



**Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties in Mainstream Schools in Ireland:  
Understandings, Attitudes and Responses**

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## Abstract

Emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) in mainstream schools in Ireland attract much attention and significant resources. Little research has been conducted in the Irish context about how this concept is understood by practitioners, nor on what influences that understanding. This has a bearing on behaviour policies and responses to the needs of students. This research investigates current understandings and definitions of EBD in mainstream primary and post-primary schools, what influences these issues and how this impacts on the development of behaviour policy and responses in schools.

Employing a social constructivist framework, data were generated using a mixed methods approach which included a literature review, questionnaires (n=47) and semi-structured interviews (n=13) conducted with principals, learning support/resource teachers and guidance counsellors, followed by an analysis of special educational needs and behaviour policy documents (n=4). Employing an inductive analytical approach, a qualitative thematic analysis was conducted which identified emergent themes from the questionnaire. These themes were investigated in the literature, informed the interview schedule and were further interrogated in the document analysis.

The research suggests variations in the level of sophistication in understandings of EBD. Definitions appear to focus on intrapersonal characteristics and suggest a certain resignation among practitioners. The effectiveness of behaviour policies is uncertain due to an imperative to produce policy, traditional views of the homogeneity of the school population, a tendency to rely on SEN policy to address EBD issues and variations in the involvement of stakeholders. Responses to EBD vary considerably, with child-centred and positive behavioural curricular approaches more in evidence at primary level. Thinking about behavioural issues and school-based responses appear to be affected by gender issues, particularly in the language used when discussing EBD.

Several themes emerge regarding how EBD is conceptualised and responded to in schools. A move towards a more holistic view of causal factors and definitions is juxtaposed against a traditional view focusing on within-child characteristics. Efforts to promote whole school approaches and inclusive behaviour policies struggle to embed themselves where school cultures are slow to change in an education system which, itself, appears to be experiencing a change of focus. Understandings of and responses to EBD are evolving at different rates in different sectors. Gender and school focus or ethos exert influences on these on-going developments but do not yet appear to be acknowledged or investigated as pertinent factors.

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# Chapter One

## Introduction

### 1.1 My Background and its Influence on my Research

The focus of this research is to investigate how the concept of emotional and behavioural difficulties is thought about and responded to in mainstream schools in Ireland. My interest in investigating this topic stems firstly from working as a post-primary teacher for two decades, meeting students whose needs did not appear to be supported well by the education system. Initially working as a teacher of French, I discovered that my personal interest in and enthusiasm for that language were not going to be sufficient in order for me to succeed as a teacher.

I moved into the areas of learning support and special educational needs quite early in my career and worked in that area for eighteen years approximately. During this period I moved from envisaging education at post-primary level in terms of a collection of individual subject areas and programmes, each separate from the other and effectively forming a collection of 'mini-schools' with students moving from one to the other, with the responsibility lying elsewhere for the amalgamation of all these 'mini-schools' into an overarching 'educational experience'. By attempting to view the situation from the perspective of the students it became more possible for me to identify how they engaged with teachers, subjects, school management and the school in general.

Taking this perspective made me realise that students do not tend to differentiate between subjects, teachers, programmes, etc, to the same extent as post-primary teachers sometimes do – for the students, school is school. Over time I began to consider certain issues – why do some students not appear to 'fit' school; does school 'fit' only some students; why do some 'succeed' and others don't; what is valued or accepted as 'success'; what understandings exist in schools of anything or anyone outside the 'norm' and what are the ramifications of those understandings?



As a post-primary teacher I supported several students presenting with emotional and behavioural difficulties along with other learning difficulties, either formally identified by the education system or informally identified by the school authorities and/or teachers working in the schools. While I worked for the most part of my career in a community school, I gained experience in several types of post-primary settings. Chapter Two provides an outline of the range of school types in the Irish education system.

I came to work in a third level teacher education setting thirteen years ago with a specific emphasis on working with practising teachers at postgraduate level through a continuing professional development programme in the area of special educational needs. Since then I have pursued my interest in emotional and behavioural difficulties. In particular I have been interested in how this category of special educational needs is considered in the overall context of the Irish education system. My consideration of this topic has developed against a backdrop of substantial developments in Irish education over the past two decades in particular. This context is outlined in Chapter Two. During the course of my career I have witnessed the development of understanding and provision, particularly at post-primary level, for students presenting with a diverse range of learning difficulties. This has been the case particularly for those presenting with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) and Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD).

My personal experience of and interest in the perspectives of others is what underlies the aims of the current research. While I appreciate that there is a considerable amount of information available to teachers and those in management positions in mainstream schools in relation to emotional and behavioural difficulties, I am interested in knowing more about how that information is being understood and interpreted, and how it is being used in order to respond to the students who present with difficulties. This is the reality that leads me to undertake this research.

Interventions with individual students, at group level or at whole school level are useful and can effect meaningful change. However they possess inherent shortcomings, not in and of themselves, but rather in the fact that they are interventions *per se*, adding something extra to the overall school experience rather than fundamentally changing it. Furthermore they can be time consuming, costly, short term, labour-intensive and limited in scope. From my experience as a teacher and teacher educator, I believe that the issues I investigate in this research are central to the potential success of attempts to support students presenting with EBD in our mainstream schools.

It is my belief that effective, long term, school wide and cost effective interventions for the support of students presenting with EBD must take place in the milieu of the whole school and among the whole school community. Particularly, the understandings and attitudes of teachers, as a community of professionals, around the complexities of EBD must be developed sufficiently in order for them to be enabled to incorporate best practice in the daily routine of school life. I feel such an approach would be more effective in the long term than the current system of problem identification related to a particular cohort of students followed by discrete interventions as an 'add on' to existing procedures.

Having worked as a teacher for several years in Irish mainstream schools I am interested in investigating the interface between the mainstream education system and the category of special educational needs (SEN) entitled Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (EBD). I wish to investigate the types and the level of understandings of EBD that exist among practitioners in Irish mainstream schools. I wish to consider how particular issues and factors integral to the education system impact on those understandings, in particular gender issues, school sector, school population and how the school presents itself in terms of its ethos or culture. I am also interested in considering how these issues impact on the policies that schools develop around behaviour as this is one area that they have been obliged to



address formally in recent years. Finally, I am also interested in how schools are currently supporting students who present with EBD.

## 1.2 Rationale for the Research

The numbers of students being identified as presenting with EBD is increasing. Recent statistics from the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) (2012) report "8,224 students in receipt of support for low incidence EBD for the school year 2011-2012" (p. 28). This represents 0.93% of the school population, of which 7,830 are in mainstream schools (0.9%). It does not include those considered to present with mild difficulties of this nature; they are reported to be in receipt of other forms of support. Statistics for 2009-2010 (NCSE, 2011) indicate 6,900 students (0.8% of the school population) were in receipt of support for low incidence EBD.

This increase in identification represents a positive consequence of government policy (*Education Act, 1998; Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, (EPSEN) 2004*) to promote inclusion in the education system, in accordance with the *Salamanca Statement* (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (1994) which promotes the right of those with special educational needs to attend regular schools. Indeed these, and other initiatives, have resulted in significant changes in special education provision in Ireland in recent decades (Rose, Shevlin, Winter and O'Raw, 2010).

However, a concomitant increase in understanding of this category of SEN, together with specific provisions in mainstream schools, has not been as much in evidence as has been the case with SLD and ASD. The paucity of research in this area in the Irish context is pertinent and what does exist is discussed in Chapter Four. There appears to be a lack of research in the Irish context in the following areas:

- Understanding of and provision for EBD, particularly in mainstream schools
- The interface between the education of students presenting with EBD and that of other students, in the context of inclusive policies and rights-based legislation
- Understanding within the mainstream education system of the complexity of the issues of SEN and of EBD in particular
- The impact of the structural framework of the Irish education system on these issues.

There has been considerable curricular change in the last ten to twenty years in Ireland, e.g. the Leaving Certificate (Applied) Programme (1995), the Junior Certificate School Programme (1996) and the Primary Curriculum (Revised) (1999). However none of these initiatives has specifically addressed the area of SEN, with the exception of guidelines emanating from the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) for teachers of students with General Learning Disability, (2007a) and for exceptionally able students (2007b).

The attempts that have been made to accommodate students presenting with SEN have focused largely on expanding the capacity of existing structures to cope with the challenges of increased numbers of such students, e.g. the growth in the provision of special needs assistants (Lawlor and Cregan, 2003), rather than making fundamental changes. However, recently the NCCA (2012) has issued a framework of reform of the Junior Cycle at post-primary level which includes provision of a curricular framework to support students and acknowledge their achievements at Level Two of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), a ten-level framework which describes all Irish qualifications (NFQ, 2013). This is seen as a major initiative in the provision for the inclusion of students whose achievements are not currently catered for within the Level Three (Junior Certificate) framework. Issues regarding transfer of information between schools and between sectors have arisen that highlight inadequacies in the system to meet the challenge of providing a continuity of service and education throughout the student's time in the system (Naughton, 2003; O'Brien, 2004).



The fragmented nature of the Irish education system is influential in how provision has been made for students. Chapter Two provides an outline of the Irish education system showing, for example, the fact that while schools are financed from central government funds they are managed at local level and are controlled by a range of disparate bodies. This has a bearing on how individual schools perceive their role in addressing the needs of students presenting with SEN. For example, post-primary schools began to actively address the challenges posed by students presenting with assessed SEN when the latter started to transfer from mainstream feeder primary schools in increasing numbers. This is currently exemplified in the provision of special classes for students presenting with ASD at post-primary level (NCSE, 2013a).

Training programmes in SEN for teachers, following a continuing professional development model, while in place for primary teachers working in the special school sector since the early 1960s, were broadened out to include mainstream primary teachers working with students presenting with SEN. A similar programme of training was provided for post-primary teachers in 2000, when the *National Training Programme for Resource Teachers (2<sup>nd</sup> Level)* was established by the Department of Education and Science (DES). At primary level, special schools (See Chapter Two, Section 2.3.2) have noted subtle changes in enrolment as students who would traditionally attend such schools now opt for mainstream schools, particularly for primary education, leaving the special schools to address the needs of students presenting with complex needs, including emotional and behavioural needs (Kelly and Devitt, 2010).

Therefore research in this area in the Irish context is timely for the following reasons:

- An overview of current realities in the Irish education system is required. Due to its fragmented nature, it is difficult to establish a clear picture of what is happening on the ground in the Irish education system and how

national policy is being interpreted at school level. This is necessary for two reasons. Firstly it is timely for the Department of Education and Skills (DES) to evaluate the effectiveness of initiatives it has sponsored to promote inclusion in the context of the *Salamanca Statement* (1994). Secondly it is necessary for school management to contextualize its response to the challenge of the inclusion of students presenting with SEN within a broader, national framework.

- There is a need to investigate how EBD is thought about by educational practitioners and whether significant differences exist here between service providers and between national and local perspectives.
- There is a need to reflect on the effectiveness of interventions extant in the education system regarding how they are meeting the needs of students presenting with EBD.
- There is a need to reflect on the impact of major legislative changes in terms of how they affect the needs of students and the practice of teachers. For example, has the provision of an entitlement to be educated in “an inclusive environment” ((EPSEN Act, 2004) improved the quality of students’ experiences of education? Have the understandings and perceptions of teachers been affected by these changes and, if so, how and to what extent?
- Research in this area is necessary to provide a basis for future planning and policy development in this area on a national level, among DES policy makers, but also at local level among educational practitioners working in schools.
- In the international context it is important for Irish educational policy-makers to compare policy and practice with international best practice, at least in the context of responsibilities under international initiatives to which the Irish government is a party, e.g. the *Salamanca Statement* (1994).
- Teachers in the Irish education system need to be able to place their own practice in an international context in order to consider its effectiveness and to benefit from new ideas.

This research attempts to address some of these issues by examining the mainstream context in primary and post-primary schools in Ireland.

### **1.3 Aims and Specific Research Questions**

The scope of this research project is limited; hence it is not deemed possible to address all of the issues outlined above. The research must also be conducted



within the particular context of its social constructivist theoretical framework and the qualitative research methods employed (see Chapter Five). These considerations limit any claim by the research to result in an exposition of findings that can be extrapolated or generalized to the population at large, as would be the case in a larger empirical study. Therefore this research project is presented as an investigation into attitudes and opinions held by informed practitioners in the field, the influences and factors that may help shape those attitudes and opinions, and the relationships between those attitudes and opinions and subsequent structures and interventions in mainstream schools.

Based on my background and experience as a teacher in mainstream schools in Ireland, I put forward the issues and questions that interest me regarding the interface between emotional and behavioural difficulties and the mainstream education system as the basis for what I investigate in this research project. These issues and questions represent the core considerations that I investigate and therefore inform and shape the nature of my research. My theoretical perspective is a social constructivist one and is discussed in Chapter Five. I am interested in asking questions and investigating issues related to those questions, whilst remaining open to the possibility of my questions changing and evolving as I progress in my research.

My approach is to investigate these questions from different perspectives concurrently. Hence I do not follow a more traditional approach of commencing with a review of the literature in order to identify research questions. Rather I choose to investigate my questions in the literature and at the same time to investigate them in the real world, by engaging with practitioners through data collection from the outset. Using my initial questions I identify themes that evolve through three stages of data analysis and that can inform my review of the literature pertinent to emotional and behavioural difficulties.

I present here the overall aims of the research that emanate from the questions that interest me in relation to emotional and behavioural difficulties in the context of the mainstream education system in Ireland. These aims are:

- To identify a range of definitions of EBD currently present in mainstream schools, in the context of national and international discourse
- To consider the relationship between behaviour policies in mainstream schools and the concept of EBD
- To investigate the issues and factors influencing the understanding of and the response to EBD in mainstream schools, e.g.
  - Whether it is a single gender or co-educational school
  - Whether it is a primary or post-primary school
  - The gender of students and teachers
  - The school's ethos or culture.

In order to investigate these three principal aims, I present them now in the form of research questions. The purpose of this is to enhance the clarity of the type of investigation that the research undertakes, by positing a list of the specific questions being asked:

- How is EBD currently understood in Irish mainstream schools in the context of national and international discourse?
- How does this relate to schools' policies on behaviour, in the context of national policy on SEN?
- How is EBD defined and what are the issues or factors that arise in defining EBD in mainstream schools?
- To what extent are these definitions influenced by
  - Gender of staff and/or students
  - School population (single gender/co-educational)
  - Sector (primary/post-primary)
  - Traditional ethos or culture of the school? (e. g. an academic focus).

#### **1.4 Overview of Structure**

The overall structure of this research is presented in a linear progression which facilitates the presentation of the information in an accessible manner. Thus, I describe a layout commencing with the context of the research, the literature



reviews and an exposition of the underlying theoretical framework of the research. This is followed by the description and rationale of the sample and the research methodologies employed, supported next by the analysis of the data gathered and culminating in a discussion of the findings of the research, commentary on the overall work and its implications, and suggestions for further research.

However this research is also very much a product of the journey that has led me to this point and which I outline in the opening sections of this chapter. The literature on EBD is extensive and yet also limited in this case due to the nature of the concepts involved and in which I am interested. Therefore the development of this research was not as linear as it is presented. The themes which provide the framework for the literature reviews emanate from three sources: issues that were already of interest to me, my initial examination of the literature and the questionnaire. Therefore the investigation of the literature developed somewhat simultaneously alongside the initial stage of data collection. I believe this is consistent with the social constructivist underpinnings of this research, which are discussed in Chapter Five.

In the next chapter, Chapter Two, I provide an outline of the context in which the research is conducted. The education system in Ireland is quite complex in terms of its structure and management, as is the relationship between central government and individual schools including the responsibilities held by each. Therefore Chapter Two provides an overview of the historical development of the Irish education system which serves to explain the structures that exist currently. It also outlines the size and scale of the system across the primary and post-primary sectors. A description is provided of the curriculum offered by each of these sectors, highlighting recent initiatives including those relevant to special educational needs and, in particular, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The move to establish a legislative framework for education and the adoption of a policy of inclusion, both commenced in the 1990s, are outlined.

Chapters Three and Four provide a review of the literature in relation to emotional and behavioural difficulties. I address the international and Irish contexts separately and I believe this is appropriate in the context of my research aims. I am particularly interested in investigating the understandings of and responses to EBD in the Irish context and, therefore, feel I need to examine separately what is said about this in the Irish literature. This allows me to identify more clearly the issues that inform the Irish situation and, indeed, to identify those that do not appear to be considered greatly in that context.

Chapter Five outlines the theoretical framework within which this research is conducted. I discuss how I locate my world view and my research interests within a social constructivist paradigm in order to justify my choice of this framework. I describe the research methods I employ, namely a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and document analysis. I outline how and why I consider them appropriate for the type of investigation I am conducting but also how they are compatible with a social constructivist paradigm. Chapter Six discusses my use of qualitative non-probability sampling and describes in detail the sample used. This chapter also addresses the issue of data collection and analysis. It describes the process of constructing, distributing and collecting the questionnaire. I consider the ethical implications of my research and outline the steps I take to comply with best practice in this regard from the point of view of establishing a sample but also with regard to constructing the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews stages of data collection.

Chapter Seven commences with an outline of the process of analysis of the questionnaire data and continues with an analysis of the findings. Chapter Eight follows a similar procedure for the semi-structured interviews. In Chapter Nine I provide an analysis of SEN and behaviour policy documents from two of the schools from the sample in order to enrich the body of data and to reinforce the rigour of the investigation. Finally Chapter Ten discusses the findings of the research,

followed by my observations, conclusions and recommendations for further research in Chapter Eleven.

The research reported here is supported by a series of appendices. These commence with a list of abbreviations particular to the Irish education system and a timeline of events and documents pertinent to the discussion. These are followed by documents relevant to the collection and analysis of data in the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The final appendices are comprised of the special educational needs and behaviour policy documents from two schools, on which the documentary analysis in Chapter Nine was conducted.



## Chapter Two

### Context of the Research

#### 2.1 Introduction

The research is conducted in the education system in Ireland. This chapter locates the research in that context by addressing five specific issues. Firstly it addresses the issue of the terminology that is used in this research. Secondly it provides an overview of the Irish education system, from an historical perspective and then it outlines a description of its current structures. Thirdly the chapter provides an overview of curriculum and assessment in the Irish system. Fourthly it outlines the legislative framework within which the education system operates, particularly in relation to special educational needs, and other major initiatives relevant to the research. The final section outlines relevant interventions in the areas of discipline and behavioural issues over the past three decades.

#### 2.2 Terminology

The issue of terminology is one that should be addressed from the outset and I suggest that there are two reasons for doing so. Firstly, in order to provide clarity, it is useful to indicate the terms that I employ in subsequent chapters and outline what I intend them to mean. Secondly terms that are particular to the Irish education system and/or the Irish context in general require elucidation.

The terms 'Special Educational Needs' and 'SEN' are widespread in the international literature and appear to be synonymous. Therefore I use these terms interchangeably in this research to refer to a range of learning needs and categories. However the term 'special educational needs' is also defined in Irish legislation in two separate Acts of the Oireachtas. The *Education Act* (1998) states that special educational needs "means the educational needs of students who have



a disability and the educational needs of exceptionally able students” (Section 1:2:1). The *Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN) (2004)* states that special educational needs:

means, in relation to a person, a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition and cognate words shall be construed accordingly.

(Section 1:1)

However, with regard to the category of SEN which describes emotional and behavioural difficulties a quite diverse range of terms is in evidence across the international literature. I refer to this briefly in Chapter Three, Section 3.2, where I provide the following examples of terms in use and discuss in detail the ramifications of differences between them:

- Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (EBD)
- Emotional and Behavioural Disorders (EBD)
- Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD)
- Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD)
- Emotional Disturbance
- Severe Emotional Disturbance.

In the Irish context the term most generally used in the literature is ‘emotional and behavioural difficulties’. This term is also the most commonly used by practitioners and is often substituted by ‘EBD’. The inclusion of the word ‘social’ in the term is a relatively new development in the Irish context, having been employed by the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) in its document *Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties: A Continuum of Support, Guidelines for Teachers* (2010). Official DES documentation (*DES Circular Letters 08/02 (2002)* and *02/05 2005b*) continues to employ the terms ‘Emotional Disturbance’ and ‘Severe Emotional Disturbance’ and I discuss the implications of the use of these very

different terms by two related agencies in Chapter Four. In this research I use the terms 'emotional and behavioural difficulties' or 'EBD' interchangeably to refer to the category of special educational needs under investigation. Where I refer specifically to any other variation of the term from the list above it is in the context of the literature under discussion or, indeed, the legislative context of a particular jurisdiction. With regard to other categories of special educational needs, I use the terminology that is current in the Irish context, which broadly follows the *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health* from the World Health Organisation (WHO) (2001).

Reference to the 'State' is common parlance in Ireland. This term is used to signify the institution of the state rather than that of the government of the State as the executive power. Agencies of the State and of government, professional and voluntary organisations are referred to in the research. A list of these agencies and their acronyms, along with other relevant abbreviations, is provided in Appendix I. Also, it is useful to note that primary schools are commonly referred to Ireland as 'national schools', for historical reasons. Education and schools at post-primary level, regardless of the particular sector, are often referred to as 'secondary education' and 'secondary schools'.

The sample in this research is made up of three categories of practitioners: school principals, special education teachers and guidance counsellors. It is useful to clarify what is meant by the latter two categories. A range of learning needs is identified in the Irish education system and in mainstream schools these are broadly categorised under two headings, either 'learning support needs' or 'special educational needs'. The former is concerned primarily with literacy and/or numeracy needs identified following the administration of standardised tests. The latter is defined in legislation (see above). Teachers whose work focuses on supporting students with learning support and/or special educational needs are commonly referred to as 'learning support' and/or 'resource' teachers. Continuing professional development



programmes at postgraduate level, funded by the DES, are available to these teachers.

Guidance counsellors, who also must hold a specific postgraduate qualification, are employed in post-primary schools to provide guidance and counselling services to students. This position does not exist in the primary sector. These services can be described as follows:

Guidance in schools refers to a range of learning experiences provided in a developmental sequence, (*sic*) that assist students to develop self-management skills which will lead to effective choices and decisions about their lives.

Counselling has as its objective the empowerment of students so that they can make decisions, solve problems, address behavioural issues, develop coping strategies and resolve difficulties they may be experiencing. Counselling in schools may include personal counselling, educational counselling, career counselling or combinations of these.

(DES, 2005e, p. 4)

It is important to comment on and clarify my use of the terms 'ethos' and 'culture' in the research. I use these terms to refer to a viewpoint extant in the Irish education system and beyond purporting to suggest that particular schools concentrate predominantly on preparing students to achieve high results in terminal State examinations in order to enter third level education, and are thereby described as having an 'academic ethos' or an 'academic culture'. Chapters Three and Four do consider the issue of ethos in the context of a discussion on inclusion and in the context of an academic ethos, both which are relevant to this research.

However the term 'school ethos' is also employed in the Irish education system at primary level in a particular sense to refer to the school's affiliation to the system of patronage under which it operates. A similar situation exists in the voluntary secondary school sector at post-primary level. Section 2.3.2 outlines the system

that operates in Ireland and describes a patronage system dominated by the Roman Catholic Church authorities at primary level. Nowadays this operates either through patronage being invested in the local Roman Catholic bishop or through an educational trust established by religious congregations. As other forms of patronage exist (see Section 2.3.2), albeit as a minority, this particular interpretation of 'school ethos', whilst being widespread, is not exclusive. I do not use these terms to refer to a school's religious ethos. It is not within the aims of this research to investigate these specific issues nor do I claim to do so.

### **2.3 Overview of the Education System**

This section provides a brief outline of the historical development of the Irish education system and its current structures. For a more detailed overview, I recommend *A Brief Description of the Irish Education System* (DES, 2004), which also provides a list of education legislation from the foundation of the State up to circa 2003. Appendix II provides a timeline of pertinent events and documents referred to in this section and elsewhere in the research.

#### **2.3.1 Historical Overview**

The Irish education system that exists today is the result of structures that have been established and adapted over nearly two hundred years, shaped by influences ranging from religious affiliations to issues of control, finance and patronage. The current system appears, on the surface, to represent a state-run system of education providing free universal education for a maximum of fourteen years starting from the age of four years approximately (Coolahan, 1981).

In reality Irish education is publicly funded but privately controlled (Coolahan, 1994). Under the Irish constitution (*Bunreacht na hÉireann*, 1937) the State is obliged to "provide for" education (Article 42). This has effectively meant that



successive Irish governments have not been obligated to provide any direct educational service to the population. Rather the State has chosen to support and expand a system that evolved for the large part during the nineteenth century, when educational provision was predominantly the preserve of voluntary institutions, usually those with religious affiliations (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), 1991). A national system of primary education was established in 1831 following Catholic Emancipation (1829) and, while this was intended to provide for the education of children of all denominations together, in reality it became dominated by the Roman Catholic and Church of Ireland (Anglican) authorities and this effectively resulted in separate systems being established (Coolahan, 1981).

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, fee-paying post-primary education was established and was provided largely on a denominational basis, similar to primary education (Coolahan, 1981). When free post-primary education was eventually extended to the general population in 1967, the principal means by which this was provided for was through the State substituting public funding for the fees previously charged by existing schools, rather than establishing a state-wide system of post-primary education, and thereby largely consolidating the existing system of provision and control. This injection of public funding led inevitably to a substantial increase in the numbers receiving post-primary education (Coolahan, 1981).

A network of special schools, recognised as primary schools, exists which attracted State support over the years; it has its origins in schools established by voluntary organisations, some dating back to the nineteenth century and denominational in nature. It was expanded greatly during the latter half of the twentieth century. Continuing professional development in special educational needs commenced in the early 1960s with diploma courses for teachers working in special schools, hence

predominantly to those trained as primary teachers. From 2000, similar courses were established for teachers in post-primary settings.

### **2.3.2 Current Structures**

The education system that is in place today at primary and post-primary levels is one in which the majority of schools are owned and/or controlled, not by the State, but for the large part by the Roman Catholic Church or by educational trusts established by a variety of Roman Catholic religious congregations and by other smaller providers (OECD, 1991). Whilst the vast majority of primary teachers are lay people, as are the principals of the schools, the management structures of schools remain under the control of religious groups or are substantially influenced by them, particularly in terms of the religious ethos of the schools (see Section 2.3.1).

Currently primary schools, in order to be recognised by and receive funding from the State, must have a patron that is recognised by the Department of Education and Skills (DES). 95% of these schools, of which there are 3,159 (DES, 2012a), have as patron the local Roman Catholic bishop (OECD, 2007). In 2011-2012 there were 509,040 students in primary schools in Ireland (DES, 2012a). Roughly 4% of primary schools are controlled by the Church of Ireland and other protestant patrons. There is a small but growing multi-denominational sector under the patronage of Educate Together and an Irish language sector (Gaelscoileanna) under the patronage of An Forás Patrúnachta. There also exist some Muslim and Jewish schools with their own patrons. This results in a situation where most primary schools have a Roman Catholic ethos and, particularly in urban areas, are traditionally single gender schools. Ireland has the largest concentration of single gender schools in the OECD at both primary and post-primary levels (OECD, 2007). This is pertinent to this research and is discussed in Chapter Four.



A network of special schools exists which are recognised as primary schools but can retain students up to eighteen years of age. These schools have management and patronage structures that are similar to those found in ordinary primary schools (OECD, 2007). There are 119 of such schools approximately (NCSE, 2012) and traditionally cater for students presenting with particular categories of special educational needs, numbering 7,420 in 2011-2012 (DES, 2012a). However nowadays individual schools cater for a variety of needs. There are currently twelve special schools catering for students with EBD (NCSE, 2011).

There were 359,047 students in State-funded post-primary schools in 2011-2012 (DES, 2012a). Out of 723 schools (DES, 2012a), 53% are secondary schools, for the most part established originally by Roman Catholic religious congregations over the last one hundred years, following the tradition of fee-paying post-primary education described earlier (Coolahan, 1981). These schools expanded substantially in number after 1967, when free post-primary education was introduced, becoming known as 'voluntary secondary schools' or 'secondary schools'; A small number of secondary schools remain fee-paying schools (Coolahan, 1981). Most secondary schools are single gender schools (see Chapter Four). Due to the country's small population of 4.59 millions (Ireland, 2012) and its geographical spread, many of Ireland's schools are small in size, particularly in the primary sector, where 45% of all schools have less than 100 students, with only 3% (approx.) having more than 500 students (OECD, 2007). At post-primary level, nearly 26% (approx.) have less than 300 students, with 44% having over 500 students (OECD, 2007).

The voluntary secondary schools continue to be influenced by the religious congregations that originally established and ran them, and have traditionally seen their role as providing what is referred to as an 'academic' education, although how this is defined is unclear (see, in particular, Chapters Three, Four and Ten for discussion of this point). There is a state-run network of vocational schools/community colleges, 35% approximately of the total, (OECD, 2007),

originally established under the *Vocational Education Act* (1930) to provide vocational preparation, but now offering a similar curriculum to secondary schools. They are operated by Vocational Education Committees (VECs) established on a city, county or borough basis. This VEC sector, as it is known, is the sector that is most directly controlled and managed by the State (Coolahan, 1981 and 1994). Along with these two sectors, a small number of comprehensive schools and a larger number of community schools were established in the 1960s and 1970s to provide new models of patronage and management following the introduction of free post-primary education in 1967. There was also a need to ensure schools were available across the entire country due to the increase in numbers. These account for 12%-13% approximately of the total number of post-primary schools, (DES, 2012a).

With regard to the teaching staff, the majority of teachers in Ireland are female; 80% at primary level and 60% at post-primary level (OECD, 2007). However, 49% of principals in the primary sector are male, whilst in the post-primary sector this figure rises to between 65% and 80% (OECD, 2007). The gender ratio of teaching staff across different school sectors represents another factor that is relevant to this research (see, in particular, Chapters Three, Four and Ten).

## **2.4 Curriculum and Assessment in the Irish Education System**

### **2.4.1 Curriculum**

Education is compulsory in Ireland between the ages of six to sixteen or until the completion of three years of post-primary education. However the majority of children start attending school at the age of four or five. Primary schools provide eight years of schooling: Junior and Senior Infants, First to Sixth class. Children can enter Junior Infants on or after their fourth birthday. Some primary schools are organized as junior schools (Junior Infants to Second Class) whilst others are senior schools (Third to Sixth class). The remainder provide all eight years of primary



education and are referred to as 'vertical' schools. The general aims of the Primary Curriculum (Revised) (Ireland, 1999a) can be summarized as follows:

- To enable the child to live a full life as a child and to realize his or her potential as a unique individual
- To enable the child to develop as a social being through living and co-operating with others and so contribute to the good of society
- To prepare the child for further education and lifelong learning.

Whilst universal pre-school education is not provided through public funds in Ireland, since 2010 the State does fund one year's appropriate setting for children before entry to the primary school. The provision of funding for a second year is currently under consideration. *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curricular Framework*, has been developed by the NCCA (2009), focusing on children from birth to six years, the age at which compulsory education must begin. However, most five year olds and 50% of four year olds attend primary school (DES, 2013).

Post-primary education provides a three-year Junior Cycle followed by a two-year Senior Cycle, equivalent to lower and upper secondary levels, with a possibility of the latter commencing with a third year optional Transition Year programme. The general aim of post-primary education is to provide:

...a comprehensive, high-quality learning environment which aims to prepare individual students for higher or continuing education or for immediate entry into the workplace.

(DES, 2004, p. 13)

Of relevance to this research are the statements of aims for each of the Junior and Senior Cycles. The aim of the former is:

The aims and intended outcomes of junior cycle emphasise the importance of students experiencing a broad, balanced and coherent programme of study across a wide range of curriculum areas in order to prepare them for transition to senior cycle education.

(NCCA, 2013a)

This objective inherently implies not only a desire but also an assumption that students continue after the end of the compulsory period of education. While this is

laudable and is largely achieved, with a 90% retention rate up to Leaving Certificate level (DES, 2012c), it also presents the underlying rationale of the Junior Cycle as a preparatory or transitional stage in the education process. Success at this stage tends to be adjudged on the basis of the individual's decision to continue in education. While State-recognized certification is available, in the form of the Junior Certificate examination, this does not contribute greatly to the choices an individual might make other than to decide on the direction or choice of subjects to take at Senior Cycle level.

An overall statement of aims or objectives for the Senior Cycle, presented in the same clear, focused way in which the Primary Curriculum is considered or in the way in which the Junior Cycle is outlined, is not available in official documentation emanating from government agencies. Rather than state the aims and objectives of the Senior Cycle the NCCA states what they emphasise:

The aims of senior cycle emphasise the role it plays in providing continuity with junior cycle, in the personal development of students and in preparing students for the challenges life presents in further and higher education, in the world of work and in citizenship. Emphasis is also placed on the importance of students experiencing a broad, balanced and coherent programme of study across a range of curriculum areas with some opportunities for limited specialisation.

(NCCA, 2013b)

Approximately 75% of post-primary schools (NCCA, 2013c) also provide the Transition Year option, its purpose being to provide:

...an opportunity to mature and develop without the pressure of a formal examination. Its flexible structure allows for a broad range of learning opportunities to be included, such as those related to personal and social awareness and development. It also provides an opportunity for learners to reflect on, and develop an appreciation of, the value of learning in preparing them for the ever-changing demands of the adult world of work, further and higher education and relationships.

(NCCA, 2009, p. 16)



There is a perception that all schools at post-primary level now appear to provide a broadly similar curriculum (Coolahan, 1995). However there still remain significant differences within the range of curricular interventions on offer in different types of post-primary schools. Voluntary secondary schools continue to be perceived by the public as providing what is referred to as an 'academic education', in a single gender environment. This opinion is represented among the questionnaire respondents and the interviewees in this research (see Chapters Seven and Eight). The curricular programmes offered by these schools tend to be confined to the Junior Certificate and the established Leaving Certificate programmes, with perhaps the optional Transition Year. This point is expanded in the following section.

#### **2.4.2 Assessment**

Formal state-wide assessment does not exist at primary level since the abolition of the Primary Certificate in 1967. However, schools are facilitated and obliged to assess levels of skills in literacy and numeracy among students at different stages of primary education. A recent initiative has been the announcement by the DES of the introduction of a national strategy on literacy and numeracy (2011). One aspect of this is to make more comprehensive the assessment of levels of literacy and numeracy across both primary and post-primary sectors.

Formal state-wide assessment occurs in the post-primary sector and is organized by the State Examinations' Commission. The Junior Certificate examination takes place at the end of the Junior Cycle, ostensibly to assist in helping to determine the direction students will take following the completion of compulsory education. The Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) was introduced in 1996 and is available in 240 post-primary schools approximately (33%) (NCCA, 2010; JCSP, 2013). It is described as a curriculum framework that assists schools in supporting those students who may be at risk of completing schooling without formal qualifications, i.e. the Junior Certificate, (NCCA, 2010). It is seen as an intervention into the Junior



Certificate rather than an alternative to it. These 240 schools are among those schools which benefit from additional funding from the DES through its Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative (see Chapter Four, Section 4.3.1) and this is currently the main criterion for selection for inclusion in the JCSP.

Terminal examinations at the end of the Senior Cycle follow three distinct programmes offered at Leaving Certificate level, namely

- the established Leaving Certificate, described as the principal basis on which entry to third level is allocated
- the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, introduced in 1994, described as a modification of the former programme, with strong vocational and technological dimensions, and
- the Leaving Certificate (Applied) Programme, introduced in 1995, as a stand-alone programme, described as meeting the needs of students for whom the two previous programmes do not adequately cater. It is seen largely as a preparation for entering employment on completion and it does not offer direct entry into third level education (DES, 2001a). This option is popular with students presenting with SEN who stay on at school following the Junior Cycle.

Whilst all post-primary schools offer the established Leaving Certificate, it is interesting that a smaller percentage of secondary schools, relative to the size of that sector, offers the Leaving Certificate (Applied) Programme, compared to other sectors. This is outlined in Table 1. This is pertinent to this research as it suggests that there may exist differences in the perceived characteristics of the student population across the different sectors. It supports the notion (see Sections 2.3.2 and 2.4.1 above) that students attending secondary schools aspire to advance to third level, hence a lower take-up of the Leaving Certificate (Applied) Programme which does not facilitate this option. This also raises issues about the readiness to respond to the learning needs of students presenting with SEN in such schools or, indeed, a lack of understanding of the learning needs of students presenting with SEN who may attend them. This is discussed in Chapters Four and Ten.

| Number of Post-Primary Schools offering<br>Leaving Certificate (Applied) Programme (LCA)<br>(n = 287) |                                       |                  |  |
|---|---------------------------------------|------------------|--|
| Sector  | Total No. of<br>Schools per<br>Sector | No. offering LCA | % of No. of<br>Schools in this<br>Sector |
| Secondary   | 376                                   | 114              | 30.3%                                    |
| VEC   | 254                                   | 108              | 42.5%                                    |
| C & C   | 93                                    | 65               | 69.9%                                    |

**Table 1** \*Number of Post-Primary Schools offering Leaving Certificate (Applied) Programme per Sector

\*Source: Education Statistics Database (DES, 2012a).

## 2.5 Legislative and Other Major Initiatives

Considerable changes have taken place in the Irish education system in recent times. A legislative framework has been established which, heretofore, was not in existence, (*Education Act, 1998; Education [Welfare] Act, 2000; Equal Status Act, 2000; Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004; Education (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2007*). Following the *Report of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC)* (Dept. of Education, 1993b) government policy moved substantially towards an inclusive model of provision. In 1998 the then Minister for Education and Science announced that students with assessed special educational needs had an automatic entitlement to a provision to address their needs and were entitled to be educated in their local school (DES, 1998). This announcement contributed significantly to the practical application of the move towards a policy of inclusion. In 1999, a major initiative on school development planning was introduced across the education system, which advocated collaborative practices among all stakeholders, including students (Ireland, 1999b and 2002b). An



important ramification of this initiative was the imperative placed upon all schools to produce policy on all aspects of school life and organisation. Pertinent to this research is the development of behaviour policies, supported by the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) (see Section 2.6).

The *Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs [EPSEN] Act*, (2004), legislated for educational provision for such students. It provided for the establishment of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) on a statutory basis in 2005. This agency established a network of Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) to co-ordinate the provision of educational services at local level for students presenting with SEN. The NCSE also provided a framework for the eventual introduction of individual education plans on a legislative footing. This section of the relevant legislation was not commenced for economic reasons and this remains the case. However, recent research suggests many schools are now planning for students' individual needs in this way (Rose, Shevlin, Winter, O'Raw and Zhao, 2012). The NCSE is also responsible for conducting research in the area of special educational needs and providing policy advice to the DES. The most recent policy advice reports concern the education of students presenting with challenging behaviour (2012) and a strategic review of current procedures for supporting students with special educational needs in schools (2013). These are discussed further in Chapter Four.

At national level several initiatives have been put in place to support the inclusion of students presenting with SEN. Task forces were established and published reports on how best to address the issues of autism (DES, 2001b) and dyslexia (DES, 2001c) across the education system. Guidelines on the inclusion of students presenting with general learning disability were finalized in 2007, having been available in draft form since 2002. Guidelines on the inclusion of students with special educational needs in second level schools were published in 2007. Draft guidelines on the inclusion of students presenting with exceptional ability were



made available in 2007. The Special Education Support Service (SESS) was established in 2003 to provide for the continuing professional development of teachers in relation to SEN. The recent NCCA recommendations (2012) for reform at post-primary junior cycle level were outlined in Chapter One, Section 1.2.

## 2.6 Initiatives in Discipline and Behaviour

Corporal punishment was abolished in all schools in 1982 (Department of Education, 1982a and 1982b). Following this decision the then Department of Education acquiesced to representations made by teachers' and management bodies to establish a committee to recommend alternatives to corporal punishment in the maintenance of discipline in schools. The *Report of the Committee on Discipline in Schools* was published in 1985, key recommendations of which were that it saw it as the role of the Minister of Education to provide the support services to enable schools to keep the level of disruptive behaviour to a minimum and to establish special units for the education of disruptive students. Guidelines on discipline in primary schools were issued for the first time in 1988 by the Department of Education.

The issues of behaviour and discipline were not addressed again in a formal manner for nearly ten years, with the publication of the *Report to the Minister of Education and Science on Discipline in Schools*, (Martin, 1997). This was followed by *School Matters: The Report of the Task Force on Student Behaviour in Second Level Schools* in 2006 and the subsequent establishment of the National Behaviour Support Service in 2007. These initiatives are addressed in Chapter Four. A final major initiative followed the establishment of the National Educational (Welfare) Board (NEWB) in 2000. In 2008, the NEWB issued its behaviour policy guidelines, *Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools*. This document supports schools in developing a behaviour policy by providing advice on best practice, promoting positive behaviour and suggesting a possible framework for schools to

follow. It briefly refers to students presenting with SEN but does not specifically deal with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Its approach is to suggest ways in which schools can support students presenting with SEN to comply with the overall school-based policy on behaviour. It is discussed further in Chapters Four, Nine and Ten.

## **2.7 Summary**

This chapter commenced by clarifying issues surrounding the use of terminology in the research. It then outlined the current structures of the Irish education system and their historical origins, in order to provide the necessary framework within which subsequent discussion evolves. It also provided an overview of the curriculum offered at primary and post-primary levels and outlined differences between the various sectors at post-primary level with regard to curricular programmes available, an issue that will be addressed in subsequent chapters. The chapter also outlined recent legislation, curricular and other initiatives of relevance to the research. Chapter Three provides an analysis of the literature relevant to the research that is available in the international context.

## Chapter Three

### Literature Review: The International Context

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature based on the following thematic areas, which emanate from the specific research questions:

- Definitions of EBD
- Conceptualisations of EBD
- The factors that influence the understanding of EBD in schools, including
  - Gender issues
  - School ethos or culture
  - Sector (primary or post-primary)
- Behaviour policies
- Responses to EBD.

As outlined in Chapter One, Section 1.4, whilst the literature on EBD overall is extensive, that which is concerned with the issues of interest to this research is limited and this is particularly the case in the Irish context. There are three implications of this reality that relate to the manner in which the literature review is constructed. Firstly, two separate literature reviews are presented, that of the international context in this chapter and that of the Irish context in the following chapter. I believe this serves better to draw attention to, elucidate on and highlight the particularities of the Irish context which represents the milieu of the research focus. Secondly, these literature reviews were developed simultaneously alongside the data collection and analysis. This approach is consistent with the social constructivist underpinnings of the theoretical framework of this research. Silverman (2010) promotes this approach as it enables the researcher to investigate the literature most relevant to their specific treatment of the topic. This supports an organic development of the emerging analysis of the data whilst it is being gathered, which is informed by the literature but which also contributes to the construction of the literature review.



Thirdly, and linked to the preceding point, is the desire to focus on a thematic analysis mentioned at the start of this chapter and emanating initially from the specific research questions. The key words in these research questions form the basis of the search strategy employed in the investigation of preliminary sources, mainly relevant academic journals and databases. The search terms employed included the following:

- Behaviour policy
- Behavioural difficulties
- Emotional and behavioural Difficulties (EBD)
- Gender and EBD
- School sector and behavioural difficulties
- School ethos and behavioural difficulties
- Definition of EBD
- School responses/interventions to EBD.

The development of the key word search progressed during the process of data collection as further themes were identified in the analysis of the data from the semi-structured interviews. Other search terms were identified and included, for example:

- Child centredness
- School culture
- Positive behaviour.

Other sources were also employed to identify literature relevant to the research questions. The *Database of SEN Research and Policy in Ireland*, maintained by the NCSE, proved an invaluable source of the material available from 2000, such as related postgraduate and doctoral research and academic journal articles. A series of research reports commissioned by the NCSE in recent years, particularly the *Evidence of Best Practice Models and Outcomes in the Education of Children with Emotional Disturbance/Behavioural Difficulties* (Cooper and Jacobs, 2011a) also proved to be a very useful source of references. Personal networking (Mertens, 2010) among colleagues, fellow students and attendance at research conferences also provided valuable sources. Given the organic nature of the development of the

literature reviews a systematic approach was developed employing the most productive search terms.

This chapter commences with a discussion regarding current definitions of EBD in the literature. This constitutes an important and relevant basis from which to begin as the issue of definition is central to the research aims. The aetiology of EBD is not central to this research and, therefore, is not addressed in detail; however a comprehensive overview of the aetiology of EBD can be found in Cooper and Jacobs (2011a). A brief summary of the main theoretical conceptualisations of EBD is included in this chapter in order to provide a contextual background. A brief outline of perspectives on behaviour is also included to support this. The next section addresses the factors in schools that influence understanding of EBD. The final sections address behaviour policy and responses to EBD.

### **3.2 Definitions of EBD**

Coverage of this issue in the literature is characterised by a general consensus that it is difficult to define EBD (Kavale, Forness and Mostert, 2005; Mowat, 2009). The *International Classification of Diseases (ICD)* (1992) and the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-IV-TR)* (2000) classifications do not provide an overall classification of EBD *per se* but, rather, consider each condition or disorder individually. Attempts to provide a definition have tended to offer wide-ranging descriptions of a variety of factors, often encompassing contributions from medical, therapeutic and psychological perspectives (Cooper, 1999; Cullinan, 2004; Hunter-Carsch, Tiknaz, Cooper and Sage, 2006). However there is also a 'legalistic' or 'administrative' perspective to the definition of EBD (Cullinan, 2004). This is particularly the case in the Irish context and this is discussed further in Chapter Four.

Indeed, the existence of such an eclectic mix of disciplines contributing to the debate may be seen as one reason for the lack of consensus. However, it is also true that the wide range of characteristics and symptoms (Dept. of Education,



1993b, 1993; DES, 2002 and 2005a; National Association of School Psychologists, 2005; Jull, 2008) evident in presenting conditions in EBD affect such a variety of different aspects of a person's life that there is a considerable degree of co-morbidity with other categories of SEN (Farrell, Critchley and Mills, 1999; Stringer and Lozano, 2007), rendering it difficult to avoid straying across boundaries.

There is also some evidence of a trend towards generalisation in definitions that are offered. Cooper (1999) suggests that EBD:

is perhaps best seen as a loose collection of characteristics, some of which are located within students; others of which are disorders of the environment in which the student operates (such as the school or the family). The third, and probably most common, category involves the interaction between personal characteristics of students and environmental factors.

(pp. 9-10)

Woolfolk, Hughes and Walkup (2013) refer to:

Behaviours or emotions that deviate so much from the norm that they interfere with the child's own growth and development and/or the lives of others...

(p. 160)

Equally, there is a view that the search for agreement in definition is less relevant than investigation into the variety of presenting characteristics and how to address them (Mowat, 2009).

However, focusing on individual conditions and disorders on the one hand, and on an holistic representation of EBD on the other, affects not only the way in which EBD is conceptualised on individual, school or systemic levels but also has major ramifications for how responses and/or interventions are thought about and delivered on each of these levels (see Sections 3.5 and 3.6). The component symptoms, factors and characteristics that can be found in the variety of definitions affect greatly the understanding of EBD and the perspectives thus taken by practitioners. EBD represents a category of special educational needs that can be said to be unique from other categories. This uniqueness manifests itself in several ways: nomenclature, quantification, definitions and the focus of interventions.



Coverage in the international literature of the majority of categories of SEN shares, for a large part, an agreed or at least a limited nomenclature which can be accessed, for example, in ICD (1992) or DSM IV (2000) classifications. However EBD is discussed in the literature using a range of different terms (Cooper, 1999; Visser, 2003; Rutherford, Magee, Quinn and Mathur, 2004; Hunter-Carsch *et al*, 2006) and also in Irish documentation (*DES Circular Letter 08/02*, 2002; NEPS, 2010), for example:

- Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (EBD)
- Emotional and Behavioural Disorders (EBD)
- Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD)
- Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD)
- Emotional Disturbance
- Severe Emotional Disturbance.

Arguably, some of these terms do not present any major inherent differences, e.g. SEBD and BESD. However, others carry with them significant ramifications for interpretation and, indeed, provision. An example of this is the inclusion of a reference to a 'social' aspect to the difficulties experienced. This contributes to a more sophisticated understanding of the nature of the range of difficulties that might be experienced by a person, but it can have other ramifications also, particularly in the responses or interventions put in place. Hence there has been a considerable increase in environmental responses and interventions, broadening the focus to include 'outside school' factors and social interactions while at the same time considering the social interactions inside school. Finally, referring to a 'social' aspect can result in broadening considerably the overall context. This renders the issue more complex in three significant ways: allowing for very different interpretations of to whom, exactly, this category refers, making quantification more difficult and affecting or modifying the focus of interventions.

Similarly, the narrowing of consideration to focus exclusively on emotional disturbance (severe or otherwise) could be argued as facilitating a medical model of intervention prevailing over other models. The terms 'emotional disturbance' and 'severe emotional disturbance' are traditionally employed in DES documentation,

(e.g. DES, 2002), and represent the only references to this category of SEN in official documentation emanating from the DES. The apparent lack of any significant treatment of these issues in the Irish literature is discussed in the following chapter.

Cole, Daniels and Visser (2003) note the difficulty in quantifying the number of students who present with EBD. Estimates in the international literature range between 10% and 20% of school-age children in the UK and USA (Hunter-Carsch *et al*, 2006). Eber, Nelson and Miles (1995) refer to a report from Illinois indicating that students presenting with severe EBD were present across all educational settings. The Department of Health and Human Services (2000) in the USA reports estimates of prevalence rates of mental health issues among children and adolescents of between 16% and 22%, depending on studies. Harris-Murri, King and Rostenberg (2006) question what they refer to as the “disproportionate representation” (p. 779) of students identified with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties as a result of assumptions made due to cultural and linguistic diversity. Variations in quantifying prevalence contribute to confusion in conceptualising the issue and can lead to speculative comments regarding estimates of numbers presenting with EBD in individual schools based on vague definitions.

Perhaps one of the more interesting aspects of the attempt to define EBD, and one which marks it out from other categories of SEN, is a consideration of the effect of behaviours and/or emotions displayed by the person in question on other people (see Woolfolk *et al*, 2013). This characteristic in the definition of EBD appears to be unique to this category of SEN. Other categories of SEN are usually defined in terms of within-person characteristics; the effect of these characteristics on other people is not considered as part of the definition.

Part of the reason for its inclusion as a relevant characteristic may be understood through a consideration of Cullinan’s differentiation between different purposes for defining EBD initially (Cullinan, 2004). He suggests that EBD is defined for either research, authoritative or administrative purposes. The first type of definition



concentrates on describing participants in a particular study. The second facilitates linking an exposition of EBD with a particular theory, while the third type is of particular interest to those charged with the delivery of services or provisions. This framework is considered further in Chapter Four in relation to the Irish context, where the DES definition is discussed in this context.

However, it is pertinent to refer here to this framework as it focuses attention on 'who' defines EBD and for what purpose, rather than 'how' it is defined. As stated earlier, a range of perspectives contribute to defining EBD; medical, therapeutic, psychological and legalistic or administrative. Cullinan's framework (2004) provides a method of categorising these perspectives in order to understand the context of their provenance. Most of these perspectives are, by their nature, concerned with social interactions so it is not surprising that there will be a tendency to concentrate on how these interactions work and affect all concerned; interaction is a two way thing.

Thus the notion of the effect on other people of emotional and behavioural difficulties is integral to the debate around defining the concept (Woolfolk *et al*, 2013) albeit with differing emphases on its effects. This is also particularly significant as this aspect of social interaction is integral to discussion of how EBD is conceptualised, which is addressed in the next section.

### **3.3 Conceptualisations of EBD**

This research attempts to investigate the extent to which emotional and behavioural difficulties constitutes a coherent 'concept' in the context of the Irish mainstream education system. This is conducted within an epistemological framework rooted in a social constructivist paradigm (see Chapter Five). Within such a framework, questions can be asked regarding how this concept is thought about in mainstream schools, how it affects or contributes to the development of behaviour policies in these schools and whether or not these processes are



influenced by a variety of factors to any great extent. Therefore the notion of EBD as a coherent 'concept' permeates the research.

Coverage of the range of theories and conceptualisations of EBD is extensive in the literature (see, for example, Clough, Garner, Pardeck and Yuen, 2005). This is often presented either historically in terms of a chronology or timeline or, alternatively, from an epistemological perspective, i.e. examining the issues from psychological, therapeutic, medical or educational perspectives. Such coverage establishes a paradigm within which EBD is often investigated in a linear fashion; moving from looking first at the theoretical basis and then investigating how the theory manifests itself in the form of policy and interventions.

The theoretical framework of this research is based on a social constructivist perspective and therefore is interested in how realities are perceived to be constructed by practitioners. This theoretical framework is presented and discussed in Chapter Five. There, I argue that it is pertinent to examine conceptualisations of EBD in the context of mainstream educational provision in order to explore the links between how EBD is conceptualised and the perceived realities of policy and interventions. Thus subsequent sections in this chapter are concerned with discussing the conceptualisation of EBD from the perspectives of factors that are rooted in the realities of schools and, in particular, from the perspectives of the issues relevant to the research questions (see Sections 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6). For now it is pertinent to discuss briefly the main theoretical perspectives present in the literature in order to provide a context for the discussion in those subsequent sections.

### **3.3.1 Theoretical Perspectives on EBD**

Theoretical perspectives on emotional and behavioural difficulties are dominated by contributions from proponents of psychological, biological, social psychological and therapeutic factors and approaches (Cooper and Jacobs, 2011a). These perspectives attempt to understand and explain EBD from their particular epistemological standpoint and, eventually, intervene to change situations. For

example, from the biological perspective genetic factors dominate as pivotal among underlying causes of EBD. This can be illustrated, for example, in the historical development of understanding of the aetiology of Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (Forness, 2004) and the subsequent medical model of intervention focusing on the prescription of psychostimulants.

Cooper and Jacobs (2011a) refer to a link between developments in thinking in EBD and subsequent interventions in this area, on the one hand, with those in therapeutic psychology and psychiatry on the other. They outline the evolution of thinking through the twentieth century in these two fields which influenced the adoption of psychodynamic, behavioural, humanistic, cognitive behavioural and systemic approaches to EBD. This evolution of thinking in EBD is characterised by a broadening of the focus from concentrating on inherent intrapersonal characteristics, integral to psychodynamic and behavioural conceptualisations of EBD, to examining the interpersonal characteristics of the individual within the wider system, i.e. the school and the wider society. Hence later humanistic approaches focus more on interpersonal relationships and cognitive behavioural approaches address the interaction between the individual's behaviour and external stimuli, in the context of the social milieu. Systemic approaches, finally, focus on social systems and the interaction of the individual with such systems (Ayers, Clarke and Murray, 2000).

While this evolutionary paradigm suggests a chronology where each way of thinking supplants the previous one, the reality is somewhat different. When the focus turns to how these conceptualisations are translated into action in schools, a wide variety of interventions is in evidence which is discussed further in Section 3.6. Current thinking in this regard favours an eclectic approach to the conceptualisation of EBD, taking a multi-faceted perspective which draws from biological, psychological and social psychological perspectives in what is referred to as a 'biopsychosocial' perspective (Cooper, 1999). This theory acknowledges the contributions of its precursors and affirms their importance in thinking about EBD. More importantly,



this perspective also expounds the necessity of multi-disciplinary responses to EBD (Cooper and Jacobs, 2011a).

The influence exerted by theoretical models of EBD on provision in schools is significant (Garner and Gains, 1996). Jones (2003) critiques the educational model of EBD, charting the development of thinking over a number of decades, from understanding EBD in terms of 'maladjustment', to EBD being considered under the general heading of special educational needs (SEN), to a preoccupation with "disorderly behaviour or disaffection" (p. 148), locating intervention firmly within the changing, or promoting scrutiny of, the environment in which the student operates.

### **3.3.2 Categories of EBD**

The previous section outlined briefly the major paradigms which have shaped the discussion around EBD up to the present. However there also exists a significant body of literature concentrating on a wide range of conditions that can be said to make up categories of EBD (Cooper, 2005). As stated earlier (Section 3.2) neither ICD (1992) nor DSM IV (2000) provides an overall description of EBD; rather these classification systems codify a range of conditions or disorders that, taken together, make up the broad family that constitutes emotional and behavioural difficulties.

These disorders can be broadly presented in the following sub-groups (DSM IV, 2000):

- Anxiety Disorders
- Attachment Disorders
- Disruptive Behaviour Disorders
- Mood Disorders
- Attention Deficit Disorders.

Each sub-group contains several discrete conditions and disorders covering a vast range of issues, ranging from mental health problems and attention deficit to challenging behaviour. These sub-categories are sometimes grouped together



under broad categorizations referring to internalizing and externalizing difficulties (Cooper, 1999). This perspective differs somewhat from a concentration on the broader generalities of the theoretical conceptualisations outlined previously. Also it is true that to some extent this suggests a different way of looking at and engaging with EBD and this is important as it is relevant to this research. While the characteristics of these conditions and disorders fit comfortably within the broad parameters of the theoretical constructs referred to earlier it can also be said that, effectively, they describe the presenting manifestations of EBD as perceived by the observer. This is important and I suggest later (Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine) that it is these manifestations that are central to the concerns and understandings of EBD held by practitioners.

### **3.3.3 Perspectives on Behaviour**

Another pertinent issue that is present in the literature is one which considers different perspectives from which to understand behaviour: where it is coming from, what is its rationale, what responses can be made to certain types of behaviour. There are two issues to be addressed here. The first is a perspective which builds on the paradigm outlined above (Section 3.3.1) of different theoretical conceptualisations of EBD, the second concentrates on the issue of challenging behaviour.

Addressing the first of these, Ayers *et al* (2000) employ the broad theoretical conceptualisations discussed earlier to focus on the behaviours manifested within each theoretical construct. Their purpose is to show how practitioners can investigate presenting behaviours in terms of their characteristics, aetiology or attendant factors with a view to initiating interventions. The second issue concerns the discussion of challenging behaviour. This concept is of interest to this research as it has become a topic of discussion in the Irish context in recent times, where research has been conducted on the incidences and understandings of challenging

behaviour in special schools. The NCSE has published policy advice to the Minister of Education and Skills (2012) on this issue. This is discussed in the next chapter. For now it is pertinent to discuss how this concept is presented in the international literature.

O'Brien (1996 and 1998) does not offer a definition but locates behaviour which is considered challenging firmly in the context within which it is being discussed. This suggests it is difficult to define and he cautions against the assumption of there being just one factor determining its existence. He is not alone in promoting the idea of there being a link between the behaviours displayed and the situational responses to that behaviour (Mc Brien and Felce, 1992). Visser (2007) discusses the complexities to be found in the literature on challenging behaviour, particularly when attempting to define it, and highlights the tendency to do so in terms of specific examples or specific characteristics. Ellis and Tod (2009) similarly do not define the term but do present two categories of challenging behaviour, the first referring to high frequency behaviours by individuals and the second referring to anger-related behaviour such as physical and verbal aggression.

Therefore the notion of challenging behaviour can be seen to constitute a nebulous concept. There is a lack of clarity or general agreement about its definition (Visser, 2007). Discussion of challenging behaviour in the literature often appears to dwell on contextualising the concept to particular situations or examples, thus permitting a wide set of parameters to exist. Broomhead (2013) investigates conflicting perceptions among parents and educational practitioners regarding responses to challenging behaviour in special and mainstream schools. These perceptions ranged from seeing these responses as providing preferential treatment on the one hand, to stigmatising students on the other. This highlights the uncertainty that exists around this issue.



### 3.4 School Factors influencing the Understanding of EBD

A central issue in this research is to examine the extent to which the understanding of EBD in schools and their responses to it are influenced by a range of factors that are integral to the internal dynamic of schools. The research is rooted in the Irish mainstream education system and therefore the factors of interest to it are influenced somewhat by that reality. While this is an important interest to declare, it is important also to state that it does not permeate all aspects of this issue. The aspects that are discussed are those of gender, school ethos or culture and school sector. This section examines the international literature in these areas and presents the salient points from it.

#### 3.4.1 Gender Issues

The relationship between gender issues and EBD does not receive comprehensive coverage in the international literature. Gender-specific studies tend to dominate over comparative studies across gender. Searches of the literature indicate a lack of research in this area (see, for example, Hess Rice, Merves and Srsic, 2008). What is available tends to concentrate on investigating and reporting rates of identification across gender; (see, for example, Maras and Cooper 1999; Young, Sabah, Young, Reiser and Richardson, 2010). This can be located in the overall context of investigations of rates of identification across gender for the broad spectrum of SEN (see, for example, Oswald, Coutinho and Nagle, 2003).

Gender issues in relation to EBD can be examined from several perspectives. The manifestation of behaviours, often referred to in the context of boys exhibiting 'externalising' behaviours and girls exhibiting 'internalising' behaviours, although Young *et al* (2010) reports evidence to the contrary, is investigated frequently (see, for example, Maras and Cooper, 1999; Hess Rice *et al*, 2008; Nicholson, 2005). The prevalence of particular conditions among males is frequently reported, as is the male-female ratio of diagnoses of Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (Cooper, 2006a); O'Mahony, 2005). Kann and Hanna, (2000) investigate Disruptive Behaviour



Disorders among girls, concentrating on diagnosis, risk factors specific to girls and possible interventions. This study emphasises the lack of research in this area and the possible negative consequences that this brings to identification and effective treatment. Cullinan, Osbourne and Epstein (2004) investigate the characteristics of girls presenting with emotional disturbance and discuss the ramifications of applying identification criteria that have been established in studies on boys to the female population, suggesting that if gender differences exist, such assumptions may result in under-identification of girls with emotional disturbance, as they may exhibit different characteristics to boys.

Responses to male and female students presenting with behavioural difficulties have also been investigated. Hurrell (1995) reports very different disciplinary procedures for girls and refers to Buswell's (1984) suggestion that girls' misbehaviour is often interpreted as being indicative of emotional difficulties, thus receiving very different responses, such as sympathy, than boys' misbehaviour. Jull (2008) also refers to several studies with similar findings. Hess Rice *et al* (2008), in their small-scale study of teachers and school counsellors, report that the language used to describe students and their behaviours is different in relation to boys and girls. Also they note these professionals less willing to work with girls, apparently perceiving their presenting problems to be more challenging.

Issues relating to the gender of teachers can also be investigated. Avramidis and Norwich (2002), for example, in their review of teachers' attitudes towards integration and inclusion, refer to several studies examining gender differences between teachers that present inconclusive results. A Danish study (Egelund and Foss Hansen, 2000), however, reports that teachers' experience is much more significant than gender in managing behavioural problems. These studies do not appear to address issues of how male and female teachers interact with or respond to male and female students presenting with EBD, however Maras and Cooper (1999) do report "that gender is often correlated with teachers' expectations about

the acceptability (or not) of certain, particularly aggressive, behaviours” (p. 66). The issue of teachers’ gender is particularly relevant to this research as the majority of teachers in Ireland are female (80% at primary level and 60% at post-primary level (OECD, 2007) and this is discussed in Chapter Four.

Finally a further issue seemingly not addressed comprehensively in the literature is that of school organisation, i.e. looking at possible differences between single gender and co-educational schools and how EBD is considered and addressed in each one. Again, this is an issue of interest to this research and it is explored further in Chapter Four. However, at this point it is relevant to state that a substantial number of Irish schools are single gender schools, both at primary and post-primary levels, and particularly so in urban areas, (see Chapter Two, Section 2.3.2).

### **3.4.2 School Ethos or Culture**

In Chapter Two, Section 2.2, I outline the parameters within which I consider the issues of ethos or culture. Discussion of school ethos or culture relates to the broader issue of inclusion in that it involves the extent to which a mainstream school supports the inclusion of students whose presence might conflict with things that have traditionally been considered important to its status, its mission or its current identity. In the Irish context another aspect to this relates to what a school (in this case usually a post-primary school) perceives as its ‘purpose’. For example, a school may be referred to as always having been an ‘academic’ school, implying that the attainment of very good results in the terminal State examinations was always considered a shared aim of the Board of Management, teachers, parents and, to a large extent, students. This is just one example and the broader issue is referred to again and discussed further in Chapter Four.



In the international context, the literature tends to employ the term 'school culture' when discussing the issue of the dichotomy between reconciling efforts to be an inclusive school with status, purpose, identity and, essentially, meeting stakeholders' expectations (Booth, Ainscow and Dyson, 1997; Paliokosta and Blandford, 2010). Coverage in the literature from the UK tends to present this issue in an historical context, linking it to the development of the National Curriculum following the *Education Reform Act* (1988) and the structural changes in funding and control of schools between the 1970s – 1990s (Booth *et al*, 1997). It is argued that these developments encouraged parents to identify schools that focused on attainment. This resulted in schools feeling pressurized to present themselves as focused on attainment and consequently excluding students whose presence compromised results (Blyth and Milner, 1996 cited in Booth, Ainscow and Dyson, 1997; Hanko, 2003).

A conflict arises due to the contradiction between the aim of being an inclusive school, and therefore welcoming of students presenting with SEN, and the desire to attain academic results, particularly if inclusion means accepting into the school categories of students who, by virtue of their learning disabilities, cannot achieve high academic results (e.g. those presenting with moderate general learning disability) or those who might interfere with the attainments of others (e.g. those presenting with EBD) by deflecting teacher time to support their needs. Hanko (2003) refers to:

...the exclusion tide that followed the introduction of the National Curriculum with its contentious league tables and routine testing. The excessively competitive academic results-centred teaching climate to which it led resulted in academic failure and disaffection for some.

(p. 126).



Palikosta and Blandford (2010) investigate this conflict and highlight a dilemma for schools and practitioners:

As long as the inflexibility of the National Curriculum prevails and the accountability that follows this becomes an end in itself, it is difficult for practices and discourses around inclusion to be owned by practitioners.

(p. 180).

This dilemma is indicative of tensions operating at local and national level that involve attitudes about what and who schools are for and whose needs are being or should be met. The *Elton Report* (1989), which promoted the development of behaviour policies in schools in England and Wales, summed up this dilemma succinctly:

Our evidence suggests that an emphasis on academic achievement is likely to promote good behaviour as long as it is not the school's only emphasis.

A school in which academic achievement is the only source of positive encouragement is likely to experience more difficulties with low achieving pupils.

(p. 107)

This issue is discussed further in Chapter Four where the complexity of the Irish school system, particularly at post-primary level, is investigated as a factor in this issue of ethos or culture.

### 3.4.3 School Sector

Comparative research of primary and post-primary settings regarding EBD is not readily apparent in the literature. School-based research tends to focus on one or other setting while literature reviews tend to focus more on the particular topics of interest rather than the settings in which they occur. Research also differentiates between mainstream and special school settings. This apparent lack of comparative research is somewhat surprising given the marked differences between

organisational structures, teacher-student relationships, curricular issues, child and adolescent development, etc.

What comparative research does exist tends to deal with the broad topics of students' psychological difficulties (Erdur-Baker, 2009), perceptions of problem classroom behaviours (Little, 2005) and of SEN and inclusion (see, for example, Avramidis, Bayless and Burden, 2000). Broadly similar concerns are reported for primary and post-primary teachers regarding the types of behavioural issues that occur. Little (2005), for example, finds that talking out of turn and hindering other students are of equal concern across sectors but notes that these become of less concern to teachers in older class groups at post-primary level, when lack of engagement becomes a problem. Avramidis and Norwich (2002), however, review the literature on teachers' attitudes to inclusion and integration and find evidence that they are influenced by grade level; however this review highlights studies that are somewhat contradictory and this lack of consistency suggests a need for cross-sectoral research in several areas.

Avramidis and Norwich (2002) suggest that the focus on subject specialisation in the post-primary setting might be less compatible with an inclusive attitude than with a focus on individual student development. This suggests sectoral differences in addressing SEN which may logically be extended to EBD. Furthermore, Ellins and Porter (2005) find attitudinal differences across subject teachers at post-primary level, albeit in a small-scale survey. They report that teachers of English, Mathematics and Science have a less favourable attitude than other subject specialists. Though not strictly relevant to this research, these findings do support the legitimacy of investigating sectoral issues as being of relevance. More relevant to this research is a study by Gibbs and Gardiner (2008) across primary and post-primary teachers in Ireland and England regarding how they attribute students' misbehaviour. This is discussed in Chapter Four.



### 3.5 Behaviour Policies in Schools

A behaviour policy may be influenced to a large extent by the understandings of behavioural issues in general and of EBD in particular that are prevalent in the school. The converse may also be the case. Hence the manner in which schools develop behaviour policies and their rationale is integral to this research. Coverage of the issue of behaviour policies in the literature tends to focus on two main aspects: the rationale for their existence and their formulation. The interface between behaviour policies and SEN receives little attention.

Following the *Elton Report* (1989), the *Education Act* (1997) legislated in this area. The rationale presented for behaviour policies can be exemplified by outlining the underlying philosophy of the *Behaviour in Schools: Framework for Intervention* initiative (Birmingham City Council (BCC), 1998):

- Children's behaviour is central to the learning process and is an intrinsic element of education.
- Problems in behaviour in educational settings are usually the product of a complex interaction between the individual, school, family, community and wider society.
- Social interaction based on mutual respect is a fundamental basis of an optimal educational environment.

(p. 50)

This philosophy highlights a theme discussed previously (Sections 3.2 and 3.3), that of the interface between behavioural difficulties manifested in classroom settings and the wider contexts of the individual, school, family and wider society, thereby concurring with the biopsychosocial approach outlined. This is pertinent as it suggests a significant level of importance is placed on accommodating students presenting with emotional and behavioural difficulties in behaviour policies.

