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EXAMINING THE EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS, TEACHERS AND LEADERS AT EDUCATE TOGETHER SECOND-LEVEL SCHOOLS

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Educate Together

ESRI ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACCS	Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
ETB	Education and Training Boards
ETSSs	Educate Together Second-Level Schools
GUI	*Growing Up in Ireland*
JMB	Joint Managerial Body for Voluntary Secondary Schools
PIAAC	Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
SEN	Special Educational Need
SNA	Special Needs Assistants
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The first Educate Together second-level schools (ETSS) opened in 2014. In the academic year 2019-2020, there were 17 ETSSs. The ethos of ETSSs rests on four core principles: equality-based, co-educational, learner-centred and democratically run. Given the scale of growth, and the distinct ethos and climate of Educate Together schools, it is timely to examine how students attending these schools experience diverse aspects of their school life. This report is based on an in-depth mixed-methods research study conducted at 11 case study Educate Together second-level schools opened prior to 2019. It is informed by a survey with first- and second-year students (n = 877), 21 focus groups with students, interviews with 27 teachers, 11 school leaders,[1] 36 parents, six school board members, and four representatives of management bodies and patron bodies.

The 11 case study ETSSs have been successful at embedding the core principles of the school ethos in the school fabric. Significant variations were also observed between the 11 schools indicating that the model is flexible and can be adjusted to different school contexts. These variations stemmed from the commitment of each school to take the voices of students, parents and staff into account, as well as environmental constraints – most notably derived from their starter school status. The Educate Together ethos attracted school leaders, teachers and staff that were committed to it, hence enabling its implementation.

The student profile of the 11 case study schools was very diverse. Across schools, 53 per cent of respondents identified as boys and 45 per cent identified as girls. Overall 47 per cent of survey respondents indicated that their mothers had attended third-level education. The education level of ETSS parents was not significantly higher than the national average. Notably, 18 per cent of survey respondents indicated they primarily speak a language other than English at home. Nationally, in 2015/2016, 12 per cent of students were born outside of Ireland (Department of Education and Skills, 2017), suggesting a higher representation of national diversity at ETSSs. Some ETSSs also had a higher than average level of students with additional needs. Participating students were also diverse in the range of belief and worldview identities. Thirty-nine per cent of students across Educate Together second-level schools identified as not having a religion. An additional 35 per cent identified as Christian, 8 per cent as Roman Catholic, 6 per cent as Atheists, and 5 per cent as Muslim. Fifty-seven per cent of the respondents to the student survey did not attend an Educate Together (ET) primary school, emphasising that the completion of an Educate Together primary education is not

[1] Ten principals and one deputy principal were interviewed; one leader from each school was included in the study. The label 'school leader' is used to refer to these 11 interviewees.

a prerequisite for attending an ETSS. The parents interviewed over the course of this research also represented a wide diversity of ethnicities, religions, sexual orientations and professions. In interviews, teachers and school leaders emphasised that the diverse student population may be both a cause and a consequence of the inclusive school environment. Students suggested that diversity was embraced and viewed in a positive, non-tokenistic way at their schools.

Focus group participants strongly indicated they like their schools and feel they belong. They described their schools as 'great fun', 'happy', 'safe', 'welcoming', and 'inclusive'. The results from the student survey illustrate that there is a diversity of views among students within and across schools regarding their experiences. Some of these differences can be clearly traced back to the accommodation status of their school, while others are more connected to school policies. Across all schools, 76 per cent of students stated that their school is a place where 'they feel they belong' and 80 per cent indicated their school is a place where they 'feel respected' either 'often' or 'very often'. Notably, measures of belonging did not differ in a statistically significant way between girls and boys; students who identify as having a disability or additional needs and those who do not report additional educational need or a disability; between students who speak a language other than English at home and those who speak primarily English; and between self-identified Christians and students of different faiths. The lack of statistically significant differences in belonging scores among these groups indicates strong integration at ETSSs. Consistent with prior research (McCoy et al., 2019a; Smyth et al., 2006), second-year students have a statistically significant lower level of belonging than first-year students.

Students provided wide-ranging examples that suggest they are consistently and democratically involved in decision-making. Students are involved in school and classroom decisions through student councils, specialised committees, surveys, and through direct interactions with teachers and even school leaders. The processes to enable such involvement varied across schools. Students were encouraged to take responsibility for their learning and were often offered options on how to show their learning (e.g. video, poster, interview, as part of group work or individually, etc.). Students were consulted on aspects such as extracurricular provision, dress-code policies, and other school policies. Teachers and school leaders emphasised that the involvement of students is age-appropriate and occurs within the overarching school norms and rules. The involvement of students in decision-making was facilitated by the strong respect between students and teachers.

Mutual respect emerged as a key feature of the relationship between students and teachers. Students at ETSSs have fewer of their primary school friends joining them

in second-level education compared with nationally representative figures from *Growing Up in Ireland*. However, once they join their new ETSS, students are able to make a comparable number of friends as the typical Irish second-level student. Levels of bullying at ETSSs are consistent with and no higher than the national average. The ETSSs placed a strong emphasis on recognising and rewarding positive behaviours, as well as trying to address behavioural difficulties by shifting the focus from the student to the problematic behaviour. This approach allows teachers to preserve positive relationships with students even after problematic behaviours occur. While this approach poses an additional level of burden on teachers, teachers acknowledge its benefits for students. The relationship between students and teachers at ETSSs have received extensive praise from students. For many of the focus group participants, the relationships with their teachers was most highly cited when they talked about what they liked about school. Data from the student survey suggest some variations both between schools and between students on how they view the interactions with teachers.

Teachers indicated that they employ a breadth of teaching philosophies and approaches. These approaches were in strong alignment with the progressive approach at the centre of the junior cycle reforms. At the core – as suggested by discussions with teachers and students – teachers aimed to promote a student-centred teaching philosophy that prioritises collaborative and active learning and builds good relationships with students. Teachers at ETSSs said they benefit from a wide degree of autonomy in the classroom and use strategies that support student autonomy. The teaching practices employed by teachers align strongly with the way students describe how they best learn, as well as student views on what makes a good teacher. Active teaching methods converged towards the goal of providing student-centred education. Inclusivity, differentiated teaching, and employing approaches such as universal design learning and the use of praise to recognise effort were at the core of the teaching approaches in the schools visited. At the same time, due to the small size of some of the schools included in this study, teachers often taught a diversity of subjects; some of these subjects were outside of the teacher's area of expertise. The schools made extensive use of digital technologies. In total, 81 per cent of surveyed students indicated they use tablets/iPads 'often' or 'very often' in class. Both students and parents were largely satisfied with the way personal electronic devices are used at ETSSs.

Fewer students at ETSSs indicated they like school or that they find Science, English and Mathematics interesting compared with nationally representative figures from *Growing Up in Ireland*. *Growing Up in Ireland* respondents were twice as likely to report an interest in Science compared to ETSS student. Some of these differences are likely due to the different profile of students at ETSSs.

Ethical Education is a school subject taught across school years at ETSSs. The subject is devised by Educate Together and is not part of the National Curriculum. The breadth, status, and even the subject name varied across the schools visited. However, values associated with the Ethical Education curriculum were covered across all schools. Most notably, teachers across subjects provided extensive examples on how they embed Ethical Education in their classes, indicating that the tenets of Ethical Education are evident across the curriculum.

The Educate Together ethos was central when school leaders and teachers discussed their rationale for applying for their current positions. This facilitated strong 'buy-in' across school stakeholders for the Educate Together ethos. Teachers and school leaders were also attracted to their current positions due to the starter status of their schools. They were excited at the prospect of creating an 'innovative' school culture within the boundaries of the National Curriculum. Yet it was precisely the starter school status that led to most of the challenges faced by ETSS leaders and teachers. Most saliently, these challenges arose due to the temporary accommodation status of some of the schools included in this study and limitations on resources.

Educate Together has been able to facilitate the creation of innovative and welcoming schools where students are seen to thrive. As the number of ETSSs grows, it is important to ensure that both existing and new schools receive the support required, particularly in the challenging starter school phase. Attracting school leaders and staff committed to making the Educate Together ethos come to life has been key to the success of ETSSs so far. It will remain central to maintaining the unique features of the Educate Together ethos into the future. Overall, this report illustrates that the initial experiences across the 11 schools provide a positive outlook for the sector, and a promising potential to support the learning and holistic development of many more Irish young people into the future.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction, context and research objectives

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Educate Together is an independent, non-governmental organisation that acts as the patron (sole or jointly) of primary and second-level schools across Ireland. While Educate Together is a patron of second-level schools, it is not a management body in this sector. Management bodies of second-level schools include Joint Managerial Body for Voluntary Secondary Schools (JMB), Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS), and Education and Training Boards (ETB). The first Educate Together primary school opened just over 40 years ago and today there are 109 such schools in the system, with an enrolment of over 30,000 students. A survey carried out on behalf of Educate Together in 2008 (Seery et al., 2008) provided evidence that parents who send their children to Educate Together primary schools would send them to an Educate Together second-level school if one existed. Since the early days of the sector, parents have expressed an interest in having a follow-through of the Educate Together ethos into second-level education (Richardson, 2009). In response, Educate Together established the first second-level schools in 2014, with the first cohort of students completing the Leaving Certificate examination in June 2019. Educate Together describes itself as 'Ireland's equality-based schools'. The Educate Together schools ascribe to four core values: equality based, co-educational, learner-centred, and democratically run. While the primary identity of Educate Together schools rests on the equality-based ethos, its history is linked to the attempt to increase the number of multi- and non-denominational schools in Ireland, as a response to demographic shifts in the country.

Historically, the majority of students in Ireland attended schools through their local Catholic National School. These schools were however supported by the Irish government (Mulcahy, 2006). Over the last 25 years, the population of Ireland has rapidly become more diverse. While in 1991 just over 90 per cent of the population were Roman Catholic, this number declined by 13 percentage points by 2016. The share of the Irish population with no religious affiliation has increased from 1.9 per cent in 1991 to 9.8 per cent in 2016 (Central Statistics Office, 2016). Ireland has also become more ethnically and racially diverse. In 2016, 'White Irish' represented 82.2 per cent of the country's population. The highest annual growth rate of any ethnic or cultural group between 2011-2016 has been registered in the category 'Other (including mixed background)' (Central Statistics Office, 2016). The religious beliefs of students too are changing in Ireland and becoming more multi-faceted (Kitching and Shanneik, 2015). However, these trends are not unique to Ireland, with many countries in Europe experiencing similar declines in religious affiliation

(Smyth et al., 2010) and increasing cultural diversity reflected in the need for more inclusive schools (Smyth and Darmody, 2011).

Demographic changes have also been matched by changes in school enrolments. Traditionally, most students in Ireland have attended denominational schools. Yet in recent years inter-denominational and multi-denominational[2] schools have been increasingly sought by parents and, once provided, have attracted an increasing share of students. In the academic year 2018-2019, 51 per cent of second-level students attended schools with a Catholic ethos, and 4.8 per cent of students were enrolled in multi-denominational schools (Department of Education and Skills, annual statistical reports). Current multi-denominational providers are An Foras Pátrúnachta, the Community National Schools,[3] as well as Educate Together.

The Educate Together sector fits within a broader Department of Education and Skills objective to expand the number and range of multi- and non-denominational schools across Ireland. Established in 2008, the Community National School sector is also expanding. As part of the *Action Plan for Education 2019* (Department of Education and Skills, 2019a), the Department of Education explicitly recognised that more diversity is needed to meet the changing needs of the population. The Schools Reconfiguration for Diversity process, was developed by then Minister for Education and Skills, Richard Bruton, to deliver on a Government target to reach 400 multi-denominational and non-denominational schools by 2030.[4] New schools will account for a certain amount of this provision, but transfers of existing schools from religious patronage will also be required to achieve that target.[5] Minister Bruton notes 'The identification of new patrons is now designed to reflect the wishes of parents and of the school community'. Democratic processes were envisaged;

> *'I believe that the best way to achieve this will be to hold a public meeting where each prospective patron can make their case to the school community, followed by a vote of all parents within that school community (whether they attended the meeting or not).'*

The Minister also notes that there is no one model that will provide the answer to this complex issue, arguing that there is room for a number of different multi- and

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2 An inter-denominational school is under the patronage or trusteeship of more than one religious faith community, while a multi-denominational school is not under the patronage of a religious faith and provides education about religions and beliefs or, in some cases, provides some faith formation for different denominations (Coolahan et al., 2012).

3 ETBs are the provider of Community National Schools.

4 This target includes primary schools.

5 Department of Education and Skill, May 2018 'Minister Bruton commences plan to increase the provision of multi- and non-denominational schools' URL: https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2018-press-releases/PR18-05-28.html.

non-denominational patrons to respond to different parental wishes through the different process now in place, including existing providers.

Since opening the first school, the number of Educate Together second-level schools has expanded, comprising 17 schools across the country as of August 2020. Given the scale of growth, and the distinct ethos and climate of Educate Together schools, it is timely to examine how students attending these schools experience diverse aspects of their school life. The aim of this study is to examine the experience of students, parents, teachers and school leaders in Educate Together second-level schools. While 17 Educate Together second-level schools operated in the academic year 2019-2020, this study aimed to include only the 13 Educate Together second-level schools opened prior to 2019. In total, 11 of these 13 schools agreed to participate in the study. The research takes a mixed method approach, using surveys of students in first and second year, combined with interviews with Boards of Management, school leaders, teachers, students and parents across the schools. Interviews with members of the three management bodies (JMB, ACCS and ETB) and Educate Together were also undertaken. The findings of this study provide new insights into how students experience Educate Together school settings and the extent to which these experiences vary across different school contexts.

The research complements a diversity of studies previously conducted on multi-denominational and non-denominational schools in Ireland, on the importance of school ethos, on the role of religion in schools, and research on Educate Together schools. However, these studies relate primarily to the primary education sector. In 2012, the ESRI published the report *School sector variation among primary schools in Ireland* (Darmody et al., 2012). The study focused on better understanding the multi-denominational primary sector in Ireland across dimensions including school choice, student profile and school profile, with a focus on Educate Together Schools. In 2018, the ESRI published a number of papers with a focus on better understanding different characteristics of Community National Schools, including on the role of principals in creating inclusive school environments (Faas et al., 2018a), children's agency in multi-belief settings (Faas et al., 2018b), and variations in school ethos among schools within the same (multi-) denominational mission (Faas et al., 2019).

With the 1998 passing of the Education Act, the patronage body model has been extended from primary schools only to all schools, including public and second-level schools. Patron bodies are responsible for establishing the school ethos. As a reflection of its novel status, challenges were noted by recent studies in embedding a school ethos within the fabric of schools and gathering buy-in from stakeholders. At the same time, mixed method approaches have found that both teachers and

students are able to articulate shared values and how they are lived within their school contexts (Liddy et al., 2019; O'Flaherty et al., 2018).

In 2013, Marks and Powell documented the emergency opening of the Bracken Educate Together National School, aimed to accommodate the rapid population growth due to higher levels of immigration and birth rate. Mulcahy (2006) completed a dissertation on Educate Together schools as an epistemic community that documents the emergence of Educate Together within the Irish historical context. More recently, Lalor (2013) conducted a case study review of Dublin-based Educate Together primary schools that documents the extensive involvement of parents within the schools. This study extends this line of research to Educate Together second-level schools.

1.2 CONTEXT

As Irish society has become more diverse in terms of cultural and religious background, the debates around school choice and admission policies have intensified (Darmody et al., 2012). In 2011, the Minister for Education and Skills published a discussion document on school admission policies with a view to changing the system. A year later, the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism report (Coolahan et al., 2012) set out proposals for addressing diversity of beliefs within the primary sector. The Education Admission to School Act was signed by the President in July 2018, with new requirements applying to school admissions from September 2021 onwards. The Act provides that every school must make an explicit statement in its admission policy that it will not discriminate against an applicant for admission on any of a number of grounds specified, while including provision for single sex schools and denominational schools to reflect, in their admission policy, the exemptions applicable to such schools under equality legislation.[6]

Earlier research has highlighted that despite demographic changes in recent decades, second-level schools in Ireland have remained predominantly denominational, chiefly Catholic in ownership and management (Darmody et al., 2012; Mulcahy, 2006). However, increased diversity in the Irish population may have contributed to a growing demand for new types of school that are multi-denominational in character. Considering these developments, Darmody et al. (2012) undertook an independent study of sectoral differences in Irish primary schools, funded by Educate Together. The study explored the composition of students attending Catholic, multi-denominational[7] and minority faith schools, the social and economic background of students enrolled in these schools, the

6 Department of Education and Skills, https://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Information/School-Enrolment/ [Accessed 21 May, 2020].

7 The report did not include Community National Schools.

prevalence of students with special educational needs, levels of parental involvement and children's experiences of school. The focus of the study was on school composition and process, rather than academic outcomes. The results showed that both minority faith and multi-denominational schools had higher proportions of children from professional, managerial and technical backgrounds than Catholic schools. In addition, maternal education levels were higher in multi-denominational schools than in minority faith or Catholic schools.

The findings are not surprising since the existing literature suggests that middle-class parents are more likely to make active school choices. The faith profile of children and their mothers also varied significantly by school sector. Around half of children (and their mothers) in multi-denominational schools were Catholic. The minority faith schools were mostly made up of those of 'other religions', but with a sizeable (30 per cent) Catholic intake. While these two school sectors had some variety in pupil intake, the Catholic schools were predominantly Catholic (90 per cent of children and 87 per cent of mothers). Children attending multi-denominational schools were also more likely to come from immigrant backgrounds than those in minority faith or Catholic schools. In terms of the prevalence of students with additional needs, the study demonstrated that there were differences across individual schools in the number of such pupils, rather than between school sectors (i.e. Catholic, minority faith, multi-denominational) (see Darmody et al., 2012).

1.3 EDUCATE TOGETHER SECOND-LEVEL SCHOOLS: CHARACTERISTICS AND ETHOS

Drawing on the annual statistical report of the Department of Education and Skills, Table 1.1 shows the distribution of schools and students across the main religious categories in Ireland. We draw on data for the 2018/2019 academic year since this is the cohort of schools examined in this study. Educate Together schools account for just under 2 per cent of second-level schools in Ireland, while Catholic schools continue to account for the largest share at 48 per cent, and inter-denominational schools are at 42 per cent. In terms of student numbers, as many Educate Together schools are in a starter phase, they account for just under 1 per cent of students. This compares to 51 per cent in Catholic schools, 40 per cent inter-denominational, just under 4 per cent multi-denominational and just over 3 per cent Church of Ireland.

TABLE 1.1 STUDENT NUMBERS FOR MAINSTREAM SECOND-LEVEL SCHOOLS

Category	Students	Percentage	Schools	Percentage
Catholic	185,963	51.25	346	47.92
Church of Ireland	12,478	3.44	23	3.19
Methodist	914	0.25	1	0.14
Jewish	154	0.04	1	0.14
Multi-denominational	14,018	3.86	31	4.29
Inter denominational	145,232	40.02	305	42.24
Quaker	756	0.21	2	0.28
Educate Together	3,374	0.93	13	1.80

Source: Department of Education and Skills, Statistical Report, 2018/2019.

The 13 schools invited to participate in this study include a diversity of patronage models.[8] For example, they include voluntary secondary schools with Educate Together as sole patron, a community school in which it is co-patron with Louth Meath ETB and two community colleges in which Dublin /Dún Laoghaire ETB and City of Dublin ETB are the patron working in formal partnership with Educate Together. None of the 13 Educate Together schools are included in the DEIS programme,[9] all are co-educational, and the average school size is 260 students. The lack of inclusion in the DEIS programme is not because the composition of the schools would not make them eligible, but because, as of now, no additional schools are being enrolled in the programme (Department of Education and Skills, n.d.).

While Educate Together is now well-established at primary school level, with the first school opening in Dalkey over 40 years ago, the potential for similar schools at second level was first considered in a feasibility study that started in 2007 (Seery et al., 2008). The report on the feasibility study highlighted that 97 per cent of Educate Together parents surveyed said that their children were happy at school, and in particular, parents were happy that their children were treated with courtesy and respect. Parents felt that Educate Together schools provided a balance between academic development and social wellbeing and it is this balance and respect that parents also wanted to see carried through to second level. By the time the feasibility study was published, plans were already underway to develop schools with a similar ethos in the second-level sector.

As at primary level, an Educate Together second-level school is guided by the four core principles as laid down in the Educate Together Charter (1990):

8 The diversity of patronage models is a result of a variety of factors, including patronage process decisions made by the Department of Education and Skills and partnership developments between Educate Together and ETB.

9 Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools offers additional resources to schools with concentrated levels of educational disadvantage.

1. They are to be multi-denominational in character, ensuring that children and young people of all social, cultural and religious backgrounds have equal access to and rights within the school;
2. They are to be co-educational, thereby encouraging children and young people to learn and live together;
3. They should be child-centred, respecting individual students' abilities to learn in unique ways;
4. Finally, Educate Together schools are to be run on a democratic basis, encouraging active participation by parents and students in the daily life of the school whilst positively affirming the professional role of the teachers.

The document *A Blueprint for Educate Together Second Level Schools* (Richardson, 2009) draws on the four core principles – multi-denominational, co-educational, child-centred and democratically run – under a number of key headings: Curriculum, Teaching and Learning; The Ethical Curriculum; Leadership, Management and Structure; and The Built Environment. In relation to curriculum issues, the Blueprint recognises the flexibility and potential which exists within the existing (national) second-level curriculum. It refers to the NCCA review of the junior and senior cycle curriculum which is intended to create a better balance between knowledge and skills, as well as promote a variety of learning strategies that will enable learners to participate in a 21st century knowledge society. It cites the work of Claxton (2008), who suggests that across educational systems

> *'we are now realising that education is about becoming a Learner rather than a Knower and coming to see that developing positive, transferable learning dispositions is a subtle but achievable goal that takes time, finesse, and a change of heart by those who run and work in our schools'* (Claxton, 2008 in Richardson, 2009, p. 7).

The Blueprint also recognises that current and future generations of young people will be faced with new and 'exciting' challenges in an increasingly complex world and that the education system must prepare them to meet these challenges. It emphasises the importance of developing life-long learning skills that will enable the graduates of Educate Together schools to be active and responsible citizens. Whatever the programmes of study available at senior cycle in an Educate Together second-level school, life-long learning skills that enable active and responsible citizenship are to be embedded in the teaching and learning opportunities provided and should be underpinned by notions such as democracy, participation, advocacy, inclusion and equality. Thus, it reminds the reader that the curriculum of these schools will be underpinned by the principles of democracy, participation, advocacy, inclusion and equality.

The Blueprint also refers to the many good teaching and learning practices which exist in second-level education in Ireland and internationally. It draws on a wide range of international research and reiterates the need for staff and students to engage in a deep and meaningful way with the knowledge, skills and values inherent in the National Curriculum and in the Educate Together ethos. To do this effectively, co-operation across subject areas is encouraged, and an approach that encompasses multiple areas of expertise and ways of knowing needs to be incorporated into curriculum organisation and planning. It states that teachers in an Educate Together school will use strategies and learning activities to facilitate curriculum differentiation stating that 'children already come to us differentiated. It just makes sense that we would differentiate our instruction in response to them' (Tomlinson, 2000 in Richardson, 2009, p. 15).

