



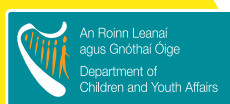
SO,

HOW WAS

SCHOOL

TODAY?

Report of a survey
on how young people are
taught and how they learn



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Joint Ministerial Foreword

As Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and Minister for Education and Skills, we are delighted to welcome this publication of ***So, How Was School Today?*** This report is the outcome of a survey developed by the National Executive of Comhairle na nÓg. It is a very welcome contribution - the enthusiasm of the young people for high-quality education is truly inspiring.

This report sets out the views of some 3,242 young people, aged 12 – 17 years, who responded to the survey from across the network of 31 Comhairle na nÓg youth councils. The findings are very interesting and the conclusions have been very carefully drawn up. A lot of food for thought has been presented which will inform policy, particularly in our post-primary schools.

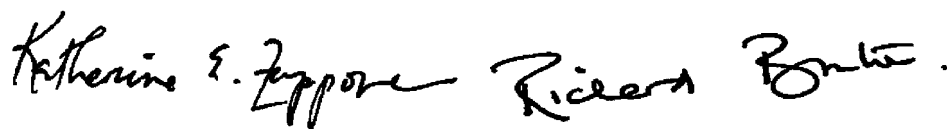
We are very glad to note that the views of our young people align very well with the thinking that underpins the new Junior Cycle. This new approach was set out in the Framework for Junior Cycle 2015 and is now being implemented in all our second-level schools. This September (2017) a new Wellbeing programme was introduced which will address many of the wellbeing needs identified by the young people. Young people want their teachers to use active teaching and learning approaches. Teachers are being equipped with a range of active teaching and learning methods that encourage greater levels of student participation in their learning.

Our young people worry that, sometimes, their views and suggestions are listened to only in a cursory or tokenistic way. This is of concern to us. The most recent Lifeskills survey of 2015 found that 99% of post-primary schools have Student Councils. This is very positive and allows opportunities for deeper engagement with students. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs is strongly committed to the inclusion of children and young people in

decision making. The **National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making, 2015 – 2020** sets out how we are working to ensure they have a voice and input into decisions that affect their lives such as in education.

The Department of Education and Skills are starting a review of Senior Cycle and we believe the views outlined in this survey will provide an insightful contribution to this work.

The students in this survey have so much to say; and we must listen to them. Their advice will enable us to continue to implement our ambitious reforms in education. We are confident that we can work together to achieve our target for Ireland to have the best Education Service in Europe by 2026. Key to realizing this ambition is providing better quality education - it must be fun, engaging and create a love of learning. Our strong commitment to the **National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making** ensures that the voice of young people will continue to play a vital role in this process.



Dr Katherine Zappone TD
Minister for Children and Youth Affairs

Richard Bruton TD
Minister for Education and Skills

Comhairle na nÓg National Executive Foreword

We on the National Executive were delighted to work on the topic of education for our term because it is one of the most important aspects of the lives of all young people in Ireland. We hope that it can make an important and unique contribution to a better-informed debate on education in Ireland.

Being a member of the National Executive of Comhairle na nÓg has been an incredible experience, as we have had the opportunity to get to know very talented people from all across the country. As well as that, we've learned some valuable skills during the creation of this survey, such as how to conduct effective research, how to communicate more clearly, teamwork and, most importantly, how to respect the views and opinions of others. This survey is the amalgamation of our work. Through it, we hope to make our voices and the voices of young people heard as loudly as possible.

Having said that, what do we wish to do having fulfilled our task of conducting a survey and gathering 3,200 voices together? As we have the results, we wish to spread them to as many ears as possible, whether it be the Minister of Education or you, the reader. We hope that our information and data will be considered in future legislation about education, youth wellbeing and other areas. We hope that teachers and principals across the nation can work with us to create a productive and effective learning environment which incentivises the student to learn and the teacher to teach.

The National Executive has been an unbelievable platform to work from for the past two years. The fact that our opinions actually had weight really drove the project forward. This was a particularly engaging topic to work on because of its relevance to all involved. If given the opportunity, we would do it all again in a heartbeat: the opportunity has been as wonderful as it was unique.

The effort put into this initiative by the group has most certainly paid off. Some of us have had very early Saturday mornings but the notion of coming up to Dublin to make a difference justified the lack of sleep. It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and we will be forever grateful for being offered it. We believe this experience has helped to develop our minds on serious relevant topics.

The past two years have been life changing to say the least. We would like to thank the inspirational staff of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Foróige and Youth Work Ireland who have dedicated a lot of their time to us during our term. It has also been a pleasure getting to know one another and we are proud to call each other friends.

The Research Support Team

Professor Dympna Devine is Head of UCD School of Education. Her specialist field is sociology, with an interest in the social study of childhood, children's rights and identities and their educational well-being. She has been nominated by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs to the National Advisory Council for Children and Young People (2015-2020).

Central to her approach is the view that education must be at the heart of any attempt to provide social justice and that education is a key factor in producing and reproducing children's social and learner identities.

Dympna is internationally recognised for her work in the areas of children's voice, rights and citizenship, and for her studies of migrant children's identities and experiences across home, school and community. She has also published in the areas of gender and education, school leadership and teacher pedagogies.

Ciara Nic Cartaigh is a Research Scholar in UCD School of Education. She has worked in the non-profit sector for more than a decade, managing and supporting development and humanitarian programmes, with a focus on education. Prior to that she worked as a support teacher for English as an additional language.

As a doctoral candidate in UCD, Ciara is researching issues of language of instruction and literacy from the perspective of the learner in resource-poor contexts. She also works as a consultant, specialising in education inclusion, early literacy and monitoring and evaluation. She has a Master's degree in Development Studies from UCD and a Bachelor's degree in English and Philosophy from NUIG.

Gavin Murphy is a Research Scholar in UCD School of Education where he also works in initial teacher and leadership education. He is a member of the 'Leading, Teaching, Learning' research cluster and his research examines leadership preparation and development. Gavin has also presented research internationally exploring the role of student voices and participation in leadership.

Working as a post-primary school teacher, Gavin completed further graduate study in Educational Leadership at University College Dublin. Subsequently, having been awarded funding as a Cambridge Trust Scholar, he completed an MPhil at the University of Cambridge with First Class Honours.

Executive Summary

Comhairle na nÓg National Executive developed this survey in response to Comhairle members, who identified their top issue as the need for young people to have a stronger say on what happens in the classroom.

The results are an important contribution to debates about education in Ireland.

These are key concerns.

- Exams are the biggest source of stress with 78% of leaving cert students and 81% of junior cert students reporting that exams make them feel stressed.
- Students prefer active learning yet only 30% agree that their teachers make learning interesting and fun. Examples of active learning include project work, role plays, quizzes and debates. Active learning also involves feedback from teachers.
- Students would like the teaching methods for mathematics, Irish and English to be improved. (These are listed in order of priority.)
- First year students tend to be most positive about their school experiences. Findings show that they have lower levels of stress and were more satisfied with levels of support relative to other years.
- Less than half of students are satisfied with the support services in their schools.
- Girls report more negative experiences of school than boys do.

These results are in line with international research, and some of the findings demonstrate that we are not supporting the educational rights for young people set out in national and international legislation. The results also reflect concerns from previous research in Ireland about our exam-focused system with lower levels of student-centred and active-learning methods in schools. The survey indicates that this influences both student engagement and wellbeing.



Comhairle na nÓg National Executive





CHAPTER 01

What is

Comhairle na nÓg?



Comhairle na nÓg are child and youth councils in the 31 local authorities of the country. These councils are designed to give young people a voice on the services, policies and issues that affect them in their local area.

One representative from each of the 31 Comhairle na nÓg is elected to the Comhairle na nÓg National Executive, which follows up on the recommendations from Dáil na nÓg to make changes for young people in those areas. The National Executive has a term of office of two years and meets once a month. The National Executive is facilitated and supported by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs Participation Support Team, who ensure that they get the opportunity to engage with appropriate Government ministers, policy-makers, Oireachtas committees and other decision makers.

Dáil na nÓg is the national youth parliament for 12-17 year-olds, which is held every two years. Local Comhairlí na nÓg elect 200 young people to Dáil na nÓg. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) funds and oversees Dáil na nÓg. The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs hosts Dáil na nÓg.

Local Comhairlí na nÓg choose the topics discussed at Dáil na nÓg. The National Executive then follows up on these recommendations over the next two years.

The Comhairle na nÓg National Showcase is held every two years. It gives young people from the 31 Comhairlí na nÓg the opportunity to:

- strengthen the national profile of Comhairle na nÓg by showcasing the work of the local groups;
- provide young people with the chance to network and share their experiences of what works in their local groups; and
- provide policy makers, service providers and local and national politicians with an opportunity to visit the showcase and experience firsthand the successes and value of Comhairle na nÓg.



CHAPTER 02

Developing the
Survey



Here are the events that led to the report you're reading.