The merits of behaviour policies are further expanded in the literature. For example O'Brien (1998) discusses the significance of a behaviour policy in a school, emphasising its importance in promoting a whole school approach and being a 'living' document, i.e. describing not only what a school believes but also what it



does with regard to promoting positive behaviour. It is interesting to note that, while O'Brien discusses this issue in a chapter on challenging behaviour, his references to behaviour policies are not particularly specific to such behaviour and can be attributed to the school situation in general.

An interesting aspect in the literature relating to behaviour policies is this contextual generality, i.e. considerable attention is given over to discussing behaviour policy in the context of the whole school population (O'Brien, 1998; Porter, 2000; Ellis and Tod, 2009). Emphasis is placed on developing principles of behaviour that can be seen as desirable: desirable to the school authorities, to parents and, indeed, to the students. This imbues a sense that the challenge for the development of behaviour policy is to establish principles that share characteristics such as fairness, respect and equality (BCC, 1998; O'Brien, 1998). However there is also inherent in this a criterion of acceptance, i.e. all protagonists must agree or 'sign up' to the principles of the behaviour policy as a pre-requisite to its effective implementation. The success or otherwise of a behaviour policy will depend on the degree to which this acceptance exists from the outset. The implications of this not being the case are not discussed widely in the literature but are very real in schools (Turner, 2006).

Indeed, not only is the necessity of a high level of agreement promoted in the literature, but there appears to exist an unstated assumption that all protagonists *can* agree to the content of the behaviour policy. Again, this aspect is one which does not receive significant attention in the literature. There is no discussion of the challenges that arise when this pre-requisite fails to be met. This presents a dilemma in the case of students presenting with SEN and, in particular, EBD. Not only does it prove more and more difficult to find common ground regarding what is acceptable and desirable, it is also increasingly more difficult for behaviour policies to be inclusive of the presenting conditions and needs of students with SEN and, in particular, EBD. This discussed further in Chapter Four (Section 4.5).

As discussion on behaviour policies in the literature tends to focus predominantly on the whole school context, so too does the discussion on the formulation of such policies and their content. The *Behaviour in Schools: Framework for Intervention* (BCC, 1998) suggests the following as being essential and this is reiterated elsewhere (see, for example, Ellis and Tod, 2009):

- Statement of ethos/principles
- Roles and responsibilities
- Procedures and practice
- Outline of rules and expectations
- Outline of rewards for good behaviour
- Outline of consequences of undesired behaviour
- Relationship with other policies
- Working with parents
- Working with outside agencies
- Outline of development, monitoring and evaluation

(p. 7)

It also recommends that the behaviour policy should:

relate closely to the school's special educational needs policy to ensure that there is a unified approach to individual pupil's difficulties in the frequent cases where behavioural difficulties exist in conjunction with 'learning difficulties...'

(p. 10)

This suggested framework for a behaviour policy is comprehensive. However, as O'Brien (1998) states the behaviour policy must be a 'living' document to which all have contributed and it is in this regard that many are found deficient (Turner, 2006; Lloyd Bennett, 2006).

Yet another interesting aspect of the coverage of the issue of behaviour policies in the literature is that of the often synonymous use of terms such as 'discipline policy' and 'code of conduct' with that of 'behaviour policy'. While the latter implies a neutrality regarding its subject matter, i.e. it lays out the school's policy in relation to behaviour in general, the former terms can be interpreted as value laden to a certain extent. They imply the existence of a set of 'rules' that will be imposed on a particular cohort in order to aspire to a certain standard. Integral to this idea is the



notion that this is a standard set for all in the school. This issue will be discussed further in subsequent chapters.

There are absences in the literature that are interesting to this research and should be highlighted here. As exemplified in the *Behaviour in Schools: Framework for Intervention* (1998), the tendency for the behaviour policy to refer to the school's SEN policy for guidance on supporting students with behavioural difficulties goes unchallenged in the literature. This, it could be argued, may be an acknowledgement of the learning difficulties that arise from or are integral to behavioural difficulties and a presumption that the SEN policy will be best placed to address these issues. However it could also be argued that this represents a tacit acknowledgement that the behaviour policy addresses the majority of the student population in a school, exclusive of those presenting with behavioural difficulties, even though breaches of the behaviour policy may incur the same sanctions for them as for their peers. This inconsistency does not appear to be addressed in the literature.

Another issue that receives little attention in the literature is the lack of emphasis in behaviour policies on differentiated learning. Turner (2006) refers to this lack of focus on differentiated learning as a major obstacle to the success of the behaviour policy. While Turner is referring to differentiation in the wider curriculum, there is also a need for differentiation in the support provided for students presenting with SEN in their efforts to understand and comply with the behaviour policy (Westwood, 2003). This is especially true of students presenting with EBD. Again this does not appear to be discussed in the literature.



### 3.6 Responses to EBD

As this research is focused on the Irish mainstream context, it is not its intention to cover at length the range of interventions discussed in the international literature. It is pertinent, however, to provide an overview of the literature on some of the main interventions in order to provide a context for the discussion in the next chapter which focuses more specifically on responses to EBD in the Irish mainstream context.

Emotional and behavioural difficulties are identified as major challenges in many countries (Poulou, 2005). In its report entitled *Inclusive Education and Classroom Practice* (2003), the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (EADSNE) states:

Behaviour, social and/or emotional problems are mentioned by almost all countries as being the biggest challenge within the area of inclusion of pupils with special educational needs. This includes problems relating to unmotivated pupils and problems related to disaffection.

(p. 20)

The influence of theoretical constructions of EBD on interventions in schools has been significant (Cooper and Jacobs, 2011a). The outline of the range of theories in this area (Section 3.3) suggests quite different conceptualisations of EBD and it is, therefore, not surprising to find a variety of interventions to address the particular characteristics inherent in each conceptualisation. Visser (2006) offers an interesting overview and critique of interventions or approaches over the past number of decades and through this identifies underlying principles or “eternal verities” (p. 233) that transcend the variety of interventions and are common to those that appear to make a difference. Overall these interventions share a variety of common purposes; for example, the inclusion of students with EBD in mainstream, the provision of educational services to them, the treatment of presenting conditions and rehabilitation.

Daniels, Visser, Cole and de Reybekill (1999) report a number of characteristics of effective practice in mainstream schools' provision for students presenting with EBD. They include:

- Good teaching
- Appropriate curriculum
- Effective behaviour policy
- Effective leadership
- Core of dedicated staff
- Staff with the ability to learn from experience
- Key staff having an understanding of the nature of EBD.

The issue of behaviour policy is discussed in Section 3.5. Other characteristics outlined by Daniels *et al* (1999) are incorporated into the discussion that follows.

The importance of the attributes of the teachers and managerial staff in responding to EBD in schools is a recurring theme in the literature. Daniels *et al* (1999) outline effective teaching methodologies, effective leadership and a team approach as elements their study found in schools displaying best practice. Along with these attributes, a good understanding of EBD and a willingness to learn from experience or adaptability are also highlighted. This is consistent with Visser's "eternal verities" (2006). Cooper (2011) and Wise (1999 and 2000) concur, referring also to personal attributes such as personal warmth, empathy and communication skills being as important as classroom management skills. Wise and Upton (1998) state that students with EBD:

appear to want teachers to better understand them and to nurture the more caring side of the teacher/pupil relationship both in and out of the classroom.

(p. 7).

Cooper and Jacobs (2011a) identify discrete interventions in three distinct categories. The first comprises of those implemented on a whole school basis and which address issues wider and other than behaviour *per se*, but which can be expected to impact favourably on behavioural issues. These include programmes to tackle literacy levels or social/educational disadvantage, etc. The rationale is clear;



improvements in reading ability, for example, will ease access to the curriculum and provide for student learning, which in turn will motivate students to engage as they achieve success, hence reducing disaffection with the teaching and learning process. The National Literacy Strategy (1998) initiative is one example of such an intervention.

Secondly, they identify specific interventions, albeit still targeted at whole school level, but which are focused on social and emotional learning, such as *Circle Time* (Mosley, 1993), *Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning* (SEAL) (Weare and Gray, 2003) and *School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support* (SWPBS) (Walker, Horner, Sugai, Bullis, Sprague, Bricker, and Kaufman, 1996). These interventions have at their core the aims of skill building or enhancement (e.g. turn-taking), managing and expressing feelings, showing empathy, self-awareness, etc. Some are discrete programmes of intervention while others are more integrated into the wider curriculum. SWPBS, for example, focuses on whole school culture, supporting at school/family/community level, proactive prevention programmes and teaching specific skills to students (Freeman, Eber, Anderson, Irven, Horner, Bounds and Dunlap, 2006; Warren, Bohanon-Edmonson, Turnbull, Sailor, Wickham, Griggs and Beech, 2006; Sugai, 2007).

The final category of interventions specifically targets students on an individual basis. Students are identified through some form of assessment, referral or educational history. These interventions may take the form of functional behavioural analysis or assessment (Cooper, 2011; Fox and Gable, 2004) followed by individualised support (e.g. allocation of a teaching/special needs assistant) and planning (e.g. an individualised behaviour plan). They often tend to operate within a cognitive-behavioural approach:

CB approaches are concerned with the ways in which the relationship between external stimuli and target behaviours can sometimes be influenced by thought processes. The aim of CBT is



to encourage the development of functional ways of thinking by challenging and changing dysfunctional ways of thinking.

(Cooper, 2011, p. 77).

They may involve removing students with EBD to a separate setting in the school (e.g. nurture groups, behaviour support classrooms/units, learning support units) or off-site (e.g. Pupil Referral Units, special EBD schools).

The nurture group has been particularly popular in the UK over a number of decades (Cooper, 2006b). Located for the most part in the primary school sector, its focus is on developing social interaction in a nurturing and supportive environment as a means of developing the competencies considered essential and developmentally appropriate for such interaction to take place (Cooper and Whitebread, 2007; Scott and Lee, 2009). Research evidence (Cooper and Whitebread, 2007; Cooper and Jacobs, 2011a) suggests this intervention has a significant impact on improving social skills, self-management and the skills that are pre-requisite to learning. While nurture groups can be established in secondary schools, this is not the norm and reports of research in this area are lacking in the literature (see Cooper and Jacobs, 2011a).

Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) were established in England and Wales in the 1990s, according to Hill (1997), as a rationalisation of a range of provisions that included on and off-site units, special schools, specialist teams, etc. Garner (1996) suggests that they “are replicating problems that have traditionally existed in segregated education” (p. 187). However, Law (1998) sees this development as a totally new entity, pointing out that PRUs were “defined as short-term intervention and that they are not EBD provision” (p 99), established to cater for students excluded from school. PRUs represent one strand of a range of off-site provisions in England and Wales that continue to include special schools and Further Education (FE) colleges (Cole, 2006). According to the literature their level of success is difficult to judge, due to broad variations in their structures and functions (Cooper and Jacobs,

2011a). Indeed the full range of interventions or responses to EBD varies considerably across jurisdictions. Research on the effectiveness of these interventions tends to be small in scale (Cooper and Jacobs, 2011a) and comparisons are difficult to make with any rigour.

### **3.7 Summary**

This chapter examined the international literature on emotional and behavioural difficulties in the context of the issues raised in the specific research questions. While a considerable body of relevant literature was identified and discussed, there was also found to be significant areas where a lack of research was in evidence. There appears to be little comparative research across gender (both among students and teachers) and sector (primary and post-primary), the interface between behaviour policy and SEN (and particularly EBD) and research focusing on single gender and co-educational settings. The issue of defining EBD was also discussed and found to be complex, as was the issue of defining challenging behaviour. Shortcomings in evaluating responses to EBD were also indicated. The following chapter investigates the literature relating to these issues in the Irish context.

## Chapter Four

### Literature Review: The Irish Context

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter investigates the literature that is particular to the Irish context. It employs a largely similar structure to the preceding chapter in order to continue the emphasis on the themes considered important to and that emanate from the specific research questions. This structure also supports a discussion of the findings of the research element of the work in the context of the Irish and the international literature, which is the focus of Chapter Ten.

#### 4.2 Definitions of EBD

Chapter Three discussed definitions of EBD that can be found in the international literature. In the main these were found to be very diverse, ranging from focusing on individual conditions to defining EBD in a very general way. The ramifications of these were discussed, as was the underlying rationale of defining EBD from either a medical, therapeutic or psychological perspective.

Another perspective was also mentioned, i.e. the conceptualization of EBD through a legalistic or administrative lens. In the Irish literature, coverage of the issue of the definition of EBD is confined to official documentation emanating from the DES and, more recently, the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), an agency of that government department. The focus of the DES perspective lies largely within an administrative framework, i.e. to categorise and quantify. This perspective is also characterised by a medical model of diagnosis, which logically fits with attempts to categorise and quantify. This medical model also fits historically in the Irish context (see below).



The *Report of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC)* (Dept. of Education, 1993b), defines Emotional and/or Behavioural Disorder thus:

Emotional and/or behavioural disorder can be defined as an abnormality of behaviour, emotions or relationships sufficiently marked and prolonged to cause handicap in the individual pupil, and/or serious distress or disturbance in the family, school or community.

(p. 132)

This seminal report has been instrumental in how SEN has been considered in the Irish education system and how the system has responded to the challenges raised by a policy of inclusion in subsequent years. It is significant that this definition still largely shapes the DES approach to EBD and a more contemporary definition of EBD *per se* is not present in official DES documentation. *Circular Letter 08/02* (DES, 2002) represents the current official reference to EBD emanating from the DES and this has been carried through into a further circular, *Circular Letter 02/05* (DES, 2005b).

*Circular Letter 08/02* (DES, 2002) delineates two distinct categories of students, those who present with Emotional Disturbance and/or Behavioural Problems and those who present with Severe Emotional Disturbance, describing the former as:

Such pupils **are** being treated by a psychiatrist or psychologist for such conditions as neurosis, childhood psychosis, hyperactivity, attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and conduct disorders that are significantly impairing their socialisation and/or learning in school.

(Appendix 2, p. 5)

Severe Emotional Disturbance is not defined in its own right. The wording of the definition quoted above, evidenced by the italicisation, emphasises the assumption of 'treatment' being under way, suggesting a medical or psychological intervention. The narrowing of consideration to focus exclusively on emotional disturbance (severe or otherwise) can be argued as facilitating a medical model of intervention prevailing over other models of service provision.

In 2010, the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) issued its publication *Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties: A Continuum of Support, Guidelines for Teachers*, introducing this term to the Irish context. Its usage of the term BESD is described thus:

As NEPS uses it, the term refers to difficulties which a pupil or young person is experiencing which act as a barrier to their personal, social, cognitive and emotional development. These difficulties may be communicated through internalising and/or externalising behaviours. Relationships with self, others and community may be affected and the difficulties may interfere with the pupil's own personal and educational development or that of others. The contexts within which difficulties occur must always be considered, and may include the classroom, school, family, community and cultural settings.

Behavioural, emotional and social difficulties may be usefully thought of as behaviour occurring along a continuum from developmentally appropriate (e.g. normal testing of boundaries) and milder, more transient difficulties to difficulties which are significant and/or persistent, and which may warrant clinical referral and intervention. NEPS considers that diagnosed mental illness/clinical disorders are included in the term, but only a small minority of pupils on this continuum would have a clinical diagnosis.

(p. 4)

This position is at variance with the official DES interpretation of EBD outlined in *Circular Letters 08/02* (DES, 2002) and *SP ED 02/05* (DES, 2005b) above. However, it is supported by the most recent policy advice report to be published by the NCSE (2013b), *Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Schools*. This comprises of a strategic review of the procedures in place for the DES to provide support to schools to deliver services to students presenting with SEN and represents the first major review of its kind since the SERC Report (Dept. of Education, 1993b). The NCSE recommends moving away from categorisation and a diagnosis of disability and, rather, providing resources based on needs.

This represents a significant divergence and suggests that quite different perspectives are being taken towards EBD by different sections of the DES and



other State agencies. The inclusion of a reference to 'social' difficulties, integral to the NEPS definition, contributes to a more sophisticated or broader understanding and acceptance of the nature of the range of difficulties experienced by students, which requires more sophisticated or broader considerations of how their difficulties might be addressed rather than purely a therapeutic perspective of psychological or psychiatric referral. Cooper and Jacobs (2011a) make the point that SEBD "acknowledges that the problem may reside in the environment rather than in the individual" (p. 9). The suggestion of the legitimacy of the possible significance of environmental factors, integral to the NEPS perspective but not to that of the earlier DES interpretation, has important ramifications for the education system in Ireland.

Another interesting feature of the issue of focusing on the severity of conditions is reiterated in an addendum to the descriptions in *Circular Letter 08/02* (DES, 2002) where, it is suggested, that only those students with diagnoses of assessed conditions are to be included here:

This category is not intended to include pupils whose conduct or behavioural difficulties can be dealt with in accordance with agreed procedures on discipline.

(Appendix 2, 2002)

Therefore, looking at the documentation available, the current perspective taken by the DES may be seen as being largely in the administrative mould, concerned with the identification of those presenting with characteristics of a medical nature and the allocation of resources to those in need. This approach, whose origins lie in the SERC Report (Dept. of Education, 1993b) and before, is thereby necessarily concerned with quantification and categorisation. The perspective taken by NEPS, on the other hand, could be classified as authoritative in that it locates itself within a more wide-ranging conceptual framework. This is expanded in the following section.



### 4.3 Conceptualisations of EBD

#### 4.3.1 Theoretical Perspectives on EBD

When reflecting on how EBD is conceptualised in the Irish context, it is interesting to note an absence of coverage in the literature of any attempt to theorize about this issue, apart from reference to the concept of challenging behaviour and particularly how this is viewed in the special school sector. This is discussed in Section 4.3.3. Any attempt to understand how the broader concept of EBD is understood requires, almost exclusively, an examination of the perspective taken by the DES in this regard, as has been discussed in the preceding section.

However a further relevant perspective to examine emanates from DES initiatives to address social and educational disadvantage. *Delivering Equality of Educational Opportunity* (DEIS) is in place since 2005 and has encompassed a number of initiatives, e.g. the *Home-School-Community Liaison Scheme* (HSCL) and the *School Completion Programme* (SCP), to alleviate conditions that militate against engagement with education. Its definition of educational disadvantage is drawn from the *Education Act* (1998):

....the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools.

(Section 32:9)

The DEIS initiative is presented by the DES as part of a continuum that includes provision for students with special educational needs, along with second chance education and measures to address the educational needs of adults. However, how the disparate aspects of this continuum relate to each other is difficult to ascertain and the absence of such thinking at the national level may, indeed, influence how schools subsequently conceptualize issues such as EBD, social difficulties and educational disadvantage.

### 4.3.2 Categories of EBD

Historically, in the Irish context, special schools were established to cater for a variety of categories of special educational needs. This network of schools continues to exist and is recognised as a vibrant and necessary aspect of provision in the wider educational context (NCSE, 2011). With regard to EBD, NCSE statistics (2012) indicate that there are twelve special schools for EBD, enrolling 366 students, out of a total of 119 special schools, while there are also nine special classes for EBD located in mainstream primary schools. Figures relating to mainstream settings suggest substantial provision of resources for EBD (NCSE, 2012).

Given this reality, it is interesting that, while there exists a substantial literature in the Irish context on such SEN categories as General Learning Disability (Mild and Moderate), Specific Learning Disability and Autistic Spectrum Disorder (see *Reach*, the journal of the Irish Association of Teachers in Special and *Learn*, the journal of the Irish Learning Support Association), there is little or no coverage in the Irish literature on EBD *per se*. A recent study by Banks, Shevlin and Mc Coy (2012) investigates the identification of children presenting with EBD in Irish primary schools and queries overall SEN classification systems, and in particular the EBD classification, given the disproportionate numbers identified with EBD who also present with a range of socio-economic disadvantage factors.

This study highlights the dearth of research overall in this area in the Irish context. An exception to this is a specific literature, albeit small, that has emerged in relation to Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. This body of work addresses issues that are largely similar to those found in the international literature, such as presenting characteristics (Wilkinson, 1997 and 2003; Buckley, Hillery, Guerin, Mc Evoy and Dodd, 2008), a parent's perspective (Jones, 2006), diagnosis (Buckley, Dodd, Burke, Guerin, Mc Evoy and Hillery, 2006) and self-image (Scanlon, 2008).



### 4.3.3 Perspectives on Behaviour

The issue of challenging behaviour is discussed in the literature in the Irish context. Most discussion concentrates on the special school sector rather than across sectors (Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI), 1998; National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education, 2004; O'Mahony, 2006). However Mac an Bhreithiún (2009) addresses it in the context of transition from primary to post-primary school for students presenting with Asperger's Syndrome and Lyons and O'Connor (2006) use data from students and teachers in a primary school to investigate the concept. This pattern of coverage is interesting in itself, as the term 'challenging behaviour' has become quite a common feature in the on-going debate about behavioural issues in all sectors (Dwyer, 2003; O'Mahony, 2006), yet is frequently employed with little reference to what is understood by the term. Lyons and O'Connor (2006) acknowledge this whilst O'Mahony (2006) comments on the increase in its use in mainstream schools and the subsequent "dilution" of its meaning (p. 16).

Two further small scale studies from mainstream schools (one in a primary school, the other unknown) indicate interest in and concern with the concept of challenging behaviour. The first (Taylor, O'Reilly and Lancioni, 1996) outlines the use of in-depth functional assessment in the development of a behaviour support plan. The second surveyed teachers involved in special education and learning support for their views on the level of confidence among teachers in dealing with challenging behaviour (Prunty, 2006), suggesting "effective communication within the school was the strongest predictor of teachers' confidence in dealing with challenging behaviour" (p. 25). These findings are supported by those of Taylor *et al* (1996).

Recently the NCSE has published policy advice (2012) to the Minister for Education and Skills on the education of students presenting challenging behaviour arising



from severe emotional disturbance and/or behavioural difficulties. As with previous references this advice does not elucidate on what is understood by the term 'challenging behaviour'. However it does attempt to quantify it and bases these figures on resource allocations to schools, among other indicators. This implies an acceptance of the *status quo*, i.e. an assumption that there exists a shared conceptualisation of 'challenging behaviour'. These statistics (NCSE, 2012) for 2011-2012 indicate the following:

- 20.4% (7,830) of the total number of students receiving additional teaching support for SEN in mainstream Irish schools presented with EBD/Severe EBD.
- 342 students attended special schools for EBD, with an additional 52 students attending special classes for EBD located in mainstream schools.
- These figures represent 0.93% of students in the Irish education system.

(These statistics do not include students receiving support for mild social or emotional difficulties, who receive support from general allocations to schools.)

The PSI (1998) outlines assessment procedures and models for interventions for challenging behaviour in its policy document *Responding to Behaviour that Challenges*. In its discussion of definition, the PSI addresses two inherent difficulties, evident from the international literature, in the attempt to define the concept of challenging behaviour. The first of these is the prevalence of focusing on the consequences of such behaviour for the individual and others rather than outlining the actual behaviour itself. It exemplifies this with a definition of challenging behaviour from Emerson, Barrett, Bell, Cummings, Mc Cool, Toogood and Mansell (1987, cited in PSI, 1998):

Challenging behaviours have been defined as behaviours of such intensity, frequency or duration that the physical safety of the person or others is likely to be placed in serious jeopardy or behaviours that are likely to seriously limit or delay access to and use of ordinary community facilities.

(p. 17)

The second difficulty relates to the context of the behaviour, i.e. due to available resources, skills and expertise particular behaviours described as challenging in one context may not be considered as such in another. This issue of context recurs

frequently in the debate around behaviour (Jones and Eayrs, 1993, cited in PSI, 1998; O'Mahony, 2006) and is very much at the core of the difficulty of establishing a generally agreed definition of EBD, not to mention affecting how EBD is understood and responded to.

Both of these issues are important in the Irish context. The SERC Report definition of EBD (Dept. of Education, 1993b), for example, refers to 'abnormalities' causing "handicap in the individual" (p.132); no particular behaviours are described. Also this definition can be seen to dwell more on the "serious distress or disturbance in the family, school or community" (Dept. of Education, 1993b), hence focusing significantly on the context of behaviour. Further, the *EPSEN Act* (2004) alludes to the issue of context when it states:

A child with special educational needs shall be educated in an inclusive environment with children who do not have such needs unless the nature or degree of those needs is such that to do so would be inconsistent with.....the effective provision of education for children with whom the child is to be educated.

(Section 2)

This suggests that the interpretation of how challenging the behaviour might be, how acceptable or unacceptable the behaviour might be, etc, may vary in the specific context within which it is observed and this variation may be considered appropriate.

#### **4.4 School Factors Influencing the Understanding of EBD**

##### **4.4.1 Gender Issues**

The relationship between gender and special educational needs receives little coverage in the Irish literature. This is surprising for several reasons. Ireland is similar to other European countries in the gender profile of teachers (Drudy, 2008). The *Sé Sí Gender in Irish Education* report (DES, 2007b) indicates that 83% of



primary teachers in 2005 were female but only 53% of principals in that sector were female. At second level, women outnumber men in the teaching profession by a ratio of 6:4, yet are under-represented in managerial roles in these schools, with possibly a 2:1 ratio in favour of men.

However another factor to be considered is the gender makeup of the population of schools in Ireland. While at primary level 74% of students were educated in mixed gender classes in 2003, this figure was only 38% at second level (DES, 2007b) indicating that, at second level, "Ireland has therefore the highest proportion of pupils in single-sex education in Europe" (DES, 2007b, p.31). How does this impact on the culture, values and expectations of second level schools? With regard to special educational needs males outnumber females by a ratio of almost 2:1 in enrolments to ordinary primary schools and special schools, with this figure having increased from 59% to 64% between the early 1980s and 2002/2003 (DES, 2007b). Figures are not available for second level schools.

Given this gender profile of schools' personnel and population it is interesting that there is little coverage of the interface between gender issues and SEN. It follows that there is no specific literature on the interface between gender issues and EBD in the Irish context. One exception to this is a small-scale study by Meegan and Mc Phail (2006) looking at attitudes among Physical Education teachers to teaching students with SEN. This study reports that "physical educator attitudes towards teaching students with SEN were not generally favourable" (p. 90). It also reports no significant differences in attitudes across gender and "no differences in attitude were found in gender for the EBD group" (p.85).



#### 4.4.2 School Ethos or Culture

The challenges presented to the mainstream education sector by a national policy of inclusion are substantial. Considerable resources and support structures have been put in place over the last ten to twenty years to facilitate an ever-increasing number of students with SEN attending mainstream schools. Statistics from the NCSE (2010), for example, indicate that 13,000 students in mainstream schools received Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support, of which 3,865 presented with Emotional/Behavioural Disturbance or Severe Emotional/Behavioural Disturbance, the largest allocation per category.

In recent years there has emerged a timely and important body of research which attempts to understand the progress that has been achieved at a systemic level in the mainstream education sector in Ireland in the efforts to establish a truly inclusive educational experience for students (see, for example, Shevlin, Kenny and Mc Neela, 2002; Rose and Shevlin, 2004). While this has concerned itself primarily with SEN in the broader sense or, in particular, with research conducted on the experiences of students with physical disabilities, this research does highlight salient points that are equally relevant to all categories of SEN, including EBD, and, therefore, are of interest to this research. Shevlin *et al* (2002) find little evidence of systemic planning to support inclusive practice in mainstream schools for students with disabilities.

Kinsella and Senior (2008) continue this theme when they argue for a systemic approach to developing an inclusive school. They point to factors that could militate against this aim, including the “potential to be exclusionary” (p. 653) on the part of the *EPSEN Act* (2004) in its caveat that states that the right to an inclusive environment may be affected if it infringes on the rights of peers (see also Section 4.3.3 above). They rightly identify a review of “structures, practices and policies and a change in the attitudes and the cultures in mainstream schools” (p. 654) as

essential components of establishing an inclusive school. While accepting the many great advances that have been made to accommodate students with SEN, they argue that these have happened at a surface level, without the necessary deep level changes such as those just mentioned, resulting in an 'integrationist' approach overall rather than an 'inclusionist' one. This point is of relevance to the current research, suggesting pertinent ramifications for understandings of EBD and provisions for students presenting with EBD in the absence of such 'deep level' attitudinal changes in relation to EBD in general.

The issue of disaffection is pertinent to EBD and this is taken up by Murphy (2008), who discusses cultural and organisational aspects of schools and the effects these can have on student retention. He suggests that a mismatch, for example, between the academic content and organisational structures of a school and the needs of students from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds is detrimental to students' needs and will affect their success rate in navigating through the education system. Related to this is the relationship between teachers' expectations of students with SEN and these students' subsequent academic learning outcomes (Shevlin *et al*, 2002; Scanlon and Mc Gilloway, 2006), i.e. positive attitudes on the surface of teachers' interactions with students with SEN might hide low expectations of attainment.

Shevlin and Rose (2008) comment on the overall paternalistic and hierarchical nature of schools and the education system in Ireland and how this can impinge on attempts to instigate the systemic change required for a reconceptualization of SEN in general. They point to the fact that though, overall, the Irish education system is highly centralized, schools retain control over important issues, such as admissions' policies, leading to an increase in challenges to decisions around admissions under equality legislation.



Another pertinent perspective on the issue of school ethos or culture is evidenced in the report for the National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education (NABMSE), entitled *Why are Post-12 Year Old Students with Special Education Needs who have Attended Mainstream Schools Seeking Admission to Special Schools?* (Kelly and Devitt, 2010). This survey seeks to discover the reasons for a steady increase in the number of students leaving mainstream schools to enrol in special schools. It finds academic reasons to be the most important in the decision to move from mainstream primary to special schools. However those who move from mainstream post-primary to special schools do so for other reasons also: emotional, social and behavioural reasons as well as academic. These reasons are also cited as important in the former group. These findings reiterate those of the previous studies cited, suggesting a lack of systemic change in the cultures and focus of mainstream schools at a deep level that is necessary for real and meaningful inclusion to happen.

#### **4.4.3 School Sector**

As in the international literature, there is relatively no comparative research in the Irish literature across school sectors. The work of Kelly and Devitt (2010) represents a rare example of any type of comparative work, in that case looking at reasons for student transfer from mainstream to special schools among post-twelve year olds (See Section 4.4.2). Gibbs and Gardiner (2008) (see Chapter 3, Section 3.4.3) investigate how primary and post-primary teachers in Ireland and England attribute students' misbehaviour. Regarding issues pertinent to the two sectors, they find that primary teachers distinguish more between their own influences and parental influences on students' behaviour than do their post-primary counterparts, although adults' behaviour is equally attributable as a causal factor to students' behaviour overall.



This appears to suggest that primary teachers might perceive parental influences differently or, indeed, place more value or importance on the parental role or involvement, than do their post-primary colleagues. Another interesting finding is the difference reported in relation to the part played by students' individual personalities on their behaviour. Post-primary teachers seemingly view this as far less important an issue than primary teachers, again leaving open to speculation why this might be so.

#### 4.5 Behaviour Policies in Schools

The evolution of behaviour policies is well documented from the 1980s to the present day, existing largely in government sponsored reports, DES circular letters and documents emanating from the three teachers' trades' unions, i.e. the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO), the Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI) and the Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland (ASTI).

The DES has issued the following reports,

- *Report of the Committee on Discipline in Schools (1985)*
- *Report to the Minister for Education on Discipline in Schools (1997)*
- *School Matters: The Report of the Task Force on Student Behaviour in Second Level Schools (2006).*

Also several pertinent circular letters have emanated from the DES, for example,

- *Circular Letters 9/82 (1982a) and M5/82 (1982b), Abolition of Corporal Punishment in Schools*
- *Circular 7/88 (1988a), Discipline in National\* Schools*
- *Circular Letter M34/88 (1988b), Guidelines on a Code of Discipline for Post-Primary Schools*
- *Circular Letter 20/90 (1990a), Guidelines towards a Positive Policy for School Behaviour and Discipline and a Suggested Code of Behaviour and Discipline for National\* Schools.*

- *Circular Letter M33/91 (1991) Guidelines towards a Positive Policy for School Behaviour and Discipline and a Suggested Code of Behaviour and Discipline for Post-Primary Schools.*

\*Primary schools in Ireland are often referred to as national schools.

The teachers' trades' unions are also active in this area. The INTO addresses the issue frequently over the years, publishing the results of a survey entitled *Discipline in the Primary School* (1993) and another such report, with the same title, in 2002, followed by *Managing Challenging Behaviour, Guidelines for Teachers* (2004) and *Towards Positive Behaviour in Primary Schools* (2006). The TUI publishes *An Approach to Discipline in Schools: Draft Policy Paper* in 2004, while the ASTI encourages its members to review discipline policies in its *Guidelines for Review of School Discipline Policy* in 2004 when it also issues *Responding to Serious Indiscipline in Schools*.

Evolution in thinking is evident as the decades advance. Following the abolition of corporal punishment in 1982 (Department of Education, 1982a and 1982b), the 1980s see a focus on the issue of discipline. Evident in the documents listed above is a concentration on developing clear guidelines on setting up codes of discipline to encompass all students attending a school, maintaining an acceptable level of discipline and providing clear procedures for dealing with any breaches. The main innovation at this point resides in the inclusion of the notion of consultation with interested parties, mainly parents, and the acceptance of the principle that such consultation represents good practice. The 1990s develops this further by introducing the concept of promoting positive behaviour and concentrating on the pastoral care of students on a whole school level (Department of Education, 1990a and 1991; Dwyer 2003).

The *Report to the Minister for Education on Discipline in Schools* (1997), for example, supports these aspirations in its consideration of the issue of discipline.



However it is also interesting to note its quite perfunctory treatment of the issue of students presenting with special educational needs (p. 18) which fails to acknowledge the complexity and diversity of the needs of this group nor how issues relating to behaviour policies affect and are affected by this complexity and diversity. It is also interesting to note that its recommendations regarding what it terms as “very problematic students” (p. 53) include the establishment of off-site support centres and support teams comprising of, for example, clinical and educational psychologists, counsellors, community gardaí (police officers) and psychotherapists. Educational services are not mentioned.

The following years witness a period of renewed concern regarding the level of behavioural problems evident in the mainstream school population, evidenced by reports in the national print media (see, for example, Pollack, 1998; Healy and Foley, 1998). The *Education (Welfare) Act* (2000), which establishes the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB), obliges all schools to develop a code of behaviour. Guidelines in this regard are published in 2008. The Task Force on Student Behaviour in Second Level Schools issues its report in 2006 and refers briefly to the continuing debate around EBD and its contributing factors. The Task Force, however, appears to concentrate on behaviour that is not necessarily associated with SEN.

The term ‘challenging behaviour’ is used in the mainstream system (see Section 4.3.3) as well as in the special school sector. The INTO’s report *Managing Challenging Behaviour, Guidelines for Teachers* (2004) adopts a definition from Emerson *et al* (1987), as does the PSI (1998), but also attempts to understand the contexts within which such behaviour may occur, acknowledging several attendant factors that would suggest presenting difficulties not inconsistent with EBD, e.g. language and communication difficulties, environmental factors, socio-economic factors, etc (p. 4). However this theme is not developed and the subsequent



guidelines promote a generic approach to the issue with no mention of differentiation to accommodate SEN.

During this decade the idea of the whole school approach is promoted as good practice (TUI, 2004; ASTI, 2004; DES, 2006 and 2007; NEWB, 2008). The *EPSEN Act* (2004), Section 2, legislates for the right to be educated in an inclusive environment (albeit qualified) and for the introduction of individual education plans (IEPs); this latter section of the legislation awaits commencement. However, there is evidence of support for the idea of individualised planning around behaviour issues (INTO, 2004); DES, 2006; Rose, Shevlin, Winter, O'Raw and Zhao, 2012), but this can have negative as well as positive connotations, as is discussed later in this section. This is also interesting in the context of the deferral of the commencement of IEPs.

There are several observations that can be made in relation to this historical chronology of the development of the consideration of behavioural issues. The first relates to the dearth of research or academic commentary to accompany or respond to such a body of work. Apart from the reports and guidelines published by the DES and the trades' unions and the surveys conducted by the latter, there is little evidence of scholarly research in this field spanning the same period. More recently, there appears in the literature some discussion of issues pertinent to *School Matters: The Report of the Task Force on Student Behaviour in Second Level Schools* (2006). For example, in my own commentary (Mc Keon, 2006) following the publication of the interim report, I express concern about a "one size fits all" (p. 79) approach to behaviour policy at second level, promoting the need to heighten awareness of the diversity of needs present among the student population and to reflect this in school policy.

Secondly the chronology of the publication of the documents cited suggests the issue was addressed initially in the primary sector, before the post-primary sector.

The INTO was very active in considering the issue of discipline and behaviour, surveying its membership and publishing reports highlighting deficiencies in the *status quo* but also recommending proactive innovation following best practice. The DES circulars from the period suggest consideration of the issue in the context of the primary sector first of all (*Circular Letters 7/88* (1988a) and *20/90* (1990a); *Report of the Committee on Discipline in Schools*, 1985), followed by the post-primary sector (*Circular Letters M34/88* (1988b) and *M33/91* (1991)); *Report to the Minister of Education and Science on Discipline in Schools*, 1997; *School Matters: The Report of the Task Force on Student Behaviour in Second Level Schools*, 2006). This traditional approach promotes a culture of two education systems, primary and post-primary, as being separate entities with little in common, a view that does not serve well the needs of students.

Thirdly, and more importantly, is the absence of any meaningful consideration of the issue of special educational needs and, in particular, EBD, in this body of literature. While it is not surprising that the contributions of the INTO, ASTI and TUI are concerned with the interests of their members in their consideration of discipline and behavioural issues and, hence, may be unspecific in this regard, it is surprising that the DES perspective also remains persistently quite unspecific relating to the particular needs of students presenting with SEN. *School Matters: The Report of the Task Force on Student Behaviour in Second Level Schools* (2006) appears to be the exception to this, including a reference to EBD/SEBD and a brief discussion of the international literature relating to its definition and characteristics (pp. 55-57). However, while it does acknowledge the complexity of the concept, it neither explores this aspect in depth nor recognises its importance. This theme is not prevalent in the report, nor does it figure significantly in its recommendations.

A fourth observation that can be made relates to the terminology adopted in these documents. Most employ 'behaviour and discipline' and 'discipline code' and the words 'behaviour' and 'discipline' tend to be used synonymously throughout. There



is no distinction between the two, nor is there any particular discussion of what is meant by behaviour *per se*, (See Mc Keon, 2006). Any reference to the individuality of students, or to any differences in presenting characteristics across students, is minimal. Where such exists it is often to promote the idea of individualised planning in the context of IEPs, which can be viewed positively. Alternatively it can be viewed negatively, e.g. in the recommendation of the segregation of certain students (INTO, 2004; *Report to the Minister of Education and Science on Discipline in Schools*, 1997). However the main point here is that the provision of differentiation on the basis of the particular needs of individuals is seen as something that is to be provided separately from the code of behaviour or code of discipline; it is something 'other than' the provision for the bulk of students, and this latter provision represents the substantive policy on behaviour in a school.

The most recent development in this area is the publication of *Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools* (2008) by the NEWB, as promised in the 2000 legislation. These guidelines provide the most comprehensive acknowledgement to date of the need to address the issue of special educational needs when considering the establishment of a behaviour policy. However its consideration of this important aspect is not manifested in an inclusive viewpoint of addressing the particular needs of this category of students from the outset when devising a behaviour policy. Rather the approach is similar to preceding approaches summarised in the previous paragraph. Neither, indeed, do these guidelines address the particular needs of students presenting with EBD.

The approach represented in the NEWB guidelines (NEWB, 2008) is to advise schools to support students presenting with SEN to:

....understand and observe the code. Students with learning difficulties may need to be taught how to relate cause and effect of behaviour in more tangible ways....They may not be able to predict consequences as easily as their peers and so may be vulnerable.



The only other reference to SEN is in the advice offered on the imposition of sanctions:

Sanctions may be needed to help a student with special educational needs to learn about appropriate behaviour and skills, as is the case of any student.

However, teachers should take particular care that they help the student with special needs to understand clearly the purpose of the sanction and the reason why their behaviour is unacceptable. The school and classroom practices that support good learning behaviour are valid for all students, including those with identified special educational needs.

Currently, therefore, making provision for students presenting with SEN and, indeed, EBD, in the development of behaviour policies appears to be considered either as an addendum to the policy or as a requirement to ensure understanding of the policy. Whilst it is true to say that the consideration of developing policy around behaviour in schools has attracted considerable attention over the past three decades bringing this issue to the forefront, the consideration afforded SEN and EBD, both issues whose profiles have increased substantially during this period, has not evolved in tandem with the substantive issue of policy formation.

#### **4.6 Responses to EBD**

Significant attention is afforded in the literature to the question of how schools can best respond to issues relating to emotional and behavioural difficulties. One of the underlying reasons for this lies in the fact that, at both primary level and junior cycle post-primary level, the curriculum makes compulsory provision for promoting the intrapersonal development of the student. Unfortunately this is not the case at senior cycle post-primary level. This provision manifests itself in the subject entitled Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) (NCCA, 1999a). Below is outlined the

underlying rationale for this subject in the primary and post-primary (Junior Cycle) curricula:

Primary:

SPHE aims to foster self-worth and self-confidence and places a particular emphasis on developing a sense of personal responsibility for one's own behaviour and actions. SPHE promotes self-awareness and understanding by helping children to name and manage their own feelings, to recognise and appreciate individual abilities, and to cope with change of various kinds. They can learn how to manage their own behaviour and to set and review personal goals within a safe and supportive environment. Such intrapersonal development will increase the child's sense of self-efficacy and help him/her to be more in control of his/her own life.

Post-Primary:

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) in junior cycle education supports the personal development, health and well-being of young people and helps them create and maintain supportive relationships. The aims of SPHE are to enable students to develop skills for self-fulfilment and living in communities, to promote self-esteem and self-confidence, to enable students to develop a framework for responsible decision-making, to provide opportunities for reflection and discussion and to promote physical, mental and emotional health and well-being.

(NCCA, 1999a)

The importance placed on the emotional well-being of the individual is paramount at each level. What is also interesting is the emphasis in the Primary Curriculum (Ireland, 1999a) on the development of "a sense of personal responsibility for one's own behaviour and actions" and "how to manage their own behaviour" (NCCA, 1999a). At post-primary level the emphasis appears to be focused more on the interaction between the individual and the community.

This change of focus appears natural in the context of the expected developmental growth of the individual through childhood and adolescence. However, I question the general assumption that all students, by the end of primary school, have acquired sufficiently the necessary abilities in managing behaviour, as this does not



take into account those presenting with EBD. Further, I suggest there is a need to continue to support such students in this regard into the post-primary setting (McKeon, 2006).

The coverage of responses to EBD in the Irish literature tends to differ somewhat between the primary and post-primary sectors. In the former the literature appears to address social and emotional issues. The latter appears to take more of a behavioural perspective focusing on developing school-wide structures to address discipline and behaviour. To illustrate this, Egan (2007) promotes developing emotional intelligence as a proactive approach to working with students in the primary sector, and particularly those presenting with EBD, and cites a definition of this concept from Salovey and Mayer (1990, cited in Egan, 2007):

...a type of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions.

(p. 189)

Egan describes an intervention to develop emotional literacy, i.e. the skills of being emotionally intelligent, delivered through the SPHE programme. Evidence is also present of efforts to adapt aspects of the *Stay Safe, Best Practice in Child Protection* programme to focus on students with SEN (Cullen, 2009). This programme, initially introduced in 1996, supported the introduction of child protection guidelines as part of the SPHE programme at primary level. More particularly, Cullen's work includes guidance specifically focused on students with EBD among other categories of SEN.

The Incredible Years programme (Webster-Stratton, 2001) has been implemented in a variety of situations in Ireland. In one incidence the *Basic Parenting Programme* instigated by the Clondalkin Partnership is part of a local community response to reinforce positive behaviours and address identified emotional and behavioural problems (Fleming and Gallagher, 2002). Also the *Teacher Classroom Management*



*Programme* has been implemented in various settings. Evaluations of both (Clondalkin Partnership, 2006; Mc Gilloway, S., Hyland, L., Ní Mhaille, G., Lodge, A., O'Neill, D., Kelly, P., Leckey, Y., Bywater, T., Comiskey, C. and Donnelly, M., 2010) suggest improvements in students' behaviour. The interesting point about these interventions is that they acknowledge the need for an holistic and multi-faceted approach to the issues identified as being problematic, therefore effectively adopting a biopsychosocial perspective to interventions as this also represents the understanding of the nature of emotional and behavioural difficulties.

At post-primary level specifically the focus on addressing behavioural issues can be traced in the literature to references such as Foy (1978) and Blanche and Hyland (1983), both of whom espouse classroom management strategies for teachers in a wider context of school-based discipline codes. This approach continues to the present day. Interestingly, Foy (1978) identifies several behavioural characteristics common in current literature, e.g. attention-seeking, opting out and destructive behaviour, and makes the following observation, presaging somewhat a contemporary biopsychosocial viewpoint:

It is a mistake to look on indiscipline/aggression/disruption in the classroom as if these were global homogeneous entities. They are complex phenomena involving the problems, needs, tensions and values of the aggressor interacting with the dynamics of the class group.

(p. 8)

Indeed, Blanche and Hyland (1983) go further to promote a pastoral care system, emphasising "emotional, social, physical and intellectual areas" (p. 4) and a team approach on a school-based level. This suggestion has subsequently become the norm in the post-primary sector and facilitates the provision of SPHE on the timetable. Scanlon and Mc Gilloway (2006) report on the importance of this programme in facilitating empathy with and understanding of students presenting with SEN among their peers.

Coverage in subsequent years includes a variety of initiatives promoting the idea of positive behaviour or positive discipline (O'Hara, Byrne and Mc Namara, 2000; Dwyer, 2003) focusing primarily, for example, on rethinking how the school approaches the issue of the management of behaviour in the context of contemporary ideas about teaching and learning and the increasing diversity of the student population, as is highlighted in the *Report to the Minister for Education and Science on Discipline in Schools* (1997). These do not specifically address the issue of EBD.

More recently, a recommendation of *School Matters: The Report of the Task Force on Student Behaviour in Second Level Schools* (2006) led to the establishment of the National Behaviour Support Service, whose brief is to “provide support and expertise to partner secondary schools on issues related to disruptive behaviour” (NBSS, 2009, p. 5). For its underlying philosophy, this support service draws on international initiatives such as the *Behaviour in Schools: Framework for Intervention* (BCC, 1998) and the *School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support* (Walker et al, 1996) programmes (See Chapter 3, Sections 3.5. and 3.6). The NBSS initiative, therefore, promotes a whole school approach:

...in most schools 80-90% of students will be sufficiently supported with whole initiatives related to positive behaviour. This implies an on-going programme, within schools, of addressing the social, emotional, academic and behavioural needs of all students.

(NBSS, 2009, p. 4)

However it also acknowledges the existence of the 10% of students who will require more targeted or individualised interventions, following the three-tiered continuum of behaviour support model outlined by Sugai (2007), thereby providing support for individualised behaviour planning and behaviour support classrooms (NBSS, 2009), the latter being similar in nature to learning support units (LSUs) in the UK. In its *Research Study of Thirty-Six Behaviour Support Classrooms* (2010) over an initial two year period, the NBSS states:



Behaviour Support Classroom teachers – by building and developing communication channels, modelling positive methodologies, actively teaching academic literacy skills and explicitly teaching social and emotional skills – have been successful to varying degrees in bringing about how ‘change’ is defined within school communities with respect to behaviour.

(p. xii)

Inherent in this cautious acknowledgement of limited success over a short period is the reference to the teaching of literacy skills. This is an important aspect of the work of behaviour support classrooms (Wickham, 2010), and is evidenced by the large amount of resources produced by the NBSS for the promotion of literacy teaching (NBSS, 2013). It acknowledges the established link recognised in the international literature between academic difficulties and behavioural problems (NBSS, 2009; Cooper and Jacobs, 2011a).

Another type of provision in the Irish context is the Youthreach initiative. This is completely separate from the school system and does not represent an example of a behavioural intervention. It was established in 1988 and targets young people who leave school without qualifications. It is available to those beyond the age limit of compulsory education. Copper and Jacobs (2011a) report:

It is widely acknowledged that many students pursue their continued schooling in Youthreach because of an ongoing history of difficulty, mostly behavioural, in mainstream schools.

(p. 19)

Mc Grath (2006) suggests the Youthreach initiative enables disaffected and excluded young people to reengage with formal education. This is facilitated by concentrating on the rebuilding of relationships based on trust and security, thus focusing on social and emotional needs of learners.

## 4.7 Summary

This chapter examined the Irish literature on emotional and behavioural difficulties in the context of the issues raised in the specific research questions. There is little coverage of EBD *per se*; rather the focus is on the general topic of behaviour in the context of school-based policy, although at primary level there appears to be more of an acknowledgement of emotional well-being. The chapter also looked at how schools have responded to issues of behaviour. The focus of the coverage of these issues differs somewhat in each sector. At primary level the discussion appears to be more student-centred concentrating on how the individual copes on an intrapersonal level. At post-primary level there appears to be more of an emphasis on the development of interpersonal skills and how this contributes to school-wide systems of behaviour management. Recently attention is focusing on the post-primary level with an emphasis on redressing the detrimental effect on behaviour of poor levels of academic skills. The following chapter introduces the research phase by discussing the theoretical and conceptual frameworks within which the research is framed, the three main research methodologies employed in the research and their positioning with those frameworks.



## **Chapter Five**

### **Theoretical Overview and Research Methodologies**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter addresses three issues. Firstly it outlines the theoretical framework within which the research is conducted, providing a rationale for the perspective taken and an outline of the conceptual framework of the research. Secondly it considers the issues of validity and reliability of the methodologies in the context of this particular research project. Whilst ethical issues are referred to here, further discussion of these issues is located in Chapter Six. Finally it provides a rationale for the choice of research methodologies employed in the collection of the data, i.e. the questionnaire, the semi-structured interview and document analysis.

#### **5.2 Theoretical Framework of the Research**

##### **5.2.1 Overview**

When undertaking a research project the researcher is obliged to consider several issues that will affect not only the final outcome of the project but, more importantly, the process of researching the phenomena in question. It is important to take into account the nature of the phenomena to be researched and the intrinsic and extrinsic influences that affect those phenomena, such as context, interpretation, social and cultural factors, etc. The researcher is obliged also to identify and acknowledge the key ethical considerations that permeate the research project and to construct the framework of the research within the parameters of these considerations. Then the researcher proceeds to weave these broad sets of considerations into the overall approach taken. From this process emerges the theoretical framework that reflects the philosophical stance adopted by the researcher when engaging with the process of gathering data pertinent to the research questions and their subsequent analysis.

In this section an integrated approach is employed to address the following issues. The overall approach to the research is located in a theoretical framework of social constructivism. Intrinsic to this framework is the underlying qualitative nature of the research and this is discussed in detail. I also investigate the relationships between this theoretical perspective and the concepts under investigation in this research. I link these relationships with the methodologies chosen, the practicalities of conducting research and the important ethical issues whose consideration and inclusion are incumbent on me as a researcher.

### **5.2.2 The Theoretical Framework Central to the Research**

Choosing a theoretical framework within which to conduct research belies the reality of the situation; rather it is a complex web of factors that combine and lead to a realisation of the theoretical framework within which the research takes shape. The researcher is obliged to consider several factors of varying degrees of importance and centrality to the research project, but all nonetheless essential. Mertens (1998) refers to this process as operationalizing, the process of identifying “the strategies that will make it possible to test the concepts and theories posed through the research questions” (p.286). These factors effectively combine to shape the overall theoretical perspective from which the researcher is working. They include the concepts under investigation along with the aims and specific research questions centred on those concepts. Consideration of the nature of the concepts involved and the types of questions of interest to the researcher affect greatly the theoretical perspective taken. However this is not the full picture. The researcher’s perspective is also influenced by other fundamental questions and, broadly speaking, these can be considered under the headings of epistemology, ontology and methodology (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Mertens, 1998; Opie, 2004; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011).



One of the central questions in the literature on research theoretical paradigms is the epistemological issue of the relationship between what is known, i.e. knowledge, and the 'knower' (Opie, 2004; Sikes, 2004; Cohen *et al*, 2011). This underlying relationship is fundamental to the overall philosophical position taken in the quest for new knowledge. It contributes to shaping the thrust of the enquiry because it shapes how the individual perceives knowledge, essentially as either an objective external reality, separate from or existing parallel to the individual, or alternatively linked somehow to or part of the individual, in that knowledge can only exist through the individual's interpretation of it or the individual's influence on its components, or as one of its components.

These different perspectives lead essentially to the adoption of either a positivist or a constructivist view of how knowledge can be discovered or investigated. Guba (1990) describes the positivist belief system as one that is:

...rooted in a *realist* ontology, that is, the belief that there exists a reality *out there*, driven by immutable natural laws. The business of science is to discover the "true" nature of reality and how it "truly" works. The ultimate aim of science is to *predict and control* natural phenomena.

(p. 19)

From the positivist perspective, objectivity is crucial, maintaining that the application of purely empirical methodologies represent the most likely way of identifying objectively the true nature of phenomena. Here, a hypothesis can be put forward and tested rigorously to see whether or not it stands up. This can be viewed as a very scientifically-based research methodology, presuming that the research methods employed to investigate the natural world can also be applied to the world of social behaviour. This approach presupposes that all investigations can or should commence with the formulation of a hypothesis. True knowledge may only be discovered through a framework of testing a statement to see whether or not, or to what extent, it is true. However I would argue that it also limits me as researcher to think largely in these terms.

This ontological position is somewhat tempered by the post-positivist standpoint, which acknowledges that absolute 'true' knowledge cannot be attained. Hence a critical realist viewpoint can be adopted, accepting that research can only take objectivity so far by being as neutral as possible (Guba, 1990). Cohen *et al* (2011) query how a positivist paradigm can investigate "the immense complexity of human behaviour and the elusive and intangible quality of social phenomena" (p. 7). Positivist and post-positivist paradigms represent approaches that do not fit well with the rationale of this research (see Chapter One, Section 1.2), given its focus on a complex set of interrelationships between practitioners and also between them and an education system that is attempting to respond to new demands being made on it. Hence I do not consider the broad positivist paradigm as being considered suitable for this research.

The theoretical paradigm within which I choose to frame this research is that of social constructivism and this influences greatly, and is influenced by, my epistemological perspective. Social constructivism can be located in the broader paradigm of phenomenology, which Denscombe (2007) states:

...concentrates its efforts on the kind of human experiences that are pure, basic and raw in the sense that they have not (yet) been subjected to processes of analysis and theorizing. In contrast to other approaches to research that rely on processes of categorizing things, abstracting them, quantifying them and theorizing about them phenomenology prefers to concentrate its efforts on getting a clear picture of the 'things in themselves' – the things as directly experienced by people.

(p. 77)

The social constructivist paradigm acknowledges the diversity of the world of human experience and attests that this diversity in turn contributes to a panorama of different interpretations of the world. So there exist multiple interpretations of the world which, of their nature, are subjective. This follows because the world is interpreted by humans, who "are conscious, purposive actors who have ideas about



their world and attach meaning to what is going on around them” (Robson, 2002, p. 24). This interpretation occurs primarily on an individual basis and, in turn, on a societal level also. This individualistic characteristic therefore implies that the knowledge or the reality emanating from the interpretation is value-laden and cannot be objective. Similarly the researcher is interpreting what is being observed or researched (Crotty, 1998; Cresswell, 2009). I argue that this ontological perspective, that knowledge is a social reality based on individual, value-laden interpretations, provides me with a sound basis for the theoretical framework adopted in this research.

The acceptance of subjectivity is an important contrasting characteristic between constructivism and positivism (Guba, 1990; Denscombe, 2007). Constructivism allows for a subjective standpoint to be a valid one, no more or less ‘true’ than any other subjective standpoint. The task facing the researcher in the constructivist paradigm is to investigate the multiplicity of these subjective views of the world and seek to make sense of them in order to address the research question. Indeed the notion of pre-determined research questions is challenged somewhat by the constructivist viewpoint and it allows for the reframing of the research questions during the research process as a valid component that contributes to the dynamic nature of the investigation (Robson, 2002).

The data integral to this research are gathered exclusively in mainstream primary and post-primary schools. This is important as it contributes to locating the research firmly in the social constructivist paradigm. Schools are integral to the society in which they exist, in this case Irish society. They are social institutions and can be seen as extensions of society. The research, therefore, is investigating the construction of understandings of EBD in Irish mainstream schools and how these understandings contribute to the behaviour policies and support systems that are constructed in Irish schools as responses to EBD.

The data are collected from respondents who are working in Irish schools, i.e. the professionals who are primarily charged with developing these behaviour policies and responses to EBD and delivering them on the ground. The specific research questions (see Chapter One, Section 1.3) seek to investigate whether or not there exist fundamental and marked differences in these behaviour policies and responses and, if so, whether or not these are the consequences of differences in understandings of EBD and, if so, what might be some of the causal factors in these differences. Therefore the nature of my investigation both presupposes and accepts that the knowledge I seek is a product of the interactions between the individuals in society, operating in social institutions (i.e. schools) and interpreting the social realities that emanate from those interrelationships (Gergen & Gergen, 2003).

### **5.3 The Conceptual Framework of the Research**

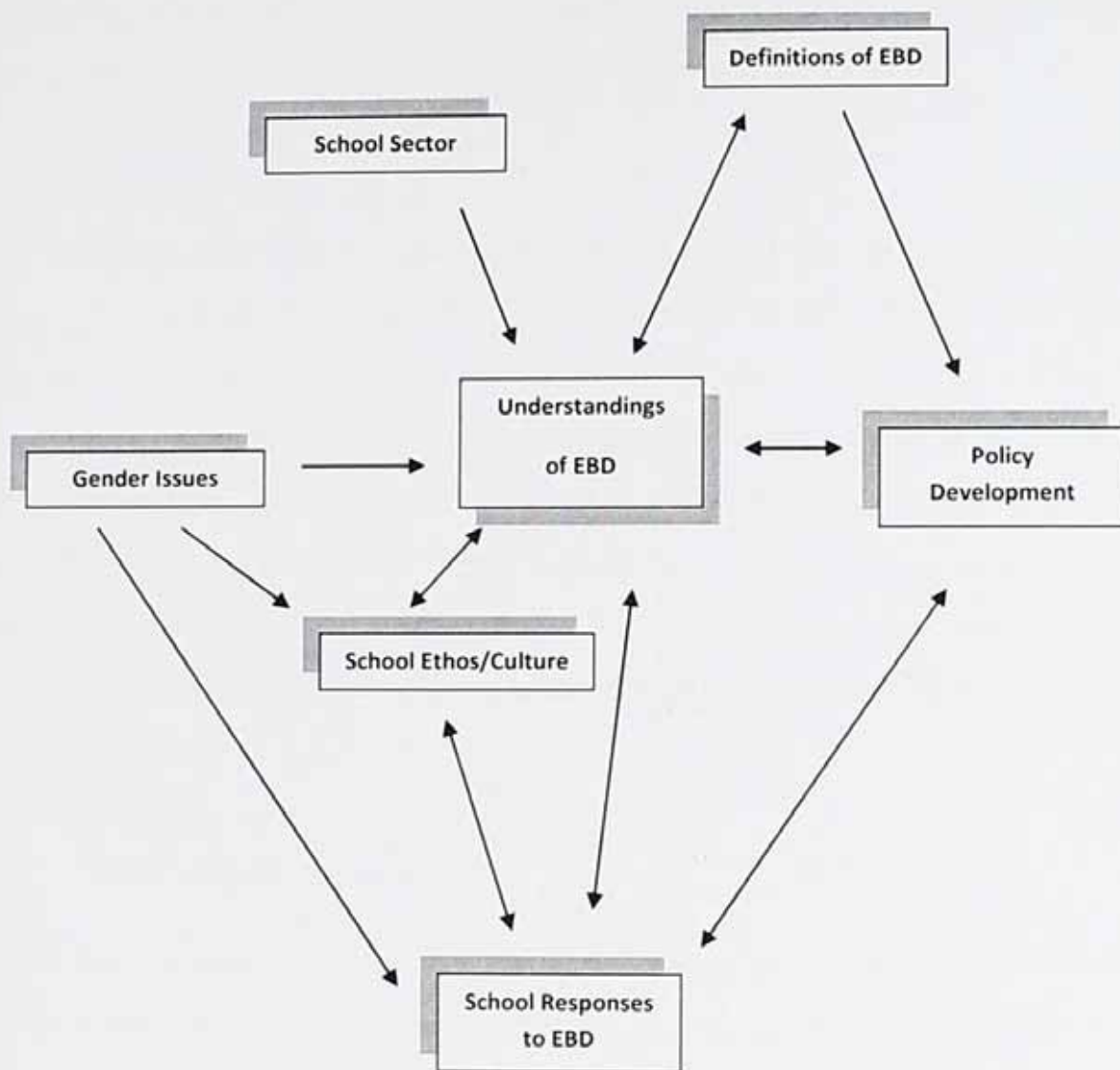
A social constructivist framework permits me to investigate in a dynamic way the multiple interpretations of reality that are perceived to exist in the research site. Inherent in the social constructivist perspective is the realisation that, as a researcher, I am integral to the development of the multiple realities whose existence is acknowledged within this framework. Effectively I am attempting to understand the world and, in order to do this, I become actively engaged in interpreting these multiple realities alongside the players being observed and investigated.

The adoption of this particular framework also brings with it the responsibility to acknowledge the unique characteristics of these multiple realities. In order to do this it is necessary to develop a fundamental understanding or appreciation of the nature of the concepts involved, how they relate to each other and how they might be articulated. Chapters Three and Four discuss the fundamental concepts integral to my research and investigate how they are discussed in the international and Irish literature. Those concepts are:



- Definitions of EBD
- Conceptualisations of EBD
- Factors that influence the understanding of EBD in schools
  - Gender issues
  - School ethos or culture
  - School sector
- Behaviour policies
- Responses to EBD in schools.

This section draws together these concepts to investigate the relationships between them and highlights the level of influence they bring to bear on each other. This demonstrates the level of sophistication of the interrelationships involved when attempting to consider the concepts that contribute to the understandings of EBD that are present in mainstream schools. Figure 5.1 demonstrates my understanding of the interrelationships between the main concepts under investigation in this research.



**Figure 5.1 Conceptual Framework of the Research**

Here I argue that the nature of the concepts involved is such that an interpretative approach is the most effective means through which to investigate them. The social constructivist paradigm holds that reality is essentially interpreted by individual players; no one truth exists and my objective as researcher is to identify and analyse these multiple realities in order to understand a phenomenon (events, circumstances, feelings, etc). Figure 5.1 demonstrates complex interrelationships between the concepts involved. These complex interrelationships contribute to the rationale for an interpretative approach to the research. Not only do various concepts influence the understandings of EBD but several also influence other



concepts and *vice versa*. For example, school ethos or culture is influenced by and influences responses to EBD and understandings of EBD and is in turn influenced by them, along with being influenced by gender issues.

The individual respondents present with different interpretations of the reality that exists for each of them, in their own unique context, influenced by their experiences of the concepts and the interrelationships in Figure 5.1. In order to access these unique realities I must investigate the opinions and understandings held by a range of respondents to issues relevant to the specific research questions (see Chapter One, Section 1.3). The ultimate aim is to attempt to establish how these issues are currently thought about, how widespread these ideas are, how much relevance is attributed to them, what different perspectives exist, etc.

#### **5.4 Issues of Validity and Reliability**

Integral to the research process are questions relating to the validity and reliability of the inquiry, its methodologies and its findings. Are the methods of inquiry valid or fit for purpose? To what extent are the findings a 'true' reflection of reality? How reliable are the findings or to what extent would they be repeated by similar research? Indeed can the findings be generalized to the population at large or to what extent is this possible? All of these questions warrant consideration as part of the research process for a variety of reasons. This section considers these issues and outlines my position in relation to the questions of validity and reliability in relation to this research.

##### **5.4.1 Validity**

This research is conducted using qualitative methodologies. As such I am interested in considering the issue of validity in that context. My concern is to consider how my research can be presented as being inherently credible within the parameters

and limitations placed upon it. In particular internal validity refers to the robustness of the research process itself. It is dependent on the safeguards built into the process to ensure as far as possible that all means have been taken to gather data that are relevant to the specific research questions. It depends on the extent to which research techniques are employed that are suitable for the purpose intended.

Much has been written on the concept of validity and this largely considers the issue through a lens of differentiating between quantitative and qualitative methods of inquiry (Maxwell, 1996; Silverman, 2010; Cohen *et al*, 2011; Robson, 2011). Cohen *et al* (2011), for example, identify several types of validity and then proceed to consider the issue in terms of how these may apply to quantitative and qualitative methods of inquiry. Locating my research within a social constructivist framework, I take an interpretative position in relation to the research process (Section 5.3) and accept that I must locate myself, as researcher, as an actor within the social realities that I am investigating as I am effectively interpreting those realities also. Taking such a stance, it is incumbent on me to acknowledge the limitations that this position places on the research process that I undertake, to strive to reduce as far as possible those limitations and to declare possible shortcomings in this regard.

Mays and Pope (1995) outline some of the main criticisms that are levelled at qualitative research, e.g. lacking scientific rigour, being susceptible to subjectivity, lack of generalizability, etc and these limitations are echoed elsewhere in the literature (see, for example, Robson, 2011). Several strategies are suggested to counter these legitimate criticisms and these largely focus on sampling techniques, data collection, triangulation and minimising research bias (Mays and Pope, 1995). Other approaches include a focus on establishing the credibility of the research (Shipman, 1997, cited in Robson, 2011). I view this as a proactive approach as it promotes the attempt to build safeguards into the design of the research project.



from its initial stages right through to its culmination. My efforts to maximise the credibility of my research rely mainly on a process of triangulation of methods, the rigour with which the research is conducted and decisions around the choice of the sample. The former are discussed now, while the choice of the sample is addressed in Chapter Six.

Triangulation is defined by Cohen *et al* (2011) as “the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour” (p. 195) and by Mays and Pope (1995) as “an approach to data collection in which evidence is deliberately sought from a wide range of different, independent sources and often by different means” (p. 110). In this research evidence is collected through the review of international and Irish literature, the questionnaire, the semi-structured interview and the analysis of documents.

Denscombe (2007) suggests that two benefits can be obtained from this form of methodological triangulation:

Findings can be corroborated or questioned by comparing the data produced by different methods.

Findings can be complemented by adding something new and different from one method to what is known about the topic using another method.

(p. 135)

I am conscious of the fact that the semi-structured interview involves a sample that had already participated in the questionnaire; however my purpose in the second stage of data collection is to investigate further and in greater depth the issues emanating from the data that had already been collected. Hence the interview schedule was influenced greatly by the results of the analysis of the questionnaire. Anfara, Brown and Mangione (2002) make this point well and I follow their example in devising a matrix to ensure the interview questions were linked to the specific research questions and the themes identified in the analysis of the questionnaire (see Chapter Six, Section 6.6.1.2, Figure 6.6).

In order to enhance the rigour of my research, I engaged in a process of member checking (Cresswell, 2009; Robson, 2011) in which copies of the initial questionnaires completed were sent to all those who had agreed to be interviewed, and they were offered the opportunity to refer to their questionnaire responses during the interview. Indeed, during the interview, they were asked to reflect specifically on one open-ended question from the questionnaire regarding their definition of EBD and to expand on this if they so wished. Following the interview, a transcript was sent to each interviewee requesting corrections, clarifications, amendments or any further information they wished to add (see Chapter Six, Section 6.6.4).

Also, in order to widen the sources from which data are collected, I engage in the analysis of documents gathered from schools where two of my interview respondents work. The purpose here is to analyse at first hand some of the documentation that was referred to in the questionnaire and semi-structured interview by respondents, but also to enable me as researcher to mine this source of data directly and independently from them. This injects a new perspective into the inquiry through my direct engagement with and interpretation of the printed policy documents from two schools. This methodology also contributes to the provision of thick descriptions, considered by many as integral to qualitative research (see, for example, Denscombe (2007), Cresswell (2009) and Cohen *et al* (2011)). Mertens (2010) describes thick descriptions as “extensive and careful description of the time, place, context and culture” (p.259). I believe that the investigation of policy documents from the schools enhances my engagement with the context and culture of the schools in question, providing me with particular and unique insights into the issues integral to the specific research questions.

Regarding the selection of the sample, purposive non-probability sampling techniques are employed in order to target respondents working directly in the field with the students in which my research is interested and who could reasonably



be expected to have something to say about the issues I am investigating. Chapter Six, Section 6.2 describes the sample in detail and the parameters for its choice. A substantial level of information regarding the purpose of the research was provided in the initial contact with the sample (see Chapter Six, Section 6.2.5) in order to clarify for the respondents my rationale for their choice. The construction of the questionnaire was such as to ensure clarity as far as possible but also to ensure it was fit for purpose and was collecting relevant data (Chapter Six, Section 6.3.1). Finally the high rate of responses received (51.65%) contributes to the overall credibility of the questionnaire employed in my research.

Two other issues relating to validity warrant discussion: bias and generalizability. In any research project the issue of bias is ever-present (Robson, 2011). Maxwell (1996) distinguishes between threats of bias emanating from both the sample chosen and the researcher. Respondents, by the very fact that they are chosen to participate and agree to do so, are set apart from the population at large and also from their peers. This may affect their responses; for example, do they agree to participate because they feel they have something unique to contribute, or do they feel they must endeavour to make a unique contribution simply because they have been asked to participate? Maxwell (1996) discusses the issue of “key informant bias” (p. 73) pointing out that the views expressed by any sample of respondents may not be typical. While non-probability sampling does not claim to be representative, it is also important to acknowledge the possibility of lack of ‘typicality’. I acknowledge this possibility and attempt to address it by the use of document analysis as a further means of data collection which is removed somewhat from the sample.

