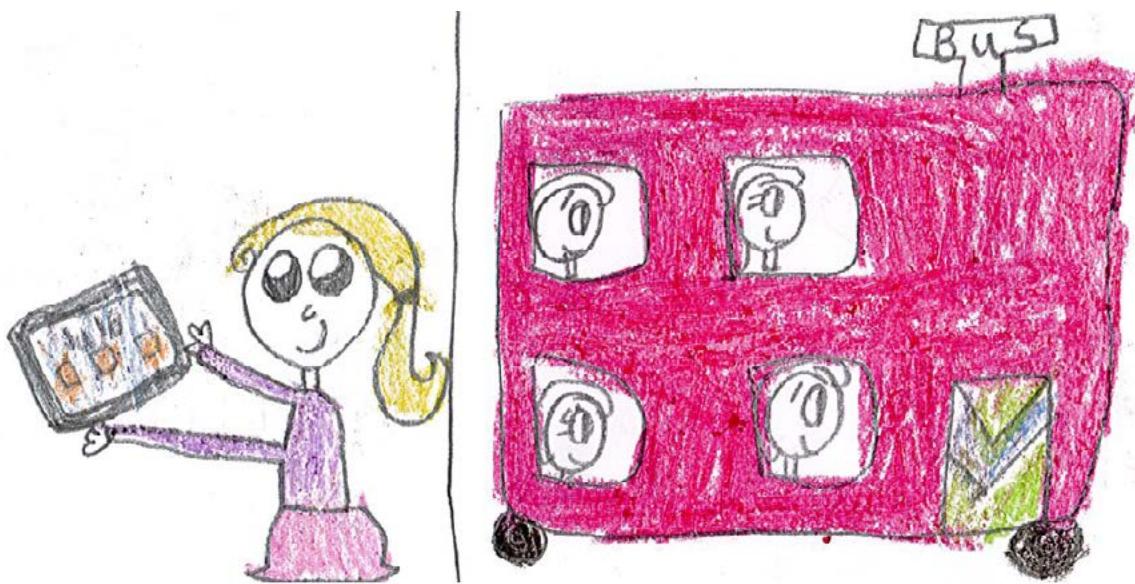


Text: "Teachers can make learning easier by playing more games in school. Also teachers can do more school trips in school. Also bringing toys in school."



Text: "Teachers can make learning fun by making our own art in school. Also reading stories outside on sunny days. Also doing fun things."

**Example 3 – Girl, 8, First class**

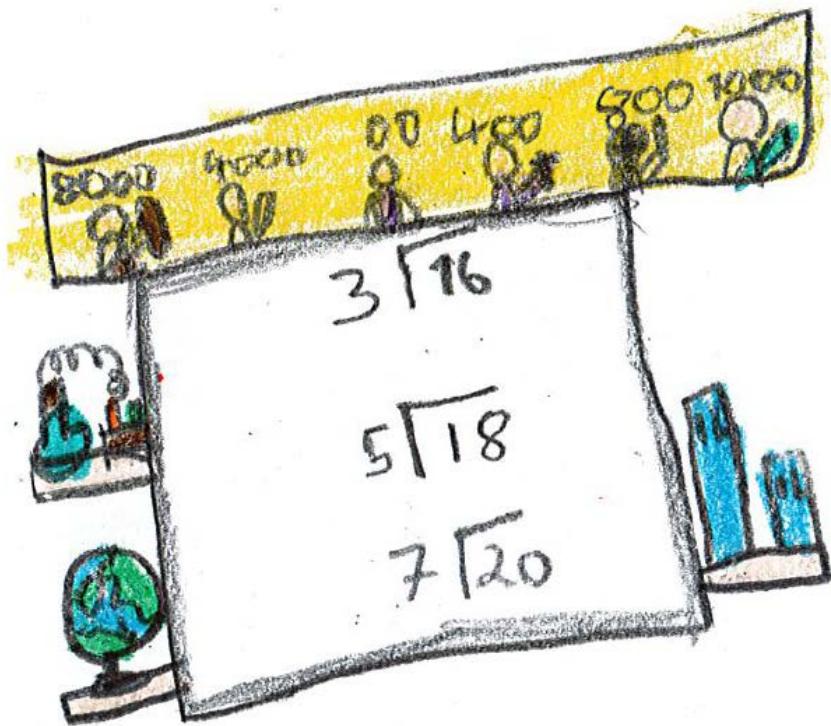


Text: "Teachers can make learning easier by having school trips every day. Teachers can make learning easier by having iPads every day."