The section on Ethical Curriculum reiterates the underlying principles of the Educate Together Ethical Curriculum for Primary Schools and notes that the values inherent in the principles – respect, equality, rights and responsibilities, justice and dignity – should underpin and permeate all school policies and practices. It states that the Ethical Education curriculum at second level is a development of the curriculum at primary level. Equality, inclusion and developing skills so all young people can participate in an increasingly diverse society in an effective and constructive way are considered an important element of curriculum provision in Educate Together second-level schools. A learner-centred approach is encouraged, and student learning should be expressed in terms of clearly stated learning outcomes which enable students to have greater ownership of, and active participation in, learning. Inclusive education in an Educate Together second-level school is envisaged as meaning the provision of a learning environment within which all young people – regardless of their ability, language, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic, social or cultural origin – will be provided with learning opportunities and classroom practices that explicitly take account of the multiple ways all students learn. Differentiated instruction and curriculum organisation which supports the inclusion of all students, which supports the transfer from primary to second level as well as engaging and motivating learners is to be shared, developed, reviewed and evaluated as part of school curriculum planning across these schools. The report cites a presentation by Professor Kathleen Lynch (2004):

> *[The Educate Together ethical curriculum] demonstrates that spiritual and Ethical Education does not have to involve separate education. It identifies the common values that we share in our humanity and offers a pathway for educating our children to live in a pluralist Ireland. It integrates theory and action in spiritual and Ethical Education. What is important about the curriculum is its truly holistic approach to Ethical Education. Children will not just be educated about spiritual values or ethical principles emanating from their own belief or religious tradition. They will learn about the values, cultures and*

lifestyles of those who are different to them. They will learn to name difference with a language of respect.

In relation to Leadership and Management, the Blueprint indicates that an Educate Together second-level school should promote participation by parents, students and teachers in decision-making processes and promote a partnership between parental involvement and the professional role of the teachers. Within this context, the principal should seek to keep the ethos and vision of the school visible, tangible and alive for everyone so that the ethos can be experienced by all members of and visitors to the school. The various school structures are designed to provide opportunities for members of the school community to be involved in the academic and social aspects of school life. Creative timetabling, curriculum adjustments, flexible use of space and innovative teaming of teachers and students will be considered both to accommodate the developmental needs of young adolescents as well as to facilitate continuity of learning from primary to second level and junior cycle to senior cycle. To facilitate deep and meaningful engagement with the knowledge, skills and values inherent in the National Curriculum and the Educate Together ethos, co-operation across subject areas, and an approach that encompasses multiple areas of expertise and ways of knowing, need to be incorporated into curriculum organisation and planning.

Finally, in seeking to provide the best possible learning environment for young people, the Blueprint emphasises that an Educate Together school community must consider how the architecture, layout, décor and facilities of a school play a vital role in shaping the learning environment and how they influence students' academic performance and wellbeing in school. Key research is cited, demonstrating that well-designed school environments help generate a positive school ethos, effective learning and teaching, good health and wellbeing in students and staff, as well as supportive relationships with families and the surrounding community (Higgins et al., 2005; Scottish Health Promoting Schools Unit, 2005; Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, 2002; Fisher, 2000). A working group on the Built Environment and Campus, as well as participants at General Members' Meetings, explored the importance of school design. The Blueprint notes that bringing the Educate Together ethos and principles into school building design requires considering such issues as efficiency and sustainability, functionality and flexibility, building in context, accessibility, democratised spaces and aesthetic quality.

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY AND OUTLINE OF THE REPORT

Given the scale of growth, and the distinct ethos and climate of Educate Together schools, it is timely to examine how students attending these schools experience diverse aspects of their school life. The study examines the experience of students,

teachers, school leaders and parents in 11 Educate Together second-level schools opened prior to 2019. It is guided by six main research questions:

1. How do students, teachers and school leaders reflect on the ethos of Educate Together schools? What are the views of these stakeholders on the provision of Ethical Education?
2. How do students in Educate Together schools report on their engagement with, and sense of belonging in, school?
3. How do students reflect on their interactions with their peers and teachers in school and the approach to discipline at their school?
4. How do students reflect on decision-making processes at their school and the extent to which democratic values are held?
5. What teaching and learning approaches are adopted by teachers at ETSSs? How do students and teachers reflect on the place of digital technologies in learning?
6. How do schools reflect on their relationship with management bodies and Educate Together?

While not an original objective of the study, this research also examines many of the challenges that newly established second-level schools in Ireland face in the current institutional and funding setup.

The next chapter of the report introduces the mixed methods methodology used for this study and offers an overview of the characteristics of the respondents to the student survey conducted across the 11 schools. Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 primarily profile the student voice as it emerged from focus groups and the student survey. Chapter 3 focuses on the student experience and school ethos at ETSSs, including aspects such as how students would describe their schools to a friend, what students like and dislike about their schools. Most notably, this chapter includes an overview on student belonging and engagement at ETSSs and the involvement of students in school decisions – key aspects of the Educate Together ethos. Chapter 4 focuses on relationships at ETSSs, as viewed by students. It describes the relationships between students, between students and teachers, and provides an overview of the discipline policies at ETSSs and how they work.

Teaching and learning at ETSSs takes centre stage in Chapter 5. The chapter draws on interviews with 27 teachers at the 11 ETSSs to discuss their profiles, how they would describe their schools, and their teaching practices. The chapter also introduces results from the student survey with relevance to teaching and learning at the schools and discusses what students think makes a good teacher. This chapter concludes with an overview on the use of technology at ETSSs. Chapter 6

focuses on the experiences and views of different stakeholders on Ethical Education, a signature subject taught at ETSSs. The chapter also discusses the subjects' provision and how it is integrated across other school subjects. The chapter introduces results from the student survey on the prevalence of global competency practices and intercultural respect at ETSSs.

Chapter 7 focuses on aspects related to leadership in ETSSs. The chapter draws primarily on interviews with 11 school leaders, chairs of Board of Management, and representatives of management bodies to discuss the challenges faced by these leaders, the relationship between schools and management and patron bodies, and the relationship between schools and Educate Together. Chapter 8 summarises the findings of this study. The conclusion of the report includes an analysis of what these findings mean for Educate Together and education policy more broadly.

CHAPTER 2

Methodology

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This report presents findings from a mixed method research study at 11 Educate Together second-level schools opened prior to 2019.[10] The authors have visited the 11 schools in person and spoke to multiple stakeholders; students, principals, teachers, chairs of Boards of Management, and parents. A survey with students in their first and second year at these schools was also conducted. This enabled comparisons between the survey conducted with Educate Together second-level students and the nationally representative longitudinal study *Growing Up in Ireland*. All but two Educate Together second-level schools opened prior to 2019 participated in this study. The report aims to offer a comprehensive overview of the findings across a range of dimensions; the student experience, teaching and learning at the school, Ethical Education provision, and school leadership. Data were collected between October and December 2019, prior to the COVID-19 school closures. This chapter highlights the methodology used to conduct the study.

The study began with a review of the historical context and the emergence of Educate Together within the Irish education landscape. International and national research was also examined with a view to identifying key variables and instrumentation for the study. These included variables predictive of pro-social behaviours (e.g. acceptance, respect of diversity) and minimising anti-social behaviour (e.g. bullying). It also included an evaluation of validated instruments that may be used to measure relevant aspects of the Educate Together experience. Additional desk research was also conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the Educate Together model, as well as the ethos of the schools involved in the field-work phase of the study.

While this study uses a mixed methods design, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected simultaneously, in order to minimise disruption within the schools. The semi-structured interviewed allowed some flexibility to interrogate emergent themes based on school observations or comments made by students but were not informed by the results of the survey. Similarly, the survey used as part of the study could not be adjusted to gather additional evidence on themes that emerged from qualitative data analysis.

[10] As of August 2020, there were 17 Educate Together second-level schools.

Survey data were analysed using SPSS, much of the analysis being of a bivariate, descriptive nature, given the scope of this study. Interviews were recorded, by consent, and transcribed verbatim. Members of the ESRI research team conducted all interviews in the case study schools, including the focus group interviews and in-depth interviews with key personnel. The qualitative data were analysed in NVivo across a range of key themes, seen as directly and indirectly related to school, teacher and student experiences.

2.2 PRESERVING SCHOOL AND RESPONDENT ANONYMITY

Table 2.1 details the pseudonyms chosen by the research team for the participating schools. The pseudonyms are used throughout the report to attribute select quotes and findings to specific schools and to illustrate variation across schools. The pseudonyms were chosen to represent trees from across different continents.

TABLE 2.1 PSEUDONYMS OF SCHOOLS

Pseudonym	
Baobab	Mangrove
Chestnut	Maple
Elm	Oak
Ginkgo	Sequoia
Hawthorn	Walnut
Magnolia	

In order to preserve the anonymity of the school and of the respondent, the pseudonym of the school will not always be used to identify a quote from a respondent. For example, in Section 3.2, quotes from participants that contrast their experience in their current school and their primary school reveal that the students are enrolled in an Educate Together second-level school that both has no uniform nor does it have detention. If the pseudonym of this school were revealed, it would make it easier for all quotes from this school to be traced across the report, thus jeopardising the anonymity of respondents. A similar decision was made for quotes where study participants discuss the state of facilities in temporary accommodation buildings. Sixth-year students were interviewed at a number of schools. Given that a minority of Educate Together second-level schools have sixth-year students, owing to their recent establishment,[11] the school year of focus group participants is also not revealed unless this information is important to contextualise the student experience. Similarly, descriptive statistics that could be used to identify the school are not provided. In some instances, discussing variations across schools is necessary in order to provide a comprehensive picture of the results, however at times school level data will not be provided. The gender

[11] First ETSSs opened in 2014; multiple schools included in this research are only in their second year of operation.

neutral 'they' is used instead of 'she' or 'he' to profile the answer of a participant. Given the small number of Educate Together second-level schools, these additional precautions are necessary in order to preserve the anonymity of participants and their school. Focus group and interview schedules are included as appendices.

2.3 FOCUS GROUPS WITH STUDENTS

In all but one of the 11 schools, two focus groups were conducted per school. One focus group was conducted with first-year students and one focus group was conducted with either second- or, where available, sixth-year students. First- and second-year students were chosen for focus groups and the ETSS survey in order to allow comparisons with the *Growing Up in Ireland* data and to ensure comparability between quantitative and qualitative data. As an exception, the research team felt that, where available, the opinion of sixth-year students would be particularly valuable, and in these schools conducted focus groups with sixth-year rather than second-year students. Only three of the 13 ETSS opened prior to 2019 have students in their sixth year. At least one of these schools is included in this study. In one school, a joint focus group was conducted with first- and second-year students. In order to protect the anonymity of the schools, the year focus group participants are enrolled in will not be revealed in this report, unless this constitutes relevant information to understand the quote. Schools were instructed to select a diversity of students for focus groups, using the following criteria: (1) one student for whom English is not their native language, but whose English level is conversational; (2) one student with a special educational need (SEN); (3) one student involved in student council; (4) one girl; (5) one boy. Overall, schools followed our diversity criteria in identifying focus group participants. For example, all focus groups included girls and boys and almost all focus groups included students for whom English was not their first language.

Parental consent was obtained prior to the students' participation in the focus groups. Focus group participants were provided with an assent form at the beginning of the focus group and were informed they still may choose not to participate. At the end of the focus group, participants were provided with a debriefing sheet that included support resources available to them if they were experiencing difficulties, including abuse.

As part of focus groups, students were asked to talk about their understanding of Educate Together and how they came to attend the school, about their expectations from the school and their goals, the support structures available to them, how happy they are with the school and what they would change about it, whether they feel they belong at the school, and their views on Ethical Education as a subject.

2.4 INTERVIEWS WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Interviews with teachers

The research team interviewed 27 teachers at 11 schools, including ten Ethical Education teachers or coordinators, eight English teachers, and nine Science teachers. English and Science teachers were chosen to represent different subject areas. Interviews with Ethical Education teachers allowed for a better understanding of the status of the subject across schools and its relationship to the school ethos. Across schools we have asked principals to provide the research team with a list of initials for English and Science teachers. The research team used the list of initials, when provided, to randomly select teachers for interview. In some schools, random selection was not possible primarily due to the number of teachers for these subjects within the school.

Teachers were asked about their teaching history and hiring experience, their views on the school ethos, their teaching philosophy and how they incorporate Ethical Education in their teaching, their perception of student engagement, the support structures available at the school, and their satisfaction with the school. Most of the interviews were conducted in person during the school visit day. A number of interviews were conducted by phone.

Interviews with principals

Ten principals and one deputy principal were interviewed for the study, thus including one leader from each of the 11 schools. All but one school leader were interviewed in person. School leaders were asked about their professional experience and their hiring experience, the role of the principal and the challenges they face, how they perceive the school ethos, available school support structures, their views on student and parental engagement, their perception of how the public perceived their school and Educate Together, and school governance.

Interviews with parents

Overall, 36 parents were interviewed as part of the study. All interviews were conducted by phone. The recruitment of parents to participate in this study was conducted via the parental consent forms. All parents whose children were invited to either take part in the ETSS student survey and/or focus groups were also asked to indicate if they would be available for a brief phone interview with the research team. These interviews were typically more structured than other interviews, and were on average less than ten minutes long. Available parents were asked to provide a phone number where they can be reached and provide some information about their availability (e.g. time of the day and day of the week when they would prefer to receive a call). Interviewed parents had children enrolled in ten of the 11 ETSSs which were included in this study. Schools were asked if they prefer to use

paper or electronic parental consent forms. Schools opted to have the consent format that was commonly used for school purposes. Nine schools preferred to use paper consent forms and two schools chose an electronic consent form. The research team mailed printed consent forms to the nine schools. More parents indicated their availability for an interview at schools where a paper consent was used than in schools that used electronic consent forms. Parents were asked a number of background questions, their views of the school, the experience of their children in the school, the reasons they chose an ETSS, their views on the use of technology, their views on the strengths of the school and the challenges the school faces.

Interviews with chairs of Boards of Management

The research team interviewed six chairs or members of school Boards of Management. These interviews were conducted by phone. Interviewees were asked about their personal history and how they came to be involved with the school, the role and responsibility of Boards of Management, the main challenges they face, their perception of the school ethos, student and parental engagement, and their perception of school governance.

Interviews with representatives of management bodies

The 11 ETSSs fall within the remit of three different management bodies, namely the Joint Managerial Body for Voluntary Secondary Schools (JMB), Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS), and Education and Training Boards (ETB). The research examined these models of patronage and the relationships between the individual schools and their management body. Interviews were conducted with key representatives of each of the three management bodies. These interviews explored a number of areas, including the relationship between the management body/patron body and school leaders/Board of Management, guidance and supports offered by the management body, ethos and place of Ethical Education, and decision-making.

2.5 THE ETSS STUDENT SURVEY

The ETSS student survey was designed by the research team for the purpose of this research project. The student survey collected data from 877 first- and second-year students at the 11 Educate Together second-level schools. No survey data were collected from sixth-year students to ensure comparability between schools. Across all schools, we aimed to survey at least two first-year classes and two second-year classes. The survey was administered during in-person school visits. The researchers were present to guide students and answer questions.

None of the schools in the study employ academic streaming when allocating students in classes and each school aims to create classes that represent all

demographic groups. As such, the sample of students within each school is likely to be representative of the first- and second-year student population in the school, regardless of the proportion of students being surveyed. Parental and student consent was obtained prior to data collection. The researchers have relied on schools to distribute and collect consent forms and as such cannot detect if patterns in parental consent bias the sample frame of the survey. In nine of the 11 schools, an online version of the survey was administered. The online version of the survey was collected using SurveyMonkey. School-related circumstances that cannot be revealed in order to preserve anonymity led to a paper version of the survey being used in two schools. Across the schools, of all students whose parents consented for them to participate in the survey and were at school during the study, 19 students (2 per cent) did not agree to participate. No further data were collected about these students. These students are not included in the count of respondents. Between 27 per cent and 90 per cent of students were surveyed within each school. The variation in the proportion of students being surveyed is due to large variation in school size, which in return reflects school age.

Where available, data from *Growing Up in Ireland* (GUI), specifically the second wave of the child cohort ('98 Cohort), are used across this study to illustrate comparisons between ETSS student survey results and national trends. GUI is a longitudinal nationally representative study in Ireland. The students in the second wave of the child cohort of GUI were surveyed at age 13, so at a similar age to the students of the ETSS student survey. In order to facilitate this comparison, many of the questions included in the ETSS student survey were reproduced from the child questionnaire of this GUI wave.[12]

On both the GUI questionnaire and the ETSS student survey, respondents were asked about the number of friends, belonging and engagement, teaching practices and methodologies, how difficult and interesting they find selected subjects, receiving extra help in school, and bullying. There are two main areas of divergence between the GUI questions and the ETSS student survey questions. First, the GUI study collected data about students from different stakeholders, including primary caregivers. This allows GUI to gather sophisticated information about the children in the study. For example, as part of the GUI, demographic information was gathered from caregivers, not children. As the ETSS student survey only collects data from students, several key questions – particularly about demographics – needed to be simplified. For example, the survey pilot revealed that children were not able to answer questions about the citizenship of their parents; instead we asked respondents what language they most often speak at home. Second, ETSSs have several unique features that derive from their ethos. GUI does not capture aspects such as global citizenship, global awareness, and school participation. Questions about global citizenship and global awareness were appropriated from

12 More information about *Growing Up in Ireland* can be found here https://www.growingup.ie.

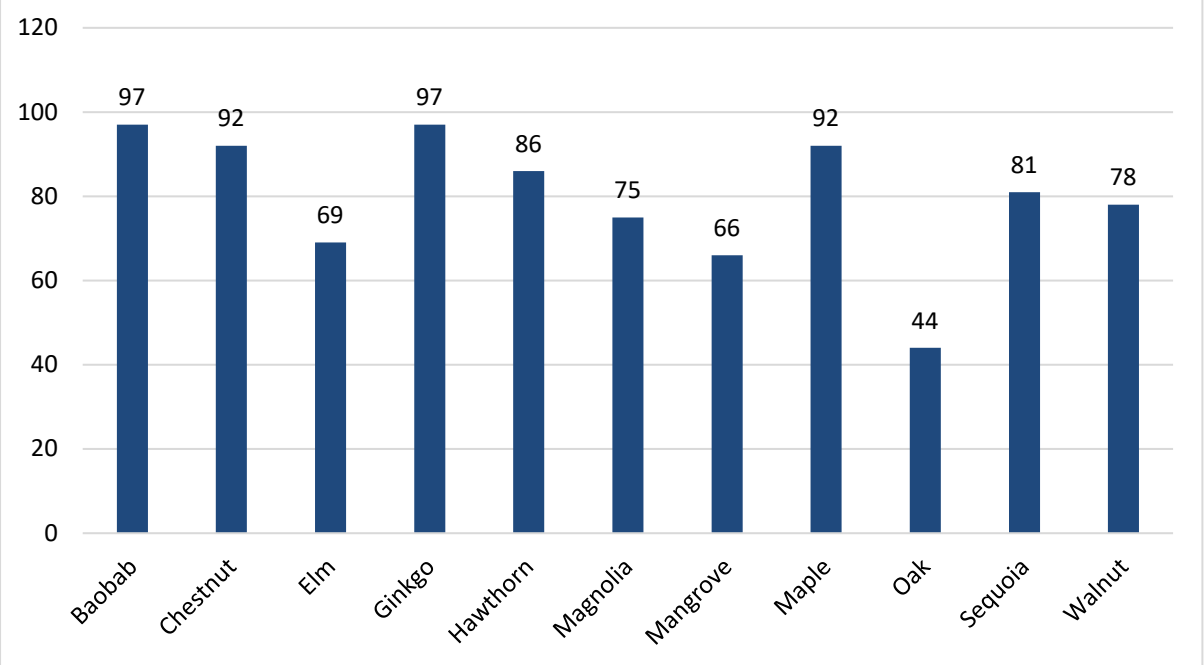
the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment global competency questionnaire (OECD, 2018). These additional items were added to the ETSS student survey to better capture relevant aspects of the Educate Together ethos.

The survey was piloted with five first- and second-year students. The pilot was used to refine question wording – particularly for newly developed scales and scales appropriated from the 2018 PISA global competency questionnaire – and to test the time required to complete the survey. Altogether, students were asked up to 43 questions. The number of questions viewed by respondents varied slightly due to skip-logic structures in the online survey. For example, if a respondent indicated they were not bullied, they were not prompted to answer additional questions about experience with bullying. The majority of these questions were multiple choice. A few open-ended questions were asked on the survey. The student survey is included as an appendix.

2.6 RESPONDENTS TO THE STUDENT SURVEY

The number of respondents to the student survey varied by school. The lowest number of responses was collected from School Oak, where 44 students completed the survey. However, at this school over 50 per cent of students completed the survey, and as such the low number of responses is a reflection of the small size of the school. Only limited data on response rates are provided in order to preserve school anonymity.

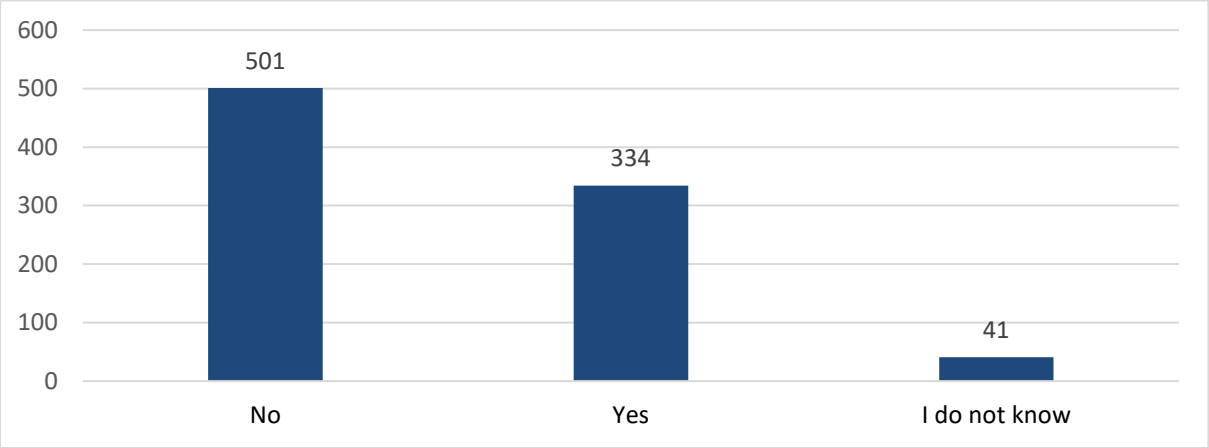
FIGURE 2.1 NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS BY SCHOOL



Source: Survey of first- and second-year students at ETSSs.

Fifty seven per cent (n = 501) of survey respondents did not attend an Educate Together primary school and 38 per cent (n = 334) of respondents attended an Educate Together primary school. Several students did not know whether they had attended an Educate Together primary school. As primary school names were not collected, the research team was unable to determine if the schools these several students attended were Educate Together schools or not. While many of the schools included in this study were oversubscribed, principals confirmed that none of them made attending an Educate Together primary school a prerequisite or gatekeeping criterion necessary in order to attend an ETSS.

FIGURE 2.2 NUMBER OF STUDENTS WHO ATTENDED AN EDUCATE TOGETHER PRIMARY SCHOOL



Source: Survey of first- and second-year students at ETSSs.

At the co-educational schools included in this study, 53 per cent of respondents identify as boys (n = 465) and 45 per cent identify as girls (n = 394), with less than 2 per cent identifying as 'Other' (n = 14). In order to preserve the anonymity of these respondents, the report will not identify them in any subsequent analyses. The higher number of boys reflects the fact that at some schools boys outnumber girls.

Across all schools, 54 per cent of respondents (n = 471) were in their first year and 46 per cent were in their second year (n = 403). The slight variation in response rate by school year can be explained by the fact that, in a few schools, the number of students enrolled in second year is lower than the number of students enrolled in first year, reflecting that these schools are growing.