November 2014

At the Comhairle na nÓg National Showcase, **500 young people** (delegates) decide **the issue they most need a say on is education and schools.**

November 2015

At Dáil na nÓg, **200 delegates** decide their **top issue** is **'the need for young people to have a stronger say on what happens in the classroom'.**

The Comhairle na nÓg CNN National Executive **develop the survey** with help from:

- the Department of Children and Youth Affairs;
- the Department of Education and Skills; and
- a steering committee of education experts and researchers from the School of Education in University College Dublin (UCD).

Questions in the survey are based on Irish research on the kinds of teaching and learning that happens in schools and teachers' opinions on what makes a good teacher and creates a positive classroom.

October and November 2016

At Comhairle na nÓg AGMs, **3,242 young people take the survey.**

UCD School of Education **analyses the survey results** using the computer statistics package IBM SPSS Statistics.

February 2017

The research support team from the UCD School of Education **present the survey results** to the Comhairle na nÓg National Executive and the executive select priority findings to highlight in the report.

November 2017

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs publish **So, How Was School Today?**, the report on the survey.

This survey is the first national study of young people's experiences of teaching and learning. We hope the results will help inform policy and best practice in education.



CHAPTER 03

And the **Results** are...



There were 13 questions in the survey. When we analysed them, we grouped the results into three themes.

- Experiences of teaching and learning in school
- Feelings about school
- Views on services and IT in school

The final question was “if you have any ideas about how teaching and learning in school could be improved, please tell us.”

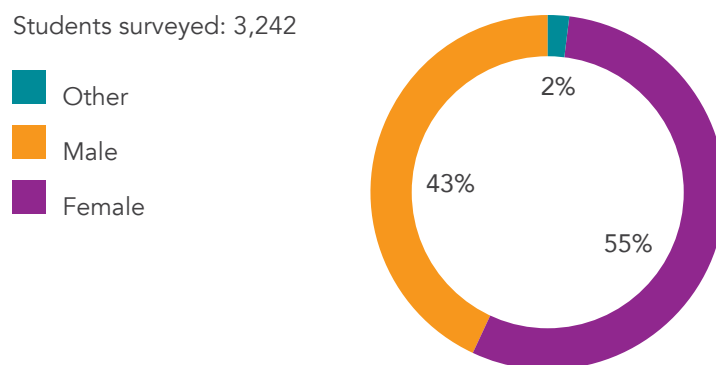
It was not possible to include questions about social class, ethnicity or disability in the survey. These issues are also important in shaping students’ experience. There is a need for further research to explore how teaching and learning in schools is influenced by social class and ethnicity and if this differs for boys and girls, and from one kind of school to another.

A copy of the survey questions is in Appendix A.

3.1 Participants in the survey by gender, school year and school type

3.1.1 Gender

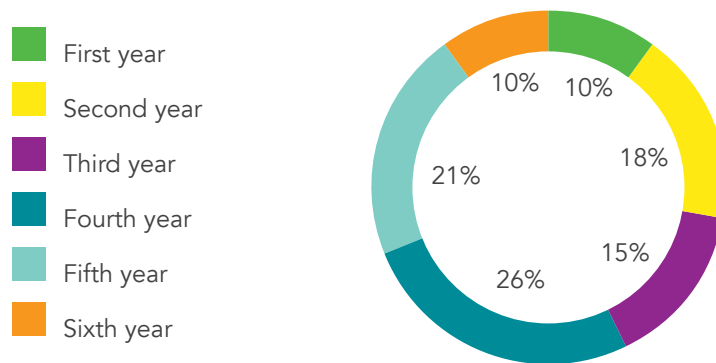
Figure 1: Students surveyed by gender



When we asked people about gender, 2% selected 'Other'. For this report, it was not possible to analyse the responses from students who chose the option 'Other' as the numbers involved were too small to make meaningful statistical comparisons. However, the impact of LGBTI+ on experiences of teaching and learning is needed in research.

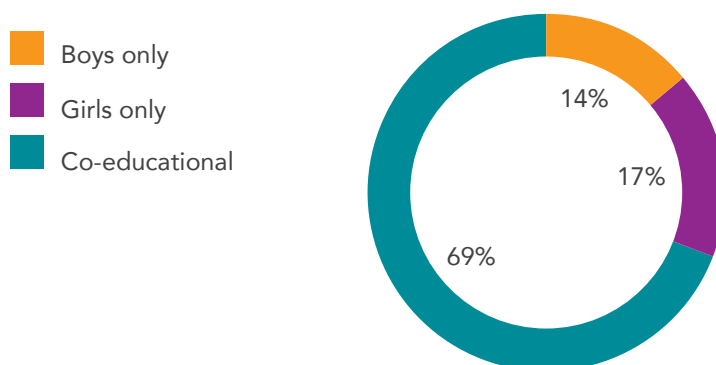
3.1.2 School year

Figure 2: Breakdown of participants by school year



3.1.3 School type

Figure 3: Breakdown of participants by gender of school

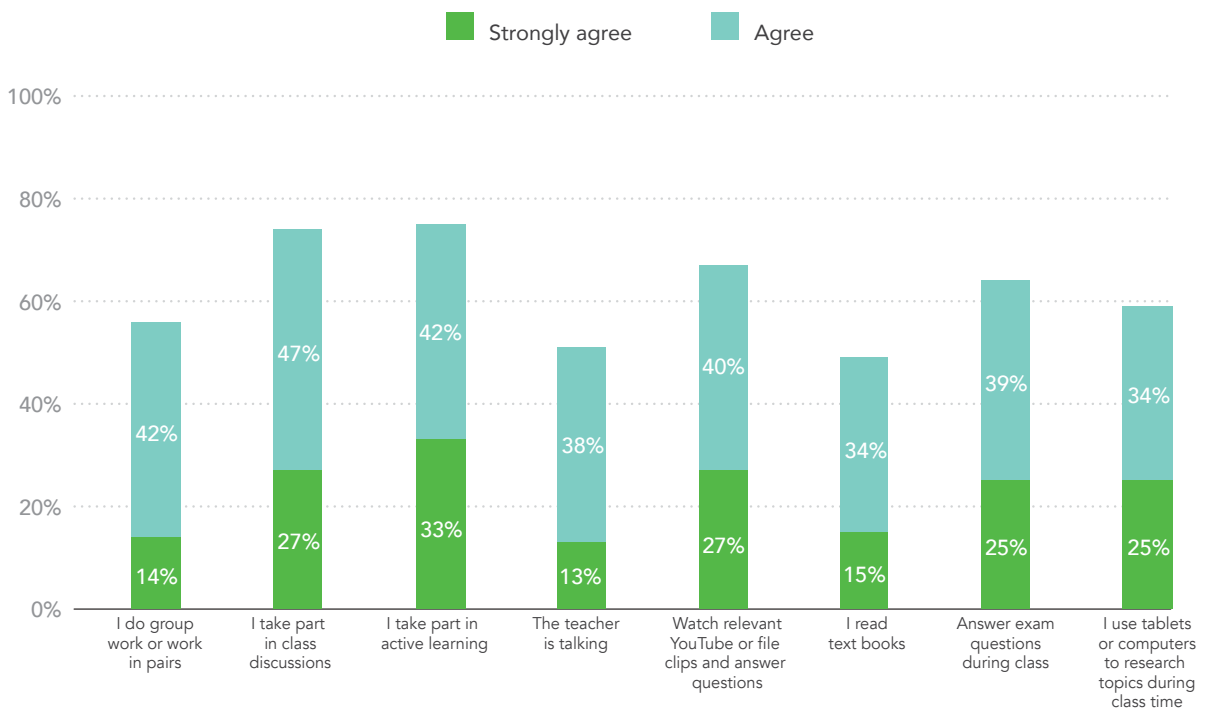


3.2 Experiences of teaching and learning in school

3.2.1 The best ways to learn

3.2.1.1 The results

Figure 4: I learn best when...



3.2.1.2 Gender

Boys and girls had similar opinions about how they learned best.

3.2.1.3 Year level

Students in all years had similar opinions about how they learned best.

3.2.1.4 Students' comments

'Have teachers be more energetic, enthusiastic and less monotone. Although this only applies to certain teachers, 'cos some teachers already do this and make learning easier.'

(Fourth year, male, **boys-only school**, Co Waterford)

'Make it more fun but with a boundary that makes sure there is learning but also fun.'