Another source of potential bias lies in the researcher her/himself. The researcher brings to the research a life experience and, usually, a particular interest in the topic under investigation. I acknowledge that this is the case for me as researcher in Chapter One, Section, 1.1. In qualitative research it is not possible to dissociate

these issues from the research process; however this is not necessarily negative. Henwood and Pidgeon, in Hammersley (1993) refer to the reflexive nature of research; “the researcher and researched are characterised as interdependent in the social process of research” (p. 24). The nature of qualitative research is such that my perspectives, opinions and attitudes, as researcher, possess validity in a similar way to those of the chosen sample. The crucial point is for me to reflect on my engagement with the research process (Cresswell, 2009) in order to be best placed to acknowledge and declare my possible biases. Indeed, acknowledging my personal involvement in the research process, through being involved in the social realities under investigation, is one argument I make to justify my choice of a social constructivist and interpretative framework for my research (see Section 5.2.2).

The issue of generalizability also requires consideration. Due to the use of non-probability sampling in this research, theoretically it is not possible to generalize its findings to the population at large. I acknowledge this fact in my rationale for the use of non-probability sampling (see Chapter Six, Section 6.2.1). The interface between generalizability and qualitative research has in the past been considered unachievable or lacking in relevance. However Ward-Schofield, in Hammersley (1993) provides a good account of the history of the development of generalizability on a conceptual level in the context of qualitative research.

Put succinctly, Ward-Schofield argues that it is possible to talk about the findings of qualitative research studies informing or being compared to further similar research; however this is dependent on meticulous attention to detail in the methods chosen, thick descriptions of data and findings, etc. Maxwell (1996), for example, refers to internal generalizability within the setting under investigation or within the sample studied, thus contributing to strengthening the internal validity of the research. This is consistent with my provision of thick descriptions (Denscombe, 2007; Cresswell, 2009; Cohen *et al*, 2011) in my analysis of the data emanating from the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview. My approach



is also consistent with a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) when, for example, I strive to identify and describe in detail the different themes exemplified across the interviewees in the semi-structured interviews (see Chapter Eight).

Another pertinent aspect of the concept of generalizability in the context of qualitative research relates to the theoretical framework underlying that research. I adopt a social constructivist approach to this research (Section 5.2.2). In putting forward that position I align myself with an interpretative stance that is based on an ontological perspective that sees knowledge as a social reality based on individual, value-laden interpretations, and is characterised by acknowledging these multiple interpretations of human activity which are subjective. Therefore aligning myself with this theoretical perspective could be perceived as being largely inconsistent with generalizing the findings of my research to other or wider settings in order to test their external validity. This perception is a valid one and I acknowledge that it compromises somewhat this aspect of external validity. However I argue that my research questions acknowledge this limitation in the fact that they do not claim this level of generalizability. Rather I state that my research questions are to investigate attitudes held by informed practitioners in the field, the factors that may help shape those attitudes and the relationships between those attitudes and subsequent structures and interventions in mainstream schools.

#### **5.4.2 Reliability**

Cohen *et al* (2011) summarize three types of reliability in quantitative research settings: stability (e.g. over time), equivalence (e.g. using equivalent forms of data gathering instruments or ensuring agreement among the team of researchers) and internal (e.g. using a correlation coefficient to correlate the results of each half of a test instrument). Such measures of reliability are not compatible with qualitative research and there is considerable discussion in the literature regarding whether

and/or how the reliability of such research can be verified (Mays and Pope, 1995; Mertens, 1998; Denscombe, 2007). Denscombe (2007), for example, provides a salient illustration of this incompatibility when he comments:

With qualitative research the researcher's 'self' tends to be very closely bound up with the research instrument – sometimes an integral part of it. As a participant observer or interviewer, for example, the researcher becomes almost an integral part of the data collecting technique.

(p. 298)

Rather than attempting to make quantitative measures 'fit' with a qualitative paradigm the literature suggests a reconceptualization of reliability within the framework of qualitative research. Within this reconceptualization Lincoln & Guba, (1985) refer to reliability as dependability. Mertens (2010) contributes to this debate in stating:

In the constructivist paradigm, change is expected, but it should be tracked and publicly inspectable. A dependability audit can be conducted to attest to the quality and appropriateness of the inquiry process.

(p. 259)

From my own perspective in this research, I am drawn to a point made by Ward-Schofield (1993) when she comments:

Yet at the heart of the qualitative approach is the assumption that a piece of qualitative research is very much influenced by the researcher's individual attributes and perspectives. The goal is *not* to produce a standardized set of results that any other careful researcher in the same situation or studying the same issues would have produced. Rather it is to produce a coherent and illuminating description of and perspective on a situation that is based on and consistent with detailed study of that situation.

(p. 202)

Thus the onus is on the researcher to provide a coherent, illuminating perspective that is based on a detailed study of the situation, so as to enable future researchers



to follow logically and comprehensively the path taken by the original researcher through the research process. The use of audit trails (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Denscombe, 2007) is recommended for this purpose and this guides me through my research process as the *modus operandi* that I employ throughout this research. This can be seen throughout my research in the level of detail I strive to provide regarding the methodological processes I follow, the decisions I make at various stages of the process, my detailed descriptions of the evidence gathered and its analysis culminating in a detailed discussion of the findings of my research.

While I acknowledge the limitations of qualitative research methods with regard to issues of reliability and, indeed, of validity, I choose to accept this challenge in my research. As my response to these challenges I offer my acute awareness of these limitations and my outline in this section of the steps I take in this research to enhance the validity and reliability of my methodologies and findings.

## **5.5 Research Methodologies**

The availability of data, access to those data, reliance on the co-operation of potential respondents and time factors must all be considered from a pragmatic perspective of what is feasible and practical to attempt to achieve. It is also necessary to choose methodologies that work well within the restrictions that any research project can present. Furthermore the researcher is constrained by any extenuating circumstances that arise during the course of data collection.

These factors contribute to establishing the appropriateness of the research methodologies chosen and combine with other factors to help choose methodologies that promote investigation of the particular phenomena that are of interest to me and that are compatible with the theoretical framework within which the research is conducted. The methodologies chosen for this research

facilitate a process of inductive analysis (Thomas, 2006; Cohen *et al*, 2011; Silverman, 2011). Themes emerge from engaging with the data at the different stages of analysis and these, in turn, inform the structure and focus of subsequent investigation. The following sections describe the research methodologies employed in this research.

### 5.5.1 The Questionnaire

The nature of the data sought influences the methods employed to collect them. In the initial stage of data collection for this research (See Chapter Six, Section 6.3) the data sought were largely of a factual nature. These types of data are easily and efficiently collected through questionnaires (Robson, 2011) and this methodology was therefore chosen as practical, efficient and fit for purpose. Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2000) state that:

surveys gather data at a particular point in time with the intention of describing the nature of existing conditions, or identifying standards against which existing conditions can be compared, or determining the relationship between specific events.

(p. 169)

These characteristics are compatible with the social constructivist theoretical paradigm adopted. The intention is to begin to gather data pertinent to the specific research questions in order to establish a basis for investigating the multiple realities that exist among the respondents around the concepts under investigation.

The questionnaire allows for the collection of large amounts of data; it is easily administered by post over a large geographical area and it allows for efficient collation of responses (Robson, 2011), all factors that are relevant to this research. The questionnaire as a research tool also facilitates the analysis of the data as they are easily transferable onto a spreadsheet, allowing for efficient manipulation



during this process. Chapter Six, Section 6.3 provides a full discussion of the construction of the questionnaire and the structure of the analysis.

An ethnographic or descriptive approach is appropriate at this initial stage as the focus is to describe what is happening on the ground in a sample of schools. Ethnography is not central to this research but such a perspective does contribute to the theoretical framework underpinning the methodologies adopted in it. For a full account of ethnography as a research methodology, see Hammersley & Atkinson (2007). An ethnographic approach is not unique to this aspect of the research and is replicated in the document analysis (see Section 5.5.3). Picciano (2004) comments on the usefulness of this type of research in educational settings, due to its being based on human interactions and social settings in schools. Scott and Morrison (2005) also focus on its usefulness and adaptability. The questionnaire employed in this research proves an effective and useful tool for gathering large amounts of data about the respondents' biographies and also about their opinions on issues pertinent to the research.

### **5.5.2 The Semi-Structured Interview**

In the first stage of data collection the literature is referred to as suggesting that qualitative research is interested in the perspectives of the respondents, its focus being on the setting and the nature of the research topic (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2006; Scott & Morrison, 2005). Ethnographic or descriptive approaches are considered appropriate for the first stage of data collection due to their usefulness, adaptability and their focus on human interactions and social settings (Scott & Morrison, 2005; Picciano, 2004).

Similarly the second stage of data collection has as its focus the desire to investigate in more depth the specific research questions explored in the

questionnaire. This second stage of data collection, too, is interested in examining the perspectives of the respondents in the context of the specific research questions allied with the themes identified in the analysis of the questionnaire data, thus allowing for an elaboration of and a deeper level of consideration of their perspectives.

Therefore the rationale underlying this stage of the research is to engage the respondents in a process of thinking about

- how they think about the issues being addressed
- how they perceive their colleagues in the wider school situation think about these issues
- how they feel the school as a whole is addressing EBD
- whether or not they feel different factors, e.g. gender, ethos or culture, environment, etc, might affect these three areas.

In order to engage in this thinking process and, indeed, to record their responses, I felt that a face to face interaction would be the most appropriate scenario and the many reasons for this are argued next. The use of face to face interviewing has a long history in the field of social research and lends itself particularly well to educational research (Tierney & Dilley, 2001, cited in Gubrium and Holstein, 2001; Nunkoosing, 2005).

No methodology is perfect and interviewing, like all others, comes with its own inherent problems. Nunkoosing (2005) suggests many of these problems lie in issues such as power and resistance in the interview setting, the differences between interviewees telling their 'story', which is authentic and particular to them, and the 'truth' in so far as it can ever be known. The subjective nature of the interaction in the interview situation is also an issue he highlights. As with all research techniques, the researcher's skill and awareness of the shortcomings of the methodology employed represent the main safeguards against such difficulties



(Nunokoosing, 2005; Wilson 1997). This issue of subjectivity is also explored in Section 5.2.2 in the context of the theoretical framework of the research.

Tierney & Dilley (2001) comment on the usefulness of the interview in exploring why particular policies are employed in schools and, indeed, how they function; both issues of interest to this research. They also outline its usefulness in educational settings to explore the social context of learning and to present case studies; again all of these uses are of interest and of relevance to me in this research. Further, they highlight the importance of interviewing practitioners in the field, i.e. principals and teachers in schools, in order to explore their "interpretations of reality" (Tierney & Dilley, 2001, p. 459). It is the reality of these practitioners' formulation and implementation of policy that is being explored in this research.

Interviewing as a research tool can be conducted in many formats. The question of whether to organize them on an individual basis or through the use of a group interview scenario was a relevant one and necessary for me to explore. There is considerable discussion in the literature regarding the relative merits of individual or group interviews. Whilst any interview situation will allow for the exploration of the interviewees' perceptions, attitudes and ideas (Wilson, 1997), formats differ greatly in how and in what context this exploration occurs, and what use is made of the expression of such perceptions.

Lewis (1992) suggests that group interviews are useful when exploring the behaviour of groups and the consensus that may be found in groups. Also they are useful when verifying data (Lewis, 1992). Denscombe (1995) states they help identify shared opinions among group members and show how participants relate to each other. Wilson (1997) explores the discussion in the literature regarding the differences between group interviews and focus groups and suggests a crucial

difference lies in the focus group's ability to "encourage and utilize group interactions", (p. 211), while group interviews "do not explicitly include participant interaction as an integral part of the research process" (Wilson, 1997).

For the current study, I employ one to one interviews and the reasons for my decision are outlined now. Firstly, the following practical reasons can be stated:

- Agreement to interview is more likely to be forthcoming when complete anonymity and confidentiality is promised
- In a small education system such as exists in Ireland, the likelihood of potential interviewees in a group interview encountering others known to them is higher and, therefore, likely to discourage participation
- The size of the cohort of potential interviewees is too small to risk non-participation for either of these reasons
- The nature of the interview topic can be viewed as a sensitive one, hence it is more likely that potential interviewees would agree to speak in private and, indeed, be less guarded in their comments
- One to one interviews are easier to organize in terms of time and place; the interviews in this research took place in the interviewees' own schools and at a time suitable for each one, thus promoting a conducive environment for each interviewee.

However other reasons also pertain that are more related to the nature of the underlying rationale of the exercise. The first of these can best be outlined by stating what I did not wish to achieve. As discussed above, a dominant feature of the group interview scenario is to observe group dynamics in order to identify shared views and develop a sense of a group 'view'. Morgan (1988) suggests a useful feature of focus groups is to allow the group, through the interaction of its members, to generate "hypotheses based on informants' insights" (p. 11). Neither of these objectives was a priority in this research. My main purpose here was to engage on an individual basis with representatives of the three types of respondents, principals, learning support/resource teachers and guidance counsellors. The priority was to develop further insights into their individual understandings and perceptions of the issues being discussed. I accept that



investigating the shared understandings and perceptions of the three categories of respondents in relation to the research questions is of interest. However I suggest that the parameters of my current research, including the size of the sample, preclude me from progressing this issue.

Secondly, the specific questions being addressed in this research related to discovering what attitudes and understandings were manifested in the Irish education system in relation to emotional and behavioural difficulties. Therefore it was essential that the responses of the interviewees related to their consideration of the issues individually and in the context of their school situation. Thirdly, during the interview stage I hoped to gather school-based policy documents in order to facilitate an analysis of documents as part of the overall research. Essentially I felt that the one to one scenario would be the ideal situation in which to request such documents but, more importantly, the subsequent analysis of the school-based documents gathered would be enriched by the fact that a respondent from the school/s in question had been interviewed.

### **5.5.3 Document Analysis**

The focus of the first stage of data collection is to describe what is happening on the ground in a sample of schools. The second stage seeks to investigate in more depth the specific research questions explored in the questionnaire along with the themes emanating from the responses received to that questionnaire. Whilst these methodologies are justifiable on paradigmatic and pragmatic grounds, I acknowledge that both of these methods possess inherent limitations, particularly in relation to the size, choice and availability of the sample (see Chapter Six, Section 6.2).

Another inherent limitation that could be perceived in the data collection so far relates to the source of data, i.e. the fact that all data are being gathered from a sample chosen by me as researcher and essentially represent the views of members of that sample on the issues under investigation. The methodology employed to select the sample in this research, qualitative non-probability sampling, is discussed in Chapter Six, Section 6.2 and this provides a rationale for its choice and suitability. This includes commentary on the merits of this type of sampling for this particular context.

The sample is small and this is always important to consider when attempting to generalize from the findings. However, as discussed in Section 5.4.1, generalizability is not an important factor in this research. I am conscious that where the researcher may not have the luxury of a larger sample from which to gather more representative data, there remains at least an obligation to consider how the views generated may be looked at from a different perspective in order to attempt to examine in another context the salient points being put forward from the analysis of the data. In considering how best to address this situation I chose to employ document analysis as a means of contextualising some of the salient issues emanating from the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. This analysis of documents is presented in Chapter Nine. Here I present a rationale of document analysis as a methodology for this research.

Cohen *et al* (2011), in discussing document analysis, refer to it as “facilitating insights into three related area of human activity” (p. 249), one of these being “the origins of the present that explain current structures, relationships and behaviours in the context of recent and longer term trends” (Cohen *et al*, 2011). Mertens (1998) points out the need to “get the necessary background of the situation and insights into the dynamics of everyday functioning” (p. 324). This demonstrates my principal justification of the inclusion of document analysis in this research which is



interested in examining current structures, relationships and behaviour around the issue of EBD in mainstream schools in Ireland.

Denscombe (2007) suggests that the introduction of government-generated documents into the analysis lends a sense of credibility and impartiality to the process, which adds a certain balance to the presentation of purely school-generated documents, although I would argue that the inclusion of the latter is consistent with a social constructivist paradigm as they can be viewed as socially constructed (Jupp & Norris, 1993) and interpreted from that perspective. In Chapter Nine I analyse school-generated documents particularly but do also consider how they are informed by national guidelines for the development of a code of behaviour that have been generated by the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB).

A further justification for the inclusion of document analysis as a research methodology is that it enhances and contributes to the ethnographic approach which was integral to the perspective from which the questionnaire was developed. Hammersley & Atkinson (2007) state that “documentary sources construct ‘facts’, ‘records’, ‘diagnoses’, ‘decisions’ and ‘rules’ that are crucially involved in social activities” (p. 121). More interestingly, they state:

Documents can provide information about the settings being studied, or about their wider contexts, and particularly about key figures or organizations. Sometimes this information will be of a kind that is not available from other sources. On other occasions they may provide important corroboration, or may challenge, information received from informants or from observation.

(p. 122)

Therefore, to conclude, I argue that an examination of a selection of policy documents contributes three important elements to the research:

- It allows for more data to be examined, in the form of samples of the types of documents to which respondents and interviewees refer. Thus the richness of the data is improved.
- It enhances overall the context of the responses collected in the questionnaire and interviews, thus rendering these data more robust.
- It strengthens the research overall as it provides for an element of triangulation by introducing a perspective other than that of the sample. It allows me to examine at first hand a selection of policy documents from schools, thus allowing for the presentation of a perspective other than that of the respondents and interviewees.

## 5.6 Summary

This chapter discussed in detail the choice of social constructivism as the underlying research paradigm of this research. This discussion included a justification for the use of an interpretative approach based on the conceptual framework inherent in the research and included consideration of the issues of validity and reliability. Finally it outlined and discussed the methodologies employed in the research, i.e. the questionnaire, the semi-structured interview and document analysis. This included a rationale for their choice here. The following chapter outlines the construction of the questionnaire and semi-structured interview and describes them from trial and pilot stages through to the final products.



## **Chapter Six**

### **Data Collection**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter commences with a detailed outline of the sample upon which the research is conducted. This discusses and describes the selection of the sample and also addresses relevant ethical considerations. The chapter proceeds to outline the data collection, which was conducted initially in two stages, i.e. the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview. In this regard it provides a detailed description of the questionnaire, its construction, the trial and pilot stages culminating in the final questionnaire distributed to the sample. Next the chapter provides a detailed outline of the semi-structured interview used in the second stage of data collection, including a rationale for the selection of the sample used in the interviews. Ethical considerations are discussed. The semi-structured interview is then outlined in detail. The interview schedule is presented and this is placed in the context of the type of information desired. Then the trial and pilot stages of this data collection phase are outlined. A brief description of some of the data collected at the pilot stage is included here in order to illustrate their usefulness and relevance to the research, before describing the full interview schedule.

#### **6.2 Sample Design**

##### **6.2.1 Rationale**

Purposive non-probability sampling is employed in the research. Gay, Mills & Airasian (2006) state that the purpose of qualitative sampling is to choose participants who are reflective and thoughtful and have an ability to communicate effectively with the researcher. My rationale is primarily to choose respondents whose work in schools is such that they could reasonably be expected to have experience of engaging with students with special educational needs and, hence, students presenting with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Also it is hoped to

engage with participants who are reflective and thoughtful and have an ability to communicate effectively with me as the researcher. The literature suggests that qualitative research requires more depth of analysis than quantitative research, due to its interest in the perspectives of the respondents, its focus on the setting and the nature of the research topic (Gay *et al*, 2006; Scott & Morrison, 2005). This is why it is of interest to me.

The choice of non-probability sampling places limitations on the research. In particular I acknowledge the limitations that this places on the generalizability of my research findings to the population at large (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). The ability to generalize my findings to the population at large is not an aim of this research. Rather it wishes to explore understandings and conceptualizations of EBD current in mainstream schools, responses made by schools to support students presenting with EBD and to investigate what types of factors may influence these two issues. It is not included in the research aims to posit definitive statements on these issues that are representative of the mainstream education system as a whole. Such an endeavour goes beyond the scope of a research project such as this.

### 6.2.2 Selection

A cohort of seventeen types of schools was identified on the basis of the variables outlined here. Two exemplars of each type were chosen, therefore thirty-four schools in total. The first requirement was to represent the variety of school types making up the majority of schools in the mainstream Irish education system, namely,

- Primary
- Post-Primary
  - Voluntary Secondary School
  - Vocational School/Community College (VEC\*)
  - Community School/Comprehensive School.

\*Vocational Education Committees (See Chapter Two, Section 2.3.2)



Within these school types the following categorizations exist and are significant (see Chapter Four, Section 4.4.1) and, therefore, represent the second set of variables for the selection of the sample,

- Single gender schools
- Co-educational schools.

Finally, certain parameters were decided upon from which to differentiate the following, as a third set of variables for the selection of the sample,

- The size of the school population: At post-primary level in Ireland, a school with a student intake of five hundred students or more is considered large enough to attract extra resources. This figure was used to distinguish between large and small schools at post-primary level. At primary level, the situation is different. 75% of these schools have fewer than eight teachers, i.e. one per grade (Junior and Senior Infants, First to Sixth Class). Beyond this figure, a school may appoint an administrative (non-teaching) principal. This was taken as the cut-off point between large and small primary schools.
- The school's location in an urban or rural area: In the Irish context an urban area is defined as "cities and towns including suburbs of 1,500 or more inhabitants" (United Nations, 2002, Table 6, pp. 104-133). This was accepted as the cut-off point between urban and rural areas.

Within this sample of thirty-four schools, the questionnaire was sent to the principals (thirty-four), learning support/resource teachers (thirty-four) and guidance counsellors (twenty-four, in post-primary schools only), thus ninety-two respondents in all, targeting key staff in the delivery of support to students presenting with special educational needs. Principals have a responsibility for administration and leadership in the teaching and learning in their schools. I also targeted special education teachers, referred to as learning support or resource teachers in the Irish context. I requested information regarding their qualifications in this area in the questionnaire in order to ensure the respondents met the criteria outlined in the rationale (Section 6.2.1). Guidance counsellors are required to have completed a relevant qualification to be in that position. The coding system employed to identify these ninety-two respondents is outlined in Appendix III.

### 6.2.3 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations have a bearing on the research and are considered here. Firstly the ethical safeguards that are required in contacting the sample and conducting the data collection *per se* are outlined in detail. The sample for this research is drawn from practitioners in a selection of primary and post-primary schools chosen to fit a set of variables that is designed to provide a cross-section of mainstream Irish schools (see Section 6.2.2 above for a detailed description of these variables). Access to schools as data collection sites is a sensitive issue that must be negotiated carefully.

This research was conducted within the parameters set out by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) in its *Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* (2004). The code of ethics followed in this research is included in Appendix IV. In that context, during all stages of data collection I was mindful of three issues: adhering to best practice guidelines on anonymity and informed consent regarding interaction with all respondents and potential respondents at each stage of data collection; confidentiality regarding data collection and storage; sensitivity regarding the personal nature of the data collected.

The methodology employed to select the sample is outlined in Section 6.2.2. In considering potential respondents I felt it was not feasible to include students as part of the respondent group. The reasons underlying this decision are primarily pragmatic and ethical ones. The inclusion of minors in the pool of respondents would necessitate seeking a complex set of permissions from schools' boards of management, from parents and from the students themselves. This would be a time-consuming exercise that would be difficult to organise given the geographical spread of the schools and whose level of success would be dubious.



This would also be difficult to negotiate due to the issues of anonymity and confidentiality. Given the size of the population in general in Ireland, the relatively small size of schools and the particular category of students I wished to investigate I felt obliged to be mindful of the sensitivities involved in this regard. Therefore the range of methodologies suitable for use in the research site was limited by the practicalities of the situation, ethical considerations and the pragmatics of the time element involved. All these considerations combined to effectively place restrictions on the size and nature of the sample, thus affecting the scope of the research project. I am aware that this represents a limitation in the research but must accept these limitations for pragmatic reasons.

However another important aspect of the ethical underpinnings of this research must also be considered. This relates to the sensitive issue of conducting research in the context of a marginalized group within the school situation and within society in general. In this regard I am mindful of the marginalized nature of the category of students about whom I wish to enquire. While the sample does not extend to minors, as outline above, it does include those who work with minors. The realisation that the respondents were asked to discuss the children and adolescents in their care was of uppermost importance in the conduct of this research.

#### **6.2.4 Consent and Confidentiality**

The following summarizes the steps taken to request the voluntary consent of participants in the data collection and ensure confidentiality (see Appendix IV for the Code of Ethics):

- Participants were all over eighteen years of age.
- A coding system (See Appendix III) was devised to identify respondents at all stages of data collection. This was stored in a locked filing cabinet and a password protected computer.
- A letter (Appendix V) accompanied the questionnaire sent to respondents indicating the purpose of the research and guaranteeing

confidentiality and anonymity. A second letter (Appendix VI) was sent after two weeks to remind respondents of the request.

- All data collected in the questionnaires were stored in a locked filing cabinet. Contact details were requested only if a respondent was willing to be interviewed at a later stage or required more information regarding same. Otherwise the identity of respondents was not requested.
- At the interview stage the participants were informed of the aims and nature of the research by an information sheet (Appendix VII). The sheet was sent to them at least forty-eight hours before being asked to complete a consent form (Appendix VIII).
- The participants were informed that they could withdraw from the research at any time without reason and their record of participation would be destroyed.
- Participants' schools would not be identified at any time during the course of the study.
- My contact details were provided for participants to obtain further information.

### 6.2.5 Contacting the Sample

The sample was initially contacted by post at their place of work. The questionnaire (See Appendix IX for the Primary questionnaire and Appendix X for the Post-Primary questionnaire) was prefaced with an introductory statement outlining the purpose of the research, the confidential nature of the research and notification of a request to be interviewed at a later stage. A covering letter (Appendix V) was included which introduced the research study, briefly explained the random nature of the respondent's selection as part of the sample, the ethical guidelines within which the research was being conducted, along with instructions for completing the questionnaire and returning it in an accompanying stamped, addressed envelope. The procedures that were followed for contacting the interview respondents are outlined in Section 6.5.



## 6.3 The Questionnaire

This section outlines the overall construction and structure of the questionnaire that was sent to potential respondents. It explains the coding system employed to anonymize the sample of respondents and describes the types of questions included and their rationale. Finally it summarises the type of information to be gathered from this process.

### 6.3.1 Construction of the Questionnaire

#### 6.3.1.1 Overall Structure

Two forms of the questionnaire are presented (See Appendix IX and Appendix X), one for respondents employed in the primary sector and one for those employed in the post-primary sector. The first contains twenty-two questions and the second contains twenty-five questions. The extra questions in the latter questionnaire address issues particular to the post-primary sector, namely

- how the school organises class placement of students, e.g. streaming, banding, mixed ability
- whether the respondent considers the school to focus primarily on the achievement of academic results or whether it sees itself catering for students within a diverse range of abilities
- what curricular programmes it offers apart from the Junior Certificate and the established Leaving Certificate, i.e. Junior Certificate School Programme, Transition Year Option, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, Leaving Certificate (Applied).

Apart from this the questionnaires are laid out in a similar style, with questions following each other in a similar and logical pattern in order to facilitate analysis. Broadly, the questionnaires follow the structure outlined below.

The first section addresses the existence or otherwise of a written behaviour policy. The first question asks if there exists a written policy in the school. Following a positive response, respondents are directed to groups of questions designed to

determine the age of the policy, its level of availability and which stakeholders were involved in constructing it. A negative response directs respondents to ignore these questions. All respondents are then directed to questions employing rating scales. The first investigates the level of awareness of the policy or unwritten understanding that the respondent perceives to exist amongst a list of stakeholders. The next investigates the level of importance the respondent perceives that the behaviour policy or unwritten understanding attracts in the day to day running of the school.

In the next section respondents are asked to identify from a list the means by which the school addresses the management of behaviour. They are also asked to define the term 'emotional and behavioural difficulties'. Finally they are asked to indicate on a rating scale the level of influence a range of variables may have on teachers when they think about the management of behaviour. The final section of the questionnaire elicits personal details about the school, the respondent's current position (e.g. principal, learning support/resource teacher, guidance counsellor) and overall professional experience. These data are requested for classification purposes.

#### **6.3.1.2 Question Types**

Questions were designed to elicit data relevant to the research questions: current behaviour or practice in schools, respondents' attitudes to a range of relevant issues, their perceptions of colleagues' attitudes to these issues, how they define EBD and, finally, to classify respondents and responses. The range of the types of questions included is limited to three, as this facilitates ease of response and also the collation of the data for analysis. These question types are outlined below.



### Open-Ended Questions

Open questions allow respondents to give any answer they wish. Hague (1998) states this is sometimes “important to capture the exact words which are given in a reply....just noting the words that people use in answer to a question can be very revealing” (p.53). This type of question is used to ask respondents to define the term ‘emotional and behavioural difficulties’.

### Closed Questions

Closed or fixed response questions are used in the research as they allow for the possibility to investigate response frequency and to compare across different cohorts of respondents (Cohen *et al*, 2011). They can also be used to guide respondents through the questionnaire, i.e. a positive response directs respondents to a particular set of questions whilst a negative response leads to a different set. They are used when it is feasible to predict the range of possible responses, thus facilitating the respondents in answering and allowing ease of coding responses. In the latter cases, provision is made for respondents to add additional responses (Cohen *et al*, 2011).

### Rating Scale Questions

Rating scale questions attempt to measure things such as an attitude or an intention (Hague, 1998; Cohen *et al*, 2011). Here they are used to gather general information about respondents’ perceptions of the general level of awareness amongst a list of stakeholders of the behaviour policy (written or unwritten), how important they perceive it to be in the day to day running of the school and, finally, how much they perceive a list of factors might influence the teaching staff when considering behavioural issues. Numerical rating scales are employed, ranging from “1- Not at all “ to “6 – Very ....”.

The literature cautions against over-simplification in the interpretation of responses to rating scale questions (see, for example, Cohen *et al*, 2011) and I accept this warning. However in this instance I suggest that my use of rating scales is justified. I am not employing them to measure respondents' attitudes *per se*. Rather my aim is simply to encourage respondents to reflect on the position of the behaviour policy in the life of the school.

### 6.3.1.3 Information Required from the Questionnaire

The questionnaire is designed to elicit data from the respondents relating to the research questions. Figure 6.1 links the research questions to the questions on each questionnaire (Primary, Appendix IX; Post-Primary, Appendix X).

| Specific Research Questions<br>(Key Words/Phrases in Italics)   | Question No. on Questionnaire |                      |
|---|-------------------------------|----------------------|
|   | Primary                       | Post-Primary         |
| How is EBD <i>currently understood</i> in Irish mainstream schools and how does this relate to their <i>policies</i> in this area, in the context of national policy?   | 1/7*, 2,<br>3, 4, 10          | 1/7*, 2,<br>3, 4, 10 |
| What are the <i>issues or factors that arise in defining EBD</i> in schools?  | 11                            | 11, 14, 15           |
| To what extent are these factors <i>influenced by gender of staff/students, makeup of school population, sector and the traditional ethos or culture of the school?</i> | 12                            | 12                   |
| What is the <i>impact</i> of these issues on <i>addressing the needs</i> of students presenting with EBD in Irish schools?  | 5, 6/9*, 8                    | 5, 6/9*, 8, 13       |

**Figure 6.1 Relationship between the Research Questions and the Questions on the Questionnaires**

\*Nos. 1 and 6 refer to a written policy. Nos. 7 and 9 refer to an unwritten policy.



### 6.3.2 Trial Questionnaire

The questionnaire was trialled with five primary teachers and five post-primary teachers, who were chosen from a cohort of learning support/resource teachers pursuing postgraduate studies in my place of work and were, therefore, accessible. The literature (Mertens, 2010; Robson, 2011) recommends this practice in order to test such issues as, for example,

- The robustness of the questionnaire as a research tool
- The framing of the questions
- The relevance of the data sought
- The clarity and logic of the layout of the questionnaire.

Trial respondents were asked to do two things,

- Answer the questionnaire as a respondent
- On a separate sheet (Appendix XI), answer the following questions in relation to the questionnaire:
  - Please make any comments on individual questions here, stating clearly the question number:  
*(e. g. question unclear, confusing, too long/short, spacing a problem, repetitive, more room needed, more instructions needed, etc)*
  - Do you think there is something else that should be included in the questionnaire?

Feedback from this trial was largely positive from the point of view of the issues outlined above. Suggestions relating to the inclusion of further questions concerned minor issues and were not acted upon. However, some difficulty was reported with the structure of one question, No. 12, which appeared on both the Primary and Post-Primary versions, namely:

In your opinion, how important is each of the following to the way in which the management of behaviour is thought about among the teachers working in the school?

(This was followed by a list of sixteen issues rated on a six point rating scale).

Respondents considered the question “confusing”, “phrased in a confusing manner”, “difficult”. The rating scale was considered satisfactory. For the pilot questionnaire, the question was rephrased to read:

In your opinion, to what extent does each of the following influence teachers working in this school, when they think about the management of behaviour?

### 6.3.3 Pilot Questionnaire

The amended questionnaire was then sent to seventeen respondents (one from each type of school). It was necessary to ensure that the pilot cohort included principals (from primary and post-primary), learning support/resource teachers (from primary and post-primary) and guidance counsellors. Within these parameters, the selection of respondents was random. Table 2 outlines the number of respondents by category to whom the pilot questionnaire was sent.

| Category of Respondent  | Number (n = 17) |
|-------------------------|-----------------|
| Primary Principals      | 3               |
| Primary Teachers        | 2               |
| Post-Primary Principals | 4               |
| Post-Primary Teachers   | 4               |
| Guidance Counsellors    | 4               |
| Total                   | 17              |

**Table 2** Number of Respondents for the Pilot Questionnaire by Category

Initially seven responses were received. Following a reminder letter sent after two weeks (Appendix VI), another four were received. Overall the response rate from the pilot questionnaire was eleven out of seventeen (65%). Table 3 outlines the number of respondents who returned the pilot questionnaire by category.



| Category of Respondent  | Number (n = 11) |
|-------------------------|-----------------|
| Primary Principals      | 2               |
| Primary Teachers        | 2               |
| Post-Primary Principals | 3               |
| Post-Primary Teachers   | 3               |
| Guidance Counsellors    | 2               |
| Total                   | 11              |

**Table 3** Number of Replies to the Pilot Questionnaire by Category

For each of the categories listed above, the data were collated under the following broad headings:

- Information regarding the details of the behaviour policy, e. g written or unwritten, age of the policy, who was responsible for drawing it up, stakeholders consulted
- Respondent's opinion regarding the level of awareness of the policy among various stakeholders
- Respondent's opinion regarding the level of importance attributed to the policy by these stakeholders
- Respondent's description of the current responses to behavioural issues present in the school
- Respondent's definition of EBD
- Respondent's opinion regarding what influences teachers when they think of behavioural issues in the school.

The majority of respondents recorded responses to all questions to which they were directed. These responses corresponded to the issues being addressed. No significant level of confusion was in evidence across the respondents, particularly with regard to the issue outlined in Section 6.3.2 (above).

### 6.3.4 Analysis of Data from the Pilot Questionnaire

A detailed schema of analysis was tested on the pilot questionnaire in order to test its rigour and depth of analysis before applying it to the full cohort of respondents. This dwelt on identifying commonalities and exceptionalities across respondents and was organised under a framework focusing on the following perspectives:

- Small Schools - Large Schools
- Primary Schools - Post-Primary Schools
- Urban Schools - Rural Schools
- Single Gender Male Schools - Single Gender Female Schools - Co-Ed Schools
- Principals – Learning Support/Resource Teachers - Guidance Counsellors
- Male Respondents- Female Respondents
- Primary - Voluntary Secondary - VEC - Community & Comprehensive.

A brief summary of the findings from the pilot questionnaire is outlined here.

#### **Commonalities across all respondents:**

- All indicate that written policies exist in their schools. Most were written recently. All or most stakeholders were involved. Most indicate a high level of awareness of the policy among the stakeholders. All indicate a high level of importance is attributed to the policy.
- There exists a wide range of school-based responses to behavioural issues. Parent collaboration and pupil counselling are common school-based responses across all respondents. Removal from lessons and temporary exclusion from school appear to be more common in post-primary schools than in primary schools.
- Most respondents feel that neither gender of teachers nor of students is very relevant, but there are some exceptions to this.
- Most indicate a variety of issues influences teachers when thinking about behavioural issues. The attitudes of adults (school management, teachers, Board of Management) are mentioned frequently.
- In relation to defining EBD, a wide variety of assessed conditions are mentioned by several respondents. Both transitory and more permanent conditions are mentioned. Several respondents separate emotional issues from behavioural issues and the idea that interventions can make a difference is in evidence across respondents.



### Exceptionalities across all respondents:

- In defining EBD, guidance counsellors appear to dwell on negative aspects, e.g. disruption, aggression.
- Post-primary teachers indicate that parents are less aware of the behaviour policy than other stakeholders.
- The allocation of a Special Needs Assistant as a response to behavioural issues appears to be more prevalent in post-primary schools.
- Post-primary principals feel that the issue of gender, of both teachers and students, is an important one.

### 6.3.5 Full Questionnaire

The pilot stage suggested that data pertinent to the specific research questions were coming through from the respondents and that further changes were not required. Therefore it was decided to continue without making any changes to the questionnaire. On this basis it was also decided to include the data from the pilot questionnaire in the overall analysis of data. The reasons for this are threefold, namely

- No changes to the questionnaire were felt necessary following scrutiny of the respondents' answer forms and the analysis of the data received
- The overall size of the sample (ninety-two), while feasible, was considered of insufficient number to warrant the luxury of ignoring data from eleven *bona fide* respondents
- The data collected from the pilot questionnaire were as relevant to the research as that which would be collected from the remainder of the respondents.

For similar reasons, it was also decided to send the questionnaire to the six people who had not responded to the pilot.

The questionnaire was then sent to the remaining seventy-five respondents in the sample, along with the six from the pilot phase who had not responded during this stage. A reminder letter, similar to that employed for the pilot questionnaire (Appendix VI), was sent out after two weeks. In all, thirty-six responses were

received at this stage, making a total of forty-seven respondents (51.65%) to this initial stage of data collection. Chapter Seven describes the data and their analysis.

#### 6.4 Semi-Structured Interviews' Sample: Rationale and Description

From the forty-seven respondents to the questionnaire a total of twenty-one indicated a willingness to be interviewed. Table 4 outlines the profile of possible interviewees by respondent type.

| Sector       | Principals | SEN Teachers | Guidance Counsellors | Total<br>(n = 21) |
|--------------|------------|--------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Primary      | 3          | 2            | XXXX                 | 5                 |
| Post-Primary | 5          | 7            | 4                    | 16                |
| Total        | 8          | 9            | 4                    | 21                |

**Table 4** Number of Possible Interviewees by Respondent Type

From this initial information it appeared possible to interview respondents representative of the three types of respondents and across the two overall types of school, primary and post-primary. However following more rigorous scrutiny the sample was reduced to seventeen for the following reasons:

- It emerged that three of these respondents (one primary principal, one post-primary principal and one post-primary learning support/resource teacher) had retired from the teaching profession since returning the questionnaire. Although only recently retired, their availability for interview became somewhat problematic; therefore it was decided to eliminate them from the sample for pragmatic reasons.
- Upon further examination, two respondents were of the same type (principals from rural, large, co-educational, post-primary, VEC-run schools). One of these was eliminated on a random basis.



The final list of possible interviewees is outlined in Table 5.

| Sector       | Principals | SEN Teachers | Guidance Counsellors | Total<br>(n = 17) |
|--------------|------------|--------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Primary      | 2          | 2            | XXXX                 | 4                 |
| Post-Primary | 3          | 6            | 4                    | 13                |
| Total        | 5          | 8            | 4                    | 17                |

**Table 5** Description of Final List of Possible Interviewees

On the basis of this cohort of seventeen possible respondents, Figure 6.2 outlines the decisions that were made regarding which respondents to contact to invite for interview. The general parameters under which possible interviewees were chosen included their availability and proximity, coupled with a desire to reflect as much as possible a diversity of school type and population. Figure 6.3 outlines the codes employed to anonymize the respondents.

| Respondent | Position  | Sector  | M/F/<br>Co-Ed | Urban/<br>Rural | Large/<br>Small | Y/N | Comment                |
|------------|-----------|---------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----|------------------------|
| CCCRLGA    | Guidance  | C & C   | Co-Ed         | Rural           | Large           | Yes | Same school as CCCRLPA |
| VECRLGA*   | Guidance  | VEC     | Co-Ed         | Rural           | Large           | Yes | Same school as VECRLPA |
| VECUSGB*   | Guidance  | VEC     | Co-Ed         | Urban           | Small           | Yes | Same school as VECUSPB |
| VCRLGA     | Guidance  | Vol Sec | Co-Ed         | Rural           | Large           | Yes | Possible pilot         |
| CCCRLPA*   | Principal | C & C   | Co-Ed         | Rural           | Large           | Yes | Same school as CCCRLGA |
| VECRLPA    | Principal | VEC     | Co-Ed         | Rural           | Large           | Yes | Same school as VECRLGA |
| VECRLPB    | Principal | VEC     | Co-Ed         | Rural           | Large           | No  | Same type as VECRLPA   |
| VECULPB    | Principal | VEC     | Co-Ed         | Urban           | Large           | No  | Retired                |
| VECUSPB    | Principal | VEC     | Co-Ed         | Urban           | Small           | Yes | Same school as VECUSGB |
| XCUSPA*    | Principal | Primary | Co-Ed         | Urban           | Small           | No  | Retired                |
| XMULPA*    | Principal | Primary | Male          | Urban           | Large           | Yes |                        |
| XFULPA     | Principal | Primary | Female        | Urban           | Large           | Yes |                        |
| CCCRLTB    | Teacher   | C & C   | Co-Ed         | Rural           | Large           | No  | Too far away           |
| CCCULTA    | Teacher   | C & C   | Co-Ed         | Urban           | Large           | Yes |                        |
| CCCULTB*   | Teacher   | C & C   | Co-Ed         | Urban           | Large           | No  | Retired                |
| VECRSTB    | Teacher   | VEC     | Co-Ed         | Rural           | Small           | Yes |                        |
| VECULTB    | Teacher   | VEC     | Co-Ed         | Urban           | Large           | Yes | Possible pilot         |
| VFULTA     | Teacher   | Vol Sec | Female        | Urban           | Large           | No  | Similar to VMULTA      |
| VMULTA*    | Teacher   | Vol Sec | Male          | Urban           | Large           | Yes |                        |
| XCULTB*    | Teacher   | Primary | Co-Ed         | Urban           | Large           | Yes |                        |
| XMULTB     | Teacher   | Primary | Male          | Urban           | Large           | Yes |                        |

Figure 6.2 Final Decisions re Interviewees (with Explanatory Codes)



| Code | Description                    | Code | Description                |
|------|--------------------------------|------|----------------------------|
| V    | Voluntary Secondary            | L    | Large                      |
| VE   | Vocational Education Committee | S    | Small                      |
| CC   | Community & Comprehensive      | P    | Principal                  |
| X    | Primary                        | T    | Teacher                    |
| M    | Single Gender School (Male)    | G    | Guidance Counsellor        |
| F    | Single Gender School (Female)  | A    | First school of this type  |
| U    | Urban                          | B    | Second school of this type |
| R    | Rural                          |      |                            |

Figure 6.3 Codes Employed to Anonymize Interview Respondents

Choice was limited and practicalities contributed to the selection process. For example, two principals and two teachers from the primary sector were the only possibilities available and were, therefore, self-selecting. The three learning support/resource teachers from the post-primary sector were chosen after eliminating other possible candidates on the basis of distance, similarity of type and/or retirement. Six of the respondents represent the principals and guidance counsellors of three different post-primary schools. Whilst this facilitated the interviewing process, the limitation of numbers contributed to their selection. Finally, two respondents, who had agreed to be interviewed, were chosen as possible pilot interviewees. VECULTB was chosen on the basis that this respondent was similar to VECUSTB (who was chosen on the basis of being one of the few respondents available from a small school), i.e. same sector, a teacher and in an urban area. VECULTB was also one of several large schools in the cohort. VCRLGA

was chosen as a pilot interviewee due to the fact that this respondent was not from one of the three schools from which it was intended to interview both principal and guidance counsellor. Therefore both these respondents were not required in the main interview cohort. Figure 6.4 outlines the final cohort of potential interviewees.

|                             | Primary | Post-Primary |
|-----------------------------|---------|--------------|
| <b>Principals</b>           | 2       | 3            |
| <b>Teachers</b>             | 2       | 3            |
| <b>Guidance Counsellors</b> |         | 3            |
| <b>Total</b>                | 13      |              |

Figure 6.4 Cohort of Potential Interviewees

## 6.5 Ethical Considerations

This work was conducted in accordance with an ethical code (Appendix IV) which is informed by the guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (2004), as for the initial stage of data collection. The following summarizes the steps taken to request the voluntary consent of participants to participate in the interviews and to ensure confidentiality throughout the process:

- An initial letter was sent to each possible interviewee reminding them of the questionnaire they had completed and returned, its topic and that they had agreed to be interviewed. This letter (See Appendix XII) invited them to consider their participation in such an interview, provided contact details (telephone and email) if they wished to contact me immediately and stated that they would be contacted in the near future to ascertain their willingness to participate. This letter also contained an information sheet (Appendix VII) providing more details about the research and outlining the general structure and length of the interview. It also indicated the following:
  - the possibility of the interview being recorded
  - the fact that it would be transcribed to assist analysis
  - they would be requested to allow anonymous quotations to be used



- neither they nor their school would be identified in the research.
- Subsequently contact was made with each respondent by telephone. This proved useful as several respondents used this conversation to enquire about the research, why they were chosen as interviewees, what the data would be used for, etc. They were reminded that they would be asked to allow the interview to be recorded.
- A schedule of dates was established with the two pilot interviews organized first. Most of the interviews took place over a three week period with the final two occurring two weeks later due to the availability of the respondents. All respondents agreed to participate.
- Prior to the date on which their interview was to take place, a letter (Appendix XIII) was sent to each interviewee reminding them of the arrangements and enclosing a copy of the questionnaire they had filled in during the initial stage of data collection. This was included in order to remind them of the issues that would be discussed and to give them the opportunity, if they wished, to reflect on those issues prior to the interview.
- On the day of the interview each interviewee was asked to sign a consent form (Appendix VIII) which complied with BERA guidelines, asking them to agree to participate in the interview, to have it recorded and to allow anonymous quotations from it to be used. All interviewees agreed to these conditions and their consent is retained in a secure file.
- At the start of the interview each interviewee was informed that they could withdraw at any time during the interview without reason and their record of participation would be destroyed. Also they were informed that they were not obliged to answer any question they did not wish to. Finally they were informed that they would be sent a transcript of the interview in the following weeks in order to make any amendments they may wish to. A copy of the letter sent with the transcript is provided in Appendix XIV.
- During the interview, the first name of the interviewee and my first name were used to allow a natural flow of conversation. Other than this neither the interviewee, nor their school, was identified during the interview.

## **6.6 The Semi-Structured Interview**

### **6.6.1 Construction of the Interview Schedule**

This section describes the overall structure of the interview. It outlines the types of questions included and their rationale. Finally it summarises the type of information it was hoped would be gathered from the interview process.

### **6.6.1.1 Structure**

The methodology selected is that of the semi-structured interview (See Chapter Five, Section 5.5.2). It was designed to be of between thirty-five to forty minutes in duration. The interview schedule consisted of a series of fourteen questions grouped under four general headings, as follows:

#### **Formulation**

1. Is the policy based on any underlying belief or rationale, e. g egalitarianism, sense of equality (treating everyone the same), fair play?
2. When devising a behaviour policy, were the issues of EBD/SEN considered at all?

#### **Content**

3. What aspects of behaviour does the policy address?
4. How detailed is the policy?
5. Do teachers and SNAs in the school have a good sense of what is in the policy?
6. How does it link with other school policies, e.g. SEN policy?

#### **Application**

7. To what extent is the policy informing daily practice?
8. How is the policy communicated to students, especially those with SEN (EBD in particular)?
9. Is the student's level of maturity an important issue when teachers are considering behavioural issues?
10. Do you think your behaviour policy is pro-active or re-active?

#### **Definition**

11. What do you think are the important aspects to consider when defining EBD?
12. Do you consider emotional difficulties and behavioural difficulties as being separate issues?
13. Does the school environment contribute in any way to the definition of EBD, e.g. ethos/culture, co-educational or single gender, school size, type of staff (e.g. gender), etc?
14. What kinds of issues might influence teachers when defining EBD?



While generally the questions were posed in this order, as it had been devised to flow naturally in that way, I was mindful of the responses of the interviewees and allowed those responses occasionally to dictate the order in which questions were ultimately asked (Robson, 2011). On occasion a question was found to be superfluous as the information had been already offered. At the end of the interview, each interviewee was asked the following question:

Is there anything you would like to add to what you have said today?

This was done in order to provide the interviewees with the opportunity to reflect on what had been said and to offer any additional information, expand on any point they had raised or provide any contextual information they felt might be relevant.

In order to encourage active participation the questions posed were predominantly of an open-ended nature in order to invite the interviewee to talk freely. The intention was for them to offer an opinion, expand on their ideas and include in the responses information that they felt was relevant. Under each question, a series of 'prompt' questions was available to me as interviewer and they were used, if required, along with usual conversational prompt phrases, to encourage further contributions from the interviewees, request elaboration or clarification, focus on a particular issue that the interviewee did not address, etc. The interview schedule, including these prompt questions is included in Appendix XV.

#### **6.6.1.2 Information Required from the Interview**

The interview schedule is designed with the following goals in mind:

- to engage in a face to face manner with a smaller cohort of respondents drawn from the three groups whose opinions are of interest to the research
- to further explore the specific research questions in this more intimate context
- to elicit more in-depth information regarding the themes emerging from the questionnaire.

The third goal above refers to the emerging themes that had been identified following the analysis of the data from the questionnaire. They are outlined in detail in Chapter Seven, Section 7.6. Here I summarise and restructure them in order to demonstrate their relevance to the interview schedule, as follows:

- A prevalence of written policies
- A high level of uniformity in contributing stakeholders
- Differences across different types of respondents and from different types of schools
- A large variety of responses to behaviour, reactive in many incidences
- Respondents from urban and rural schools particularly appear to display differences
- Gender issues in relation to single gender schools, male/female practitioners and the influence of gender overall
- A large variety of responses in relation to the definition of EBD.

Figure 6.5 links the research questions and these themes to the questions included in the interview schedule.



|                   | Research Questions &<br><i>Themes from Analysis of Data from the Questionnaire</i>  | Interview<br>Question  |
|-------------------|---|--|
| Research Question | How is EBD currently understood in Irish schools and how does this relate to their policies in this area, in the context of national policy?  | 1 2 2d 3 4<br>6  |
| Theme             | <i>Prevalence of written policies. High level of uniformity across stakeholders. Should there be a complex profile of policies and of understanding?</i>  | 1a 2 2b 2d<br>3 4 6  |
| Research Question | What is the understanding of the difference between emotional needs and behavioural difficulties, both at local and national levels?  | 1b 2 2d 4<br>12 12a 12b  |
| Theme             | <i>Prevalence of written policies. High level of uniformity across stakeholders. Should there be a complex profile of policies and of understanding?</i>  | 2 4 12 12a<br>12b  |
| Research Question | What are the causal factors in defining EBD in schools?   | 2d 4   |
| Theme             | <i>Differences across different types of respondents and from different types of schools, e. g. guidance counsellors talk about maturity. Co-ed.; more extreme (more traditional?).</i><br><br><i>Definition of EBD. Huge variety of factors at play.</i><br><br><i>Urban-rural differences. Urban and large seem to have a somewhat different profile to others.</i> | 2 2d 3 4 6<br>9 9d   |
| Research Question | To what extent are these factors influenced by: Gender of staff/students, makeup of school population, sector, traditional ethos or culture of the school.  | 3a 4 10<br>10a 10b 13<br>13a 13b<br>13c 13d 14<br>14a 14b<br>14c 14d |
| Theme             | <i>Huge variety of responses to behaviour. Reactive in lots of incidents.</i><br><i>Definition of EBD.</i>  | 2 2b 2d 3 4<br>11 11a 11b<br>11c                                     |
| Research Question | What is the impact of these issues on addressing the needs of students presenting with EBD in Irish schools?  | 2 6 7a 7b<br>7c 8?   |
| Theme             | <i>Huge variety of responses to behaviour. Reactive in lots of incidents.</i>   | 3 7a 7b 7c<br>10 10a 10b   |

Figure 6.5 Relationship between the Research Questions, the Themes Identified in the Analysis of the Questionnaire Data and the Questions in the Interviews

### 6.6.2 Trial Interviews

Two trial interviews were conducted to test the rigour of the interview schedule. One primary teacher and one post-primary teacher were chosen from a cohort of learning support/resource teachers pursuing postgraduate studies in my place of work and were, therefore, accessible. The same rationale as was outlined for the questionnaire (Section 6.3.2) applies in this instance, i.e. the recommendations from the literature that this practice tests, for example,

- The robustness of the research tool
- The framing of the questions
- The relevance of the data sought
- The clarity and logic of the layout of the interview schedule.

The interview was conducted in the manner described heretofore. Following the interview proper, each of the two interviewees was asked to comment on the following issues:

1. The preliminary discussion about the imminent interview
2. The questions asked, their clarity, length, relevance, etc
3. Whether or not there was any repetition in the questions
4. The overall length of the interview.

The responses of the two interviewees were taken into account along with my own impressions of the trial interviews. Overall there was satisfaction with the length of the interview (thirty-five to forty minutes), the preparation for the interview and the relevance of the issues presented for discussion. The layout of questions was restructured somewhat to allow for a more logical sequence or if it was found that they fitted better in another of the four main sections in the interview. Some questions, for the most part 'prompt' questions, were found to be unnecessary as they were repetitious.



### 6.6.3 Pilot Interviews

Two pilot interviews were conducted with two respondents who had completed the questionnaire, thus they constituted genuine candidates. They were a post-primary learning support/resource teacher and a guidance counsellor. Their choice as pilot interviewees is described in Section 6.4 (above). Their profiles are as follows:

- VCRLGA: This interviewee is a guidance counsellor in a large, rural, co-educational post-primary school in the voluntary secondary sector.
- VECULTB: This interviewee is a learning support/resource teacher in a large, urban, co-educational post-primary school in the VEC sector.

In each of these pilot interviews the interview schedule proceeded as planned, indicating that no further adjustments were necessary. This pilot phase provided me with the opportunity to familiarise myself with the roll out of the interview and to practise further my role as interviewer, i.e. allowing the interviewee to speak without interjecting, as in a discussion. This was considered to be an invaluable learning process which contributed to the integrity of the interview process as a means of genuine data collection in the field (Silverman, 2010).

The pilot interviews were transcribed and were sent to the interviewees as promised. One was returned with only minor syntactic amendments. As stated in the accompanying letter (Appendix XIV) it was presumed the second pilot interviewee was happy with the transcript. Then a preliminary analysis was carried out on the data collected. The purpose of this analysis was to test the rigour of the research instrument and to ascertain whether or not it would yield interesting, relevant and useful data. This was found to be the case. A random selection of the data provided by each interviewee is provided in the following sections to illustrate this. An in-depth analysis of these data is not necessary at this stage.

### 6.6.3.1 Summary of Pilot Interview: VCRLGA

This interviewee considers the ethos of the school to be central to all aspects of provision, including its policy on behaviour:

...it would be in line with the Mercy ethos and there would be great emphasis on justice and care of the individual, not just in an academic capacity but of the whole individual...

...the emphasis is on the needs of the individual not just on the school body as a whole.

While the interviewee considers the behaviour policy would "reflect the individual student's needs", there is also a recognition that, with regard to students with SEN, it "needs to be a little bit more cognisant of the needs of that particular body of students".

Students' background is considered to have a substantial impact on how the school responds to individuals' needs, e.g. "the background the child comes from...", "the home circumstances that the child leaves every morning". However this interviewee also acknowledges the impact of school-based relationships:

Whether or not the student has a specific, we identified learning need that would be another factor. Whether or not the relationships that the student experiences in school impact on how he or she behaves, I'd be talking about peer relationships in regards to things like bullying. We'd talk about relationships with teachers and how that might impact. So if a child is presenting with behaviour problems, we would factor all of those type (sic) of things.

As researcher I was particularly interested in the interviewee's involvement with students presenting with EBD in her role as a guidance counsellor in the school. The following extract outlines this succinctly:

I suppose in my work as guidance counsellor I would very often meet students and at first they might just be referred on to me



because their behaviours are unacceptable but very often there will be an underlying reason or that at least in part explains those behaviours. So it could be that the student has emotional behavioural problems that may or may not be related to or part in parcel of them also having a specific learning difficulty. So they would often be students whose, if you like, circumstances or their difficulties would be supported by a psychological report. So a significant number of students say with psychological reports would end up being referred to our services because, and maybe, not always but sometimes because their behaviour in class is not acceptable.

Another issue of interest to me was the interviewee's perspective regarding the interface between emotions and behaviour. While she feels they are nearly always connected, she considers this might not necessarily always be the case. When asked to expand on this by giving an example, the interviewee provides an interesting insight into a type of behaviour she would seemingly not consider inherent in EBD:

A student may have emotional difficulties but they don't manifest themselves readily in terms of their behaviour. So they appear to function in an acceptable manner and again can very often go unnoticed or could go unnoticed if one wasn't looking out for them. The silent sufferer, the student who ticks all the boxes in terms of behaviour, presents their homework, turns up on time for class, is respectful towards their teachers and their fellow pupils but is suffering because of something that has happened in their life, maybe something like a bereavement, but it could be something more profound, extending back into their early childhood or maybe something that was passed or even ongoing for them.

### **6.6.3.2 Summary of Pilot Interview: VECULTB**

For this interviewee the issue of maintaining order is afforded substantial consideration. When discussing the rationale for a behaviour policy she states:

...you would need one in a school to formalise how you manage behaviour in a school this size so I suppose you formulate how every year group should be running their code...

and regarding the focus of the policy, it is felt:

Yeah, it would be more in the classroom, you know, paying attention, classroom disruption, homework, coming prepared for class, consistently coming late for class, they would be the sort of behaviours that you would be looking at – behaviour coming into class, you know, not sitting in the seat that you have been allocated, those sort of things.

The question of the position of special needs assistants elicits valuable insights from this interviewee, implying a lack of awareness of the degree to which they are informed about and knowledgeable of school policy yet acknowledging their central role in managing behaviour:

The SNAs – I don't know how informed they are of the policy. I certainly wouldn't have taken on board to inform them of the policy.

And I suppose most of the students with the SNAs – the behaviour would be managed, a lot of the poor behaviour would be managed by the SNAs so they wouldn't actually go through the stages.

Another interesting insight provided by this interviewee is in relation to the question of staff gender and its impact on the approaches taken to behavioural issues. With reluctance, she acknowledges a slightly different emphasis in this regard from male and female teachers:

I think maybe – I think a lot of our – now I might be saying this wrong but I think a lot of our – the female teachers are maybe softer about things.

In their approach – I think just in their approach – that it isn't just cut and dry (sic).



They see the grey area – I think I am thinking some of the male staff. This is the way it is, this is the way you would have it. And that is it. Now, in saying that the younger male staff would be – and I am thinking of the tutor now of this child who is refusing the SNA – he would be very pro the child, so I suppose it depends on your relationship with the child as well.

#### **6.6.4 Full Interview Schedule**

All respondents contacted agreed to be interviewed. Subsequently a total of thirteen main interviews were held. All interviews were transcribed and copies sent to the interviewees, requesting corrections, clarifications, amendments or any further information they wished to add. Nine out of the thirteen transcripts were returned, of which five had made some minor syntactic amendments. Then a thematic analysis of the data was conducted. Chapter Eight describes the data and their analysis.

A number of interviewees volunteered to provide me with copies of school-based documentation; others were invited to do so, e.g. policies on admissions, special educational needs and behaviour, mission statements, etc. I explained that these documents might be used during a further stage of my research and anonymity was guaranteed. All of those invited to do so agreed willingly; a lot of this information is already in the public domain, for example via schools' websites. These documents were supplied immediately after the interview or within a few days. A rationale for the decision to engage in document analysis is provided in Chapter Nine, Section 9.2.

#### **6.7 Summary**

This chapter outlined the methodology of the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview which were employed as the data collection instruments in the initial stages of the research. Ethical considerations were also discussed in this

regard. Detailed descriptions of the instruments and their construction and testing through trial and pilot stages were provided. The data collected at the pilot stages were described and analysed following the detailed framework outlined in order to illustrate their usefulness and relevance to the research. Finally the administration of the full questionnaire and semi-structured interview was outlined. The following chapter presents the data from the questionnaire and their analysis.



## Chapter Seven

### Findings of the Questionnaire

#### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the initial stage of data collection, i.e. the questionnaire. It provides an overview of the rates of responses and a breakdown of the profile of the respondents. It then outlines the structure of the analysis that was conducted, which includes a rationale for the thematic structure chosen. This is followed by the layout of this thematic structure and a detailed summary of the responses received. Next the chapter provides an analysis of the data, concluding with a summary of the main themes emerging from the initial stage of data collection.

#### 7.2 Overview of Questionnaire Responses

This section provides a brief overview of the rate of responses received from the questionnaire, including a breakdown of the profile of the respondents. A detailed description of the sample is provided in Section 6.2, along with its underlying rationale.

From a sample of ninety-two a response rate of 51.65% was achieved (forty-seven returns). This includes the pilot questionnaire stage, from which there were eleven returns from a pilot sample of seventeen. Pilot questionnaire returns were included in the total as there were no changes made to the questionnaire following the pilot stage (See Section 6.3.5). Table 6 provides a breakdown of the final respondents, under the general headings of Principals, Teachers and Guidance Counsellors, showing the relevant figures for the primary and post-primary sectors.

|                        | PRINCIPALS |       | TEACHERS   |       | GUIDANCE COUNSELLORS |       | TOTALS<br>(n = 47) |
|------------------------|------------|-------|------------|-------|----------------------|-------|--------------------|
|                        | PILOT      | MAIN  | PILOT      | MAIN  | PILOT                | MAIN  |                    |
| PRIMARY RESPONSES      | 2          | 4     | 1          | 3     | N/A*                 |       | 10                 |
|                        | 6 = 12.8%  |       | 4 = 8.5%   |       |                      |       | (21.3%)            |
| POST-PRIMARY RESPONSES | 3          | 10    | 3          | 12    | 2                    | 7     | 37                 |
|                        | 13 = 27.7% |       | 15 = 31.9% |       | 9 = 19.2%            |       | (78.8%)            |
| TOTAL RESPONSES        | 5          | 14    | 4          | 15    | 2                    | 7     | 47                 |
| TOTAL %                | 10.6%      | 29.8% | 8.5%       | 31.9% | 4.3%                 | 14.9% | (100%)             |
| OF RESPONSES           | 40.4%      |       | 40.4%      |       | 19.2%                |       |                    |

\*This position does not exist in primary schools.

**Table 6 Summary of Questionnaire Respondents**  
(Percentages are rounded off to one decimal place)

Of the forty-seven respondents, the overall gender divide is 47% male and 53% female approximately. Table 7 provides a breakdown of the gender divide among the respondents across principals, teachers and guidance counsellors. Statistics are displayed for each sector (see Chapter Six, Section 6.2.2).

|  | PRINCIPALS |      |        |      | TEACHERS |      |        |      | GUIDANCE COUNSELLORS |      |        |      | TOTAL<br>(n = 47) |
|--|------------|------|--------|------|----------|------|--------|------|----------------------|------|--------|------|-------------------|
|  | MALE       |      | FEMALE |      | MALE     |      | FEMALE |      | MALE                 |      | FEMALE |      |                   |
|  | Pilot      | Main | Pilot  | Main | Pilot    | Main | Pilot  | Main | Pilot                | Main | Pilot  | Main |                   |
| PRIMARY                                      | 1          | 2    | 1      | 2    | 0        | 1    | 1      | 2    | N/A*                 |      |        |      | 10                |
|  | 6.4%       |      | 6.4%   |      | 2.1%     |      | 6.4%   |      |                      |      |        |      | (21.3%)           |
| POST-<br>PRIMARY<br>(Voluntary<br>Secondary) | 1          | 4    | 0      | 1    | 1        | 2    | 0      | 4    | 0                    | 0    | 0      | 5    | 18                |
|  | 10.6%      |      | 2.1%   |      | 6.4%     |      | 8.5%   |      | 0%                   |      | 10.6%  |      | (38.3%)           |
| POST-<br>PRIMARY<br>(VEC)                    | 0          | 4    | 0      | 1    | 0        | 0    | 1      | 4    | 1                    | 0    | 1      | 1    | 13                |
|  | 8.5%       |      | 2.1%   |      | 0%       |      | 10.6%  |      | 2.1%                 |      | 4.3%   |      | (27.7%)           |
| POST-<br>PRIMARY<br>(C & C)                  | 1          | 1    | 0      | 0    | 1        | 1    | 0      | 1    | 0                    | 1    | 0      | 0    | 6                 |
|  | 4.3%       |      | 0%     |      | 4.3%     |      | 2.1%   |      | 2.1%                 |      | 0%     |      | (12.8%)           |
| TOTAL  | 3          | 11   | 1      | 4    | 2        | 4    | 2      | 12   | 1                    |      | 1      | 6    | 47                |
|  | 29.8%      |      | 10.6%  |      | 12.8%    |      | 27.6%  |      | 4.2%                 |      | 14.9%  |      | (100%)            |

\*This position does not exist in primary schools.

**Table 7 Summary of Respondents by Gender and Sector**

(Percentages are rounded off to one decimal place)

A full outline of all respondents in relation to each variable is provided in Appendix XVI.



## 7.3 Structure and Rationale of the Analysis

### 7.3.1 Structure

A coding system was devised to identify respondents at all stages of data collection.

This is represented in Figure 7.1 below:

| Code | Description  |
|------|--|
| VS*  | Voluntary Secondary School   |
| VE   | Vocational Education Committee School (VEC)  |
| CC   | Community or Comprehensive School  |
| P*   | Primary School   |
| L    | Large School Post-Primary: >500 Students<br>Large School Primary: Administrative Principal |
| S    | Small School Post-Primary: <500 Students<br>Small School Primary: Teaching Principal       |
| M    | Single Gender (Male) Student Population  |
| F    | Single Gender (Female) Student Population  |
| C    | Co-Educational Student Population  |
| P    | Principal Teacher  |
| T    | Special Education Teacher  |
| G    | Guidance Counsellor  |
| U    | Urban Geographical Area**  |
| R    | Rural Geographical Area**  |
| A    | First school of this type  |
| B    | Second school of this type   |

Figure 7.1 Coding System used to Identify Respondents

\*During the collation of the data on a spreadsheet, the following codes were changed to facilitate their manipulation:

| <u>Existing Code</u> | <u>New Code</u> | <u>Description</u>         |
|----------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|
| P                    | X               | Primary School             |
| VS                   | V               | Voluntary Secondary School |

\*\*See Chapter Six, Section 6.2.2.

An example of a code representing a respondent follows,

VS-M-U-L-P-A:

Voluntary Secondary School – Male – Urban – Large – Principal – A (First School of this Type).

On receipt of completed questionnaires, the data were transferred onto a spreadsheet under the following headings:

- Respondent Description
- School Description
- Details of Policy
- Awareness of Policy
- Importance of Policy
- Current Responses
- Definition of Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties
- What Influences Teachers.

These are described in the following paragraphs.

### Respondent Description

This section identifies the respondent as male or female. It indicates how s/he identifies her/his position held, i.e. administrative principal, teaching principal, learning support teacher, resource teacher or guidance counsellor. It indicates how long that position has been held and how long the respondent has been in the teaching profession overall. Finally it indicates whether or not the respondent agreed to be interviewed.

## **School Description**

Data about the respondent's school are summarised here. This includes the number of students, teachers and special needs assistants (quantified under male and female for each category). It also includes any other staff particular to this school, e.g., support/project workers, counsellors, etc and any DES initiatives from which the school benefits, e.g., School Completion Programme, Home School Community Liaison, DEIS, etc.

## **Details of Policy**

This section indicates whether the respondent's school has a written policy on behaviour or not. It provides an indication of when the policy was written and by whom. It also allows the respondent to indicate how widely available s/he believes the policy to be.

## **Awareness of Policy**

This indicates how aware the respondent believes different stakeholders are of the policy. The stakeholders are identified as:

- Board of Management
- School Management
- Teachers
- Special Needs Assistants
- Students
- Parents.

A six point rating scale is provided, ranging from "Not at all aware" to "Very aware". Responses are grouped under three broad categories, which is consistent with the rationale for employing rating scales as outlined in Chapter Six, Section 6.3.1.2 :

|        |        |
|--------|--------|
| Low    | 1 – 2  |
| Medium | 3 – 4  |
| High   | 5 – 6. |



### **Importance of Policy**

Here, the respondent is asked to offer an opinion as to how important s/he thinks the behaviour policy is in the day to day running of the school. Again, a six point rating scale is employed in a similar fashion as before, indicating a range from "Not at all important" to "Very important".

### **Current Responses**

In this section the respondent is given a list of eleven possible responses to behavioural issues in a school setting and is asked to indicate those that are relevant to her/his school. The opportunity is provided to include any other initiative not mentioned on the list. These are summarised in this section.

### **Definition of Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties**

Here the respondent is asked to state what s/he understands by the term 'emotional and behavioural difficulties' and this is summarised in this section.