Overall, 81.5 per cent of survey respondents indicate they speak English as their primary language at home. Eighteen per cent of respondents indicate they primarily speak a language other than English at home, with only 0.5 of respondents indicating their primary language at home is Irish. This question likely

underestimates the linguistic and ethnic diversity of respondents, as some students who speak two languages at home may not always choose the option 'Other'. There were strong variations across schools in the language spoken at home by students. In one school, almost 50 per cent of respondents indicated they speak a language other than English at home. There is no equivalent question in the child cohort of GUI. Instead, GUI asks parents if they were born in Ireland (15 per cent were not), if they are a citizen of Ireland (5 per cent were not), and what is their ethnic or cultural background (10 per cent did not identify as Irish). Similarly, the Department of Education and Skills estimated that in the 2015/2016 school year, 12 per cent of students in post-primary schools were born outside of Ireland (Department of Education and Skills, 2017). Principals also noted that many students (up to half in one school) come from families that have Medical Cards. These comparisons highlight the diversity of intake to ETSSs compared with the average for post-primary schools in Ireland. The degree of linguistic and ethnic diversity suggested by the ETSS survey is however consistent with 2018 PISA results for Ireland. These suggest that 82 per cent of PISA participants were born in Ireland, 10 per cent were first generation migrants, and an additional 8 per cent were second generation migrants. In 2003, 97 per cent of students who participated in the PISA study were Irish, 2 per cent first generation, and 1 per cent second generation (OECD, 2020).[13]

In part, the higher incidence of foreign language speakers at ETSSs may be explained by the welcoming attitude the schools display towards these students, as suggested by several focus group participants. Both undersubscribed and oversubscribed ETSSs have high levels of student diversity (as measured by language spoken at home).

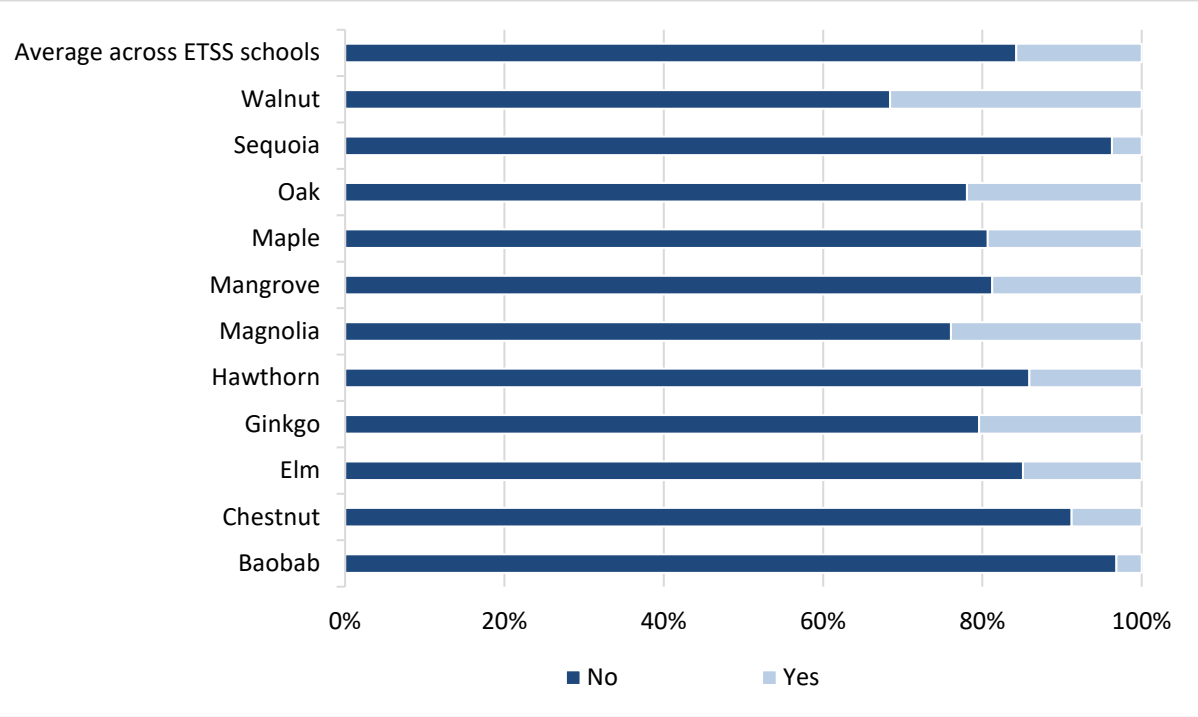
> *'I applied to (name of non-ETSS school) and they said -- so when I came in here in 2014 my English was not -- my English was like zero. So pretty much when they heard that I cannot speak English fluently they were like, no, we can't take this boy in because we don't have the time to teach him English. Which I found so stupid, and whatever, so then this school appeared, and I was like, okay, let me try this and they took me like that, no bother.'* (Focus group participant)

Across schools, 15.7 per cent of students indicated they have a special need or disability (Figure 2.3) and 22.2 per cent of students indicated they received extra help with school subjects in the last 12 months (Figure 2.4). It is likely that these numbers are an underestimation of the level of need at ETSSs, as some school leaders and teachers suggested the level of need at their school is higher than 30 per cent of the student body, as discussed in Chapter 7. By comparison, 13 per cent of 13-year-olds in the child cohort of the GUI indicated they received extra

[13] Data generated using https://pisadataexplorer.oecd.org/ide/idepisa/ on 17 August 2020.

help in some subjects in the last 12 months. Research using GUI data estimates that 21 per cent of students have a disability (McCoy *et al.*, 2012a; 2016). However, a direct comparison between the self-reported figure gathered through the ETSS student survey and GUI figures is not possible, due to variation in instrument design. In particular, estimates of SEN prevalence from the GUI study draw on information from multiple informants, including parents, thereby providing a more robust estimate of SEN prevalence than possible in this study (see McCoy et al., 2012). While some of the schools included in this study had small classes due to their starter status, none of the interviewed parents indicated that they chose an Educate Together second-level school due to a perceived small class size.

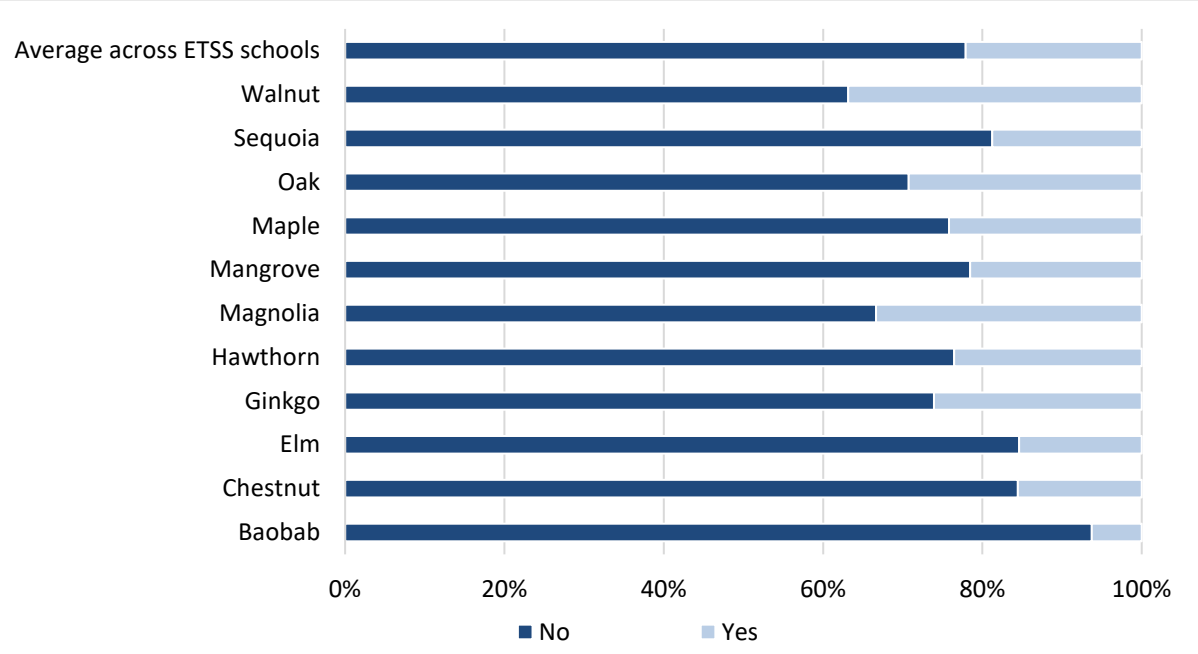
FIGURE 2.3 PREVALENCE OF SPECIAL NEED OR DISABILITY BY SCHOOL (%)



Source: Survey of first- and second-year students at ETSSs.

The self-reported rate of additional need with academic subjects varies considerably across the 11 schools. The rate among respondents is as high as 36.8 per cent in School Walnut and as low as 6.3 per cent in School Baobab.

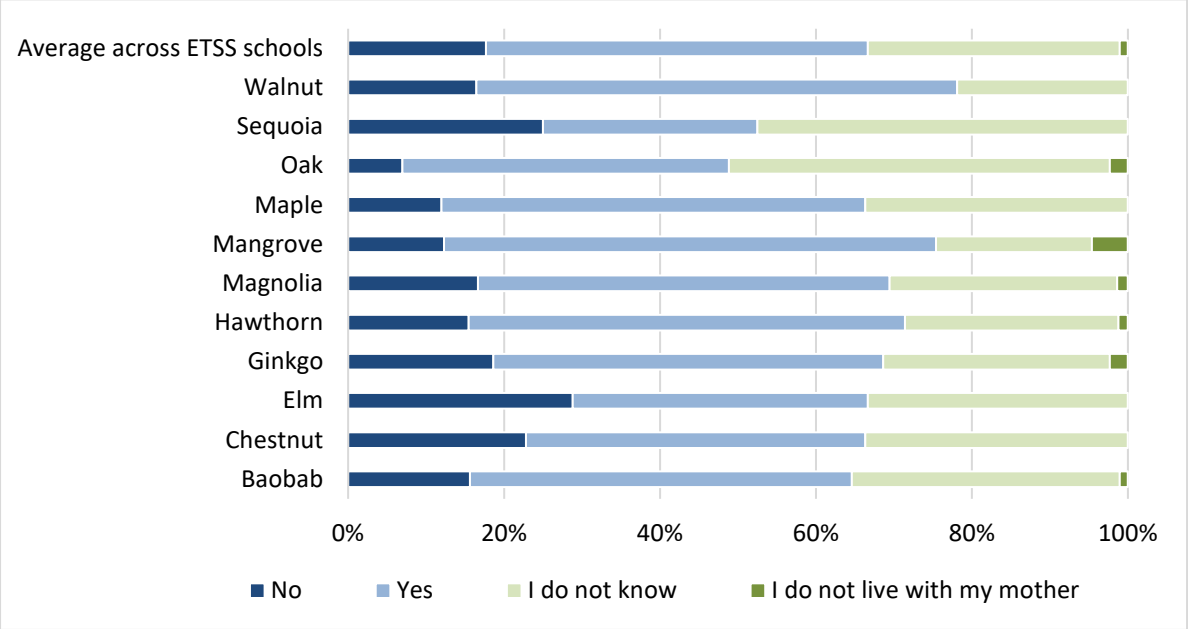
FIGURE 2.4 RECEIPT OF ADDITIONAL HELP IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS BY SCHOOL (%)



Source: Survey of first- and second-year students at ETSSs.

Overall, 47 per cent of students indicated that their mother attended a university or an institute of technology. However, a large proportion of students did not know if their mothers attended a higher education institution or not (31 per cent). The proportion of students whose mother attended third-level education varied by school, being as low as 27.5 per cent in School Sequoia and as high as 63 per cent in School Mangrove. Of the children included in the second wave of the child cohort of GUI, 45.2 per cent had a primary caregiver (most frequently the mother) that completed at least higher education (31.7 per cent completed higher education and 13.5 per cent completed postgraduate education). While the ETSS student survey poses limitations in gathering a full understanding of the education background of caregivers due to methodological differences between the two studies, the data collected do not seem to indicate a disproportionate representation of children with mothers who attended higher education at ETSSs.

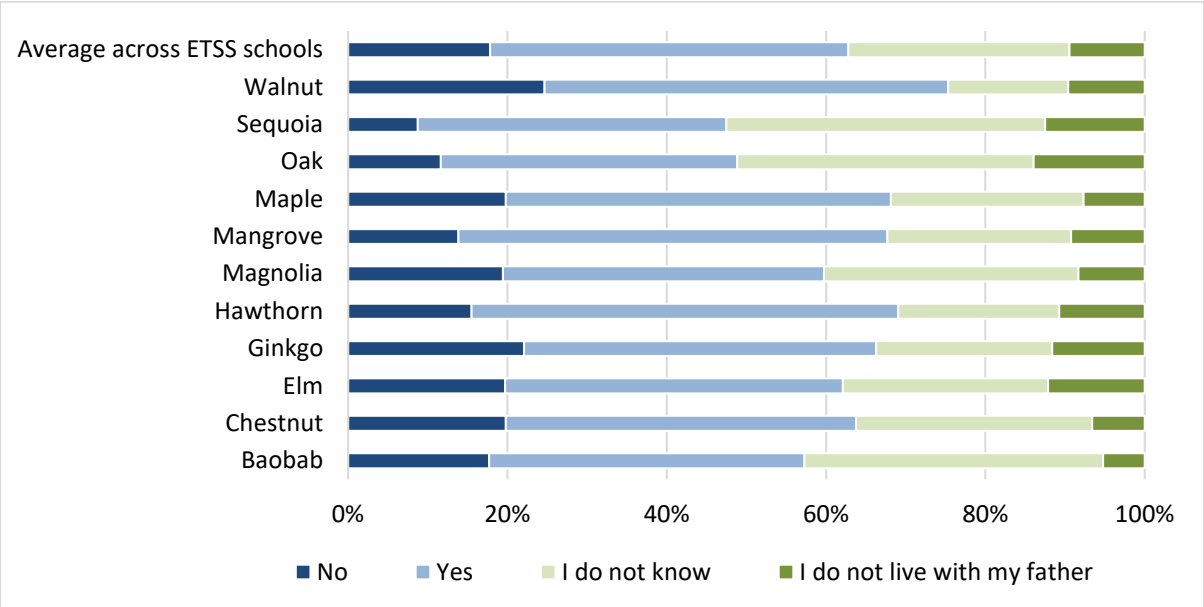
FIGURE 2.5 HIGHER EDUCATION PARTICIPATION AMONG RESPONDENTS' MOTHERS BY SCHOOL (%)



Source: Survey of first- and second-year students at ETSSs.

The proportion of students who indicated their father attended a university or an institute of technology was lower than for mothers (45 per cent). Notably, across all schools, a higher proportion of students indicated they do not live with their fathers (9.4 per cent). The proportion of students who indicate they do not live with their fathers ranged from 5 per cent to 14 per cent across schools.

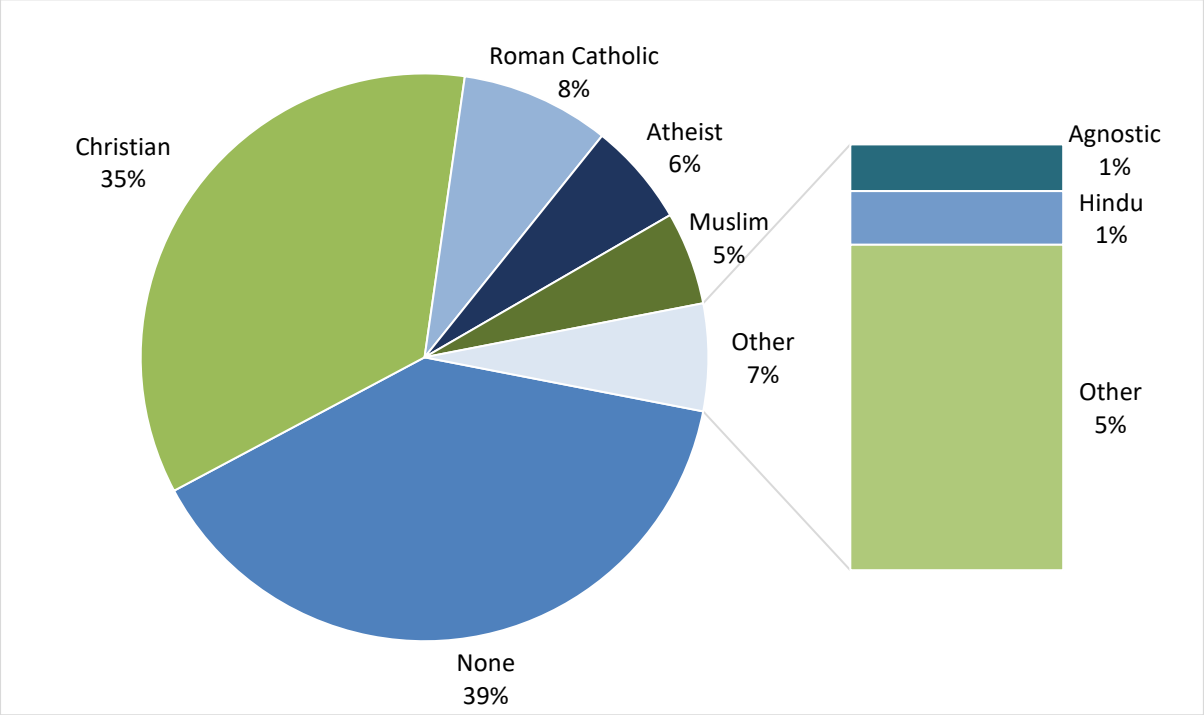
FIGURE 2.6 RESPONDENTS WHOSE FATHER ATTENDED HIGHER EDUCATION BY SCHOOL (%)



Source: Survey of first- and second-year students at ETSSs.

The schools in this study are truly diverse in the range of belief and worldview identities. When asked *'what is your religion or belief'*, 39 per cent of students across Educate Together second-level schools identify as not having one. An additional 35 per cent identify as Christian, 8 per cent as Roman Catholic, 6 per cent as Atheist, 5 per cent as Muslim, and an additional 4 per cent identify as 'Other' than the options provided to this question. The religious identity of students varied across schools. In School Maple, 60 per cent of students identify as having no religion, whereas in School Chestnut the equivalent figure is 18 per cent. Overall, these numbers are quite distinct from the population of Ireland. According to the 2016 Census, 73 per cent of the population identified as Roman Catholic and 9.8 per cent indicated they have 'no religion' (Central Statistics Office, 2016). A direct comparison to the ETSS population based on the student survey is not possible, due to differences in the way questions are asked on the student survey and the census.

FIGURE 2.7 RESPONDENTS BY RELIGIOUS BELIEF ACROSS SCHOOLS (%)



Source: Survey of first- and second-year students at ETSSs.

2.7 CONCLUSION

The mixed-methods multi-stakeholder design of this study allows for a detailed cross-sectional picture of the experience of students, teachers and leaders at ETSSs to emerge. By using select questions employed by GUI, this study is able to offer comparisons with nationally representative thresholds, but only on select items. This design allows the researchers to understand some of the complexities associated with ETSSs. Broader trends as well as variations across schools emerge

in this research. Some of variations in school policy are linked to the high level of autonomy of schools in Ireland (Kenny et al., 2020). At the same time, this study is not meant to be a definitive account of the experiences of ETSS stakeholders.

The demographic characteristics of the respondents to the student survey indicate that ETSSs are indeed very diverse, and on some aspects more diverse than the typical Irish school. At the same time, significant variations between schools are also revealed. Schools differ both in their size and cohort composition. Later in the report additional areas of variation between ETSSs are discussed, including variation due to their starter school status, patronage model, and select aspects of the student experience.

CHAPTER 3

The student experience and school ethos

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This research project focused on capturing a multifaceted understanding of the student experience at ETSSs. While the student voice is featured across all sections of the report, it is the primary focus of Chapter 3 and Chapter 4. This chapter discusses aspects of the student experience that are closely aligned with the school ethos at ETSSs. The chapter draws both on focus groups conducted with students at the 11 schools included in the study as well as key aspects of the student survey. At times, the perspectives of teachers, principals and parents pertinent to aspects of the student experience are also included in this chapter and across the report.

The chapter starts by discussing how students would describe their school to a friend. As an open question, the answers provided by focus group participants to this question offer key insights into themes that emerged across the study: the importance of a learner-centred approach and the diverse nature of the intake to these schools. Section 3.3 provides an overview of what students say they like and dislike about their schools. This section also includes an overview of what teachers say students like about their schools and illustrates strong alignment between the views of teachers and the views of students. Next, the chapter covers student belonging and engagement at ETSSs. The focus on belonging and engagement is meant to better capture whether the equality-based and co-educational core aims of Educate Together affect the student experience. Last, the chapter discusses the democratically-run nature of the schools, another core value of Educate Together.

3.2 HOW STUDENTS WOULD DESCRIBE THEIR SCHOOLS TO A FRIEND

One of the first questions focus group participants were asked is *'how would you describe your school to a friend who has not visited the school before?'*. This question did not prompt students to talk about specific aspects of their experience, but to use their own words and reference any aspect they find relevant. Across focus groups, students overwhelmingly described their school in positive terms. Three themes emerged across students' descriptions of their schools. These themes strongly align with the broader discussions that took place across focus groups. Students described their school as *learner-centred* and as *diverse.* Less strongly but consistently, students discussed commonly referenced differences between Educate Together schools and other schools, such as not having a uniform. These descriptions align with the Educate Together school ethos and will re-emerge in subsequent sections of the report. A small minority of students across focus groups discussed some negative aspects regarding their experience, primarily connected to the relationships between students and to school

infrastructure. These aspects are discussed in more detail in Section 3.3. The current section also includes an overview on how parents would describe the school to a friend who has never visited the school before.

Student centeredness

According to the Educate Together core values, a student-centred approach 'means that we put children at the heart of all policies and practices and involve them in decision-making where appropriate'.[14] Students did not use the words 'child centeredness' directly to describe their schools. However, they discussed multiple aspects that could be ascribed to the concept of child centeredness, including positive feelings they experience in the school environment, their experience being treated as a whole person, and the way they are taught. Many students described the school as *'great fun', 'happy', 'safe', 'welcoming'* and *'a free place like you can feel free and not like locked up'* with reference to both the school and the classroom environment. Also reflecting child centeredness, students felt that their teachers are aware and take account of their personal circumstances and experiences, thus students felt they are treated as whole persons. This is due, in part, to the way teacher-pupil relationships are fostered across schools and the equality philosophy that the ETSSs ascribe to. One focus group participant summarised this idea as follows.

> *'I would say it's like, one of the best schools in here, personally. Now, I say that because the teachers in here are so understanding of our home problems and problems in school in general… The name is Educate Together school, I would say the teachers, they also learn stuff from us as well. It's more like -- it's not like a teacher-student barrier, it's more like an older sister or an older brother or both.'* (Focus group participant, School Baobab)

Other participants discussed their classroom experience and how the relationships between teachers and students manifest in this setting. Participants emphasise both the differentiated learning support received in the classroom and the way they are engaged in learning by their teachers.

> *'They try to assist you. Like, they don't just talk at you, they talk to you and with you… They explain, like, as much as they can and then... they don't just talk at you from the top of the class.'* (Focus group participant, School Magnolia)

> *'Even though like you're learning stuff and everything, it doesn't feel like you have to go [to school], it's miserable to go, you kind of look forward to going because like the lessons are, they make them quite interactive… you learn a lot more than just reading from a book*

[14] Educate Together, https://www.educatetogether.ie/about/values/, [Accessed May 26, 2020].

> *because they do a lot more activities, teach you stuff, which I found really good.'* (Focus group participant, School Hawthorn)

Diverse schools

Students also brought up diversity, with reference to both the composition of the student body – including as co-educational schools – and to suggest how inclusive their school was. One student described the school as '*very unique, and it's very diverse. It's quite like mixed and there are quite a bit of ethnicities over here*.' (Focus group participant, School Chestnut). Many students used the words *'inclusive' 'accepting'* and *'friendly'* to describe their school.

> *'I'd describe it as an inclusive school. Like, you're not left out of anything. You're accepted for who you are.'* (Focus group participant, School Elm)

The demographic characteristics of respondents to the ETSS student survey, as discussed in Chapter 2, indeed suggest that Educate Together second-level schools are more diverse – on average – than the typical Irish second-level school.[15] The diversity of the student population at ETSSs was also visible in the parental interviews. Among the 36 parents, the research team has spoken with mothers, fathers, foster parents, single parents, married parents, same-sex parents, parents across the social ladder, including engineers, taxi drivers, and care workers. Several parents we spoke with wore born abroad and originated from Asia, Africa, Eastern-Europe and North America. The children of several interviewed parents enrolled at an ETSS had been identified as having a special educational need.