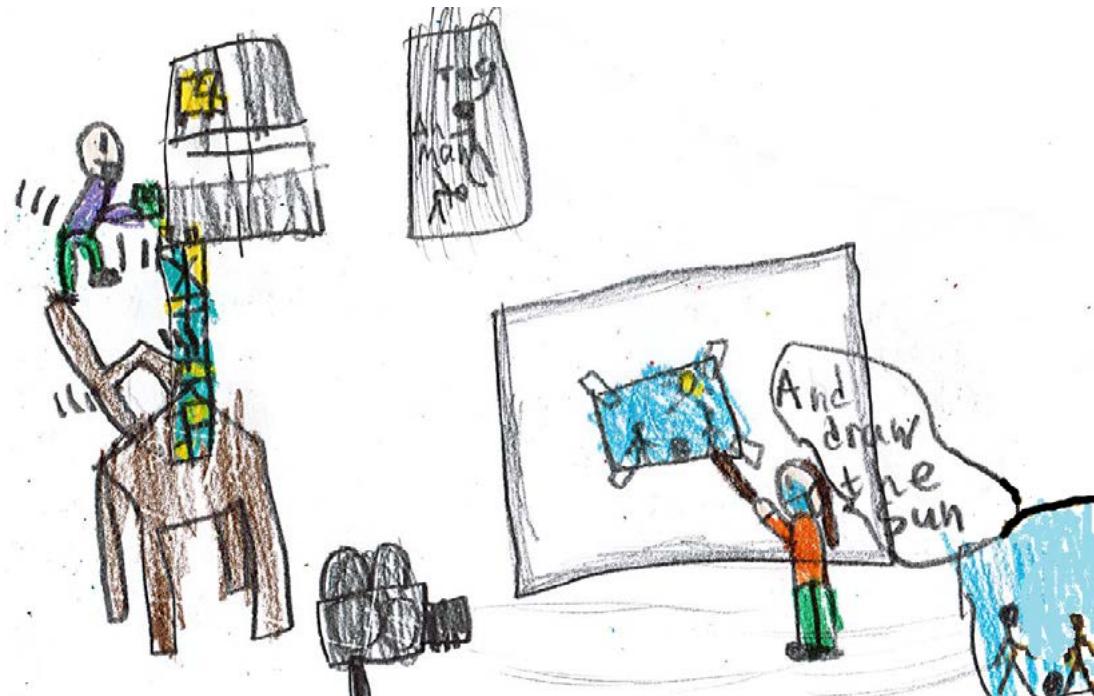


Text: "Teachers can make learning fun by bringing toys in school on Friday."

**Example 4 – Boy, 9, Third class**

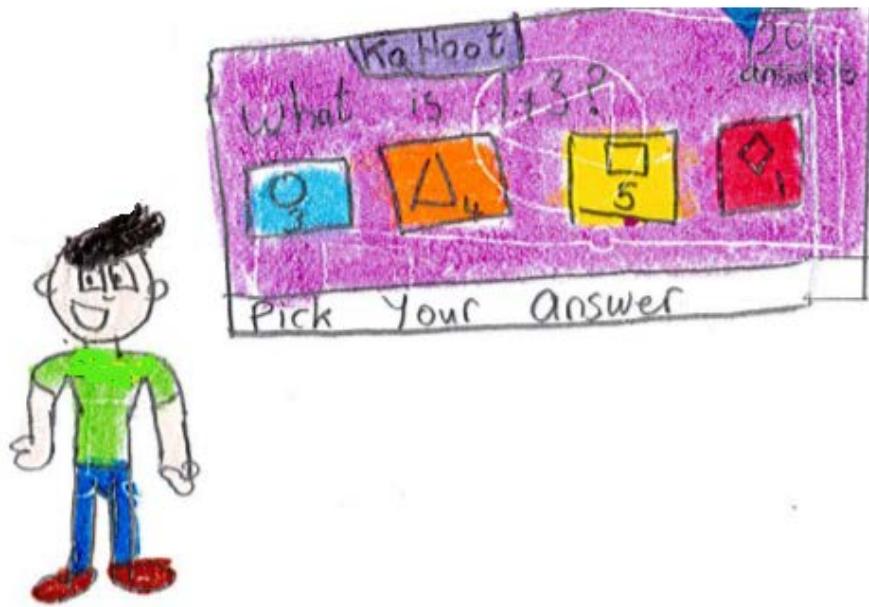


Text: "Division (the easy way), geography, atlas work...science, history."



Text: "Art, Lego, free time, movie day, break time, school tour."

## Example 5 – Girl, 10, Fourth class



Text: "I think learning would be easier if in Maths and Irish we could play learning games and quizzes."