### **What Influences Teachers**

Finally, employing a rating scale as before, the respondent is asked the extent to which s/he thinks teachers working in the school are influenced by a list of factors regarding the management of behaviour, namely:

- Attitudes of Board of Management
- Attitudes of Teachers
- Attitudes of Special Needs Assistants
- Attitudes of School Management
- Class Group Organisation
- Gender of Students
- Gender of Teachers
- Knowledge of Students' Emotional Needs
- Knowledge of Students' Learning Needs
- Appropriateness of the Curriculum
- Teaching Methodologies Used
- Size of the Class
- Size of the School Population
- Students' Home Environment.

These raw data were then summarised under seven broad sets of variables, representing the following categories of respondents: school size, sector, location, population, position held, gender of respondent and school type. These sets of variables are:

- Small Schools - Large Schools
- Primary Schools- Post-Primary Schools
- Urban Schools- Rural Schools
- Single Gender (Male) – Single Gender (Female) - Co-Educational
- Principals – Learning Support/Resource Teachers - Guidance Counsellors
- Male Respondents - Female Respondents
- Primary Schools- Voluntary Secondary Schools– Vocational Educational Committee Schools– Community & Comprehensive Schools.

Table 8 provides a breakdown of the number of respondents for each variable in each of the sets of variables named above. The parameters used to differentiate between small and large schools, and between urban and rural areas, are provided in Chapter Six, Section 6.2.2.

| Variables                                | Number (n = 47) | % of Total |
|--|-----------------|------------|
| Small Schools                            | 21              | 44.7%      |
| Large Schools                            | 26              | 55.3%      |
| Primary Schools                          | 10              | 21.3%      |
| Post-Primary Schools                     | 37              | 78.7%      |
| Urban Schools                            | 31              | 66%        |
| Rural Schools                            | 16              | 34%        |
| Single Gender (Male)                     | 7               | 14.9%      |
| Single Gender (Female)                   | 12              | 25.5%      |
| Co-Educational                           | 28              | 59.6%      |
| Principals                               | 19              | 40.4%      |
| Learning Support/Resource Teachers       | 19              | 40.4%      |
| Guidance Counsellors                     | 9               | 19.2%?     |
| Male Respondents                         | 22              | 46.8%      |
| Female Respondents                       | 25              | 53.2%      |
| Primary Schools                          | 10              | 21.3%      |
| Voluntary Secondary Schools              | 18              | 38.3%      |
| Vocational Educational Committee Schools | 13              | 27.6%      |
| Community & Comprehensive Schools        | 6               | 12.8%      |

**Table 8** Numbers of Respondents by Variable

(Percentages are rounded off to one decimal place)

### 7.3.2 Rationale

The rationale underlying the choice of the seven sets of variables is, for the most part, self-explanatory. Male and female respondents might be expected to present somewhat differing points of view in relation to emotional and behavioural difficulties. Chapter Three (Section 3.4.1) and Chapter Four (Section 4.4.1) indicate a lack of coverage of gender-related issues in the literature on EBD. Similarly,



primary schools and post-primary schools are organised differently and deal with different age groups; therefore differences might be expected. This is an area that receives little attention, as discussed in the literature reviews (Chapter Three, Section 3.4.3; Chapter Four, Section 4.4.3). The different positions and responsibilities held by respondents suggest they might be expected to have different perspectives, hence the need to differentiate between principals, teachers and guidance counsellors. Single gender and co-educational schools might yield interesting data in the context of the high proportion of single gender schools in Ireland (see Chapter Two, Section 2.3.2) and the lack of coverage of this issue highlighted in the literature review (Chapter Four, Section 4.4.1).

The final three sets of variables require further justification. The Irish education system at post-primary level has always been and remains very fragmented (see Chapter Two, Section 2.3.2). This has led to very different perceptions both in the various sectors and in society at large regarding the nature of the ethos or culture prevailing in the schools and, indeed, the expectations for students in the schools. This issue is addressed in Chapter Four (Section 4.4.2). Therefore it is appropriate to investigate the possibility of differences between the various types of schools in the system. As outlined in Chapter Two, Section 2.3.2, many of Ireland's schools are small in size, particularly at in the primary sector. Therefore it is pertinent to examine small and large schools.

Finally, an urban area in Ireland is defined as "cities and towns including suburbs of 1,500 or more inhabitants", (UN, 2002, pp. 104-133). However larger urban areas do exist, e.g. the greater Dublin area has a population of 1.27 million (Ireland, 2012) and schools can be found in very rural areas (see Chapter Two, Section 2.3.2 for discussion of this issue). Therefore it is considered worthwhile to include these parameters in the research. The next section summarises the data collated under the sets of variables described above.

## 7.4 Summary of the Responses

The following sections provide summaries of the responses for each of the sets of variables outlined in the previous section. Whilst it is necessary to interrogate the data and begin to construct meaning from what they indicate, I am conscious of the limitations of this exercise. This research is qualitative and based on a social constructivist theoretical framework. The sample is small and purposive and cannot be used to generalise to the population at large. Therefore it is important to remember this when considering the summaries of the data presented here. References to numbers of respondents, numerical comparisons and contrasts made between variables, etc, are indicative only and must be treated with caution.

### 7.4.1 Small Schools – Large Schools

There is substantial consistency across responses from all the schools, large and small, with regard to the existence of a behaviour policy. Of forty-seven respondents, forty-four report having a written policy in place, with the remaining three reporting an unwritten policy to exist (two small schools and one large school). A reference to an unwritten policy refers to there being no one document in the school in which its policy on behaviour is outlined. Those where a written policy exists report that it is widely available, citing examples of copies in student journals, school websites, printed brochures and teachers' own copies.

When questioned regarding the age of the policy, a more diverse picture emerges. In small schools there exist three distinct groups, roughly equal in number, citing a policy that was written firstly within the past two years, secondly within three to five years ago and finally more than five years ago. Those in the latter group indicate that the policy has been reviewed since its formulation. No information was elicited on the nature or outcome of this review. In large schools twelve indicate their policy is older than five years, twelve more fall into the category of three to five years, with only four schools having written a behaviour policy within



the past two years. While this indicates that the majority of respondents state that written behaviour policies have existed in their schools for more than three years (approximately nineteen from three to five years ago and a similar number from five years ago) it is interesting that such a diverse profile exists across all the respondents, possibly suggesting a range of different perspectives being taken on this subject linked to the size of the school. Overall, respondents report that large schools tend to have formalised their policy in this area earlier than small schools.

Regarding the involvement of the various stakeholders in the writing of the policy, respondents from both small and large schools indicate that students and special needs assistants represent the most likely candidates to be excluded. The majority indicates that a high level of importance is given to the behaviour policy, with forty-three respondents in this category. The other four respondents indicate a medium level of importance, of which three were from large schools. Similarly, most respondents indicate a high level of awareness of the policy across most stakeholders. Parents and special needs assistants represent the most likely groups to be cited as having less awareness than others; this is common to both large and small schools.

Most respondents report a wide variety of responses to the management of behaviour. Removal from lessons is reported more often in large schools than in small ones. Permanent exclusion is reported by a minority of respondents from both small (five) and large (six) schools. The use of behaviour support classrooms in the post-primary sector is reported. This is a relatively new intervention in the Irish education system, following the establishment of the NBSS (see Chapter Four, Section 4.6). Staff training in this area is reported by fifteen respondents in large schools, less so in small schools. The idea of teachers depending on their own classroom management techniques is common across both small and large schools, but more so in the latter.



Where positive discipline programmes are reported, and this is widely the case across all respondents, there is little detail given despite the option of providing such detail. Overall there appears to exist a wide range of responses across all types of schools, both large and small. The reasons for this may be positive or negative. For example, it might indicate an appreciation of the complexities of the presenting difficulties and the need for flexibility in the schools' responses. Alternatively it might suggest a lack of focus at whole school level on providing an integrated response to those difficulties. This is discussed further in Chapter Ten, Section 10.4.

Regarding the issue of defining EBD there is a common trend across respondents from large and small schools to locate factors contributing to this within the individual student. Also, twice as many respondents from large schools than from small schools cite diagnosed conditions. However the overall figure across all respondents to do this is small. While small schools cite school environment as being important, many large schools mention home environment as being significant.

Analysis of the factors that influence teachers most when thinking about behavioural issues suggests that gender represents one of the least important factors in this regard, be it the gender of either students or teachers. This is the case across all sets of variables. Respondents from small schools generally agree that all other factors influence teachers highly, e.g. school ethos or culture, school and class size, etc. Respondents from large schools differentiate more between these factors, e.g. rating the attitudes of the Board of Management and school size as being only of medium importance in influencing teachers.

#### 7.4.2 Primary Schools – Post-Primary Schools

Responses suggest that respondents from primary and post-primary schools share a similar profile with regard to the existence, availability and age of their behaviour policies. Of forty-seven respondents all but three, post-primary in each case, indicate that written policies exist in their schools and are widely available. These three respondents report a high level of awareness and understanding of their schools' position regarding behaviour, along with a high level of importance being attributed to this position by stakeholders.

Most of the written policies were produced between three to five years before the time of the questionnaire and several of the respondents remark that the policy was updated recently; indeed some suggest this occurs annually. The majority report that most stakeholders were involved in writing the policy, with special needs assistants being the most likely not to have been included in this. Post-primary school respondents also report that students and parents are likely not to be consulted in the formulation of the behaviour policy.

All respondents tend to indicate that a high level of importance is attached to the behaviour policy. However a more diverse picture is provided when they are asked to comment on the level of awareness of the policy across the range of stakeholders. Two primary school respondents suggest that the level of awareness may be lower among parents, students and SNAs than among other stakeholders. The post-primary respondents display a more varied picture. Parents figure substantially in the medium categories of awareness, as does the Board of Management. SNAs are also reported with a medium level of awareness, but only in a few schools. Two respondents reveal interesting replies to this question. One indicates a low level of awareness among the Board of Management, students and parents. Another feels that the Board of Management and school management (i.e.



principal, deputy and assistant principals) represent the categories that are most aware while all others are less aware.

A wide variety of responses to behavioural issues is in evidence across primary and post-primary schools, according to the forty-seven respondents. All respondents report that teachers employ their own classroom techniques to deal with such issues. Indeed only one respondent (primary) out of the total number states that a whole school approach is taken. However, thirteen respondents mention some form of positive discipline programme being in existence in their schools. Few offer to provide further detail. These data may suggest that whilst such programmes may exist in schools, their profile in the school, the degree to which they are employed and/or their effectiveness may be open to question.

Removal from the situation is reported as being popular across both sectors. However this takes different forms. In primary schools it appears only to refer to removal from lessons. Removal from school does not appear to be an option in primary schools; only two respondents report temporary removal from school. In the post-primary sector, removal from lessons is reported as being widespread, accompanied by temporary removal from school (i.e. suspension) by a large number of respondents' schools. Permanent exclusion from school is not reported as an option at the primary level but is reported as such by eleven of the post-primary respondents. The other post-primary respondents do not include this in their choice of responses, therefore indicating it is not an option in their schools.

Responses by primary school respondents report significant investment in systems of rewards and sanctions and collaboration with parents. Only two report team teaching while six report counselling services for students. Rewards and sanctions are also popular choices for the post-primary respondents, as is the idea of staff



training. Finally the idea of behaviour support classrooms is mentioned by several post-primary respondents where their schools are involved with the NBSS.

When asked to define the concept of emotional and behavioural difficulties, one of the most interesting points to note is the prevalence of assessed conditions among certain sectors of respondents. Both principals and teachers among the primary respondents refer to such conditions a lot, as do post-primary teacher respondents. Post-primary principals and guidance counsellors refer very little to them. Gender is generally seen as having little influence on teachers' responses to behavioural issues. Primary respondents consider that a wide variety of factors influence teachers, suggesting a willingness to attempt different interventions depending on the circumstances. Amongst post-primary respondents different factors receive ratings from high to low across the three categories of post-primary respondents. This suggests the possibility of there being very different views of how to respond to emotional and behavioural difficulties across significant players in the post-primary sector.

#### **7.4.3 Urban Schools – Rural Schools**

The pattern of the level of involvement of stakeholders in devising the behaviour policy differs between respondents from urban and rural schools. More than half of respondents from urban schools report all stakeholders being involved in writing the policy. This is not the case among respondents from rural schools, where only two out of sixteen make this claim. Students are the most likely group not to be involved in this process in these schools. Respondents from urban schools report that, if any group is excluded, it is likely to be SNAs. A small group of respondents from urban schools indicate that management groups, i.e. the Board of Management and senior school management, were responsible for writing the policy.

Most respondents, be they from urban or rural schools, report a high level of awareness of the behaviour policy. However there are two interesting exceptions, one urban and one rural. One urban school respondent reports a low level of awareness of the policy among the Board of Management, students and parents. A rural school respondent reports an interesting spread of data here, with the awareness of management high, that of students, teachers and SNAs having a medium level of awareness and that of the parents being low. Whilst the reasons for these exceptions are unclear, they are in sharp contrast to the predominant view. All respondents, except for four from urban schools, report that a high level of importance is attributed to the behaviour policy. These four report a medium level of importance.

A wide range of responses to behavioural issues is reported across all respondents. However there appear to be significant differences between urban and rural schools' respondents in this regard. Twice as many respondents from urban as opposed to rural schools suggest their schools have a wide range of responses to behavioural issues (seven urban and three rural). 50% of respondents from rural schools report that staff training is a factor; this does not appear to be as significant among those from urban schools. However among these respondents collaboration with parents is much higher than among respondents from rural schools. More respondents from urban than from rural schools (only four of the latter) report having in place some form of positive discipline programme. Student counselling appears popular in both groups and behaviour support classrooms are also reported. Respondents from six urban schools and four rural schools report permanent exclusion as being an option in their schools.

Regarding the definition of EBD the main difference between respondents from urban and rural schools lies in their references to diagnosed conditions. In contrast to those from urban schools, only three respondents from rural schools cite examples of diagnosed conditions. Urban schools' respondents report a range of



possible factors, from grief to brain injury and they focus a good deal on a lack of social skills among students. Both groups of respondents dwell on factors that reside within the student. For both urban and rural schools' respondents the issue of gender does not seem to be considered significant, neither of teachers nor students. Among urban schools' respondents several factors are attributed medium to high levels of influence on teachers. This is not the case in respondents from rural schools where most factors are attributed a high level of influence.

#### **7.4.4 Single Gender (Male) - Single Gender (Female) - Co-Educational**

Overall the details of the behaviour policy are similar across respondents from single gender and co-educational schools. Most report policies varying in age from two-three years to twelve years old. Some review the policy regularly, others not as regularly. One respondent from a single gender male school and two from single gender female schools indicate their schools have unwritten understandings rather than formal written policies. SNAs and students are the most likely stakeholders not to be involved in writing the policy. However one co-educational school respondent states that teachers as well as SNAs were excluded. Most tend to indicate the policy is widely available.

Single gender female schools appear to have the highest level of awareness of the policy across most stakeholders. While single gender male and co-educational school respondents report high levels of awareness across stakeholders, more exceptions occur in these schools than in single gender female schools. Four single gender male school respondents report medium levels of awareness among students, parents and/or SNAs. A similar pattern appears in co-educational schools for parents and SNAs, accompanied by the Board of Management. The majority of respondents indicate a high level of importance is afforded the policy.



Removal from lessons and temporary removal from school are common across all three school types as typical responses to behavioural issues, along with counselling. Respondents from two single gender female schools (from twelve) and eight co-educational (from twenty-nine) cite permanent exclusion; no respondent from a single gender male schools reports this as an option. Respondents from those single gender male schools report that teachers' own techniques are important; this is not as obvious in the other school types. As already indicated very few respondents mention positive discipline programmes or structured programmes of any type. The exceptions to this are some single gender female schools and some co-educational schools.

When asked to define emotional and behavioural difficulties marked differences appear between co-educational schools on the one hand and single gender schools on the other. The respondents from the former type respond to this question in quite a negative tone overall. Several cite assessed conditions; this is not the case in the respondents from single gender schools. A wide variety of factors are considered to influence teachers in their responses to behavioural issues, regardless of school type. Teacher and student gender tends to receive a low rating across the majority of respondents, although some respondents from single gender male schools rate this in the medium category. Respondents from single gender female schools rate emotional and learning needs in the medium range.

#### **7.4.5 Principals – Teachers – Guidance Counsellors**

Most report written policies that have been produced relatively recently, within three to five years ago. Some principals report that policies are more recent than that, with one indicating its policy is older. Teachers and guidance counsellors report that some policies are updated regularly. Students are the most likely to be excluded from the process of formulating the policy, along with SNAs. Principals

report that teachers and management are most likely to have written the policy on behaviour.

The level of awareness of the behaviour policy is reported as relatively high and consistent across all three groups. Only slight variations occur, e.g. SNAs and parents are perceived as being slightly less aware than other stakeholders, albeit still being considered at a medium level of awareness in most cases. One post-primary teacher considers that students, parents and the Board of Management have a low level of awareness; this is outside the norm for all groups. One guidance counsellor feels the Board of Management and the school management are more aware than any other stakeholder. All three categories of respondents indicate the behaviour policy is afforded a high level of importance, apart from three respondents, two teachers and one guidance counsellor, all three of whom said it is considered to be of medium importance.

The most popular responses to behavioural issues are reported as being systems of rewards and sanctions, collaboration with parents and teachers' own techniques. This is consistent across principals and teachers. Guidance counsellors dwell on the provision of positive discipline programmes while some of these also mention behaviour support classrooms. The latter is also reported by respondents who are principals and teachers. Permanent exclusion is reported by six principals and four teachers, with only one guidance counsellor reporting this as an option. Both primary principals and teachers in general place considerable importance on the identification of assessed conditions when attempting to define emotional and behavioural difficulties. Few guidance counsellors do so.

Overall there is evidence of a wide variety of issues of which to be aware when thinking of EBD. All categories mention the emotional state, whether this is due to an inability to cope or to express feelings. Social skills are considered important by



teachers, as is home background. The latter is also mentioned by some principals and is linked to parenting skills. Gender, of students or teachers, is ranked consistently low across all categories when asked what influences teachers in responding to behavioural issues. The attitude of the Board of Management is also often rated as having little influence.

#### **7.4.6 Male Respondents – Female Respondents**

Both male and female respondents report the policy is considered to have high importance among stakeholders. SNAs are the most likely to be considered not to be highly aware of it. A wide variety of responses to behavioural issues is reported by male and female respondents. When asked to comment on what factors influence teachers most in their responses to behavioural issues in school, both male and female respondents rate the attitudes of the Board of Management as exercising little influence on them. Similarly gender, either of teachers or of students, is considered to exert little influence on their responses. All other factors are equally considered by both male and female respondents to exert medium to high influence. The attitudes of special needs assistants receive slightly higher rating from a number of female respondents than from male respondents overall.

There are significant differences between male and female respondents regarding the issue of defining the concept of emotional and behavioural difficulties. Female respondents are more likely to mention assessed conditions when explaining what they understand by this term. The language employed by each category is markedly different. Female respondents could be described as more empathetic while their male colleagues display more negative language (See examples in Section 7.5.2).



#### 7.4.7 Primary – Secondary – VEC – C & C

Respondents from different sectors reveal different profiles regarding the details of behaviour policies. Three respondents from post-primary voluntary secondary schools indicate that written policies do not exist in their schools. Also in this sector, the age of the written policies that exist varies widely, as is the case amongst respondents from primary schools. Half of the community and comprehensive schools' respondents (three out of six) indicate policies were written within the previous year, with the other three having policies over three years old. Several VEC schools' respondents report policies older than five years. These variations across the sample are consistent with the emergence of national guidelines for behaviour policies (NEWB, 2008) and suggest there was little sense of a systemic approach nationally until then. This suggests the development of policy in this area may have been influenced more by the imperative to comply with DES regulations rather than providing a framework of good practice in this area. All that have written policies indicate that they are widely available. SNAs are the most likely to have been excluded from being involved in writing the policy across all sectors, followed by students.

All sectors report a high level of awareness of the policy in general, with primary school respondents indicating the highest level of awareness, followed by the community and comprehensive schools' respondents. One post-primary voluntary secondary school respondent indicates a low to medium level of awareness among parents, students, SNAs and teachers. This is very much the exception. SNAs and parents represent the most likely candidates not to have high levels of awareness. Most respondents across all sectors report the behaviour policy is afforded a high level of importance. The only exceptions to this are two post-primary voluntary secondary school respondents and one primary school respondent.

Differences exist between sectors regarding the issue of permanent exclusion. Primary school respondents report this is not an option whereas eleven from the post-primary sector report the opposite; three voluntary secondary school respondents (of eighteen), three from the community and comprehensive sector (of six) and five from the VEC sector (of thirteen). Temporary exclusion and removal from lessons are reported across all sectors, including primary. Collaboration with parents and counselling is reported as being popular in the primary sector; while this is mentioned in the post-primary sector, it is interesting that it does not stand out from other responses in a sector where guidance counsellors are available.

Gender (student or teacher) and school size are rated low by a large number of respondents across all sectors. The attitude of the Board of Management is similarly rated low in the post-primary sector. In the primary sector, a wide range of factors receive high levels of importance in influencing teachers in their responses to behavioural issues. The VEC and community and comprehensive sectors appear somewhat similar. In the voluntary secondary sector, the influence of a wide range of factors varies considerably between medium and high.

## **7.5 Analysis of the Responses**

At the initial stage of data collection it is difficult to identify with certainty the issues emerging from the research. Therefore it is important to tread carefully in the initial analysis of the data with regard to what is perceived as significant. However the literature encourages the researcher to start analysing the data immediately in order to explore what they reveal (Cohen *et al*, 2011; Robson, 2011). This section provides an initial analysis of the responses in the context of the main research questions, which are outlined first. The analysis considers each of the research questions in so far as this is relevant, as certain aspects of the research questions cannot be addressed at this stage of the research. The main purposes of this analysis are as follows:



- to develop an understanding of how issues in the research questions are being thought about among the respondents as main players in responding to emotional and behavioural difficulties as these present in mainstream Irish schools
- to compare and contrast the views expressed across the different sets of variables identified in Section 7.4
- to identify commonalities and differences of opinion and responses to EBD that may exist across respondents in the contexts of their positions and their types of situations.

The main research questions are as follows:

- How is EBD currently understood in Irish mainstream schools in the context of national and international discourse?
- How does this relate to schools' policies on behaviour, in the context of national policy on SEN?
- How is EBD defined and what are the issues or factors that arise in defining EBD in mainstream schools?
- To what extent are these definitions influenced by
  - Gender of staff and/or students
  - School population (single gender/co-educational)
  - Sector (primary/post-primary)
  - Traditional ethos or culture of the school? (e. g. an academic focus).

### 7.5.1 Current Understandings of EBD and Schools' Policies

The majority of respondents state that written behaviour policies have been established in their schools for a number of years. Overall, however, large schools tend to have formalised their policy in this area earlier than small schools. This may suggest that the size of the school population is a determining factor in a school's response to behavioural issues, something which is not unreasonable in the light of the possible numbers involved and the possible perception of a more formalised response being required in order to manage those numbers. Similarly a larger school may also witness more incidents of behavioural issues, thereby encouraging a more proactive response in the form of a written policy being developed.



Regarding the involvement of the various stakeholders in the writing of the policy, the majority of schools across all sectors indicate a trend to include the views of the Board of Management, school management, teaching staff and parents in the development of the policy, whatever that involvement may be. This is consistent across all sets of variables. Across the majority of schools, students and special needs assistants represent the most likely candidates to be excluded, suggesting a tendency not to consider the views of the largest group of stakeholders, the students. This is an interesting situation considering the relatively recent development of written behaviour policies indicated by the respondents (e.g. twenty-five approx. within the past five years). This time span coincides with a period when a major school development planning initiative was rolled out across all schools in the education system (Ireland, 1999b and 2002b). One of its underlying tenets included the importance of collaboration in planning, including collaboration with students. It may be the case that such a collaborative climate does not extend beyond the teaching and learning situation to other aspects of school life, such as the development of policies in general, or perhaps just not in the development of behaviour policies in particular.

The possible exclusion of the opinion of special needs assistants from the development of a behaviour policy may coincide with the relatively recent appearance of this position in schools in the Irish education system (Logan, 2006), particularly in post-primary schools, and lack of clarity regarding their function and deployment in schools. However this scenario does not apply as much to the primary sector, special needs assistants having been present in primary schools for longer than in the post-primary sector. However there remain questions to be addressed in relation to their almost universal exclusion in the development of behaviour policies.

A slight deviation from the exclusion of SNAs in policy development in this area is found in urban schools, where over half of the respondents report all stakeholders

being involved in writing the policy, thus including special needs assistants. This is not the case among respondents from rural schools, where only two out of sixteen make this claim. Students are the most likely group not to be involved in this process in these schools. A small group of respondents from urban schools indicate that management groups, i.e. the Board of Management and senior school management, were responsible for writing the policy, to the exclusion of all other stakeholders.

All sectors report a high level of awareness of the policy, with primary school respondents reporting stakeholders being the most highly aware, followed by the respondents from the community and comprehensive schools. Single gender female schools appear to have the highest level of awareness of the policy across most stakeholders. Several single gender male school respondents report medium levels of awareness among students, parents and SNAs. A similar pattern appears in co-educational schools for parents and SNAs, accompanied by the Board of Management. Parents and special needs assistants represent the most likely groups to be cited as having less awareness than others; this is common to schools across all sectors.

Exceptions to this are two respondents whose responses display interesting data. One from a small, rural, VEC school indicates a high level of awareness among the Board of Management and the school management and only a medium level among all other groups, while that of parents is reported as being low. Another respondent from a large, urban school indicates a low level of awareness among the Board of Management, students and parents. Most respondents across all sectors report the behaviour policy is afforded a high level of importance. The only exceptions to this are two post-primary voluntary secondary school respondents and one primary school respondent.



### 7.5.2 Issues or Factors in Defining EBD in Schools

Several issues or factors are cited by all categories of respondents when asked to define EBD. The most frequently mentioned are those suggesting that emotional and behavioural difficulties occur because of characteristics emanating from within the individual student. A post-primary teacher describes:

Problems that present in a child due to a psychological condition, e.g. autism or ADHD and/or a traumatic experience in early to middle childhood, e.g. death of a parent, abuse incident. These difficulties are rarely managed using reasonable means and so require greater resources, e.g. SNA, resource teaching.

This focus on within-student characteristics is the case across urban and rural respondents. Examples include grief, trauma and poor social skills. Respondents refer to students' inability to express emotions or to cope appropriately with emotional issues. Male respondents are more inclined to refer to this. They also mention anger management. Another post-primary teacher describes:

Students who for reasons (i.e. early childhood difficulties, etc) have serious difficulty with emotional outburst and managing their own behaviour.

Another factor mentioned frequently is the existence of assessed conditions. This is the case particularly among respondents from urban schools. Both categories of primary school respondents (principals and teachers) and post-primary teachers tend to mention such conditions. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is one such condition cited often among respondents. Respondents from co-educational schools, overall, are less likely to do so.

While the overall profile of responses demonstrates that a wide range of causal factors is recognised across all categories of respondents, some differences do exist in the manner in which various categories of respondents report their understanding of EBD. This is particularly the case among male and female respondents. The language employed by female respondents could be described as more caring and empathetic than that used by their male counterparts. Female



respondents focus on emotional aspects more than behavioural issues. Issues or factors associated with the home background of students are frequently cited as relevant to the causality of emotional and behavioural difficulties. A female primary principal describes students who may be:

under stress from home problems which can lead to their being unable to cope in school, poor self-esteem, failure in class, poor relationships...

The language employed by male respondents when discussing EBD could be described as having a more negative tone, which could be suggestive of an emphasis on extreme conditions and/or a feeling that the situation cannot change. Male respondents focus on very different causal factors to their female colleagues; they place high importance on characteristics such as inability to express themselves, anger management, lack of social skills, etc. A male primary principal describes:

Persistent long-term problems generated due to previous trauma. Unlike typical students, this behaviour manifests itself in everyday or common situations, i.e. antisocial reaction to authority, peers, etc.

There is also a significant difference in emphasis between small and large schools with regard to where respondents from these schools locate causal factors for EBD. Small schools suggest that school environment as important in this regard; this is not the case in large schools, where many mention home environment as being significant. In common with female respondents overall, respondents from large schools display a trend towards focusing on the emotional state of the student and of behaviours expressing this emotional state. This may suggest an awareness of the complexities of EBD. One interesting example from these respondents is very negative on this question, apparently indicating little or no understanding of this issue:

Someone not content with their lot as a result of varying reasons.

Another respondent in this sample considers emotional issues and behavioural issues separately:

Emotional to me means the student's behaviour is sparked by some crisis in his/her life (family issues). Behavioural refers to the way the student misbehaves, the way they manifest their unease - bored in class, unable to catch up - leads to a lashing out in class.

Exceptions such as these appear across the data.

Overall the responses from the primary respondents reflect a seemingly sophisticated understanding of EBD, recognising a variety of influencing issues or factors. These include an awareness of the link between social development and learning. There are few exceptions to this; only one respondent makes a very general response to this question suggesting a lack of appreciation of the complexities of the issue. Among post-primary respondents, principals and teachers dwell on students' emotional state in their definitions of EBD, and home background is also mentioned often. Indeed issues or factors relating to the home figure significantly across all sectors as being significant in defining emotional and behavioural difficulties. While guidance counsellors also refer to students' emotional state, they also mention students' level of maturity in the skills required to deal sufficiently with the kinds of difficulties experienced. They rarely refer to assessed conditions, unlike their colleagues in other positions.

While the primary sector responses indicate quite a sophisticated awareness of a range of causal factors, the VEC sector responses are in sharp contrast to this, with quite negative language displayed across the responses in this sector and a tendency to describe quite extreme behaviours. Some voluntary secondary school respondents (four in all) make similar remarks. The community and comprehensive school respondents tend to link the definition of EBD to issues or factors emanating from outside the school, e.g. home, family or to those emanating from within the student.



The differences between co-educational school respondents and those from single gender schools are also quite marked. In the co-educational school respondents, the focus is on the extreme end of the behavioural spectrum, e.g. psychiatric conditions, being out of control, inability to control behaviour. Within student conditions are mentioned a lot. Respondents from single gender schools appear more inclined to talk about the emotional state and behaviour communicating emotional needs. Those from single gender female schools talk about social interaction and being able to get on with people in school. While only one of these respondents mentioned the home environment as being important, their colleagues in single gender male schools dwell more on the home environment as being of importance.

### **7.5.3 Emotional Needs and Behavioural Difficulties**

Nuances can be observed in the data provided by the respondents regarding their understanding of the relationship between emotional needs and behavioural difficulties. These are evident predominantly in their responses when asked to define EBD. In respondents from large schools there is a trend towards dwelling on the emotional state of the student and of behaviours expressing this emotional state. This may indicate a sophisticated engagement with or understanding of EBD. Those from small schools do not suggest such a trend. Indeed, one respondent from a small school, quoted in the previous section, demonstrates quite a negative response when asked to define EBD, suggesting little or no understanding of this issue:

Someone not content with their lot as a result of varying reasons.

While another respondent from a small school, also quoted above, completely separates emotional needs from behavioural issues, again suggesting little understanding of the overall issue:



Emotional to me means the student's behaviour is sparked by some crisis in his/her life (family issues). Behavioural refers to the way the student misbehaves, the way they manifest their unease - bored in class, unable to catch up – leads to a lashing out in class.

The emotional state and the idea of not being able to deal with emotions are mentioned by respondents across the urban/rural divide, being given more importance in those from urban schools. Respondents from rural schools rate this equally with other factors. Female respondents focus more on emotional issues in their definitions of EBD than on behavioural issues, in contrast to their male counterparts. When male respondents do mention emotional issues they tend to dwell on extreme emotions such as anger, in the context of anger management. Respondents from single gender schools also appear to dwell more on the emotional state when defining EBD. They make a link between behaviour acting as a means of communication regarding emotional needs. Guidance counsellors also refer to the emotional state of their students, linking this to the students' level of maturity in the skills required to deal sufficiently with the difficulties encountered.

#### **7.5.4 Influences on the Issues or Factors that Define EBD in Schools**

Regarding what influences teachers in their consideration of behavioural issues there is a common trend across all respondents, regardless of category, that gender is of little relevance, either that of students or of teachers. Respondents from small schools generally agree that all other factors influence teachers highly. Respondents from large schools, however, display a more differentiated profile across influencing issues or factors. For example, the attitudes of the Board of Management and school size are rated only of medium importance as influencing teachers. Overall for these respondents, there exists a wider spread of degree of importance of influencing factors than for respondents from small schools. This may demonstrate more of an appreciation of the complexity of issues that may be manifested in larger schools. Or indeed it may be indicative of the difficulty of

addressing issues on a more individual level than would be the case in smaller schools.

When asked about what influences teachers when thinking about behaviour, respondents in rural schools attribute a high level of influence to most factors. Respondents from urban schools appear to consider that factors have different levels of influence. This suggests that in rural schools size, focus and attitudes, along with the organisation in schools and the programmes on offer are all considered to contribute to influencing teachers in how they respond to behavioural issues. The level of influence attributed to such factors in urban schools, where most schools are larger, is much broader. While this may be accounted for by the fact that larger schools may have more possibilities available to them to experiment with a variety of interventions, it could equally suggest either a certain level of complexity in thinking or, perhaps, confusion about these issues in these schools.

The attitude of the Board of Management is one which also appears to exercise little influence on teachers, according to the various categories of respondents. Primary respondents demonstrate a more consistent profile when attributing influence to various factors on teachers, considering that a wide variety influence teachers. Post-primary respondents do not display the same level of consistency. Different factors receive ratings from high to low across the three categories of respondents. The attitudes of special needs assistants receive a slightly higher rating from a number of female respondents than from male respondents overall.

Respondents from the voluntary secondary sector display a slightly different pattern than those from other post-primary sectors and the primary sector. In the voluntary secondary sector, the influence of a wide range of factors varies considerably between medium and high. This could be indicative of either of two



things, i.e. that all these factors are of relevance or that respondents cannot distinguish between them, perhaps suggesting that they have never really thought about these issues. Respondents from single gender female schools rate emotional and learning needs as medium; a higher rating would be expected here in the light of how these respondents define EBD. However, one possible explanation of this may be that the latter represents a personal definition from each female respondent, whereas the former relates to how these respondents feel their colleagues (both male and female) perceive these issues.

#### **7.5.5 Impact on Addressing the Needs of Students**

Whilst a wide range of responses to behavioural issues is reported across respondents from all schools there appear to be some differences between urban and rural schools with regard to the range of responses to behavioural issues. In these urban schools collaboration with parents is reported as being much higher than it is in rural schools, perhaps for the obvious reason of people living closer to the school and therefore more available to visit it. More urban than rural schools (in fact only four of the latter, which is very low) report having in place some form of positive discipline programme. Staff training and student counselling appear popular among both sectors. Behaviour support classrooms are also reported.

There is little detail given about the positive discipline programmes in place, despite the option of providing such detail. It may be that it is either a response devised by the school itself or, indeed, that the respondents are unsure about the programme or some aspects of it. To what extent such programmes involve a whole school approach is also a question that warrants consideration. In this regard it may indicate an assumption of or a presumed level of knowledge about structured programmes existing in schools where this may not necessarily be the case. Indeed the fact that all respondents report that teachers employ their own techniques to



deal with such issues might suggest that this is more widespread or more important than whole school approaches.

A striking feature is the variety of responses mentioned. These include removal from lessons (particularly in the post-primary sector), whole school approaches, SNA allocation, temporary and permanent exclusion and mentoring. Most of these responses are cited in only one or two cases, indicating quite a variety of responses across the education system as a whole with no one response being dominant. The overall profile of a wide range of responses across all types of schools may be indicative of several factors. These may include, for example, insufficient planning, a lack of focus at whole school level or a lack of appreciation of the complexity of the problems being encountered. Alternatively it may be indicative of an appreciation of the need to respond on an individual, case by case basis.

Removal from the situation is popular across all sectors. In the primary sector this appears only to refer to removal from lessons. As no other information was sought, it is not known how this is managed. From the responses provided, removal from school does not appear to be an option in primary schools; only two respondents report temporary removal from school. Removal from lessons is reported as being widespread in the post-primary sector, accompanied by temporary removal from school (i.e. suspension) by a large number of respondents' schools. Again no further information was elicited so there is no information regarding the length of absence from school. Six post-primary principals report that permanent exclusion is an option in their school. Four post-primary teachers report the same while one guidance counsellor reports this is an option in their school. The other post-primary respondents do not include this in their choice of responses, therefore suggesting it is not an option in their schools.

Whilst collaboration with parents and counselling are reported as being popular in the primary sector, it is interesting that while this is mentioned in the post-primary sector, it does not stand out from other responses in a sector where guidance counsellors are available. Given that they are not present in the primary sector, it is not unreasonable to expect their presence in the post-primary sector would precipitate a greater impact than this. The most popular responses to behavioural issues are reported as being systems of rewards and sanctions, collaboration with parents and teachers' own techniques. This is consistent across principals and teachers in all sectors. Guidance counsellors dwell on the provision of positive discipline programmes while some of these also mention behaviour support classrooms. The latter is also reported by principals and teachers from these schools as they are involved in NBSS initiatives.

The responses from the voluntary secondary school sector reflect interventions that appear to react to situations; few mention positive, proactive-type responses. This is in contrast to the primary sector where counselling, social skills and positive discipline programmes are all cited. The VEC and community and comprehensive sectors cite a wide range of responses. Respondents from single gender male schools report that teachers' own techniques are important; this is not as obvious in the other school types. Very few respondents mention positive discipline programmes or structured programmes of any type. The only exceptions to this are some single gender female schools and some co-educational schools.

## **7.6 Emerging Themes**

Here I summarise briefly four main themes emerging thus far from the analysis of the questionnaire data, with a level of caution commensurate with an initial stage of data collection.



**1. The prevalence of written policies across the range of respondents and the high level of uniformity in relation to the profile of stakeholders who contributed to developing them**

With only three respondents reporting that unwritten understandings exist in this aspect of school life, there is a high level of consistency across all sectors of written policies being in existence and, equally importantly, that being the case for a number of years.

The expected ramifications of this situation are twofold. Firstly, given the length of time these policies have been in existence, it could be expected that this situation would have generated quite complex policies around behaviour. The initial stage of data collection does not investigate the actual policies in place so there is currently no evidence of how detailed they are. However, Chapter Nine provides an analysis of two behaviour policies, one each from the primary and post-primary sectors, which goes some way towards addressing this issue. Secondly, it is not illogical to expect that quite a sophisticated or complex understanding around the issue of behaviour should be in existence and there are three reasons for this: respondents report their policies have been in place for relatively long periods (several over three – five years); the behaviour policy having a high level of importance in their schools is reported consistently across respondents; a high level of awareness is also reported across most stakeholders.

However it could be equally argued that little consideration has been given to either the complexity of the behaviour policy or to the level of understanding of the issue of behaviour since the establishment of such policies on a formal footing. Indeed, since the School Development Planning Initiative (Ireland, 2002b), many schools have found themselves required to address, in a short space of time, a dearth of policy in a wide number of areas and might have focused on concentrating all their efforts on catching up with the initial work of producing



policies and putting them in place, rather than reviewing, maintaining and developing them as “living” documents.

The high level of consistency across all respondents regarding the range of stakeholders involved in the development of the policy represents an interesting phenomenon. Indeed more interesting is the identification of students and special needs assistants as being most likely to be excluded from the process. The former represents the group to whom the behaviour policy will have most relevance. Research suggests the inclusion of the students’ voice in matters that directly affect them, particularly issues around behaviour, promotes inclusive practices and may increase the level of success of interventions in this regard (see, for example, Davies, 1996 and 2006; Prunty, Dupont and Mc Daid, 2012).

Special needs assistants represent the group which may include people who have been directly employed because of behavioural issues being a reality for certain students (Lawlor and Cregan, 2003; Logan, 2006). Their day to day involvement with students presenting with EBD identifies them as being directly involved with the roll out of the behaviour policy in the school. These issues raise several questions. What does the exclusion of these groups mean? Is this incidental or deliberate? What does this suggest about what has developed as behaviour policy in schools? To what extent is this consistent with what would be considered best practice in policy development as put forward by the School Development Planning initiative (Ireland, 2002b) or the guidelines on developing a behaviour policy by the NEWB (2008)?

The low level of influence of boards of management on teachers’ responses to behaviour is a theme running across several responses. It is interesting that the body with ultimate responsibility for running the school, and for the welfare of all

those in it, does not appear to be a significant player in one of the key aspects of school life, at least in the minds of the respondents.

## **2. The differences to be found across different types of respondents and from respondents from different types of schools**

A commonality across most respondents is that there exists a large variety of factors at play regarding the issue of EBD. Also differences are present depending on the category of respondent. Guidance counsellors, for example, appear to be more conscious of the issue of students' level of maturity than do their colleagues in the post-primary sector. As they work in post-primary schools only, this point does not apply to their primary colleagues. It is interesting that adolescents' level of maturity is not more evident as an issue across all post-primary respondents. Respondents from large urban schools, for example, stand out somewhat from their colleagues in other post-primary schools. They report their schools tend to have formalized written policies earlier, focus more on the home environment than the school environment and emphasise the student's emotional state more than behavioural issues.

Some differences are suggested overall between respondents from urban and rural schools, as outlined in Section 7.4.3. Related to this is the large variety of responses to behaviour reported across all respondents. These are re-active responses for the most part, i.e. interventions put in place to respond to behavioural issues as opposed to pro-active planning to support students presenting with EBD before difficulties emerge. Respondents from co-educational schools appear to dwell on different aspects of behaviour than do their colleagues in single gender schools, particularly when discussing the manifestation of behaviours in schools, concentrating more on the extreme end of the behavioural spectrum.



### **3. The definition of EBD**

Interesting points emerge regarding how respondents define EBD. There is a high level of consistency across all respondents of focusing on factors emanating from within the individual when asked to define emotional and behavioural difficulties. This appears to be the case regardless of gender of respondent, school type, location, etc. Conversely, there is an absence of consideration of environmental factors, i.e. those that are extraneous to the individual, when an attempt is made to define EBD. When such factors are mentioned they tend to refer only to home or community-based issues. The issue of the environment created by the school itself is a factor that rarely receives mention.

### **4. The gender perspective**

This raises three interesting aspects. The first of these refers to the differences identified between respondents from single gender male and female schools on the one hand, and co-educational schools on the other. The former tend to display a wider range of responses regarding the factors that influence teachers when thinking about behavioural issues than do those from co-educational schools. Secondly, differences emerge between male and female respondents. The language used by male and female respondents may, reflect differences in how they think about these issues, e.g. female respondents' tend to focus more on the emotional state of students. Thirdly there exists a high level of consistency across respondents that gender, either of staff or students, is of little relevance when issues relating to behaviour are considered in schools. This is interesting in an education system dominated by single gender schools at both primary and post-primary levels.



## 7.7 Summary

This chapter outlined in detail the first stage of data collection. It described the research instrument employed, i.e. the questionnaire, and its development. The framework for the analysis of the data collected was described and justified. This was followed by an in-depth analysis of the data, juxtaposing different sets of variables considered to provide interesting and pertinent contexts for such an analysis. Finally the initial themes emerging from the analysis were outlined. These are explored further in the interview stage of data collection. This represents the focus of the following chapter.

## Chapter Eight

### Findings of the Semi-Structured Interviews

#### 8.1 Introduction

The second stage of data collection consists of a semi-structured interview with thirteen respondents who had agreed to be interviewed following the questionnaire. The methodology of the selection of the sample for the interview and an outline of the structure of the interviews are provided in this chapter. This chapter also provides an analysis of the main findings. The interviews, which were of forty minutes duration on average, were conducted in the interviewees' schools, due to this venue's convenience and familiarity for them.

The questions posed during the semi-structured interviews were formulated on the basis of the recurring themes that arose from the analysis of the data gathered in the questionnaire (Chapter Seven, Sections 7.5 and 7.6). These themes were considered against a background of the aims and the specific research questions (Chapter One, Section 1.3), the intention of which was to verify their direct relevance to those aims and research questions and thereby to justify them further as being integral to the overall focus of investigation in the research. The construction of the interview schedule was cognisant of these emerging themes and this construction is outlined in Chapter Six, Section 6.6.1.

#### 8.2 Structure and Rationale of the Analysis

A process of thematic analysis is undertaken on the data from the semi-structured interviews. This approach is employed as it supports the research aims and the specific research questions and is consistent with the interpretative nature of the overall enquiry, rooted as it is in the experiences of practitioners in schools. Thematic analysis is consistent with a social constructivist framework which forms

the basis of the overall theoretical framework within which this research is embedded. Chapter Five, Section 5.2.2 outlines this framework in detail.

From a theoretical perspective, one benefit of thematic analysis is its flexibility (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This is important as the specific research questions include that of achieving an understanding of the way in which practitioners in schools interpret the realities within which they operate; the reality of understanding emotional and behavioural difficulties as presenting conditions in their students, the reality of implementing their schools' behaviour policies, the reality of their pastoral responsibilities towards their students and the reality of national and international responses and guidance on providing for these students. Therefore the flexibility inherent in the process of thematic analysis permits the researcher to identify themes as they emerge from the data rather than pre-impose themes on the data. This process is central to the analysis of the data from the questionnaire, from which analysis four emergent themes formed the basis of the interview questions in order to allow further investigation in these areas. These emergent themes, outlined in Chapter Seven, Section 7.6, are as follows:

- The prevalence of written policies across the range of respondents and the high level of uniformity in relation to the profile of stakeholders who contributed to developing them.
- The differences to be found across different types of respondents and from respondents from different types of schools.
- The definition of EBD.
- The gender perspective.

To initiate this thematic analysis the transcripts were read through twice in order to become familiar with the data. They were also checked against the recordings of the interviews to verify accuracy. Braun and Clarke (2006) advise undertaking these steps as they inform the early stages of analysis. A staged process of analysis ensued, identifying "concepts, themes, events and topical markers" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p.207). When these initial stages were completed the process of coding was



undertaken. In order to provide a structural framework for the coding (Rubin & Rubin, 2005), four general headings were used to classify all the codes, each covering between two to four questions, namely

- Formulation of the policy
- Content of the policy
- Application of the policy
- Definition of EBD.

Appendix XVII outlines the codes that were attributed to the data.

The final stage of the coding process involved re-ordering the coded data into categories that were relevant to the specific research questions central to the overall research. At this stage certain codes were subsumed into others, while others were discarded as not being relevant. The rationale that informed this level of analysis was based on examining the questions asked, looking at frequently mentioned concepts and themes, making comparisons between interview responses and identifying new ideas emerging from the responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Gubrium & Holstein, 2001). This approach is consistent with the interpretative paradigm within which the analysis was undertaken. These final categories, of which there are five, are identified and discussed in the following section. Appendix XVIII outlines the codes included in these categories.

### **8.3 Analysis of the Responses**

The coding process culminated in the identification of five general issues that are of relevance to the specific research questions (Chapter One, Section 1.3). The following category headings are used in the analysis that follows:

- Issues relating to the level of knowledge regarding special educational needs and EBD
- Issues relating to influences from outside the school
- The individual student as the central focus
- Gender issues

- Issues relating to the development of policy.

Figure 8.1 outlines the links between the specific research questions and the five categories listed above.

| Specific Research Questions   | Category Heading for Analysis of Interview Data |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|   | 1   | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| How is EBD currently understood in Irish mainstream schools in the context of national and international discourse?   | √   |   | √ |   | √ |
| How does this relate to schools' policies on behaviour, in the context of national policy on SEN?   | √   | √ | √ |   | √ |
| How is EBD defined and what are the issues or factors that arise in defining EBD in mainstream schools?   |   | √ |   | √ |   |
| To what extent are these definitions influenced by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gender of staff and/or students</li> <li>• School population (single gender/co-educational)</li> <li>• Sector (primary/post-primary)</li> <li>• Traditional ethos or culture of the school? (e. g. an academic focus)?</li> </ul> |   |   |   | √ | √ |

**Figure 8.1 Relationship between the Specific Research Questions and the Category Headings used in the Analysis of the Interview Data**

### 8.3.1 Issues relating to the Level of Knowledge regarding SEN and EBD

An issue which presents across a range of interviewees' responses relates to how informed they appear to be in relation to special educational needs (SEN). This manifests itself in a number of ways across the interviewees, namely in:

- a lack of sophistication in their conceptualization of SEN
- querying the inclusion of EBD in the overall category of SEN

- seeing students presenting with SEN as a homogeneous group
- how they define EBD.

When questioned specifically about school responses to students' needs a number of interviewees' responses display a lack of sophistication in their conceptualization of special educational needs. One teacher interviewee, when asked how the school's behaviour policy fits with current understandings of SEN, makes the following generalisations:

I think it fits very well, I think the whole thing of the rewards system for good behaviour works extremely well because these students can be rewarded for just being kind to another student and *obviously students with special educational needs are nearly by nature, very kind*. So they can get that, they can receive positive rewards like that. *They also tend to have excellent attendance in school here and again, to be called out for your attendance and to be rewarded for your attendance is also very positive for them as well, and encourages further attendance.*

(My italics)

Another interviewee, a guidance counsellor, when asked whether or not the emotional state of the students was taken into account when the behaviour policy was devised, replied:

I don't think they were looking at the emotional needs as such. I think it was more the staff needs as it were, that was the guiding principle.

Another guidance counsellor, when asked about understanding of the diversity of SEN, whilst demonstrating a level of knowledge regarding co-morbidity with other difficulties, appears to question the inclusion of EBD as a category of SEN:

.....I would kind of question that people's perception of special educational needs, like, you talk about emotional behavioural difficulties, *they don't necessarily have emotional/behavioural difficulties, they have specific educational needs. You might have a literacy difficulty; you might have Dyslexia, Asperger's, whatever the case may be. But it doesn't necessarily label them as having*



*emotional/behavioural difficulties.* But it's their coping mechanisms. But what we have in the system here in the school is that we have a resource, we do operate team teaching. We have mixed ability teaching (sic). Equally we have streaming to a degree in the Irish and the Maths. But for English now three years ago we introduced that mixed ability for up to Junior Cert for English. And that has very positive repercussions because it's giving everybody a very equal chance. For the students who need support we have resource hours available, team teaching and the learning support.

(My italics)

A further example of this lack of sophistication in the conceptualization of SEN is found in another guidance counsellor's comments on whether or not the issue of SEN had been considered in the school's response to behavioural issues. The interviewee is hesitant when considering the school's responses to students' needs and states:

I don't really think so.... I have to say. No I don't think so. Because a lot of people haven't been diagnosed as well and all of that. I do think it should be an issue in the policy about behavioural issues. Because we expect with students with special educational needs to conform and we have them included in our school population. And if things are more difficult for them than what it is let's say for the mainstream students, well, yes of course we should consider how it is because they are going to exhibit maybe the antisocial and emotional difficulties within a group setting.

Some interviewees indicate that there exists a tendency in the school to consider students with SEN as a homogeneous group. The language they use in the interviews reflects this, e.g. referring to 'our special education kids'. A principal, when asked about the development of the behaviour policy and how special educational needs were thought about at the time, makes the following response:

But bearing in mind the fact that we've had anything from a quarter to sometimes nearly half of our intake would be special needs of some description that we had to inform the drawing up of it. But there wasn't a specific kind of, if the child had special needs x, y and z follows.

Finally, the issue of how interviewees define emotional and behavioural difficulties provide further insight into their level of knowledge in this area. For this question, interviewees were shown the definition they had been asked to provide in the questionnaire; a copy of the questionnaire they had filled in had been sent to them when arrangements were made for the interview to take place (See Chapter Six, Section 6.5 for these procedures). During the interview they were asked whether or not they were happy with it or wished to revisit it, with a view either to change it or expand on it in any way. None expressed a desire to amend the definition they had given and expressed satisfaction with what they had said. Figure 8.2 summarises each of the definitions that had been provided by the interviewees in their questionnaires.

| Interviewee | Definition of EBD  | Interviewee | Definition of EBD   |
|-------------|--|-------------|---|
| XMULTB      | What are the triggers to behaviour, maybe from outside the school. Behaviour communicating needs.                                    | VECRSTB     | Some conditions cited. Economic or social background may be factor in performing in school environment.                                   |
| XMULPA      | Linked definitely with home environment, poor parenting, neglect in early childhood.   | VECRLPA     | Inconsistency in home or school life. Outburst of emotion, lapse in concentration, to work consistently, to follow the code of behaviour. |
| XFULPA      | Disruptive, inappropriate attention-seeking behaviour, often based on unstable home life, bereavement, undiagnosed syndromes.        | VECRLGA     | Behaviour that is inconsistent with normal behaviour. Students tend to display aggressive, verbal and physical abuse towards others.      |
| XCULTB      | Identifies transitory and permanent conditions. Aware of wide variety of presenting characteristics. Links to learning difficulties. | CCCULTA     | Psychiatric problems from childhood experiences, temporary or long term.  |
| VMULTA      | Links with emotional state of pupil. Using behaviour strategies to cope with emotions. Acting out emotions.                          | CCCRLPA     | Emotional difficulties linked to family issues. Behavioural difficulties linked to manifesting this unease, lashing out.                  |
| VECUSPB     | Inability to control emotions, lack of concentration, anger management difficulties. Poor parenting skills.                          | CCCRLGA     | Inability to control behaviour. Over-reacting, lack of inhibition.  |
| VECUSGB     | Disruptive in class, interfering with teaching and learning.   | XXX         | XXX   |

Figure 8.2 Summary of Definitions of EBD Provided by the Interviewees



These definitions of EBD suggest that, from the interviewees' perspective, the causality of emotional and behavioural difficulties emanate from phenomena that are located outside the school and/or classroom situation. Many refer to factors emanating from the home background or socio-economic factors. These definitions also include a high concentration on factors located almost exclusively within the individual student: outburst of emotion, lapse in concentration, attention-seeking behaviour, lashing out, learning difficulties, etc. Several interviewees focus on an inability to control behaviour or emotions. Some refer to assessed conditions or syndromes. The tone of these comments by the interviewees can be interpreted as one of resignation; the causes of EBD appear to be located outside the school and/or outside the influence of the school. There is little sense that there exists any connection or interaction between the school or the teaching and learning situation and the milieu from which these factors develop.

### **8.3.2 Issues relating to Influences from outside the School**

Among the most cited of the external phenomena contributing significantly to how the interviewees define EBD is that of home background. All interviewees refer to this as being significant. One principal from the primary sector refers to students' background on seven occasions during the interview and the comments that follow serve as pertinent examples of issues that are raised by other interviewees. This principal speaks about the quality of parenting:

...but I might take a less severe approach in my tone of voice, because I know that the parenting at home is hit and miss at best.

I would obviously want to know as well – I would obviously want to know from the parents like for example – again without trying to be too intrusive – like what is their style in parenting. Are they a punishment or reward type of parent? Are they strict or a kind of a more fluid parent – most of all – are they a consistent parent.

This interviewee also considers familial dysfunction to contribute significantly to how children present in school and feels the child is formed by all her/his previous experiences; this comes through in the following exchange:

**I want to talk to you now about the idea of emotional behaviour difficulties and how that is actually defined – can I first of all ask you – what do you think are the important aspects to consider when we are trying to define emotional behavioural difficulties? What kind of issues are there?**

Well I suppose – there is obviously the history of the child – I mean if there has...

**In what sense the history now?**

Well, we will say – if there has been for example bereavement – if there has been a family break-up. If there has been family dysfunction, if there is possibly alcoholism in the home, if there is drugs in the home and things like that. I mean I would be of the philosophy and it is not just regarding school – that every one of us is the accumulation of every minute we have lived. I am the person I am today because of everything good and bad that has happened to me in the last forty-eight years almost. And I would be the same with the children.

So, I think you need to know the full history of the child. In a totally non-prurient and invasive sense but what might have created that difficulty or added to an already fragile psyche.

The interviewee expresses the opinion that one is the sum total of 'everything good and bad that has happened' to her/him, however there is a sense that this range of experiences includes only one's experiences in fora other than the school.

The home background is not the sole external factor influencing how the interviewees consider emotional and behavioural difficulties. Another about which they were asked is the issue of the guidelines for developing a code of behaviour published in 2008, *Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools* (NEWB). Several interviewees indicate that the NEWB guidelines had been consulted. However it is not clear at what stage this was done. In several instances the policy



would have been written before the guidelines were available. Therefore, at best it may be the case that the guidelines were perused to see if the existing policy complied with them. Some interviewees report that the policy had been reviewed in the light of the guidelines, but no specific details are available to illustrate how this was carried out or, indeed, whether or not any changes were made.

The interviewees were asked specifically if the guidelines had been consulted when the school's behaviour policy was drawn up. Several state that this had been the case, however the extent to which this consultation had contributed significantly to the policy varies greatly. One post-primary teacher states:

I think that is where a lot of the work done by the committee on behaviour worked, they work directly off the NEWB policy documents, the School Matters booklet as well and I think they were guided by what was in the NEWB....

and a primary principal similarly state:

Yes, that was the document we used if you like, as a blueprint for the last year and a half now. We're just about at the point now of re-writing, but that I must say was an excellent document.

.... the whole way it was put together, the templates to use, the way of thinking, that you know, certainly covered every single aspect that you could possibly want to cover.

However others are more hesitant:

I know in our special needs policy we...sorry to go back to the special needs...I know we refer to it and I'm sure they refer to it in the code of discipline, I couldn't tell you off the top of my head, because legally they have to have all those things.

I could only say that the group were probably made aware and yes it would be, because anything like that that comes in is brought to the attention (of the school).



A further factor impacting on the development of behavioural policy relates to the issue of suspension and/or expulsion from school. The *Education Act (1998)* regulates how this is dealt with in the Irish education system. Section 29 of the *Education Act (1998)* permits students to appeal a decision by the Board of Management of a school not to enrol a student, to suspend or to expel. This has been quite a contentious issue, particularly in the post-primary sector. Several appeals have been successful, i.e. schools have been obliged to readmit students (Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS), 2010). This has been predominantly the case where the interventions and procedures initiated prior to the decision to suspend or expel, in order to prevent the necessity of such a decision, have not been considered robust. This point is relevant to this research as it raises questions regarding the sophistication of schools' behaviour policies and the interventions included in them to address behavioural issues. The then Minister for Education and Science included amendments to Section 29 (*Education Act, 1998*) as part of subsequent legislation (*Education (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2007*). The term 'Section 29 Appeals' is well known in the Irish education system and this has been a contentious issue (see, for example, Regan, 2012).

One post-primary interviewee makes a particular point in relation to Section 29 of the *Education Act (1998)*. This interviewee describes the situation where his school had been revisiting the behaviour policy over the previous year in order to update it. The context for this exercise was discussed. Firstly the impetus for this was reported by the interviewee as being located in a number of successful appeals taken by the parents of students who had been suspended or expelled from the school. Secondly, the interviewee reported that the focus of the revisiting of the policy was to ensure its compliance with legislation, i.e. to ensure the school would be on firmer ground in the future when it initiated suspension or expulsion procedures against a student.

Interesting issues are raised by the responses from this interviewee. Firstly, this is the only interviewee to raise the issue of Section 29 appeals and, therefore, the only one to report it as a factor in initiating a review of the behaviour policy. This is also the only incidence among all interviewees where a factor outside the school or not specifically within-student is raised as an issue in this regard. While this is interesting in itself and in relation to this particular school, it is also interesting for the fact that it is not reported by other interviewees.

This raises interesting questions about the range of responses employed by schools to address behavioural issues. Primary schools have not been as reliant on Section 29 as have post-primary schools in relation to behavioural issues. In the primary sector, Section 29 appeals have been more of an issue in relation to failure to enrol students (ACCS, 2010). While the age cohort of students would be a factor in this regard, it is the case that this legislation does also refer to the primary sector. While Section 29 has been predominantly an issue in the post-primary sector, as stated above it is only raised by one interviewee in this sector as a factor in the development of behavioural policy. This is unusual given that several post-primary school respondents are reported in the questionnaire as indicating their schools employ suspension and four indicated expulsion was an option in their schools (see Chapter Seven, Section 7.4.2).

A final external factor influencing the way in which behavioural issues are being thought about concerns the post-primary sector only. This is in relation to *School Matters: the Report of the Task Force on Discipline in Second Level Schools* (2006). This is discussed in Chapter Four, Section 4.6. One of its recommendations is the establishment of the National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS) to disseminate best practice in relation to school responses to behaviour, support a recognised cohort of schools in a practical way and, indeed, support students returning from Section 29 suspensions.



Two interviewees from the post-primary cohort of interviewees report to be working with the NBSS; both are from the same school. They report a positive experience in this regard. The establishment of the Behaviour Support Classroom, with the support of the NBSS, is reported to represent a positive intervention. This is where a cohort of students spends most of the school day over a defined number of weeks away from their usual classroom (see Chapter Four, Section 4.6). The principal interviewed also refers to the importance of providing support to students when they return to the regular classroom from the Behaviour Support Classroom. This appears to indicate an awareness of the importance of continuing support on an ongoing basis and this, also, is interesting as no other post-primary interviewee refers to this issue. Only one interviewee from this cohort, the interviewee who raised the issue of Section 29 appeals, also reports that the *School Matters Report* has had an influence on the review of the school's behaviour policy. It is interesting that the other post-primary interviewees do not seem to have considered this possibility.

### **8.3.3 The Individual Student as the Central Focus**

One of the main issues emanating from the analysis of the interview data is one where the central focus is the individual student. This focus is addressed from many different perspectives. These are presented below.

The issue of 'child centredness' is mentioned by two primary respondents as being crucial to how they personally and, on a wider level, their schools, interact with the students in their care. One of these interviewees uses the phrase 'child centredness' and presents it as being a cornerstone of the school's mission statement, reporting that everything is discussed and all decisions are made in the context of the child being at the centre of the debate and/or the decision-making process:



XXXXX was the first principal of the school, she was here for 20 years and it was absolutely like her life and breath was child centredness, she felt very strongly and believed absolutely in it, that the child was...we said really the child was at the centre of every decision that we make in the school, that's how we really define it if people ask us what is it, because sometimes people think child centred is the child can be doing what they like to be doing or whatever, but really how we define it is that we always bring everything back to children....

The second interviewee, while not using exactly the same term, talks about the student being central to everything the school does:

I feel that our policy here is very much child focused,  
and continues to speak in this way throughout the interview.

In the post-primary sector a teacher also highlights the importance of engaging with the students on an individual basis, in response to a question about the behaviour policy treating all students as a homogeneous group:

No, I think unfortunately a lot of people wanted strict guidelines as in, if a child does this, this is what will happen. Some teachers preferred to have a system like that. I think from management it came that it's not always the best way, so rather than force ourselves that X,Y and Z must happen it is left slightly more open for the caoimhnóir\* or moltóir\*\* to make the judgment based on the student.

\*Yearhead

\*\*Class Tutor

This focus on the individual student is elaborated on in the idea of individualised responses which permeates a considerable number of interviews. This refers not only to individual interviewees but also the broader school community realising the value or importance of seeing and responding to each student as an individual. Interviewees talk about the need to tailor the engagement with each one to meet

her/his individual circumstances. The following examples illustrate this from the post-primary respondents:

In a general way there is a very pastoral approach to the discipline here in the school so there is differentiation.

And it's there then we do maybe, if there is an individual problem or situation we look at that. It could mean that the student, if they didn't have an assessment done we may have to get an assessment done, we may have to get counselling..... So I suppose it does cater for individual needs.

This is also manifested in attempting to interpret behaviour policies to accommodate those circumstances and generally to be willing to be flexible in responding to how their students present in the day to day school situation. In response to a question asking if the behaviour policy allowed for individual differences, this guidance counsellor's reply is typical:

The policy as such doesn't if you see what I mean. But the teachers make allowances for individual pupils. And you will often find that coming up that if another student had done this they'd be out of the school and be out on their ear. But because of this particular individual or whatever there are exceptions made all right, there is some greater leniency showed.

Certain interviewees identify as an issue the dilemma of the need to strike a balance between equality of consideration for all students and the necessity to respond to individuals' circumstances from an egalitarian perspective. This refers, on the one hand, to the desire to be fair to each individual and the desire to treat all students equally when interacting with them. This is reported to be a tenet afforded considerable prominence in schools' behaviour policies. Aspirations in this regard can be discerned in the statements of rationale prefacing the SEN and behaviour policies analysed in Chapter Ten (see Appendices XIX-XXII). It is also reported to be an issue cited by students and their parents when interacting with schools regarding behavioural issues, i.e. contrasting how individuals are treated in apparently similar situations. On the other hand, interviewees are cognisant of a



diversity of presenting conditions and circumstances, e.g. different categories of SEN, complex profiles of learning abilities, attention deficits and home backgrounds. These characteristics are so diverse as to demand an egalitarian approach favouring individualised responses if the individual needs of students are to be addressed, as one post-primary principal puts it:

But we're also conscious that you know when you have a mix of 680 students and you might have 25 or 30 students or maybe 40 students who need - and you have to be sensitive with the code of behaviour that you have to be more sensitive with them than you would with others. The other 630 don't see why. And when we argue consistency, and I mean teachers would argue consistency, how do you get - how do you bridge that to try and accommodate these issues that are coming into the school from certain students and who can show the other students we are being consistent?

Thus interviewees report a dichotomy of trying to balance two different approaches, an equality of treatment that is supported overtly in behaviour policies and an egalitarian approach that is justified by the complex range of needs with which students present but which is often only covertly referred to in behaviour policies, if at all.

There is substantial consideration afforded to the conditions and abilities with which students present when they enter the school situation. This is very evident as the range of comments made in this regard is quite marked, but more interestingly what also stands out is the dearth of commentary on any perceived detrimental characteristics within the school environment. Effectively, this suggests a dominance of a deficit model being used to conceptualise emotional and behavioural difficulties and is evidenced in three ways.

Firstly they refer to the emotional characteristics displayed by students being dependent on the emotional support and stability provided by the student's family and the home environment. The level of emotional maturity of the student is mentioned. The ability of the student to cope with stress in the school environment



is reported often as being dependent on the level of emotional maturity nurtured in the student by the home environment. A typical comment is:

Well to me, emotional behaviour is a student who is not able to concentrate on what they are here in school for, we will say, their teaching and learning because there is something going on in their mind. There is something upsetting them in their mind. And I think myself from talking to special needs teachers and talking to the chaplain, whatever that a lot of those are brought in from outside.

Secondly they refer to the behaviours displayed by students as being assimilated outside the school environment, e.g. in the home or from their interactions with the peer group outside the school. What is also interesting is the fact that those interviewees who mention this only appear to be referring to negative or undesirable behaviours. Recognition of the contribution of these outside environmental factors to the development of positive or desirable behaviours is rare. Whilst this is not to suggest there is any level of denial that this might happen, it does point to a predominance of negative views in relation to the influence of factors outside the school environment.

Thirdly, repeated references are made to conditions with which students present on entering the school situation or which are diagnosed soon after entry, e.g. attentions deficits, hyperactivity, ODD, etc. These within-child characteristics tend to be discussed in terms of being deficits with which the school has to cope and over which it has little influence. A level of helplessness is evident in the comments from interviewees in this regard. One post-primary teacher relates the following story:

...this student is now out of school until the end of the school year but like that again, after a diagnosis just in February of this year of ADHD there was no follow through with CAMHS\* and I think it was the parents who let down the situation a little bit there.

We knew there was something underlying it but it needed that confirmation so that we could say, "Right, well that's definitely it, that is the problem" but the next step is to move that on and to get someone to do a follow up with that.

Without the parental cooperation around it we cannot move and the child is stuck.

\*Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

Related to this issue is the question of the students' emotional state. This is considered by most interviewees as being important in two ways. Firstly several connect the students' emotional state with their readiness to learn. Examples are cited of students experiencing trauma or family discord and how this makes it very difficult for them to engage with the demands of the teaching and learning situation. Equally, other examples are cited by interviewees of the resultant behaviours manifested by students who are experiencing emotional difficulties. These behaviours are cited as ways of coping or reacting to events taking place outside the school situation. The following examples illustrate this:

...yes the emotional state of the child or the family was taken into account.

...there's something wrong there so we discover that they're not happy and they can get very angry. Anger management is a big thing. But when you break it down there's always something that can be done.... But they never really get down to... we associate the anger with being in the school...with the teachers or that. But really the anger is about something different and the student has then transferred it into the school.

You know, you are aware of that and so if there are emotional needs and difficulties. There could be short-term bereavement or something like that or it could be longer term mental illness or emotional difficulties.

The issue of schools being proactive in the teaching of desirable behaviours is one which is only addressed by one or two interviewees. This low level of occurrence is quite interesting. It is common across both primary and post-primary interviewees and across types of interviewees. It suggests that the idea of teaching desirable behaviours is not a major issue for schools. It may be the case that schools do not consider it to be within their remit to act in this area or, perhaps that this occurs incidentally in the school situation. Alternatively, desirable behaviours may be considered as something students learn elsewhere and bring to the school situation, in the same way that undesirable behaviour was considered above.

If this is the case it may suggest that the ability to behave in a manner acceptable or appropriate to the school situation is a pre-requisite to engagement in that situation. As this is something that is unlikely to be taught proactively in school, questions arise about this presumption on the part of schools, their understanding of the nature of emotional and behavioural difficulties and the supports that many students require to function successfully in the school situation.