Dress code

Multiple focus group participants discussed the fact that students are not required to wear a school uniform. A policy motion passed at the 2016 Annual General Meeting of Educate Together states that no Educate Together school will impose a compulsory school uniform. Dress codes varied across schools, with some schools making use of optional hoodies. Few schools had uniforms that precede the 2016 policy motion. Typically, school dress-code policies were decided based on consultations with students and/or parents, as discussed in Section 3.5, but were not revised as new cohorts joined the school, indicating the greater involvement of first cohorts in decision-making at starter schools. At the schools where uniforms were not required, students either contrasted their current school experience with their previous schools or simply mentioned the lack of uniforms. References to uniforms were at times accompanied by references to other distinguishing school features, such as being able to call their teachers by their first names and the distinct approach to discipline taken by the school. The discipline practices across

[15] High levels of diversity have also been documented at other schools – particularly in urban environments – in Ireland (see Smyth et al., 2009).

the schools are discussed in further detail in Chapter 4. The views of students about the school dress code is discussed in Section 3.3. Below is an exchange between two students who participated in one focus group illustrating how students contrast their experience at an ETSS with their past experiences as well as the experiences of their peers not enrolled at an ETSS.

> Participant 1: *'There's nothing really bad to say about the learning experience, but it's just a lot different from my old school, like very different… We had a uniform and we couldn't call our teachers by their first name and it was all girls as well. So like it's -- yeah, it's a lot [different]...'*
>
> Participant 2: *'Yeah, it's different to like all my friends' secondary school as well. Like, they're like "Oh, I got detention" or whatever and I'm like "Oh, we don't have detention".'* (Focus group participants)

How parents would describe the school to a friend

In interviews, parents were also asked how they would describe the school to someone who has not visited the school before. In their answers, parents emphasised the 'friendly', 'warm', 'open' and 'positive' environment, in alignment with the views expressed by students. Parents suggested that their children receive a lot of attention, even at some of the larger ETSSs. Multiple parents mentioned the multi-denominational and co-educational status of the school. A majority of interviewed parents chose an ETSS primarily because of their multi-denominational and co-educational status. Several parents explicitly mentioned they would describe the school as a place where their children are 'happy', 'thriving', and 'getting an excellent education'.

> *'Relaxed atmosphere between the pupils and the teachers. I would say I have a very good experience in the short amount of time I have been there and my daughter absolutely loves it, she's thriving.'* (Parent)

Most interviewed parents also stated that they would 'definitely' recommend the school to other parents. When asked 'why', parents primarily referenced the positive experiences their children have had at the school.

> *'It's the best thing that could have happened to her. She was bullied in primary [school] and a lot of it came from being the only child in the class that was not Catholic… Being at the current school has been fabulous… It's been accepting and liberating'.* (Parent)

Parents also indicated they would recommend the Educate Together second-level model to others. Recurrently, parents mentioned that they believe Educate Together schools better match demographic shifts in Ireland and the world more

broadly and they hope this education model would better prepare their children for adult life.

> *'Because of demographic changes… it is good to mingle with children from other backgrounds and better understand the world they live in. I think at a mixed school and an Educate Together school they get to learn about different cultures. If they learn this from a young age, there will be no racism.'* (Parent)

3.3 WHAT STUDENTS LIKE AND DO NOT LIKE ABOUT THEIR SCHOOL

Students across focus groups were asked what they like about their school, what they dislike, and what would they change about their school if they were principal for a day. In their answers, students talked about school infrastructure and facilities, school rules and procedures, academic aspects, and the school ethos.

School infrastructure and facilities

Across select schools, students most commonly expressed concerns about the school infrastructure and school facilities. This was primarily the case at the few schools that had a precarious accommodation status, a subset of the schools that were in temporary accommodation. However, students at schools sharing a building with another school also expressed concerns. The quality of temporary accommodation varied across schools, with some schools being hosted in modern buildings on a temporary basis, other in prefabs of varying quality, re-appropriated old buildings, and a mix of different buildings. Both school leaders and teachers emphasised the multiple challenges associated with temporary accommodation. Their views are discussed in Chapter 7.

Securing a permanent building was a priority for students both when they discussed what they dislike about their school and also when they discussed what they would change about their school. The two quotes below are from focus group participants at different schools.

> *Participant 1: 'We need a new school building.'*
>
> *Participant 2: 'Yes.'*
>
> *Participant 3: 'A permanent one, and not the temporary, brick building, duct-tape over there.'* (Focus group participants)
>
> *'I'd definitely prioritise getting us into a new school. I feel like I know they are trying to get us in as fast as they can but I feel like they are putting other things on top of that and they really need to, like, stop organising events for the school and stuff when we just really need to get into our new school, because the [adjoining school] is growing and it's not fair on them either that, like, we're taking up their space. We're*

> *taking their classrooms just because we don't have a school, and we're not prioritising that.'* (Focus group participant)

The lack of permanent accommodation impacted multiple aspects of school life. The location of temporary accommodation resulted in long commuting times for students at one school.

> *'I think the only thing -- it's not even that I don't like it, it's just the location and the building, I guess. I mean, it's in a really nice area, but then it does take me 40 minutes to get to school. But it's fine.'* (Focus group participant)

At some schools, students mentioned the inappropriate heating system. Several students at two schools mentioned that their school is *'so cold'*.

> *'The radiators need -- like, they either need to be changed… They're warm themselves but the actual building is damp, so it's -- you can't do much.'* (Focus group participant)

In some instances, students talked about the impact the temporary accommodation had on their learning, most notably due to the poor conditions of specialised classrooms, labs and gym facilities. Participants at two schools mentioned that they would like to have a 'real' or 'proper' science lab. One participant mentioned that due to the lack of a gym, students need to commute a relatively long distance to use a nearby gym facility, thus cutting into their PE time. Students at schools in temporary accommodation were more likely to bring up aspects of the school infrastructure that bothered them. At one school, students said that lockers did not close properly and that bathrooms did not have working hand-driers. At a different school, students mentioned that they did not yet have tables in the cafeteria.

Some students located in permanent accommodation raised minor concerns about infrastructure-related aspects. At one school, students mentioned that toilets had graffiti and that there were not enough water coolers for the number of students in the school. At several schools, students – particularly in their first year – mentioned that crowded hallways impede their ability to navigate the school building. However, students also praised the quality and standard of the physical infrastructure. One student cited the school facilities as one of the key things they liked about their school. Sixth-year students who moved into a new building during their second-level studies praised the new building and indicated they felt connected to the building process. For these students, the building was a key aspect of their school memories and feeling of belonging.

School policies and procedures

Students across all schools expressed strong and at times contradictory opinions about school policies and procedures. Students expressed various degrees of disagreement with policies about toilet use during class time, not having a break between classes, how class disruptions are addressed, and house arrangements. These concerns tended to be school specific. As an exception, students across schools had strong, divergent opinions about the dress-code policy. At some schools with a no uniform policy, some students mentioned they would like to have some school-distinguishing piece of clothing. The exchange below summarises the feelings of students across one focus group, which typifies this sentiment.

> Participant 1: *'I suppose this is probably only a personal preference, and everybody is probably going to disagree with me, but I went to a school that didn't have a uniform, like a primary school, and so did a lot of people, and I think it might be nice, even not like a full uniform, maybe, just like a jumper or T-shirt, like [name of school], not a full uniform, but just something that makes you feel more like a school.'*
>
> Participant 2*: 'I agree with that, because even just getting dressed every morning, I think it would just be easier. Because I didn't have a uniform in my old school either, but it would probably just be easier, it would probably make you feel like more part of the school, I guess. It doesn't really make a difference.'*
>
> Participant 3: *'I'm really bad at getting dressed in general, and I had a uniform at my old school, and it was pretty handy. But I'm sure a lot of people like being able to dress how they want to.*' (Focus group participants)

When asked if they suggested a dress-code policy change, students in the same focus group mentioned this was not a 'big problem' for them. Across multiple focus groups, students linked their school's dress code to freedom of expression, even in schools that use jumpers carrying the school logo/crest.

> *'I think as well with the uniform, it just gives you a lot more -- it doesn't seem like much, just having jeans and shoes, the only restriction they have on it is you're not allowed ripped jeans… There's a lot more freedom.'* (Focus group participant; School with jumper uniform)
>
> *'I like it because I kind of -- I feel comfortable when I go into school, 'cause I know most of my friends end up with – their [uniform] jumpers are really itchy and they're so uncomfortable, but [with no uniform] you kind of -- and you can express yourself kind of, in a way.'* (Focus group participant, School with no uniform).

Across different focus groups, some participants mentioned that they chose an ETSS – at least in part – because their school did not have a uniform. The quotes below are from students at different schools.

> *'I came here because you don't have to wear uniforms. I heard good things about the school, like -- and I went to the open night and we liked it so I came here.'* (Focus group participant)

> *'So basically I just came here for so many reasons, one of them they had no religion subject and, yeah, they didn't have uniforms and they're more into technology and laptops.'* (Focus group participant).

Teaching and learning

While an in depth-discussion on teaching and learning at ETSS is included in Chapter 5, it is worth noting at this stage that students talked extensively about liking their teachers and their lessons. Students said they found the lessons at school to be 'engaging' and that they liked the teaching methods.

> '*The teaching methods and all, like the teacher is teaching, like, with you, not, like, at you.'* (Focus group participant, School Magnolia).

> *'I have chemistry on Tuesday, like doubles, and I'm always looking forward to that because I love the class. I love how (name of teacher) teaches.'* (Focus group participant).

Students praised their relationship with their teachers and other school staff members in response to multiple questions addressed during focus groups, as discussed in Section 4.3. Many students said they like their teachers.

> *'I just like the teachers. The respect you have.'* (Focus group participant, School Baobab)

> *'You can talk to all the teachers.'* (Focus group participant, School Ginkgo)

School ethos

In general, students did not highlight aspects related to the ethos of the school when asked what they dislike about the school. Instead, many of the examples they provided to illustrate what they do like about their school were connected to the school ethos. These often mirrored how students described their school, as introduced in Section 3.2. Students talked about belonging and learner-centeredness, diversity and inclusion, trust and freedom, and the ease with which they made friends. With reference to belonging and diversity, students at one school mentioned that they most like '*the welcoming feeling of it'*, while many students across schools said they liked '*everything*' about their school. Another participant tied the welcoming nature of the school with feeling happy.

> *'Everybody's just so nice. I mean, there's nothing; since the start of the year I've just felt happy. The school just -- it just really feels like [a] safe place to be and the teachers and the students just make it feel really welcome and it's really nice.'* (Focus group participant, School Elm)

Student diversity and inclusion was reflected both in who attended the school and the attention received by students once they are in school. A dialogue in one focus group captured both aspects.

> *Participant 1: 'I like that it's friendly because one of my friends, she went to -- I think it was (name of local school) or (name of local school) but she has dyslexia, so they wouldn't let her in because they're non-dyslexic-friendly but (name of ETSS) is like -- it's friendly with people who have autism, who have dyslexia and all like mental and physical diseases.'*
>
> *Participant 2: 'They're giving me loads of help, like way more than I got last year in my primary school. Like I did get help but not as much as I'm getting now and they're doing a really good job of like taking their time with like people whom -- even if they don't like have a disability or anything, even if they just can't understand something, they still take their time and everyone -- like everyone can -- is kept at the same level, which I think is good because no one's barking, "I'm like 50 like subjects ahead of you", rather than -- so you're all kind of relating to the same subject and I think that's really good how everyone is kind of kept equal.'* (Focus group participants, School Hawthorn)

How teachers think their students view school

Teachers were also asked what they think students like about their school. The responses of teachers strongly matched the areas highlighted by students. Teachers believed students appreciate the strength of the student voice within their school, the ability to express themselves, and the relationship between students and teachers, including the ability to call teachers by their first names. Teachers also believed that students like the school diversity, the fact that students do not need to wear a uniform, and the technology available to them.

> *'I think students like being able to be themselves. I think they feel very comfortable being themselves and they kind of celebrate their own uniqueness together, you know. From what I've observed, students they actually -- they compliment each other, they talk about each other's interests, like even if it's an interest that isn't common, and they support each other. They love wearing their own clothes. They love getting to express themselves… I think the novelty of using the iPad as well… It's hard sometimes to get them off the iPads…. They*

> *talk positively about their classes and their teachers and how they learn stuff, so hopefully that is one of the things that they like. And I think they like interacting with each other.'* (Teacher, School Ginkgo)

3.4 STUDENT BELONGING AND ENGAGEMENT

As part of focus groups, students were asked directly if they feel they belong at their school. In addition, the student survey included two distinct measures of student belonging and engagement, one typically used in GUI and a new scale developed by the authors. As such, this section introduces both quantitative and qualitative data that provide insights into student belonging at Educate Together second-level schools.

Why student belonging and engagement matter

There is now a large body of research demonstrating the importance of student engagement and belonging for a host of short- and long-term educational outcomes. Children and young people emphasise the affective or emotional as much as the learning aspects of school life (Alexander, 2008), and these play a key role in shaping how they feel about their school experience. Engagement and belonging are not conceptualised as attributes of the student, but rather a state of being, highly influenced by contextual factors, such as policies and practices of the school and family or peer relations (Sinclair et al., 2003). Moreover, since student engagement is considered to be 'malleable' (Fredricks et al., 2004) it is an area with significant potential for change and intervention (Frawley et al., 2014).

Drawing on data from the *Growing Up in Ireland* study, Frawley et al. (2014) examine self-concept among boys and girls in Irish primary schools. The findings show important differences in terms of the affective elements of school engagement, with boys more likely than girls to score significantly lower levels on measures of 'good' behaviour and intellectual school status, while girls score significantly lower on freedom from anxiety than boys. The findings also illustrate that predictors of disengagement are about more than student gender – in that working-class children and students with special educational needs are faring less well in terms of affective engagement in school. McCoy and Banks (2012) similarly find important variations in school engagement and belonging and find that both academic engagement and social engagement play a central role in understanding the broader school engagement of students with special educational needs.

What students say about belonging at their schools

In response to the question *'Do you feel you belong at this school?'*, across focus groups and across schools, students overwhelmingly said 'yes'. Broadly, students provided two justifications for their answers (1) feeling accepted by their school and (2) a strong sense of community, primarily in their relationships with teachers.

Across schools, students talked about feeling accepted for who they are. Their answers to questions about belonging matched their descriptions of their school, as diverse. Students provided examples that indicated strong acceptance of different genders, sexual identities, nationalities, but also personalities and hobbies among students.

> *'They're kind of like really accepting as well. Like gender as well. Like gender equality rights, and even like your sexuality and everything, like. Like people are just kind of really lenient of it. They just accept it.'* (Focus group participant, School Chestnut)

> *'I'm from like -- my parents are from a different country (name of country),… and some people in my primary just like slag other people, like Indians and (participant's nationality) and Russians and all that but like this school really accepts all type of people.'* (Focus group participant, School Hawthorn)

> *'You are accepted the way you are. There's no real pressure to change anything about yourself for the school. There's no real policies on like, you can have this piercing and that hair colour.'* (Focus group participant, School Baobab)

A feeling that generally preceded and emerged as a necessary condition for acceptance is *safety*. Students first needed to be safe in order to feel they belong.

> *'Because I think kind of "belong" is like a safe feeling, so I kind of associate belong with safe. So I feel like I do belong in the school.'* (Focus group participant, School Elm)

The presence of diversity facilitated a feeling of acceptance for diversity and it went as far as to encourage unique expression among students, as one participant summarised.

> *'I suppose if you're in a school where everybody was taught to be the same and then you felt that you were different, you wouldn't feel like you belong because everybody else is the same, but the fact that it's so diverse here and different, you feel like you belong even if you're not the same as everybody else. No-one's the same. And you're not taught to be the same.'* (Focus group participant, School Mangrove)

A second component of belonging was the relationships students have with each other, and more importantly with their teachers. Several students across focus groups mentioned, unprompted, that a strong relationship with their teachers underpinned their feeling of belonging at the school. This strong relationship was amplified by teachers taking an interest in the lives of students and feeling that teachers 'know them' and are aware of their presence.

> *'All the teachers would know us properly, they wouldn't just know us as students, like they'd ask you are you like -- say if you were out sick they'd say something like, "Oh, we missed you".'* (Focus group participant, School Ginkgo)

> *'I think it's also the teachers looking out for you. They go, "Oh, (name of focus group participant), how are you, how did you get on in that tournament on the weekend?", or whatever it is you're doing, they'll know. So you're constantly being talked about your own life, you're not just ignored. You're make to feel like, oh, yes, they know me.'* (Focus group participant, School Baobab)

A sense of community was also key to belonging for students. This was facilitated by having open interactions with peers and teachers and a feeling that students know the people at the school.

> *'It's a really open community. Because there isn't a lot of people in the school, you get to know everyone really well, and that gives you a better chance to, I guess, talk to them and stuff, so you never feel awkward talking to the teachers or talking to everyone because you know who everyone is.'* (Focus group participant, School Mangrove)

In many ways, the strong relationship with teachers – based on respect – and the sense of community among students are also the mechanisms through which a feeling of acceptance is established at the school and in which diversity is embraced and viewed in a positive, non-tokenistic way.

However, not all students across all focus groups felt they belonged at the school. A few students mentioned that they would prefer to be in a single-sex school or a more 'traditional' school. In these few instances, students primarily mentioned that they missed their primary school friends, who are currently attending a more 'traditional' school. Focus group conversations revealed that the quality of accommodation may have an effect on students' feeling of belonging at their schools. It was not necessarily the temporary status of accommodation that students particularly cared about, but the quality of the space and the integrity of the building (e.g. having proper heating, having a physical education space, or not feeling excluded when sharing a building with a different school). In response to the question *'do you feel you belong at this school?'* one participant said:

> *'I do, yes,… but like I did obviously consider other schools. Like when I came here I loved it and all but I was thinking like: "When are we getting proper facilities?" and all this stuff, and like I was thinking about that… but I -- honestly coming here now I don't regret my decision at all.'* (Focus group participant)

School leaders also believed that students at their school feel they belong. They indicated that student belonging is part of the school ethos and is fostered through active practices such as having themed weeks, creating traditions that students look forward to, and offering extracurricular activities students are interested in. At its core, school leaders suggested that student belonging is best fostered by listening to students and involving them through democratic practices.

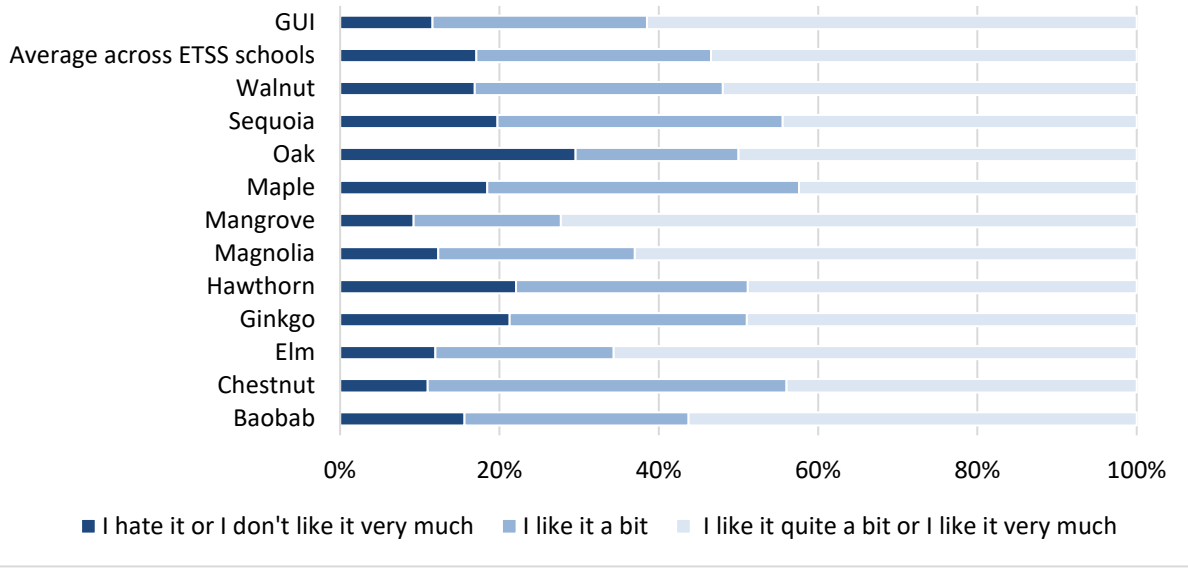
> *'We're working on [fostering student belonging] as part of the ethos piece… They're attending after school activities and lunch-time activities. The student council, there is great enthusiasm around it, so that will give them an opportunity to be part of the decision-making.'*
> (School leader)

In interviews, parents also overwhelmingly agreed that their children are getting on well in their schools both socially and academically. The vast majority of parents interviewed suggested that both they and their children are happy with the school.

How do students feel about school in general?

Student belonging and engagement has traditionally been measured as part of the GUI study by using the question '*How do you feel about school in general?*'. Overall, 53 per cent of ETSS student survey respondents indicated they like school either 'very much' or 'quite a bit'. On the other hand, 17 per cent of students indicated they either 'don't like their school very much' or they 'hate' it. By comparison, 61.5 per cent of GUI respondents either 'like school very much' or 'like it quite a bit' and 11.6 per cent of students either 'didn't like school very much' or 'hate it'. These numbers varied by school, with 72 per cent of students at School Mangrove indicating they like school either 'very much' or 'quite a bit'. It is important to note that some of these differences may reflect the profile of ETSSs, many of which have a more diverse intake than the nationally representative population of schools captured by GUI. Previous evidence has highlighted lower levels of engagement among students with SEN, for example (McCoy and Banks, 2012).

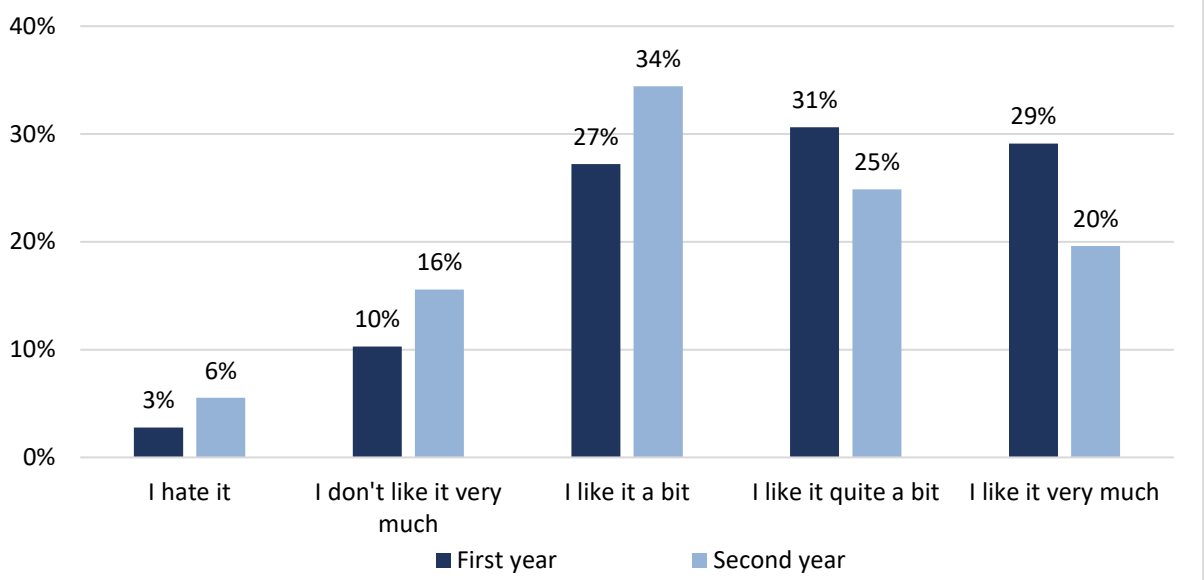
FIGURE 3.1 HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT SCHOOL IN GENERAL BY SCHOOL (%)



Source: Survey of first- and second-year students at ETSSs and *Growing Up in Ireland*, Child Cohort, Wave 2 (at 13 years).