(Third year, female, **co-educational school**, Co Donegal)

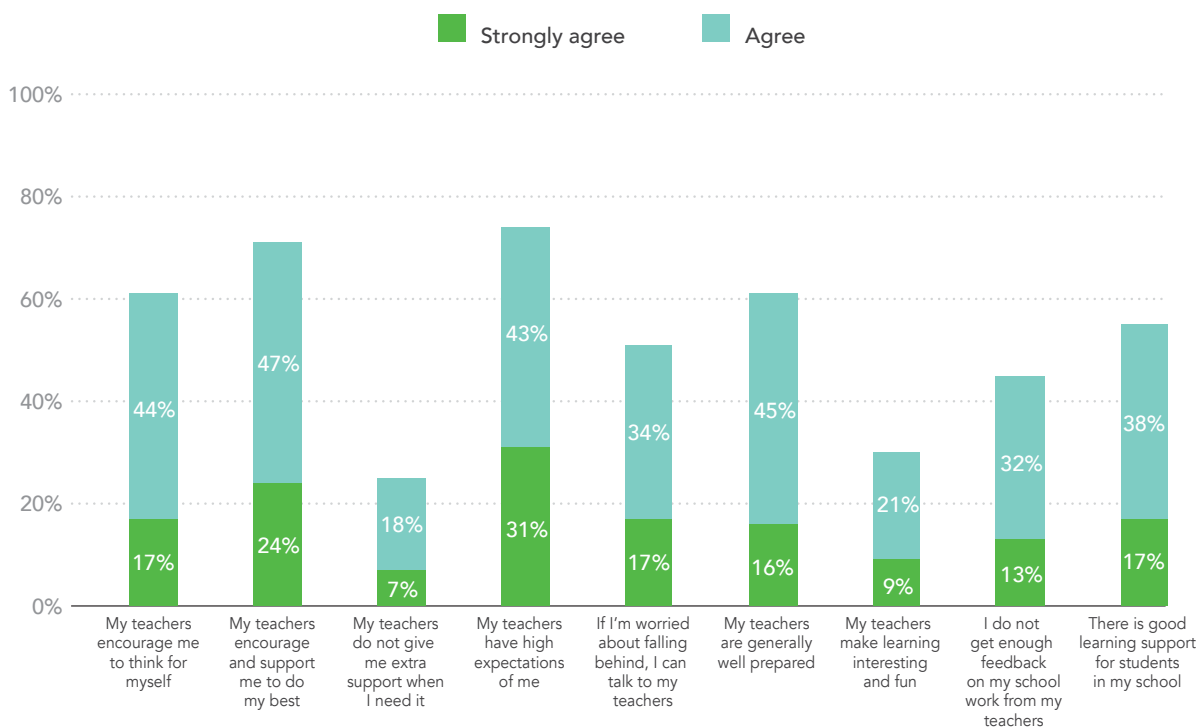
'During double class allow students to stand up/move around, as it is very hard sitting down for long periods and encourage more activities outside during the day.'

(Fourth year, female, **girls-only school**, Co Dublin)

3.2.2 Opinions on teaching and learning

3.2.2.1 The results

Figure 5: Experiences of teaching and learning



3.2.2.2 Gender

Some notable gender differences emerged. Boys are more likely to agree with the statement that:

- they can talk to their teachers if they are worried about falling behind (56% of boys compared to 47% of girls); and
- there is good learning support for students in their school (59% of boys agreed compared to 47% of girls).

3.3.2.3 Year level

Agreement or disagreement with the statements varied depending on year level. First-year students tend to be most positive about their experiences of teaching.

3.2.2.4 Students' comments

'We need more feedback from teachers to know how students are doing.'

(Fifth year, female, **co-educational school**, Co Mayo)

'Instead of forcing everyone to fit into a fixed mould, we should be allowed to explore what we're passionate about'

(Fourth year, female, **co-educational school**, Co Dublin)

'Not all students are the same - one size does not fit all.'

(Third year, male, **boys-only school**, Co Monaghan)

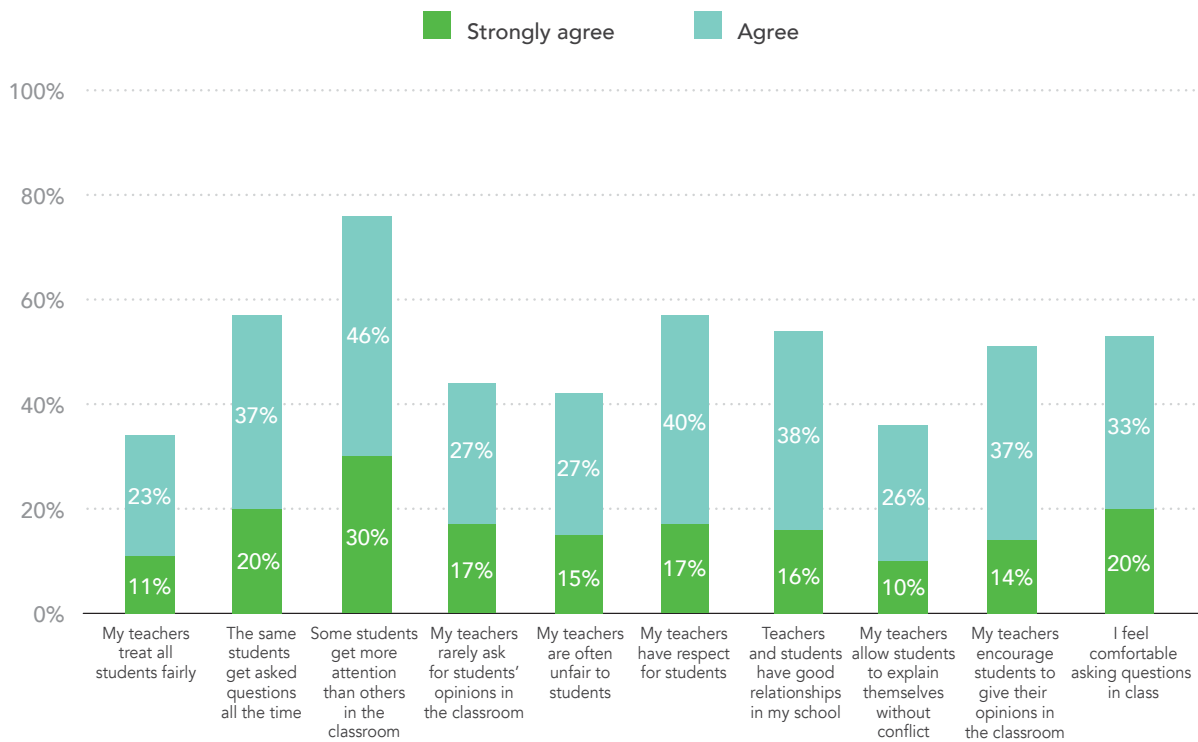
'The teachers in my school are brilliant'

(First year, male, **co-educational school**, Co Cork)

3.2.3 Communication in the classroom

3.2.3.1 The results

Figure 6: Communication and relationships in the classroom



3.2.3.2 Gender

Figure 7: Girls' and boys' agreement with selected positive statements on classroom relationships

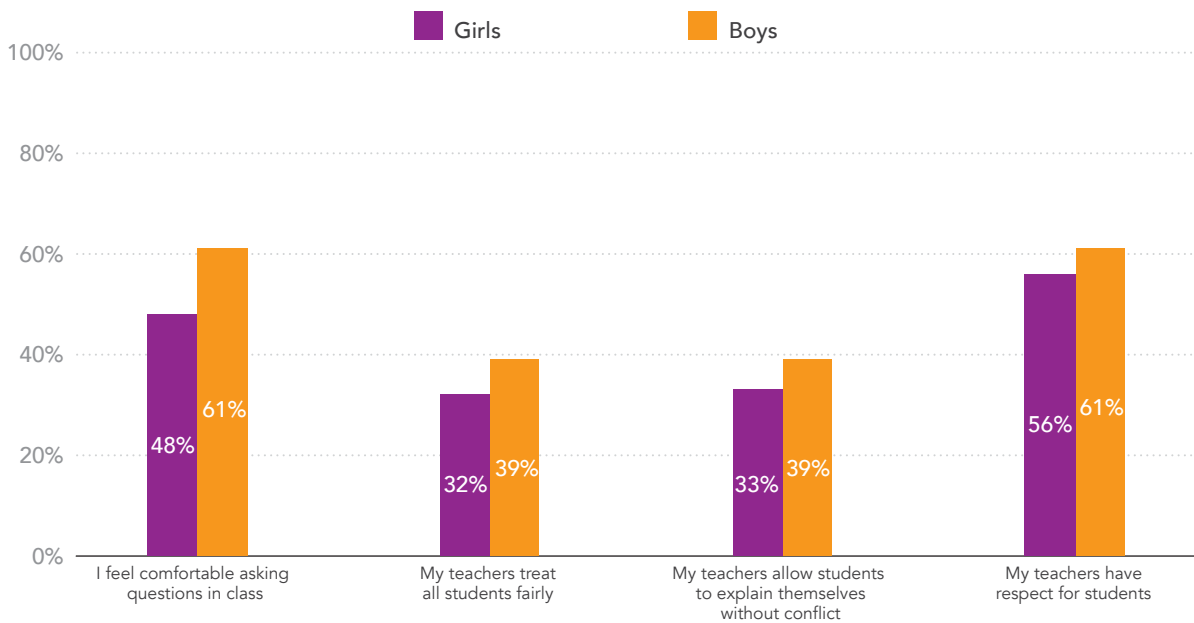
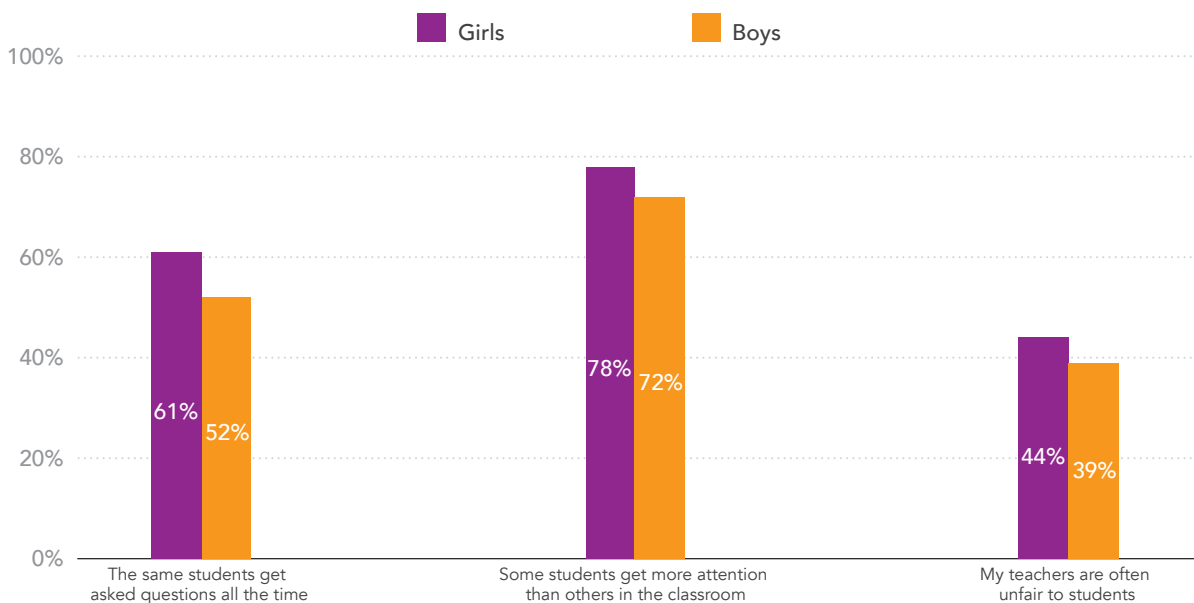