Students' age is considered by most post-primary interviewees to be a factor when asked about how teachers think about behavioural issues. There is a distinction made between junior cycle (roughly twelve to fifteen years) and senior cycle (roughly sixteen to eighteen years) with regard to the behaviours expected from students. Most post-primary interviewees distinguish in this way and also refer to expectations of students' levels of maturity in the junior and senior cycles. One post-primary teacher states:

I do know, yes we do, and did differentiate between junior and senior. I think that was a kind of a stage of life thing, it's a growing thing and as a school I think that is probably part of our job to make sure they are.



Another is more precise:

Yeah, I'd say that once we get into senior cycle there is a different expectation. So, once they go, say beyond, say into transition and fifth and sixth that we expect a certain level of maturity from our students. Now, rightly or wrongly, because as you know, some of them don't ever reach levels of maturity until maybe long after they have left school.

References are also made to the level and type of supports available to these two cohorts. These points tend to be made by the guidance counsellors. Traditionally guidance counsellors tend to interact more with senior cycle students due to the career guidance aspect of their work. Thus they are more likely to interact with senior cycle students in the course of their work and, evidently, issues may arise. The guidance counsellors who were interviewed report not to be familiar with junior cycle students to the same extent. Indeed, as with some primary schools interviewees (again borne out in the data from the questionnaire) post-primary interviewees refer to other agencies providing counselling services in schools to students presenting with EBD.

One post-primary teacher reports reluctance on the part of the school's guidance counsellor to have referral to the guidance counsellors included as a stage in the chain of referral in the behaviour policy, lest they be too closely identified with behavioural issues:

There was a very strong argument made at our own discipline day by the counsellor that we shouldn't link the two together too closely, in that the view of the student might be seen then that the counsellor was to do with only behavioural issues. There is a danger of that and he has built a rapport with students over long periods of years here and would like to maintain the distance between the two and not have the two linked. On one of the forms it said, a visit to the counsellor was one of the next approaches and it was suggested that we take that out, the link between the two was over-identification of counselling with behaviour.

### 8.3.4 Gender Issues

The issue of gender is all the more important to consider in the Irish context due to the high number of single gender schools in the system and the gender balance within teaching staff and management in schools (Chapter Two, Section 2.3.2; Chapter Four, Section 4.4.1). Whilst this research does not include a quantitative analysis of its data, nonetheless it is important to be cognisant of a number of issues in this regard, which include:

- Single gender and co-educational schools
- The gender balance of the school's staff
- The gender balance of the school's staff relative to whether or not it is a single gender or co-educational school
- Interactions between staff and students depending on gender.

Students' gender is raised by a small number of interviewees as an issue. Here respondents are acknowledging that their experience has witnessed differences in the behaviours and experiences of male and female students, albeit very slight, and are also acknowledging different responses from teachers to issues involving male or female students. One guidance counsellor states:

... this year and last year we've had a lot of trouble with female students. We've had, by and large the majority of troublesome students were male then but this year we had a collection of very fiery and very difficult to handle female students. Which was a new, well not totally, a new experience but it was a new phenomenon to have so many of them as it were, such a group of them in a particular year.

It depends then as well what works better with male students and female students as well. That might differ in terms of sanctions or even approaching them and talking to them and giving out to them or whatever. There can be decided differences between the two.

A post-primary teacher responds in the following way:

**Do you think they (the teachers) might intervene differently or consider things differently whether they are dealing with a boy or a girl?**

I think nature does that.

**You think so, in what way? How would it manifest itself?**

I think a lot of people would come out with the “boys will be boys”.

**Right, okay.**

And may tend to accept something more from a lad than they would from a girl.

**And that would be irrespective of the gender of the teacher?**

Yeah.

A primary teacher, working in a co-educational school introduces the issue of role models, saying:

I do think that for some boys who are living in a single parent family, I do think that definitely in my experience can bring up issues

.....I think yeah, boys in some ways are suffering quite a lot in that situation at the moment in a way, most single family situations are, it's a mother mostly in the home, so girls still have that role model and then for most children they come to school and most of the teachers in primary school they meet are women, and the SNAs as well, so they have a lot of role models; whereas I think for boys, some boys have very few male role models and I think they miss it.

This primary teacher and the post-primary teacher quoted above feel that male and female teachers think about or respond differently to behavioural issues. Both feel male teachers are more accepting of a situation as it presents itself and therefore don't feel the need or see the point in reflecting on or discussing it in depth. Female teachers are felt to be the opposite. Both are hesitant to mention this, feeling it is not an appropriate thing to say. The following extract from the primary teacher illustrates this and also offers an opinion that male students take a similar view:



I do think if you were to ask the males on the staff, they would probably say, we do a huge amount of talking and negotiation, we do a lot of work with kids around feelings, emotions, all of that...

....sometimes I think they just think 'Look, good, whatever, they'll be fine, there's a bit too much of that.' That's...I've had those signals a couple of times. So I think they just think 'God, just...yeah, just get on with it, whatever', and I think, in fairness, I think some of probably the older boys might feel that sometimes as well. You know?

Yeah, and they don't want to spend ten minutes discussing was it fair that somebody got the ball and somebody did whatever, they're just like 'Whatever, let's just keep playing the game, we're wasting time.' I think...and it's not that I mean men are completely one way and women are the other, but there seems to be a bit of an 80-20 thing there with males and females sometimes. It's just, you've asked, so that's my honest...that's a very honest answer! It may not be politically correct, but that's my experience of it.

### **8.3.5 Issues relating to the Development of Policy**

Issues relating specifically to the behaviour policy can be categorised under two broad subheadings:

- The development of the policy and
- The interpretation and application of the policy.

#### **8.3.5.1 The Development of the Policy**

There is a consistent attitude across interviewees that behaviour policy has experienced a major shift in focus, from promoting sanctions and outlining unacceptable behaviours to a position where the policy is seen as a positive influence on promoting and acknowledging compliance with a shared view of how the school community wants to be. Indeed, and equally as important, all appear to accept that the policy should evolve and most attest that this has been the case. Chapter Nine provides an in-depth analysis of the behaviour policies of two schools from the sample, along with their SEN policies.

An example of this development of policy is provided by a guidance counsellor, who reports that the policy has developed over time from having a negative focus of listing unacceptable behaviours. Now the focus is on promoting acceptable behaviour by having the policy indicate how the students should behave. The focus is on promoting positive behaviour. This suggests an evolution of behaviour policy and this is present across all interviewees' responses, as this statement illustrates:

Well certainly in the recent version of it there are much more positive, how would you put it, phrases and statements in it. In terms of the sort of behaviour that's expected and things like that. Rather than sort of negative 'thou shalt nots' and things like that. So that has come in, plus as well they've instigated a, well, not exactly a reward scheme, but a sort of a positive aspect of it. The previous code of discipline was all negative as well. They were all functions and sanctions and things like that. Now they are trying to focus on positive behaviours and trying and encourage those as well.

And the idea of that is to promote a positive aspect towards work. So that the code of behaviour isn't just what you shouldn't do. It's the sort of things you should be doing, as it were, as well.

At least ten interviewees comment on whether or not the behaviour policy is consistent with the SEN policy or, indeed, any other policy in their schools. Most suggest that there exist clear links and that this has been seen as necessary and important. Some appear to have been prompted by the NEWB guidelines to look at this issue, suggesting they might not have been aware of its importance before that. This is discussed further in Chapter Nine. However, not all are of this view. Some acknowledge no link between policies at all, or that this is currently being addressed or that it might be a good idea to do so. This suggests a lot about the commitment to policy formulation in any area. It also highlights the journey schools are taking and have taken over the last number of years in the area of policy formulation. It asks questions about the level of commitment and the actual value placed on these initiatives by schools and school management. This is an interesting issue and can be illustrated by one teacher's acknowledgement of the fact that a



behaviour policy now exists in the school because it is obliged to have policies in all areas:

I think also I suppose it's basically it was a set policy because we've had to bring in all these policies.

This refers to the School Development Planning Initiative (Ireland, 1999b and 2002b) and suggests a move towards having policies for the sake of having policies.

The level of contribution made by different stakeholders to the development of the behaviour policy is investigated in the first stage of data collection (See Chapter Seven, Sections 7.4 and 7.6). Students, along with SNAs, are found to be the least likely to be involved in this. While no information is available to explain the former's exclusion from this, two interviewees refer to the difficulty that is presented in trying to make SNAs aware of the policy in the school. This is put down to them not being in the school for the same length of time as teachers. This is an interesting perspective; it demonstrates an assumption that SNAs are more transitory in the school staff than teachers and may offer one reason for their exclusion at the development stage. One interviewee states:

Well, SNAs, probably now if I was to put my hand on my heart they may not have been as briefed in as what they should have been. Because our SNAs tend to come for a year or two and then they're gone. So, we wouldn't have one that's here for the last four or five years or six years.

Another interviewee highlights the importance of the contribution that can be made in the development of the policy by the SEN department in the school. This contribution can facilitate the development of the policy from a 'one size fits all' model to a more comprehensive and sophisticated policy:

So, yes, it is a 'one-size-fits-all', it is a homogenous group. I would say that people writing the policy tend to write it from that perspective and without people like ourselves, who are chipping in from time to time and making amendments to it, it would get lost.



This contribution illustrates the continuing link between the initial development of the policy and its subsequent development through its interpretation and application on the ground. Further discussion of this aspect follows.

### **8.3.5.2 The Application and Interpretation of the Policy**

Several diverse comments are recorded regarding the manner in which interviewees feel the policy is being applied and interpreted in their schools, particularly by teachers. Also related to this issue is the degree to which students understand the behaviour policy. These issues are addressed in this section.

Three interviewees put forward several ideas regarding how the behaviour policy is applied in their schools. Interestingly the interviewees are a principal, a teacher and a guidance counsellor, all from the post-primary sector. The term 'flexibility' could be employed to explain how policy is interpreted on the ground:

But in general there is a pastoral approach to discipline but the documentation and the procedural approaches and that can be very formal and might not suit some of our students.

One suggests this is necessary in order to respond to the diversity of needs encountered among the student population, suggesting that the behaviour policy could never cover every situation. Another states:

It's how the teacher in the classroom responds and reacts. I mean we'd have some kids who would; I mean if you were doing it rigidly then they'd be out of the school long ago.

Another factor presented is that of the teacher's previous experience; this may have either a positive or negative influence:

...as long as I'm working in this everybody interprets the policy in their own way. It is a hugely subjective kind of thing. So, you would end up with people who would consider something to be a major misdemeanour might somewhere else be fairly minor. So, it depends then on your frame of reference. If you've come from a particular type of school or your own experience of other schools

or whatever it might be. You bring all of that to bear into the frame.

There is a high level of assumption on the part of interviewees that the behaviour policy is fit for purpose due to the fact that it appears to be applied on a day to day basis and its inherent procedures appear to be followed. There appears to be a reliance on the level of sophistication inherent in the policy to confirm this view. One guidance counsellor states the following:

I don't think people refer to it every day because it's a system and it's a formulated system. And it's something that as a whole staff we have spoken about it. They're all aware of the... and any changes they're made aware of it. I mean, as teachers, I suppose we are creatures of habit and young people like routine, they like structure. They want structure and we just kind of go with that.

A principal also states:

I suppose it would be. There is no one getting up and saying it is being monitored on a yearly basis, whatever. I would hope that there is regular checking and the relationships and communications we would have with the tutors and these staff meetings when we do refer to it that we are trying to issue out and promote good practice all the time.

A teacher also assumes the policy was being applied on a daily basis:

I would say it is informing daily practice within the classroom quite a bit for the majority of teachers because if you consult the book which is the book where all the misdemeanours are entered up and a report of the incident and so on would be in there.

When asked to comment on how it is known that students understand the behaviour policy, two main trends are evident. Firstly the responses from most interviewees indicate that this is an issue that had not received much consideration in the past. This guidance counsellor makes the following comments:

**And how does the school know if the pupils actually understand what's in the policy?**



That's a good question. I presume by how well they behave or their compliance.

**That's the only way it would know?**

Yes, I mean we wouldn't do sort of general quizzes or questions around it or whatever. We generally do it with compliancy.

While a primary teacher tries to recall how the school responds to a student who is 'having difficulties':

**So, how does the school know if the pupils understand the policy?**

That's a very interesting question, I suppose really we would all...it's a team approach here in the school, again going back to our behaviour plans, if we fail...if a child in a classroom is having particular difficulties, we would go back to our pastoral care team and explore why that child maybe is having difficulties. So it may be down to the fact that they may not have the cognitive ability to understand them, so we would work on a very individual basis through our pastoral care team.

This may suggest an assumption that all students understand the underlying rationale of the policy and that this includes students presenting with SEN. This assumption may be erroneous.

Related to this is another trend that suggests an assumption of understanding based on the level of compliance with the behaviour policy among students, i.e. as most students appear to be complying with the policy it is assumed they all understand it. One interviewee states:

It is only when it is tested I guess, you know.

However there are two interesting issues that can be raised in relation to this. Most interviewees attest to the fact that their behaviour policies are quite complex, addressing all aspects of school life. This fact is borne out by the data from the questionnaire in which the majority of respondents report a wide range of responses to behavioural issues and can be evidenced in the behaviour policies included in Appendices XXI and XXII. Secondly, most interviewees also attest to the



fact that the majority of students comply with accepted everyday standards of behaviour that apply anywhere, inside or outside of school. Thus, it could be argued that the following assumption is present in schools: behaviour policies work well and can be understood by all students; this is considered to be the case because most students appear to comply with them. However this implies a level of complacency in schools at a systemic level. I suggest that this also raises questions about the integrity of the egalitarian rationale espoused by several interviewees and evidenced in the SEN and behaviour policy documents analysed in Chapter Ten.

This is interesting as it relates to the interviewees' understanding of SEN. It also suggests that the idea of positive behaviour support may not really be implemented where students with SEN are concerned. Difficulties are only addressed reactively, not proactively. This might suggest that a lot of the interventions put in place in schools to promote positive behaviour do not necessarily contribute greatly to compliance with the behaviour policy, as most would comply anyway. The question could be asked about whether or not these are appropriate interventions for students with EBD as they may not necessarily be addressing their particular difficulties.

#### **8.4 Emerging Themes**

The five areas outlined in the previous section represent the analysis of the responses made by the interviewees from the perspective of the issues that are relevant to this research and are contained in the specific research questions. As in Chapter Seven, Section 7.6, it is useful to summarize the main themes emanating from this analysis at this point in order to highlight the salient issues as they emerge from the data.

The first issues to emerge from this analysis relates to the level of knowledge regarding SEN and EBD amongst practitioners and how sophisticated that knowledge appears to be. There appears to be a tendency to identify a cohort of students in a school as 'special needs students' who share ill-defined characteristics but are considered to make it difficult for them to conform to standards laid down for the majority of students, be they standards relating to curricular issues or other issues. This necessitates the provision of resources to 'support' them, including supplementary teaching, emotional support and monitoring. Evidence is present in the data of a level of scepticism amongst some interviewees regarding the legitimacy of EBD and, indeed, of SEN. Whilst this view is debated in the literature in a wider forum from a philosophical perspective, this is not necessarily the perspective taken amongst those interviewees putting forward these views, whose rationale in this regard is unclear. The emphasis on causal factors of EBD emanating predominantly from within the student or from environments outside the school situation tends to support this perspective.

Paradoxically another issue highlighted in the interview data is the consideration of the individual student. This is expounded in a positive sense in the concept of 'child centredness' coming from some respondents in the primary sector, where the student is seen as the central point around which every aspect of provision is viewed. Other respondents, in the post-primary sector, appear to infuse a sense of individualism into their interpretation and application of policy. Their responses suggest an egalitarian awareness of the individuality of the student, in that they are conscious of being flexible in how they interpret and apply behaviour policy. This is linked to an emphasis on being aware of the emotional state of the individual, which also comes through in the interview responses.

A further issue that emerges from the interview data relates to the extent to which schools are proactive in teaching what they perceive to constitute appropriate behaviours. This is only referred to by a small number of interviewees. References



to the SPHE programme, which is a core part of the curriculum up to and including Junior Cycle at post-primary level, are minimal. Indeed the data appear to suggest that, in most instances, students are not hugely supported in any really structured way in this regard.

Gender issues also come through as being pertinent from the interview data. This is interesting as these references to gender differences are made hesitantly. This issue is reported in the questionnaire data as not being relevant, but some interviewees report subtle differences between male and female practitioners, and between how male and female students react. The hesitancy evidenced in relation to this issue, along with the fact that it is not present in the questionnaire data, raises the question that gender may have significance as a variable in the consideration of EBD. The issue of gender is discussed in the literature reviews (see Chapter Three, Section 3.4.1 and Chapter Four, Section 4.4.1) where questions are also raised in this regard.

Another issue to emerge from the data refers to the interface between guidance counsellors and EBD in the post-primary sector. Chapter Two, Section 2.2 outlines the role of a counselling service in schools in empowering students to address behavioural issues and develop coping strategies. The responses from the guidance counsellors interviewed appear to suggest that they are in some way peripheral to the interventions and responses to students presenting with EBD in schools. Other interviewees from the post-primary sector refer to other counselling services, CAMHS for example, rather than the on-site guidance counsellor. This is pertinent to the research and is also discussed in Chapter Ten, Section 10.4.

The final issue to emanate from the interview data relates to policy development. Several interviewees attest to the fact that behaviour policy has developed over time to become more positive in the language employed, more supportive of



students and more aware of SEN in general. However there also appears to exist a level of complacency among interviewees regarding behaviour policies and how they address the issue of EBD. Several attest that they assume their behaviour policy is appropriate and works well on the basis that most students appear to adhere to it. Their knowledge of the development of the policy and the extent to which various stakeholders were involved in its formulation is limited overall, as is their knowledge of its provisions for students presenting with EBD.

## **8.5 Summary**

This chapter discussed the semi-structured interviews. It outlined the structure that was employed to analyse the findings from the thirteen interviews conducted and provided a rationale for this in the context of the theoretical framework that informs the research overall. Five general areas were identified in the analysis of the interview data that address issues of relevance to the specific research questions. These were presented and the interviewees' responses discussed. A summary of the salient issues was presented. These issues will be examined further in the discussion of the findings in Chapter Ten in the context of the literature. The next chapter, Chapter Nine, presents the final stage of data collection which is comprised of document analysis carried out on the behaviour and SEN policies from a primary school and a post-primary school from the interview sample.

# Chapter Nine

## Document Analysis

### 9.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an analysis of school-based documents relevant to the research. The documents under scrutiny are the special educational needs and behaviour policy documents from two schools that are represented in the first and second stages of data collection. The chapter begins with a rationale for the inclusion of document analysis in the research, building on the discussion in Chapter Five, Section 5.5.3. This is followed by a rationale for the selection of the two schools and a brief description of each of the schools involved. The next sections present a description and detailed analysis of the documents provided by the two schools, concluding with a summary of the findings of the analysis.

### 9.2 Rationale

The reasons for the inclusion of document analysis as a methodology in this research are threefold. Firstly it is considered consistent with the overall research aims and specific research questions. Secondly it is consistent with the theoretical and conceptual frameworks on which the research is based. Thirdly it contributes to the rigour of the research methodology as it supports a further strand of enquiry into the specific research questions, thereby allowing for a triangulation with the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. These reasons are explored further in the following paragraphs.

Looking again at the specific research questions (Chapter One, Section 1.3), it is clear that the development of policy at school level is one of the central issues in my research. Here I restate my specific research questions, underlining the key words and phrases that illustrate this:

- How is EBD currently understood in Irish mainstream schools in the context of national and international discourse?
- How does this relate to schools' policies on behaviour, in the context of national policy on SEN?



- How is EBD defined and what are the issues or factors that arise in defining EBD in mainstream schools?
- To what extent are these definitions influenced by
  - Gender of staff and/or students
  - School population (single gender/co-educational)
  - Sector (primary/post-primary)
  - Traditional ethos or culture of the school? (e. g. academic focus).

In this chapter I investigate how two sample schools are presenting their policy on behaviour. This is investigated in the context of their policy on SEN and, in particular, what that says about EBD. The purpose of this is to elucidate further the understanding of EBD that exists in schools and how this may be influenced by the factors outlined above, i.e. gender issues, school population, sector and school ethos or culture. Looking at real documents contributes to the research as it permits me, as researcher, to look at the same type of material that may have informed the responses of questionnaire respondents and interviewees in the previous stages of data collection. Looking at documents in this way involves doing more than simply looking at their content. Prior (2008) makes an interesting case for documents to be seen in a dual role, “both receptacles of content, and as active agents in networks of action” (p. 822). My focus is to investigate policy documents as actors in the social realities of schools. Prior argues that a document is interpreted by its readers and “there is no predicting how it is going to circulate and how it is going to be activated in specific social and cultural contexts” (p. 824). This perspective is consistent with my theoretical perspective of social constructivism and it represents the perspective from which I analyse the documents under consideration in this chapter.

Further to this, my analysis follows from the semi-structured interviews, of which the interview schedule is constructed around themes identified in the analysis of the questionnaire that are relevant to the specific research questions (see Chapter Seven, Section 7.6) and from whose analysis five major areas or issues are identified that are relevant to those same research questions (See Section 9.5 below). Therefore my analysis is influenced by these five issues and, effectively, explores



the extent to which they are manifested within the policies presented from the sample schools, either explicitly as policy statements or implicitly as perceived influences upon the policies. I follow a thematic approach to the analysis, as opposed to content analysis (Bowen, 2009) as I am concerned with more than just the surface level of the documents, i.e. what is written down, but rather “the subtle and intricate meanings conveyed by the writer or inferred by the reader” (Denscombe, 2007, p. 238). Again, this is consistent with the interpretative approach that permeates this research. Section 9.5 below outlines in detail the process of the analysis undertaken.

The purpose of this chapter is not to provide a representative sample of policy documents from the Irish education system at large. The scope of such an endeavour is beyond that of this research; my sample (Chapter Six, Section 6.2) is small and is based on qualitative non-probability sampling. So I am aware of the limitations of the current exercise. I suggest that it is useful to present an illustrative example of policies pertinent to my research questions in order to support and further elucidate the discussion of those questions. Further, and more importantly, I argue that it is feasible, justifiable and useful, through the analysis of policy documents from two schools (described in Section 9.4 below), to investigate how the development of policy around behaviour has been carried out in two real case scenarios, which are ostensibly informed by the context of the national guidelines available, not only to compare and contrast the two, but also to examine how two individual schools respond to issues that are relevant to this research.

The theoretical and conceptual frameworks of this research are outlined in Chapter Five, Sections 5.2 and 5.3. In that chapter I argue that a social constructivist paradigm provides a useful and robust framework within which to investigate the social realities that exist in the research site. I suggest that my ontological perspective, that knowledge is a social reality based on individual, value-laden interpretations, provides me with a sound basis for the theoretical framework I adopt in this research (Chapter Five, Section 5.2.2). I also accept Robson’s view that the world is interpreted by humans, who “are conscious, purposive actors who have

ideas about their world and attach meaning to what is going on around them” (Robson, 2002, p. 24).

On a conceptual level, Figure 5.1 (Chapter Five, Section 5.3) illustrates my understanding of how the concepts I am investigating interact with and influence each other. These dynamic interrelationships demand that my objective as researcher is to identify and analyse these multiple realities in order to understand phenomena. Examining real documents, generated in real situations in schools, represents a method of investigation that is consistent with a social constructivist and interpretative framework (Jupp & Norris, 1993; Cohen *et al*, 2011). Examining real documents is useful because it connects the research, and me as researcher, to the social realities under investigation. Moreover, I consider that the analysis of documents from the field renders the research more real and, therefore, more accessible. Rapley (2007), in particular, provides a sense of this ‘realness’ in his discussion of “documents-in-use” (p. 88) and “the immediate here-and-now context” (Rapley, 2007) which, I suggest, links the research process inextricably with the reality of the social contexts under scrutiny.

The third justification for the inclusion of document analysis in this research is to enhance the rigour of the research methodology and analysis of the data overall by strengthening their validity and reliability through the provision of triangulation between the questionnaire, the semi-structured interviews and now the analysis of documents. Chapter Five, Section 5.4 outlines my position in this research regarding validity and reliability. I am very conscious of the difficulties of instilling rigour into these aspects of the research process when using qualitative methodologies. However, as I illustrate in Chapter Five, Section 5.4, there is considerable and credible discussion in the literature to support this. In that chapter I outline my efforts to incorporate into my research methodologies and analysis of data sufficient consideration and awareness of the need to strengthen my methodological and analytical base in order to render my research as valid and reliable as possible. Therefore, through the inclusion of document analysis I am strengthening the overall robustness of the evidence I gather in this research by



using documents to investigate from a different perspective the issues pertinent to the research and also to enhance the richness of the description of the research site and the data gathered from the sample.

### **9.3 Document Collection and Selection of the Sample**

This section outlines in detail how the documents were collected, followed by the rationale for the choice of the two schools from which policies are analysed in this chapter. It also describes the schools in the context of the variables outlined in Chapter Six, Section 6.2.2.

#### **9.3.1 Collection of Documents**

Chapter Six, Section 6.4 provides a rationale for and a description of the sample of thirteen main interviewees, whilst Section 6.6.8 outlines the semi-structured interview itself. Inherent in the interview schedule (Chapter Six, Section 6.6.1) employed during the main interviews were references to documents produced by the schools that are directly relevant to the research, including mission statements, policies on SEN and behaviour, etc. Some interviewees volunteered to make these documents available to me as a natural extension of the discussion. It is common practice in Ireland for schools across the country to make these kinds of documents available in the public domain via their websites and several do so. Whilst this contributes to a growing culture of openness on the part of schools and is to be welcomed, it remains to be seen what the documents actually contain, hence the relevance of this analysis of documents.

Where this offer occurred I agreed readily to accept the documents out of courtesy and also not to inhibit the interviewees' engagement with the interview process in any way. However I also suggested that these documents might contribute in some way to a further stage of the research, guaranteeing their confidentiality, to which oral consent was granted. In some other instances I requested these documents under the same conditions. With regard to the latter, on each occasion my decision to make this request came towards the latter stages of the interview and, thus, was opportunistic, based on the level of ease with which the interview had been



conducted and my impressions of how the request might be considered. I was mindful of the fact that such a request had not been signalled in my contact with the interviewees beforehand when I had outlined the interview conditions. However, I feel the decision to introduce this request at that stage struck a balance between my consideration of and adherence to ethical guidelines on the one hand and the opportunity to gather potentially useful and pertinent data midway through that stage of the research.

In all, documents were collected from five interviewees representing four schools: one primary teacher, one guidance counsellor and three post-primary principals (the guidance counsellor and one of the principals were from the same school and each offered the documents voluntarily and independently). Figure 9.1 indicates the documents that were collected, employing the titles used by the schools.

|                                | School No. 1 | School No. 2 | School No. 3 | School No. 4 |
|--------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Mission Statement              | X            | X            | X            | X            |
| Admissions or Enrolment Policy | X            | X            | X            | X            |
| SEN Policy                     | X            | X            | X            | X            |
| School Rules                   |              |              |              | X            |
| Behaviour Policy               |              |              | X            |              |
| Behaviour & Discipline Policy  |              | X            |              |              |
| Code of Behaviour              | X            |              | X            |              |
| Conduct Report System          |              |              |              | X            |

**Figure 9.1 Documents Available from Schools**

I analyse documents from the following two schools:

School 1: The SEN Policy and the Code of Behaviour

School 2: The SEN Policy and the Behaviour and Discipline Policy.

The next section describes all four schools and provides the reasons for the choice of these two.

### 9.3.2 Selection and Description of the Sample Schools

Following the variables outlined in Chapter Six, Section 6.2, the four schools in Figure 9.1 (above) and the interviewees from them can be described as follows:

#### School 1

Respondent's Code: X C U L T B (Teacher)

This is a large, primary school which is co-educational. It is in an urban area. The learning support/resource teacher was interviewed. The teacher volunteered documents from the school.

#### School 2

Respondents' Codes: C C C R L P A (Principal)

C C C R L G A (Guidance Counsellor)

This is a large, post-primary community school which is co-educational. It is in a rural area. The principal and guidance counsellor were interviewed. Documents were requested from the principal.

#### School 3

Respondents' Codes: V E C R L P A (Principal)

V E C R L G A (Guidance Counsellor)

This is a large, post-primary (VEC) school which is co-educational. It is in a rural area. The principal and guidance counsellor were interviewed. Documents were requested from the principal.

#### School 4

Respondents' Codes: V E C U S P B (Principal)

V E C U S G B (Guidance Counsellor)

This is a small, post-primary (VEC) school which is co-educational. It is in an urban area. The principal and guidance counsellor were interviewed. Both volunteered documents from the school.

The first and second schools described above were chosen as the sample schools for the document analysis, largely for pragmatic and logical reasons, but also with regard to pertinent criteria. These reasons are outlined here:

- The category of the respondent is not a relevant variable for my purposes here.
- All the schools are co-educational. Therefore the schools' population is not a factor in my decision.
- I wished to take the opportunity to analyse documents from the primary and post-primary sectors as this is consistent with the research aims. Hence School No. 1 was chosen.
- Respondents from the first three schools indicated that their behaviour policies had been reviewed or updated within the previous year and that this had been done in the context of the NEWB guidelines for developing a code of behaviour. The principal from School No. 4 indicated that a review of the policy was currently under consideration. Therefore I decided to eliminate School No. 4 from the document analysis as its policy was not at a similar stage of development at the other schools' policies.
- Of the three post-primary schools, School Nos. 3 and 4 are both part of the VEC system. The principals from each school indicated that their policy development in all areas is influenced by the regional educational structure of which their schools are a part. This is not the case for School No. 2 which is also a post-primary school, making it similar to the sample primary school, School No. 1, in this regard. Hence School No. 3 was eliminated from my choice.
- This resulted in School No. 2 being the most suitable post-primary school and it was chosen.

Figure 9.2 describes the two schools from which documents are analysed. Here, and in the following sections of this chapter, School No.1 is referred to as 'P1', while School No. 2 is referred to as 'PP2'.



| School         | Characteristics         |             |            |       |
|----------------|-------------------------|-------------|------------|-------|
|                | Sector                  | Urban/Rural | Population | Size  |
| No. 1<br>(P1)  | Primary                 | Urban       | Co-Ed      | Large |
| No. 2<br>(PP2) | Post-Primary<br>(C & C) | Rural       | Co-Ed      | Large |

**Figure 9.2 Characteristics of the Schools for the Document Analysis**

The reasons for choosing these two schools can be summarised as follows:

- The chosen schools are both large schools, as per the defining parameters for this variable (Chapter Six, Section 6.2.2). While these parameters differ for primary and post-primary schools I feel it is a relevant factor in this context as each school would consider itself to be in this category, within its own sector, and, hence, have an awareness of how that might impact on its provisions.
- They are both co-educational schools.
- Each school is in a position to develop its own policies in the context of national guidelines, without any other outside influence.
- Each has reviewed its behaviour policy within the previous year and reports that this has been carried in the context of national guidelines provided by the NEWB.

#### **9.4 Initial Description and Comparison of the Documents**

Two policies from each school are included in the analysis. The policy on special educational needs (SEN) should provide data on how each school defines SEN and how it positions itself to respond to those issues and also to the needs of students presenting with SEN. The policy on behaviour should provide data on how the school conceptualises behavioural issues and positions itself to respond to the needs of students presenting with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD), if, indeed, it does. Here I briefly describe the salient features of these policies,

focusing on their similarities and differences. In the following sections, the policies from both schools are referred to as the 'SEN policy' and the 'behaviour policy', regardless of how each school titles them. The policies are included in Appendices XIX - XXII.

#### **9.4.1 Policies on Special Educational Needs**

P1's SEN policy is entitled the 'Whole School Policy on Special Needs' and is included in Appendix XIX. PP2's SEN policy is entitled 'Special Educational Needs' and is referred to in-text as a "policy statement"; it is include in Appendix XX. P1 indicates that the policy was produced by the principal and 'support' teachers (learning support, special education, English as an additional language) and was ratified by its Board of Management in December 2009. No such detail is included in PP2, however it is known from the interview with the principal that the policy was active during the same academic year. While it indicates that the Board of Management, staff, parents and students were consulted, it does not state who produced it.

Comparing both documents reveals a high level of consistency regarding the areas that are considered, as Figure 9.3 demonstrates. This is discussed in the analysis in Section 9.5. Here I summarise a variety of sub-headings under six general areas indicating the similarities across both documents. Figure 9.3 also includes other actual sub-headings that are particular to each document.

| Description  | P1                                 | PP2 |
|--|------------------------------------|-----|
| Context  | X                                  | X   |
| Roles and Responsibilities                                   | X                                  | X   |
| Identification of Students                                   | X                                  | X   |
| Planning   | X                                  | X   |
| Organisation of Teaching                                     | X                                  | X   |
| Monitoring   | X                                  | X   |
| <b>Other Sub-Headings</b>                                    |                                    |     |
| <b>P1</b>  | <b>PP2</b>                         |     |
| Exemption from the Study of Irish                            | Resources                          |     |
| Prevention and Early Intervention                            | Individual Education Plans         |     |
| Liaising with Parents/Guardians                              | Inclusive Curriculum               |     |
| Links with Outside Agencies                                  | Gifted Students                    |     |
| Handing over of Records to Second Level Schools              | Limitations                        |     |
| Mainstreaming Children from Special Educational Environments | Addendum on 'Exceptional Students' |     |
| Ratification and Review                                      |                                    |     |

**Figure 9.3 Initial Comparison of SEN Policies (P1 and PP2)**

The P1 SEN policy document is lengthy, running to twenty-two pages exclusive of six appendices. It is clearly laid out using a numbered system and sub-headings, making the main document relatively easy to access. This is not the case with the appendices whose titles are unclear in most instances; the final appendix is not indicated as being an appendix. The PP2 SEN policy document is not as lengthy, running to thirteen pages, of which the final two appear to be an addendum or later addition dealing exclusively with what is termed "exceptional students". Therefore the overall level of detail is greater in P1.

This level of detail in P1's SEN policy is accounted for by the fact that it outlines in detail the roles of principal, class teacher, support teachers, language support teachers, parents/guardians and special needs assistants and provides considerable



detail regarding various procedures under a variety of headings. Delineating roles and procedural practice in this manner appears to be considered important in this school and substantial effort has been invested in doing so. The PP2 SEN policy, on the other hand, employs more general terms throughout. The following extracts illustrate this and serve as examples of the levels of detail included in each document. They outline the role of non-specialist teaching staff (in P1 the 'Class Teacher' and in PP2 the 'General Teaching Staff'):

#### P1 Role of the Class Teacher

The class teacher has primary responsibility for the progress of all pupils in his/her class(es), including pupils with SEN

His/her role is to:

- Endeavour to prevent and alleviate learning difficulties by appropriate differentiation and teaching strategies, including using the staged process (*DES Circular SP ED 02/05*) for those children for whom concerns have arisen
- Collaborate with the support teacher in the development of GPLPs/IPLPs and IEPs
- Adhere to support services allocated to pupils
- Implement the school policies on screening and selecting pupils for supplementary teaching/resource provision and be involved in developing appropriate targets in the pupil's Individual Profile and Learning Programme (IPLP) and Individual Education Plan (IEP)
- Maintain contact with the parents/guardians during the identification, screening and referral process and the supplementary teaching process
- Liaise with support team to ensure on-going support is provided for pupils for whom supplementary teaching has been reduced or discontinued
- May assist the Principal in the supervision of the work of SNAs and provide SNAs with a sense of direction through assigning class-related tasks.

(p.4)

#### PP2 General Teaching Staff

- To make provision for students with learning support/special educational needs in their classes and subject areas
- To be part of a whole school approach in relation to special educational needs as well as literacy/numeracy
- To develop a positive ethos in the classroom for fostering an inclusive approach to meeting the social and educational needs of all students including students with special educational needs

- To identify personal training needs and to secure training where needed. This will be supported by school management and by the committee subject to the availability of adequate resources.

(p.4)

The high level of consistency apparent across both documents regarding the areas included in the policies is interesting. Whilst on the one hand they represent quite important considerations, e.g. roles and responsibilities, how to identify special educational needs, how to plan for and monitor progress and how to organise for it, this may equally be the result of the schools following best practice, access to which is readily available to them. This may suggest a positive disposition on their part to engage with the needs of their students and is further exemplified in their mission statement and/or statement of ethos, which are addressed at the beginning of each document.

Both schools' SEN policies refer to official documentation but, interestingly, of two distinct varieties. P1 refers to DES circular letters relating to SEN, the allocation of resources and exemption from studying Irish (*DES Circular Letters 12/96, SP ED 24/03 and SP ED 02/05*), whilst PP2 refers to legislation (*Education Act, 1998; Education (Welfare) Act, 2000; Equal Status Act, 2000; EPSEN Act, 2004*). The *EPSEN Act (2004)* is incorrectly entitled the 'Education for People with Disabilities Act' in this section of the document. This may be indicative of the fact that DES circular letters, particularly in the area of SEN, have traditionally focused on the primary sector almost exclusively; hence a lack of engagement with them in the post-primary sector, where there does exist an awareness of national legislation. However, it must be pointed out that national legislation regarding SEN applies to all education sectors and such awareness exists equally in the primary sector. Most regulations in the circular letters cited in the P1 document also apply to the post-primary sector. One interesting exception to this focus on legislation in PP2 appears in its SEN policy where, in outlining the duties of the SNA, it quotes substantially from *DES Circular Letter SNA 15/05 (2005c)* without referencing that document.



#### 9.4.2 Policies on Behaviour

P1's behaviour policy is entitled the 'Code of Behaviour' and is included in Appendix XXI; that from PP2 is entitled 'Policy Statement for School Behaviour and Discipline' and is included in Appendix XXII. P1 indicates that the policy was produced by a group of teachers following school development planning meetings attended by teachers and parents/guardians and was ratified by its Board of Management in January 2009. The principal of PP2 informed me during the semi-structured interview that the policy was 'renewed' during the 2009-2010 academic year. The policy states it was produced following "consultation with the stakeholders, which includes students and all members of the school community" (p. 4). This information is consistent with data collected from respondents in both schools in the questionnaire.

An initial comparison reveals that the two behaviour policies do not resemble each other to the same extent as those relating to SEN. Figure 9.4 outlines the general headings from each policy and shows clearly the areas that are afforded particular attention in each school's behaviour policy.



| P1   | PP2   |
|--|---|
| Rationale  | Mission/Ethos Statement   |
| Relationship to Characteristic Spirit of the School  | Standards of Behaviour  |
| Aims   | School and Classroom Rules <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction</li> <li>• School Attendance</li> <li>• Respect for Others and the School Environment</li> <li>• Dress and Appearance and Property</li> <li>• Behaviour in the Classroom and while Representing the School</li> <li>• Discipline Structure</li> <li>• Role of Parents</li> </ul> |
| Content of Policy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guidelines for Behaviour in the School</li> <li>• Whole School Approach in Promoting Positive Behaviour</li> <li>• Positive Strategies for Managing Behaviour</li> <li>• Promoting Good Behaviour</li> <li>• Suspension/Expulsion Procedures</li> <li>• Keeping Records</li> <li>• Procedures for Notification of Pupil Absences from School</li> <li>• References to other Policies/Documents</li> </ul> |   |
| Success Criteria   |   |
| Roles and Responsibility   |   |
| Implementation Date  |   |
| Timetable for Review 2010  |   |
| Ratification and Communication   |   |
| Appendices   |   |

**Figure 9.4 Initial Comparison of Behaviour Policies (P1 and PP2)**

Both behaviour policies are of similar length, with P1's policy containing twenty-five pages with three appendices and PP2's policy containing twenty-three pages. Each is easily accessible, containing tables of contents, headings, sub-headings and bullet points to guide the reader through them. While both policies refer to the *Education (Welfare) Act (2000)*, which provides for the establishment of the National Educational Welfare Board, P1's policy also refers to the guidelines issued by that body in 2008 (*Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools*), outlining what the guidelines recommend should be included in a code of behaviour. In this

context, it is pertinent here to include an extract from the NEWB guidelines outlining the contents of a code of behaviour and this is provided in Figure 9.5. These guidelines are discussed in detail in Chapter Four, Section 4.5. PP2's behaviour policy focuses exclusively on the obligation of schools under the legislation re attendance and absenteeism and does not reference the guidelines. The P1 policy also indicates it is informed by other documentation and literature, and includes a substantial list as an appendix. The PP2 policy, on the other hand, refers only to legislation, i.e. the *Education Act (1998)*, the *Education (Welfare) Act (2000a)* and the *Public Health (Tobacco) Act (2002a)* and does not indicate that it was informed by any other literature; nor does this appear to be the case.

| <b>Template for the written code of behaviour</b>   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How our code was developed</li> <li>• Our vision for relationships and behaviour in the school and the ways in which the school promotes good behaviour</li> <li>• The school Mission Statement (reflecting any foundational documents provided by the Patron)</li> <li>• The expectations for students, staff and parents and how they will treat each other</li> <li>• How students, teachers and parents can help to promote a happy school</li> <li>• Roles and responsibilities of staff members in relation to behaviour</li> <li>• The purpose and content of school rules</li> <li>• Systems for acknowledging good behaviour, progress and effort (e.g. reward system)</li> <li>• How students, staff and parents can help each other to meet the standards expected in the school</li> <li>• Where parents or students can get help when problems arise</li> <li>• The consequences of unacceptable behaviour: what happens when people break the rules (responses and sanctions)</li> <li>• Procedures for detention, if in use</li> <li>• Reference to school policies to deal with bullying, harassment and sexual harassment</li> <li>• When and where behaviour will be subject to the code of behaviour (e.g. school bus, school tours, other school-linked activities)</li> <li>• Policies and procedures for suspension and expulsion</li> <li>• Procedures for notifying the school about reasons for absence from school</li> <li>• Procedures raising a concern or bringing a complaint about a behaviour matter</li> <li>• The plan for reviewing the code</li> <li>• Details of who to contact about behaviour matters</li> <li>• Date the code (or a new part of the code) was approved by the Board of management or Patron.</li> </ul> |

**Figure 9.5** Contents of a Code of Behaviour (Extract from NEWB Guidelines, p. 59)



## 9.5 Analysis of the Documents

### 9.5.1 Structure of the Analysis

Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 177) refer to “sampling on the basis of concepts that have proven theoretical relevance to the evolving theory”, i.e. focusing on concepts that are repeatedly present (or absent). This is consistent with an interpretative paradigm as outlined in Chapter Five, Section 5.3. It follows best practice in the use of qualitative research methods in that it provides for a detailed examination of the emergent data using different filters or perspectives, resulting in a thick description considered desirable when employing these types of methods (See Chapter Five, Section 5.4.1). I am also informed here by Bowen (2009), who states:

In grounded theory research, as in other forms of qualitative inquiry, the investigator is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. As such, the researcher/analyst relies on skills as well as intuition and filters data through an interpretative lens.

(p. 36)

Continuing this approach I base the analysis of the policy documents primarily within the context of the five issues that emanate from the analysis of the data gathered in the semi-structured interviews (Chapter Eight, Sections 8.3 and 8.4). These five issues provide a framework which is grounded in the analysis of the data previously gathered and, I argue, this approach is therefore justified as a relevant one within which to investigate the policies from the two sample schools. This approach is also consistent with my aim of illustrating how each sample school is presenting its policy on behaviour, as discussed in the rationale in Section 9.2. Whilst following this analytical framework I am aware that the documents themselves may present new issues pertinent to my research questions, as this process of document analysis also represents a legitimate and equally important stage of data collection.

The issues identified in the analysis of the semi-structured interviews are outlined in Chapter Eight, Section 8.3. The following sections analyse the sample documents under the same category headings:



- Issues relating to the level of knowledge regarding special educational needs and EBD
- Issues relating to influences from outside the school
- The individual student as the central focus
- Gender issues
- Issues relating to the development of policy.

### 9.5.2 Issues relating to the Level of Knowledge regarding SEN and EBD

Chapter Eight, Section 8.3.1 outlines four issues in relation to the level of knowledge among interviewees about SEN and EBD. These are:

- a lack of sophistication in their conceptualization of SEN
- querying the inclusion of EBD in the overall category of SEN
- seeing students presenting with SEN as a homogeneous group
- how they define EBD.

The documents analysed illustrate clearly how these issues are borne out at the policy level in these two schools. While P1's SEN policy does not offer a definition of SEN it refers throughout to students who present with SEN and to categories such as "high incidence disability", "low incidence disability", "resource" children, "pupils for whom English is an additional language", etc. It appears from the policy that the school conceptualizes SEN not just in terms of official DES categorizations but also in terms of allocation of resources; these references in the policy rely heavily on *DES Circular Letter SP ED 02/05 (2005b)*. This suggests the school is well informed of official regulations and is taking care to follow them in order to fulfil its responsibilities. However the suggestion that those students for whom English is an additional language are considered to present with special educational needs is incorrect in the context of official definitions present in legislation.

PP2's SEN policy offers a definition of SEN which is not informed by any referenced literature nor by legislation but includes most categories of SEN, including "pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties that may be long or short term" and "pupils with temporary emotional trauma", (p.2), both consistent with what is found in the literature. However this school's definition also refers to those from

the travelling community, those for whom English is not their first language and a category called “newcomers from another system” (p.2), none of whom is included in official definitions. This poses two questions. Firstly, how well informed is the school’s personnel in this regard? These three categories of students all require various types of support; however they may not have special educational needs within the definitions provided by legislation in Ireland, (see Education Act, (1998), Section 2.1, and EPSEN Act, (2004), Section 1). Secondly, what does this definition of SEN say about the school’s understanding of EBD? The sub-categories quoted above appear appropriate, however there is no further reference to them in PP2’s behaviour policy (see below).

Both schools’ SEN policies tend to refer to students presenting with SEN as a homogeneous group. While PP2’s policy delineates a list of thirteen categories to whom its definition of SEN applies, the only further differentiation made is to distinguish between categories of students for whom learning support provision and SEN provision will be made. This differentiation is linked to different allocations of teaching resources from the DES and is consistent with regulations in this regard. However for the large part a homogeneous group of students presenting with SEN is referred to throughout PP2’s SEN policy. P1 makes similar references to such categories in terms of resource provision, as outlined above, and for the large part does not differentiate between different categories of SEN.

Similarly the behaviour policies from both schools do not refer specifically to or define emotional and behavioural difficulties, even though PP2’s SEN policy did include categories of students presenting with EBD (see above). Both refer to SEN (P1 referring to students presenting with SEN; PP2 referring to the SEN Department) in the context of general comments about students presenting with SEN requiring additional support or there being support available to them. The phrasing of the statements in both behaviour policies imply that students presenting with SEN (therefore including EBD) are expected to adhere to the overall rules and regulations contained within the behaviour policy. While P1’s statement in this regard is more specific, it also contains some quite negative comments,



focusing on sanctions and assisting students to understand why their behaviour may be unacceptable. Its statement regarding sanctions is, in fact, quoted (unreferenced) almost *verbatim* from the NEWB guidelines (2008), Section 8.6, p. 55:

Sanctions may be needed to help a student with special educational needs to learn about appropriate behaviour and skills, as in the case of any student. Teachers will take particular care that they help the student with special needs to understand clearly the purpose of the sanction and the reason why their behaviour is unacceptable. The school and classroom practices that support good learning behaviour are valid for all students, including those with identified special educational needs.

(p. 14)

The approach taken by each school in this regard is therefore consistent with the NEWB guidelines, which encourage extra support for students presenting with SEN to enable them to comply with the behaviour policy (Chapter Four, Section 4.5). This compatibility between the schools' positions and that of the national guidelines, I argue, suggests a certain lack of sophistication in conceptualising EBD at school level in these sample schools. This is demonstrated in a generalised view of the nature of SEN which, indeed, is sometimes erroneous, as is shown in the case of both schools' definitions above. Also, national guidelines do not appear to be of assistance to these schools in promoting greater understanding of the complexities of emotional and behavioural difficulties.

### **9.5.3 Issues relating to Influences from outside the School**

All four policies contain evidence that they have been influenced by factors from outside the school situation. For the most part these factors are comprised of government legislation and DES circular letters. For example, P1's behaviour policy includes a list of twenty references, including legislation, DES circular letters and other literature, several of which are referred to within the text of the document. Figure 9.6 provides a summary of the categories of documents/agencies that are referred to specifically or incidentally, both referenced and unreferenced, within the documents or the appendices.



| Description   | P1<br>SEN Policy | P1<br>Behaviour<br>Policy | PP2<br>SEN Policy | PP2<br>Behaviour<br>Policy |
|---|------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| Legislation   |                  | X                         | X                 | X                          |
| DES Circular Letters                                | X                | X                         |                   |                            |
| DES Guidelines                                      | X                | X                         | X                 |                            |
| NEWB Guidelines on Code of Behaviour                |                  | X                         |                   |                            |
| Special Education Support Service (SESS)            | X                |                           |                   |                            |
| Other Government Agencies (Health Authorities, etc) |                  | X                         |                   |                            |
| Published Books                                     |                  | X                         |                   |                            |
| Other Guidelines (Non-Government)                   |                  | X                         |                   |                            |
| Standardised Assessment Tests                       | X                |                           |                   |                            |

**Figure 9.6** Categories of Documents/Agencies Influencing Sample Policies

The level of influence exercised by these factors varies substantially between the policies. As Figure 9.6 demonstrates, P1 appears to be more influenced than PP2 by these factors from outside the school and this is followed through within the policy documents from that school in three ways, namely:

- the level of detail contained in the policies overall
- the influence on the shape or structure of the policies, and
- what is included in the policies.

This is demonstrated, for example, by P1 including in its SEN policy an outline of the staged approach to the delivery of support for students presenting with learning support or SEN, which is drawn from *DES Circular Letter SP ED 02/05 (2005b)*, and also its references to named standardised assessment tests including explanations of standardised scores. Also, its behaviour policy is influenced by the NEWB guidelines (see above). This level of detail is absent from the policies from PP2, apart from the description of the duties of special needs assistants, drawn from the unreferenced *DES Circular Letter 12/05 (2005a)*, already discussed, which is contained in its SEN policy, and specific references to the school's obligations under legislation contained in its behaviour policy.

This contrast in the level of detail between the policies from each school raises interesting issues. At surface level P1, through its quite detailed policies, appears to display an appreciation of the level of complexity inherent in SEN and behavioural issues and, hence, it appears to have a sophisticated set of responses or provisions which is current, well informed and well thought out. In contrast, PP2's policies contain a considerable number of generalised statements which, among other things, could imply a lack of understanding of the complexities of the issues or a lack of engagement in teasing out the pertinent issues. P1's policies attempt to use the referenced documents to construct a proactive plan of action to deal with issues or, indeed, to pre-empt them. PP2, on the other hand, appears to be reactive in that it refers to legislation to delineate its obligations or to justify its responses to situations, e.g. in its behaviour policy it refers to its obligations to "monitor attendance and report students to the National Education Welfare Board who have in excess of 20 days absence during the school year" (p. 7), whereas P1 states it "strives at all times to encourage maximum school attendance in all pupils" (p. 23), going on to outline the measures it takes to promote this.

However this apparently sophisticated position on the part of P1 requires further analysis. Firstly it is predominantly the case only in relation to its SEN policy as opposed to its behaviour policy, and then only in instances where it is relatively straightforward to provide detail, e.g. outlining the staged approach to the



provision of support, describing standardised test results or outlining the headings contained in an Individual Profile and Learning Plan. However in its behaviour policy, what appear to be detailed statements of 'action being taken' could also be interpreted as 'actions that might be taken', e.g. the lists of bullet points that follow sub-headings such as "Students are more likely to behave well when..." (p.11), "Other strategies to encourage and promote good behaviour include..." (p.11) and "Some strategies used in response to incidents of inappropriate behaviour are..." (p.12). There is no clear indication that these actions are in fact the actual actions taken in the school, by whom, when, etc. Also its unreferenced transcription of the NEWB guidelines' comments re sanctions (see Section 9.4.2 above) belies an original or a well thought out response to this issue.

Secondly it can be argued, from the point of view of the application of policy, which is addressed in Section 9.5.6 below, that the level of detail written into the policies is of less importance than the individualised responses made on a case by case basis. This is a theme articulated by some interviewees (Chapter Eight, Section 8.3.5.2) and also will be discussed in the next chapter. PP2's generalised statements may, in reality, facilitate highly individualised and complex responses to situations in the school, relying on the experience of teachers to personalize how they interact with students in particular situations. These themes are also present in the responses of interviewees (Chapter Eight, Section 8.3.5.2). Therefore it is difficult to make judgements about the quality of individual policies outside of the school context and I am aware of this as a limiting factor in my analysis. Chapter Ten discusses these issues in more depth.

A further issue to be addressed is to note what appears not to be mentioned in the policies as influencing factors. This relates to relevant reports or guidelines from other sources. It can be observed, for example, that P1's policies do not refer to guidelines issued by the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) in 2007 entitled *Special Educational Needs: A Continuum of Support* (DES, 2007c). Neither do the policies from PP2 refer to *School Matters, The Report of the Task Force on Student Behaviour in Second Level Schools*, published in 2006. Why this is so is not

clear. P1, in its SEN policy, does refer to collaboration with NEPS psychologists and appears to value this, yet does not include references to guidelines to which it would have access. Similarly, PP2 would have had access to the School Matters Report when it reviewed its behaviour policy but does not refer to it; however it is important to place this in the overall context that this school's policies do not appear to have been informed by the literature available to it in the public domain, for whatever reason.

While it is interesting to consider why or how various sources do or do not influence the development of the policies, I am aware that this is speculative as best. However I suggest it is important to point out that both schools appear to be cognisant of a necessity to be compliant with official regulations, either of a legislative or procedural nature, hence their references to NEWB guidelines, legislation and DES circular letters. The two documents mentioned above do not share a similar status. It could be argued that this may suggest a perceived requirement to include the former due to their more official status and this is understandable. However it could also imply a focus on regulation as an overall guiding principle for the development of policy. Again, this is understandable and, indeed, equally valid. The balance between these considerations and the interests of students, integral to the policies that emerge, remains the object of speculation.

#### **9.5.4 The Individual Student as the Central Focus**

In the analysis of the data from the semi-structured interviews there is substantial consideration given to the dilemma of attempting to develop a behaviour policy that, on the one hand, can be seen to treat all students equally while, on the other hand, respond to the particular needs of individual students (Chapter Eight, Section 8.3.3). This is seen by interviewees as a very difficult yet necessary balance to achieve. Therefore it is pertinent to examine how this is addressed by the two sample schools in their behaviour policies, if at all.

Examination of the two policies suggests that P1 recognises this as an issue and attempts to engage with it in various ways throughout its behaviour policy (see



below). PP2's behaviour policy, on the other hand, does not demonstrate any appreciable recognition of this issue. This is interesting given its inclusion of categories of EBD in the groups of students it identifies as requiring support linked to its definition of SEN (see Section 9.5.2). There appears to be quite a disjointed relationship between the SEN and behaviour policies in this school. The only references made to such students in PP2's behaviour policy are when it refers to additional support staff and it states:

The Guidance Counsellors and Chaplain are available to meet students and parents/guardians by appointment. The Guidance Counsellors are always ready to help with student worries or difficulties, which may be personal, related to study, subject options and later on career choices.

(p. 19)

The school Special Educational Needs Department also provide support for students with a range of learning and behavioural difficulties. Class teachers, Year Heads, Senior Management can refer to the Resource/Learning Support teacher any student they are concerned about. A written explanation should accompany any such referrals.

(p. 19)

It is interesting to note the focus of the concerns that may fall into the remit of the guidance counsellors (largely curriculum and career-based issues). No reference is made regarding the nature of the concerns that may lead to a student being referred to the learning support/resource teacher. Neither is there any reference to what interventions, if any, might take place. This demonstrates quite interesting assumptions about the perceived nature of the work of these two practitioners or, indeed, a lack of knowledge about that work. Also it could imply that no specific or targeted intervention is put in place, leading to questions about what happens, how effective it is, how and by whom this is decided, etc.

By contrast P1's behaviour policy attempts to strike a balance between the school community of students and the needs of the individual by frequent reference to its "characteristic spirit" (p. 3) which is "child-centred" (p. 6). It states that the policy's aim is to "ensure that the individuality of each child is respected and that individual

differences are celebrated”, (p. 3). While it outlines its expectations for each individual student (p. 5) this is tempered with a caveat that “Due regard will be given to the age and range of abilities in implementing the Code of Behaviour” (p. 5). This policy also refers to how the school will actively develop skills in the students, by citing a list of named interventions and, importantly, states:

Cognisance will be taken of behavioural difficulties that arise from special educational needs of individuals. Behaviour targets and specific strategies may be included as part of an Individualised Education Plan.

(p. 6)

The focus on the student as an individual, exemplified in P1’s behaviour policy echoes a similar focus in its SEN policy and demonstrates a clear link between the two policies, both of which refer to the “characteristic spirit” of the school. Indeed the behaviour policy references the other school policies that “have a bearing on the Code of Behaviour” (p. 24) and includes the SEN policy.

#### 9.5.5 Gender Issues

In the semi-structured interviews the majority of interviewees felt there were no significant differences in the ways in which male and female teachers thought about or responded to behavioural issues. However there were dissenting opinions to this (see Chapter Eight, Section 8.3.4 for a discussion of this issue).

An examination of the sample policies indicates that they are written in a gender neutral manner, e.g. referring to ‘pupils’, ‘students’, ‘teachers’, ‘SNAs’, ‘staff’, ‘parents/guardians’ without reference to gender and using gender neutral terms such as ‘his/her’. This is as expected. It is also interesting to note the gender makeup of the staff and students of the schools. Both schools are co-educational with equal numbers of male and female students in each approximately. The gender of staff differs significantly. P1, with fourteen teachers and six SNAs, has only two males on staff, both teachers. PP2 has a better balance: twenty-seven female and twenty male teachers, with one male SNA and one female SNA. This imbalance in P1 is consistent with the norm for the primary sector, as are the



figures for PP2 for the post-primary sector (see Chapter Two, Section 2.3.2 and Chapter Four, Section 4.4.1).

Regarding the significance of these statistics, it may be reasonable to assume that those involved in the development of the policies in P1 were for the most part females, however the same cannot be assumed for PP2. What can be stated with certainty about the sample policies is that both schools either appear to consider the issue of student gender as not having any significance, as exemplified in the language employed by them, or are not aware of any significance this may have. The former is consistent with the point made in the semi-structured interviews and referred to above. This is not the full picture, however, given that a small number of interviewees held opinions that differ from the norm. Similarly the latter point is interesting in the context of the literature on gender difference (see Chapter Three, Section 3.4.1). These points are discussed further in Chapter Ten, Section 10.5.

#### **9.5.6 Issues relating to the Development of Policy**

The issues identified from the analysis of the semi-structured interviews in relation to the development of the behaviour policy *per se* (Chapter Eight, Section 8.3.5) are fourfold, namely

- which stakeholders are involved in policy development
- how behaviour policies link with other policies in the school
- a move towards the promotion of positive behaviour in behaviour policies
- how the policy is applied 'on the ground' and how it is monitored.

These issues are manifested to varying degrees in the sample policies, demonstrating interesting levels of engagement with pertinent questions.

Regarding the issue of stakeholders' involvement in the development of policy, Sections 9.4.1 and 9.4.2 (above) outline this and indicate a seemingly more comprehensive engagement with stakeholders on the part of P1 in relation to both its policies. The vagueness of PP2's reference in its SEN policy, indicating which stakeholders were consulted without indicating how this happened, at what stage

of policy development or to what extent, coupled with an absence of any such reference in its behaviour policy, suggest a lack of any comprehensive consideration of this issue in this school. If this is the case, its commitment to genuine collaboration with stakeholders could be questioned. While it may very well be the case that stakeholders were consulted, the data from the semi-structured interviews tends to suggest that policies are largely well developed by the time this occurs, leaving it too late for any meaningful contribution to be made.

Similarly, the degree to which the behaviour policies are consistent with other policies in the schools differs considerably between P1 and PP2. P1's policy contains a section in which it outlines the other policies with which it links (p. 24), which at least suggests this issue is considered of relevance. The extent to which this is true would require analysis of those policies which, unfortunately, are not available. In the case of PP2, the only other policy referred to is the policy on suspension and expulsion (p. 19). Neither its SEN policy nor its behaviour policy makes any reference to the other. This has already been discussed in Section 9.5.2 in terms of specified categories of EBD being named in its SEN policy yet not being referred to again in its behaviour policy. This inconsistency between the policies suggests that PP2's policies seem to have been developed in isolation from each other and poses interesting questions about the extent to which the practitioners in this school, who were involved in the development of its policies, are aware of the complexities of EBD and how these should be considered at policy level.

Both behaviour policies display evidence of promoting positive behaviour. However the approaches taken to achieve this are quite different in each school's policy. In the case of PP2 this issue is considered in the context of the rights of the individual and is outlined in terms of 'expectations' placed on students. Its "Charter of Rights and Responsibilities" (p. 9), is claimed to have been prepared "in consultation with teachers, parents and students" (p. 8) and outlines four rights, of respect, learning, freedom from harassment/physical abuse, etc and the right to report such treatment. Each of these is presented with an accompanying responsibility (p. 9). Attendance, courtesy, orderliness and respect for property are examples of



expectations of all students that are cited. This approach suggests the onus of responsibility around behavioural issues rests with the individual and is something that the student brings to the school situation rather than being something that can be taught or nurtured within the school context. This is an important point as it points to, for example, how PP2 conceptualises student readiness and/or ability to take responsibility and to engage in self-control.

P1 devotes a section of its policy to a “Whole School Approach in Promoting Positive Behaviour” (p. 6), in which it outlines the steps it takes to promote the “quality of relationships” and “a strong sense of social cohesion” (p. 6). In this section it names the programmes it uses to support the behaviour policy, e. g. its ethical education programme and the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programme (NCCA, 1999a) in the curriculum. In this section it also acknowledges the difficulties that may be experienced by students presenting with SEN. This school also uses the notion of a charter, as does PP2, but in P1 this is drawn up at class level with the collaboration of the students. The following sections, “Positive Strategies for Managing Behaviour” and “Promoting Good Behaviour” (pps. 9-16) outline its use and other actions that may occur to promote positive behaviour. Whilst I comment above (Section 9.5.3) on the fact that this represents more an indication of possible actions rather than a definitive list of actions that actually occur, it is relevant to note the positive tone of these sections in P1’s behaviour policy in the context of promoting positive behaviour. It is also relevant to contrast this with PP2’s focus on what is expected of all students with little reference as to how they are supported in meeting the expectations that are placed upon them nor, indeed, of a reference to any differentiation between students presenting with various needs such as those presented by EBD.

This leads to the final issue to come from the analysis of the data from the semi-structured interviews, the application of the behaviour policies on the ground. How do these schools envisage the practical application of their policies and what procedures and structures, if any, do they put in place to translate them into reality? PP2’s behaviour policy describes a “Discipline Structure” (p. 15) which

outlines a hierarchy of responsibility and referral around behaviour issues. While this includes positive comments, e.g. the subject/class teacher will “attempt to modify behaviour to ensure a positive, happy, (sic) learning environment within the classroom” (p. 16), it focuses largely on procedures around sanctions, e.g. detention, suspension, referral to deputy principal/principal. A detailed list of examples of misdemeanours and possible sanctions, ranging from “minor”, “serious” to “very serious” is included (p. 20). This section also includes references to the guidance counsellor, chaplain and the SEN department which are discussed in Section 9.5.4. The policy also refers to a discipline committee, comprising of two members, and includes this as one of many “accepted procedures for dealing with discipline issues” (p. 17). No other reference is made to this committee in the behaviour policy. Its purpose and functions are unclear.

PP2’s policy makes one reference to how incidences of positive behaviour are monitored, “Positive behaviour should also be reported to the Tutor” (p. 16). Overall, it is interesting to note that, in PP2’s behaviour policy, the issue of rewards is dealt with after all the previous information re sanctions, etc, is outlined, not necessarily presenting this issue as an afterthought but suggesting a stronger focus on managing unacceptable behaviour. This short section outlines the school’s aims or reasons for having a rewards system, which include very positive things such as recognition of achievement, motivation and developing a culture of praise (p. 22). Citing four categories to which rewards are linked, two refer to academic achievement on an on-going basis, one refers to extra-curricular achievements and one is entitled “consistent improvement/most improved” (p. 22) thus indicating that while achievement in traditional areas appears to be to the fore in this school, there is some acknowledgement of a diversity of abilities present also.

The PP2 behaviour policy does not consider how its implementation or level of success will be evaluated, nor does it indicate a review date. By contrast, P1’s policy addresses these issues in a forthright manner, including a list of success criteria (p. 24) and a timetable for review (p. 25). Both of these suggest an awareness of the importance of embedding the policy into the everyday life of the school, e.g.



success criteria include “observation of positive behaviour”, “consistent implementation of the policy by all staff” and “positive feedback from teachers, parents and pupils” (p. 24).

## 9.6 Summary of the Analysis

The analysis is carried out using a framework based on the major issues emanating from the analysis of data gathered in the semi-structured interviews. The rationale for this framework is outlined in Section 9.5.1. Overall the major findings of the document analysis can be summarised as follows.

On initial examination there appears to be a major difference between the two schools’ policies in terms of the knowledge base on which they are constructed. Whilst both schools use outside sources in the development of their policies, the extent to which this happens differs greatly. Some sources are referenced, others are not. P1 uses a wider variety of sources than PP2, which for the most part references legislation only. The information contained in these sources is sometimes used incorrectly and, although this is not the case generally, this does affect important aspects of the policies analysed. This raises questions about how knowledgeable these schools are in relation to SEN and, in particular, EBD. While P1 appears to be knowledgeable of the former, both schools appear to rely considerably on the NEWB guidelines for guidance on behavioural issues and tend to adhere rigidly to those guidelines. References to EBD are sparse in P1’s policy and largely absent from PP2’s behaviour policy.

The language employed by the schools is markedly different. Whilst this is not the case in relation to the SEN policies, it is very evident in the behaviour policies. P1 phrases issues in a positive manner and clearly makes a point of doing so; this enhances its underlying ethos or “characteristic spirit”. PP2’s behaviour policy focuses on outlining procedures dealing with breaches of the policy and only includes a short statement about promoting positive behaviour. The content of the SEN policies is largely similar although there is more detail in P1’s policy. This is not so in the case of the behaviour policies, where the content differs considerably. P1

shows the balance is weighted towards addressing how the school can support positive behaviour and provides considerable detail here providing examples of programmes, etc. PP2 provides considerable detail about the sanctions to be imposed, the expectations of students and their responsibilities.

A marked difference between the behaviour policies is the focus in P1 on how the school community teaches acceptable behaviour, contrasting with PP2's expectations that students can and should take responsibility for their own behaviour. Its policy suggests that this is expected from the beginning of a student's career in the school. This can be viewed as the primary school seeming to accept a role in teaching behaviours and supporting students' development in this area, whereas the post-primary school appears to have little appreciation of the diversity of students' development in this regard, again questioning its knowledge of the concept of EBD.

## **9.7 Summary**

This chapter analysed the policy documents on SEN and behaviour from each of two schools, one primary and one post-primary. The rationale for the inclusion of document analysis in the research methodology was discussed, followed by the rationale for the selection of the two schools and a brief description of each one. A detailed analysis of the documents followed, employing a framework based on the issues emanating from the semi-structured interviews. The chapter concluded with a summary of the major findings of the analysis. The next chapter provides a discussion of the findings of the data collection in the context of the literature reviews undertaken.



## Chapter Ten

### Discussion of Findings

#### 10.1 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the findings of my research. The theoretical underpinnings of my research take a social constructivist perspective and this is outlined in Chapter Five. This perspective is integral to the discussion in this chapter as it permits me to interact with and interpret the data in order to construct meaning around the specific research questions. This constitutes a dynamic engagement with the opinions of the questionnaire respondents and interviewees along with the analysis of the evidence collected from the two schools' policies. Here I discuss my findings under five main headings which represent the broad themes that have emerged from the ongoing research and which have contributed to shaping the research throughout. Several of these issues have already been discussed in preceding chapters. These themes are as follows:

- Understandings of EBD and influences on those understandings
- Definitions of EBD in mainstream schools
- Responses to EBD in mainstream schools
- Gender issues
- School ethos or culture.

The overall conclusions to be drawn from the research and its implications are presented in Chapter Eleven. That chapter also includes my observations on how the research was conducted and recommendations for further research.

In order to contextualise this discussion I believe it is important to revisit the aims and the specific questions on which my research is based and to comment on the degree to which I have remained faithful to the issues or questions that interested me initially. The aims outlined in Chapter One are as follows:

- To identify a range of definitions of EBD currently present in mainstream schools, in the context of national and international discourse

- To consider the relationship between behaviour policies in mainstream schools and the concept of EBD
- To investigate the issues and factors influencing the understanding of and the response to EBD in mainstream schools, e.g.
  - Whether it is a single gender or co-educational school
  - Whether it is a primary or post-primary school
  - The gender of students and teachers
  - The school's ethos or culture.

The aims of my research have remained consistent throughout the course of the work. The three major issues of definition of EBD, behaviour policies and influencing factors have informed and shaped my work at all stages of data collection, data analysis and literature review. This is evident in the development of the preceding chapters.

Similarly the subsequent specific research questions have remained consistent also and they are presented here again:

- How is EBD currently understood in Irish mainstream schools in the context of national and international discourse?
- How does this relate to schools' policies on behaviour, in the context of national policy on SEN?
- How is EBD defined and what are the issues or factors that arise in defining EBD in mainstream schools?
- To what extent are these definitions influenced by
  - Gender of staff and/or students
  - School population (single gender/co-educational)
  - Sector (primary/post-primary)
  - Traditional ethos or culture of the school (e. g. an academic focus)?