Students in their second year were less likely to like school than students in their first year. Overall, 13 per cent of first-year students and 21 per cent of second-year students either said they 'hate' school or 'don't like it very much'. Conversely, 60 per cent of first-year students and 45 per cent of second-year students either 'liked school quite a bit' or 'very much'. The decreased engagement with school among second-year students is statistically significant and consistent with prior research (Smyth et al., 2006) and GUI-based research (McCoy et al., 2019a).

FIGURE 3.2 HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT SCHOOL IN GENERAL BY YEAR (%)



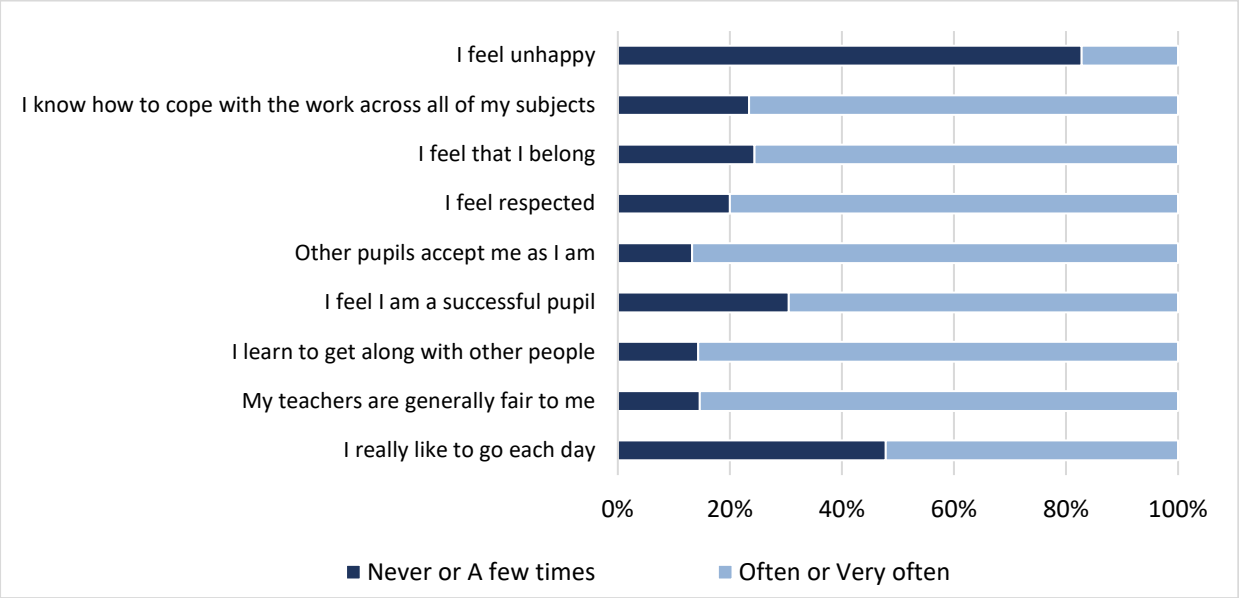
Source: Survey of first- and second-year students at ETSSs.

The student belonging scale

The use of the question *'how do you feel about school?'* as a measure of student belonging poses several limitations. Most significantly, the question does not necessarily measure belonging at a specific school, but how students may feel in any school environment. In order to better capture student belonging, the research team designed a new scale, not available in the GUI study. This scale was tested for reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.84).[16,17] The belonging scale asks students to indicate how often they think their school is a place that meets a series of statements. The following response options are provided 'very often', 'often', 'a few times', or 'never'. The statements included in the belonging scale are (1) I really like to go each day; (2) My teachers are generally fair to me; (3) I learn how to get along with other people; (4) I feel I am a successful student; (5) I feel unhappy; (6) Other pupils accept me as I am; (7) I feel respected; (8) I feel that I belong; (9) I know how to cope with the work across all of my subjects.

Across all schools, 75.6 per cent of students stated that their school is a place where 'they feel they belong', 80 per cent indicated their school is a place where 'they feel respected' either 'often' or 'very often'. A smaller proportion of students (52.2 per cent) felt that their school 'is a place where they like to go each day either 'often' or 'very often'. In contrast, 17 per cent of students indicated they feel unhappy either 'often' or 'very often'.

FIGURE 3.3 BELONGING SCALE, MY SCHOOL IS A PLACE WHERE… (% ACROSS SCHOOLS)



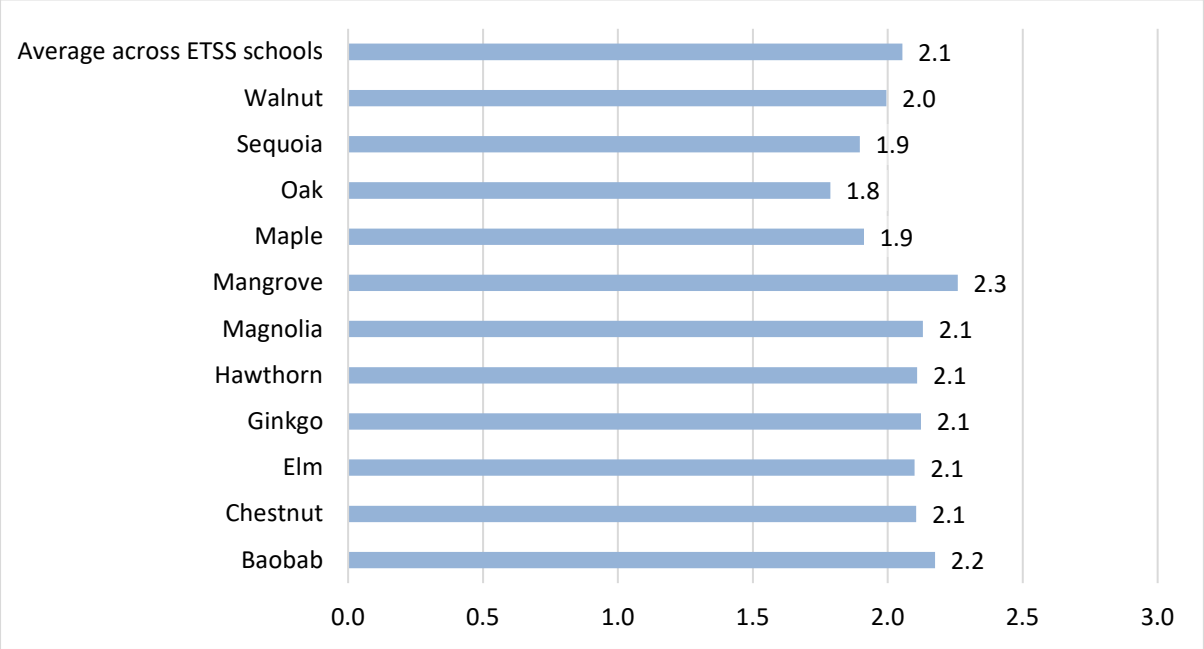
Source: Survey of first- and second-year students at ETSSs.

16 A score greater than 0.70 indicates a more reliable scale.

17 For the item 'I feel unhappy', the reversed values were included in the reliability test to ensure comparability between items.

The mean value on the belonging scale across schools was 2.1 out of 3. The same mean value was recorded across schools for the statement 'I feel that I belong'. This mean value is the equivalent of all students having chosen the option 'often' across all items. As illustrated in Figure 3.4, and consistent with the results to the question *'How do you feel about school in general?'*, some variation can be noted across schools. The extent of variation between schools in the overall belonging score is small, with five schools having a mean average of 2.1, equivalent to the average across schools.

FIGURE 3.4 BELONGING SCALE (MEAN SCORE BY SCHOOL)



Source: Survey of first- and second-year students at ETSSs.

Effect of key pupil and school characteristics on student belonging

We tested the significance of key demographic variables on the degree to which students liked school on one hand (GUI measure of engagement), and the self-developed belonging scale on the other hand, as outcome variables in two OLS models.[18]

Second-year students were statistically less likely to feel they belong and engaged with school compared with first-year students. Otherwise, there were no statistically significant differences in belonging and engagement on key demographic variables. Students whose mother attended a university or an institute of technology were as likely as students whose mother did not attend third-level education to feel they belong and engaged. Differences in engagement

[18] Variance inflation factor values were below 5.0 for all independent variables in the two models, indicating that the multi-collinearity assumption of OLS models was met.

and belonging between boys and girls were not statistically significant. Similarly, no statistically significant differences were noted between students who speak English compared to those who speak a language other than English at home. Students who reported a special educational need, a disability status or receiving additional support in school did not have statistically significant differences in belonging and engagement compared to other students. Self-described Christian students were as likely to report feeling they belong and engaged at their school. Students who attended an Educate Together primary school were as likely as students who did not attend an Educate Together primary school to feel they belong and engaged (see Table 3.1)

These results are promising, as they indicate that traditional areas of division in the student experience, along gender, social class, and special educational needs lines are not strongly reflected in the experiences of students at ETSSs. No statistically significant differences were found between the belonging and engagement of students at schools where JMB is the management body versus schools where ACCS or ETB are the management body.

TABLE 3.1 EFFECT OF PUPIL AND SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS ON SCHOOL BELONGING (OLS MODEL)

	Belonging scale	How do you feel about school in general[19]
Constant	2.287	3.522
JMB (reference ACCS and ETB)	-0.099	-0.024
Second year (reference first year)	-0.221***	-0.360***
Attended Educate Together primary school (reference did not attend)	-0.092	-0.006
Girl (reference boy)	-0.009	0.174
Mother attended a university or an institute of technology (reference did not attend)	0.091	0.173
Other language than English spoken primarily at home (reference English)	-0.008	0.212
Has a special educational need or disability (reference does not have a special need or disability)	0.080	0.220
Received extra help in school in the last 12 months (reference did not receive help)	-0.114	-0.019
Other than Christian religion (reference Christian religion)	-0.054	-0.071
N	521	522

Source: Survey of first- and second-year students at ETSSs.
Note: ***p<.001; **p<.01; *p<.05.

[19] A logistic regression analysis was conducted to test what characteristics have a statistically significant effect on students 'hating school' or 'not liking it at all' (reference 'liking school a bit', 'quite a bit', or 'very much'). Students who speak a language other than English primarily at home were found to be statistically significantly less likely to 'hate or to not like school' (p = .005). Another logistic regression was conducted to test what characteristics have a statistically significant effect on students 'liking school quite a bit' or 'very much' (reference 'hating school', 'not liking school', or 'liking it a bit'). Students whose mothers attended a university or institute of technology were statistically significantly more likely to 'like school quite a bit or very much' (p = .03).

3.5 DEMOCRATIC SCHOOLS AND STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION-MAKING

Both during focus groups and as part of the student survey, students provided strong evidence to support the claim that Educate Together schools have a relatively strong democratic culture. This is in alignment with the Educate Together ethos, where students are actively involved in school and classroom decisions. As outside observers, representatives of management bodies have noted the democratic ethos of ETSSs.

> *'Around student voice…[ETSSs have been] early adopters of a level of student democracy not seen in other schools. …They have broken ground in areas and learned lessons that can be shared'* (Management body representative)

Teacher interviews also provided rich evidence that the student voice is important in the classroom and that it guides instruction and evaluation. The evidence from teachers is discussed in further detail in Chapter 5.

Why democracy in schools matters

In a meta-analysis of theoretical perspectives on democratic education, Sant (2019) highlights how 'multiculturalist' educators pay particular attention to democratic curricula and pedagogies in school, a key tenet of the Blueprint for Educate Together Schools. Multiculturalists advocate for students to have opportunities to better understand their own culture (Alexander, 2007). Within this approach, students can be given opportunities to reflect and better understand themselves and to comprehend the nature of the stereotypes they hold (Alexander, 2007; Camicia, 2009). This process of inquiry can also allow students opportunities to engage with multiple identities (Kumi-Yeboah and Smith, 2016), as they learn of other traditions and experiences (Alexander, 2007; De Lissovoy, 2018).

Participatory democratic educators, including Brough (2012), Kahne et al. (2016), and Zyngier et al. (2015), present a model of holistic education built on student involvement with decision-making and on action-centred pedagogies. Generally, students are expected to be able to openly participate in educational activities, raising their voices and having their views taken into account (Brough, 2012). In the literature, this is often defined as open class, climate, and ethos pedagogies (Bacon and Sloam, 2010; Zyngier et al., 2015). Participation in class, school, and youth councils is often emphasised as a priority (Engel, 2008; McCowan, 2010). There is some evidence to suggest that students attending 'democratic schools' may fare better on domains like student motivation and learning. Comparing student motivation in Israeli traditional and democratic schools, Vedder-Weiss and Fortus (2011) show that a decline in adolescent motivation for science learning is

not an inevitable developmental trend, since it is apparent only in traditional schools, not in democratic ones.

Student councils and informal decision-making channels

Across focus groups, students gave many examples to illustrate how they contribute to the decision-making process within their school. This student involvement happened through formal structures as well as informal processes. At most schools, students were actively involved in a student council, the leading formal structure for student involvement. The student council, as 'a representative structure for students',[20] was often, but not always, established through a popular vote and it most often included students from all years.

> *'We have a student council for which we had a democratic vote to see who would get on. And we have people at the class level, and then someone at year. So there's a year rep, a class rep, and a class-rep deputy. So everyone in the class can give their ideas to them.'* (Focus group participant)

Students provided multiple examples showing that student councils were not a mere formality and that these councils provide a valuable mechanism for active involvement in decisions made by the schools. Among others, students were involved in decisions about extracurricular offers, dress-code policies, and sustainability school policies. In some instances, representatives from the student council were invited to attend Board of Management meetings.

> *'Every time there's a Board of Management meeting, one person from the student council gets to go and then that helps… to make the decisions through the school.'* (Focus group participant)

Students talked about their involvement in the school and classroom decisions both prompted – as a response to questions about the student voice – and unprompted. When asked if the school was what they expected, one participant at school Magnolia said, without being prompted *'I thought we wouldn't have as much choice in it but then we actually have a lot more than what I thought*'. As a response to a question on student belonging, a student at School Mangrove mentioned '*I think the school actually does value the students' opinions. They do really listen to us*.' One student also emphasised that involvement in school decisions was not reserved for older students. Instead, having students provide input was one of the values of the school.

> *'Compared to I'd say most secondary schools where it's just the sixth years that get a small input, we have, like, a lot of input in our school and I think that's really like one of the values [of this school,] is*

[20] Educate Together, https://www.educatetogether.ie/students/councils/, [Accessed May 30, 2020].

community. If you look, it builds the community a lot more.' (Focus group participant)

Students at several schools mentioned various committees and structures beyond student councils that facilitated school involvement. These committees allowed students to get involved in activities of interest to them without the need to be members of the student council. Examples provided by students were green/climate action and LGBTQ-related initiatives.

'We also have a green school, so people who are specifically for the environment or I don't know, would like to make the school greener, they can sign up for that. And you don't have to get voted in for that. So if you don't like saying speeches or stuff like that, then maybe you can do that.' (Focus group participant)

Several students across different schools reflected that communicating through a student council is not necessary to get their voices heard. Students talked about strong relationships with teachers and the leadership structure and their ability to reach out directly to school personnel about ideas, suggestions, and challenges they face.

'The good thing about this school [is] you just don't need a school council to, like, reach or report to the Board of Management. You just, like, easily can talk to the teachers and they will get you.' (Focus group participant, School Elm)

Students have mentioned that consultations with students and parents have also happened though online surveys. One such survey with students was conducted at a school serendipitously during the authors' research visit. Students in one focus group also mentioned that parents were asked for input on the uniform code at the school through an online survey. Focus group participants at two schools mentioned that school assemblies were also used sometimes to consult students.

'Even in assembly they might bring up something they might want to do'. (Focus group participant, School Mangrove)

'We'll all go into the hall and like sometimes we'll have a vote concerning -- they'll tell us what they think they ought to do and then like ask, "Do you agree with this?"' (Focus group participant, School Ginkgo)

A few focus group participants believed that the high level of student participation may be linked to the new school status of their school, as new schools have to make many decisions.

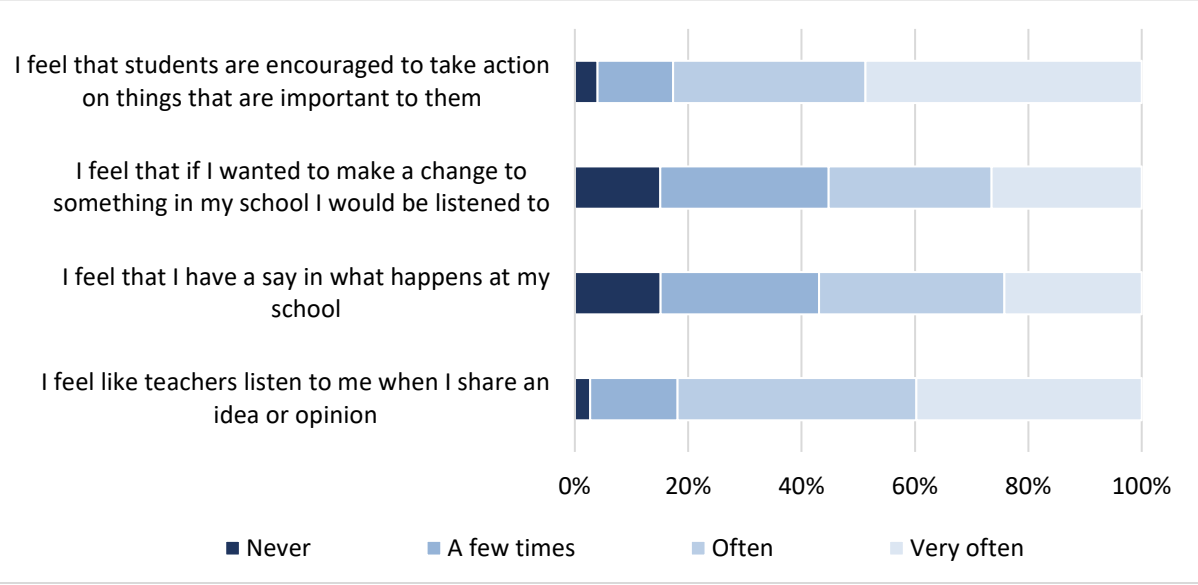
> *'I think because it's quite early days, we are quite involved, because there's still a lot of decisions to be made. It's not like, maybe if a school's been going for a very long time, you wouldn't be as involved'* (Focus group participant, School Mangrove)

Not all focus group participants felt that their voice was heard or reflected in school decisions. Across several focus groups, students were relatively unhappy with various school-level policies – most notably mobile phone policies or uniform policies – and the extent to which they were consulted in those decisions. In some of these instances, students in past cohorts at the school were consulted and policies did not change as new students joined the school. Interviews with teachers and principals have clarified that the involvement of students in decision-making processes still needs to be age-appropriate and that listening to the student voice does not mean that schools should or can always implement student suggestions. This view does not suggest that the student voice is not important, but that teachers, principals and parents all have a strong voice in the school. A more detailed discussion on student autonomy is included in Section 5.4.

The student voice across schools

The ETSS student survey asked several questions with relevance to democracy, school level participation, and the student voice. Across all schools, over 80 per cent of students feel that they are 'encouraged to take action on things that are important to them' and 'feel like teachers listen to them when they share an idea or opinion' either 'often' or 'very often'. Fewer students feel that their school is a place where 'if they wanted to make a change to something in their school, they would be listened' either 'often' or 'very often' (55 per cent) and feel that they 'have a say in what happens at the school'. Fifty-seven per cent of students selected either 'often' or 'very often' in response to this statement. These responses indicate an overall high level of student participation in decision-making at the school level across the 11 schools. The scale used to measure student perceptions on student voice was developed by the authors and has been tested for reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.824). This scale is not available in the GUI, and hence no comparative national figures can be provided.

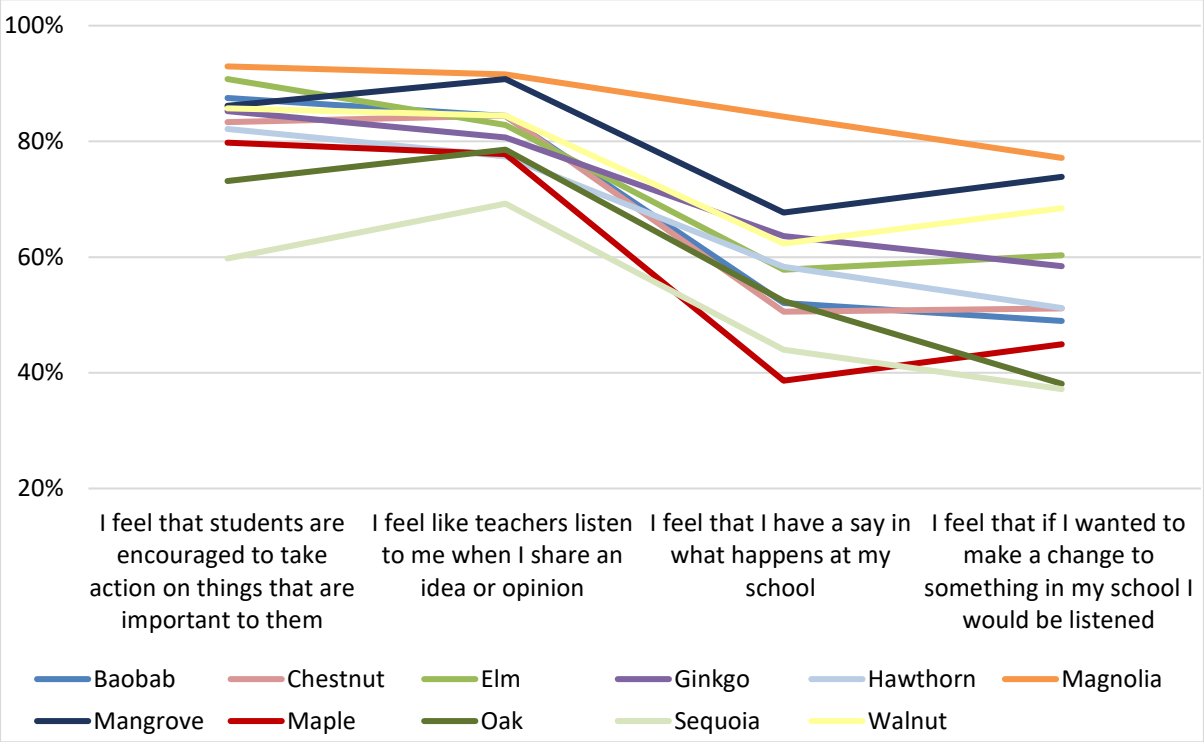
FIGURE 3.5 STUDENT VOICE INDICATORS ACROSS ALL SCHOOLS (%)



Source: Survey of first- and second-year students at ETSSs.

Self-reported rates on the indicators of the student voice scale vary across the 11 schools included in this study. Figure 3.6 includes an overview of the proportion of students that selected either the option 'often' or 'very often' in response to the indicators included in the student voice scale. For each item, there is at least a 20 percentage point difference between the highest school score and the lowest school score. The widest variation across schools was on the indicator 'I feel that I have a say in what happens at my school'. On this indicator, at school Magnolia, 84 per cent of students selected either 'often' or 'very often'. On the other hand, at School Maple only 39 per cent of student gave the same response. However, at School Maple 80 per cent of students indicated that students feel encouraged to take action on things that are important to them. The results suggest that school specific characteristics have a strong effect on students' perception that their student voice matters. However, due to the small sample of schools, further analysis on what characteristics matter cannot be conducted.