Figure 8: Girls' and boys' agreement with selected negative statements on classroom relationships



3.2.3.3 Year level

People in first year are most positive about relationships with their teachers and communication in the classroom. People in fourth year are least positive.

3.2.3.4 Students' comments

'Talk to your students like they are normal people and treat them equally.'

(Fourth year, female, **girls-only school**, Co Clare)

'Treat everyone equally. Don't take people's exam scores only and praise them in the class. Try to include everyone, more than one person in the class has an opinion.'

(Third year, female, **co-educational school**, Co Limerick)

'Teachers should talk to the shy ones and try and bring them out of their shell.'

(Third year, female, **co-educational school**, Co Cork)

'Make sure those who want to pursue teaching are interested in the profession for the right reasons. Raise the points for teachers to attract high achievers and not just those who do not know what else do when they finish their degree.'

(Fourth year, male, **co-educational school**, Co Dublin)

'Help teachers to become more open-minded.'

(Second year, female, **co-educational school**, Co Waterford)

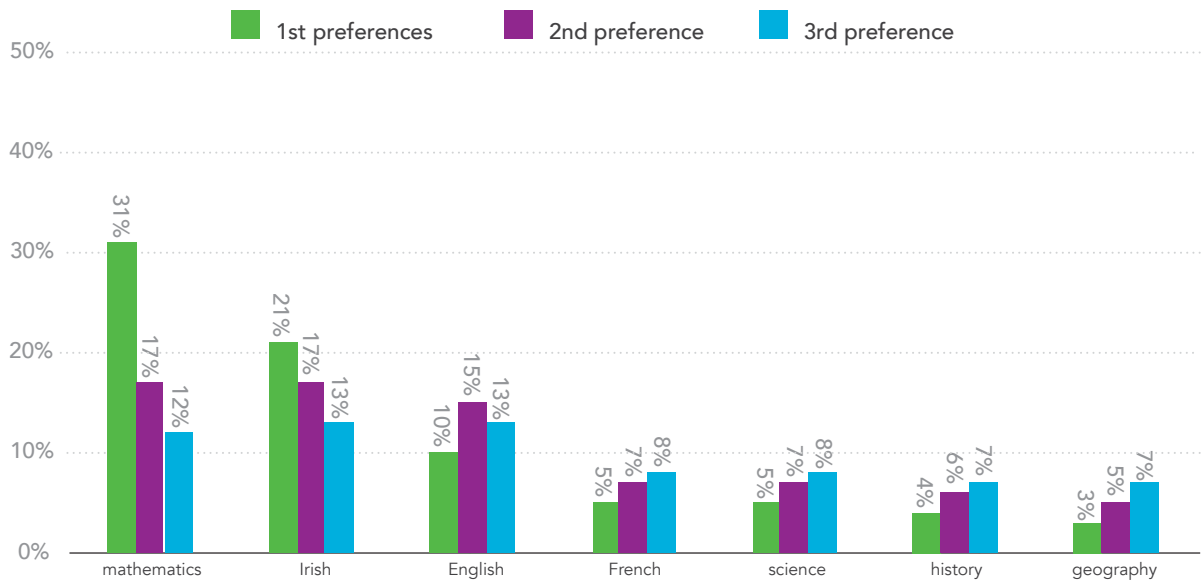
'Make the teachers be happier in the environment not stressed and sad.'

(Fourth year, female, **co-educational school**, Co Cork)

3.2.4 Subjects where the teaching needs to be improved

3.2.4.1 The results

Figure 9: If you could improve the teaching of subjects in your school, which three subjects would you choose, in order of importance?



3.2.4.2 Gender

Both boys and girls indicated that mathematics teaching is what they would like to see improved first.

3.2.4.3 Year

All years indicated that mathematics teaching is what they would like to see improved first.

3.2.4.4 Students' comments

Student comments were more likely to mention Irish or other language teaching than mathematics teaching.

'In my case I would like to see more teachers able to teach through Irish. Also for subjects like chemistry and business, there is no book through Irish.'

(Sixth year male, **co-educational school**, Co Louth)

'Irish should be language-focused not exam-focused.'

(Fifth year, female, **girls-only school**, Co Dublin)

'I believe more focus should be dedicated to languages as most focus is put on subjects which help careers in STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths] Departments.'

(Fourth year, female, **co-educational school**, Co Tipperary)

'French and foreign languages curricula are too weak and students not able to speak the language after 5-6 years, more immersion is required and standards need to be more demanding.'

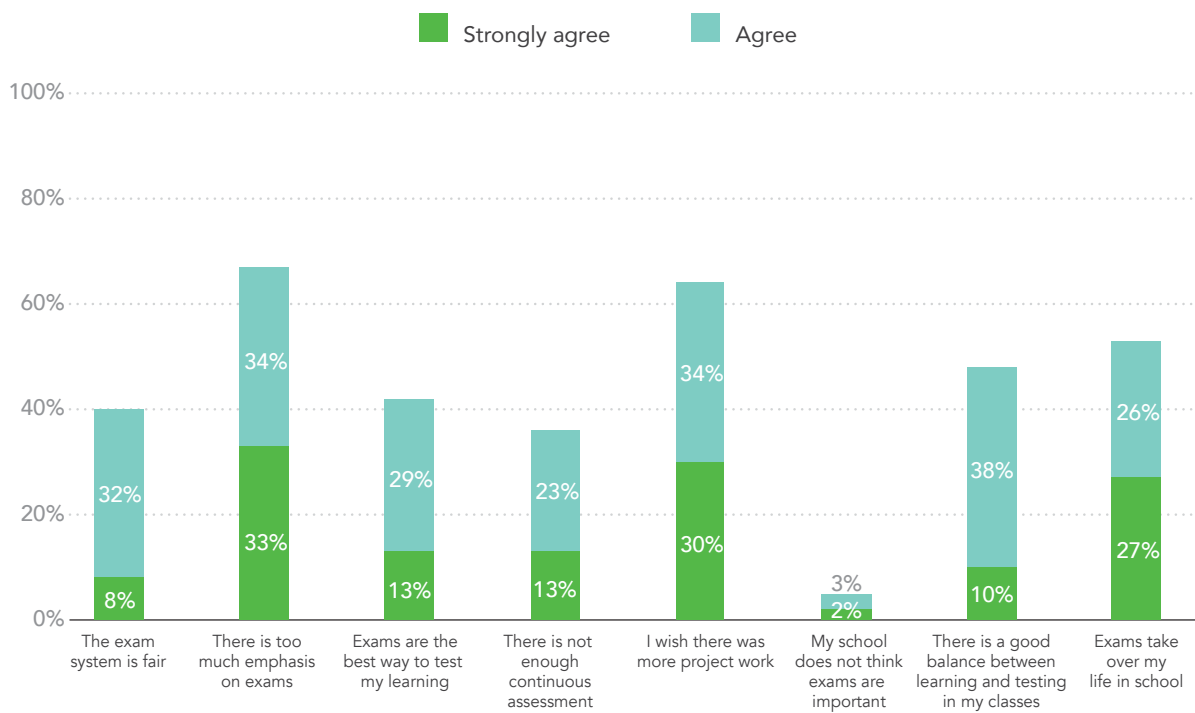
(Fifth year, female, **co-educational school**, Co Longford)