Whilst these questions have remained consistent throughout the study, the emphasis attached to each of these research questions has shifted somewhat over the course of my investigation. This development is consistent with a social constructivist perspective to researching in the real world and is also consistent with the nature of the research methodologies chosen for this investigation. Indeed I suggest that a realisation of such changes in emphasis as data are analysed and



interpreted is a hallmark of a true social constructivist interpretation of the researcher being in the real world and contributing to the realities under investigation. This view is supported in the literature (see, for example, Robson, 2011). Shifts in emphasis have occurred regarding investigating what influences how EBD is defined. The following sections will discuss these shifts in emphasis and, in particular, their significance in the context of the overall aims will be examined.

## **10.2 Understandings of EBD and Influencing Factors**

Whilst there is evidently a close relationship between the issue of how EBD is understood and how it is defined in schools, I investigate the two issues separately in my study. I consider that separating these two issues facilitates a more in-depth analysis of the reality of these issues in schools. Looking at how practitioners conceptualize EBD is predicated on investigating the factors that influence those understandings at a micro level. This provides an exposition of the underlying rationale that accounts for how and why schools are defining EBD in the ways in which they do. There are three major findings from this research relating to the understandings of EBD in mainstream schools, namely variations in understandings of EBD, differing levels of sophistication within those understandings and issues relating to policy development. These are outlined in the following paragraphs.

There appear to exist wide variations of understanding of the concept of EBD across the entire sample. This diversity is manifested across all three stages of data collection, the questionnaire, semi-structured interview and document analysis. It is characterised overall by varying degrees of knowledge emanating from a variety of sources. Most important of these is the fact that some practitioners possess some knowledge of SEN overall, along with some knowledge of EBD with a particular focus on behavioural issues. There also exists a certain knowledge of and reliance on DES documentation around the allocation of resources to various categories of SEN. Finally there exists a tendency to include for consideration any identifiable grouping in the school that differs from the mainstream. Interview responses, in particular, suggest a tendency for interviewees to feel comfortable with discussing

SEN at a conceptual level, suggesting they consider themselves to have an understanding of this, followed by transference of what they know about SEN in general to a subsequent discussion of EBD when asked specifically about this topic. Indeed there is evidence in the data of a tendency among interviewees to refer to students presenting with SEN as a homogeneous group sharing a broad range of characteristics, suggesting that this is representative of similar thinking in their schools. One interviewee refers constantly to “our special needs kids” while the SEN policy from PP2 (the post-primary school) offers a long list of groups of students whom the school appears to consider may present with SEN (see Appendix XX, p. 2).

Whilst these wide variations of understanding of EBD manifest themselves across the whole sample, the research suggests that, within that reality, there also exist significant differences between respondents from the primary and post-primary sectors regarding the level of sophistication of the understandings that exist about EBD. Sectoral differences are not widely investigated in the literature, Gibbs and Gardiner (2008) being an exception to this. Data from the questionnaire suggest that this situation does not appear to be differentiated to any great degree across the different sub-sectors within the post-primary sector, implying it may represent a genuine difference between the primary and post-primary sectors overall. Data from all three sources (questionnaire, interview and document analysis) appear to suggest that, although to a large extent the tendency to consider all students presenting with SEN as a homogeneous group sharing a broad range of similar characteristics (discussed above) exists in both primary and post-primary sectors, there appears to be evidence of a more sophisticated understanding among respondents from the primary sector.

The reasons for this may be twofold. Firstly it is the case that, historically, specific provision for students presenting with SEN in general has been present in the primary sector for a longer period. Following the SERC Report in 1993, the expansion of services for SEN impacted on the primary sector first and to a greater extent than on the post-primary sector. Special schools are classified as primary



schools by the DES and follow the Primary School Curriculum (1999) predominantly. Added to this, the DES has tended to address issues of SEN provision at an official level in the primary sector before the post-primary sector. For example, continuing professional development in special educational needs for teachers in the post-primary sector has only been provided by the DES since 2000, whereas it has been available in the primary sector since 1962. Overall, therefore, those working in the primary sector have had longer to address and consider these issues, supported by an official framework within which to operate, than have their counterparts in the post-primary sector, leading to more sophisticated understandings and responses.

Secondly this may be due to organisational differences between the two sectors. The curriculum at primary level is an integrated child-centred curriculum. This is not the case at post-primary level. The nature of the primary school is one where teachers spend most of the day with one class, which provides opportunities for a greater level of knowledge regarding the learning needs of the students and possibilities for initiating appropriate responses. The allocation and organisation of resources has been present in the primary sector for longer and has subsequently been adapted in a more sophisticated way than in the post-primary sector. This is illustrated in the example of *Circular Letter SP ED 02/05: Organisation of Teaching Resources for Pupils who need Additional Support in Mainstream Primary Schools* (2005b) which provides for an integrated approach to providing additional teaching resources, based on a staged approach. This allows primary schools considerable autonomy in organising the deployment of their resources with the intention of promoting more inclusive practices such as in-class support. This initiative has yet to be introduced into the post-primary sector. As a result, a whole school approach to policy development across the school, but particularly in response to SEN and behavioural issues, developed more quickly and more comprehensively in the primary sector.

In relation to the understandings of EBD in mainstream schools, the third significant finding from this research concerns issues relating to policy development. Recent years have seen an impetus for schools to develop policies to cover all areas of

school life. This is in response to the legislative requirement (Education Act, 1998) to develop an overall school plan in the context of school development planning and, of relevance to this research, to develop a policy statement on SEN (Education Act, 1998). A rush to produce policies in order to comply with this imperative appears to have resulted in an emphasis on quantity over quality. Commenting on the level of discussion that preceded the development of the behaviour policy in their school, one teacher puts this succinctly (see Chapter Eight, Section 8.3.5.1):

I think also I suppose it's basically because it was a set policy because we've had to bring in all these policies.

Related to this are the difficulties inherent in conceptualizing and defining such a nebulous issue as EBD in the first place. Issues of definition are discussed in Section 10.3. A tendency to focus more on presenting characteristics and responses is a position that lends itself to allowing the co-morbidity of presenting characteristics across a range of conditions to compromise clarity and this is identified in the literature (Mowat, 2009). This can be seen, for example, in PP2's inclusion of a wide range of groups of students as possibly presenting with SEN.

Another suggestion, linked to this, relates to the level of meaningful systemic change in schools necessary for the development of a truly inclusive school (see Chapter Four, Section 4.4.2). Here it is argued that surface level change, such as a focus on policy writing, is being achieved but this has occurred to the detriment of deep level meaningful change in attitudes, structures and, indeed, policies (Shevlin, Kenny & Mc Neela, 2002; Kinsella & Senior, 2008). This might suggest that the production of policy statements is more imperative than meaningful understanding of the concepts and issues inherent in those policies.

### **10.3 Definitions of EBD**

The research focuses on two aspects in relation to defining emotional and behavioural difficulties. It investigates how EBD is defined in mainstream schools



and also investigates what influences practitioners working in these schools when they attempt to define EBD.

Figure 8.2 (Chapter Eight, Section 8.3.1) provides a summary of the definitions provided by the interviewees, followed by an analysis of their contents. This analysis identifies a level of resignation on the part of the interviewees, locating the causes of presenting characteristics either within students or within settings other than the school, and by extension compromising the possibilities of any positive effects of school-based interventions or influence. The underpinnings of such an attitude are, I suggest, linked to a hypothesis, inherent also in the DES definition of EBD, that supports a medical model of causality, locating reasons for emotional and behavioural difficulties either within recognisably assessable conditions, the responsibility for which lie within medical and therapeutic milieux, or within home, family and/or community environments over which education practitioners have little or no influence. Whilst the pervasiveness of this attitude across the mainstream education system cannot be extrapolated from the data generated in this research, I suggest that there is sufficient evidence presented here to support the view that such an attitude exists. This represents a significant finding of this research.

This research suggests that the issue of defining EBD among practitioners in the Irish mainstream education context is complicated at best. Overall this is consistent with the international literature. There has been little work in this area in the Irish context (see Chapter Four, Section 4.2). What research does exist into EBD or related matters in the Irish context either does not address the issue of definition or works within a context of definitions presented in the international literature more than what little is presented in its Irish counterpart, which is understandable. This failure to address or to place any significant importance on definition is also consistent with the views of Mowat (2009), who suggests it appears to be more beneficial to concentrate on investigating presenting characteristics and how to address them. This appears to be very much the prevailing view in the Irish context. Definitions suggested by respondents to the questionnaire (Figure 8.2, Chapter

Eight, Section 8.3.1) concentrate more on describing presenting characteristics of EBD rather than on defining the concept. Amongst the interviewees there was little interest in exploring further the definitions they had provided in the questionnaire.

Regarding how EBD is defined in the Irish literature this research highlights the fact that the Irish context is marked by somewhat substantial differences between statements regarding definition emanating from the DES on the one hand and what is being emphasised by practitioners in schools on the other, which are much broader than the former. Alongside this the research also points to substantial differences in definition between the two main official stakeholders, namely the DES and NEPS. The recent strategic review on supporting students with SEN in schools (NCSE, 2013) recommends moving away from the emphasis on a diagnosis of disability.

EBD is difficult to define. Several perspectives suggest a range of characteristics and this leads to a high level of co-morbidity of presenting characteristics with other conditions. This is highlighted in the international literature (Cooper, 1999; National Association of School Psychologists, 2005; Jull, 2008) and is evident also in the Irish context (NEPS, 2010). The main source of definition in the Irish context is official governmental documentation. The current situation, where there are quite substantial differences between the DES definitions (DES, 2002 and 2005a) and those of its own psychological service, NEPS (2010), typifies the range of perspectives present in the international literature.

Inherent aspects of definitions found in the international literature include characteristics particular to the individual, e.g. biological and psychological characteristics, along with other environmental and social influences. These too are present in the Irish context, but to a lesser extent. This is a relatively recent development (NEPS, 2010). There is an emphasis still on a medical model of definition within DES thinking, which is picked up in the responses to the request to define EBD in the questionnaire, mentioning undiagnosed syndromes, transitory and permanent conditions, psychiatric problems linked to childhood experiences,



etc. Only recently is there evidence of a shift in thinking towards a more holistic viewpoint as exemplified by the NEPS definition, which places equal consideration on environmental influences and, more importantly, the interface between all influences. This can be identified to a certain extent across the sample by some of the questionnaire responses and among some interviewees. They identify other influences, e.g. poor parenting, emotional difficulties linked to family issues, anger management issues, links to learning difficulties, etc. This shift in thinking is compatible with the recent policy advice from the NCSE (2013).

This latter perspective is consistent with a trend in the international literature towards a more generalised approach to defining EBD (e.g. Cooper, 1999; Woolfolk *et al*, 2013) and contrasts more specifically with the approach taken by the DES. More importantly it is more consistent with the opinions shared by certain questionnaire respondents and interviewees (see above), and this suggests the NEPS viewpoint may be influenced by its engagement with practitioners in schools or *vice versa*. However, it is also important to note that, as is seen from the examples taken from the questionnaires and interviews above, such a view is not consistent across all sectors in mainstream Irish education. Characteristics that are integral to the individual are reported consistently across all sectors as being major defining elements of EBD. In particular named assessed conditions, e.g. ODD, OCD, AD/HD, are very evident in the responses (Chapter Seven, Section 7.5.2). Emotional influences are considered predominantly in the context of what the student brings to the school situation and the home environment is mentioned frequently. These are particularly mentioned by respondents from large schools, for example, regardless of school sector.

Influences on how EBD is defined are also investigated in this research. The work of Cullinan *et al* (2004) is cited and is useful in identifying three overall underlying reasons for attempting to define EBD in the first place (Chapter Three, Section 3.2). The DES definition can be identified with an administrative perspective associated with categorisation and quantification. I suggest that its position has not moved on from this perspective over time as it fits very well with the administrative functions

of allocating resources on the ground. This way of organising has been strengthened considerably since the establishment of the NCSE in 2005 on a statutory basis, one of whose functions has been to oversee the allocation of resources. However, as stated above, the NCSE (2013) is now recommending moving away from this way of organising.

However this administrative approach to defining EBD appears to have been largely unchallenged in the Irish context from a research perspective. I believe this is a significant finding of my research. The more recent viewpoint expressed by NEPS and supported by the NCSE policy advice, is more consistent with current thinking in the international literature and places it more within Cullinan's authoritative perspective. This is important as it implicitly legitimizes and, indeed, draws from perspectives present among certain practitioners in Irish mainstream schools and evidenced by data collected in my research. It represents a mismatch between DES thinking on the one hand and a significant cohort of education practitioners on the ground.

Another aspect of the issue of defining EBD which warrants discussion is that of the position of social factors in any such definition. This is common across the international literature (see, for example, Visser, 2003; Hunter-Carsch *et al*, 2006) yet this only appears significantly in the Irish context in the definition contained in the NEPS guidelines (2010). The absence of a reference to social factors from the DES definition of EBD has its antecedents in the historical departmental responses to social deprivation and economic disadvantage, which saw separate and discrete interventions into schools located in areas identified by social and economic criteria. The *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools* (DEIS) programme (see Chapter Four, Section 4.3.1) represents the current manifestation of these initiatives. I suggest that this type of planning has resulted in four significant outcomes.

Firstly, it has impacted on how EBD is defined in that the notion of social factors being inherent in EBD has not, until recently, been integral to how EBD is



conceptualised and defined in the Irish context. Secondly, being concentrated in areas of social and economic disadvantage has resulted in particular interventions and responses being implemented to target social and economic disadvantage in isolation, with less emphasis on an holistic biopsychosocial perspective of EBD being taken. However it is important also to note that Banks *et al* (2102) suggest a possible over-representation of students from schools in designated socially and economically disadvantaged areas.

Thirdly, it has resulted in a situation where many schools that are not located in designated socially and economically disadvantaged areas may not be identifying and addressing learning needs among their students. These needs would otherwise be classified under a broad definition of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Fourthly this situation has facilitated the continuation of the administrative perspective characterized by a culture of categorization and quantification, a medical model of diagnosis and description of difficulties and a tendency to focus on the extreme end of a spectrum of presenting conditions. This latter aspect is exemplified in the responses from the research data to the request to define EBD (referred to above) and is common across all respondents from all sectors. This suggests an emphasis on very difficult presenting behaviours often associated with factors emanating from the home environment or socio-economic factors. This has also impacted on the way in which the education authorities and mainstream schools have responded to EBD, which is discussed in Section 10.4 below.

#### **10.4 Responses to EBD**

In order to investigate the responses to EBD in mainstream schools the research looks at two particular issues, firstly that of policy development in relation to behaviour and secondly the issue of responses and interventions to support students around behavioural issues. The research identifies several findings with regard to these issues.

In relation to policy development around behaviour there is a high level of consistency between the Irish context and what is reported in the international and Irish literature. Several aspects of this can be identified. There is considerable coverage of policy development around behaviour in the international literature and the main focus is on how to develop policy at a whole school level (O'Brien, 1998; Daniels *et al*, 1999; Porter, 2000; Birmingham City Council, 2003; Ellis and Tod, 2009). A recurring theme is the notion of a school community having a shared vision of the kind of behaviour desired in the general environment. This is repeated in the Irish context and is evidenced in the literature over the past number of decades (see Chapter Four, Section 4.5) culminating in the NEWB guidelines (2008) on developing a behaviour policy.

The international literature largely suggests collaboration between stakeholders in working towards a policy that incorporates shared values, understandings and desires around behaviour (see, for example, Daniels *et al*, 1999; Ellis and Tod, 2009) and this presupposes a level of homogeneity across the entire school community. This represents the on-going challenge to policy makers with regard to behaviour. The number of stakeholders involved and their relative involvement, interest or level of influence in school life also represents a great challenge. The possibility for genuine collaboration varies enormously from one situation to another and depends on a level of commitment to the process that cannot be taken for granted (Daniels *et al*, 1999).

There is an inherent weakness in basing behaviour policy development on a presupposed shared vision of common goals in this area. This is something that appears to go unchallenged in the literature and this represents a significant finding of this research. Furthermore the data from this research suggest that genuine collaboration across stakeholders in policy development is far from being the norm in the Irish context. The findings from the questionnaire provide evidence that students and special needs assistants are consistently more likely to be excluded from this process (see Chapter Seven, Section 7.5.1 and Chapter Eight, Section 8.3.5.1).



Data from the interviews suggest that, if consulted, these and other stakeholders are often approached towards the end of the process of policy development, largely being presented with a *fait accompli*. This questions the possibility of genuine input by them and, indeed, the level of understanding of what genuine consultation and collaboration actually mean and require. It raises questions about the status of these stakeholders vis à vis decision-making in schools. It also raises questions about the students' voice in schools and how genuine are efforts to include this in matters that affect students' well-being to such a significant extent. This reality appears to be contrary to evidence in the research (Davies, 1996 and 2006; Prunty, Dupont and Mc Daid, 2012) which suggests that regard for the students' voice promotes inclusive practice and may improve responses to behavioural issues in schools. I suggest this is a significant finding of this research.

The discussion of special educational needs in the context of behaviour policy does not receive substantial attention in the Irish literature. In contrast to this, in the UK context Daniels *et al* (1999), outline key characteristics of effective practice in mainstream schools in supporting students with EBD (see Chapter Three, Section 3.6). In the Irish context, there appears to be an inherent practice where schools rely on their support structures around SEN to elaborate on how provision for students with SEN (including EBD) is to be managed or how the behaviour policy is to be implemented. This practice is also integral to the NEWB guidelines (2008) and the research provides several data indicating that schools follow such guidance (see, for example, Chapter Eight, Section 8.3.5.1 and Chapter Nine, Section 9.3.2).

These two issues suggest two interesting and related possibilities. On the one hand this situation implies that behaviour policy in the Irish context is conceptualised as an overarching statement that applies to all students attending a school. This view is supported by data from the semi-structured interviews. When asked about the success of the behaviour policy, several interviewees said they had never thought about this issue but assumed it was working well as most students appeared to comply with it most of the time (Chapter Eight, Section 8.3.5.2). On the other hand it also suggests a situation where issues relating to aspects of policy around

behaviour are contained not only in the behaviour policy but also in the school's support systems for students presenting with SEN. While this is not addressed in the literature this supposition is supported by data from this research along with suggestions inherent in the NEWB guidelines (2008).

For example, several interviewees across a variety of sectors report a level of flexibility that is inherent in the application of the behaviour policy. This allows for the accommodation of individual characteristics among certain students (see, for example, Chapter Eight, Section 8.3.3, where the concept of 'child centredness' is introduced, and Section 8.3.5.2). This is relevant to the issues raised above regarding the students' voice (Davies, 1996; Prunty *et al*, 2012). This flexibility is continued in the analysis of the policy documents examined in Chapter Nine, largely in relation to P1, the example from the primary sector. However in PP2's behaviour policy from the post-primary sector, there is also a suggestion that the SEN team in the school supports students with behavioural problems and has a more prominent role in this than the guidance counsellor, whose focus is seen as more curriculum and career-based. I suggest that this development represents a significant finding of this research and is currently undocumented in the literature.

There appears to exist a situation where the SEN policy and SEN personnel are considered to have responsibility regarding behavioural issues, in supporting students who present with difficulties, which is not related to the general behaviour policy of the school. This responsibility does not appear to be within the remit of the guidance counsellor. This is evidenced, for example, by a point made in Chapter Eight, Section 8.3.3 where a discussion is reported about not wishing to have guidance counsellors associated with behavioural issues in a post-primary school. It points to an understandable confusion amongst practitioners about differentiating between EBD on the one hand and behavioural issues on the other.

In relation to responses and interventions in schools the Irish context appears to be largely consistent with international practice. The data from the questionnaires and interviews indicate that a wide range of responses is in evidence across all sectors



of the Irish mainstream education system. For the most part this is consistent with the international literature. Cooper and Jacobs (2011a) suggest three types of interventions: those at whole school level that can be expected to impact on behavioural issues (e.g. a focus on literacy), those specifically designed to promote social and emotional learning at whole school level (e.g. positive behaviour programmes) and individualised interventions (e.g. individualised behaviour planning). In the Irish context this research presents data from the questionnaires in particular that demonstrate consistency with the first two types of interventions (see Chapter Seven, Section 7.5.5). The third type of intervention is addressed later in this section.

The fact that there is such a wide range of responses and interventions, however, also suggests that schools essentially have been left to respond to the situation individually and this is a significant finding. Data from the questionnaires do not identify any particular set of interventions associated with particular sectors, e.g. primary and post-primary, or with other variables such as single gender or co-educational schools. However one common feature that can be identified is in relation to the idea of the promotion of positive behaviour. This is mentioned by several questionnaire respondents (Chapter Seven, Section 7.5.5) and interviewees (Chapter Eight, Section 8.3.5.2) as an intervention and can be further identified in the document analysis (Chapter Nine, Section 9.5.6).

However very little detail is provided in the questionnaire responses regarding how this is promoted in the schools other than to suggest that teachers employ their own techniques in the classroom (Chapter Seven, Section 7.5.5). This occurs also among the interviewees. One exception to this can be found in P1's behaviour policy, where the SPHE programme is cited as one example of a means by which the school attempts to implement the notion of promoting positive behaviour (Chapter Nine, Section 9.5.6). PP2's behaviour policy, on the other hand, appears to approach this from the perspective of identifying examples of behaviours in the context of students' rights and responsibilities (Chapter Nine, Section 9.5.6).

It is interesting that whilst practitioners identify the promotion of the idea of positive behaviour they also appear not to be able to describe what that means at whole school level or how it is implemented. This issue is afforded considerable coverage in the international literature (see, for example, O'Brien, 1998; Freeman *et al*, 2006; Warren *et al*, 2006) but is not addressed comprehensively in the literature in the Irish context, with few references identified (O'Hara *et al*, 2000, Dwyer, 2003; NEWB, 2008). I suggest that the concept of promoting positive behaviour constitutes a phenomenon that has not yet embedded itself fully in schools in the Irish context. The notion of promoting positive behaviour is related to that of teaching appropriate behaviours and this is discussed in Chapter Eight, Section 8.3.3. There I discuss the relatively few incidences among interviewees of this occurring in their schools and I extrapolate possible reasons for this. Among them I suggest that this may not be construed as being within the schools' remit. Here I suggest that the concept of promoting positive behaviour may still be at the preliminary stages of development in Irish schools overall, more aspirational rather than a concrete structured intervention. This is a significant finding of this research.

As stated the data suggest no particular set of interventions that is associated with specific sectors across the sample. However some points can be made to illustrate what is happening in schools. In the primary sector, there is evidence of some interventions that are consistent with the aims of the Primary Curriculum and, in particular, the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programme. This is supported in the literature (Egan, 2007; Cullen, 2009). This, in turn, suggests that a whole school focus may be more established in the primary sector. At post-primary level, interventions focus more on establishing structures to implement the behaviour policy; PP2's behaviour policy provides a good example of this (see Appendix XXII). While this can also be seen as an example of a focus at whole school level, it is different in that it seems to focus more on the implementation of the structures rather than focusing on the individual circumstances of students.

The reliance on flexibility in the interpretation of the behaviour policy, whilst present in both primary and post-primary sectors, appears to be the dominant



initiative to be found in the post-primary sector. Its existence in both sectors is evident in the analysis of the policy documents in Chapter Nine. On a practical level, some examples of such responses are linked to the geography of the urban-rural divide. For example, urban schools are more likely than rural schools to collaborate with parents but are also more likely to suspend and exclude students (Chapter Seven, Section 7.4.2). The former might be due in part to the availability of parents to attend the school for consultation, whilst the latter may also be due to the proximity of students' homes if they are removed from lessons.

Cooper and Jacobs (2011a) identify as a third overall category of intervention in schools that of individualised behaviour planning and this is relatively new to the Irish context, particularly in the context of whole school planning. Individualised planning around curriculum learning targets is an established feature in the Irish education system (Rose *et al*, 2012), particularly in the primary sector, but the idea of targeting behavioural objectives is a more recent feature and this is evidenced in the recent NEPS guidelines on BESD (2010). However the wide variety of responses identified in Irish schools could also be seen as an attempt, albeit unstructured, to provide individualised responses to students' needs. This is an issue that is not addressed in the literature in the Irish context.

Another recent initiative to individualise responses is present in the establishment of the NBSS and the focus on targeted individuals in schools as one intervention it supports (see Chapter Four, Section 4.6). More recently the NCSE has issued policy advice (NCSE, 2012) to the Minister of Education and Skills, in which it promotes the idea of targeted individualised planning. The idea of individualised planning around behavioural issues is only now presenting itself in the Irish context. The lack of research in this area in the Irish context represents a significant finding of this research.

## **10.5 Gender Issues**

In the Irish context the issue of gender becomes more relevant due to characteristics that are particular to the Irish education system. These are outlined

in Chapter 4, Section 4.4.1 and relate not only to the high ratio of females to males in the teaching profession (which, admittedly, is a phenomenon shared with other countries) and an inverse ratio in management positions in schools, but also to the relatively high number of single gender schools in Ireland, particularly at post-primary level. Furthermore, even though the majority of teachers are female, there is a tendency for there to be higher ratios of male teachers to female teachers in single gender male schools than in single gender female schools or in co-educational schools. A significant number of male teachers in the primary school sector tend to be located in single gender male schools. The reasons for this tend to be historical and due to long-standing management and patronage structures in Irish schools (see Chapter Two, Section 2.2). Finally, also relevant is the gender profile of students presenting with SEN, with males outnumbering females in enrolments in primary and special schools in a ratio of 2:1 (see Chapter Four, Section 4.4.1).

The issue of gender in relation to EBD is one which is not explored in the Irish literature. In the international literature research appears to focus on investigating rates of identification across gender and gender-specific studies of manifestations of behaviours among students, e.g. externalising behaviours in male students and internalising behaviours in females (Maras and Cooper, 1999; Young *et al*, 2010). Acknowledgement of a lack of breadth of investigation is also in evidence (Hess Rice *et al*, 2008). There appears to be no evidence of research relating to EBD that is specific to sector (primary or post-primary), school population (single gender or co-educational) or teachers (male or female), all of which are of interest to this research.

With regard to how schools respond to students presenting with EBD, the international literature cites studies that have identified, for example, differences related to gender, differences in disciplinary procedures, differences in the language used to describe behaviours and a tendency to relate emotional issues to the behaviour of females rather than to the behaviours of males (see Chapter



Three, Section 3.4.1). This type of profile is mirrored in the data from this research. Given its small scale and sample, definitive statements cannot be made but I think it is useful to summarise the kinds of issues that are suggested by the data.

The data from this research suggest some differences in understandings of EBD between male and female practitioners. Evidence from the questionnaire and interview stages of data collection supports this assertion. The data also suggest this to be the case between single gender and co-educational schools. For example, in the questionnaire the language used by male respondents in defining EBD tends to be more negative than that of female respondents and males focus more on the extreme end of a spectrum of characteristics (see Chapter Seven, Section 7.4.6). Similarly, among interview respondents female respondents employ language that suggests more willingness to engage with difficulties, especially emotional difficulties, and a willingness to talk through issues.

Respondents to the questionnaire from single gender male schools report that teachers are reliant on their own classroom management techniques when responding to behavioural issues, suggesting a lack of emphasis on a whole school approach, and also tend to give importance to the home environment as a factor in behavioural difficulties. Those from single gender female schools focus more on the emotional state of students as a factor. Interestingly, respondents from co-educational schools tend to dwell on examples of behaviour at the extreme end of the spectrum when asked to discuss these issues. The reasons for this are unclear but it may be related to the more diverse population attending these schools, the often wider range of curricular programmes on offer and/or the ethos or culture present, and this is discussed in Section 10.6.

Whilst most interviewees report they feel there are no significant differences in the ways in which male and female teachers think about and respond to behavioural difficulties, there are some exceptions, in particular one primary teacher and one post-primary teacher (see Chapter Eight, Section 8.3.4). The point made by these two teachers relates to female teachers appearing to engage with and discuss

issues more than their male colleagues, who appear not to believe such in-depth scrutiny is always necessary. It is very difficult to extrapolate any significant findings from these data as it is necessary to be cautious particularly given the small sample involved. However these views are reported in the interviews and offer a different perspective to the accepted viewpoint; indeed the hesitancy with which these views were shared indicates this. I think it is worthwhile to consider these data against a background of research referred to in the literature (Maras and Cooper, 1999; Avramidis and Norwich, 2002; Hess Rice *et al*, 2008, etc) which appears to suggest that considerable more work needs to be carried out into the significance of gender in the area of EBD. I consider that this represents a significant finding of this research.

## **10.6 School Ethos or Culture**

Understandings and interpretations of the concepts involved in the notions of 'school ethos' or 'school culture' may be influenced by a wide variety of issues such as personal belief systems, what is considered to be of value in education and how educational success is measured, along with practitioners' length of service in a particular school and in their teaching career, the variety of that experience, etc. In the context of this research school ethos or culture can refer to the readiness of schools (represented by its structures, management, staff, etc) to accept, acknowledge and support students who present with learning difficulties emanating from emotional and behavioural difficulties.

The international literature refers to this (see Chapter Three, Section 3.4.2) and also to the conflict between including such students on the one hand in response to official policy on inclusion whilst, on the other, complying with demands for high levels of attainment in state examinations from parents and others. The notion of these two demands being mutually exclusive appears to be prevalent (Booth, Ainscow and Dyson, 1997; Paliokosta and Blandford, 2010). This is relevant to the Irish education system also, both at primary and post-primary levels, and is considered in the Irish literature in the context of effective inclusiveness and attitudes towards the inclusion of students presenting with SEN (Shevlin *et al*, 2002;



Scanlon & Mc Gilloway, 2006; Kinsella and Senior, 2008; Shevlin and Rose, 2008). This is consistent with the data from this research which demonstrate that issues of inclusion overall and attitudes around effective inclusion for students presenting with EBD are influenced by such considerations.

The conflict between the desire to sustain high academic attainment, in terms of success in terminal State examinations, and the inclusion of students presenting with SEN is pertinent in the Irish post-primary system where such attainment in State examinations and transfer to third level education are considered to be crucial in determining a school's success. Annual reporting of these transfer rates in the national print media is testament to this (see, for example, Flynn, 2012). The notion of an 'academic' ethos is anecdotally strong and this is presented in terms of attainment in the Leaving Certificate examination and transfer to third level.

As outlined in Chapter Two, Section 2.3.2, there are different types of school at post-primary level in Ireland. Traditionally these schools catered for different outcomes for their students, with secondary schools (voluntary or fee paying) being seen as providing an 'academic' education leading to third level education and eventual entry into the professions, whilst the schools under the control of Vocational Educational Committees (VECs) were originally established to provide vocational training leading to apprenticeships and employment in trades. Whilst most post-primary schools now offer broadly similar curricula, there do exist significant differences in the programmes they offer (see Chapter Two, Section 2.4.1) and this, in turn, affects and is affected by the degree to which a particular school espouses an 'academic' ethos.

Therefore, in the context of this research and at post-primary level in particular, the idea of school ethos or culture can refer to:

- a school's readiness to accept, acknowledge and support students from outside the mainstream and/or
- an emphasis on attainment in State examinations and transfer to third level education.

The first possibility has been addressed in the preceding paragraphs in so far as it is relevant to this research. The second possibility outlined above is not prevalent in the Irish literature but is relevant to this research. It is in acknowledgement of this reality that the questionnaire sent to post-primary respondents specifically included a question relating to this. Its purpose was to elicit at least a basic idea of how the respondents felt the school viewed itself in terms of this particular focus. The interviewees were not asked a specific question in this regard. However, regardless of sector, all were asked to comment on how their school presents itself to the outside world, leaving open the possibility that their responses could have included references to the school's ethos or culture, among other things.

In the questionnaire, of thirty-five post-primary respondents to answer the relevant question, six (17%) indicated they considered their school did have an academic focus; all six being voluntary secondary schools. When this figure is viewed in the context that there are only twelve other such schools in the total of thirty-five, I suggest that, whilst this does not represent a very high percentage of the full sample, neither is it insignificant. 33% of respondents from voluntary secondary schools in the sample considered their schools to have an academic focus, in contrast to the fact that no other respondent from other post-primary sectors who supplied an answer shared this view. The responses from the interviewees suggest different perspectives being taken by different sectors. Those from primary schools report the school presenting itself as 'caring', 'inclusive', 'child-centred', etc. Among the post-primary interviewees, responses tend more to focus on how the school believes it is perceived by the public rather than how it presents itself. The notion of being compared with other post-primary schools is evident here. Whilst terms such as 'caring' and 'inclusive' occur, so too do the terms 'academic' and 'vocational'.

When juxtaposed, for example, with the low percentage of voluntary secondary schools which provide the Leaving Certificate (Applied) programme (see Chapter Two, Section 2.4.2), I suggest that it can be argued that there is a question to be addressed here in relation to the readiness of certain types of schools, at post-



primary level, to be open and responsive to the inclusion of students whose profiles do not presumably 'fit' well with the focus of the school. This is further suggested by the responses of interviewees when asked to consider what influences how schools define EBD. The predominance of locating such influences in within-child characteristics and/or influences linked to environments located outside the school setting is significant (see Chapter Eight, Section 8.3.2). The idea that schools' environments might influence this issue is not considered by interviewees to any great extent, suggesting a lack of appreciation of how central school ethos or culture can be in this regard. I suggest that this is a significant finding of this research.

## **10.7 Summary**

This chapter discussed the findings of the research focussing on the data gathered in the questionnaire, the semi-structured interview and the document analysis. This was conducted in the context of the review of the international and Irish literature and particularly highlighted issues which are not covered extensively, if at all, in the literature. These issues will be addressed further in Chapter Eleven. There, I begin by making some observations on my research. Then I draw together and elucidate further on the conclusions of my research. Finally, I discuss the implications of the research and make some recommendations for further research in this area.

## Chapter Eleven

### Observations, Conclusions and Recommendations

#### 11.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an opportunity to reflect on the research overall and, in so doing, it addresses three issues. Firstly, it reconsiders the overall relevance of the research with the benefit of hindsight. This section also includes my observations on the strengths and limitations of the research. Secondly this chapter outlines what I consider to be the main conclusions that can be drawn from the research and how these contribute to knowledge on this topic. Finally it outlines the implications of this research and some general recommendations for further research questions and how these might be investigated.

#### 11.2 Observations on the Research

The topic of EBD *per se* has not received substantial coverage by researchers in Ireland until relatively recently. However issues related to this topic have been considered over many years in the Irish context, leading to an eclectic body of interventions and responses in schools. These are discussed in Chapter Four. Social and emotional development, behavioural issues, discipline and behaviour policies, whole school and community-based approaches, etc are documented as having been developed and/or implemented over the years to address issues that were perceived as requiring attention for a wide variety of reasons.

These reasons were as diverse as, on the one hand, the realisation, as part of the overall inclusion debate, that the education system and curriculum should provide for the holistic development of the individual including their social and emotional needs. On the other, responses to perceived 'problem' students who did not 'fit' easily into the system's extant structures were deemed necessary. However the effectiveness of these interventions and responses, and the extent to which they impact on EBD, represent important questions that have not been interrogated rigorously in the Irish context.



I suggest that an underlying reason for this shortcoming lies in the lack of comprehensive consideration of the concept of EBD in the Irish context in the first instance. This paucity of coverage of EBD in Ireland *per se* represents the underlying rationale for a study such as this. I believe that this research contributes to the knowledge in this area. It is timely to consider EBD in the context of the Irish mainstream education system for several reasons and these are outlined in Chapter One, Section 1.2. These include investigating how EBD is thought about and understood by practitioners in schools. They also include how national policy is being interpreted on the ground in schools and the interface between the national and local situations. Finally it is important to consider how recent developments in inclusive practices and policy formation may be impacting on students presenting with EBD. This is particularly so following a period of expansion in provisions for special educational needs in general due to the development of inclusion as government policy in this area of education to comply with international agreements and best practice in other countries. Section 11.4 considers how research in this area in the Irish context might develop by suggesting directions for further research emanating from this work.

However, the limited body of research also represents a challenge to me as researcher in this field. As has been outlined, a lot of work done in this area in the Irish context has concentrated on responding to perceived problems or difficulties that have presented themselves in the education system. Two recent interventions exemplify this. *School Matters: The Report of the Task Force on Student Behaviour in Second Level Schools* (2006) led to the establishment of the National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS) in response to a perceived problem of indiscipline among a certain cohort of students in post-primary schools and this is discussed in Chapter Four, Section 4.5. More recently, the NCSE Policy Advice Paper entitled *The Education of Students with Challenging Behaviour arising from Severe Emotional Disturbance/Behavioural Disorders* (2012) suggests how the DES may support schools in responding to such behaviours. Each of these initiatives concentrates its attention on problem-solving interventions at national and local level. While each initiative serves a specific purpose and therefore contributes to the debate around

the issues on which they focus, neither is specifically charged with investigating current understanding of the underlying concept of emotional and behavioural difficulties from a theoretical perspective.

Therefore the challenge for me as researcher is to move beyond the perspective of interventions and responses and to focus my attention instead on investigating the underlying assumptions, understandings and beliefs that exist within the mainstream education system in order to consider whether or not they shed any light on how EBD is addressed and why the system organises as it does. This task is challenging due to a lack of research at this fundamental level from which my investigation could proceed with a view to developing understanding in this area.

I believe that a major strength in my research is represented in my realisation that the questions that interest me address issues not particularly investigated heretofore. This allows me the freedom to establish research questions that address my interests relating to this topic and which were not suggested by previous research. My work commenced with a set of questions that addressed my research interests and that were framed in a social constructivist perspective that would allow me to conduct a new investigation in the field. Chapter Five outlines my theoretical perspective and provides a justification for the framework I chose for my research.

I believe the social constructivist perspective taken in this research has been largely successful and there are several reasons for this. Chapter One outlines how this perspective fits with my own professional background. The 'fit' between the two allowed me to feel secure in my on-going investigation, employing methodologies that are consistent with such a perspective. More importantly this perspective also fits well with the challenge presented by the absence of a particular knowledge base on the aspects of EBD in the Irish context that are of interest to me. Lacking such a knowledge base required me to enter into the discussion with practitioners in the schools in order to establish knowledge alongside them, not just to gather data from them. This was enhanced by the particular challenges inherent in



qualitative research with regard to validity and reliability; the requirement to question and test the rigour of the data by triangulation (see Chapter Five, Section 5.4). This rigorous investigation of the data from the questionnaire and semi-structured interview was not just further examined in the context of the international and national literature on EBD but it was also carried out through document analysis. This allowed me the opportunity to interpret directly and at first-hand what two schools are presenting in their SEN and behaviour policies (Chapter Nine) in order to elucidate how the institutions and those practitioners working in them (who were responsible for the policies) understood the concepts of interest to the research.

Regarding the methodologies employed in the research, I think it is important to reflect on their level of effectiveness in addressing the specific research questions in the context of the theoretical paradigm adopted. Chapter Five, Section 5.4, considers issues of validity and reliability from the perspective of the qualitative and interpretative nature of the enquiry. Section 5.5 of that chapter outlines the methodologies employed in this research and the underlying rationale for each one. In those sections I put forward my reasons for the methodologies employed and with hindsight I argue that their choice was correct. I believe these methodologies succeeded in providing me the opportunity to position myself as an actor in the social realities of practitioners, which is integral to a social constructivist paradigm, as discussed in Chapter Five, Sections 5.2.2 and 5.5.

These methodologies also provided me with worthwhile data that were relevant to the issues under investigation. This is evidenced by the volume of data gathered that facilitated a rigorous examination of the issues. This allowed for a comprehensive analysis of these issues against a background of the coverage afforded these issues in the literature. It also facilitated the identification of issues that are not covered there. It is also evidenced in the depth of analysis that was made possible by the semi-structured interviews and the opportunity of interrogating the issues from my own perspective as researcher through the document analysis. This process of deepening the analysis and employing several

avenues of investigation contributes to the rigour of the research and was made possible through the methodologies chosen.

It is important to identify and acknowledge any limitations to the study. In the case of my research I acknowledge that the main limitation to my findings may be related to the sample on which the work was conducted. There are two aspects to consider in this regard, the population from which the sample is drawn and the size of the sample. I consider it important to comment on each of these issues here.

Decisions around the population from which to draw the sample are determined by pragmatic issues such as availability but also more pertinent issues such as relevance to the research questions. Employing non-probability sampling techniques I chose to target principals, learning support/resource teachers and post-primary guidance counsellors in my research as these are the practitioners primarily involved in and responsible for the issues under investigation in my research. I provide a comprehensive rationale for my decision in Chapter Six, Section 6.2. I contend that my research questions themselves confirm that I am justified in targeting this population alone. Further to this I also discuss my ethical and pragmatic reasons for not including students in the sample. I acknowledge that the absence of the student's voice limits my research findings to the extent that it only allows me to consider the opinions of the practitioners working in schools on a day to day basis. However I am of the opinion that this is consistent with my research aims and, of equal importance, it is justified in the context of the realistic limitations on my research that I outline in Chapter Six, Section 6.2.3.

Another aspect regarding the issue of the sample relates to its size. Firstly it is important to restate the fact that the original sample ( $n = 92$ ) did include the range of school types found in the Irish education system (Chapter Six, Section 6.2.2) and achieved a response rate of 51.65% ( $n = 47$ ) to the questionnaire. Whilst I acknowledge that it is difficult to generalise my findings to a wider context because of its size, I also contend that it does not follow that my findings are insignificant. My research aims state clearly that my intention is to identify a range of definitions



of EBD current in mainstream schools, to consider the relationship between behaviour policies in mainstream schools and the concept of EBD and to investigate factors influencing the understanding of and the response to EBD in mainstream schools (Chapter One, Section 1.3). It is neither my intention to establish these issues definitively based on a representative sample of mainstream schools in Ireland nor to attempt to generalise my findings to the wider context. I believe that I achieve the aims elucidated at the beginning of my research and my findings are outlined and discussed in Chapter Ten in support of this contention.

Further, I contend that such aims are achievable in the context of a small sample for the following three reasons. Firstly the theoretical framework within which I structure my research is based on a social constructivist view of knowledge and how it is considered. I am interested in how practitioners are constructing knowledge around the concepts contained in my research aims. In order to achieve this it is necessary to engage in dialogue with practitioners and attempt to examine as close to first hand as pragmatically possible the realities that exist in the field. A small sample allows for the possibility of this closeness to the 'research site' that is made up of the sample. Secondly, and consistent with a social constructivist viewpoint, my research is qualitative in nature, asking for and trying to interpret the opinions and attitudes of those practitioners; hence a small sample is pragmatic in the context of a qualitative study of this nature. Thirdly, in an effort to address perceived issues of working with a small sample, I am particularly conscious of the necessity to test the rigour of the data being collected. This, I believe, is achieved by a process of triangulation, i.e. investigating and questioning the data from the questionnaire and semi-structured interview on their own merits whilst also examining the emerging data against a backdrop of the International and Irish literature and, finally, analysing and interpreting documentary evidence from two sample schools.

The structure of my research demonstrates clearly a purposeful *modus operandi*. My research questions are investigated first of all through the questionnaire. The themes identified in the data from the questionnaire inform the interview schedule

in order to provide for deeper investigation and analysis through a meaningful dialogue with practitioners in mainstream schools. Simultaneously I review the international and national literature to establish current thinking on the issues contained in the research questions. Finally, I analyse living policy documents to capture another perspective on the issues emanating from the data gathered in the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. This in-depth and rigorous mining of the data is consistent with the interpretative nature of the research and contributes to its social constructivist underpinnings. This structure, I believe, affords me a sound basis from which I can discuss my findings with confidence and this discussion is presented in Chapter Ten.

### **11.3 Conclusions**

Chapter Ten provides a detailed discussion of the major findings of my research in the context of the specific research questions. In this section I wish to focus more on the original research aims and to outline the main conclusions from my research from that perspective. My conclusions are presented under each research aim below. These conclusions contribute to the recommendations for further research that are outlined in the final section of this chapter.

#### **To identify a range of definitions of EBD currently present in mainstream schools, in the context of national and international discourse**

This research suggests that there exists a quite complex situation in relation to how practitioners in mainstream schools conceptualise and define EBD. The official thinking emanating from the DES appears to be largely based on an historical perspective predicated on a medical model, highlighting assessed and easily labelled conditions, which tends not to consider social and/or environmental aspects of causality. This can result in a certain resignation amongst practitioners that nothing can be done to alleviate these conditions as they feel their causes are located in environments outside the school. It is supported by the systemic culture of allocating resources to schools based on such labelling resulting in a focus on presenting characteristics.



Whilst this view is present among practitioners it does not reflect the full picture. There is also evidence of a more holistic perspective among some practitioners, shared by other professionals, e.g. the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), which recognises a broader spectrum of characteristics encompassing social, emotional and behavioural characteristics which are interrelated and which can be affected by environmental factors both outside and inside the school. The current situation, therefore, appears to be one where there exist quite different ways of conceptualising EBD and there is a fundamental shift occurring in how practitioners think about EBD. Whilst not necessarily being mutually exclusive these differing conceptualisations complicate understandings, interventions and responses in schools.

### **To consider the relationship between behaviour policies in mainstream schools and the concept of EBD**

This research suggests that the relationship between EBD and the development of policy on behaviour in mainstream schools is very much dependent on wider considerations regarding how schools view the notion of the development of policy in general, how they view the student population in general and how they view the cohort of students presenting with SEN in particular.

Recent years have witnessed considerable efforts in schools to comply with official DES policy in terms of school development planning. This appears to have resulted in a somewhat formulaic response to producing school policies in a broad range of areas including SEN and behaviour. NEWB guidelines on developing behaviour policy, which do not substantially address either SEN or EBD, were made available during this period resulting in a wide diversity of consideration of SEN and EBD in the subsequent policies developed. Furthermore, several respondents in the sample reported that behaviour policies had already been developed when the guidelines became available but they were 'looked at again' in the context of the guidelines, implying that whatever positive influence that may have been exerted by the guidelines may have been minimal.

A further conclusion relates to how schools consider the student population in general. The evidence from this research suggests that the fundamental premise from which schools commence when developing behaviour policy is that such a policy can and should apply equally to all students in a school regardless of presenting characteristics. To be seen to be affording all students equal treatment is important and contributes to a general sense of fairness which is, in turn, consistent with a traditional view that the student population is homogeneous. While this latter view is changing, it appears to have been supplanted somewhat by a situation where, as far as the behaviour policy is concerned, all students presenting with SEN are considered in a homogeneous way.

Related to this phenomenon I further conclude that it appears to be in the implementation of the behaviour policy on the ground that recognition and flexibility is afforded to the diversity of presenting characteristics of individual students. Indeed SEN policies are referred to in the data from the interviewees as offering guidance in schools in this context. This situation manifests itself as a flexible and caring response to individual needs. However it can be said that it may rely substantially on the degree to which an individual or school is caring and/or flexible.

**To investigate factors influencing the understanding of and the response to EBD in mainstream schools, e.g. the school's ethos or culture, whether it is a single gender or co-educational school, whether it is a primary or post-primary school, the gender of students and teachers.**

This research suggests that there are significant differences between the primary and post-primary sectors in relation to how EBD is understood and in how schools respond to EBD. The historical 'head start' enjoyed by primary schools in providing services, supported by the DES, is documented in this research and has facilitated schools to take advantage of the extra resources provided by the State over the past ten to fifteen years. Also, the organisational structures integral to primary schools and the integrated curriculum present in that system, coupled with DES policies on inclusion and school development planning, have further facilitated



these schools by allowing practitioners to focus on the learning needs of students as well as their social and emotional development. The post-primary system, on the other hand, has been hampered by a later commencement of the school development planning initiative and, therefore, a lack of experience in whole school planning. This has been coupled with a lack of trained personnel in SEN until only recently and a curriculum landscape dominated by the provision of discrete programmes focusing on terminal examinations for the most part. The notion of social and emotional learning appears to be, at best, an addendum to the curriculum or, at worst, assumed to be of lesser importance in this sector.

This research further suggests that the school ethos or culture represents an important influencing factor in both sectors. At primary level, the focus appears to be more child-centred, in line with the curriculum, where the individual needs of students appear to be to the forefront. The relatively small size of a substantial number of the schools in this sector may be a factor in this. School ethos or culture at post-primary level appears to be more concerned with results and achievement (academic or otherwise) rather than on the individual student. In this sector engagement with the student population is largely conducted at the level of the group rather than on the individual level, especially in the junior cycle. Again, school size may be influential here. Organisational and curricular structures are also important.

Guidance counsellors were included in the sample in order to investigate the interface between this cohort of practitioners, who are charged with a counselling role in the post-primary sector, and issues pertinent to the specific research questions. The findings suggest that the position occupied by guidance counsellors in relation to EBD is ambiguous. Whilst identifying the support of students around personal issues as being part of their role, respondents and interviewees from this category report not to be involved greatly in provisions for students presenting with EBD. Their level of knowledge and understanding in this area appears to be limited and there appears to be a perception that EBD falls within the remit of SEN and the

teachers responsible for that area in schools, namely learning support/resource teachers.

According to this research gender represents an influencing factor of some importance. The research documents the gender ratio among teaching staff and management across the primary and post-primary sectors of the education system but, more importantly, the dominance of single gender schools, especially at post-primary level, in the Irish education system. The uniformity of responses from the sample attesting to the lack of importance of gender as an issue, juxtaposed with the illuminating opinions of individual interviewees to the contrary, indicate there is substantial research required here to understand the complexities inherent in this issue. This issue is addressed further in the next section. Overall, however, gender does appear to be significant in how EBD is thought about in schools, particularly the gender of teachers in their language and what they focus on in this regard. More significant may be the suggestion inherent in the research that practitioners do not yet appear to be aware of this or, at least, to acknowledge it.

#### **11.4 Implications and Recommendations for Further Research**

In Chapter One, Section 1.2, I outline several reasons why I believe it is timely to conduct the research that is presented here. The main points raised there can be summarised as follows in the form of questions.

- What is the link between national policy and what is happening at school level? How is policy being interpreted on the ground?
- More particularly, how is EBD thought about by educational practitioners and do significant differences exist between national and local perspectives and between different sectors at local level?
- How have policy and legislative innovations, e.g. a systemic move towards inclusive policies, impacted on how practitioners and schools understand and respond to EBD?

I believe this research represents a timely and interesting contribution to the knowledge that currently exists about realities in the Irish education system, realities that are articulated in these questions. Section 11.3 summarises the



conclusions that I have drawn from my research and these are based on the discussion of my findings in Chapter Ten.

The conclusions I draw from my findings have implications for how the Irish education system responds to and supports students presenting with EBD. They suggest that there exist variations across the education system in terms of understandings of EBD among practitioners, how the concept of EBD is defined and the development and application of policy. These variations manifest themselves in differences in how the primary and post-primary sectors respond to support students presenting with EBD and how schools' ethos or culture, organisation and gender issues affect those responses. There appears to exist a mismatch between official DES thinking, national agencies and practitioners on the ground and this is a complex issue.

These realities have implications for the degree to which students presenting with EBD are supported in schools and the effectiveness of those supports. This appears to be the case between the primary and post-primary sectors but also within the different types of post-primary schools. This can depend on the makeup of the school population, being single gender or co-educational or the school's ethos or culture. The way in which policy around behaviour is developed and applied in schools can impact significantly on how effective interventions can be. Again there are variations in how this occurs across schools. This situation has implications for how effective and supportive policies can be developed in schools that reflect systemic consistency for the benefit of students. Understandings of the concept of EBD appear to be influenced to a large degree by sectoral characteristics and, rather, need to be grounded and developed in national and international research more than appears to be the case currently.

The apparent emphasis, particularly in the post-primary sector, of considering students in terms of being part of a homogeneous group presenting with SEN, rather than looking at individualised needs has implications in two ways. It will have a direct impact on the level of success of interventions at national and local level

and of behaviour policies. Also this situation has implications for the future development of inclusive practices in schools that promote a focus on individualised needs.

Now I present some recommendations for further research in this area which, I believe, would advance understanding of the issues I investigate or issues that are identified during my research as being worthy of investigation.

I believe the issue of gender is important in relation to EBD in the Irish context and warrants further attention. Whilst the gender ratio among teachers and principals in Ireland is similar to that which can be found elsewhere, the gender ratio found in the makeup of school populations is significantly different. My research makes reference to the large numbers of single gender schools in the Irish system, particularly at post-primary level. Respondents and interviewees refer to gender in their contributions and I consider these references and certain inconsistencies in the emerging data throughout my analysis and discussion of my findings. I believe, in particular, that more research needs to be carried out within and across single gender schools to compare the understandings and responses to behavioural issues and EBD.

The issue of behaviour policies is another area where, I believe, further research is required. As I outline in my research, the formal development of policy *per se* is a relatively recent phenomenon in the Irish education system at primary and post-primary levels. Very pertinent questions are raised in my research concerning the level of collaboration among stakeholders in the development of policy on behaviour and SEN, how such policies are implemented and how they are monitored, etc. In my research I conduct an analysis of two schools' policies on behaviour and SEN and discover variations in and interpretations of definitions of these concepts, among other things. I believe that further document analysis on a larger sample would be timely given the relatively recent history of formal policy development in the Irish context. This would investigate further the questions alluded to in my research regarding how understandings of EBD are being



articulated in behaviour policies and, indeed, how informed those understandings are.

Due to the constraints I outline in Chapter Six, Section 6.2.3 and also discuss briefly in Section 11.2 above, I did not include students in the sample I selected for this research. With hindsight I believe that this was a correct decision for this particular research project. However I do acknowledge that the voice of students is one aspect not present in my research. Also, there is a growing literature on the importance of including the voice of students regarding how the education system impacts on them. Therefore I believe there is merit in investigating the issues included in my research questions from the perspective of students. I believe the limitations I outline in Chapter Six, Section 6.2.3, particularly those ethical issues relating to anonymity and confidentiality, may be overcome using different structures to those employed in this research project.

My research is based in the mainstream education setting for the reasons outlined in Chapter One. Whilst continuing investigation in this setting is required in order to elucidate further the issues raised by this research, I suggest there is also merit in comparative studies between the mainstream and special schools settings in Ireland. The long-standing existence of special schools for students presenting with EBD and the recent development of the provision of the NBSS at post-primary level present, I believe, an opportunity for such research.

## Appendix I

### Abbreviations

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| <b>ACCS</b>  | Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools                                   |
| <b>ASTI</b>  | Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland   |
| <b>CAMHS</b> | Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service   |
| <b>CAO</b>   | Central Applications' Office   |
| <b>CPD</b>   | Continuing Professional Development  |
| <b>DEIS</b>  | Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Education                                      |
| <b>DES</b>   | Department of Education and Skills<br>(formerly Department of Education and Science) |
| <b>EPSEN</b> | Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (2004)                      |
| <b>GPLP</b>  | Group Profile and Learning Plan  |
| <b>HSCL</b>  | Home School Community Liaison Scheme   |
| <b>HSE</b>   | Health Service Executive   |
| <b>IEP</b>   | Individual Education Plan  |
| <b>INTO</b>  | Irish National Teachers' Organisation  |
| <b>IPLP</b>  | Individual Profile and Learning Plan   |
| <b>JCSP</b>  | Junior Certificate School Programme  |
| <b>LCA</b>   | Leaving Certificate (Applied)  |
| <b>LCVP</b>  | Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme   |
| <b>LS</b>    | Learning Support   |
| <b>NBSS</b>  | National Behaviour Support Service   |
| <b>NCCA</b>  | National Council for Curriculum and Assessment                                       |
| <b>NCSE</b>  | National Council for Special Education   |
| <b>NDA</b>   | National Disability Authority  |
| <b>NEPS</b>  | National Educational Psychological Service   |
| <b>NEWB</b>  | National Educational Welfare Board   |
| <b>NFQ</b>   | National Framework of Qualifications   |
| <b>PDST</b>  | Professional Development Service for Teachers  |
| <b>RACE</b>  | Reasonable Accommodation in Certificate Examinations                                 |



|             |                                       |
|-------------|---------------------------------------|
| <b>SCP</b>  | School Completion Programme           |
| <b>SEN</b>  | Special Educational Needs             |
| <b>SENO</b> | Special Educational Needs Organiser   |
| <b>SERC</b> | Special Education Review Committee    |
| <b>SESS</b> | Special Education Support Service     |
| <b>SNA</b>  | Special Needs Assistant               |
| <b>SPHE</b> | Social, Personal and Health Education |
| <b>TUI</b>  | Teachers' Union of Ireland            |

## Appendix II

### Timeline of Events and Documents Pertinent to the Research

| Year | Event/Document  |
|------|---|
| 1930 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vocational Education Act</li> </ul>  |
| 1937 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bunreacht na hÉireann, Constitution of Ireland</li> </ul>  |
| 1962 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Training programme in special education established</li> </ul>   |
| 1965 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Department of Health: Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Mental Handicap</li> </ul>  |
| 1967 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Abolition of Primary Certificate Examination</li> <li>Introduction of Free Post-Primary Education</li> </ul>   |
| 1971 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Curaclam na Bunscoile, Primary Curriculum</li> </ul>   |
| 1980 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Government of Ireland: White Paper on Educational Development</li> </ul>   |
| 1982 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Circular Letter 9/82: The Abolition of Corporal Punishment in National Schools</li> <li>Circular Letter M5/82: Abolition of Corporal Punishment in Schools in respect of Financial Aid from the Department of Education</li> </ul>   |
| 1985 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Government of Ireland: Report of the Committee on Discipline in Schools</li> </ul>   |
| 1988 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Circular Letter 7/88: Discipline in National Schools</li> <li>Circular Letter M34/88: Guidelines on a Code of Discipline for Post-Primary Schools</li> </ul>   |
| 1990 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Circular Letter 20/90: Guidelines towards a Positive Policy for School Behaviour and Discipline and a Suggested Code of Behaviour and Discipline for National Schools</li> </ul>   |
| 1991 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Circular Letter M33/91: Guidelines towards a Positive Policy for School Behaviour and Discipline and a Suggested Code of Behaviour and Discipline for Post-Primary Schools</li> </ul>  |
| 1992 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Irish National Teachers' Organisation: Discipline in the Primary School</li> </ul>   |
| 1993 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Department of Education: Guidelines on Countering Bullying Behaviour in Primary and Post-Primary Schools</li> <li>Irish National Teachers' Organisation: Discipline in the Primary School</li> <li>Department of Education: Report of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC)</li> </ul> |



|      |   |
|------|---|
| 1994 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation: The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education</li> </ul>   |
| 1995 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Irish National Teachers' Organisation: Meeting the Needs of Children with Social and Emotional Problems</li> </ul>   |
| 1996 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government of Ireland: A Strategy for Equality; Report of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities</li> <li>• Irish National Teachers' Organisation: Effective School Organisation</li> </ul>  |
| 1997 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discipline in Schools, Report to the Minister of Education</li> <li>• Irish National Teachers' Organisation: Parental Involvement: Possibilities for Partnership</li> </ul>  |
| 1998 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education Act</li> <li>• Press Release by Minister for Education and Science Micheál Martin, T.D.: Major initiative in Special Education Services; "Move marks breakthrough for integrated education and children with autism"</li> </ul>  |
| 1999 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Department of Education and Science: Developing a School Plan; Guidelines for Primary Schools</li> <li>• National Council for Curriculum and Assessment: Special Educational Needs; Curriculum Issues</li> <li>• Primary Curriculum (Revised)</li> </ul>   |
| 2000 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education (Welfare) Act</li> <li>• Equal Status Act</li> <li>• National Training Programme for Resource Teachers (Second Level) established</li> </ul>   |
| 2001 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Department of Education and Science: Report of the Task Force on Autism</li> <li>• Department of Education and Science: Report of the Task Force on Dyslexia</li> </ul>  |
| 2002 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Circular Letter SP ED 07/02: Applications for Full-Time or Part-Time Special Needs Assistant Support to Address the Special Care Needs of Children with Disabilities</li> <li>• Circular Letter SP ED 08/02: Applications for Full-Time or Part-Time Resource Teacher Support to Address the Special Education Needs of Children with Disabilities</li> <li>• Irish National Teachers' Organisation: Discipline in the Primary School</li> </ul> |
| 2003 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Circular Letter SP ED 24/03: Allocation of Resources for Pupils with Special Educational Needs in National Schools</li> <li>• Irish National Teachers' Organisation: Supporting Special Education in the Mainstream School</li> <li>• National Council for Special Education (NCSE) established</li> <li>• Special Education Support Service (SESS) established</li> </ul>   |

|      |   |
|------|---|
| 2004 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland: Guidelines for Review of School Discipline Policy</li> <li>• Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland: Responding to Serious Indiscipline in Schools</li> <li>• Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act</li> <li>• Irish National Teachers' Organisation: Managing Challenging Behaviour; Guidelines for Teachers</li> <li>• Teachers' Union of Ireland: An Approach to Discipline in Schools; Draft Policy Paper</li> </ul>  |
| 2005 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland: ASTI Policy Paper; Task Force on Student Behaviour in Second Level Schools</li> <li>• Circular Letter SP ED 02/05: Organisation of Teaching Resources for Pupils who need Additional Support in Mainstream Primary Schools</li> <li>• Department of Education and Science: Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)</li> <li>• Irish National Teachers' Organisation: Towards Positive Behaviour in Primary Schools</li> <li>• Moving Beyond Educational Disadvantage; Report of the Educational Disadvantage Committee 2002-2005</li> <li>• UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: Ireland's Second Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child</li> </ul> |
| 2006 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Irish National Teachers' Organisation: Towards Positive Behaviour in Primary Schools</li> <li>• Irish National Teachers' Organisation &amp; School Development Planning Support: Code of Behaviour Policy Template</li> <li>• Department of Education and Science: School Matters; The Report of the Task Force on Student Behaviour in Second Level Schools</li> </ul>  |
| 2007 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Department of Education and Science: Guidelines on the Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs in Second Level Schools</li> <li>• Education (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act</li> <li>• National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA): Guidelines for the Inclusion of Students with General Learning Disability</li> <li>• National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS): Special Educational Needs; A Continuum of Support, Guidelines for Teachers</li> </ul>  |
| 2008 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB): Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools</li> </ul>   |
| 2010 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS): Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties, A Continuum of Support</li> </ul>   |
| 2011 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Department of Education and Skills: Learning and Literacy for Life, The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020</li> </ul>  |
| 2012 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Council for Special Education (NCSE): The Education of Students with Challenging Behaviour arising from Severe Emotional Disturbance/Behavioural Disorders</li> </ul>   |
| 2013 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Council for Special Education (NCSE): Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Schools</li> </ul>  |



## Appendix III

### Coding System: Identification of Respondents

| School                  | Male<br>Female<br>Co-Ed | Urban<br>Rural | Large<br>Small | Principal<br>(P) | LS/Resource<br>Teacher<br>(T) | Guidance<br>Counsellor<br>(G) |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|----------------|------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Voluntary Secondary (V) | Male (M)                | Urban (U)      | Large (L)      | V-M-U-L-P-A/B    | V-M-U-L-T-A/B                 | V-M-U-L-G-A/B                 |
|                         | Male (M)                | Urban (U)      | Small (S)      | V-M-U-S-P-A/B    | V-M-U-S-T-A/B                 | V-M-U-S-T-A/B                 |
|                         | Female (F)              | Urban (U)      | Large (L)      | V-F-U-L-P-A/B    | V-F-U-L-T-A/B                 | V-F-U-L-G-A/B                 |
|                         | Female (F)              | Urban (U)      | Small (S)      | V-F-U-S-P-A/B    | V-F-U-S-T-A/B                 | V-F-U-S-T-A/B                 |
|                         | Co-Ed (C)               | Rural (R)      | Large (L)      | V-C-R-L-P-A/B    | V-C-R-L-G-A/B                 | V-C-R-L-G-A/B                 |
|                         | Co-Ed (C)               | Rural (R)      | Small (S)      | V-C-R-S-P-A/B    | V-C-R-S-G-A/B                 | V-C-R-S-G-A/B                 |
| VEC (VE)                | Co-Ed (C)               | Urban (U)      | Large (L)      | VE-C-U-L-P-A/B   | VE-C-U-L-T-A/B                | VE-C-U-L-G-A/B                |
|                         |                         | Urban (U)      | Small (S)      | VE-C-U-S-P-A/B   | VE-C-U-S-T-A/B                | VE-C-U-S-G-A/B                |
|                         |                         | Rural (R)      | Large (L)      | VE-C-R-L-P-A/B   | VE-C-R-L-T-A/B                | VE-C-R-L-G-A/B                |
|                         |                         | Rural (R)      | Small (S)      | VE-C-R-S-P-A/B   | VE-C-R-S-T-A/B                | VE-C-R-S-G-A/B                |
| C & C (CC)              | Co-Ed (C)               | Urban (U)      | Large (L)      | CC-C-U-L-P-A/B   | CC-C-U-L-T-A/B                | CC-C-U-L-G-A/B                |
|                         |                         | Rural (R)      | Large (L)      | CC-C-R-L-P-A/B   | CC-C-R-L-T-A/B                | CC-C-R-L-G-A/B                |
| Primary (X)             | Male (M)                | Urban (U)      | Large (L)      | X-M-U-L-P-A/B    | X-M-U-L-T-A/B                 | NA                            |
|                         | Female (F)              | Urban (U)      | Large (L)      | X-F-U-L-P-A/B    | X-F-U-L-T-A/B                 | NA                            |
|                         | Co-Ed (C)               | Urban (U)      | Large (L)      | X-C-U-L-P-A/B    | X-C-U-L-T-A/B                 | NA                            |
|                         |                         | Urban (U)      | Small (S)      | X-C-U-S-P-A/B    | X-C-U-S-T-A/B                 | NA                            |
|                         |                         | Rural (R)      | Small (S)      | X-C-R-S-P-A/B    | X-C-R-S-T-A/B                 | NA                            |
| <b>Totals (n = 92)</b>  |                         |                |                | 17 x 2           | 17 x 2                        | 12 x 2                        |

E. G.: V-M-U-L-P-A

(Voluntary Secondary, Single Gender Male, Urban, Large,  
Principal, First school of this type)

| Totals (n = 92)             |                               |    |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|----|
| School Types                | 17 types x 2 examples of each | 34 |
| Principals                  | 17 types x 2 examples of each | 34 |
| LS/Resource Teachers        | 17 types x 2 examples of each | 34 |
| Guidance Counsellors        | 12 types x 2 examples of each | 24 |
| Total Number of Respondents |                               | 92 |

| Codes               |    |                |   |
|---------------------|----|----------------|---|
| Voluntary Secondary | V  | Large          | L |
| VEC                 | VE | Small          | S |
| C & C               | CC | Urban          | U |
| Primary             | X  | Rural          | R |
| Principal           | P  | Male           | M |
| Teacher             | T  | Female         | F |
| Guidance            | G  | Co-Educational | C |
| First Example       | A  | Second Example | B |



## Appendix IV

### Code of Ethics

The researcher's work will be conducted in accordance with an ethical code which is informed by the guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (2004).

#### Consent

- Participants will all be over 18 years of age.
- A letter will accompany the questionnaire sent to respondents indicating the purpose of the research and guaranteeing confidentiality and anonymity. A coding system has been devised to identify respondents at all stages of data collection. The key to this coding system will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and a password protected computer.
- All data collected in the questionnaires will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. Contact details will be requested only if a respondent is willing to be interviewed at a later stage or requires more information regarding same. Otherwise the identity of respondents will not be requested.
- At the interview stage they will be informed of the aims and nature of the research by an information sheet. The sheet will be given to them at least forty-eight hours before being asked to complete a consent form.
- The participants will be informed that they may withdraw from the research at any time during the research without reason and their record of participation will be destroyed.
- Contact details of the researcher will be provided for participants to obtain further information.

#### Conduct of research

- There will be no element of deception.
- Interviews will take place in a venue and in a setting that provides a private, comfortable and safe place for both the participant and the

researcher. The first option will be to conduct interviews in the participants' schools.

- Interviews will be recorded by digital voice recorder with the participant's permission. Recordings will be identified by the code used for the original questionnaires. The data will be held on CD ROM in a separate locked filing cabinet to their personal details. Transcriptions of the data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and a password protected computer.
- Participants will be informed that they are not obliged to answer any question or respond to any statement unless they wish to do so.
- Participants will be made aware that they may stop the interview at any time and in addition withdraw from the research.
- Personal details will be kept confidential and separate from the data, and stored in a locked filing cabinet and a password protected computer. Participants will be informed that their personal details will only be kept for the sole purpose of the research and will be destroyed within three months of the completion of the research.
- Participants' schools will not be identified at any time during the course of the study.

### Feedback

- All participants taking part in the interview will be sent a copy of the transcription to check it is an accurate representation of their narrative.
- All participants will be given the opportunity to receive feedback on the results of the study, on request.



## Appendix V

### Cover Letter Accompanying the Questionnaire

[Address]

[Date]

Dear Colleague,

I am engaged in some research about the ways in which school personnel think about and plan for the management of behaviour. I enclose a confidential questionnaire which I would appreciate you completing and returning in the envelope supplied.

I hope to gather information from a sample of principals, Learning Support/Resource teachers and Guidance Counsellors, across primary and post-primary schools. I am sending the questionnaire to a small, random sample of teachers in these positions, including you, covering the different types of schools in Ireland. As I am surveying a small number of teachers, your responses are very important.

The questionnaire will take approximately twenty minutes to complete. Please try to answer the questions as fully as possible, following the instructions included. When you have completed it, please place the questionnaire in the stamped, addressed envelope provided and return it to me, by post, within the next few days.