FIGURE 3.6 STUDENT VOICE BY SCHOOL (% STUDENTS THAT SELECTED 'OFTEN' OR 'VERY OFTEN')

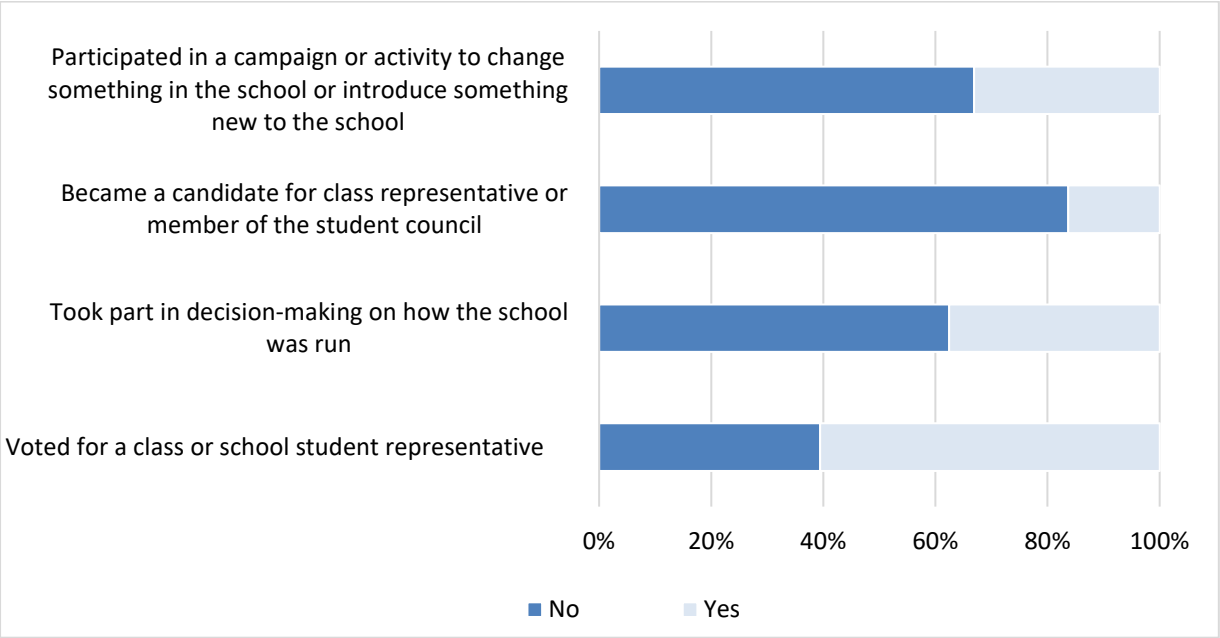


Source: Survey of first- and second-year students at ETSSs.

Level of participation in decision-making

On the student survey, students were also asked about their level of participation in school decision-making. The level of involvement in school decision-making processes was overall lower than students' view on how strong the student voice is within schools. However, they indicate a relatively strong level of involvement (Figure 3.7). Across all schools, 16 per cent of first- and second-year students surveyed said they became a candidate for class representative or a member of the student council. Sixty-one per cent of respondents indicated they voted for a class or school representative. Overall, 33 per cent of students indicated they participated in a campaign or activity to change something in the school or to introduce something new to the school and 38 per cent stated they took part in decision-making on how the school was run. These questions are not asked as part of GUI and no comparative figures can be provided.

FIGURE 3.7 PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING ACROSS ALL SCHOOLS (%)



Source: Survey of first- and second-year students at ETSSs.

Similar to the variation across schools on the student voice scale, there is some variation across schools in relation to student participation in decision-making. Most notably, at four schools the share of students that indicated they have voted for a class or school student representative is relatively low – between 13 and 43 per cent. At the majority of schools, between 66 and 90 per cent of students indicated they voted for a class or school representative. At three of the four schools with a lower voting rate, student participation is relatively low across all indicators. However, lack of student voting for a class or school representative was not always a proxy for weaker participation in decision-making. For example, the school where only 13 per cent of survey respondents indicated they have voted for a peer also registered the highest share of students who stated they 'took part in decision-making on how the school was run' (69 per cent). This evidence is corroborated with data collected through focus groups, which points towards a variety of tools different ETSSs use to involve students, with no one model applied across all schools. One of these schools with a low score used an assembly model instead of a student council. This model makes use of direct democracy, where everyone participates, without the need to vote for a peer representative.

The parents interviewed for this research were not particularly involved with formal school affairs. However, most interviewed parents believed that their voice would be heard within the school if they wanted to be involved. Parents appreciated being informed about the events and affairs of the schools, confirmed they completed school surveys, and indicated having 'excellent' relationships with the school principal. In a few instances parents indicated they were not fully happy

with the communication level from their child's school. This was particularly the case at new schools with a lack of administrative staff. It is important to note, the sample of parents interviewed was not intended to be representative of all parents.

3.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided an overview on how students perceived their experience at Educate Together second-level schools across a number of dimensions: how students would describe their school to a friend and what students like and do not like about their school. The chapter also discussed how key components of the Educate Together school ethos: engagement and belonging and democratic involvement are perceived by students. On key sections, the views of students are placed in the broader context of school policies and the views of other school stakeholders. This juxtaposition adds a layer of nuance to the emerging debates and experiences of students. Two key aspects of the student experience at ETSS – relationships and teaching and learning – are discussed in subsequent chapters. The relationship between students and the relationship between students and teachers are discussed in Chapter 4. The academic experiences of students are further discussed in the Chapter 5.

Overall, the experiences of students at Educate Together schools is positive. Students like their schools and feel they belong. The aspects of the school that students most like are aligned with key elements of the school ethos: belonging and positive, open relationships with their teachers. At the same time, the results from the student survey illustrate that there is a diversity of views among students within and across schools regarding their experiences. Some of these differences can be traced back to the accommodation status of their school, while others are connected more directly to school policies. At the same time, Educate Together second-level schools as starter schools are still working to create policies and practices that meet the needs of their students. This ongoing development is done by seeking and listening to the student voice within the boundaries of age-appropriate considerations and school norms.

CHAPTER 4

Student relationships at Educate Together second-level schools

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on relationships at ETSSs. First, the chapter discusses the relationship between students at ETSSs, including an overview of relationships between peers more broadly, and friendship and bullying specifically. An overview of the relationship between students and teachers follows. This section centres on the importance of respect in teacher-pupil relationships – a key theme that emerged across the multiple data sources collected as part of this research. The chapter concludes with an overview of school behavioural policies. As shared by both teachers and school leaders, it is a common misconception that 'everything goes' at ETSSs. This was not the case, as schools had clear guidelines in place to address potential problematic behaviours and support students. These school guidelines and practices strongly embraced a restorative practice approach.

4.2 HOW STUDENTS GET ALONG WITH THEIR PEERS

Students were asked about their relationships with their peers both as part of focus groups and the student survey. Focus group participants described their relationship with peers in a nuanced way, illustrating that tensions sometimes exist, but that students would have some friends they get along with in the school. The student survey also reveals a complex picture about the relationships between students at ETSSs.

Relationship with peers

Students showed a mixed view of their relationships with their peers. Overall, students agree they get along with their peers and they have good friends at their school, even if they may not get along with everyone. In general, participants had a mature understanding of the fact that not all students will get along with everyone.

> *'I feel like I've gotten along quite well with a lot of students. While others are hanging out and going out with each other, I would stay at home, but I believe in school that it's a good way for the students to meet, and especially the tutor groups. But about the students and the conflict, and sometimes other students won't get along with each other, while others can get on quite well. So, what I'm meaning by that is I could be the greatest, I could be the nicest person around this entire school, be nice to everyone, but I could have conflict with one student, and it could be the same for any other person.*' (Focus group participant, School Hawthorn)

Some participants mentioned they interact with students across school year groups. School size was discussed by students as having a mediating effect on their relationship with peers. One student mentioned '*It sounds bad, but you kind of have to get along with everybody since we're all so close*.' While a participant in a different school mentioned '*you know everyone, because it's a smaller community*'. In one school with a stronger gender imbalance, one student discussed the impact of the underrepresentation of girls on her social life at school.

> *'See, they're so different that it's kind of hard in a way but it's like all different kids from all different schools. I came with a lot of my friends so I get along okay but because there's so little girls it's hard again. Even though I do mix with some of the boys but they're -- they hang out kind of -- they're boys. They mess a lot whereas I'd rather just hang out.'* (Focus group participant)

Both students and parents discussed strategies that the schools undertook to facilitate relationship building and integration among students. Parents discussed the importance of orientation and school visit nights to foster belonging and relationship building. Several parents of students with autism mentioned that their children were invited to explore the school and meet the teachers prior to the start of the academic year in order to facilitate integration. This practice was seen by these parents as particularly useful at easing the transition of their children into second-level education. Students seem to agree that orientations were useful, that teachers were present during breaks and could intervene in the event that problematic behaviours occurred, and that a culture of respect dominated the relationships between peers and between students and teachers, an aspect further discussed in Section 4.4. The following exchange between students in one focus group illustrates the active policies schools took to facilitate positive interactions between peers.

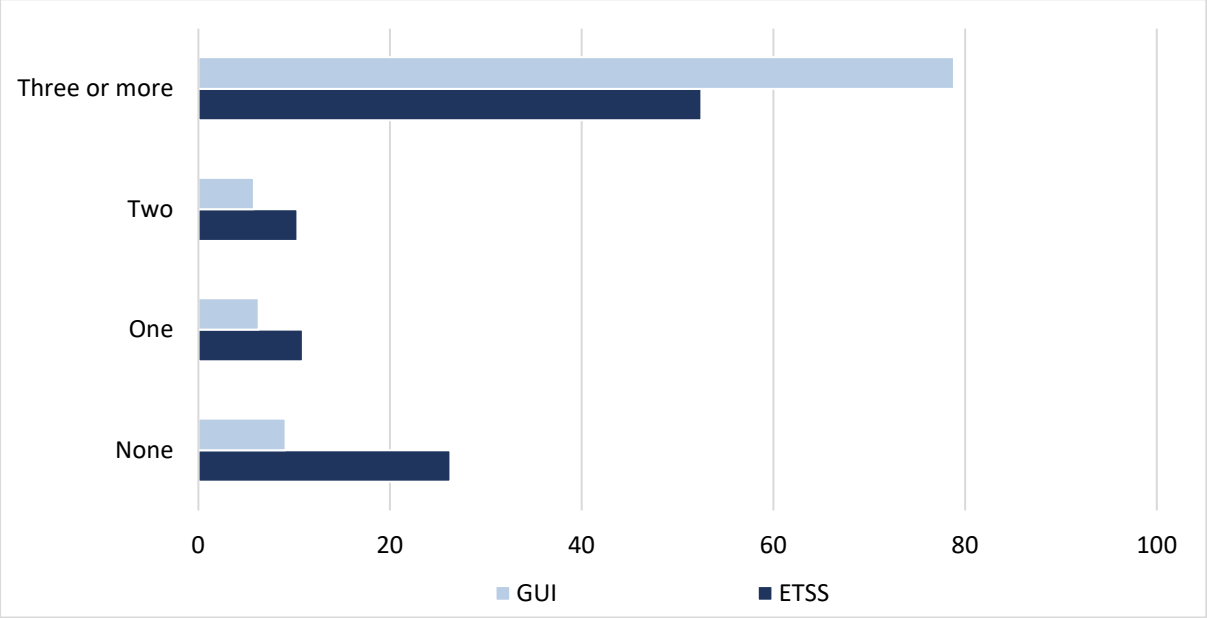
> *Participant 1: 'I think the teachers are really good at making the children be friendly with each other. For example, last week, I don't remember what day it was, but we did this thing called the Social 60, where we got to chat to, I think about half the people in the school for 60 seconds, so you just move and you get to know a person and then you go down, and it was really nice because I now know a lot more about the other people in this school.'*
>
> *Participant 2: 'Yes, I think the first two days that we came here were literally just icebreakers and getting used to where the classes are, so that probably helped a lot.'* (Focus group participants)

Friendship at ETSSs

In the ETSS student survey, participants were asked multiple questions about their friends. Both GUI and the ETSS student survey ask respondents '*How many of your*

friends from primary school are in your secondary school?' and '*How many of your friends from primary school are in your class?*'. Overall, GUI respondents have more of their friends join the same second-level school than students in the ETSS student survey. For 26 per cent of ETSS student survey respondents, none of their primary school friends joined the same second-level school. The equivalent figure for GUI respondents was 9 per cent. Instead, 79 per cent of GUI respondents and 53 per cent of ETSS student survey respondents have three or more friends from primary school with them in their second-level school.

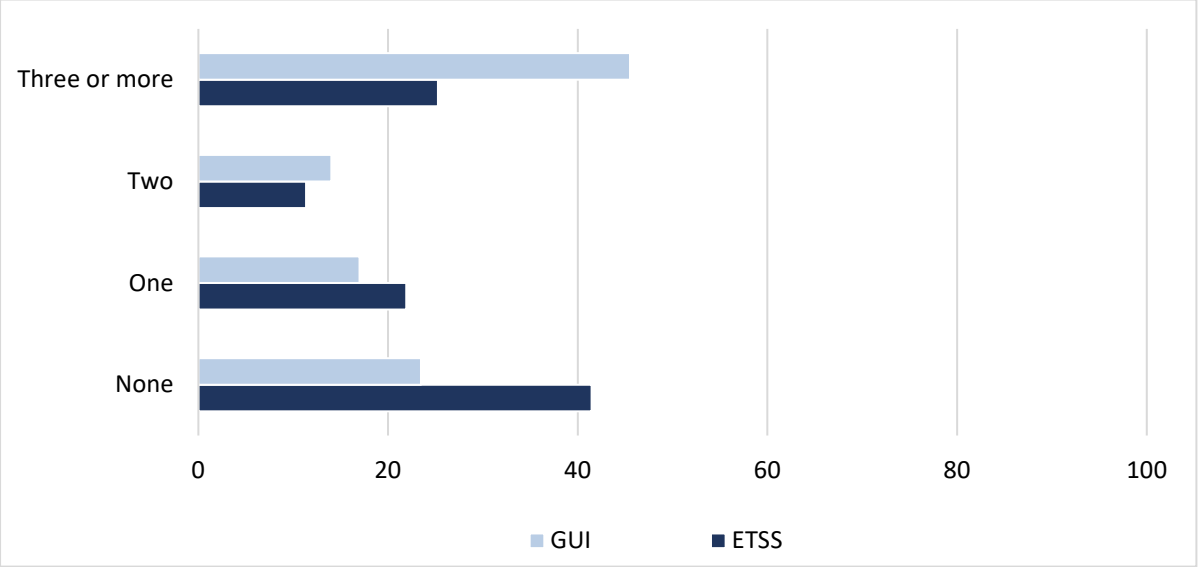
FIGURE 4.1 NUMBER OF FRIENDS FROM PRIMARY SCHOOL THAT JOINED SAME SECOND-LEVEL SCHOOL



Source: Survey of first- and second-year students at ETSSs and *Growing Up in Ireland*, Child Cohort, Wave 2 (at 13 years).

Similarly, the percentage of ETSS student survey respondents that have no friends from primary school in their class (41 per cent) corresponds with the incidence found among GUI respondents (24 per cent). Conversely, GUI respondents are almost twice as likely to have three or more friends from their primary school in their class than ETSS respondents. These differences most likely reflect the typical small size of ETSSs, as many have been established in recent years.

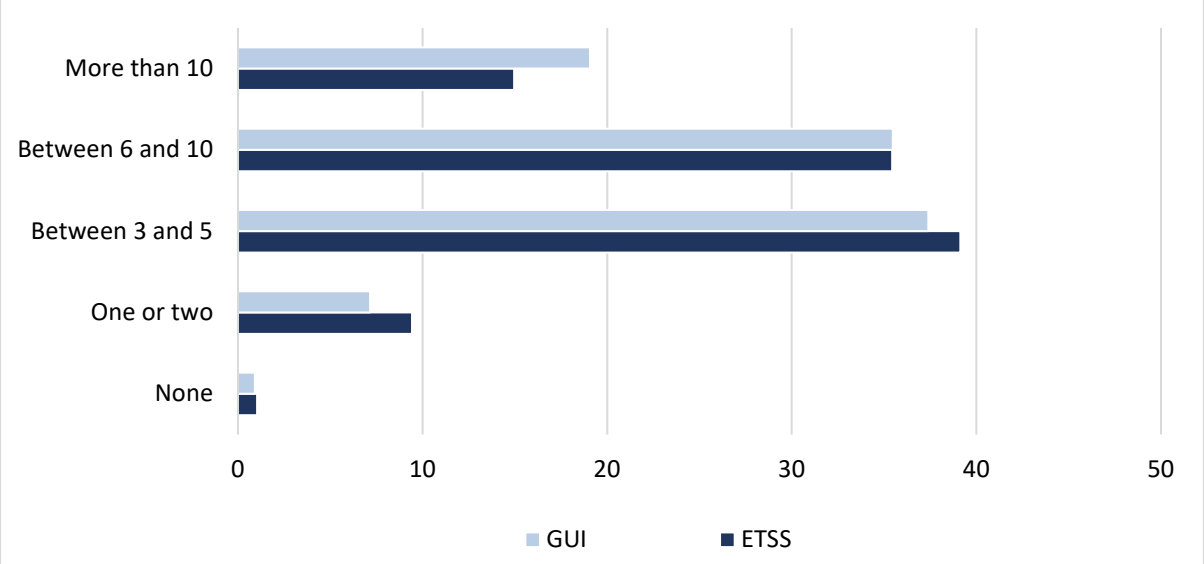
FIGURE 4.2 NUMBER OF FRIENDS FROM PRIMARY SCHOOL THAT JOINED SAME CLASS



Source: Survey of first- and second-year students at ETSSs and *Growing Up in Ireland*, Child Cohort, Wave 2 (at 13 years).

However, smaller numbers of friends transferring with them from primary school does not seem to significantly impact on the number of friends that students at Educate Together second-level schools have. The number of friends that students 'hang around with' is very similar across the GUI and the ETSS respondents (Figure 4.3).

FIGURE 4.3 NUMBER OF FRIENDS RESPONDENTS 'HANG AROUND WITH'



Source: Survey of first- and second-year students at ETSSs and *Growing Up in Ireland*, Child Cohort, Wave 2 (at 13 years).

Bullying at ETSSs

A random sample of 45 per cent of the students in the ETSS student survey (n = 386) were asked if they experienced bullying in the last three months and if they bullied anyone in the last three months, using the questions about bullying included in the GUI questionnaire. The survey did not include additional items or questions that would measure students' perception of discrimination along gender, race, ethnicity, or sexuality lines. Overall, 10 per cent of students (n = 40) indicated they have been bullied in the last three months. Of these students, a small minority indicated they have been victims of physical bullying. The majority of students who indicate they experienced bullying state that the bullying took the form of gossip, spreading rumours or verbal bullying (name-calling, hurtful slagging). The most frequent reason for bullying identified by these respondents was jealousy or related to physical appearance (clothes, glasses, weight, height, etc.). Very few students indicated that the reason for bullying related to their family background or their sexual orientation.

Overall, 10 per cent of GUI respondents also indicated they had been bullied in the last three months, making the self-reported rate of bullying equivalent between the GUI and ETSS student survey respondents. Only 1 per cent of students across the 11 schools indicated they have bullied someone in the last three months. Overall, 2 per cent of GUI respondents indicated they have bullied someone in the last three months. As such, bullying at ETSSs is no higher than the national average.

When asked to discuss discipline at the school, students across multiple focus groups engaged with the topic of bullying. Most students agreed that their school handles bullying in an effective way.

> *'The school takes bullying to the next level. It's not tolerated at all. Whereas other schools kind of overshadow that part. They're just kind of like, "Oh, you know, it's normal for (older) years to push first years into lockers." But here it's kind of like once you come in, you're just like one big family.'* (Focus group participant, School Baobab)

> *'In other schools, I know there's like a lot of like bad behaviour, and like people fight, and there's like -- but there's not in this school. Sure there might be fights, but they're always like contained, and they like act really strictly on it, so it doesn't happen again… First punch they stop at that. So it's good with the rules.'* (Focus group participants, School Chestnut)

One focus group participant brought up their own experiences with bullying. Asked if they were able to talk to someone about being bullied and if they received the support they needed, the respondent said 'Yeah'.

> *'Well, there is bullying in the school. I've experienced this myself. But otherwise your friend groups -- as long as you have a good friend group you're fine, but other people, they're not so nice, but it really depends on the person.'* (Focus group participant)

Participants in a focus group at one school identified bullying as a key problem. Students shared a sense of disappointment at the lack of effectiveness of discipline policies in addressing students' concerns about bullying. One participant mentioned '*I don't think they handle bullying very well...'*. Other focus group participants seemed to agree. The focus group participants at this school also provided multiple examples of bullying incidents. When one participant stated *'There was a boy in my class that was bullied by [older] years'*, another one added *'One boy in my class was threatened by [older] year because he was walking down the stairs slowly and then the [older] year went 'I'm going to kick you off the stairs if you don't move'*, followed by a third focus group participant who *mentioned 'There is a girl in our year that threatens everyone with her brother. We all know her brother is not going to do anything'.* None of the participants stated that they felt personally unsafe. This school registered the third highest reported rate of bullying among ETSS student survey respondents.

4.3 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

Students discussed their relationships with teachers at various points in the focus groups, most notably when asked who they would talk to at the school if they had a worry or concern, what they like about their school, and what makes a good teacher. Across almost all focus groups, students overwhelmingly praised their teachers and mentioned that the relationship between students and teachers is primarily based on respect. While focus group participants reflected positively, the broader survey population conveyed a more complex picture in terms of inter-personal relationships across the 11 schools.

The role of respect in teacher-pupil relationships

In focus groups, students often identified mutual respect as the key feature of the relationship between students and teachers. This view also emerged during teacher interviews. The importance of respect across schools derived from the school ethos and was reinforced by teaching or embedding Ethical Education across school subjects, as discussed in Chapter 6. Multiple students mentioned that being able to call their teachers by their first names helped foster this positive relationship based on respect.

> *'Yes, it's more of a mutual respect. I think when you can call [teachers] by their first names too, you build-up more of a rapport with them.'* (Focus group participant, School Baobab)

The importance of respect between teachers and students in return facilitated closer relationships between students and teachers, with these closer relationships not seen as undermining the authority of the teacher. Instead, this facilitated a friendlier dynamic between the two, in which the students could have better conversations with the teachers and the teachers could take a stronger interest in the wellbeing of their students.

> *'I feel like we have, like, really close relationships with most of the teachers. I don't know why. 'Cause in other schools you just there's a teacher, he's in charge. But in this school, like, you talk to the teacher and you actually have, like, interesting conversations with the teacher.'* (Focus group participant, School Magnolia)

Students described positive relationships with a diversity of adults at their school. Some students referenced the school principal and deputy principal by their first names and identified them as key support persons. Students also identified special needs assistants, guidance councillors, tutors and year heads as key staff members they feel they can reach out to with a worry or concern.

Positive relationship with teachers was one of the frequently referenced answers by focus group participants to the question '*What do you like about this school*', as discussed in Section 3.3, and a key component of student belonging, as discussed in Section 3.4. Mutual respect also emerged as an incentive to behave positively for students at some schools, as discussed in Section 3.5.

Student views on the relationship between students and teachers were triangulated by the responses provided by parents. Parents mentioned that their children have a 'brilliant', 'very positive', and 'great' relationship with their teachers. Unprompted, several parents mentioned that one of the strengths of the school is the quality of the relationship between students and teachers – based on 'mutual respect', in which teachers treat students 'as equals and listen to the children'. Some parents mentioned that teachers became 'mentors' for their children and that their children 'love' their teachers. On a few occasions, parents mentioned isolated incidents in which a child did not get along well with a teacher, but such instances were attributed to 'personality differences'. Parents also understood that it is not possible to always get along with everyone.