Text: "I think learning would be more fun if the teacher played more games and show us more pictures and videos."

### **Example 6 – Girl, 10, Fourth class**



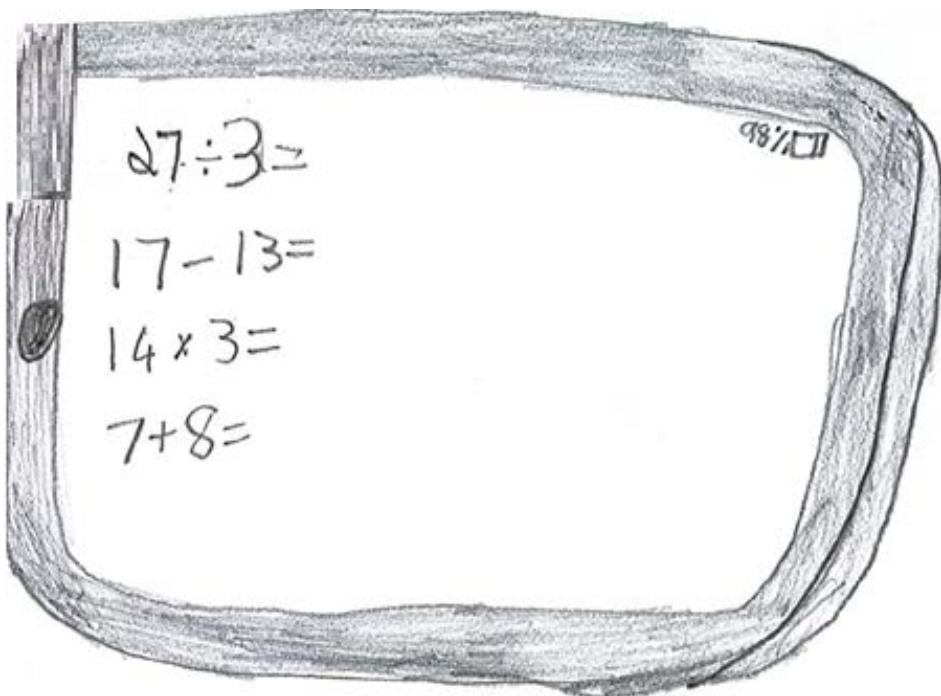
Text: "If you are stuck on something they can help by bringing you up to their desk and the teacher can explain it to you. Or if you find something difficult and you don't understand it, you can ask the teacher if they could explain it again."

### **Example 7 – Girl, 10, Fourth class**



Text: "I think if teachers gave points to kids it would be a lot more fun. For example if a kid got a question correct they would get a point on a chart."

### Example 8 – Boy, 10, Fourth class



Text: "Learning on electronics will make learning easier and more fun."



Text: "Bring learning outside and having a break every so often. A friend helping you would be fun and easier. Most importantly, no homework, more P.E., and longer yard."

### **Example 9 – Boy, 11, Fifth class**

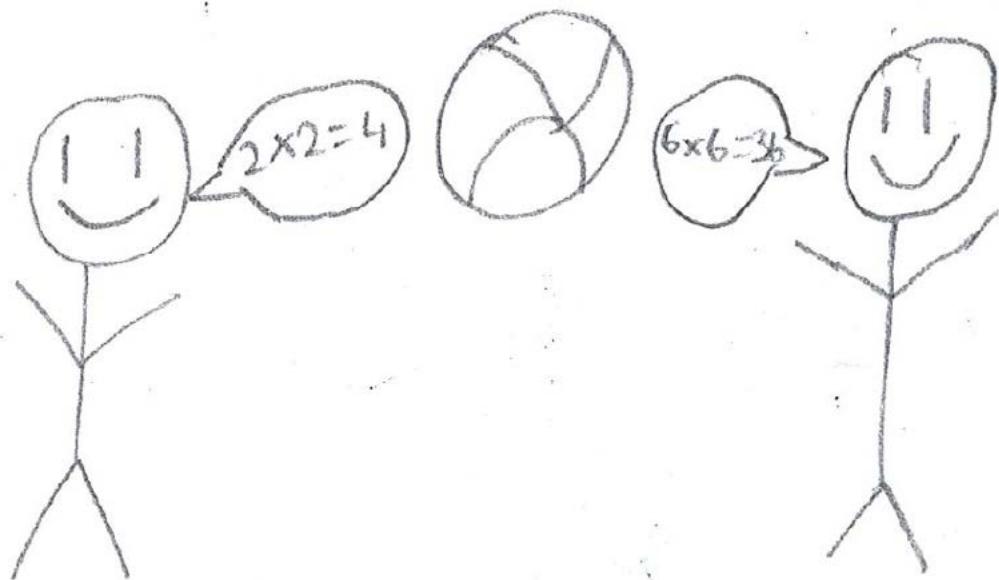


Text: "Use competitions to add excitement to the classroom. Add a reward system to encourage good behaviour. Use local facilities, so kids shall be excited to come to school. Mix children together to make sure everyone has a friend."