All information supplied by you will be treated in the strictest confidence. Any identifying information will be kept securely by me throughout the duration of my research and will only be used in order to contact you should you indicate your interest in participating in a follow up interview. I am carrying out this research in conjunction with the University of Northampton (UK) and am bound by the Research Code of Ethics of that university.

Thank you for your time and your valuable responses.

Yours faithfully,

---

[Name of Researcher]

## Appendix VI

### Second Letter re Questionnaire

[Address]

[Date]

Dear Colleague,

You may remember that I wrote to you recently asking you to complete and return a confidential questionnaire on the issue of behaviour and schools' responses to behaviour management. I am writing now just to let you know that this research is continuing and I would still appreciate your response if you are willing to complete the questionnaire.

I am surveying a very small number of respondents; therefore it is really important to receive as many responses as possible. The questionnaire takes approximately twenty minutes to complete. If you are willing to complete the questionnaire on this occasion, please try to answer the questions as fully as possible, following the instructions included. When you have completed it, please place the questionnaire in the stamped, addressed envelope that is provided and return it to me, by post, within the next few days.

All information supplied by you will be treated in the strictest confidence. Any identifying information will be kept securely by me throughout the duration of my research and will only be used in order to contact you should you indicate your interest in participating in a follow up interview.

I am carrying out this research in conjunction with the University of Northampton (UK) and am bound by the Research Code of Ethics of that university.

Thank you for your time and your valuable responses.

Yours faithfully,

---

[Name of Researcher]



## Appendix VII

### Information Sheet re Interviews

[Date]

The purpose of this study is to gather information about how schools and teachers think about emotional and behavioural difficulties in the context of special educational needs. It will also address the extent to which behaviour policies exist in schools, how they are established and how they influence the day to day running of the school. Finally the study will address what teachers feel is relevant and important when thinking about the management of behaviour.

It is hoped to gather information from a sample of principals, Learning Support/Resource teachers and Guidance Counsellors, across primary and post-primary schools. Because you are actively involved in the management and operation of your school, I believe you are suited to address the issues outlined above. Therefore, I would like to include your opinions in my research.

Participation in this research is voluntary. It will involve an interview of approximately thirty - forty minutes in length to take place in a mutually agreed upon location. I would suggest your school as a suitable location. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences, by advising me before, during or after the interview.

With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the interview has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you wish.

All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study, however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used. Data collected during this research will be retained for three months after its completion in a locked filing cabinet and on a password protected computer. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this research.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please

contact me at [telephone number] or by email at [email address]. I am carrying out this research in conjunction with the University of Northampton (UK) and am bound by the Research Code of Ethics of that university.

I look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this research.

Yours faithfully,

---

[Name of Researcher]



## Appendix VIII

### Consent Form re Interview

I have read the information sheet about research being conducted by [Name of Researcher] in conjunction with the University of Northampton (UK).

I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses.

I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in the thesis to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous.

I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher. This research is guided by the Code of Ethics of the University of Northampton (UK).

With full knowledge of all the foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this research:

Yes

No

I agree to have my interview audio recorded:

Yes

No

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in the thesis that comes from this research:

Yes

No

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please print)

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix IX

### Primary Questionnaire

#### QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for agreeing to complete this questionnaire. It will take about twenty minutes to complete. The information you provide is confidential and neither you nor your school will be identified at any stage of the research.

At the end I ask you to include some information to help me classify your answers for analysis. I also ask if you would consider being interviewed at a later stage about the issues raised by all respondents to the questionnaire. If so, I ask for your name and contact details.

*When finished, please place it in the stamped, addressed envelope provided, seal the envelope and post it.*

#### Purpose of the Questionnaire

I am interested in finding out about how schools and teachers think about emotional and behavioural difficulties in the context of special educational needs. I am also interested in finding out the extent to which behaviour policies exist in schools, how they are established and how they influence the day to day running of the school. Finally I want to find out about what teachers feel is relevant and important when thinking about the management of behaviour.

Thank you for agreeing to complete this questionnaire.



**Start here.**

1. Does your school have a written policy on behaviour?      Yes      No  
(Please circle "Yes" or "No")

**If "Yes", answer the following questions Nos. 2 – 6.**

**Then go to Question No. 10.**

**If "No", ignore Nos. 2 – 6 and go straight to Question No. 7 now.**

2. Where is this policy available?

(Tick all that apply)

- a. School website
- b. School brochure
- c. Kept in the staff room
- d. Kept in the office
- e. Posted in corridors/classrooms
- f. Each teacher has a copy
- g. Students' diaries/journals
- h. Other

(Please specify)

---

---

- i. Do not know

3. When was it written?

(Tick one)

- a. Within the past year
- b. Between one – two years ago
- c. Between two – three years ago
- d. Between three – five years ago
- e. Over five years ago
- f. Do not know

4. Who was involved in writing the policy?

(Tick as many as appropriate)

- a. Principal
- b. Deputy Principal
- c. Assistant Principal/s
- d. Board of Management
- e. Most or all other teachers
- f. Special Needs Assistants
- g. Parents' representatives
- h. Students

















e. If "Yes", please indicate:

i. Course name

---

---

---

ii. Year completed

---

f. If "No", have you completed any other course? **Yes** **No**  
(Please specify)

---

---

---

15. How many years (to the nearest whole number) have you worked in this position in this school? \_\_\_\_\_

16. How many years (to the nearest whole number) have you worked in this school overall? \_\_\_\_\_

17. Number of years teaching overall \_\_\_\_\_

18. Please indicate the type of school this is:  
(Please tick one box only)

a. Junior School

b. Senior School

c. Vertical School

19. Please tick

a. Single Gender (Male)

b. Single Gender (Female)

c. Co-Educational

20. Number of students in the school

a. Male

---

b. Female

---

21. Number of current staff

a. Teachers (Include Principal, Deputy Principal/s)

i. Male

---

ii. Female

---

b. Special Needs Assistants

i. Male \_\_\_\_\_

ii. Female \_\_\_\_\_

c. Other staff not included above

(Please specify)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

22. Does the school participate in any of the following programmes designed to promote participation?

(Tick all that apply)

a. School Completion Programme

b. DEIS

c. Home School Community Liaison

d. Other

(Please specify)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

e. None

***I hope to follow up this questionnaire with some interviews. Would you please indicate your level of interest in being interviewed?***

▪ I would be willing to be interviewed

▪ I would not be willing to be interviewed

▪ I would like more information about being interviewed

**In order to contact you about being interviewed, please supply the following. *These details will be treated in the strictest confidence.***

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Contact Tel.: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for your time and valuable responses.**



## Appendix X

### Post-Primary Questionnaire

#### QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for agreeing to complete this questionnaire. It will take about twenty minutes to complete. The information you provide is confidential and neither you nor your school will be identified at any stage of the research.

At the end I ask you to include some information to help me classify your answers for analysis. I also ask if you would consider being interviewed at a later stage about the issues raised by all respondents to the questionnaire. If so, I ask for your name and contact details.

*When finished, please place it in the stamped, addressed envelope provided, seal the envelope and post it.*

#### Purpose of the Questionnaire

I am interested in finding out about how schools and teachers think about emotional and behavioural difficulties in the context of special educational needs. I am also interested in finding out the extent to which behaviour policies exist in schools, how they are established and how they influence the day to day running of the school. Finally I want to find out about what teachers feel is relevant and important when thinking about the management of behaviour.

Thank you for agreeing to complete this questionnaire.

**Start here.**

1. Does your school have a written policy on behaviour?      Yes      No  
(Please circle "Yes" or "No")

**If "Yes", answer the following questions Nos. 2 – 6.  
Then go to Question No. 10.  
If "No", ignore Nos. 2 – 6 and go straight to Question  
No. 7 now.**

2. Where is this policy available?  
(Tick all that apply)

- a. School website
- b. School brochure
- c. Kept in the staff room
- d. Kept in the office
- e. Posted in corridors/classrooms
- f. Each teacher has a copy
- g. Students' diaries/journals
- h. Other

(Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

- i. Do not know

3. When was it written?  
(Tick one)

- a. Within the past year
- b. Between one – two years ago
- c. Between two – three years ago
- d. Between three – five years ago
- e. Over five years ago
- f. Do not know

4. Who was involved in writing the policy?  
(Tick as many as appropriate)

- a. Principal
- b. Deputy Principal
- c. Assistant Principal/s
- d. Board of Management
- e. Most or all other teachers
- f. Special Needs Assistants
- g. Parents' representatives
- h. Students
- i. Other

(Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

- j. Do not know









**Now go to Question No. 10.**

**All respondents: Answer these questions, please.**

**10.** Which of the following are used in the school to address the management of behaviour?

*(Tick all that apply)*

- a. Training for staff in behaviour management
- b. Removal of students from lessons
- c. Temporary exclusion from school
- d. Permanent exclusion from school
- e. A school-based system of rewards and sanctions
- f. Teachers use their own management techniques
- g. Collaborating with parents
- h. Counselling for students
- i. Allocation of a special needs assistant
- j. Behaviour support classroom
- k. Team teaching
- l. Positive/Assertive discipline programmes   
*(Please name the programme, if known)*

\_\_\_\_\_

- m. Other   
*(Please specify)*

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**11.** What do you understand by the term "emotional and behavioural difficulties"?

*(Please expand)*

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_







***In order to help me to classify your responses, would you please answer the following questions also?***

15. I am  
(Please tick)

Male

Female

16. Please tick the position you hold:

a. Principal

b. Learning Support Teacher

c. Resource Teacher

d. If you are a Learning Support or Resource Teacher, have you completed a DES-recognised training programme in Learning Support and/or Special Educational Needs

(Please circle)

Yes

No

e. If "Yes", please indicate:

i. Course name

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

ii. Year completed

\_\_\_\_\_

f. If "No", have you completed any other course? Yes No  
(Please specify)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

g. Guidance Counsellor

17. How many years (to the nearest whole number) have you worked in this position in this school? \_\_\_\_\_

18. How many years (to the nearest whole number) have you worked in this school overall? \_\_\_\_\_

19. Number of years teaching overall \_\_\_\_\_

20. Please indicate the type of school this is:

*(Please tick one box only)*

- a. Voluntary Secondary School
- b. Private Secondary School
- c. Comprehensive School
- d. Community School
- e. Community College
- f. Vocational School/College

21. Please tick

- a. Single Gender (Male)
- b. Single Gender (Female)
- c. Co-Educational

22. Number of students in the school

- a. Male
- b. Female

---

---

23. Number of current staff

- a. Teachers *(Include Principal, Deputy Principal/s)*
  - i. Male
  - ii. Female
- b. Special Needs Assistants
  - i. Male
  - ii. Female
- c. Other staff not included above  
*(Please specify)*

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24. Does the school participate in any of the following?

*(Tick all that apply)*

- a. School Completion Programme
- b. DEIS
- c. Home School Community Liaison
- d. Other  
*(Please specify)*

---

---

---

e. None



25. Which of the following programmes are offered in the school?

*(Tick all that apply)*

- a. Junior Certificate
- b. Junior Certificate School Programme
- c. Transition Year (Optional or Compulsory)
- d. Leaving Certificate
- e. Leaving Certificate (Applied)
- f. Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme
- g. Other

*(Please specify)*

---

---

***I hope to follow up this questionnaire with some interviews. Would you please indicate your level of interest in being interviewed?***

- I would be willing to be interviewed
- I would not be willing to be interviewed
- I would like more information about being interviewed

**In order to contact you about being interviewed, please supply the following. *These details will be treated in the strictest confidence.***

Name:

---

Contact Address:

---

---

---

Contact Tel.:

---

**Thank you for your time and valuable responses.**



## Appendix XII

### Letter Requesting an Interview

[Date]

Dear Colleague,

Some time ago you very kindly participated in a questionnaire that I sent you concerning the ways in which school personnel think about and plan for the management of behaviour. Your responses proved very useful to me in my research.

At the time you indicated that you would be willing to be interviewed at a later stage of the research. This letter is an invitation to consider participating in an interview with me. I enclose an information sheet providing you with more details about this research and what your involvement would entail if you decide to take part in an interview.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at [Telephone Number] or by email at [Email Address] I am carrying out this research in conjunction with the University of Northampton (UK) and am bound by the Research Code of Ethics of that university.

I will contact you again shortly to enquire if you are willing to participate and, hopefully, to arrange a time and date for the interview to take place.

I look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this research.

Yours faithfully,

---

[Name of Researcher]



## Appendix XIII

### Letter Confirming Date for Interview

[Date]

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in an interview with me. This letter is to confirm the following details:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

The interview will take 30-40 minutes approx. As indicated I would like to record the interview and will discuss this further with you at the start of my visit.

I enclose a copy of the questionnaire you filled in last year, for your information.

I look forward to meeting you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this research.

Yours faithfully,

\_\_\_\_\_  
[Name of Researcher]

## Appendix XIV

### Letter with Transcript

[Date]

Dear [Name],  
I hope this finds you well.

As promised I am sending you a transcript of the interview you very kindly did with me as part of my research for my Ph D.

I would be grateful if you would look at this transcript to see if you are happy with your responses. If you would like to change anything or add something to any of your responses, please do so on the transcript and return it to me in the envelope provided.

Alternatively, if you do not wish to make any changes there is no need to return it to me. I will assume you are happy with it if I do not hear from you in the coming weeks.

Again, may I take this opportunity to thank you most sincerely for taking the time to facilitate this research. It is much appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

---

[Name of Researcher]

## Appendix XV

### Interview Schedule with Prompt Questions

#### FORMULATION

1. Is the policy based on any underlying belief or rationale, e. g egalitarianism, sense of equality (treating everyone the same), fair play?
  - a. What is said in the policy about the reasons for having it in the first place?
  - b. Does the policy allow for individual differences among students?
2. When devising a behaviour policy, was the issue of EBD/SEN considered at all?
  - a. Was the behaviour policy written up as if it was for a homogeneous group?
  - b. Could it be described as a one size fits all policy? Is there a sense that such a thing can exist?
  - c. How does this fit with understandings of the diversity of SEN?
  - d. Was the emotional state of the students taken into account when devising the policy? Is the emotional state an important aspect?

#### CONTENT

3. What aspects of behaviour does the policy address?
  - a. Is there more of an emphasis on classroom behaviour or outside the classroom?
4. How detailed is the policy?
5. Do teachers and SNAs in the school have a good sense of what is in the policy?
6. How does it link with other school policies, e.g. SEN policy?
  - a. Was there any thought given to other policies when the behaviour policy was written?
  - b. When those other policies were written, was any thought given to the behaviour policy?
  - c. How does the school's policy link up with NEWB guidelines or any national guidance on policy?
  - d. Were the guidelines consulted? Was the policy reviewed in the context of the guidelines?



## **APPLICATION**

### **7. To what extent is the policy informing daily practice?**

- a. Do people refer to it daily?
- b. Is there consistency in this across everyone working in the school?  
How do you know this?
- c. Is it being monitored? Who monitors it? How is this being done?

### **8. How is the policy communicated to students, especially those with SEN (EBD in particular)?**

- a. What arrangements are made to inform students of aspects of the policy?
- b. In what ways is this done?
- c. Are any supports put in place to convey the detail of the policy?
- d. How does the school know if the students understand the policy?

### **9. Is the student's level of maturity an important issue when teachers are considering behavioural issues?**

- a. Is the emotional state an important factor when interpreting the policy?
- b. What latitude is there?
- c. Is it the same for all?
- d. Does the school expect different levels of compliance or understanding from students at different levels of maturity?
- e. Would the same be true for different categories of special educational needs?
- f. Is the student's SEN an important issue in the consideration of behavioural issues?
- g. Does it depend on what the issue is? Would you factor it in all the time, sometimes or never?
- h. In the case of students with EBD, is this considered to be a factor when interpreting the policy, or when applying it?

### **10. Do you think your school's behaviour policy is pro-active or re-active?**

- a. Is it seen in terms of being a discipline code to deter certain behaviours or as a means of promoting acceptable behaviours?
- b. Is it present to control or support?

## **DEFINITION**

**11. What do you think are the important aspects to consider when defining EBD?**

- a. Do you think there are common understandings of EBD across schools?
- b. Are there certain issues that crop up again and again, e.g. order, infringement of the rights of others, etc?
- c. Look at the definition you gave. Are you still happy with it? Do you want to add anything or expand on it?

**12. Do you consider emotional difficulties and behavioural difficulties as being separate issues?**

- a. Does the policy address them differently?
- b. Can they be different or thought about separately?

**13. Does the school environment contribute in any way to the definition of EBD, e.g. ethos or culture, co-ed or single gender, school size, type of staff, etc?**

- a. Size, population, background?
- b. Profile of the students?
- c. How does the school's ethos or culture affect the way in which EBD is defined in the school?
- d. How would this school define itself to the outside world?

**14. What kinds of issues might influence teachers when defining EBD?**

- a. Do they think about different aspects on a gender basis, age, level of maturity, background?
- b. What role does gender play in addressing behavioural issues?
- c. Is the gender of the principal and/or teachers important?
- d. What about the gender of the students?

**15. Is there anything you would like to add to what you have said today?**

# Appendix XVI

## Identification of Questionnaire Respondents

| Respondent       | Post-Primary |           |             |               |           |            |           |           |           |           |           |           |                     |
|------------------|--------------|-----------|-------------|---------------|-----------|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|---------------------|
|                  | Male         | Female    | X (Primary) | V (Vol. Sec.) | VE (VEC)  | CC (C & C) | Urban     | Rural     | Large     | Small     | Principal | Teacher   | Guidance Counsellor |
| CCCRLGA          | ✓            |           |             |               |           | ✓          |           | ✓         | ✓         |           |           |           |                     |
| CCCRLPA          | ✓            |           |             |               |           | ✓          |           | ✓         | ✓         |           |           |           | ✓                   |
| CCCRLTB          |              | ✓         |             |               |           | ✓          |           | ✓         | ✓         |           | ✓         |           |                     |
| CCCULPB          | ✓            |           |             |               |           | ✓          | ✓         |           | ✓         |           | ✓         | ✓         |                     |
| CCCULTA          | ✓            |           |             |               |           | ✓          | ✓         |           | ✓         |           |           | ✓         |                     |
| CCCULTB          | ✓            |           |             |               |           | ✓          | ✓         |           | ✓         |           |           | ✓         |                     |
| VECLGA           |              | ✓         |             |               | ✓         |            |           | ✓         | ✓         |           |           |           | ✓                   |
| VECLPA           |              | ✓         |             |               | ✓         |            |           | ✓         | ✓         |           | ✓         |           |                     |
| VECLPB           | ✓            |           |             |               | ✓         |            |           | ✓         | ✓         |           | ✓         |           |                     |
| VECRSGA          |              | ✓         |             |               | ✓         |            |           | ✓         |           | ✓         |           |           | ✓                   |
| VECRSTA          |              | ✓         |             |               | ✓         |            |           | ✓         |           | ✓         |           | ✓         |                     |
| VECRSTB          |              | ✓         |             |               | ✓         |            |           | ✓         |           | ✓         |           | ✓         |                     |
| VECLPB           | ✓            |           |             |               | ✓         |            | ✓         |           | ✓         |           | ✓         |           |                     |
| VECLTA           |              | ✓         |             |               | ✓         |            | ✓         |           | ✓         |           |           | ✓         |                     |
| VECLTB           |              | ✓         |             |               | ✓         |            | ✓         |           | ✓         |           |           | ✓         |                     |
| VECUSGB          | ✓            |           |             |               | ✓         |            | ✓         |           |           | ✓         |           |           | ✓                   |
| VECUSPA          | ✓            |           |             |               | ✓         |            | ✓         |           |           | ✓         | ✓         |           |                     |
| VECUSPB          | ✓            |           |             |               | ✓         |            | ✓         |           |           | ✓         | ✓         |           |                     |
| VECUSTB          |              | ✓         |             |               | ✓         |            | ✓         |           |           | ✓         |           | ✓         |                     |
| VCRLGB           |              | ✓         |             | ✓             |           |            |           | ✓         | ✓         |           |           |           | ✓                   |
| VCRLPA           | ✓            |           |             | ✓             |           |            |           | ✓         | ✓         |           | ✓         |           |                     |
| VCRSPA           | ✓            |           |             | ✓             |           |            |           | ✓         |           | ✓         | ✓         |           |                     |
| VCRSPB           | ✓            |           |             | ✓             |           |            |           | ✓         |           | ✓         | ✓         |           |                     |
| VCRSTA           | ✓            |           |             | ✓             |           |            |           | ✓         |           | ✓         |           | ✓         |                     |
| VFULGA           |              | ✓         |             | ✓             |           |            | ✓         |           | ✓         |           |           |           | ✓                   |
| VFULGB           |              | ✓         |             | ✓             |           |            | ✓         |           | ✓         |           |           |           | ✓                   |
| VFUSGA           |              | ✓         |             | ✓             |           |            | ✓         |           |           | ✓         |           |           | ✓                   |
| VFUSGB           |              | ✓         |             | ✓             |           |            | ✓         |           |           | ✓         |           |           | ✓                   |
| VFUSPA           |              | ✓         |             | ✓             |           |            | ✓         |           |           | ✓         | ✓         |           |                     |
| VFUSPB           |              | ✓         |             | ✓             |           |            | ✓         |           |           | ✓         | ✓         |           |                     |
| VFUSTA           | ✓            |           |             | ✓             |           |            | ✓         |           |           | ✓         |           | ✓         |                     |
| VFUSTB           |              | ✓         |             | ✓             |           |            | ✓         |           |           | ✓         |           | ✓         |                     |
| VMULTA           | ✓            |           |             | ✓             |           |            | ✓         |           | ✓         |           |           | ✓         |                     |
| VMULTB           |              | ✓         |             | ✓             |           |            | ✓         |           | ✓         |           |           | ✓         |                     |
| VMUSPA           | ✓            |           |             | ✓             |           |            | ✓         |           |           | ✓         | ✓         |           |                     |
| VMUSTB           |              | ✓         |             | ✓             |           |            | ✓         |           |           | ✓         |           | ✓         |                     |
| <b>Sub-Total</b> | <b>17</b>    | <b>19</b> |             | <b>17</b>     | <b>13</b> | <b>6</b>   | <b>22</b> | <b>14</b> | <b>18</b> | <b>18</b> | <b>13</b> | <b>14</b> | <b>9</b>            |



| Primary          |          |          |             |               |          |            |          |          |          |          |           |          |                     |
|------------------|----------|----------|-------------|---------------|----------|------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|---------------------|
| Respondent       | Male     | Female   | X (Primary) | V (Vol. Sec.) | VE (VEC) | CC (C & C) | Urban    | Rural    | Large    | Small    | Principal | Teacher  | Guidance Counsellor |
| XCRSPA           | √        |          | √           |               |          |            |          | √        |          | √        | √         |          |                     |
| XCRSPB           | √        |          | √           |               |          |            |          | √        |          | √        | √         |          |                     |
| XCULTB           |          | √        | √           |               |          |            | √        |          | √        |          |           | √        |                     |
| XCUSPA           |          | √        | √           |               |          |            | √        |          |          | √        | √         |          |                     |
| XCUSTA           |          | √        | √           |               |          |            | √        |          |          | √        |           | √        |                     |
| XFULPB           |          | √        | √           |               |          |            | √        |          | √        |          | √         |          |                     |
| XFULTA           |          | √        | √           |               |          |            | √        |          | √        |          |           | √        |                     |
| XFULTB           |          | √        | √           |               |          |            | √        |          | √        |          |           | √        |                     |
| XMULPA           | √        |          | √           |               |          |            | √        |          | √        |          | √         |          |                     |
| XMULTB           |          | √        | √           |               |          |            | √        |          | √        |          |           | √        |                     |
| XMULTA           | √        |          | √           |               |          |            | √        |          | √        |          |           | √        |                     |
| <b>Sub-Total</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>7</b> | <b>11</b>   |               |          |            | <b>9</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>7</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b>  | <b>6</b> |                     |

| Full Totals   |           |           |             |               |           |            |           |           |           |           |           |           |                     |
|---------------|-----------|-----------|-------------|---------------|-----------|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|---------------------|
| Respondent    | Male      | Female    | X (Primary) | V (Vol. Sec.) | VE (VEC)  | CC (C & C) | Urban     | Rural     | Large     | Small     | Principal | Teacher   | Guidance Counsellor |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>21</b> | <b>26</b> | <b>11</b>   | <b>17</b>     | <b>13</b> | <b>6</b>   | <b>31</b> | <b>16</b> | <b>25</b> | <b>22</b> | <b>18</b> | <b>20</b> | <b>9</b>            |
| <b>n = 47</b> | <b>47</b> |           |             | <b>47</b>     |           |            | <b>47</b> |           | <b>47</b> |           |           | <b>47</b> |                     |

## Appendix XVII

### Classification of All Codes

| Formulation of Policy |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| Code                  | Description   |
| CC                    | <i>Child centredness</i>  |
| IND RES               | <i>Individualized responses</i> by teachers                                   |
| ETH                   | <i>Ethos or culture</i> of the school   |
| CONFO                 | <i>Conformity</i>   |
| LEARNDIFF             | A sense that students <i>learn differently</i> from each other                |
| ASSUMPRO              | <i>Assumption</i> teachers know the students' full <i>profile</i>             |
| LACK                  | <i>Lack</i> of sophistication re SEN  |
| HOMOG                 | Sees student population as a <i>homogeneous</i> group                         |
| QUERYEBD              | <i>Queries</i> EBD as a category of SEN                                       |
| POLDEV                | <i>Policy development</i> over time   |
| TEACHINT              | <i>Teachers</i> are <i>interpreting</i> the policy individually               |
| DESAWARE              | <i>Desire</i> among teachers to be <i>aware</i> of students' difficulties     |
| INDDIFF               | Policy allows for <i>individual differences</i> among students                |
| 29                    | Policy being developed in response to <i>Section 29</i>                       |
| SEN TEAM              | <i>SEN team</i> in the school contributing to policy development              |
| Content of Policy     |   |
| Code                  | Description   |
| SNA BEH               | <i>Special Needs Assistants</i> involved in <i>behaviour</i> management       |
| NEWB                  | <i>National Educational Welfare Board</i> guidelines                          |
| POL LINK              | <i>Behaviour policy</i> linked to SEN Policy                                  |
| STUDRESP              | <i>Student responsibility</i> for their own behaviour                         |
| JUNSEN                | Distinguishes between <i>junior</i> & <i>senior</i> cycles re behaviour       |
| SNAUNAWAWE            | <i>SNA</i> s <i>unaware</i> of the content of the behaviour policy            |
| CLASS                 | Focus mostly on <i>classroom</i> behaviour                                    |
| WHOLSCH               | Behaviour across <i>whole school</i> is addressed in the policy               |
| OBSER                 | <i>Observation</i> used to check if policy is working                         |
| SCHMATTER             | <i>School Matters</i> report used in development of the policy                |
| REDEMP                | <i>Redemption</i> built into a graded system to respond to behavioural issues |

| Application of Policy |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| Code                  | Description   |
| IND APP               | <i>Individualized approaches to students' difficulties</i>                |
| BEH FOCUS             | <i>School-wide or class-based behaviour is the focus</i>                  |
| TEA APP               | <i>Teacher responds alone to behaviour issues</i>                         |
| POL SAKE              | <i>Policy is developed for its own sake</i>                               |
| CONTR                 | <i>Control is the main focus of the policy</i>                            |
| CONSGOOD              | <i>Consistency across all teachers is good</i>                            |
| ASSUMP                | <i>Assumptions re students' understanding of the policy</i>               |
| ASSUMPCOVERT          | <i>Assumptions that policy is applied covertly every day</i>              |
| CONSPROB              | <i>Consistency can be a problem</i>                                       |
| SENBEH?               | <i>SEN not considered in behavioural issues</i>                           |
| HEST                  | <i>Hesitant about SEN and recognition of support</i>                      |
| COUNS                 | <i>Counselling used as a response to behavioural issues</i>               |
| MATIMP                | <i>Maturity level of students is important</i>                            |
| STUNDERS              | <i>Students understanding the policy</i>                                  |
| CONSULT               | <i>Consultation in the school is good</i>                                 |
| EMOTIONS              | <i>Emotional state of the student is important</i>                        |
| TEACHBEH              | <i>Teaching the expected behaviour</i>                                    |
| SUPPORTS              | <i>Support given to those coming from the Behaviour Support Classroom</i> |
| LATIT                 | <i>Latitude is shown by students in trying to understand behaviour</i>    |
| POLDAILY              | <i>Policy is informing daily practice</i>                                 |
| REACT                 | <i>Policy is largely reactive</i>   |
| GUIDBEH               | <i>Interesting perspective on behaviour by a guidance counsellor</i>      |
| LOCAL                 | <i>Local initiatives by teachers</i>                                      |



## Definition of EBD

| Code      | Description  |
|-----------|--|
| DIFFS     | <i>Differences across schools</i>                              |
| BACKG     | <i>Background of students</i>                                  |
| GENTEACH  | <i>Gender differences among teachers</i>                       |
| EBD DEF   | <i>Definition of EBD</i>                                       |
| EMBEH     | <i>Emotional issues &amp; behavioural issues linked</i>        |
| STAN      | <i>Monitoring standards</i>                                    |
| LAB       | <i>Labels</i>  |
| GENSTUD   | <i>Gender differences among students</i>                       |
| SHARE     | <i>Teachers &amp; students share a similar background</i>      |
| AGE       | <i>Age range: both young &amp; older teachers</i>              |
| HEAR      | <i>Teachers listening to &amp; hearing students' concerns</i>  |
| BALRIGHTS | <i>Balancing rights of different groups</i>                    |
| POL/PRAC  | <i>Policy &amp; practice are contradictory</i>                 |
| GUIDBEH   | <i>Guidance counsellors not involved in behavioural issues</i> |
| INCHILD   | <i>Difficulties are inherent in the child</i>                  |
| EQUALEGAL | <i>Dilemma of equality and egalitarianism</i>                  |
| NBSS      | <i>National Behaviour Support Service making a difference</i>  |
| DISJOINT  | <i>Disjointed services</i>                                     |
| CULT      | <i>Cultural differences</i>                                    |

## Appendix XVIII

### Description of Codes Classified under Categories

| Category 1: Issues related to the level of knowledge regarding SEN and EBD |  |
|--|--|
| LACK   | Lack of Sophistication re SEN  |
| HOMOG  | Seeing Student Population as a Homogeneous Group                         |
| QUERYEBD   | Queries EBD as a Category of SEN   |
| SENBEH?  | SEN not Considered in Behavioural Issues                                 |
| HEST   | Hesitant about Level of Support & Recognition given to Students with SEN |
| EDBDEF   | Definition of EBD  |

| Category 2: Issues related to influences from outside the school |  |
|--|--|
| NEWB   | NEWB Guidelines  |
| 29   | Policy in Response to Section 29 (Appeals)                         |
| SCHMATTER  | School Matters Report Influences Policy                            |
| NBSS   | NBSS Making a Difference   |
| SUPPORTS   | Support given to Those Coming from the Behaviour Support Classroom |
| BACKG  | Students' Background   |

| Category 3: The individual student as the central focus |  |
|---|--|
| CC  | Child Centredness                            |
| INDRES  | Individualised Responses                     |
| EQUALEGAL   | Equality and Egalitarianism                  |
| INCHILD   | Within Child Difficulties                    |
| EMOTIONS  | Emotional State of the Student is Important  |
| TEACHBEH  | Teaching Behaviour                           |
| STUNDERS  | Students Understanding the Policy            |
| JUNSEN  | Distinguish between Junior and Senior Cycles |
| INDDIFF   | Policy allows for Individual Differences     |
| CULT  | Cultural Differences                         |
| LEARNDIFF   | Students Learning Differently                |

| <b>Category 4: Gender issues</b> |                                   |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>GENSTUD</b>                   | Gender Differences among Students |
| <b>GENTEACH</b>                  | Gender Differences among Teachers |

| <b>Category 5: Issues related to policy</b> |   |
|---|---|
| <b>POLDEV</b>                               | Policy Development over Time                          |
| <b>TEACHINT</b>                             | Teachers Interpreting the Policy                      |
| <b>SENTEAM</b>                              | SEN Team Contributing to the Policy                   |
| <b>POLLINK</b>                              | Link to SEN Policy                                    |
| <b>SNAUNAWAWE</b>                           | SNAs Unaware of Policy                                |
| <b>OBSER</b>                                | Observation used to Check if Policy is Working        |
| <b>POLSAKE</b>                              | Policy for its own Sake                               |
| <b>ASSUMP</b>                               | Assumptions re Understanding                          |
| <b>ASSUMPCOVERT</b>                         | Assumptions that Policy is Applied Covertly every Day |
| <b>POLDAILY</b>                             | Policy Informing Daily Practice                       |
| <b>REACT</b>                                | Reactive Policy                                       |
| <b>POL/PRAC</b>                             | Policy and Practice are Contradictory                 |



## Appendix XIX

### P1 Whole School Policy on Special Needs

*This document has been reformatted.*

*Original page numbers are indicated by [START PAGE X]*

[START PAGE 1]

#### 1. INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

P1 is a multi-denominational co-educational national school with just over 200 pupils on roll. In September 2009 there are 3 full time positions and one part time position on the support team. This is a revision of the previous whole school policy on special needs which was ratified in March 2005 and was in effect until 2009. The framework for this plan was discussed at a staff meeting in Spring 2009 and feedback received from staff was used to inform aspects of policy making. The Principal and support teachers (2009-2010) were responsible for revision and redrafting of the current policy. The working group reviewed current practice in the school with particular reference to practices that have been successful and those that need to be developed.

At present there are three full time support teaching positions, providing both learning support and resource, with an additional 18 hours part-time (DES circular 0024/2009) plus 2 hours EAL support.

#### 1.1 Vision

In P1 the characteristic spirit of the school, which can be identified in all classroom activities, the school playground, staff room and all school committees, is guided by four founding principles. They state that education should be:

- Child centered
- Democratic
- Multi-denominational
- Co-educational

The characteristic spirit of the school provides pupils, staff and parents/guardians with opportunities to experience appreciate and respect diversity. This enables all students to belong to an educational community that validates and values their individuality. Our

[START PAGE 2]

mission statement outlines the school's aim to reflect and affirm diversity so that each member of the community feels equally valued, respected, accepted and supported. Our philosophy recognises the unique nature of each child and aims to ensure that no child is an outsider. The school has adopted a whole school approach to inclusive education.

Through the promotion of inclusive practices we aim to enable all pupils to:

- be afforded a sense of belonging in a diverse school community;
- be provided with a stimulating environment and allowed to grow and learn at their own individual pace and to reach their potential (within the constraints of large class size);
- develop an appreciation and respect for each person's unique characteristics;
- promote self-knowledge, self-respect and affirmation of their own strengths;
- promote friendship and skills of empathy within the school community;
- nurture in all pupils, feelings of empowerment and the ability to make a positive difference.

The plan for inclusive education aims to assist teachers by:

- sharing of information between class teachers and support teachers and discussion of individual children's educational, social and emotional needs and progress;
- having a sense of shared responsibility for the individual learning targets of the pupils with special needs and allowing for supplementary teaching and team teaching with support teachers;

- providing different ways of perceiving and meeting the challenges of diversity in the context of a whole school approach;
- sharing responsibilities and having a collaborative approach to differentiation of the curriculum;
- promoting positive attitudes to inclusive education;
- sharing information on training and professional development in special needs education.

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## **2. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **2.1 Role of the Board of Management**

- to oversee the development, implementation and review of the school policy on special education needs;
- to ensure that adequate classroom accommodation and teaching resources are provided for teachers of children with special educational needs;
- to promote professional development in the area of special educational needs;
- to provide secure facility for storage of records.

### **2.2 Role of Principal Teacher**

- to assume overall responsibility for the development, implementation and monitoring of the school's policy on special educational needs;
- to oversee the implementation of a whole school assessment and screening programme to identify pupils with special educational needs so that these pupils can be provided with the support they need;
- to keep teachers informed about the external assessment services that are available and the procedures to be followed in initiating referrals;



- to help teachers increase their knowledge and skills in the area of special needs by providing guidance and advice with regard to teaching methods and materials and by encouraging teachers to avail of relevant in-career development;
- to liaise with external agencies and advise parents/guardians on procedures for availing of specialist services;
- to assist pupils with special educational needs in their transition to second level education;
- to assign and supervise the duties of Special Needs Assistants.

[START PAGE 4]

### **2.3 Role of Class teacher**

The class teacher has primary responsibility for the progress of all pupils in his/her class(es), including pupils with SEN.

His/her role is to:

- endeavour to prevent and alleviate learning difficulties by appropriate differentiation and teaching strategies, including using the staged process (DES Circular SP ED 02/05) for those children for whom concerns have arisen;
- collaborate with the support teacher in the development of GPLPs/ IPLPs and IEPs;
- adhere to support services allocated to pupils;
- implement the school policies on screening and selecting pupils for supplementary teaching/resource provision and be involved in developing appropriate targets in the pupil's Individual Profile and Learning Programme (IPLP) and Individual Education Plan (IEP);
- maintain contact with Parents/guardians during the identification, screening and referral process and the supplementary teaching process;
- liaise with support team to ensure on-going support is provided for pupils for whom supplementary teaching has been recently reduced

- or discontinued;
- may assist the Principal in the supervision of the work of SNAs and provide SNAs with a sense of direction through assigning class-related tasks.

## 2.4 Role of Support Teachers

The role of the support teacher is:

- to assist in the implementation of a broad range of whole-school strategies designed to enhance early learning and to prevent learning difficulties;
- to collaborate and consult with principal, class teachers, SNAs, parents/guardians and other professionals with regard to the provision of special education. (A schedule of such meetings is outlined in appendix 5);
- to carry out diagnostic assessments where appropriate;
- to co-ordinate the implementation of whole –school procedures for the selection of pupils for supplementary teaching in the case of children receiving learning support;

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- to develop and implement IPLPs/IEPs for pupils, as appropriate, in consultation with class teachers and parents/guardians, SNAs;
- to deliver prevention and early intervention programmes to pupils from junior infants to second class;
- to implement the Forward Together Programme in S.I. and First Class, informed by the results of the M.I.S.T. administered in the second term of S.I.;
- to engage in collaborative teaching, where appropriate;
- to provide appropriate support teaching to pupils with a diagnosis of a low incidence disability, e.g. dyspraxia; ref DES Circular SP ED 02/05, or high incidence, e.g. dyslexia;

- to provide supplementary teaching in English and/or Mathematics to pupils who score at or below the 12<sup>th</sup> percentile on standardised norm-referenced tests;
- to maintain a Weekly Planning and Progress record for each individual or group of pupils receiving support;
- to monitor and record progress of pupils in achieving the agreed learning targets;
- to contribute to the development of policy on special educational needs at the whole-school level;
- to provide advice to class teachers, when required, in such areas as individual pupil assessment, programme planning and availability of teaching resources, as well as approaches to language development, reading, writing and mathematics for pupils experiencing difficulties.

## 2.5 Role of the Language Support Teacher

The language support teacher will:

- support the pupil's development of English language proficiency so that he or she can gradually gain access to the curriculum;
- support the pupil's integration into the host culture and promote the skills necessary to socialise with his/her peers;
- work in collaboration with the mainstream class teacher to set relevant and achievable learning targets for each pupil

[START PAGE 6]

- help the pupil to develop appropriate strategies and skills to support future formal education in general;
- meet with parents/guardians and discuss ways in which home-school co-operation can support these targets.



## 2.6 Role of the Parents/guardians in supporting the work of the school

Parents/guardians can prepare for and support the work of the school by participating with their child in such activities as:

- book sharing / reading stories;
- storytelling;
- paired reading (listening to and giving supportive feedback on oral reading);
- discussion about school and other activities to build vocabulary and thinking skills;
- encouraging the use of correct language and full sentences when communicating with their children;
- counting, measuring and other activities involving number;
- arranging visits to parks, museums, libraries etc, to broaden the range of their child's experiences;
- reading environmental print when on shopping trips, family outings, etc.;
- talking positively about school and school work;
- implementing suggested home-based activities outlined in the pupil's IEP. or IPLP;
- ensuring homework tasks are completed;
- attending parent/teacher meetings and contributing to and supporting their child's learning programme;
- communicating with teachers if any major event occurs in the life of the pupil;
- encouraging their child to share their own interests, culture, etc., as appropriate;
- sharing knowledge of their child e.g. strengths, needs, learning styles, interests, etc., with teachers and SNAs.

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## **2.7 Role of Special Needs Assistants (SNAs)**

The principal is directly responsible for the management of the special needs assistants and for assigning duties. As with special needs teaching resources he/she may, where appropriate, deploy individual SNA resources to support several pupils with special needs. In appropriate circumstances this may involve the deployment of an individual SNA in more than one classroom (DES Circular 24/03).

The SNAs duties are of a non-teaching nature, such as:

- when appointed to a particular pupil, support that pupil's particular needs;
- give general assistance to class teachers, under the direction of the principal;
- work under the direct supervision of principal, class teachers and special education teachers;
- support the class teacher through preparation and tidying up of materials and classroom;
- report to teachers any relevant observations or information regarding the child, e.g. from playtime, social activities, etc;
- assist on out-of-school visits and assist in the supervision of pupils with special educational needs during assembly, recreational and dispersal periods.

## **3. EXEMPTION FROM THE STUDY OF IRISH**

Children may be allowed exemption from the study of Irish in the circumstances outlined in DES Circular 12/96, section 1. a-f. When a parent/guardian applies for an exemption the prescribed procedures in section 4 apply. As part of the procedures in section 4 the school authorities prepare a full report on the student, in consultation with the relevant class/support teacher. (Appendix 4: copy of school report).

## **4. PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION**

### **4.1 Prevention Strategies**

In P1 we strive to prevent or alleviate learning difficulties by implementing appropriate whole-school programmes in English and Mathematics and social programmes where appropriate. The strategies used in our school to prevent learning difficulties include:

- development of agreed approaches to the teaching of English and Mathematics (school policies) to ensure progression and continuity from class to class;
- ongoing structured observation and assessment of literacy and numeracy skills is carried out in the infant classes to facilitate early identification of possible learning difficulties;
- provision of additional support in language development and in relevant early literacy and mathematical skills to pupils who need it;
- implementation of parallel reading programmes (e.g. ORT) with parental involvement;
- encouragement of parental involvement in developing children's oral language skills, sharing books with children, and developing their early mathematical skills.

### **4.2 Early Intervention Strategies**

**When difficulties arise in the early years, whole-school strategies for implementing early intervention are employed.**

Early Intervention Programmes may involve:

- intensive small group teaching or one-to-one teaching when deemed necessary;
- placing a strong focus on the development of oral language, laying the foundation for meaningful reading activities and further development of language and comprehension skills;
- emphasising the development of phonics and phonological awareness and a range of other word identification skills, e.g. sight word



recognition and using contextual cues;

- developing fine and gross motor skills and using fine motor skills in the development of writing skills;

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- in mathematics, focussing on language development, the development of mathematical procedures and concepts and providing opportunities for children to experience a broad range of maths equipment for all areas of the school maths programme.

## **5. IDENTIFICATION, SCREENING AND REFERRAL PROCESS.**

From second class onwards the prevention and early intervention strategies will be supplemented by the identification, screening and referral process.

### **5.1 Preliminary Screening**

- open communication between parents/guardians and teachers, and shared responsibility for all the pupils' well being, should lead to an early identification of need;
- the collaborative nature of the school involves the principal, support teachers and SNAs in contributing confidentially any relevant observations or concerns from early morning playtimes, playground behaviour or small group activities to the class teacher;
- the playground behaviour record slips, class behaviour record slips and incident forms will be used to highlight concerns about children who are experiencing social/emotional and behavioural difficulties in the general school setting.

**The class teacher utilises the following screening measures:**

- teacher observes the pupil formally and informally;
- literacy, numeracy and motor skills are screened through the

teacher's notes and observations and through work samples;

- the progress meeting record forms will show evidence of communication of concerns between teachers and parents/guardians;
- pupil record forms filled in by the class teacher at the end of junior infants and senior infants in the areas of social/emotional development, literacy and numeracy and health information are given to the principal, the support teachers and also passed on to the next class teacher;

[START PAGE 10]

- stage one of the staged process will be initiated by the principal or class teacher when concerns arise.

## 5.2 Testing

- The Middle Infant Screening Test (M.I.S.T) is administered in the fifth term of school. (2<sup>nd</sup> term of senior infants) by the class teacher assisted by the support teachers.
- The Drumcondra Reading Test is administered in term 1 in all classes from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> class. The support teachers take responsibility for distributing, collecting and arranging machine scoring of these tests, when appropriate.
- The Drumcondra Maths test and Drumcondra Spelling Test are administered in term three to all classes from 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup>. The support teachers take responsibility for distributing, collecting and arranging correction of these tests.
- Significant changes (15 percentile points or more) in a child's score in the Drumcondra Maths, Reading and Spelling Tests are highlighted by the class teacher. A significant rise in a child's score is marked using a yellow highlighter and a significant drop using a pink highlighter, indicating the number of percentile points. The class teacher must examine the child's test booklet to determine the source of the change.

If mitigating factors apply, such as frequent absenteeism or if the child has been unwell or particularly nervous during the testing process the class teacher should make a note beside the child's score on the class result sheet. Where the significant change is downwards, parents/guardians are informed of this change by the class teacher.

- Parents/guardians are informed of the results of their child's standardised tests at the progress meetings in November. A percentile ranking score is given which allows a parent or guardian to see where their child is placed in relation to other pupils of the same age at that particular time .i.e. A percentile ranking of 55 percentile states that 55% of pupils of the same age are at the same or below the same level as this child and 45% of pupils have scored better.
- If a pupil (2<sup>nd</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> class) scores at or below the 12 percentile in Literacy for the first time, the parents/guardians will be informed early in the term by the class teacher before the child receives learning support.

[START PAGE 11]

- In the case of the Drumcondra Maths Test, which is administered at the end of the school year, parents/guardians whose children score at or below the 12 percentile for the first time will be informed by the class teacher as early as possible to facilitate the child receiving learning support at the start of the new term.
- There will be timetable provision made on the support teachers' timetable for the morning of the last working Friday of each month to carry out diagnostic and/or other testing of children who are at stage 2 of referral. The school has a range of diagnostic test materials for use by the support teachers.

### **5.3 The staged approach to referral.**

(It is important to note that while the process is a staged one, every child may not necessarily move through the process in a linear fashion, e.g. a child with



significant needs may proceed directly to stage 3).

### **Stage 1**

- Should the class teacher or parent/guardian have concerns about the academic, physical, social, behavioural or emotional development of a pupil, the class teacher will then administer screening measures. These may include screening checklists and profiles for children from junior infants to first class, standardised, norm-referenced tests for older children and behavioural checklists where appropriate.
- Following screening and profiling the class teacher devises a short, simple plan for extra help within the normal classroom setting and completes the Stage 1 screening form (Appendix 1). Parents/guardians will be involved in implementing aspects of the programme at home, where necessary.
- The support teachers can assist the class teacher by providing formal, informal and observational tools and advice on resources to aid implementation of the plan of learning which is focussed on the relevant area of need in the classroom setting.
- The class teacher will continue to observe, assess and review the plan.
- If, after an appropriate period of time and three reviews of screening and classroom interventions, there is still concern about a child, the class teacher will consult with parents/guardians and the support team about further adaptations to the plan or moving on to stage two.

[START PAGE 12]

- Support may be sought from NEPS psychologist, particularly in relation to the implementation of a behaviour plan.

### **Stage 2**

If concern remains after three reviews and interventions by the class teacher and parents/guardians the child will be referred, with parents/

guardians permission, to the support team for diagnostic and/or other testing.

The class teacher will give the stage 1 form to the principal. The principal will pass a copy to the support teachers who will carry out the assessments. On completion of the assessments a recommendation will be made. If the assessments show that the child meets the criteria for support teaching under DES guidelines, this will be arranged. Parents/guardians, class teacher and support teacher are involved in drawing up the learning programme and its implementation.

In P1 supplementary teaching by the support teachers is prioritised as follows:

- (a) Pupils from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> class at or below the 12<sup>th</sup> percentile in literacy
- (b) Early intervention for literacy, J. I. to 2<sup>nd</sup> class
- (c) Pupils from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> class at or below the 12<sup>th</sup> percentile in numeracy
- (d) Early intervention in numeracy, J. I. to 2<sup>nd</sup> class
- (e) Pupils at the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> percentile in literacy and numeracy in 3<sup>rd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> class where resources allow.
- (f) Where a pupil needing support could benefit from a programme set up for a resource child they may join the resource child's group programme where this benefits both pupils. This support could be based on curriculum or social and emotional needs.

**Pupils with the highest level of need will have the highest level of support.**

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### **Stage 3**

If significant concerns exist after one instructional term in learning support the pupil may be moved on to Stage 3 of the process.

- The support teachers will reassess the pupil at this stage.
- The school may request an assessment of need from a relevant specialist professional, in consultation with the pupil's

parents/guardians. The Principal co-ordinates the referral of pupils to outside agencies e.g. the *National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)*. In a situation where the school has been allocated an assessment or assessments under the NEPS scheme, the assessment(s) will be allocated to those children with the greatest need. This will be decided by the Principal, in consultation with the relevant teaching staff and NEPS psychologist.

- The class teacher fills in the referral form in consultation with the appropriate school personnel.
- A parent/guardian may choose to have a child assessed privately.
- Where children enter the school with a previous assessment the principal will meet with the parents/guardians and relevant external specialist personnel to discuss the pupil's strengths and needs prior to entry to the school or during the first term of entry.
- Following referral an appropriate assessment will be conducted, e.g. psychological assessment, speech and language assessment, etc.
- Where a diagnosis of a disability is made resources are granted accordingly. A child with a diagnosis of a high incidence disability, e.g. dyslexia, will be given support either in the classroom or from the support team. A child with a diagnosis of a low incidence disability, e.g. ASD, will be given support from the support team, according to DES Special Education Circular 02/05.
- In consultation with the parents/ guardians, and relevant specialists, the support teacher and class teacher will draw up a specific learning plan in the IEP/ IPLP format.

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- Necessary resources are identified and sourced to meet the needs of the pupil. The principal will liaise with the SENO (Special Education Needs Organiser) in providing specific resources and services for a pupil.
- The school will review these specific learning plans yearly, unless it is



necessary to do so more often for specific pupils.

- Referral for specialist review will occur where it is deemed necessary to draw up a more appropriate IEP or IPLP specific to a child's changing needs.

## **6. INDIVIDUALISED PLANNING**

### **6.1 Individual Profile and Learning Programme /Group Profile and Learning Programmes (IPLP/GPLP)**

The Individual Profile and Learning Programme will contain:

- details from the class teacher;
- assessment results (before and after supplementary teaching);
- summary of other information;
- strengths and Needs;
- priority Learning Needs;
- learning Targets for a particular period;
- class based learning activities;
- learning support activities;
- home support activities;
- supplementary support activities e.g. support from SNA, ICT, etc.;
- external support services where applicable.

The IPLP should be drawn up in consultation with the pupil's class teacher and parents/guardians and also, where appropriate, with the pupil. Generally the IPLP's should be reviewed yearly. This is dependent on the allocation of learning support to the school each year and also on the need for review of some individual programmes. GPLPs (Group Profile and Learning Programmes) will be used in a group teaching setting, where appropriate to particular pupils' needs.

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## **6.2 Short term plans**

Weekly / daily plans are kept with specific learning targets prioritised and attainments recorded for individuals and groups.

## **6.3 Individual Education Plans (IEPs)**

The Individual Education Plans are a result of a consultative, collaborative process and will contain the following elements:

- information from parents/guardians, class teachers, support teachers, SNAs, pupils themselves and all other personnel involved with the pupil;
- formal and informal assessment of the pupil;
- recommendations;
- pupil's strengths/needs;
- priority learning needs;
- specific learning targets;
- teaching strategies/materials/resources;
- assistive technology/ technology plan where appropriate;
- differentiation of the curriculum is discussed with class teachers and this is included in the class teacher's long term and short term planning.

The IEP meetings are held early in Term 1. These are attended by the class teacher, support teacher, parents/guardians, external professionals (and the pupil, depending on age and maturity). The support teachers meet with all parents/guardians during the November Progress Meetings.

Prior to I.E.P. meetings class teachers and parents/guardians are requested to complete a brief profile of their child's strengths, needs and priority learning needs and to bring this profile to the meeting. The class teacher, support teacher (and SNA where applicable) meet before the IEP meeting to discuss and prioritise the child's learning needs.

## **6.4 Record Keeping**

Records are kept of the following:

- IEPs IPLP s and GPLPs;
- screening, standardised, diagnostic tests;
- psychological reports and assessments from external professionals;
- individual pupil files, which may include letters to/from parents and accident or incident forms;
- end of year whole-school special needs profile;
- exemptions from Irish.

## **7. ORGANISATION OF SUPPLEMENTARY TEACHING**

### **7.1 Timetabling**

- cooperation and flexibility are essential in drawing up timetables and also in accommodating changes in timetables throughout the school year;
- the support teachers draw up the timetable (some teaching models e.g. team, alternate, station and parallel may restrict the support team's flexibility in regard to time-tabling);
- children who need support during social play on a Friday morning receive this in the classroom;
- where a child is receiving one to one instruction, has an exemption from Irish and is not participating in Irish class, the support teachers should endeavour to timetable around this.

### **7.2 Approaches to support teaching**

The support teachers will adapt their teaching approaches and strategies to meet the individual needs of the pupils in their caseload. Examples of such approaches are outlined in Appendix 2.



### **7.3 Support for pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL)**

- Pupils for whom English is an additional language are placed in an age appropriate class.
- Every effort is made to help the pupil and Parents/guardians to settle in to the school environment.
- Where appropriate, other Parents/guardians or pupils may act as translators or interpreters for the pupils and their family initially. If necessary the B.O.M will consider funding for translation of important school correspondence e.g. of a legal nature.
- In general where a pupil may qualify for exemption from Irish, as per Circular 12/96, the school will complete the necessary documentation to obtain this exemption.
- The school employs a teacher for pupils for whom English is an additional language when DES criteria are met and where grant assistance is available to the school.
- This teacher provides support on an individual or group basis.
- These pupils may also receive support under the General Allocation Model when criteria are met.

### **7.4 Provision for Exceptionally able pupils**

- To date the Dept. of Ed and Science have provided no extra resources for students who are exceptionally able.
- The exceptionally able pupils' learning is supported in the classroom by differentiating the curriculum (see Appendix 3)
- If it is possible to group exceptionally able children with a resource child for specific project work the school actively engages in this process if it is of benefit to the SEN pupil (e.g. class project work, IT skills group, social skills groups).

### **7.5 Continuing/ discontinuing support teaching**

- A pupil will continue to receive support from the support team for as long as he/she meets the school's criteria as outlined in Section 5.3 of this policy;
- A pupil with a high incidence disability whose needs may be more appropriately met alongside their peers in the classroom may no longer receive support from the support team if deemed appropriate, following consultation with the class teacher and parents/guardians e.g. a child with a diagnosis of dyslexia who scores firmly in the average to above average in standardised tests.

## **8. MONITORING PROGRESS**

**P1 has whole-school systems in place for monitoring progress of all aspects of special education support.**

### **8.1 Whole-school approaches to monitoring the implementation of the whole school plan for special education**

P1 considers regular consultation and liaison among class teachers and support staff to be essential to the implementation of the whole-school plan for special needs. Support personnel endeavour to make the best use of informal time to monitor the implementation of the plan, e.g. break-times, play times, in the mornings and after school to liaise with class teachers and SNAs. Formal meetings also occur between members of the support team, between support team and class teachers and SNAs and between support team and principal. These meetings assist in the monitoring of the whole-school plan by reviewing and updating the following:

- the school's prevention and early intervention programmes;
- the school's screening programme for the selection of pupils for diagnostic assessment;
- the various procedures that necessitate the involvement of the

class teacher and the parents/guardians, for example, diagnostic assessment;

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- appropriate criteria for continuing/reducing support levels for pupils at the end of a term of supplementary teaching;
- progress of pupils in receipt of support, with reference to the learning targets in their IPLPs/IEPs;
- involvement of class teachers and parents/guardians in implementing suggested activities in pupils' learning programmes;
- alignment of pupils' class and supplementary teaching programmes;
- referral of pupils for additional assessment and support;
- time-tabling of pupils for support teaching;
- adequacy of resources for support teaching;
- sharing of information and knowledge about a pupil;
- staff meetings and ISM (In School Management) meetings— special needs issues are regularly on the agenda;
- mentoring and supporting new teachers and support staff;
- feedback from parent/guardians at meetings.

## **8.2 Whole school procedures for monitoring the progress of individual pupils in receipt of support**

There is on-going monitoring of each pupil's progress in relation to the attainment of targets using the *Weekly Planning and Progress Record*, so that class teaching and supplementary teaching continue to be responsive to the pupil's needs at all times. This is reflected in the up-dating/adapting of GPLPs/IPLPs/IEPs at the end of the first instructional term. A full review may take place at the end of the first instructional term if the need arises.

A more detailed review of the pupil's progress takes place annually with reference to his/her IPLP or IEP. This review details progress to date and



culminates in a decision on the level and type of support that the pupil will need in the future, the form that that support should take, and, where appropriate, a revision of the learning targets and

[START PAGE 20]

activities in the child's IPLP, IEP or GPLP. This may also encompass results of standardised testing, where appropriate.

## **9. LIAISING WITH PARENTS/GUARDIANS**

The ethos of our school supports partnership with parents/guardians in all aspects of school life. We adhere to principles of:

- (a) mutual respect and support for each other
- (b) shared expertise
- (c) consultative collaboration
- (d) effective two way communication.

- Teachers liaise informally with parents/guardians at school opening and closing times.
- Appointments for meetings between teachers and parents/guardians may be made at any time during the school year through the secretary's office.
- Individual progress meetings are held in the first term, and parents, guardians meet with both class teachers and support teachers.
- Parents/guardians are consulted at each stage of the staged process, prior to participating in the "Forward Together" programme, prior to administering tests where parental permission is required. Parents/guardians or support teacher may require a meeting where the child's needs have changed.
- Parents/guardians are directly involved with the support team in drawing up the IPLP's and IEPs.

## **10. LINKS WITH OUTSIDE AGENCIES**

- The principal, in consultation with deputy principal, parents/guardians support teacher and class teacher will refer all pupils who have gone through the staged process as outlined in this policy to external professionals or agencies.

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- The principal and/or class teachers and support teachers will liaise with professionals and agencies that have provided reports on pupils, and facilitate multi-disciplinary teams if appropriate.
- The support teacher responsible for a particular child will co-ordinate the visiting teacher service for that child, e.g. a child with visual impairment, where appropriate, in consultation with the principal.

## **11. HANDING OVER OF RECORDS TO SECOND LEVEL SCHOOLS**

During sixth class all parents/guardians receive a letter from the principal requesting permission for the school to forward to second level schools relevant information regarding their child. Provided permission is received the principal communicates information requested to the relevant secondary school (appendix 5).

## **12. MAINSTREAMING CHILDREN FROM SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS**

Where appropriate the school may be in a position to facilitate visits to a mainstream classroom by a child from a special school setting, where this is part of the child's IEP formulated in that school. This arrangement will be decided on an individual basis, taking into consideration the child's needs and the school's capacity to meet these needs. The arrangement will adhere to any relevant DES guidelines.

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### 13. RATIFICATION AND REVIEW

This policy was ratified by the BOM of P1 on December 15<sup>th</sup> 2009

The policy will be reviewed in line with any changes and developments in special needs' provision.

[START PAGE 23]

#### Appendix 1 SAMPLE COPY

#### Stage 1 Screening Form

Child's Name \_\_\_\_\_ D.O.B \_\_\_\_\_

Class/year \_\_\_\_\_ Class teacher \_\_\_\_\_

Reason for screening

Literacy numeracy motor behaviour other (please specify)

Teacher's class plan to address above concerns in classroom setting

Plan for parental involvement/support

Review dates (1/2 termly, termly, etc.)



[START PAGE 24]

First review

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ parent/guardian involvement:                      yes      no

Outcome/ongoing plan:

Second review

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ parent/guardian involvement:                      yes      no

Outcome/ongoing plan:

Third review

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ parent/guardian involvement:                      yes      no

Outcome/ongoing plan:

Any further action to be taken

**WHEN COMPLETED THIS FORM MUST BE PHOTOCOPIED AND A COPY KEPT  
IN THE CHILD'S CLASS FILE. THE ORIGINAL MUST BE GIVEN TO THE  
PRINCIPAL FOR FUTURE REFERENCE.**

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Dated \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 2

- Withdrawing pupils on an individual/group basis to the support teacher's room for one to one teaching.
- Early intervention work in the junior classes.
- Managing the "Forward Together" programme from the MIST (Middle Infant Screening Test) with the senior infant Teacher.
- One teaches and one assists or supports: Both teachers are present in the classroom, one teacher leads the instructional activity while the other teacher observes, checks students' understanding, supports the work of the SEN pupils and manages behaviour. The roles of the teachers can be interchanged here in order for the class teacher to work closely with the SEN children in a classroom setting also.
- Strategic Learning in the classroom. The support teacher may schedule time to collaborate with a class teacher in teaching a specific learning strategy in their classroom that would meet the needs of the SEN pupils but also the other pupils. Examples of strategies that could be used would be Social Skills Training activities, Circle time, Study Skills or Visualising and Verbalising (Nancy Bell).
- Class Teaching. The support teacher may on occasion or regularly teach a particular subject area to a whole class and enable the class teacher to withdraw an SEN pupil or a group and provide supplementary teaching to them.
- Alternative teaching: The school may target a specific subject area and may break up classes into groups and have two or more teachers working intensively on the particular area of need. e. g. during Maths class two support teachers work with the class teacher. One teacher takes the larger group of pupils while the other teachers provide the curriculum to small groups at a pace appropriate to their varying needs.
- Station teaching: Two teachers or more divide the content to be taught to the class between them. Each teacher delivers a portion of the lesson to a section of the class group and then students rotate among the teachers.

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- **Parallel teaching:** This involves two teachers teaching two groups the same content simultaneously.
- **Team teaching:** Both teachers jointly plan the lesson content and both are equally involved in the instruction of the class. They take turns providing information, leading activities and discussions and demonstrating the concepts being taught.

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### **Appendix 3**

Differentiation for exceptionally able children

- (a) **Modifying the content of the curriculum.** Students are given the opportunity to study subjects in greater depth. They may also explore more abstract ideas and themes through group work or individual project work. They may also work on more advanced material in any subject.
- (b) **Modifying the process.** Pupils are encouraged to use research skills. Different questions and thinking skills are used for these pupils. They are provided with opportunities to investigate more in the curriculum area through project work.
- (c) **Modifying the product.** The pupils are encouraged to adjust an activity and are given the opportunity to present it in many forms. They are provided with choice and variety in presenting what they have learned.
- (d) **Modifying the learning environment.** Within the limitations of small classrooms and large class sizes the principal and class teachers actively encourage independence and child centeredness and high mobility around the classroom. The exceptionally able children are doing something that is different to the “normal “class curriculum. The school agrees with the aim for HOTS (higher order thinking skills) rather than MOTS (more of the same).



[START PAGE 28]

#### Appendix 4

RE: 6<sup>th</sup> class Entry to Secondary Schools for September 2010

Dear Parents/Guardians,

During this year I will receive requests from a number of secondary schools regarding your children starting in secondary schools in September 2010. Secondary Schools make a number of requests.

Some examples are:

Does the student have a psychological report?

Is the student receiving resource hours?

Is the student receiving learning support?

If yes, in what areas are they receiving support?

Has the student any additional needs in the area of English as an additional language [EAL]?

Has the student an Irish exemption?

Requests for students test results in Literacy and Mathematics.

This list is not fully comprehensive but covers most of the requests I have received.

Please give your consent to give information to your child's 2<sup>nd</sup> level school.

I give consent for information to be given to the second level school regarding my child \_\_\_\_\_ (child's name)

Parents/Guardians signature \_\_\_\_\_

I do not give consent for information to be given to the second level school regarding my child \_\_\_\_\_ (child's name)

Parents/Guardians signature \_\_\_\_\_

Parents/Guardians may request a copy of any information which goes to their

child's second level school.

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Principal

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## **Appendix 5**

### **Schedule of Meetings**

#### **September**

1. Class teacher and support teacher.
2. IEP meeting with parents/guardians, class teacher, support teacher.
3. Class teacher, previous SNA (where applicable), current SNA (where applicable) and support teacher.
4. For General Allocation Children, where requested by either parents/guardians or teacher

#### **November**

Progress Meetings (Refer to school policy)

#### **Second Term of Senior Infants**

- Parents/guardians of pupils recommended for Forward Together following the
- MIST with class teacher and /or support teacher.
- On completion of Forward Together Programme parents/guardians and class teacher and /or support teacher.
- Where there is a requirement to review/discuss policies and practices the Support Team meet on the last working Friday of the month.
- Close contact is maintained during the school year with parents/guardians of children receiving support.
- Meetings are held throughout the year when requested by either parents/guardians, class teacher, support teacher and Principal.

### **Checklist for parents/guardians of children with special needs who are transferring to post-primary school**

(Some of these questions may be relevant to your child's needs when transferring to secondary school)

- How many special needs teachers are in the school?
- Is there much SNA provision in the school?
- What experience does the school have of supporting children with .....(your child's needs)?
- Is special needs provision by means of withdrawal or in-class support or a combination of both?
- Is the Junior Certificate School's Programme on offer?
- What is the availability for all students of a variety of subjects, including subjects with a practical emphasis?
- Is there a range of "taster" subjects offered as part of first year?
- Will the pupils be streamed? Will there be mixed ability grouping in the first year?
- Is there a system of pastoral care in the school? Is there a buddy system in operation? Is there a clear and effective anti-bullying policy in the school?
- What is the average class size?
- What accommodations (e.g. exam accommodations) are available for children with special needs?
- Is there information sharing between support staff and other staff e.g. regarding how homework can be supported?
- Are there open days, parents' evenings, induction events for pupils and their parents/guardians
- Is there a specific orientation day for children with special educational needs before the school opening in September?

Reference [www.sess.ie](http://www.sess.ie)



## Appendix XX

### PP2 Special Educational Needs

*This document has been reformatted.*

*Original page numbers are indicated by [START PAGE X]*

[START PAGE 1]

In accordance with the Mission Statement of PP2, we recognise the dignity of each individual in our school community and we aim to promote a sense of self-esteem through his/her academic and non-academic experience. This experience should be broad balanced, relevant and stimulating. We acknowledge the pupil's right to education in the mainstream and his/her entitlement to have his/her needs addressed by a continuum of provision matched to these needs. We recognise our responsibility to promote active partnership with and between agencies that offer support for pupils, parents and teachers.

The formulation of this policy has been guided by the following legislation: The Education Act (1998), The Education (Welfare) Act (2000), The Equal Status Act (2000) and the Education for People with Disabilities Act (2004). The school will endeavour to include students with special educational needs and will examine all policies from the perspective of such students' needs when they are being reviewed. This Policy Statement has been drawn up in consultation with the Board of Management, Staff, parents and students of PP2. It applies to all pupils in the school, to their parents and to all members of the school staff and management.

## **Definition of Special Educational Needs**

Students with learning support/special educational needs should be recognised as individuals who have strengths that can be nurtured and weaknesses that can be supported.

[START PAGE 2]

Those with such needs could be:

- Pupils who have significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children in their class group.
- Pupils with sensory or physical disability that hinders their use of everyday educational facilities.
- Pupils with specific learning difficulty.
- Pupils with emotional or behavioural difficulties that may be short or long term.
- Pupils with temporary emotional trauma.
- Pupils with Speech and Language disorder.
- Autism or autistic spectrum disorder.
- Pupils who fall behind the general level of progress of the class for other reasons e.g. illness.
- Pupils from the travelling community.
- Pupils whose first language is not English.
- Pupils who particularly gifted and need additional stimulus.
- Newcomers from another system.
- Some pupils who fall into more than one of the above categories.

## **The Special Support Needs Team**

The Special Educational Needs Team will consist of:

Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator, Resource Teacher, Learning Support Teacher, S.E.N., Guidance Counsellor, Special Needs Assistants, Principal, Deputy Principal, Chaplain.

[START PAGE 3]

### **Special Needs Support Team: Terms of Reference**

- To identify students with special educational needs as soon as possible following their enrolment in the school.
- To ensure that assessment procedures are clear and that they are adhered to.
- To improve Special Education Needs advice and support.
- To raise the skills and awareness of staff.
- To explore the broadening of opportunities in mainstream education.
- The personalisation of learning for children with Special Education Needs.
- The access of information on how well children with Special Education Needs are progressing in school.
- The examination of opportunities for progression beyond school for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities.
- To investigate and plan for best practice in relation to all aspects of Special Education Needs, including methodologies, student motivation and involvement of parents.

#### ***The Special Needs Co-ordinator will co-ordinate:***

- The establishment of a special needs register.
- Liaison with parents, teachers and external agencies.
- The provision of support to students with special educational needs.
- The monitoring of Special educational needs provision in the school.
- Transfer programmes between primary and second level, and between second level and adult and working/training life.

[START PAGE 4]

- To identify and create links with external support agencies such as NEPS, HSE, Garda Juvenile Liaisons.



## **SENO**

There is ongoing communication – a protocol is developed through which the school and its personnel liaise with the SENO.