4.4 BEHAVIOUR AND DISCIPLINE POLICIES

At the centre of behaviour policies across ETSSs was the promotion of respect between peers and between students and teachers. Schools had strict rules to address negative behaviours but focused extensively on promoting positive behaviours and repairing relationships. When asked *'How is discipline handled at*

your school?' school leaders and teachers often made reference to the use of restorative practice. Restorative practice is a value-based philosophy which 'aims to consciously build relationships' and to 'respond to harm/conflict in a way that honours relationships' (Creating Relational Learning Communities, n.d.). Most often, the reference to restorative practice was unprompted by the researchers. At many schools, the use of restorative practice was a key feature of the school ethos. Principals talked extensively about how the school implements these practices, including promoting healthy relationships based on respect and offering praise for positive behaviours. Teachers discussed restorative practices when they contrasted their current school with previous schools at which they had been teaching, when talking about what they like about their current school and when asked directly about how they handle problematic behaviours. The use of restorative practices was part of a broader set of tools that schools used to create a respectful environment and to address problematic behaviours. However, at times, both students and some teachers showed some misunderstandings about the use and role of restorative practices.

Students' understanding of discipline and behavioural policies at the school level highlighted different aspects. Students described the use of positive and negative reinforcements and expressed some concern about how discipline policies are implemented, using their sense of fairness. Across different voices, a nuanced view of the use of discipline practices at ETSS emerged, yet schools showed the ability to adapt and revise behavioural practices and policies aimed to meet the needs of the student body more effectively.

This section starts by discussing what restorative practices are. It then provides an overview of policies and practices across ETSSs to address problematic behaviours. The views of students on behavioural policies are presented next, followed by an overview on how different stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of these policies.

Restorative practice

The theme of interpersonal relationships is intricately related to the nature of discipline approaches in schools and restorative practice is a key component of the document *A Blueprint for Educate Together Second Level Schools* as noted earlier. Restorative practice is a means of promoting heathy relationships which emphasises dialogue, respect and empowerment. It also aims to address conflicts in an emotionally heathy way (O'Dwyer, 2014). The practice has gained in international appeal over the past decade in particular and has been adopted in many settings (Fives et al., 2013; O'Dwyer, 2014). In Ireland, the *Children Act 2001* made provision for the application of restorative approaches with young people and there has been positive feedback regarding the benefits of the approach (Kenny, 2008; Wilson, 2011). Fives et al. (2013), in a review of the literature, note

that implementing restorative techniques can significantly improve the attitudes of students towards learning in many schools, as well as boosting their morale. In contrast to this, enforcing punishments in the classroom for misbehaviour can be detrimental to the self-esteem of individual students and does not encourage them to take responsibility for their actions (IIRP, 2009). Students perceive teachers who use restorative practice to be more respectful and its use has been linked to lower racial and ethnic discipline gaps (Gregory et al., 2016).

With restorative approaches, conflicts and misbehaviours are usually perceived as 'learning situations' as the practitioner supports the young person towards finding solutions regarding his/her misbehaviour (Wearmouth et al., 2007; Gellin, 2011). However, there is also evidence to suggest that teachers can be reticent about adopting restorative practice in classrooms (Mirsky and Wachtel, 2011; Fives et al., 2013). A number of studies (Blood and Thorsborne, 2006; Morrison, et al., 2005) suggest that achieving staff 'buy-in' to restorative projects is central to effective implementation, but can be problematic (Fives et al., 2013). Some teachers fear that greater amounts of time could be taken away from teaching other subjects which they need to focus on in order to complete the curriculum. Other teachers worry that they do not possess the requisite mediation skills that they need to resolve conflicts between students (Fives et al., 2013), highlighting the importance of professional development opportunities.

School policies and practices to address behavioural difficulties

Teachers described facing various levels of behavioural challenges across schools and across school years. At most schools, teachers stated that they witness very few instances of problematic behaviours, whereas at a minority of schools teachers identified behavioural difficulties as a challenge. Across all schools, the majority of teachers made reference to the use of restorative practices to address behavioural difficulties. Strategies employed by teachers included the following non-mutually exclusive examples:

- Letter of referral, starting with interventions by subject teachers, with the involvement of parents at various points. At most schools this was tracked through an online system;
- Personalised interventions based on a student's profile and with a focus on positive reinforcement;
- Having one-to-one conversations with students to increase awareness about their responsibility for their actions, the consequences of those actions for other students and teachers and asking them to participate in the process of identifying solutions for their behaviours;
- Creating restorative spaces (e.g. community action group, homework group, behavioural support sessions during lunchtime);

- Use of a code of behaviour that rests on the promotion of respect;
- Use of team teaching to further engage students and to enhance social skills and engagement with curricular contents;
- Zero tolerance for fights was discussed at multiple schools. For at least one school, a fight resulted in suspensions for all parties.

The schools included in the study adopted a variety of rules and processes to handle discipline. At most, but not all schools, discipline procedures included a positive component, where students received praise or rewards for positive behaviours in addition to being sanctioned for negative behaviours. The use of praise for positive behaviours is a key component of the use of restorative practice. The terminology used across different schools for positive and negative reinforcements included merits and demerits, points (minus and plus), and thumbs up and thumbs down. Across these schools, the information on students' behaviours was tracked. Schools also employed a variety of rewards for positive behaviours. At one school, students reported that the parents of well-behaved students received postcards from their school, whereas a different school employed a practice called praise pod.

> *'In assembly on a Friday, they pick one student from the year, and they say, "This person has been really good", and they'll send a postcard to your parents.'* (Focus group participant)
>
> *'There's also a small thing called praise pod. If you do something nice, someone could write your name into a box and then you would send a little video back to your parents saying that, "I did something good".'* (Focus group participant)

At a different school, the reward applied at the house level, giving groups of students, rather than individual students incentives to engage in positive behaviours.

> *Participant 1: 'Yes, and like you'd also be encouraged to do your best because like they'd encourage you and also, as we said earlier, in VSware sometimes if you're like doing really good they give you points… if you have like loads of points in your VSware I think it's -- is it the base class that has the most gets some surprise?'*
>
> *Participant 2: 'It's our [house], whoever has the most they get like to have a pizza afternoon with a movie and so that's like good motivation'.*
>
> *Participant 3: 'And like sometimes they might give individual prizes for if you're doing really well'* (Focus group participants).

Behaviour policies through the student voice

Students' description of school discipline policies was often consistent with the emphasis on promoting positive behaviours and the use of restorative practice. These descriptions included delays in using harsher discipline methods and the rarity of detentions.

> *'There's, like, a small bit of it but, like, not -- not like you'd expect in other schools where straight away you're getting shouted at, you're getting detention, your mam will get called. Like, they're kind of just, like, taken out of it and, like, talk to you after class, like, seeing what the root of the problem was.'* (Focus group participant, School Magnolia)

Indeed, students at some schools emphasised that their school has no detention. At others, detention was replaced by more constructive approaches to problematic behaviours, such as homework clubs. These practices are in line with a restorative approach.

> *'So the thing I like about it compared to other schools is that punishment actually has -- like it's not really a punishment. It's just trying to actually help you overcome the problem. It's not just like, you know stay after school for an hour. It's like stay and you can do your homework*.' (Focus group participant, School Mangrove)

Students also explicitly mentioned that respect for their teachers served as a strong incentive for them to behave. These responses are consistent with the responses of teachers, who distinctively identified respect as a means to enable the successful use of restorative practices.

> *'Because everyone like likes the teachers they want to do well for them.'* (Focus group participant, School Mangrove)

> *'Because when -- and also, like, when you have, like, a bond with a teacher, you don't want the teacher being mad at you and, like, you don't want, like, to not do -- like, I can't -- there's a word for it. Like, yeah, you want to, like, meet your expectations that the teacher has for you and do your work.'* (Focus group participant, School Magnolia)

Effectiveness of school behavioural policies

Teachers and students were asked if they perceive behaviour policies at the school as effective. A nuanced discussion emerged. Overall, teachers found behavioural policies to be very effective, but they also acknowledged limitations of their school's approach. Some teachers believed that restorative practices were not effective with all students, and that more punitive practices may be more effective in such cases. There is some evidence of misconception about the role and place

of restorative practices among some teachers. While restorative practices encompass a wide range of strategies, they are incompatible with more punitive approaches. All quotes from teachers provided in this section belong to teachers from different schools.

> *'I think if we are going to use a detention, which I do feel sometimes restorative doesn't work with certain kids, and I have to be honest… we can talk about it but they're teenagers at the end of the day and sometimes these big concepts and ideas don't actually mix with some teenagers. It works for some, but I think as an adult we can understand that and we can feed off it really well but when it becomes quite a serious offence or a repeated offence… sometimes students need that detention.'* (Ethical Education Teacher)

> *'And I do believe that maybe it's important to kind of – the old school works for [a] reason. You know, the old school systems and manner as long as you're using it -- you're not using it a really negative way. This is detention, you understand why you're in for detention, so you have that chat with them, they know why they're in, they're not just shoved into a detention for forgetting six homeworks or something, but they've had the talk about it, you know, and there has to be an outcome from it. There has to be to be a follow up. So maybe have the restorative after a detention. But don't just claim it's just all restorative because we have to -- have to work on what works because for me personally I don't think the restorative is working as it should or it's not being taught properly.'* (Ethical Education Teacher)

Another concern expressed by a few teachers was the view that employing restorative practices takes more time and energy from the teacher than punitive approaches.

> *'We don't have time really to do restorative [practice]. Like if I have a class of 25 kids, there might be three kids who have issues in the class, I don't have time with a full timetable to sit down, "Okay, you're going to have restorative tomorrow at lunchtime, you're going to have restorative" you know, it's demanding, it's demanding.'* (Ethical Education Teacher)

> *'Is not always easy because there are days where you're really tired or, like, we're all human beings, but I always try to be fair and what's most important is instead of addressing bad behaviour it's always -- and it works -- it works -- I have the feeling for me at least that it works better to use positive reinforcement.'* (Teacher).

At the same time, most teachers found behaviour policies to be effective in both addressing problematic behaviours and maintaining relationships with students.

> *'I never heard about [restorative practice] before I came to this school, and I think we are still designing and tweaking things, but it means that you always have good relationships with the students regardless of what happens, and I think this makes a huge difference and no resentments, on either side, both students and teachers.*' (Teacher, School Hawthorn)

One of the mechanisms through which school behaviour policies and restorative practices allow the relationship between students and teachers to continue even after problematic behaviours occurred is by shifting the focus of the conversation or the intervention from the student to the behaviour, as exemplified by one teacher. While this teacher acknowledges that employing restorative practice is challenging and that progress is sometimes slow, they use the metaphor of a marathon to exemplify its effect.

> *'"You're not the problem, this is the problem" and circle conversations, so something happens, it's a restorative chat, it happens again it's a restorative chat, it happens again it kind of goes to progress leader and there would be a restorative circle then, and then it may need to go to (name of principal). So that's kind of -- and again that's very time consuming, it's exhausting, and even to find the time… and sometimes that time hasn't been found. So something has happened and now we're in class again and there's been no repercussions in the old fashioned way or whatever, so that can be challenging. But again it's a marathon, not a sprint, and that's what gets you through and it's just to kind of, yeah, try and work on that.'* (Teacher, School Magnolia)

One teacher suggested that the use of a behaviour policy approach, in which the teacher acknowledges and rewards positive behaviours, is fairer. This is because instead of focusing time and attention on the minority of students who engage in problematic behaviours, the teacher is able to acknowledge everyone's contribution.

> *'There has to be some kind of discipline in a school and I think before it was only negative, so that's the only attention you're getting, so I think that the positive points, although it's not perfect, is a step in the right direction to try and just highlight -- because loads of them are good and you would end up giving all your attention to like that one kid who's speaking out as opposed to like 11, 12 kids that are just doing exactly what you've told them and their very best. So I think that on a practical sense it helps.'* (Teacher, School Maple)

The main argument for this approach is that it builds student teacher relationships which in turn has a positive impact on learning and achievement for students. It

may serve to reshape toxic beliefs about violence, a role that educational settings should seek to address. For example, one Ethical Education teacher exemplified how classroom conversations may serve to address students' beliefs about the role of violence to address conflicts.

> *'I've got a particularly kind of difficult second-year group and we're covering communication at the moment and a lot of them would very happily tell you that, you know, there is a lot of violence to solve issues… So, that's kind of -- and then, I'm finding that you'd have other students backing them up because they'd say, "You know, that is the way of it. That's the only way you can do it" and then -- so, I would involve other students to say, "Well, is this the way you would deal with a conflict or an issue?" and then they would say, "No" and give their reasons. So, that's kind of a way of smoothing out behaviours because those students who think that violence is the only way can see that there are other points of view as well and okay, maybe they can try talking, you know, thinking of others.'* (Ethical Education Teacher).

In contrast to the nuanced views brought by teachers, students offered a more restrictive interpretation of the effectiveness of behavioural policies and practices. At times, focus group participants expressed concern about what they perceived to be 'not strict enough' or overly lenient discipline practices within the school. Some students suggested that the policies may not be effective for individuals most likely to misbehave, that occasionally classroom interruptions are not addressed in a timely manner, and that sometimes problematic behaviours go unnoticed. Punishments such as detention and bad notes – as discussed in the quote below – are not in line with restorative practice.

> *'I'm not being rude or anything, but I don't really like the way they have like bad notes and suspensions, because sure you don't do your homework five times, six times, if you get a suspension or something, but like people don't really care about suspensions. They're like, "Okay. We're suspended. We don't really care". To them it's just another day off. So it doesn't really help. I feel like there should be something else. For detentions, they only sit down and just like do their work. I feel like it should be something more strict where they're made to do something which would make them not get detention again. Some people don't even care if they get detentions over and over again.'* (Focus group participant)

Sixth-year students in one focus group mentioned that they find the behaviour policies to be less effective for older students.

> *Participant 1: 'It's very much because the first years are new to the school, they are trying to follow all of the rules because they're scared,*

> *obviously… But after the third year you've kind of got used to it with the school and the way the system works. Then you realise it's just a number, it's not going to affect me.'*
>
> *Participant 2: 'It's not going to affect me getting into the college that I want; it's not going to affect me getting the points that I want. So it works, but it doesn't work at the same time.'* (Focus group participants)

At the same time, with some exceptions, students generally believed that behaviour policies are relatively effective at addressing bullying behaviours in their school, as discussed in Section 4.4.

> *'It's strict. There are boundaries. The school doesn't -- how to say it, respect bullying, or racism, or anything like that. They turn it down instantly, like.*' (Focus group participant, School Chestnut)

4.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on understanding the relationships between students and between students and teachers at ETSSs, as well as how these relationships are managed. Multiple stakeholders – particularly students – strongly emphasise that relationships between students and teachers at ETSSs are positive and based on mutual respect. Respect was key to students feeling they are valued, and it enabled the successful use of restorative approaches at multiple schools. At the same time, several misconceptions on the role of restorative practice within the broader discipline policies and practices at the school were evident among some teachers and students, indicating the need for additional training and support in this space.

Student survey respondents join their ETSSs with fewer friends but end up having a comparable number of friends to the national average. Bullying rates at ETSSs are no higher than the national average, despite its more diverse student population (Jackman et al., 2020; Kavanagh et al., 2018). Current behaviour and discipline policies at ETSSs pose a few challenges for teachers and do not always seem fair to students, but they yield significant and positive results, as suggested by teachers. The next chapter focuses on teaching and learning at ETSSs.

CHAPTER 5

Teaching and learning at Educate Together second-level schools

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Twenty-seven teachers at 11 ETSSs were interviewed for this study. English, Science and Ethical Education teachers were chosen for these interviews, however all interviewed teachers taught multiple subjects. This chapter discussed their experiences at ETSS, with a focus on teaching and learning. Across schools and subjects taught, teachers provided a rich, nuanced, and informed reflection on their experiences. Teachers also detailed their teaching philosophy, which centred on differentiation and the use of active teaching methods. This section also includes a more detailed view from students about their experience as learners at ETSSs.

Second-level schools have been at the interface of significant policy reforms in recent years – particularly policy changes at the junior cycle level, which aim to respond to the fast-changing society in a globalising world. The Framework for Junior Cycle, with full cycle coming on stream in 2021, adopts the more progressive and flexible learning and learner centred principles of the primary school curriculum (NCCA 2010; 2011; 2017). The changes currently being embedded in schools are significant and aim to transform the nature of teaching, learning and assessment in junior cycle education. The reform emphasises the kinds of active learning valued by young people and provides a more holistic approach by embedding key skills, overcoming the weaknesses in earlier provision (Smyth et al., 2008; McCoy et al., 2014a). Allowing schools greater autonomy over curriculum development and assessment is intended to encourage creativity and responsiveness to the needs of students in individual schools. Competences in digital skills also feature strongly in the new programme. In particular, students are expected to use technology and digital media tools to learn, work and think collaboratively and creatively in a responsible and ethical manner. These features are strongly present at the 11 case study schools.

5.2 PROFILES OF TEACHERS AT ETSSS

The teachers interviewed for this study showed strong commitment to their schools, the students they teach and a rigorous work ethic. The most frequently referenced reason they were attracted to their current job was the Educate Together ethos and the degree to which it aligned with their 'personal values'. Teachers were attracted to the idea of 'pupil-centred learning', 'inclusivity', and the 'restorative practice' approach. Teachers also believed that Educate Together schools would support their 'creative' and 'progressive' teaching philosophies. A secondary motivation for why teachers pursued their current position rested in the

upward mobility opportunities provided by a new school. These two leading motivations were mirrored by school leaders in their response to the question 'why did you apply for your current position', as discussed in Chapter 7.

> *'Because this school was a new school, I felt that I would have a lot of freedom here, and because it was restorative practice, that's more in line with my values. So, I didn't really like the punitive system, even though I loved the (school patron) school I was in. Because it was restorative practice I thought, you know, "This is kind of new and exciting". And because I was going to be on my first year out, and the school was going to be in its first year, everyone was new, so it wasn't like I was a new teacher coming into a school. So, that really appealed to me as well.'* (Teacher)

No school-level statistics were gathered about the diversity of the teaching staff. While the majority of interviewed teachers were Irish-born, a few had an international background. Both female and male teachers were interviewed and interviewees were at different stages in their career.

5.3 HOW TEACHERS DESCRIBE THEIR SCHOOLS

In interviews, teachers were asked how they would describe their school to a colleague at a conference. Overall, teachers spoke very highly about their experiences, mirroring the overall positive descriptions of students discussed in Section 3.2 and school leaders in Section 7.2. In their answers, teachers first and foremost emphasised how inclusive their schools are, described the innovative nature of their school, and discussed the work environment and their relationship with the school staff. Teachers also positioned ETSSs in the broader school environment in Ireland by describing them as comprehensive new schools that embed the 'distinct values of Educate Together'.

Inclusive schools

When asked to describe their school, teachers primarily talked about their school as 'inclusive', 'open', and 'multicultural'. Schools were described as inclusive both due to their enrolment philosophy and practice, and the environment they create for students. Several teachers talked about the demographic composition of students at their school and described their school as 'multicultural'. However, diversity at the school was described in different ways and drawing on different criteria, including ability, ethnicity and socio-economic status.

> *'I would describe it as a state -- or like a state school, like a comprehensive school with a diverse mix of ethnic groups.'* (Teacher, School Sequoia)

> '*To someone who's never been here I would say it's an extremely inclusive school. You know, we've had -- we've had lots of students who have been school refusing in other schools and they've come here… But it has reignited their enjoyment of education*.' (Teacher, School Elm)

> *'I suppose we have some middle-class kids but… like you have a huge sort of, I don't know, like diversity in socioeconomic status, which is something you don't always get in loads of schools.'* (Teacher, School Maple)

Teacher interviews also emphasise that the diverse student population may be both a cause and a consequence of the inclusive school environment, as discussed in Sections 3.2 and 3.4. It is likely that through the creation of an inclusive school environment ETSSs are able to attract more diverse students. Teachers characterised both the student body and the school environment as inclusive.

> *'I think it's just extremely warm, extremely vibrant and opening to everybody. Like the minute you walk in the door everybody's so friendly, everybody's accepted, everybody's just so nice to each other but at the centre of it all the main focus that we have is forming really good relationships with the students.'* (Teacher, School Mangrove)

Work environment and relationship with school staff

Teachers describe their schools as 'collaborative', 'fun', and 'innovative' with strong positive relationships among teachers. At the same time, teachers emphasise that ETSSs are 'fast paced' and require 'hard work'. Teachers systematically described positive relationships with their colleagues and with the school principal. School leaders praised teachers, their commitment to the school ethos. For many school leaders, working with the teaching staff was one of the most rewarding aspects of their jobs. While at times in newly established schools, one-teacher departments allowed less subject-specific collaboration, teachers felt supported in their work by a collaborative staff and a strong professional development culture. Interviews with teachers support the conclusion that democratic and progressive values do not only manifest in the relationships between students and between students and staff, but also between teachers and between teachers and school leadership.

> *'It's very welcoming, very inclusive, I find that there's kind of a nice atmosphere, nice relationship between staff and students and a really nice relationship between staff.'* (Teacher, School Walnut)

> *'I would say we're first and foremost -- we're a community, a community of individuals that has a collective responsibility to each other. I would say from a teacher's perspective we have a very professional outlook and attitude towards the work that we do. We're*

> *supportive and collaborative. In terms of teaching and learning and what's happening in our classrooms, I would say we have an inclusive approach, we're creative in how the educational experience of our students is laid out for them. I would say we focus on getting to know one another, we're very good at building relationships.'* (Teacher, School Ginkgo)

With reference to teaching and learning, teachers across schools also described their school as innovative. Teachers felt they were encouraged to be creative and test new ideas and approaches.

> *'Very innovative, I feel like I can do a lot of things here that I'm maybe a bit more restricted in another school and it's encouraged here. I think the students are quite content here, I suppose that shows in their -- the way they appear in class.'* (Teacher, School Sequoia)

Teachers mentioned that working hard is a component of the school culture. At the same time, they emphasised that their school was a good place to work, challenging but fulfilling.

> *'I think teachers who come from other schools and move in would definitely say that, like, the new staff that joined this year, who have been teaching for ten years in another school, would say, "God, like, the pace here is so fast". And, a lot is expected of you, but that just drives people on, which is good.'* (Teacher, School Chestnut)

> *'Everybody works hard. There is some amount of expectation that everyone will work hard, so you work hard but we have fun, enjoy ourselves. It's a good place to work.'* (Teacher, School Baobab)

The hard work described by teachers stemmed from multiple factors. First, teachers were encouraged to engage systematically in curriculum development due to the use of technology and as a result of decreased reliance on textbooks. This is a common feature of innovative schools, documented in the academic literature (Marcus-Quinn et al., 2019). Second, teachers had to teach multiple subjects, a common feature of new schools, as discussed in Section 7.3. Third, they teach these subjects for the first time in their schools, and have no prior resources developed by the school to rely on.

> *'Content is always going to be an issue, creating your own lessons is a challenge, it's beneficial in the sense that you tailor the learning to the students, but it's a fair bit of work especially when you're starting off at a new school where previous resources may not have been there, so we're building everything up from the start.'* (Teacher, School Elm)

This sentiment was also echoed by teachers in response to the question *'Would you recommend teaching and working at this school to a friend?'*. While all teachers would recommend their school to a friend – with some teachers saying, 'Yes, 100 per cent' – several cautioned that the school requires hard work.

> *'Yes, I think you have to be willing to think progressively and maybe like we work hard definitely because we have no books and you're creating your own resources, so I think you have to be willing to -- you have to be really passionate about your subject. But I'm really happy here, you know, so I'd recommend it to other people, yes.'* (Teacher, School Walnut)

5.4 TEACHING PRACTICES

Interviewed teachers indicated that they employ a breadth of teaching philosophies and approaches. However, at the core, they explicitly aimed to promote a student-centred teaching approach that prioritises collaborative and active learning and builds good relationships with students. Teachers at ETSSs said they benefit from a wide degree of autonomy in the classroom and use strategies that support student autonomy. The teaching practices discussed by teachers and students align strongly with the way students describe their learning as well as student views on what makes a good teacher, as discussed in Section 5.6. They also facilitated deep and meaningful engagement with the knowledge, skills and values inherent in the National Curriculum and the Educate Together ethos.