3.3 Feelings about school

3.3.1 Exams and assessment

3.3.1.1 The results

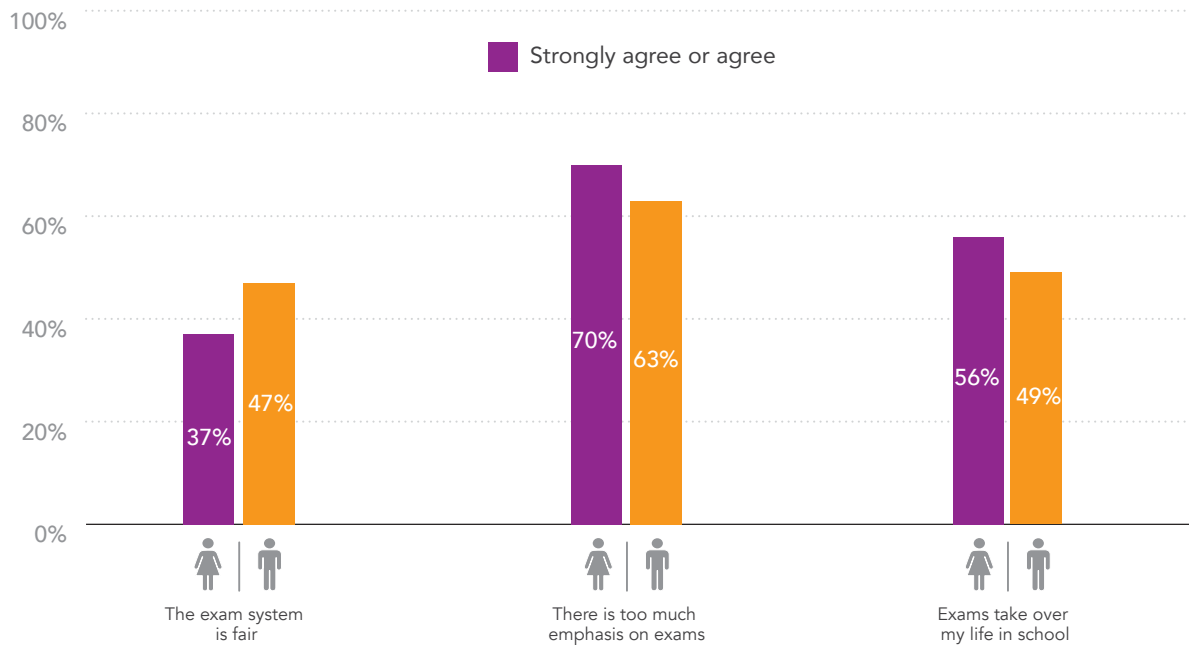
Figure 10: Views on exams and testing in school



3.3.1.2 Gender

Girls were more critical of exams than boys. In addition, girls in girls-only schools were more critical of exams than girls in co-educational schools.

Figure 10a: Selected views on exams by gender



3.3.1.3 Year

First-year students were the most positive about exams. Sixth-year students were most likely to be negative about exams.

3.3.1.4 Students' comments

'There should be less emphasis on exams. Student's progress should be individual and not compared to others.'

(Fourth year, female, co-educational school, Co Clare)

'...More continuous assessments, more walking debates. Students assess teachers.'

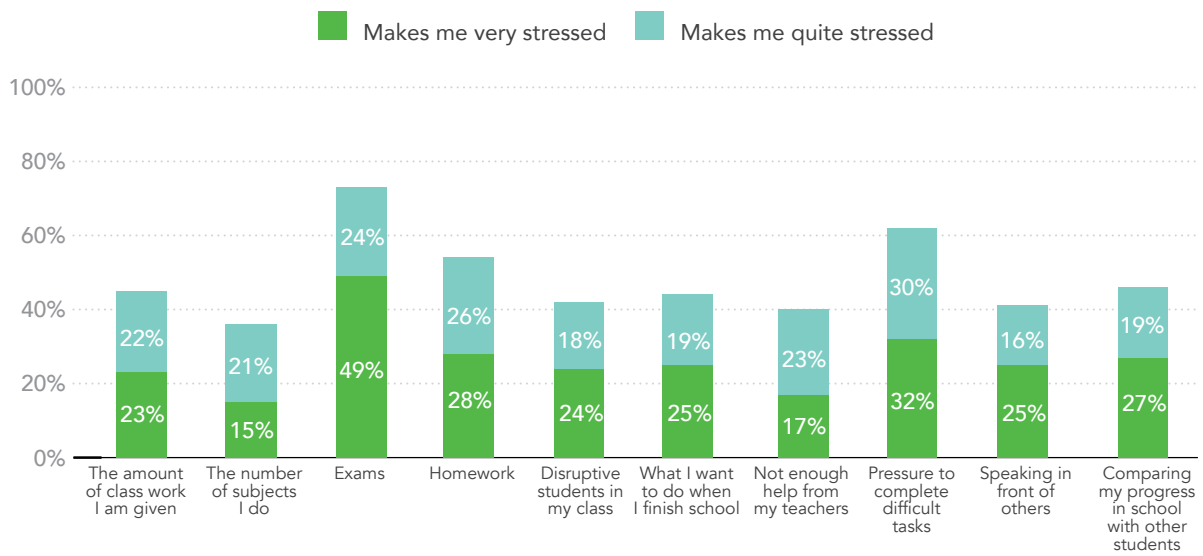
(Fifth year, female, co-educational school, Co Galway)

Many comments on exams also mentioned stress, so we have included them in section 3.3.2, which is about stress.

3.3.2 Stress

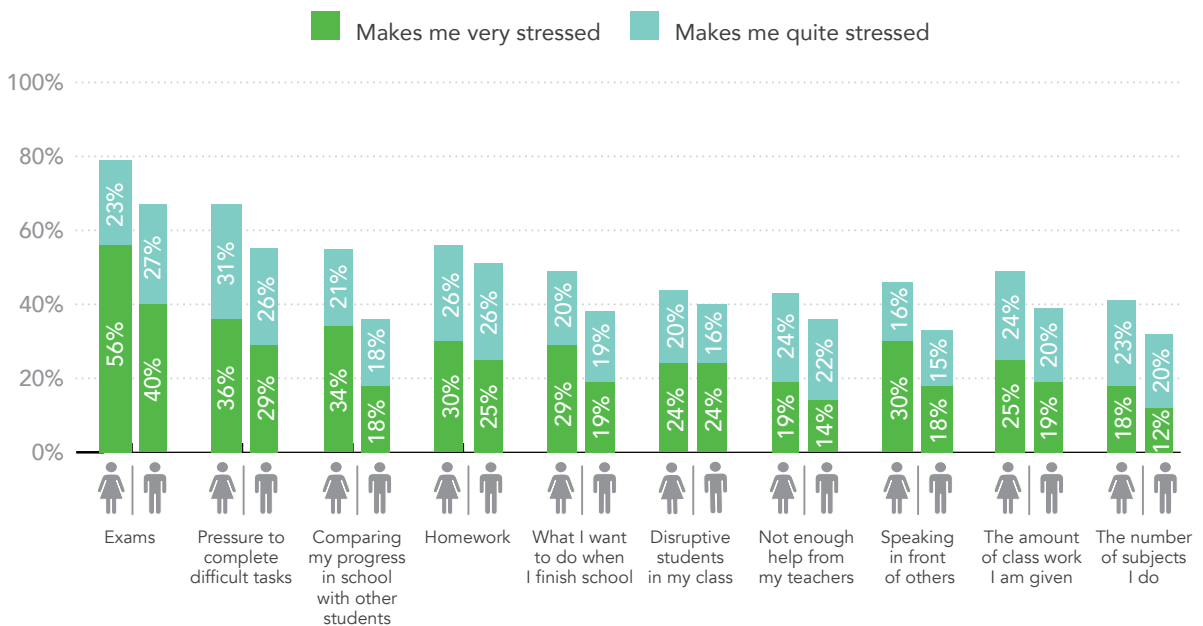
3.3.2.1 The results

Figure 11: What contributes to feelings of stress in school?