### **General Teaching Staff**

- To make provision for students with learning support/special educational needs in their classes and subject areas.
- To be part of a whole school approach in relation to Special Educational Needs as well as literacy/numeracy.
- To develop a positive ethos in the classroom for fostering an inclusive approach to meeting the social and educational needs of all students including students with special educational needs.
- To identify personal training needs and to secure training where needed. This will be supported by school management and by the committee subject to the availability of adequate funds.

### **Parents**

- To work in positive partnership with the school and other agencies.
- To support and encourage their child in his/her education.
- The school has a responsibility under Section 14 of the Education for Persons with Special Education Needs Act 2004 to:

[START PAGE 5]

- (a) Inform parent of their child's educational needs and how those needs are being met.
  - (b) Consult parents with regard to the making of all decisions of a significant nature concerning their child's education and invite them to participate in such decisions.
- In addition, schools have the following responsibilities to parents:
    - (a) To provide training to staff on good communication and relationships with parents.

- (b) To develop positive relationships with parents.
- (c) To ensure that parents' views are heard and understood.

### Special Needs Assistants

- Special Needs Assistants (SNA's) work closely with and under the direction of the Principal and the learning support/special educational needs co-ordinator and the individual subject teachers in the implementation of the school's policy as it relate to individual students or groups of students. In particular, SNA's play a very important role in the health and safety of the student/s in his/her/their social and emotional development.
- The duties of the Special Needs Assistants are assigned by the Principal in accordance with the guidelines of the Department of Education & Science.
- Their work be supervised by either the Principal or the Special Needs Co-Ordinator or by a relevant subject teacher.
- Their duties involve tasks of a **non-teaching nature** such as:
  - Assisting student write, take notes and write down homework etc.

### [START PAGE 6]

- Assisting students to board and alight from school buses.
- Where necessary, travelling as escort on school buses may be required.
- Special assistance (as necessary) for students with particular difficulties e.g. helping physically disabled students with typing and writing.
- Assisting with clothing, feeding, toileting and general hygiene.
- Assisting on out-of-school visits, walks and similar activities.
- Assisting the teachers in the supervision of students with special needs during assembly, recreational and dispersal periods.

- Accompanying individuals and small groups who may have to be withdrawn temporarily from the classroom.
- Generally assisting the subject teachers, under the direction of the Principal and/or the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator, with duties of a non-teaching nature.
- Where a Special Needs Assistant has been appointed to assist a school in catering for a specific student, duties should be modified to support the particular needs of the student concerned.

### **Resources**

There are three adequately equipped Learning Support rooms to meet the various needs of each individual student.

### **Identification of Pupils with Special Educational Needs**

Students will be identified as requiring supplementary teaching on the basis of:

[START PAGE 7]

- Formal assessment-standardised tests on enrolment.
- Information from parents.
- Information from primary schools. (Questionnaires to be circulated).
- Information from other second level schools where a pupil is transferring in.
- Reports from the psychological services.
- Informal assessment-observation of progress in mainstream classes.

A Register of pupils with Special Educational Needs will be drawn up for the school. This will include pupils for whom these needs have already been stated and pupils who, after assessment by the school/external agencies, have demonstrated entitlement to special needs provision.



## **Individual Education Plans**

In order to provide optimum special educational needs provision for each student a system of record keeping will be put in place.

- Each student in receipt of learning support and/or resource teaching will have an individual profile and learning plan.
- A student will contain relevant personal, educational, and social information.
- An Individual Educational Plan will be drawn up on the basis of the learning strengths, difficulties, needs of the student and will contain short-term long-term educational goals. This work will be co-ordinated by the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator and will be a collaborative process involving school management, subject teachers, special education department, support services, parents/guardians and pupil.

[START PAGE 8]

## **Models of Organisation**

PP2 will strive to provide as varied an approach as timetable constraints will allow to the provision of learning support and special education while keeping in mind the best interests of the students. Models of organisation that may be considered are:

- Withdrawal of individuals or small groups from a mainstream subject.
- The Learning Support/Resource teachers will provide support to specifically identified students.

Learning Support will be provided to students who fall into the following categories:

- Students with clearly observable difficulties in acquiring basic skills in literacy and/or numeracy.
- Students whose intellectual functioning is at or below the 12<sup>th</sup> percentile on standardised tests.

- Students who fall into the category of being Borderline Mild General Learning Difficulty.
- Students diagnosed with a Specific Learning Difficulty that hinders their ability to process language and/or numbers.

***Special Education Needs provision will be made for students who present with:***

- Physical Disability
- Sensory impairment.
- General Learning Disability (Mild or Moderate).
- Emotional or Behavioural Disorders.

[START PAGE 9]

- Specific speech and language disorder.
- Autism or autistic spectrum disorder.
- Assessed syndromes.
- Multiple disabilities.
- International students with English language needs.

Support services provided by the HSE will be accommodated in the case of all pupils enrolled in the school who are entitled to these services.

### **Inclusive Curriculum**

Where possible, the school will provide a curriculum that will be inclusive of pupils with special educational needs. Where possible, subject teachers will differentiate the curriculum to suit the needs of pupils in the class.

### **Gifted Students**

- Exceptional gifted students may have to manage significant issues related to their exceptionalities. They may also face challenges related to their sense of identity, their development of self-confidence, their realistic self-assessment of their abilities, and the development of strategies for overcoming barriers and maximising independence.

- Some exceptional students may experience in making the transition from one level of course to another, from one school to another, and from secondary school to post secondary education, work, or community living.
- Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) will help these students progress more smoothly.

[START PAGE 10]

- To help deal with the many challenges that exceptional students may face, starting on entry to the school, all exceptional students and their parents and class tutors should be involved in drafting an ILP with the students that:
  - Takes into account the student's particular strengths, interests, and needs, as well as the expectations for the student's learning during the school year.
  - Is a tool to help teachers monitor and communicate student growth.
  - Is developed with reference to a reasonable focus (e.g. What are the student's goals and aspirations? How effective are the strategies and resources selected to support the student's learning? Should changes be made?).
  - Is a flexible, working document that can be justified as necessary.

### **Monitoring/Review**

The Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator; who will avail of staff meetings, questionnaires to pupils, teachers and parents; will review Special Educational Needs provision on a regular basis. Very close liaison with parents will be required. The Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator will provide an annual report to the Board of Management of the school, giving details of the number of pupils and staff involved, and making recommendations for the future.



## **Limitations**

PP2 will use the financial and personnel resources provided by the Department of Education and Science to make reasonable accommodation for students with disabilities or special educational needs up to a nominal cost.

[START PAGE 11]

PP2 will encourage all staff to become involved in Special Educational Needs teaching and will facilitate their training and in-career development. The school will also promote awareness among students and parents of issues related to Special Educational Needs.

[START PAGE 12]

## **Cuts**

- Schools are in a unique position of being able to provide a variety of co-ordinated activities to meet each exceptional student's strengths, needs and interests, leading to further education, work , and/or community living opportunities. Each exceptional student's success in accessing post secondary options and the necessary supports in the future depends on advanced planning as well as linkages within the school and with other community agencies and other partners.
- In planning and providing for the guidance and career education needs of exceptional students, principals will ensure that there is a process to:
  - Correlate students' annual education plans (starting in first year) with their ILPs.
  - Ensure that students have equitable access to career exploration opportunities that reflect the goals set out in their annual education plans and ILPs.
  - Ensure that class tutors, year heads and guidance counsellors receive the information they need to provide the necessary and appropriate support for their students.
- If teachers are uncertain about meeting the needs of gifted students within the regular classroom, the following steps should be helpful.

These steps point out strategies that enable the teacher to present learning opportunities to promote learning.

[START PAGE 13]

- I. Always provide choices. When establishing learning opportunities, provide more than one choice for students to demonstrate understanding choices that maximise student's interest. This approach allows the student to establish their learning goals and self-assessment strategies. These students need opportunities to self-assess and make critical judgements about their work.
- II. Deviate from the old and familiar. This is an important step. These students tend to learn best with non-traditional methods. Discovery learning needs to be promoted, prompt them with questions like: How can you find? Where can you find that information? How do you know?
- III. Always find out what these children already know. Remember if the learning isn't new, what are you doing it for? If a child already understands the concept, move forward, always give them credit for what they already know.
- IV. Remember that gifted students often grasp concepts quickly. Be prepared for this. Have challenge activities ready!
- V. Always build upon their interests.
- VI. Peer support is critical. Provide opportunity for gifted students to work with their intellectual peers.
- VII. Avoid drill and practice and note taking activities. This will cause boredom, which often escalates into unacceptable behaviour. Keep them challenged. Provide ongoing challenging activities with a problem solving focus.
- VIII. Give project based learning opportunities as much as possible.

# Appendix XXI

## P1 Code of Behaviour

*This document has been reformatted.*

*Original page numbers are indicated by [START PAGE X]*

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[START PAGE 1]

### **P1 Code of Behaviour**

The P1 Code of Behaviour is the set of practices and procedures that together form our school's plan for helping students to behave well and learn well.

The code of behaviour helps the school community to promote the school ethos, relationships, policies, procedures and practices that encourage good behaviour and minimise unacceptable behaviour. The code of behaviour helps teachers, other members of staff, students and parents to work together for a happy, effective and safe school.

Our code expresses the vision, mission and values of P1 and its Patron. It translates the expectations of staff, parents and students into practical arrangements that will help to ensure continuity of instruction to all students. It helps to foster an orderly, harmonious school where high standards of behaviour are expected and supported.

The code of behaviour enables school authorities to strike an appropriate balance between their duty to maintain an effective learning environment for all and their responsibility to students whose behaviour presents a challenge to the teaching and learning process.

Maintaining a harmonious environment can present a challenge to schools, given competing needs, time pressures and varying capacities or readiness to learn. A code of behaviour that has the support of the school community can go a long way to helping schools meet this challenge successfully.

The revised version of P1 Code of Behaviour was initiated in March 2006.

### **Rationale**

1. This policy is being reviewed at this time in response to an area of concern arising from the Whole School Development Plan. As part of this whole school development plan a facilitated school development planning meeting was held,(March 29<sup>th</sup>,2006), where the aim was to review the existing Code of Behaviour in light of the founding principles of Educate Together; child centred, democratic, multi denominational and co-educational, and to ensure that the code was in line with Department guidelines. On this day four workshops took place, each comprising of staff members and parents/guardians, under the headings:

- Setting a positive climate
- Preventative strategies
- Dealing with misbehaviour
- Communication/Record keeping

[START PAGE 2]

In response to this school development planning session a document "Towards a Code of Discipline" was drawn up, which highlighted the already existing positive climate of the school and made suggestions for some initiatives that could further enhance this positive climate.

A further whole school planning day, with a Department of Education facilitator, was held in May 2008. Following this planning day a group of teachers collated all information to produce this final draft.

The National Educational Welfare Board document "Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools" was sent to schools in September 2008. This necessitated further review of our Code.

2. It is a requirement under section 23 of the Education Welfare Act, 2000 that the Board of Management must prepare and make available a Code of Behaviour for its students. The act requires that the school code of behaviour is prepared in accordance with Guidelines issued by the National Educational welfare Board (NEWB). It details in Section 23(2), that the code of behaviour shall specify:

- A. *The standards of behaviour that shall be observed by each student attending the school;*
- B. *The measures that shall be taken when a student fails or refuses to observe those standards;*
- C. *The procedures to be followed before a student may be suspended or expelled from the school concerned;*
- D. *The grounds for removing a suspension imposed in relation to a student; and*
- E. *The procedures to be followed in relation to a child's absence from school.*

[START PAGE 3]

### **Relationship to characteristic spirit of the school**

*The aim of the Code of Behaviour is to ensure that the individuality of each child is respected and that individual differences are celebrated, acknowledging the right of each child to an environment in which they can safely learn and grow. The entire school community has a part to play in contributing to this environment. The strength of this community, together with a high level of co-operation between staff, parents/guardians and children, will ensure a high standard of behaviour.*

*In P1 National School we recognise that each member of the school community, staff, parents/guardians and children have the right to be treated with respect and consideration, therefore every effort will be made by all members of staff to adopt a positive approach to the question of behaviour in the school. Positive techniques of motivation and encouragement will be utilised by staff, placing greater emphasis on rewards than on sanctions. School rules are kept to a*



*minimum and are there to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of all members of P1 National School.*

## **Aims**

By introducing this revised version of the school Code of Behaviour our aim is:

- To ensure an educational environment that is guided by our Educate Together ethos
- To allow the school to function in an orderly way where all children can make progress in all aspects of their development
- To create an atmosphere of respect, acceptance, open-mindedness and consideration for others
- To promote positive behaviour and self-discipline, recognising the differences between children and the need to accommodate and accept these differences
- To ensure the safety and well-being of all members of the school community
- To assist parents and pupils in understanding the systems and procedures that form part of the code of behaviour and to ensure their co-operation in the application of these procedures
- To ensure that the system of rules, rewards, and sanctions are implemented in a fair and consistent manner throughout the school.

[START PAGE 4]

## **Content of policy**

The policy is addressed under the following headings:

Guidelines for behaviour in the school

Whole school approach to promoting positive behaviour

- Staff
- Board of Management
- Parents
- Pupils

### Positive strategies for managing behaviour

- Classroom
- Playground
  - Other areas in the school

### Rewards and sanctions

- Rewards and acknowledgement of good behaviour
- Strategies for dealing with unacceptable behaviour
- Involving parents in management of problem behaviour
- Managing disruptive aggressive or violent behaviour

### Suspension / Expulsion

- Suspension
- Expulsion
- Appeals

### Keeping records

- Class
- Playground
- School records

Procedure for notification of a pupil's absence from school

Reference to other policies

[START PAGE 5]

## 1. Guidelines for behaviour in the school

The Education Welfare Act, Section 23, states that the code of behaviour shall specify *"the standards of behaviour that shall be observed by each student attending the school"*.

In P1 National School our aim is to promote positive behaviour, which will allow the school to function in an orderly and harmonious way. We aim to enhance the learning environment where every child can have the opportunity to make progress in all aspects of his/her development.

- Each pupil is expected to be well behaved and to show respect for self and others, and to show kindness and willingness to help others.
- Each pupil is expected to show respect for the property of the school, other children's, and their own belongings.
- Each pupil is expected to attend school regularly and punctually.
- Each pupil is expected to do his/her best both in school and for homework.
- Each pupil is expected to have everything needed for class and to keep his/her personal space and belongings tidy.
- Each pupil is expected to show a readiness to use respectful ways of resolving difficulties and conflict and to show and practice forgiveness.

**Due regard will be given to the age and range of abilities in implementing the Code of Behaviour.**

Each parent/guardian will be provided with a copy of the Code of Behaviour to discuss and sign with their child/children. A Positive Behaviour Week will be held in the school in September each year. As part of this week, one night's homework will involve both parent/guardian and child reading, discussing, and jointly signing the Code of Behaviour. There will be regular follow up on the behaviour code throughout the school year.

[START PAGE 6]

## **2. Whole school approach in promoting positive behaviour**

*'In P1 we recognise that positive school ethos is based on the quality of relationships between staff and the ways in which pupils, staff and parents/guardians treat each other.*

*This positive ethos permeates all the activities of the school and helps in forming a strong sense of social cohesion within the school'.*



## Staff

*In our school, our aim is to treat all children with respect and dignity. There is a strong sense of community and cooperation among staff, pupils, and parents and all are agreed that their focus is primarily on the promotion and recognition of positive behaviour*

The ethos of P1, the core of which is child centred, lends itself to a spirit of close co-operation among all the partners in a child's education.

- Our code of behaviour will be reviewed on an on-going basis.
- Parents/Guardians are made aware of the Behaviour Policy, which includes strategies, rewards, and sanctions, through behaviour week in September, through curriculum meetings, and through school rules in the Homework Diaries.
- Through a staff-mentoring programme, which operates in P1, new staff members are made aware of the Behaviour Policy.
- All staff have been consulted on and have agreed on the Code of Behaviour
- Cognisance will be taken of behavioural difficulties that arise from special educational needs of individuals. Behaviour targets and specific strategies may be included as part of an Individualised Education Plan.

*The school's Learn Together, Ethical Education Programme and Social Personal and Health Education curriculum are used to support the code of behaviour. These curricular areas aim to help our children develop communication skills, appropriate ways of interacting and behaving, encourage forgiveness, develop resilience, and promote conflict resolution skills. They also aim to foster self-esteem and to help children accommodate differences and develop citizenship.*

- Relevant policies and resources are available to all staff and are reviewed on an on-going basis.
- Parents/Guardians of newly enrolled children are informed about the curriculum and their part in supporting it at new parents meetings,

curriculum meetings, and progress meetings and through information packs.

- A range of activities is used to develop these skills in children e.g. Circle Time, Toy Time, Golden Time, Assemblies, Achievement Book, Workshops on relevant topics, EEP stories, and Discussions.

[START PAGE 7]

### **Board of Management**

*The Board of Management of P1 has a role to play in the maintenance of acceptable standards of behaviour in a school. It should be supportive of the Principal Teacher in the application of a fair code of behaviour and sanctions used, which are part of a plan to change behaviour and to help students understand the consequences of their behaviour and to take responsibility for changing that behaviour.*

- The Board of Management of P1 is consulted in the drafting/reviewing of the code of behaviour.
- The Board of Management is responsible for providing a safe and orderly environment for staff and pupils to work in.
- The Board of Management, through on-going consultation, supports the staff in devising and upholding the behaviour code.
- Departmental procedures are in place for the Board of Management to deal with serious breaches of behaviour.

### **Parents**

*'Schools need the support of parents/guardians in order to meet legitimate expectations with regard to good behaviour and discipline'* \*

*P1 recognises that, in line with our school ethos, parents work in partnership with staff to meet legitimate expectations with regard to positive behaviour and discipline.*

Co-operation and communication between staff and parents/guardians is actively encouraged through formal and informal meetings, workshops, written communication, information packs etc.

- Planning days were held in the initial stages of formulating this policy, where parents/guardians and staff worked together to explore areas of the behaviour code in relation to the Ethical Education Programme. Also, a representative group from the stakeholders in the school came together to devise and outline a draft policy.
- Parents/Guardians of newly enrolled children are informed about the Behaviour Code and their part in supporting it, at new parents meetings, at curriculum meetings and through information packs.
- Parents are expected to support the school in the promotion of positive behaviour and the maintenance of high standards of behaviour by:

[START PAGE 8]

- Encouraging their children to uphold the school's ethos and code of behaviour
- Encouraging their children to respect all members of the school community
- Making themselves aware of and cooperating with the school's system of rewards and sanctions
- Ensuring their children are in school on time
- Attending meetings at the school if requested
- Helping their children with homework and ensuring that it is completed
- Ensuring their children have the necessary books and materials to complete their schoolwork and take part in school activities.
- The adults in the school have a responsibility to model the school's standards of behaviour, in their dealings both with students and with each other. The ways in which parents/Guardians and teachers interact



will provide students with a model of good working relationships.

\*Circular 20/90- Guidelines towards a Positive Policy for School Behaviour and Discipline

[www.sess.ie/ress/Files/Circular%2020-90%20Code%20of%20Discipline.doc](http://www.sess.ie/ress/Files/Circular%2020-90%20Code%20of%20Discipline.doc)

## **Pupils**

Pupils are involved each September in creating a Class Charter for their own class, reflecting the school code of behaviour. The active Student Council in the school promotes ownership of our code of behaviour and provides pupils with an opportunity to monitor its enactment.

[START PAGE 9]

### **3. Positive strategies for managing behaviour**

*'The most effective methodology that teachers develop in attempting to manage challenging behaviour is to prevent it occurring in the first place'.*

The following positive strategies will be used throughout the school to promote good behaviour and to prevent misbehaviour.

## **Classroom**

- In September of each year teachers will discuss with the children the Happy School Rules, as outlined in P1 homework diary, in an age appropriate way. Reference can be made in senior classes to P1 Code of Rights and Responsibilities from the homework diary. (Ref.p.4 of this document)
- Each parent/guardian will be provided with a copy of the Code of Behaviour to discuss and sign with their child/children. (Whole School Homework night will occur in September specifically for discussion of Code of Behaviour and signatures in Homework diary).
- Pupils, when creating their Class Charter, are encouraged to draft rules using positive language.
- Pupils will be encouraged to see the similarities between "their" rules and those set out in P1 journal.

- Teachers will ensure that pupils understand and are frequently reminded of how they are expected to behave
- A clear system of acknowledging and rewarding good behaviour and sanctions for misbehaviour is in place in each classroom.
- Teachers will implement a range of classroom management techniques that ensure a variety of activities and methodologies to sustain pupil interest and motivation
- Teachers will timetable activities in the classroom to maximise promotion of positive behaviour

\* Managing Challenging Behaviour, Guidelines for Teachers INTO 2004: 5

Junior classes can use SPHE curriculum guidelines

[START PAGE 10]

### **Playground(s)**

The positive strategies, which P1 implements to promote good behaviour, to prevent behavioural difficulties and to deal with incidences of unacceptable behaviour in the playground, are:

- A concise set of playground rules which emphasise positive behaviour and make it clear what activities are permitted. These are discussed at staff meetings, and then communicated to pupils in the individual classrooms and at whole school assemblies.
- A list of the rules will be included on the playground clipboards.
- One teacher is on duty in the senior yard and one in the junior yard. SNAs are shared between both yards.
- When there is a need to supervise more closely the behaviour of certain age groups, certain areas of the playground, certain individual pupils, this is discussed at staff meetings and necessary arrangements are put in place. An agenda item on behaviour/ individual pupil needs is included at each staff meeting.
- A range of play activities is allowed on senior yard, with each class being responsible for its own box of activities.
- On occasion senior children will teach games to junior children. This will be

organised from the classroom.

- The creation of zones within the playground provide sections for specific age groups, and quiet activities are made available in the playground.
- Children are required to remain seated during indoor break. They may read, draw, or do puzzles. Laminated indoor rules are on display in each classroom.
- Pupils are escorted to the playground by the class teacher and are collected from class lines at the end of yard time.
- To use the toilet children take a 'leithreas' sign from the teacher on duty. Only two children from senior yard and one from junior yard may go at any one time. An SNA stays inside supervising children who are not on yard.
- To manage incidents of misbehaviour, a Behaviour Form and Accident and Incident Report Forms are included on the yard duty clipboard.

#### **Other areas in the school**

All staff members are proactive in communicating rules/expectations to children in all areas of the school. Positive behaviour by the children is acknowledged and praised.

[START PAGE 11]

#### **4. Promoting good behaviour**

##### **Rewards and acknowledgement of good behaviour**

*P1 places a greater emphasis on affirming positive behaviour than on sanctions*

The day-to-day school management, classroom teaching and our Educate Together ethos will enable most students to behave in ways that support their own learning and development.

Teachers and other school staff use a range of strategies for promoting good behaviour at class and school level.



Students are more likely to behave well when:

- they are given responsibility in the school and are involved in the development of the code of behaviour
- they are encouraged to see that the code works in a fair way to the benefit of all
- the standards are clear, consistent and widely understood
- parents support the school by encouraging good learning behaviour and there are good relationships between teachers, parents and students.

Other strategies to encourage and promote good behaviour include:

- positive everyday interactions between teachers and students
- good school and class routines
- clear boundaries for students
- helping students themselves to recognise and affirm good learning behaviour
- recognising and giving positive feedback about behaviour
- exploring with students how people should treat each other
- involving students in the preparation of the school and classroom rules.

Systems for acknowledging positive behaviour are in use in classrooms and at times form part of a planned intervention to help an individual student to manage their own behaviour. When using reward systems teachers are mindful that:

- any reward systems used will be meaningful
- students will understand that rewards acknowledge behaviour that is valued and wanted
- rewards can be given for effort and not only for achievement.
- Systems for acknowledging positive behaviour will be inclusive and used consistently throughout the school. It is acknowledged that rewards should not become the goal of learning or result in unhelpful competition.

[START PAGE 12]

### **Responding to inappropriate behaviour**

Despite the best efforts of schools, inappropriate behaviour happens. Even minor breaches of the code of behaviour can be disruptive, particularly if they are persistent. Serious misbehaviour can have damaging and long-lasting effects including disruption of the student's own learning and the learning of others. It can cause distress and anxiety or even pose a threat to the safety of students and teachers. Our policy is to intervene early and positively when student behaviour does not meet the standards expected in the school.

The objective of a sanction is to help the student to learn. The purpose of sanctions is to bring about a change in behaviour by:

- helping students to learn that their behaviour is unacceptable
- helping them to recognise the effect of their actions and behaviour on others
- helping students (in ways appropriate to their age and development) to understand that they have choices about their own behaviour and that all choices have consequences
- helping them to learn to take responsibility for their behaviour.

Some strategies used in response to incidents of inappropriate behaviour are:

- reminding the pupil (reflection)
- reasoning with the pupil
- reprimand (including advice on how to improve and may also include a warning)
- "putting it right", e. g. clean table after marking it
- withdrawal from part lesson or peer group
- loss of privileges, e.g. loss of golden time
- payback time
- carrying out a useful task in the school
- prescribing additional work/prescribing weekend and/or extra

homework

- referral to Principal
- referral to Deputy Principal

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- communication with parents/guardians, either oral or written
- suspension\*
- expulsion

\*See Section 5 on Suspension

Temporarily removing a student from the classroom to a supervised location may be appropriate in the interests of classroom management in order to ensure the learning of other students and to help the individual student to recognise and learn about the impact and consequences of their behaviour. However, consistently denying a student access to a particular part of the curriculum as a **general sanction** would not be appropriate.

Sanctions are used in the school as part of a plan to change behaviour. A sanction is a form of positive intervention. They are used as part of a wider plan to help the student learn. Sanctions are used in a respectful way that helps students to understand the consequences of their behaviour and to take responsibility for changing that behaviour. In particular teachers are aware that sanctions should:

- defuse and not escalate a situation
- preserve the dignity of all the parties
- be applied in a fair and consistent way
- be timely

Staff use agreed sanctions and teachers know the level of sanction they are authorised to apply.



### **Application of sanctions**

Initially class or support teacher by way of warning and/or advice will deal with misbehaviour but, if behaviour is more serious or persistent, the Principal will be informed and the parents may be involved. In the case of gross misdemeanours the

Principal will be informed immediately. On the Principal's judgement a case may be referred to Board of Management for consultation.

All of the staff (Principal, Deputy Principal Class teachers, Special Educational Needs teachers, Special Needs Assistants, Classroom Assistants) has a shared responsibility in operating the school's Code of Behaviour. Visiting staff, student teachers, coaches, etc. are expected to abide by the P1 Code of Behaviour.

The staff member who has dealt with or observed the misbehaviour will communicate incidents of notable misbehaviour to the class teacher.

In addition, the school has a mentoring system to support new staff, and teachers who have management responsibilities (In School Management team) in the school may provide support to class teachers in addressing behaviour issues with an individual or a class group.

There is an agreed method of recording matters to do with students' behaviour.  
(See appendix)

### **Students with special educational needs**

Sanctions may be needed to help a student with special educational needs to learn about appropriate behaviour and skills, as in the case of any student. Teachers will take particular care that they help the student with special needs to understand clearly the purpose of the sanction and the reason why their behaviour is unacceptable. The school and classroom practices that support

good learning behaviour are valid for all students, including those with identified special educational needs.

### **Bullying**

In P1 bullying behaviour of any kind is unacceptable. Teachers have a professional duty of care to address bullying and the school has an anti-bullying policy. Action to be taken in relation to alleged breaches of the school's bullying policy are set out in this policy.

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### **Building relationships with parents**

In P1 we recognise the importance of building relationships with parents, and so keeping problem behaviour to a minimum. Parental understanding and support for the implementation of the code of behaviour is strengthened through activities such as:

- a new parents meeting giving an introduction to the school and its standards, expectations for students and the role of parents in helping students to meet the standards
- encouraging parents to share information about anything that might affect a student's behaviour in school, and making sure they know how to do so
- early communication to alert parents to concerns about a student's behaviour, so that ways of helping the student can be discussed and agreed.
- agreed procedures through which parents can communicate any concerns they may have about a student, and explore ways of helping the student
- information offered through the Parents' Association, such as talks or workshops on behavioural matters and aspects of child development
- parental involvement in reviewing and planning school policies, as part of school development planning.

### **Involving parents in management of problem behaviour**

In the case of persistent misbehaviour or a serious incident of misbehaviour, generally the class teacher will contact parents, either verbally or in writing. The Principal may also contact the parent. In the case of gross misbehaviour, the Principal, Deputy Principal, class teacher or Special Educational Needs teacher will contact parent/guardian either verbally or in writing.

Teachers will be mindful of the sensitivities of parents when meeting to discuss their child's behaviour. Principal may also be present and the child may be included at some stage of the meeting.

Parents are encouraged to contact the class teacher if they have concerns. This may be done by making an appointment through the school office or directly with the class teacher, as set out in the Parental Involvement Charter.

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### **Managing aggressive or violent misbehaviour**

- Parents and teacher will need to work together to help the student to modify behaviour and to work towards changing it. This will involve the Principal and other in-school supports.
- Children who display repeated emotional disturbance in school will be referred for psychological assessment with the consent of parent
- Through the Special Educational Needs Organiser, appropriate support is sought from services available e.g. Health Service Executive, National Educational Psychological Service.
- Principal and P1 Special Education Teachers team may facilitate teachers in sharing practice and support in the management of challenging behaviour, if required.
- A mentoring system is in place for newly qualified teachers and teachers new to the school, to support them in managing challenging behaviour.
- Teachers may avail of INTO seminars on managing challenging behaviour or in-service courses run by Institute of Child Education and Psychology,



Education Centres, etc. and refer to publications.

- In the event of seriously violent or threatening behaviour causing a risk to the safety of the pupil himself/herself or the safety of other pupils or staff, steps will be taken to distance the pupil from the immediate environment of other pupils and the Principal will be notified immediately.

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## 5. Suspension / Expulsion procedures

The Education Welfare Act, 2000, stipulates that a code of behaviour shall specify... *'the procedures to be followed before a student may be suspended or expelled from the school concerned'* and *"the grounds for removing a suspension imposed in relation to a student."* \*

\* The Education Welfare Act, 2000 Sections 23(2) c, d

### Suspension

The Principal shall inform the education welfare officer, by notice in writing, when *a student is suspended from a recognised school for a period of not less than 6 days.* \*\*

\*\* The Education Welfare Act, 2000 Sections 21(4) a

Circular 20/90 states that *'Parents should be informed of their right to come to the school and be invited to do so in order to discuss the misbehaviour with the Principal Teacher and/or the class teacher. This should always be done when the suspension of a pupil is being contemplated'*.

### Procedure employed in P1 in relation to suspension and expulsion:

The Board of Management has the authority to suspend a student.

Grounds for suspension:

- the student's behaviour has had a seriously detrimental effect on the education of other students.
- the student's continued presence in the school at this time constitutes a threat to safety

- the student is responsible for serious damage to property

A single incident of serious misconduct may be grounds for suspension.

For gross misbehaviour or repeated instances of serious misbehaviour, suspension will be considered. Aggressive, threatening, or violent behaviour towards a member of staff will be regarded as serious or gross misbehaviour.

The Board of Management has authorised the Principal and or the Chairperson to exclude a pupil from the school for a maximum initial period of three school days.

Procedures that ensure fairness when excluding a pupil will include:

- Ensuring other means of intervention and dealing with the behaviour has been tried.
- Parents will have been invited to the school to discuss the intention to exclude.
- A fair investigation will have taken place, taking both parents' and pupil's perspective into account.
- Parents and student will be informed about the complaint.
- Parents and student will be given an opportunity to respond.

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- Parents may be informed by phone or in writing.
- In the case of immediate suspension, parents will be notified, and arrangements made with them for the student to be collected.
- The BOM, before reaching a decision to exclude a pupil, will ensure its decision will be reached in an unbiased manner. Suspension will be in accordance with the terms of Rule 130(5) of the Rules for National Schools.
- Following suspension, a plan to re-integrate the student will include, where possible, an arrangement for a member of staff to provide support during the re-integration process. Student contracts will if necessary be put in place for the student and his/her parents. This will enable the school to set behavioural goals with the student and parent/s. All efforts will be made to

support the student to adhere to this contract. It will be expected that the parent/s will support and maintain support at all times for their child. Regular positive contact will be necessary until the student has re-settled.

- When an immediate suspension is considered by the Principal, a preliminary investigation will be conducted to establish the case for the imposition of the suspension. The formal investigation will immediately follow the imposition of the suspension. In the case of immediate suspension the parents guardians will be notified, and arrangements made with them for the student to be collected.
- P1 suspension form \* will be filled in noting which parent/guardian collected student, what time student was collected, place and time of supervision and personnel supervising whilst waiting arrival of parents/guardians
- Parent/Guardian will sign P1 suspension form.
- The Board of Management has authorised the Principal, with the approval of the chairperson of the Board, to impose a suspension of up to five days in circumstances where a meeting of the Board cannot be convened in a timely fashion.
- The National Education Welfare Board will be notified by phone, fax, or email and using the standard form \*\* if a student is suspended for a cumulative total of six or more days,

\* See Appendix Two

\*\* Forms are available on [www.newb.ie](http://www.newb.ie)

### **Implementing the suspension**

The Principal shall notify P/G in writing of the decision to suspend

- Letter stating period of suspension - dates it begins and ends
- Reasons for suspension
- Any programme to be followed by student and or parent



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- Arrangements for returning to school and any commitments to be entered into by student and parents
- Provision for an appeal to Board of management
- Right to appeal to the secretary General of the DES (Education Act 1998 section 29)

### **Expulsion (permanent exclusion)**

Under the Education Welfare Act, 2000, 'A student shall not be expelled from a school before the passing of twenty school days following the receipt of a notification under this section by an educational welfare officer' (Section 24(4))

It is the right of a Board of Management to take '...such other reasonable measures as it considers appropriate to ensure that good order and discipline are maintained in the school concerned and that the safety of students is secured.' (Section 24(5))

*The Board of Management has the authority to expel a student. As a matter of best practice this should be reserved for the BOM and not delegated.*

### **Grounds for expulsion**

*Before a student is expelled:*

A meeting is held with parents and student to try to find ways of helping the student to change her/his behaviour.

- Ensuring the student understands the consequences of their behaviour should it continue.
- Ensuring all possible options have been tried.
- Seeking the assistance of support agencies.
- Serious grounds are:
- Student's behaviour is a persistent cause of significant disruption to the learning of others or to the teaching process.
- The student's presence constitutes a real and significant threat to safety.
- The student is responsible for serious damage to property.

- The kinds of behaviour that might result in expulsion for first offence
- A serious threat of violence against another student or member of staff
- Actual violence or physical assault
- Supplying illegal drugs to other students in the school
- Sexual assault

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### **Appeals**

Under Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998, parents (or pupils who have reached the age of 18) are entitled to appeal to the Secretary General of the Department of Education and Science against some decisions of the Board of Management, including:

- (1) permanent exclusion from a school and
- (2) suspension for a period which would bring the cumulative period of suspension to 20 school days or longer in any one school year.

Parents/Guardians will be informed in writing by the Principal of the decision of the Board of Management to permanently exclude or suspend the student.

Parents/Guardians will be informed of their right of appeal, the associated timeframe of 42 calendar days from the date the decision of the school was notified to the parents and student.

Parents will be given a copy of Circular 22/02.

The Board of Management will prepare an appeal if the school is being investigated by the Dept of Education and Science\*.

\*Section 12, Circular 22/02 – Processing of an Appeal

## 6. Keeping records

In line with the school's policy on record keeping, and data protection legislation, the school maintains records in relation to pupils' behaviour.

### Class level

- Copies of incident forms/ child's reflection on an incident will be copied and kept in the child's file. Copies may also be given to the Principal.
- A pupil will be referred to the Principal for serious breaches of discipline and for repeated incidents of minor misbehaviour.
- The degree of misdemeanours i.e. minor, serious or gross, will be judged by the teachers and/or Principal based on a common sense approach with regard to the gravity/frequency of such misdemeanours\*.
- Staff have a clear and consistent understanding of what constitutes excellent behaviour and what constitutes unacceptable behaviour and discuss these matters regularly at staff meetings.
- The end of year report includes a reference to behaviour.
- Problematic behaviour will have been discussed with parents before noting/recording on the end of year report.

\* Circular 20/90

### Playground

- Supervising teachers maintain written records of behaviour/incidents on standard behaviour/incident forms. These forms are maintained and collated weekly by a member of the SNA staff, who brings instances of repeated misbehaviour to the attention of the Principal.
- To ensure consistency in the application and interpretation of the rules, a comprehensive list of playground rules\*\* is attached to the playground clipboard and is on display in the staff room. These are discussed regularly with the children and amended following discussion by the whole staff at staff meetings, if necessary.

\*\* See Appendix Three



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### **School records**

- The class teacher maintains individual files for each child. In cases referred to the principal, documents pertaining to that case will usually be photocopied and a copy given to the Principal.
- Formal records are maintained by the Principal e.g. factual reports of particular incidents, communication between school and home, with outside agencies, Board of Management etc.
- The Principal also maintains documentation pertaining to appeals under Section 29. 7.

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### **7. Procedures for notification of pupil absences from school**

The Education Welfare Act, 2000, Section 23(2) (e) states that the code of behaviour must specify *“the procedures to be followed in relation to a child’s absence from school”*. Section 18 stipulates that parents must notify the school of a student’s absence and the reason for this absence.

- P1 strives at all times to encourage maximum school attendance in all pupils by:
  - Creating a stimulating and attractive school environment
  - Acknowledging good or improved attendance
  - Adapting curriculum content and methodologies to maximise relevance to pupils
  - Adapting, on occasion, the class and school timetables to make it more attractive to attend and to be on time
  - Making parents aware of the terms of the Education Welfare Act and its implications.
  - P1 policy in relation to explanation of pupil absences is that parents/guardians send in a note or ring the office informing

teachers of their child's absence from school and the reason for this absence.

- Written notes are signed and dated. A written record of phone calls is kept and passed on to the class teacher. These records are kept in the class filing cabinet until the end of the school year.
- P1 uses the standard forms to report on pupil absences to the National Education Welfare Board\*.

\* See forms on [www.newb.ie](http://www.newb.ie)

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## 8. Reference to other policies/documents

Other school policies that have a bearing on the code of behaviour are:

- Learn Together Policy
- SPHE plan
- Anti-bullying Policy
- Enrolment Policy
- Home / School links
- Health & Safety Statement
- Dignity at Work Policy
- Special Educational Needs
- Homework Policy
- Parent Charter

## Success Criteria

Practical indicators of the success of this policy are:

- Observation of positive behaviour in class rooms, playground and school environment
- Consistent implementation of the policy by all staff in the school
- Willingness among staff to discuss and modify the policy when needed
- Positive feedback from teachers, parents and pupils
- Parents positively supporting criteria and implementation of sanctions

### **Roles and Responsibility**

- The BOM will read, discuss and officially ratify this policy
- Responsibility for the implementation of this policy rests with all staff, in partnership with parents, and with BOM.
- Principal, Deputy Principal, and In School Management team will monitor the implementation of this policy.
- The Principal, teachers, Special Needs Assistants and all those working with children in the school have a pivotal role in ensuring that this Code of Behaviour is implemented fully and positively throughout the school at all times
- Student Council will have an active part to play in promoting good and positive behaviour. Senior pupils in the school have responsibility in showing example to juniors. All children will play their part in promoting a positive ethos in the school in conjunction with the Code of Behaviour.
- Senior students will act as student monitors to promote safe, responsible respectful and acceptable behaviour.
- Parents have an important role in upholding P1 Code of Behaviour and in supporting staff and children in the implementation of this policy.

### **Implementation Date**

This policy will apply from February 1<sup>st</sup> 2009.

### **Timetable for Review 2010**

The operation of this policy will be reviewed and, if necessary, amended in February 2012

### **Ratification & Communication**

P1 Board of Management officially ratified this policy January 2009.



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## Appendix One:

### References

- Education (Welfare) Act, 2000 Section 23(1 -5), 24 (1-5)
- Education Act, 1998 Section 15 (2(d))
- Circular 20/90 on Discipline (DES web site [www.irlgov.ie/educ](http://www.irlgov.ie/educ)). Also in CPSMA Handbook
- Circular 22/02 Appeals Procedures under Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998. (DES website). Deals with appeals under the following headings:
  - A. Permanent exclusion from a school
  - B. Suspension
  - C. Refusal to enrol
- Guidelines for Developing School Codes of Behaviour (National Education Welfare Board) *Draft edition published for consultation in 2007*
- Department of Education and Science Guidelines on Countering Bullying Behaviour in Primary and Post Primary Schools (1993) available on DES website
- Report to the Minister of Education Niamh Breathnach, T.D. on Discipline in Schools. Maeve Martin, 1997. Ch. 4 p.56-61  
Recommendations for Schools
- Stay Safe and Walk Tall Programmes
- Management Board Members' Handbook. Revised 2007. CPSMA: A suggested Code of Behaviour & Discipline for National Schools
- INTO (2004) Managing Challenging Behaviour: Guidelines for Teachers
- INTO (2006) Towards Positive Behaviour in Primary Schools
- INTO (1995) Enhancing Self Esteem
- The Education Act 1998. The Education Welfare Act 2000. Questions and Answers, INTO
- The Principal's Legal Handbook Oliver Mahon B.L. IVEA 2002 Ch. 2 School Discipline

- Responding to Bullying. First Steps for Teachers. The Cool School Programme. NE Health Board
- Investigating and Resolving Bullying in Schools. The Cool School Programme. NE Health Board
- Stop it! Steps to Address Bullying. Wexford Education Network. Wexford Area Partnership. Phone: 053 23994

[START PAGE 27]

- Working towards a Whole School Policy on Self-Esteem and Positive Behaviour. Jenny Mosley. Positive Press 2001
- Working Together – to promote positive behaviour in classrooms, CEDR, Mary Immaculate College of Education
- Achieving Positive Behaviour. A Practical Guide. Patricia Dwyer. Marino

[START PAGE 28]

**Appendix 2:**

**Suspension Form**

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**Appendix 3:**

**Behaviour and Accident & Incident Report Forms**

# Appendix XXII

## PP2 Policy Statement for School Behaviour and Discipline

*This document has been reformatted.*

*Original page numbers are indicated by [START PAGE X]*

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**PP2**

**Code of Behaviour**

**Mission Statement**

*PP2 provides an education setting in which the person is encouraged to grow at every level, personally, academically, spiritually, socially and culturally.*

**Ethos Statement**

In fulfilling its mission the school nurtures and affirms the uniqueness and full development of each individual. It promotes the personal and emotional development of students, staff and management in a caring and respectful environment. The school ethos respects the dignity of each person by listening to their views and encouraging them to question and search for meaning.

Mindful of our role in the education of young people the school endeavours to provide a learning and teaching environment that encourages students to give due importance to their studies and promotes educational excellence. Day to day classroom work is enhanced by field studies, projects and scheduled professional direction on study methods and examination techniques.

The ethos seeks also to awaken spirituality in all members of the school community. It strives to establish the school as a witness to the reign of God and the gospel values and will nurture the Christian faith through RE classes, annual retreats and through providing opportunities for spiritual engagement (prayer services, prayer opportunities) while at the same time demonstrating a spirit of tolerance of the religious beliefs of others, facilitating them in whatever way possible in the practices of their own faiths.

In living the ethos the school will raise awareness, develop a concern and support for the vulnerable and disadvantaged in society. It will promote an awareness of justice and equality and establish a positive attitude towards

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the social inclusion of minority groups in a multi-cultural society. It will attempt to develop a community which facilitates the development of a spirit of service and care in which parents, guardians, educators and young people work together for the good of the school, the community and the environment. PP2 recognises the importance of cultural and extra-curricular activities for all. This incorporates respect for our national language, our heritage, our sporting, artistic and musical interests, and our sense of national community and school pride. A cultural and extra-curricular programme is offered, and all students are encouraged to participate.

### Standards of Behaviour

In our school students are encouraged to take responsibility for themselves, for their own learning and for their discipline. This policy has been developed and modified in consultation with the stakeholders, which includes students and all members of the school community. **Inevitably some responsibilities remain unnamed and it is the intention of the school to update this policy from time to time, as circumstances require. In the meantime the list should not be regarded as exhaustive and the mere fact that a particular matter is not specified in this code will not exonerate a student from blame should there be an infringement of another person's rights.**

The rules are kept to a minimum and emphasise personal responsibility, safety and respect for persons and property as fundamental requirements. The Board of Management, Principal, Deputy Principal, and all staff have the right and duty to ensure that the rights of all are respected. It is understood that the Board of

Management acts in “loco parentis” and has a duty of care in upholding these rules, and that the scope of this policy covers conduct when in school uniform, in class, within the school grounds, at break-time and lunch time, while travelling to and from school, while on school trips and involved in school activities. At enrolment the students and their parents/guardians are

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given a copy of the school rules and must sign these as part of the enrolment procedure. The Year Head retains this copy in the student's file.

### **Respect, Rights and Responsibilities**

In PP2 there is one basic school requirement for all: **We must show respect for self, other people, the property of other people, and the environment in which we live.** Through respect for others, we aim to create a positive working environment and develop a spirit of community and togetherness. The school rules and the code of behaviour are based on these principles. The school rules and behavioural code are subject to changes as the need arises.

#### **Respecting and Recognising the Rights of Others:**

- Teachers have the right to carry out their work in an atmosphere of co-operation and mutual respect.
- Every student has the right to be educated without disturbance from other students.
- Respecting others means treating others with courtesy and fairness (good manners).
- Respecting others also means resolving difficulties and conflict in a responsible and fair manner.



- All adults employed in the school, parents and visitors to the school, have the right to expect full co-operation from all students inside and outside class.
- Parents/guardians have the right to expect that their children will work to the best of their ability at all times.
- Everyone has the right to work in a supportive and safe environment without the fear of being bullied.
- All members of the school community have the right to enjoy their free time and break time without being bullied or intimidated.

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### **Recognising One's Own Responsibilities:**

- Every student has a duty to work to the best of his/her ability in school.
- Every student has a duty to treat everyone in a respectful manner.
- Every student must understand that fighting, bad language, inappropriate comments and rough behaviour show serious disrespect and shall not be tolerated.
- Regular attendance is necessary if each student is to derive the full benefits of teaching and learning.
- Every student has the responsibility to respect the authority of those charged with their care and education.
- Every student is responsible for his/her own personal property.
- Every student has a responsibility to respect all school property and that of others.

## School and Classroom Rules

### Introduction

The purpose of the Code of Behaviour is to establish clearly for students, their parents/guardians and their teachers, the areas of responsibility and the standards of behaviour that PP2 has set for its students.

The Code of Behaviour is outlined in six main sections:

1. School Attendance.
2. Respect for others and the school environment.
3. Dress, Appearance and Property.
4. Behaviour in the classroom and while representing the school.
5. Discipline structure.
6. Role of adults, parents and guardians.

### 1. School Attendance

In order to derive meaningful benefit from their education, a key element of pupils experience is the quality time they spend in school. It is expected therefore that students will attend school regularly and

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punctually. Under the “Educational Welfare Act 2000,” schools have a legal obligation to monitor attendance and report students to the National Education Welfare Board who have in excess of 20 days absence during the school year. The following procedures are designed to facilitate the monitoring of attendance.

## Attendance and Punctuality

- Progress at school requires optimum attendance and punctuality. It is expected that students will attend school regularly, unless prevented from doing so by illness.
- Students should acquire the habit of punctuality. School commences with early morning assembly at 8.50 a.m. each day. Students are expected to be present for assembly. Lateness is only acceptable in cases of extreme emergency.
- Reason for lateness must be given to the Year Head. Latecomers may not enter class without a pass obtained from the Secretary's office.
- When a student is absent from school, a written explanation from parent/guardian must be given to the Year Head on the first day of return. **Please note that slips for absences have been included in the back pages of the homework journal.** Persistent or unexplained absence will be investigated by the Attendance Officer. Medical Certificates should be supplied with the note if the student has attended the doctor.
- A student wishing to leave school temporarily during the school day, e.g. for a dental visit, must present a note of explanation to the Year Head, **and must be signed out and back in by a Parent/Guardian at the Secretary's office.**
- Students are not permitted to leave the school grounds during break times. **Students must be present for all house exams as a prerequisite for advancing to the next year's course.**



## 2. Respect for others and the School Environment

To promote learning in the school students are encouraged to set goals for themselves regarding their relations with each other, their relations with people in authority and their progress in their academic and other work. Each student will be encouraged to seek excellence in achieving their best in these areas. The school has a positive Pastoral Care System which encourages students through personal and group contact.

**Courtesy** The school ethos is based on mutual respect and courtesy for all members of the school community.

- It is expected that all students show politeness, respect and courteous co-operation to **all** school staff, fellow students, visitors to the school and bus drivers at all times.
- Visitors to the school are to be welcomed and directed to the Secretary's office.
- Ill mannered, disruptive or dangerous behaviour will not be tolerated.
- Pupils are expected to move quietly throughout the school in an orderly manner and to observe the one way system in the corridors.
- Any form of aggression or harassment either physical or verbal to any member of the school community will be viewed as contrary to the school ethos.
- Any form of defiance of members of staff will not be tolerated.
- Bad language or coarseness will not be tolerated.

### **Bullying**

A stable secure learning environment is essential in order that students are educated to the highest possible standard. Any form of bullying undermines the quality of education and may impose psychological damage. PP2 disapproves of

bullying and is actively engaged in counteracting such behaviour. The following Charter was prepared in consultation with teachers, parents and students.

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### **Charter of Rights & Responsibilities**

Each person in PP2 has:

- The right to be respected, and the duty to respect others.
- The right not to accept, and the duty not to engage in, name-calling, physical abuse, ganging up, isolating or harassing other people.
- The right to report if this is happening to them, and the duty to report it if they see it happening to others.
- The right to learn and the duty to promote learning and recreation in a safe and enjoyable atmosphere.

Bullying in any form (verbal, physical or psychological or cyber) is not tolerated. Students who are experiencing bullying or who witness bullying, or suspect that bullying is taking place are encouraged to report such incidents to their Tutor, Year Head or someone in authority, or to a parent/guardian who should contact the school. Information will be treated sensitively.

### **Procedure in Countering Bullying**

- A copy of the above Charter is displayed in each classroom.
- All students are made aware of the Charter.
- Pastoral classes raise awareness of the negative effects of bullying.
- Students are encouraged to report all cases of bullying.
- All students are encouraged to develop a sense of self worth.
- All reports of bullying are investigated in consultation with the Class Tutor, Year Head, Deputy Principal and Principal.

## Litter/Environment

PP2 is involved in the Green School Initiative which endeavours to foster a caring attitude towards our environment. In the interests of Health & Safety and the protection of our environment, every effort should be made to maintain all areas inside and outside the school, litter free.

- Litter must be disposed of in the bins provided.
- All areas of the school must be kept litter free.

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- Students are encouraged to recycle materials in the appropriate bins.
- Graffiti, vandalism, damage to trees, shrubs and the environment are not acceptable.

All students will be expected to partake in clean-up duties when requested to do so by members of staff. The support of **all students** in using the bins provided and keeping the school litter free will promote a healthy and safe environment for all.

## Smoking

Arising from the Public Health (Tobacco) Act 2002 it is the policy of PP2 that all of its workplaces are smoke-free and that all employees, students and visitors to the school have a right to work and /or visit the school, in a smoke-free environment. **Smoking is prohibited within the entire school boundary and on school buses with no exceptions.** Apart from its illegal aspect, students are endangering their health and the health of others, especially those suffering from respiratory problems of any kind. Because of its serious nature, any student found smoking/in possession of, cigarettes, **will face a serious sanction.**



## **Addictive Substances**

Addictive substances e.g. alcohol and illegal drugs are strictly banned in PP2. Any student found in possession of any of these substances whether for use, sale or supply, will face the prospect of immediate suspension and possibly a more serious sanction following due process. The school will be obliged to inform parents/guardians and the relevant authorities.

## **Mobile Phones/Multi-Media Devices**

The school insists that students should not bring mobile phones/ipods/mp3 players, etc. to school, save in exceptional circumstances (e.g. school tours which extend beyond the normal school hours). Where students must bring mobile phones to school, they should be left in the student's locker. The phone should never be turned on and/or used during the day. Please note that the school is not responsible for phones or

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other multi-media devices that are lost, damaged or stolen. Where teachers form the opinion that the student's mobile phone causes a disruption of any sort, it will be confiscated. It must be given to the teacher on request and it will be left in the school office for collection by the student's parent/guardian at a time convenient to school management.

## **One-Way System**

Students are requested to walk in **single file** on the **right hand side** in a quiet disciplined manner for ease of movement on corridors.

## **Behaviour in the School Grounds**

Students are required to remain within clearly defined areas in the playground, i.e. behind the double yellow or white lines at entrances and exits and other areas, and within the natural boundaries of the school.

Students are not permitted in the following areas:

- In front of the school during school time, unless being dropped or collected by a Parent/Guardian or by instruction from a member of staff, including quad area, lawns and roundabout area.
- Staffroom and front corridor.
- The driveway to the rear of the school.
- The back driveway leading to the village (except for local children coming to and going home from school).

All students are encouraged to participate in organised school extra-curricular activities. Students who wish for some quiet time may use the library facilities or specified classrooms adjacent to Social Areas during lunch time.

## **Fire and Emergency Procedures**

In the interest of health and safety, when the fire alarm sounds, all students must follow the instructions of teachers, health and safety signs and proceed without delay to the fire point on the quad at the front of the school where they will be accounted for.

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## **Property**

Each student is expected to respect the property of the school and of other students. The school provides lockers to support students in caring for their

own property. It is the responsibility of each student to ensure that his/her locker is secured with a lock. Any form of theft or interference with the property of others will be treated as a serious offence.

- Every item brought to school should be clearly marked with student's name.
- Students should get their books and materials for class at break times.
- The school cannot compensate students for articles lost or damaged.
- Compensation for any damage to school property will be the responsibility of the parents of the offending student.

### **3. Dress and Appearance and Property**

#### **School Uniform**

All students are required to wear the correct uniform, be neat and tidy at all times, while at school, representing the school or while travelling to and from the school.

#### **Girls**

- Mid-grey knee length skirt, with inverted pleat at the front (Option of mid-grey ladies trousers with petrol-blue pin stripe).
- Petrol blue jumper with crest.
- Grey blouse with school tie (red with petrol blue stripe).
- Grey knee socks or plain black opaque tights.
- Black shoes. No runners allowed in classrooms.

#### **Boys**

- Mid-grey pants.
- Petrol blue jumper with crest.



- Grey shirt with school tie (red with petrol blue stripe).
- Grey socks.
- Black shoes. No runners allowed in classrooms.

### **Boys and Girls**

- Black water proof school jacket with fleece lining is compulsory for all students. No other type of jacket is acceptable.
- For P.E. - all students must wear the PP2 tracksuit.
- Boots/runners are not acceptable for any students.

### **General Appearance**

As a sign of respect for oneself and for others, a neat, tidy and well groomed appearance is essential for all students. Hair should be neat and tidy, within the natural colour range and suitable for school and work.

In the interest of safety, no jewellery is permitted, except one pair of stud type ear rings for girls. Male students are to be clean shaven and are allowed to wear one stud ear ring if they so desire. No other facial jewellery is permitted. Make-up is forbidden for all students.

The wearing of the school uniform contributes much to the maintenance of order and discipline in the school and parents are asked to ensure that pupils are not negligent in this matter. In the interest of fairness to all, it will be necessary to take disciplinary action against those who breach these rules. The management will rule on the acceptability of individual cases in relation to any aspect of the uniform, dress or appearance.

#### **4. Behaviour in the Classroom and while Representing the School**

##### **The Classroom**

Students deserve a pleasant and effective learning environment. It is therefore essential that students co-operate with each teacher within the classroom.

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- Authority within the classroom rests with the teacher in charge of the classroom. The teacher's authority also extends beyond his/her classroom to include the entire school campus.
- Punctuality and proper preparation are essential for the smooth running of each class.
- Homework must be completed to the best ability of each student.
- A neat and tidy environment in the classroom should be maintained.
- Students should enter and leave the classroom in an orderly manner.
- Courtesy and respect must be shown towards other students and teachers in the classroom.
- Students must not disturb the work of the teacher or other students in any way.

In addition to the general rules outlined above, individual teachers will draw up and explain rules pertaining to their own classroom.

##### **Homework**

PP2 offers a comprehensive range of academic and practical subjects so as to provide its students with a full range of learning experiences. School work must be supplemented by homework both written and oral. It is important for parents to ensure that their child devotes sufficient time to completing good quality homework. It is also recommended that time be spent at home studying

work done in class each day. Failure to hand up quality homework on time may result in disciplinary sanctions.

**Homework Journals are compulsory for all students.** They form a means of communication between parents, teachers and students. Homework assigned by each teacher should be entered in the pupil's journal each day. Parents should check this journal at least once a week. Homework journals are checked on a regular basis by the Class Tutor. Journals which have been defaced will have to be replaced. Sanctions will be imposed on students who repeatedly fail to hand up

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completed/good quality homework.

- Homework, including written exercises, learning, revision and review, is given on a regular basis and students are required to complete it neatly and to the best of their ability.
- Students are required to note all homework assigned in their School Journal.
- Parents/Guardians are required to ensure that when the homework, written and oral, is completed, the homework notebook is then signed by them when required by the teacher.
- If for some reason, homework or part of it cannot be completed, parents/guardians are required to note this in the school journal.
- Persistent offenders may be suspended with prescribed homework which will be inspected by the Year Head before he/she will be permitted to return to school.

We are most anxious that every student should make progress and we ask for the co-operation of parents in ensuring that this aspect of their child's education receives the time and attention it requires.



## **Representing the School**

When representing the school in Debating, Gaisce, Sports, Trips, etc., students are required to uphold by their courtesy and behaviour, the good reputation and ethos of the school, their family and themselves.

- Directions from the person (s) in charge must be complied with at all times.
- School rules remain in force, including the ban on smoking and use of addictive substances.

## **5. Discipline Structure**

### **The Subject/Class Teacher**

The most important person in developing a friendly open atmosphere with mutual respect between teacher and student in the school is the

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class teacher. He/she is responsible for discipline within the class and will attempt to modify behaviour to ensure a positive, happy, learning environment within the classroom.

**The accepted procedures for dealing with discipline issues include:**

- Meeting and discussion with student.
- Additional class-work or homework.
- Note to parent (s) in journal.
- Litter or cleaning duties.
- Supervised lunchtime detention.

- Subject Teacher Report to be given to Tutor/Year Head for persistent misbehaviour or a once-off serious incident.

### **The Class Tutor**

The class tutor has particular responsibility for his/her assigned class group. The tutor's role is mainly a caring one, but also minor misbehaviour that occurs outside the classroom must be reported to the Tutor. In addition, recurring classroom misbehaviour must be reported by the classroom teacher to the Tutor. Positive behaviour should also be reported to the Tutor.

### **The accepted procedures for dealing with discipline issues include:**

- Meeting and discussion with student. (record kept).
- Additional class work or home work.
- Lunch time detention.
- Note home to parents.
- Litter or cleaning duties.
- Report to Year Head. Any Conduct Report from a teacher or any other member of staff should be reported to the relevant Year Head.
- Loss of privilege for the student.
- Recommendation for Friday detention to Year Head.

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### **The Year Head**

The Year Head has overall responsibility for the students in the year group and is aided by the Tutor. Serious incidents and recurring minor incidents concerning any student must be referred to Year Head. When a student is referred to the Year Head he/she will decide on a course of action which will usually take one of the following forms:

### **The accepted procedures for dealing with discipline issues include:**

- Meeting and discussion with student (record kept) **and possible referral for guidance (record kept).**
- Additional homework.
- Lunchtime detention.
- Contact with Parent(s)/Guardian.
- On report.
- Litter or cleaning duties.
- Friday detention.
- Meeting with parents.
- Referral to chaplain or counsellor for guidance (record kept).
- Withdrawal of privileges in consultation with parents and or double Friday Detention.
- Referral to Discipline Committee. The Discipline Committee will comprise of the relevant Year Head and Tutor. The Principal/Deputy Principal will be involved if deemed necessary.
- Referral to Principal/Deputy Principal.

### **The Principal/Deputy Principal**

Referral to Principal/Deputy Principal will take place if necessary and all up-to-date backup documentation regarding the student's file will be examined. These referrals should be reserved for very serious misbehaviour or continuous misbehaviour. In serious situations, however, the Principal/Deputy Principal may be directly involved from the outset (e.g. substance abuse, health and safety).



**The accepted procedures at this stage include:**

- Meeting and serious discussion with student.
- Letter to home.
- Litter and cleaning duties.
- Meeting with student and Parent(s)/Guardian.
- Possible referral to Chaplain or Counsellor.
- Referral to BOM under Discipline Item on Agenda.
- Suspension.

*(i) In-House:* A student may be suspended from classes but must be present on the school premises. In-house suspension may take any one of five forms or a combination of the five forms specified below.

- Suspension at back of class.
- Suspension in another class.
- Suspension from specified activities.
- Suspension in suspension room away from his/her peers.
- Suspension outside Deputy Principal's or Principal's office.

*(ii) Out of School:* A student may be suspended from school until the issue in question has been resolved. It will be the responsibility of the student for making up any loss of instructional time.

**The Board of Management**

The Principal has power for any cause which she/he judges adequate, to dismiss a pupil, subject to the approval of the Board of Management. The parents/guardians must be informed in writing of the decision, the reason for the dismissal, and of their right to appeal the decision. Appeals to the Board of

Management can be made personally by the Parent/Guardian with the student. The Board of Management complies with all elements of the Education Act 1998 and the Education (Welfare) Act of 2000. Suspensions and exclusions are subject

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to appeal under Section 29 of the Education Act as outlined in the Act (**Refer to Suspension and Expulsion Policy**).

### **Additional Support Staff**

The Guidance Counsellors and Chaplain are available to meet students and parents/guardians by appointment. The Guidance counsellors are always ready to help with student worries or difficulties, which may be personal, related to study, subject options and later on career choices. If parents/ guardians wish to make an appointment with the school counsellors or the Chaplain, they should contact the main office. Year Heads or Senior Management can refer to the Chaplain or to the Guidance Counsellors any students requiring support.

The school Special Educational Needs Department also provides support for students with a range of learning and behavioural difficulties. Class teachers, Year Heads, Senior Management can refer to the Resource/Learning Support teacher any student they are concerned about. A written explanation should accompany any such referrals.

### **Sanctions**

Despite the best efforts of school staff, parents and students, it is inevitable that behavioural problems will occur. Sanctions are necessary to support the standards of behaviour. The Board of Management views such sanctions as corrective supports rather than punishment; the purpose is to promote positive

behaviour and a safe atmosphere in the school community, based on the principle of respect for all. The aim of the following sanction procedure is to ensure that misbehaviour can be corrected in a manner which is fair, effective and dignified.

Each teacher is responsible for discipline within his/her own classroom. Routine reprimanding by the teacher in charge of the class will be the general procedure for minor incidents of indiscipline. The teacher may, depending on the offence, implement one of the following sanctions. As the seriousness of the incidents progress other members of staff will be consulted.

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## Guidelines Concerning Misbehaviour

| <b>Minor</b>   | <b>Serious</b>   | <b>Very Serious</b>  |
|--|--|--|
| <p><b>Minor</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Late for class.</li> <li>2. No books/pen/P.E gear etc.</li> <li>3. No homework.</li> <li>4. Make up/ Uniform.</li> <li>5. Rubbish/ Papers.</li> <li>6. Chewing gum.</li> <li>7. Drinks in classroom.</li> <li>8. No diary.</li> <li>9. Going to lockers.</li> <li>10. Running on corridor.</li> <li>11. Using sheets of paper rather than copies (J.C. level).</li> <li>12. Minor class disruptions.</li> </ol> <p><b>Sanctions</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Verbal correction reflecting age – warning.</li> <li>2. Extra work relevant to subject.</li> <li>3. Suspension to other class.</li> <li>4. Penalty Sheet – repeat homework or extra work.</li> <li>5. Class detention.</li> <li>6. Communication with parents using school diary – to be signed.</li> <li>7. On Report.</li> <li>8. Penalty Sheets specific to subject area.</li> <li>9. Clean-up duties.</li> </ol> | <p><b>Serious</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Persistent minor offences without improvement.</li> <li>2. Smoking.</li> <li>3. Graffiti on school property and in journal.</li> <li>4. Phone/ going off/ using phone.</li> <li>5. Cheek/ back answering.</li> <li>6. Questioning authority of teacher.</li> <li>7. Inappropriate comment re other students.</li> <li>8. Writing on uniform and tearing uniform.</li> <li>9. Out of bounds.</li> <li>10. Littering.</li> <li>11. Absent from class without permission.</li> <li>12. Disrupting exams.</li> </ol> <p><b>Sanctions</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Detention/picking up (Litter)</li> <li>2. On report.</li> <li>3. Conduct report with details of punishment to Tutor/Year Head.</li> <li>4. Lunchtime Detention.</li> <li>5. Friday Detention.</li> <li>6. Contact parents.</li> <li>7. Clean up at break time.</li> <li>8. Sent home until work completed at discretion of Year Head.</li> <li>9. Behavioural Contract.</li> <li>10. Discipline Committee.</li> <li>11. Letter of apology.</li> <li>12. Withdrawal of privileges.</li> <li>13. Suspension (smoking).</li> <li>14. Confiscation/suspension (phone).</li> </ol> | <p><b>Very Serious</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Using foul language towards a member of staff.</li> <li>2. Bullying/ Harassment (Including cyber bullying and mobile phone bullying).</li> <li>3. Fighting.</li> <li>4. Policy of non-compliance.</li> <li>5. Stealing.</li> <li>6. Vandalism.</li> <li>7. Grouping threateningly.</li> <li>8. Aggressive/dangerous behaviour.</li> <li>9. Personal comments towards teacher or other staff/student.</li> <li>10. Truancy.</li> <li>11. Not following adults/ teachers directions</li> <li>12. Persistent offences without improvement.</li> <li>13. Refusal to obey teachers or non-teaching staff.</li> </ol> <p><b>Sanctions</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Discipline Committee</li> <li>2. Friday Detention.</li> <li>3. Isolation / removed from class.</li> <li>4. Privileges withdrawn.</li> <li>5. Behavioural Contract.</li> <li>6. Sent home until work is completed.</li> <li>7. Suspension.</li> <li>8. Expulsion.</li> </ol> |

## **Detention**

Detention takes place on Fridays after school from 2.00 p.m. – 4.00 p.m.

**When placing a student on detention the procedure is as follows:**

- Letter posted home informing parents of the detention and the reasons for same. The student shall be responsible for completion of appropriate work if given.
- A student who fails to attend Friday Detention must complete the detention the following Friday or face suspension.
- A student who arrives late for detention on more than two occasions will be referred to Year Head for further sanction.
- Students must do the work set by the supervising teacher in detention.
- A student who is late for detention should complete that day's detention and be scheduled for the following week's detention also.
- Failure to behave in Friday Detention will result in a double Friday Detention or suspension.
- Repeated detentions for any reason require the further sanction of suspension.

## **Rewards**

High expectations produce higher standards from students in coursework, homework and general behaviour.

Aims of rewards system.

- To provide a structured system by which different levels of achievements can be recognised and rewarded.
- To foster a culture in which praise and rewards become more widely used.

- To provide a system that is clearly understood and valued by students and consistently applied by teachers.
- To motivate students to improve and work to high standards.

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Our means of rewarding good behaviour, commitment to school life, positive attitude and a strong work ethic fall into four categories:

1. Academic progress.
2. Quality homework.
3. Contribution to the school in the extra-curricular area.
4. Consistent improvement/most improved.

The types of rewards will include:

- Verbal praise.
- Written comments in diary.
- Certificate home.

In addition, the school will hold an annual Awards Ceremony at which students' contribution to the school will be recognised.

### **Modelling Standards of Behaviour – The Responsibility of Adults**

Adults in the school have a responsibility to model the school's standards of behaviour, in their dealings both with students and with each other, since by their example they are providing a powerful source of learning for students.

Parents are expected to model the standards that students are asked to respect. In order to do this, they need to be familiar with the standards and to understand the importance of expecting students to behave according to



these standards. Parents of all students should ensure that their child is familiar with, and understands the Code of Behaviour.

The ways in which parents and teachers interact will provide students with a model of good working relationships.

## **6. Role of Parents**

The support and co-operation of parents is essential for the effective operation of the Code of Behaviour. If teachers and parents are not working in harmony, pupils inevitably suffer. The school's policy is to

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keep parents informed of any problems before they escalate.

Parents are invited to keep closely in contact with the school regarding all aspects of their child's progress. Organised contacts on the part of the school include annual parent/teacher meetings, twice yearly reports, newsletter, educational meetings for parents relating to students' welfare and development. The school encourages parents to make full use of these opportunities. Parents are welcome to arrange a meeting with a particular Teacher, Class Tutor, Year Head, Principal or Deputy Principal.

The school appeals to parents to ensure that pupils attend regularly and punctually, and that a written explanation is provided without delay for unavoidable absence or lateness. Parents have a clear responsibility to ensure that their son/daughter devotes sufficient time to complete good quality homework.

It is also important for parents to inform teachers if problems are encountered concerning homework. If at any time, a student is experiencing personal difficulties, such as those caused by serious illness in the home, a

bereavement, or if there is any other serious cause for anxiety, parents are encouraged to inform the school so that teachers may be understanding and sympathetic in dealing with any problems at school which may result from such difficulties.

In all matters of conduct the management and staff of the school wish to work in collaboration with parents/guardians. We welcome comments and suggestions as to how the goal of a caring community might further be realised and contributed to by all.

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