### **Example 10 – Boy, 11, Fifth class**



Text: "I think it would be easier to learn different subjects if there would be more posters on the wall because I could just look at the walls if I forgot something."



Text: "I think it would be more fun if we had more games like throwing the ball and answering maths questions."

### Example 11 – Girl, 11, Fifth class



Text: "Teachers can make learning more fun by using mini whiteboards more. I think mini whiteboards are really enjoyable and I definitely recommend it to other people. I also think pair work is very enjoyable too! You get to work with other people and they could help you on things you find hard."



Text: "Teachers can make work more fun by outside learning. I think outside learning is really important for children and adults. It can boost the students' confidence more and it can be a way to be more active!"

# Appendix 8: Full breakdown of areas that participants in each online consultation session were from

| Area                       | Session 1 (n=12) | Session 2 (n=13) |
|----------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Co. Cork – Cork City       | 1                | 0                |
| Co. Cork – Town            | 1                | 1                |
| Co. Cork – Rural           | 1                | 0                |
| Co. Dublin – City (South)  | 1                | 0                |
| Co. Dublin – City (Fingal) | 2                | 0                |
| Co. Galway – Rural         | 0                | 1                |
| Co. Kilkenny – Town        | 1                | 0                |
| Co. Laois – Town           | 1                | 0                |
| Co. Leitrim - Rural        | 0                | 1                |
| Co. Limerick – City        | 0                | 2                |
| Co. Longford – Town        | 0                | 1                |
| Co. Mayo – Town            | 0                | 1                |
| Co. Mayo - Rural           | 0                | 1                |
| Co. Meath – Town           | 1                | 0                |
| Co. Offaly – Rural         | 1                | 0                |
| Co. Roscommon – Rural      | 0                | 1                |
| Co. Waterford – Town       | 0                | 1                |
| Co. Wexford – Town         | 2                | 0                |
| Co. Wicklow – Town         | 0                | 2                |
| Co. Wicklow – Rural        | 0                | 1                |



# Appendix 9: Summary of consultation findings for children and young people

Note. This appendix is not intended as advice to schools, rather it is intended as a summary of what the children and young people told us through this consultation presented in a child-friendly format.



## Developing an evaluation framework for teachers' professional learning (TPL) in Ireland: Small-scale consultation with children and young people

**Teachers' Professional Learning (TPL)** includes professional learning and development activities for teachers and school leaders. Teachers' participation in TPL can impact on students' learning and experiences at school so it is important to understand what children and young people think about their learning and experiences when evaluating TPL. Children and young people were consulted in this study.

In June 2021, **427 primary pupils** and **25 post-primary students** answered **two consultation questions**. These were:

1. How can teachers make learning easier?
2. How can teachers make learning more fun/engaging?



Grouped under **4 themes**, primary school pupils provided suggestions related to...

| Curriculum, teaching and learning   | Culture and learning environment   | Relationships and partnerships   | Play, recreation, and stress reduction  |
|---|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear explanations</li> <li>• Educational games</li> <li>• One-to-one support</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lessons outdoors</li> <li>• More classroom support</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater student choice/voice</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More playtime/yard time</li> <li>• Student comfort aids (e.g., teddies or toys)</li> <li>• More learning breaks</li> </ul> |

Grouped under **3 themes**, post-primary students provided suggestions related to...

| Teaching methods   | Student-teacher relationships  | Learning environment   |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using a variety of teaching methods</li> <li>• Increasing opportunities for classroom discussions</li> <li>• Encouraging participation and critical thinking</li> </ul> | <p><b>Teachers ...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being respectful, friendly, and approachable to students</li> <li>• Fostering or encouraging positive relationships with students</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving classroom management</li> </ul> |

This infographic outlines the results of a small-scale consultation with children and young people. The consultation and findings are intended to inform the development of an evaluation framework for TPL, to give some insights into students' views, and to illustrate the use of some methods that may support gathering these views. The findings are not intended to serve as advice for teachers or schools.

### More Info

The framework will be published in 2023. You can find out more at <https://www.erc.ie/overviewTPL>  
Publications are available at <https://www.erc.ie/TPLwellbeing/publications>



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