3.3.2.2 Gender

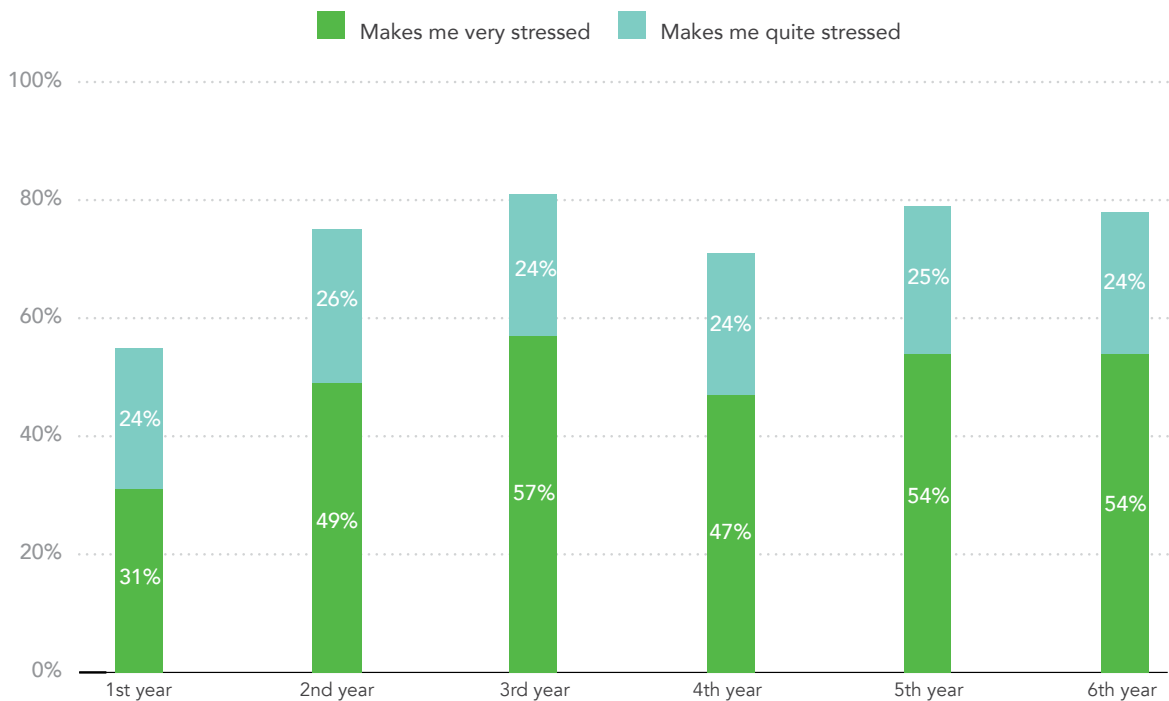
Figure 12: What contributes to stress?



3.3.2.3 Year

Stress due to exams is at its highest in 3rd, 5th and 6th year, with 78%-81% reporting that exams make them quite or very stressed.

Figure 13: By year: exams make me stressed



3.3.2.4 Students' comments

'Have a proper system for mental health and exam stress... the availability of a designated person to discuss and facilitate issues and discussion.'

(Fifth year, male, **co-educational school**, Co Leitrim)

'I would appreciate if there was one class a day just to take time out and focus on mindfulness and well-being'

(Fourth year, female, **girls-only school**, Co Cork)

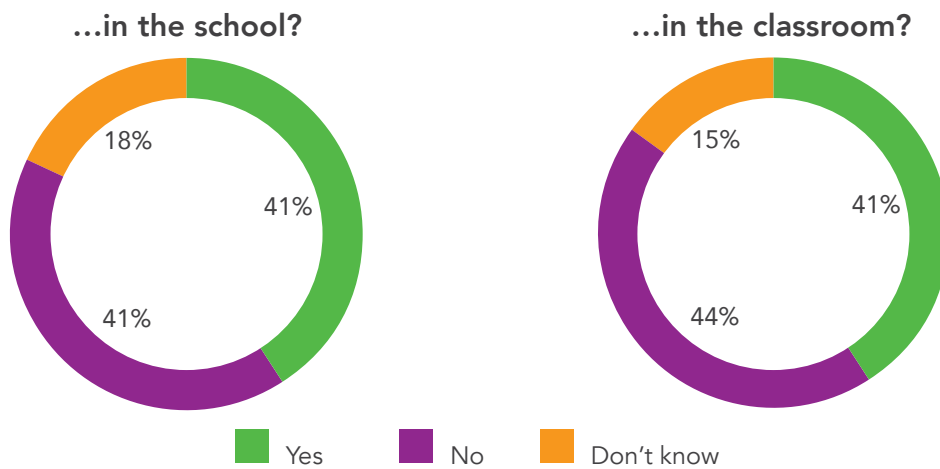
'Stop putting unbelievable amounts of pressure on students.'

(Fifth year, female, **co-educational school**, Co Dublin)

3.3.3 Having a say

3.3.3.1 The results

Figures 14 and 15: Do students have a say?



3.3.3.2 Gender

Boys were more likely than girls to agree they had a say in their school and classroom.

3.3.3.3 Year

Students in junior cycle were more likely to agree they had a say than students in senior cycle. First years were most positive. Fourth and fifth years were least likely to feel they had a say.

3.3.3.4 Students' comments

'I think teachers should take our opinions on board because as young people our ideas are often new, relevant and innovative when it comes to things that effects us. We are after all the students.'

(Fourth year, female, **co-educational school**, Co Cork)

'More emphasis on a safe learning environment where students can actually give their opinions.'

(Sixth year, female, **co-educational school**, Co Wexford)

'Students should be taken seriously when they go to the principal about a teacher'

(Fifth year, female, **co-educational school**, Co Wicklow)

'Students need to have way more impact on how they learn than an older person who passed through the education system under very different circumstances.'

(Third year, male, **boys-only school**, Co Galway)

'Let people have more freedom in their subject choices as they will work more, Let people be unique.'

(Third year, male, **boys-only school**, Co Mayo)

'Even though girls are the minority they should still be respected and be given the same opportunities.'

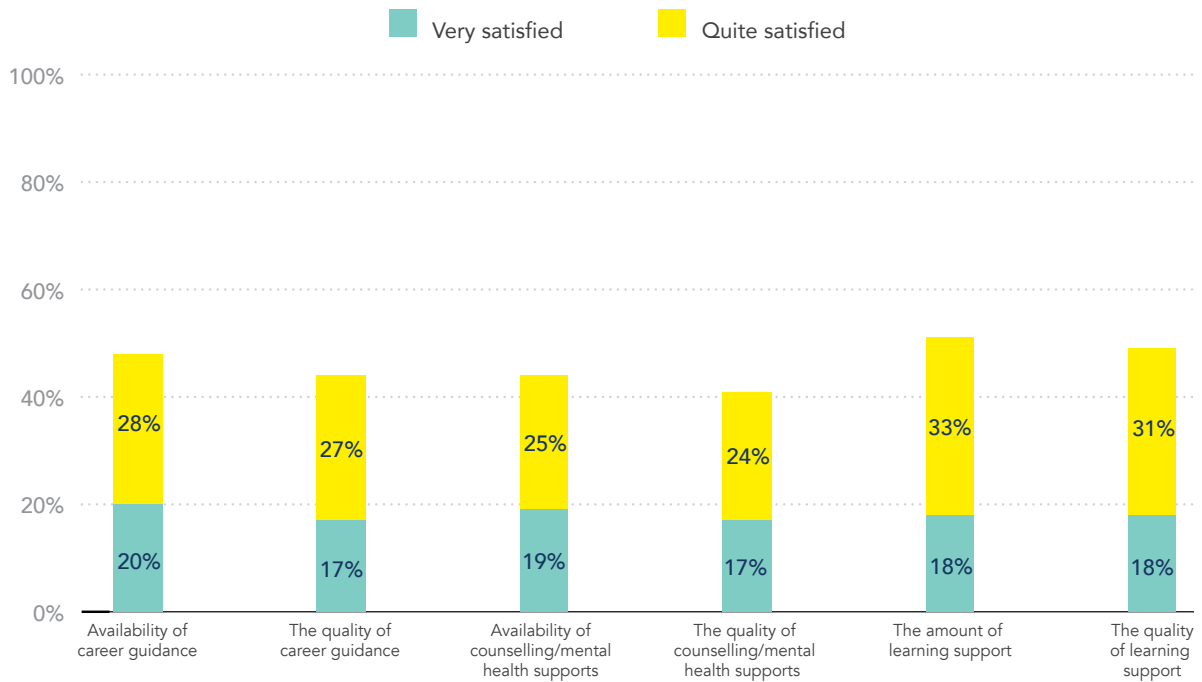
(Fourth year, female, **co-educational school**, Co Sligo)

3.4 Views on services and IT in school

3.4.1 Satisfaction with school support services

3.4.1.1 The results

Figure 16: How satisfied are you with...?



3.4.1.2 Gender

Boys were more satisfied than girls with support services in their schools. There was no variation by gender between co-educational and single-gender schools.

3.4.1.3 Year

There was no difference by year.

3.4.1.4 Students' comments

'Students need to learn about what it's like after school e.g. buying a house, renting an apartment – these need to be taught to all students.'

