

# SUSPENSIONS & EXCLUSIONS IN PRIMARY SCHOOL CHALLENGES & SOLUTIONS

## SEMINAR REPORT



Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> November 2019

Crowne Plaza, Dundalk

## Attendance

**Over 70 people attended.**

**A full list of schools, groups and agencies that attended can be found at Appendix 1.**

## Introduction & Overview

**John Moloney**

**Retired Primary School Principal**

## Keynote

**Dr Paul Downes**

**Director of the Educational Disadvantage Centre, Institute of Education, Dublin City University**

- Addressed the seminar by video link
- Illegal to expel children at Primary School Level
- The need for Counsellors & Therapists in schools
- Restorative Practice approaches
- First teachers for children are their parents

## Understanding the reasons for challenging behaviours in school setting

**Grainne Murphy**

**Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), HSE**

1. Lifestyle
2. Medical issues
3. Cognitive functioning
4. Specific learning difficulty
5. Speech & language disorder
6. Occupational therapy needs
7. Home life
8. Social & emotional development
9. Psychiatric disorders
10. Childhood trauma
11. Physical disability in a child, parent or sibling

## National & Local Context

**Georgina Traynor**

**Tusla Educational Support Service (TESS)**

- 3 strands to TESS
- Focus on early intervention
- School & parents working together
- In school supports
- Deis – TESS supports: SCP, HSCL, NEP's
- CAMHS Psychology Services
- Tusla Social Work Department
- Local Youth Organisations & Groups
- Other Community Statutory/Voluntary Groups
- Code of Behaviours
- Specific requirements – Section 23(2) EWA 2000
- Expulsions – can only be decided by BOM, parents must be invited in writing informing them of reason for meeting
- LMETB – 14 days to appeal
- Section 24, Section 29

## Perspective from Inside Schools

**Padraig McCabe**

**Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN)**

- Support teachers needed
- Do schools have trained staff to deal with behaviours?
- Schools are under pressure with approaches
- Health & safety issues
- Sign of systems failure
- Serious misbehaviour can have damaging & long lasting effects of students own learning and the learning of others
- Tools for schools to adjust to suit child's behavioural needs
- Look at schools quality framework
- Leading, teaching & learning
- Standard to foster a commitment to inclusion & equality
- Managing the organisation
- Establish healthy learning, safe environments
- Supports – allocated on the basis of need
- Language shapes the way we think
- GROW – Goals, Reality, Options, Will Do!!
- One size doesn't fit all
- Schools need HELP!!

## Restorative Practice: A Solution?

**Claire Casey**  
**Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) Tallaght**

**Richie Walsh**  
**Mark's SNS**

- Building good relationships, preventing conflict, restoring harm
- System is broken
- Child centred education
- Learning ready
- Nobody talking about well-being of teachers & Principals
- When adults change – everything changes
- Restorative Practice – develop, maintain, repair
- Parents need to know we don't shout at each other in our school
- Engage respectful with staff & students
- Use restorative language
- Stop asking WHY!
- Fair process
- Free expressions of emotions
- High levels of support
- Challenges inappropriate behaviours
- Encourage acceptance of responsibility
- Setting of clear boundaries – encourages accountability
- Reduces disciplinary incidents
- Reduces workplace conflict
- Improves staff morale
- Blame is a TOXIC WORD!

## Open Forum – Panel Discussion

- 1. Deputy Principal of Redeemer Boys' School:** Frustration with the system. Children are falling through the net because of lack of supports in schools. Dept of Education needs to wake up!!
- 2. Coordinator of School Completion Dun Dealgan:** Greatest issue is parenting. Wish is to get Deis & Non Deis Training
- 3. Principal CBS Primary School:** Deis schools have access to Incredible Years Programme. Set up locally Restorative Practice Training
- 4. Principal Bay Estate School:** Staff of 36, if training comes up only 2 teachers can go. All crying out for training
- 5. The Genesis Programme:** When we send child home we could be sending them to a difficult home situation. Every child needs one adult they can turn to. Come together. Dept of Education – hard door to open
- 6. Richie Walsh:** Non Deis Schools – find ways to get training, deal with issues as a community. Restorative Practice – get trained, practice for a year and then train to be a trainer. Do training within the schools, teachers did summer course in Restorative Practice, feel the energy in the school.