(Third year, male, co-educational school, Co Roscommon)

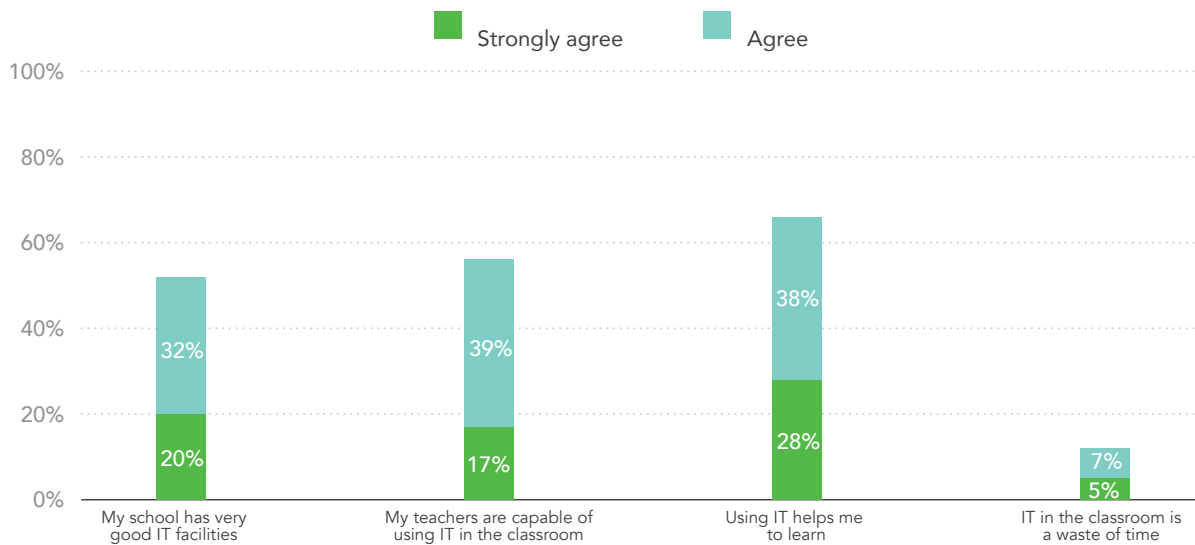
'There should be a system in which every student has one teacher in which they can talk to'

(Fourth year, female, **girls-only school**, Co Dublin)

3.4.2 IT in school

3.4.2.1 The results

Figure 17: IT in schools



3.4.2.2 Gender

Students in co-educational schools were most satisfied with the IT available to them, how teachers use it and how it helps them to learn (53%). Students in girls-only schools were least satisfied (46%).

3.4.2.3 Year

There was no difference by year in levels of satisfaction with the IT available.

3.4.2.4 Students' comments

'Teachers should be taught how to use IT better.'

(Fourth year, female, **girls-only school**, Co Kerry)

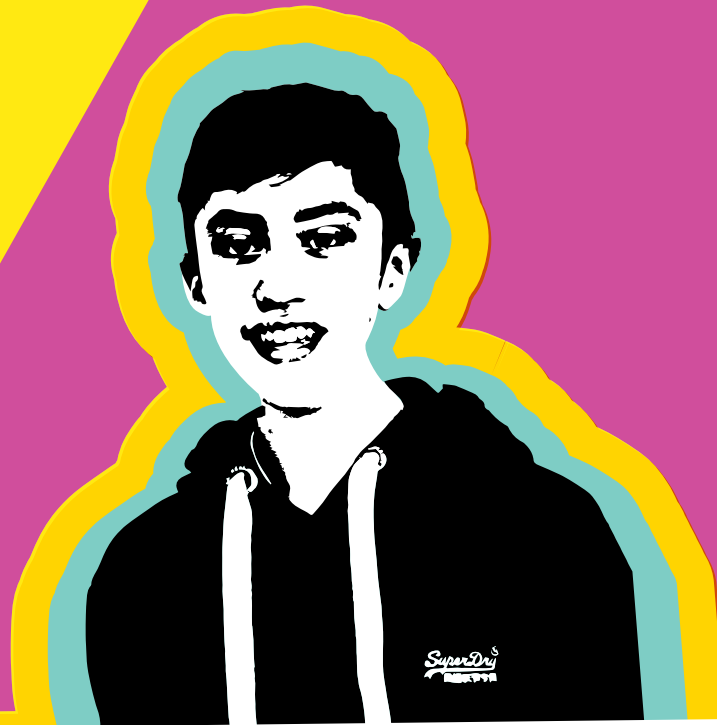
'More access to computers and online learning resources.'

(Fourth year, male, **boys-only school**, Co Dublin)

'In IT, we do things students already know.'

(First year, female, **co-educational**, Co Longford)





CHAPTER 04

What

we've learned



A large number of students took this survey. This shows how important these issues are to students – it can be difficult to get people to take part in research, but 3,242 surveys were returned.

4.1 How young people experience teaching and learning in school

- Teachers have high expectations for student learning and are encouraging of students in school.
- Students are very dissatisfied with the style of teaching used and with the way compulsory subjects are taught. In order of priority, students in all years are most dissatisfied with the teaching of mathematics, Irish and English.
- There is a mismatch between how teachers teach and how students feel they learn best. Young people prefer active learning, but only 30% of students think their teachers make learning interesting and fun.
- While students say their teachers generally support them, many students are:
 - dissatisfied with the kind of feedback they get, and
 - do not think they can talk to their teachers about worries about falling behind.
- In general, students do not think their teachers treat all students fairly.

4.2 Young people's feelings about school

Young people must stay in school until they are 16, but most stay in school until they complete the Leaving Certificate at 18. But this does not mean they are happy with their experience in school.

- Most students have a lot of stress because of exams.
 - Exams are the biggest source of stress, along with doing difficult tasks and homework.
 - Students think there is too much emphasis on exams.
- Students have little autonomy (self-rule) and control over what happens to them in school.
 - Only half of students felt encouraged to give their opinion in class.

- Most students did not feel they could explain themselves without conflict.

4.3 Opinions on support services and IT

Students have mixed experiences of supports in secondary schools. Supports include career guidance, mental health and counselling services and learning support.

- Less than half of students are satisfied with counselling and career guidance services, and just half are satisfied with the availability and quality of learning support.

Just over half of students think their schools have good IT facilities, but students also feel that IT could be better used.

4.4 The importance of gender and age

Being a boy or girl influences the kind of experiences young people have in school.

- Girls tend to be less positive about their experience of school than boys are.
- Girls-only schools have higher levels of exam stress.
- The age and year level of students also influences their experience.
 - First years tend to be more positive about their school experience and the support services they have. This suggests the transition from primary to secondary school is generally positive.
 - Fourth year students are least satisfied with experiences of teaching, learning and communication in the classroom.
 - Fourth and fifth year students are least satisfied with having a say.
 - Sixth-year students have the highest levels of exam stress.

4.5 Issues to explore

Government policy is clear that children and young people should have a say in matters that directly affect them and that they should be empowered to express their views.

However, the findings of this survey highlight the lack of voice young people have in school and that they would like to have more of a say. These findings can be a starting point to explore how best to help secondary school students influence their own education.

Exam stress is a key issue. The emphasis on high stakes exams needs attention as it influences not only student wellbeing but also how teachers teach.

There is a need for more research into how teachers teach and how students are learning in schools and classrooms in Ireland. This is especially important given the influence teaching has on student wellbeing and attitudes to school. Research is needed on the kinds of learning methods that challenge and stimulate students, and that encourage students to be actively involved. The benefits of such methods need to be explored so that the relationships between teachers and students are based on mutual trust and respect.

The difference in experience between boys and girls is also an important area to look at. For example, what contributes to the difference in stress between girls and boys in schools? What are the differences between girls only, boys only and co-educational schools in how teachers interact with boys and girls?

The survey suggests that as young people move through the secondary school system they become less positive in their attitudes about school. More research is needed to explore how the school system connects with the experiences of young people as they get older.

It was not possible to include questions about social class, ethnicity, disability and LGBTi+ in the survey. There is a need for further research to explore how teaching and learning in schools is influenced by social class and ethnicity and if this differs for boys and girls, and from one kind of school to another.



APPENDICES





Appendix A: The Survey

At Dáil na nÓg 2015, the 200 delegates from Comhairle na nÓg voted on the need for students to have a stronger say on what happens in the classroom in their schools.

The Comhairle na nÓg National Executive set out to discover how young people in Ireland feel about the way they are taught and the way they learn. They developed a survey, with the help of researchers.

Young people at every Comhairle na nÓg AGM were asked to fill out this survey. The survey was completely **anonymous** and **they did not have to take part**. The survey is outlined on the following 3 pages.

Please contact Professor Dympna Devine at the UCD School of Education (dympna.devine@ucd.ie) if you would like to use this questionnaire in your school.



First, please tell us a little bit about yourself:

1. Gender

Female Male Other

2. School Year

1st 2nd 3rd 4th/TY 5th 6th

3. Is your School

Boys only Girls only Mixed

4. I learn best...

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| When I do group work or work in pairs | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| When I take part in class discussions or debates | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| When I take part in active learning (e.g. quizzes, learning games, role play, walking debates, peer correction, hot seating) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| When the teacher is talking | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| When I watch relevant YouTube or film clips and answer questions | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| When I read text books | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| When I answer exam questions during class | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| When I use tablets or computers to research topics during class time | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other ways I learn best... | | | | | |

5. If you could improve the teaching of subjects in your school, which three subjects would you choose, in order of importance?

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

6. Exams and Assessment

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| The exam system is fair | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| There is too much emphasis on exams in my school | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Exams are the best way to test my learning | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| There is not enough continuous assessment in my school | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I wish there was more project work in my school | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| My school does not think exams are that important | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| There is a good balance between learning and testing in my classes | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Exams take over my life in school | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

7. Teaching and learning

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| My teachers encourage me to think for myself | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| My teachers encourage and support me to do my best | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| My teachers do not give me extra support when I need it | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| My teachers have high expectations of me | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| If I am worried about falling behind, I can talk to my teachers | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| My teachers are generally well prepared | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| My teachers make learning interesting and fun | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I do not get enough feedback on my school work from my teachers | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| There is good learning support for students in my school | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

8. Communication in the classroom

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| My teachers treat all students fairly | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| The same students get asked questions all the time | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Some students get more attention than others in the classroom | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| My teachers rarely ask for students opinions in the classroom | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| My teachers are often unfair to students | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| My teachers have respect for students | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Teachers and students have good relationships in my school | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| My teachers allow students to explain themselves without conflict | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| My teachers encourage students to give their opinions in the classroom | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I feel comfortable asking questions in class | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

9. IT (computer, tablets, YouTube, film etc) in schools

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| My school has very good IT facilities | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| My teachers are capable of using IT in the classroom | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Using IT helps me to learn | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| IT in the classroom is a waste of time | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

10. How do you feel about the following?

| | Makes me very stressed | Makes me quite stressed | Sometimes stresses me | Does not stress me much | Does not stress me at all |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| The amount of class work I am given | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| The number of subjects I do | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Exams | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Homework | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Disruptive students in my class | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| What I want to do when I finish school | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Not enough help from my teachers | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Pressure to complete difficult tasks | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Speaking in front of others | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Comparing my progress in school with other students | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other (please state) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

11. How satisfied are you with the following in your school?

| | Very satisfied | Quite satisfied | Not sure | A bit unsatisfied | Very unsatisfied |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Availability of career guidance | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| The quality of career guidance | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Availability of counselling/mental health supports | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| The quality of counselling/mental health supports | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| The amount of learning support | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| The quality of learning support | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other (please state) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

12. Do you think students in your school have a say in what happens?

In the classroom Yes No Don't know

In school Yes No Don't know

13. If you have any ideas about how teaching and learning in school could be improved, please tell us

Appendix B: The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is the key international instrument for outlining children's rights to have a voice on matters that directly affect them. A number of articles in the Convention relate directly to students' rights in relation to expressing themselves and to education.

Article 12 set out the rights of the child to be heard.

Article 12

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

This means that young people have the right to give their opinion, and adults should listen to them.

Articles 28 and 29 set out the rights of the child to education.

Article 28

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:
 - a. Make primary education compulsory and available free to all;

- b. Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need;
 - c. Make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means;
 - d. Make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children;
 - e. Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates.
2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity with the present Convention.
 3. States Parties shall promote and encourage international cooperation in matters relating to education, in particular with a view to contributing to the elimination of ignorance and illiteracy throughout the world and facilitating access to scientific and technical knowledge and modern teaching methods. In this regard, particular account shall be taken of the needs of developing countries.

Article 29

.....

1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:
 - a. The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;
 - b. The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;
 - c. The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national

values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own;

- d. The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;
 - e. The development of respect for the natural environment.
2. No part of the present article or article 28 shall be construed so as to interfere with the liberty of individuals and bodies to establish and direct educational institutions, subject always to the observance of the principle set forth in paragraph 1 of the present article and to the requirements that the education given in such institutions shall conform to such minimum standards as may be laid down by the State.

Article 28 means that **young people have the right to an education, and they should be encouraged to go to school.**

Article 29 means that **education should be designed to help young people develop their skills and abilities.**

Appendix C: Irish legislation and policy on the rights of the child

Our Government's strategy on giving young people a say

Ireland is the first country in Europe to have developed a cross-Government strategy on young people's participation in decision making. It is titled **National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making 2015-2020**, and it was published by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in 2015. This strategy is part of **Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014-2020**.

The goal of Government strategy is to give children and young people a voice in their individual and collective everyday lives, including in early education, schools and the wider formal and non-formal education systems.

A Government strategy document includes commitments. In this strategy, the Department of Education and Skills made some commitments that relate directly to the results of our survey.

G14.20 Young people will continue to be consulted as part of the revision of curricula, including the Primary School Curriculum and the Junior Cycle Student Awards.

G17.1 The Department of Education and Skills will encourage more primary schools and all post-primary schools to establish student councils. Data from the latest Lifeskills Survey (2012) indicate that 14% of primary schools and 97% of post-primary schools have established student councils.

G17.2 The Department of Education and Skills Schools Inspectorate will review its current practices on student participation in the inspection process with a view to enhancing the level and quality of student participation.

G17.3 The Teaching Council will consult students on teacher education and a range of other matters. Appropriate mechanisms for consulting students will be determined in consultation with relevant agencies.

G17.4 The National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning will analyse the data from the first full Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE) (2014). A report based on improving the student experience will be published in 2015.

Education Act 1998

Section 27 of the Education Act 1998 directs school boards to permit students to contribute to decision making. It requires schools to:

- establish and maintain procedures for informing students about what the school is doing;
- involve students in running the school by working with their parents and teachers; and
- allow students in post-primary schools to set up student councils.

This legislation was an important development: it was the first time in Irish education that the rights of students to have some say in their education was recognised.

The Act does not direct that schools should help students develop their skills so they can contribute to decision making. The Act would be enhanced if it directed schools to promote decision-making skills.

Appendix D: National and international research on students having their say on education

To develop the questions in this survey, we reviewed research on student voice. **Student voice** is the idea that students should have a say on how they are taught and what they learn.

A key issue in voice is power: who has the power to exercise their voice and whose voice is silent. National and international studies have looked into this. This appendix summarises the findings of this research. If you would like to learn more, the titles of the research publications are in the bibliography.

Research summaries

- Providing ways for students to influence their schools and help make key decisions benefits them. It improves the school culture and the learning environment, so students should be considered partners in learning. (Lundy 2007, Devine and McGillicuddy 2016, Downes 2013, Symonds 2015, Rudduck 2007.)
- Students are concerned that all aspects of their lives – what they wear, eat, do, think and learn – are controlled when they are at school. But students have little say on what is happening and how it affects them. (Devine 2003.)
- Student councils often have little influence on what happens in schools. They are not able to bring about major change. Instead, they are consulted about behaviour and discipline. (Fielding 2011, Keogh and White 2005, Osler 2010, Rudduck 2007.)
- The way students are permitted to share their opinions is inconsistent, and it may not be done to benefit students and their schools. There is a risk that these councils are organised only because inspections require it. (Rogers and Gunter 2012.)
- Teachers may be reluctant to let students have their say because they are worried about disruptive behaviour and discipline. (Devine 2002.) Teachers experience pressures because of our very competitive, exam-focused system that results in teachers teaching to the test. This has a direct effect on students' experience. (Devine, Fahie and McGillicuddy 2013.)
- The background of students can influence the way teachers teach. Teachers may have different expectations and use different teaching methods for:
 - boys and girls;
 - people from different social backgrounds; and
 - people from different ethnicities.(Devine and McGillicuddy 2016)

- Students' potential to influence and bring about change was dependent on their social background and the kind of programme they were studying. (Hjelmér & Rosvall 2017.)
- In 2016, Smyth looked at students' experiences and perspectives on education, including positive and negative attitudes.
 - In general, positive attitudes decline after first year and then increase. First-year students have a 'honeymoon' period as they make the transition from primary to secondary school. This decline continues throughout junior cycle. Positive attitudes increase throughout senior cycle.
 - Girls tended to be more positive than boys.
 - Social background was very important in determining how students thought about and engaged with school.
 - Students wanted more fun, hands-on learning but often got the opposite.
 - All students had increased stress in exam years, but girls were more likely to say they were under strain, losing sleep and losing confidence, especially while studying for the Leaving Certificate.
 - Students consistently expressed their concern over a lack of respect and not having a voice in schools.

In addition to the survey in this report, UCD School of Education analysed school inspectorate reports from the past five years for secondary schools. Inspectors noted these issues.

- Inconsistencies in the quality of written feedback that students get
- Not enough active learning in classrooms and plenty of opportunities to develop active learning
- Greater subject choice at all levels is needed
- Not enough engagement and activity from student councils especially on teaching and learning.

What this research means

In summary, all this research confirms that young people have limited opportunity to have their say in schools. The opportunities they do have do not give them the chance to voice key concerns that they may have about teaching, learning, facilities and how they experience their lives in school.

This means there is a growing gap between how young people are treated in school and outside of school.

The research outlined here has contributed to Government policy, which now focuses on involving students in more decision making in schools.

The results of the Comhairle na nÓg survey confirm the findings of these studies.



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