## Group Discussion

### The Seminar was divided into groups to look at 3 particular questions

1. What changes can be made in your school or community to address the issue of Expulsions & Suspensions at Primary Level?
2. What supports & resources would you need to implement these changes?
3. What changes or supports could be implemented collectively on an area basis to address the issue of Expulsions & Suspensions at Primary Level?

## Feedback / Ideas for Next Steps

The feedback from the groups fell into four thematic areas:

1. Training
2. Interagency Collaboration
3. Lobbying and Advocacy
4. Resources

### Training

- Change the mindset/Change the language
- Access to support/training for all schools
- Training for staff – Dept of Education Led
- Parenting supports
- Early intervention
- Restorative Practice training in the community

### Interagency Collaboration

- Multi Disciplinary Teams, Speech and Language Teacher & Occupational Therapy Supports
- Agencies working together at local level

### Lobbying and Advocacy

- Department of Education & Skills need to be more involved, not available to answer questions
- Principal led – staff buy in
- Working group to challenge Government (a voice for the children)
- Communication channels for child

### Resources

- We have Maths recovery, no behaviour recovery
- Access to school completion funding
- Speech & Language and other services needed in schools
- Support teacher in all schools
- Expansion of Emotional Behavioural Difficulties services
- Access to CAMHS etc
- One key adult to support school/community in trauma consequences
- Time allocated to foster relationships between children & school personnel/sharing food together
- Counselling for children
- Resources for social & emotional needs

## Seminar Evaluation

Attendees were asked to complete an Evaluation Form. A synopsis of the results of this can be found at Appendix 2.

**Appendix 1 – Schools, Groups & Agencies in Attendance**

An Garda Síochána  
Ardee Educate Together  
CBS Primary, Chapel St, Dundalk  
CDI Tallaght  
Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) - HSE  
Coláiste Chú Chulainn, Dundalk  
Children & Young People's Services Committee Louth - Tusla  
Deeside School Completion Programme  
Dun Dealgan National School  
Educational Welfare Service  
Foroige  
Fostering and Aftercare Service – Tusla  
Gaelscoil Dhún Dealgan  
Holy Family School Completion Programme (Drogheda)  
HSE - Louth Disability Services  
Irish Primary Principal's Network (IPPN)  
Joint Policing Unit  
Lios na nÓg  
Louth Meath Education & Training Board (LMETB)  
Louth Disability Services – HSE  
North East Springboard Support  
Oriental School Completion Programme (Dundalk)  
Primary Care, Dundalk – HSE  
Redeemer Boys NS  
Redeemer Girls NS  
School Completion Programme Dhun Dealgan  
Scoil Eoin Baiste  
Scoil Mhuire Na nGael, Bay Estate, Dundalk  
Scoil Phádraig Naofa, Kilcurry, Dundalk  
St Brigid's School, Dundalk  
St Joseph's NS, Dundalk  
St Nicholas Monastery NS  
St Oliver's NS Drogheda  
St Paul's NS, Drogheda  
St. Francis NS, Blackrock, Dundalk.  
St. Mark's SNS, Tallaght  
The Genesis Programme  
Tusla Educational Support Service (TESS)  
Tusla

## Appendix 2 – Seminar Evaluation / Synopsis of Results

Number of respondents: 21

### ***How well the content meet your needs?***

Average score: 8 (out of 10)

### ***How did you rate the effectiveness of the Presenters?***

Average score: 9 (out of 10)

### ***How did you rate the methods / styles used?***

Average score: 8 (out of 10)

### ***What have you learned from today's presentations and discussions?***

- That everyone feels the same
- That are benefits from adopting some of these approaches in schools
- That there are different approaches available
- There is a deep level of concerns around the struggle schools are experiencing regarding behaviour
- There are alternatives to dealing with conflict

### ***In what way will it benefit you?***

- Take pressure off in school
- Good to hear other people feel the same about adopting these approaches in schools
- More understanding
- Greater communication on the issue
- Higher level of awareness

### ***What issues do you feel were not covered at the Seminar. Could you expand on your reasons for highlighting the issue?***

- Solutions needed
- Departmental input (particularly Department of Education and Skills)

### ***How would you rate the Venue and Time of the Event?***

Venue = Excellent

Time = Good