Teaching philosophy

In interviews, teachers were asked to discuss their teaching philosophy and the methods they typically adopt in their teaching. When asked to discuss their teaching methods, teachers consistently said they prefer active and collaborative teaching methods. Active and collaborative teaching approaches discussed included the use of experiments, discovery learning, team work, group discussions, student peer teaching, teaching in circles, debates, gallery walks (a teaching approach that allows students to discuss as they walk through the classroom), story-telling, making videos, employing physical movement and teaching outdoors. Related, teachers also discussed the importance of encouraging students to take responsibility for their learning.

> *'I'm a Chemistry teacher, so it's all very active. Loads of experiments. I think hands-on is the way to go, and probably because I enjoyed that myself because that is how I learned. So my room would be very active. If my classroom is quiet, there's something wrong; they're never quiet'.* (Teacher)

> *'Okay, so as active as possible, okay. There is huge power when a student discovers, as opposed to if you're told, and then when you have the piece of information -- so when you discover that piece of*

> *information you need to use that piece of information or else it's just inert. And you can learn it and regurgitate it but if you don't use it, it disappears. So it's about actually actively using that kind of lessons as we go along.'* (Teacher, School Magnolia)

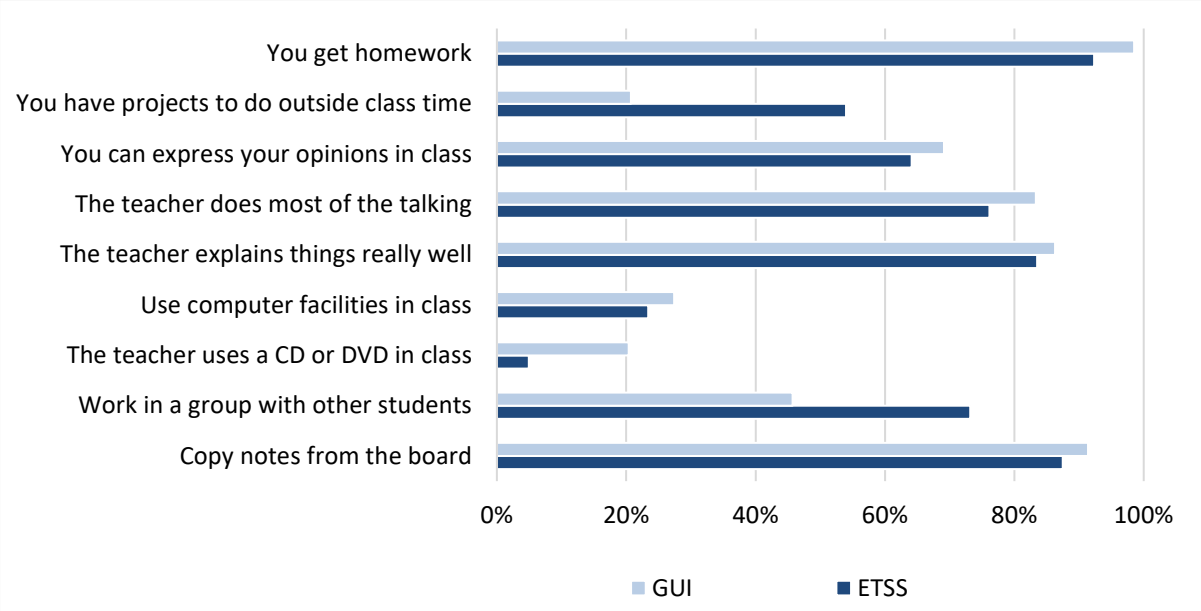
Active teaching methods converged towards the goal of providing student-centred education. Inclusivity, differentiated teaching, and employing approaches such as universal design for learning and the use of praise to recognise effort were at the core of the teaching approach in the schools visited.

> *'I'd say there's not one particular approach; I think it's informed by everything that you encounter in your life, your own experiences in the classroom. I very strongly believe in inclusivity. I one hundred per cent feel that all students within the room need to be pulled into the lesson at some point, and it doesn't necessarily mean they have to be brought up on stage in front of everyone and on show, but they should feel that they have a part to play. I feel very strongly that their efforts should be acknowledged as well, so in terms of completing a task, what they've done successfully and what they've to improve on. Both of those needs to be acknowledged. So what they're doing well in to give them that degree of success, that feeling of accomplishment, alongside the areas that they need then improve so they have a role to play.'* (Teacher, School Baobab).

These approaches stemmed from the Educate Together ethos, but were supported by established school practices, including the use of team teaching when possible, strong collaboration between teachers, and a strong professional development culture. Team teaching became a less sustainable practice as schools grew, however it remained quite common for subjects such as English and Mathematics. Team teaching and co-teaching were viewed by teachers as particularly helpful for students that require additional help, but also to enhance feedback provision for all students. Collaboration did not just occur in the classroom, but also spanned cross-school activities. One teacher described collaborative planning conducted online among all schoolteachers to design a module for first- and second-year students. At a different school, teachers had a standing teaching and learning meeting every week that also served as a professional development space centred around different topics, including formal assessment, latest research, and making the best use of technology available. While a focus on promoting diversity was evident across interviews and focus groups, the researchers did not prompt teachers to discuss or highlight culturally responsive pedagogy practices. At the same time, neither teachers nor focus group participants brought up this subject themselves.

On the student survey, students were asked to say how often they experience select teaching practices at their schools. The teaching practices selected included both practices incorporated in the GUI study and additional practices that reflect the Educate Together ethos. Figure 5.1 includes the teaching practices appropriated from the GUI instrument on the ETSS student survey. Most notably, while only 21 per cent of GUI respondents indicated they engage in projects outside of class time 'often' or 'very often', the equivalent figure for ETSS student survey respondents was 54 per cent. Similarly, 46 per cent of GUI respondents and 73 per cent of ETSSs respondents indicated they work in a group with other students. Marginal differences can also be observed for how often teachers do most of the talking. While the share of survey respondents that indicate they use computer facilities in class appears relatively low, it only illustrates part of the picture regarding the use of technology in the classroom. In total, 81 per cent of students indicate they use tablets/iPads often or very often in class (see Section 5.7 for details).

FIGURE 5.1 FREQUENCY OF SELECT TEACHING PRACTICES ETSS-GUI COMPARISON (% OFTEN OR VERY OFTEN, ALL SCHOOLS)

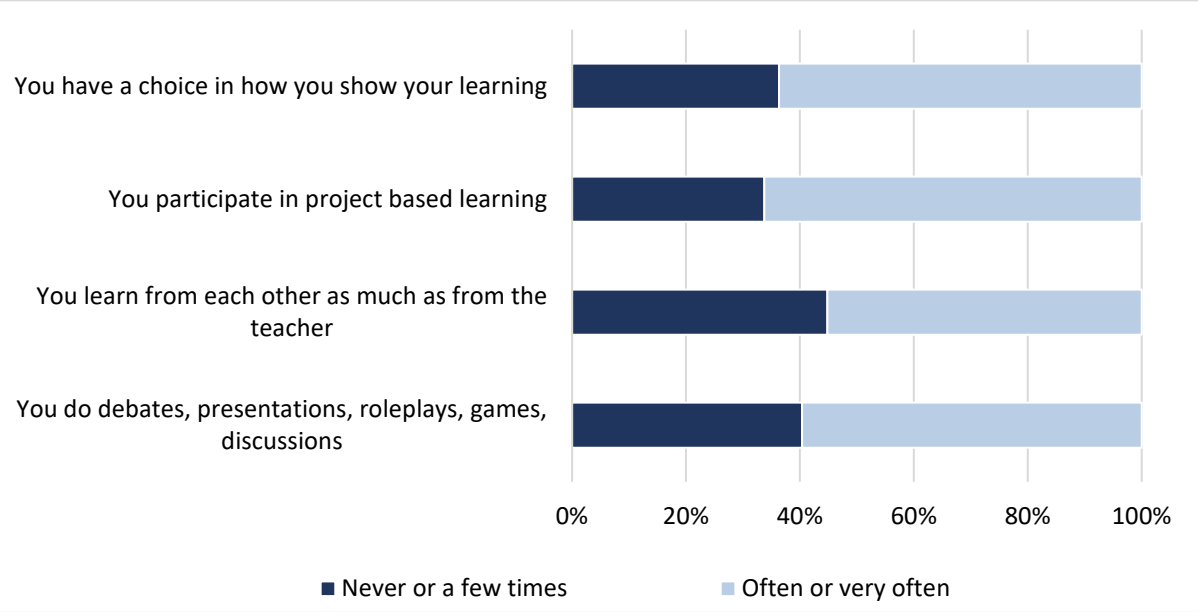


Source: Survey of first- and second-year students at ETSSs.

ETSS student survey respondents were also asked about the frequency with which they participate in project-based learning, learn from each other, and engage in active class activities such as debates, role-pay, games and discussions. These items are not included in the GUI study, and no national comparison can be provided. At least 55 per cent of respondents indicated they engage in each of these activities 'often' or 'very often'. It can also be noted that 64 per cent of respondents indicated they have a choice in how to show their learning either 'often' or 'very

often'. This practice is in strong alignment with the democratic and student-centred ethos of ETSSs and it is further discussed in Section 5.4.

FIGURE 5.2 FREQUENCY OF ADDITIONAL SELECT TEACHING PRACTICES ETSS STUDENT SURVEY ONLY (ALL SCHOOLS)



Source: Survey of first- and second-year students at ETSSs.

Teacher and student autonomy

Teachers systematically agreed that they have a wide degree of autonomy within the boundaries of the National Curriculum, which all schools follow. This feeling was shared by teachers across schools and subjects. Often, teachers discussed teacher autonomy and freedom interchangeably. One teacher described the autonomy they have as a sign of trust from the school leadership and their colleagues.

> *'I have a lot of freedom to do what I want to. You know and I feel that I do. I feel that I could go in and, you know, within the structure of the syllabus, you know, I could do anything really. There is -- there is a lot of freedom.'* (Teacher, School Sequoia)

While teachers felt that they benefited from strong autonomy, this autonomy occurred in a context of both strong cooperation among teachers and exposure to each other's teaching. Teaching at ETSSs – as autonomous as it is – was driven by feedback from peers and students. Teachers often engaged in team teaching and received feedback on their classroom interactions. Teachers also made use of their autonomy to be responsive to student needs and to increase student engagement.

> *'Oh gosh, yes, see that's it, I'd like to think that I had complete autonomy, but then lessons shift and change depending on what's*

> *going on. So if the kids are enjoying an aspect of a lesson and you can see that in them, I now feel like I've the experience to take that step back and allow that to flourish within the room.'* (Teacher, School Baobab)

One teacher mentioned they felt that teaching autonomy at ETSSs is facilitated by the strong relationship based on respect between students and teachers.

> *'I think I have a lot of autonomy. I think I'm just -- again I'm very fortunate that I'm here since the very beginning [the opening of the school] and I have a very good sense of the students because I've known them -- I was here when there was only 40 and now we have [over 200 students], so I would have a very good sense of them and a good relationship with them as well. So I have a lot of autonomy. I think when the relationships are good it's easy to have autonomy.'* (Teacher, School Walnut)

Teachers ensured that students too had some autonomy in the classroom. As shown in Figure 5.2, 64 per cent of ETSS student survey respondents indicated they have a choice in how they show their learning either 'often' or 'very often'. Maintaining the wellbeing of students, ensuring that learning occurs on track, keeping in mind age-appropriate teaching techniques, and respecting school rules were priorities for teachers. After these conditions were met, teachers offered options among which students could make choices. For example, in Mathematics, students might be asked to complete five questions out of a set of ten. In English, students may get to pick one text to read from among a number of options. Teachers also mentioned that, at times, students were given different options for how they present the outcome of their learning (e.g. video, poster, interview etc.) and choices as to whether they would like to work in groups or individually. In some classes, students were involved in the process of designing the success criteria. Giving students choices emerged as one of the means through which differentiated teaching occurs at ETSSs.

> *'I do differentiate tasks every week on a Friday based around a novel of their choice that they're reading and a plethora of different tasks, learning tasks that they can complete. So, you know, some might be more visual, some might be more kinaesthetic. Like it just -- I think they actually have a lot of autonomy to choose their learning tasks, you know. I think it's really important to give them that freedom as well because not every kid learns the same.'* (Teacher, School Oak)

What teachers want their students to learn

As expected, teaching the National Curriculum was a key priority for the teachers. Teachers were also keen that their students were supported in learning important

values and skills that will be useful to them and facilitate their personal growth. Overall, the skills and values discussed by teachers aligned with the ideal of a holistic education, blended with skills needed in the current socio-political context. Often, these values derived from having Ethical Education embedded across the curriculum, as discussed in Chapter 6.

One teacher wanted their students to learn 'the ability to communicate clearly' in writing and orally and to 'be aware readers', particularly on social media. Another teacher said they want students to feel 'inspired' and to have 'the confidence to do anything they want to do', yet also to acknowledge their privilege and that they have the responsibility to 'use that privilege to do more good'. The importance of hard work, personal responsibility and taking ownership of their own learning were key values many teachers wanted their students to learn. Several parents also emphasised that their children are becoming aware of the fact that they are responsible for their own learning. These parents credited ETSSs for instilling this value in their children. Learning to nurture positive relationships was an important value some teachers also wanted their students to develop. Teachers also wanted their students to become life-long learners, to continue reading and remain inquisitive.

5.5 INTEREST IN LEARNING

Teachers were asked to describe the extent to which their students are interested in learning. While some teachers believe that their students varied in their level of interest, others described their students as having a high level of interest in learning. In part, the divergent views among teachers can be explained by variations between schools. Some teachers also suggested that variations also exist between classes and cohorts in relation to their interest in learning. Most notably, second-year students were viewed as being less interested in learning, a finding noted in broader research (see McCoy et al., 2019a). For some teachers, variable motivation between students in terms of achieving academically was also seen as evidence of diversity in engagement and interest in learning. However, many teachers considered this diversity as part and parcel of an inclusive school environment, as captured by the quote below.

> *'Again, like any school, you have such a range, you have some kids who are so highly driven and then you have other kids where it's not as big as a priority and then you've got other kids who just struggle to access the curriculum, so there's always that uphill battle with them. I would find with some of the kids like that, especially the ones who are struggling to access the curriculum, there's definitely a -- rather than be seen to fail, they'd rather be seen to not try, you know that kind of a way. So, rather than putting themselves out there and actually do it and not be able to do it, they'd rather just kind of step back and withdraw themselves from the situation. But I wouldn't say it's any*

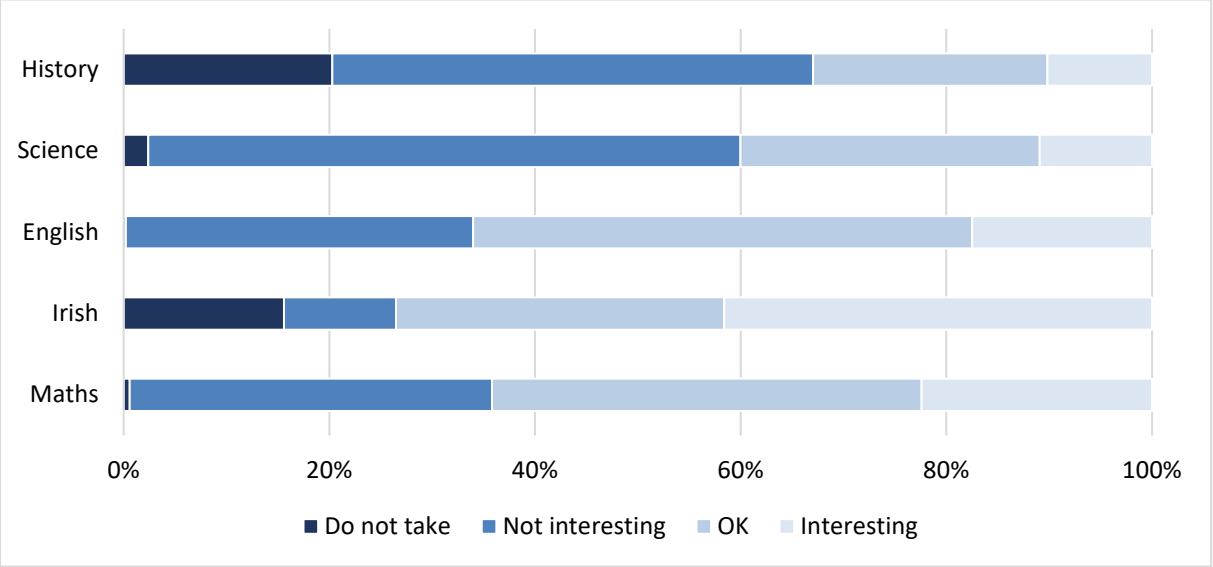
> *different to any other school I've been in. You've always got a cohort of kids that are extremely driven, you've always got the middle ground of kids that are there or thereabouts and they need a little bit of a push and then you've always got the kind of the minority of kids who definitely need a lot more support and motivation.'* (Teacher, School Sequoia)

Students who participated in the focus groups were also asked how important learning is for their peers. Students too shared that interest in learning among their peers was mixed. Across focus group participants, students provided answers including 'half-half', '70/30', 'it depends', and 'some'. In response to this question students also suggested that some of their peers who are not interested in learning contribute towards class disruptions. At the same time, focus group participants indicated that they themselves were interested in learning and were aiming for high academic achievement.

The ETSS student survey asked students how interesting they find Mathematics, Irish, English, Science and History, as well as how difficult they find these subjects. Overall, 16 per cent of survey respondents did not take Irish. National data indicate that in 2014, 8 per cent of post-primary students had an Irish exemption (Darmody and Smyth, 2016). In contrast, only 5.5 per cent of the GUI child cohort at age 13 did not take Irish. GUI also does not ask students about how interested they are in History or how difficult they find this subject. Overall, a negligible proportion of both GUI child cohort students at age 13 and ETSS student survey respondents did not take English and Mathematics. While a larger share of ETSS student survey respondents indicated they do not take Science (2.4 per cent) than the GUI population (0.6 per cent), this difference is small enough to allow comparisons between the two groups. The findings in this section may be partially explained by the high level of additional educational need among students at ETSSs.

More than 60 per cent of ETSS student survey respondents found Mathematics, Irish and English either 'OK' or 'interesting'. Across respondents, 20 per cent did not take History and 33 per cent found the subject to be either 'OK' or 'interesting'.

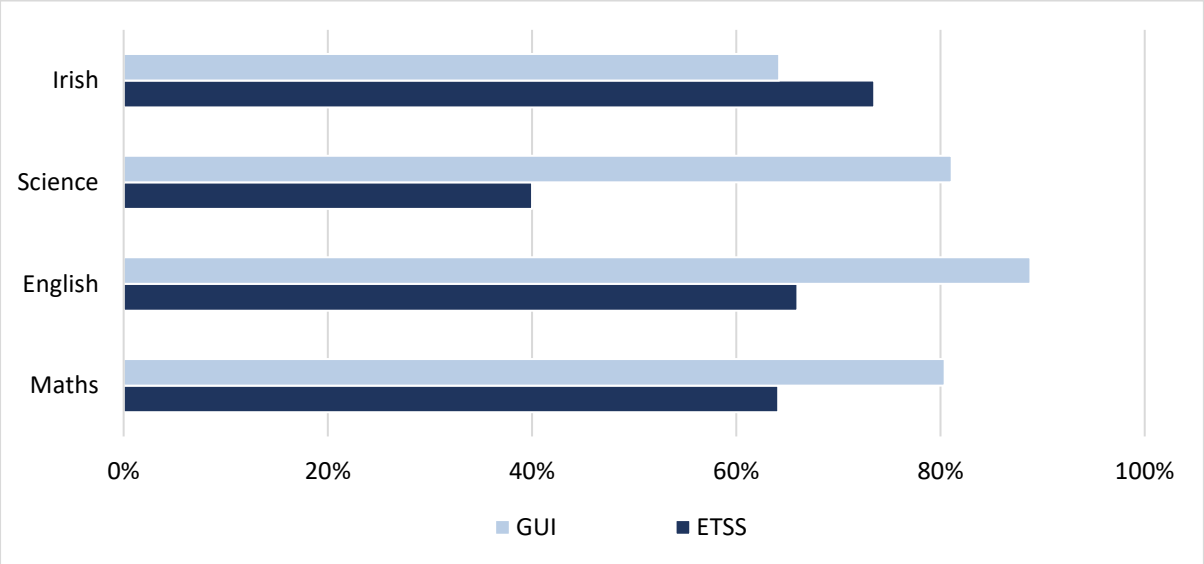
FIGURE 5.3 EXTENT TO WHICH RESPONDENTS FIND SUBJECTS INTERESTING (ALL SCHOOLS)



Source: Survey of first- and second-year students at ETSSs.

In contrast, a larger share of GUI respondents indicated they find Science, English and Mathematics either 'OK' or 'Interesting', but fewer GUI respondents found Irish to be either 'OK' or 'Interesting'. The widest gap between GUI respondents and ETSS student survey respondents is registered for Science, where GUI respondents are twice as likely to report an interest compared to ETSS student survey respondents (see Figure 5.4).

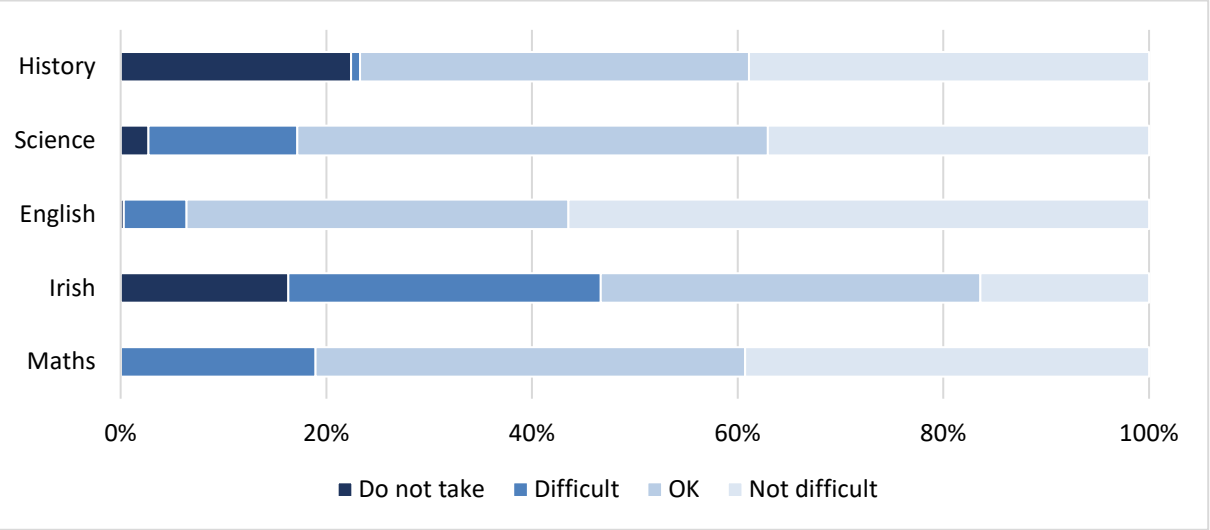
FIGURE 5.4 EXTENT TO WHICH RESPONDENTS FIND SUBJECTS OK OR INTERESTING (ETSS-GUI COMPARISON)



Source: Survey of first- and second-year students at ETSSs and *Growing Up in Ireland*, Child Cohort, Wave 2 (at 13 years).

In terms of perceived difficulty, over 80 per cent of ETSS student survey respondents found Mathematics, Science and English to be either 'OK' or 'not difficult'. The equivalent percentages for History (71 per cent) and Irish (53 per cent) were lower.

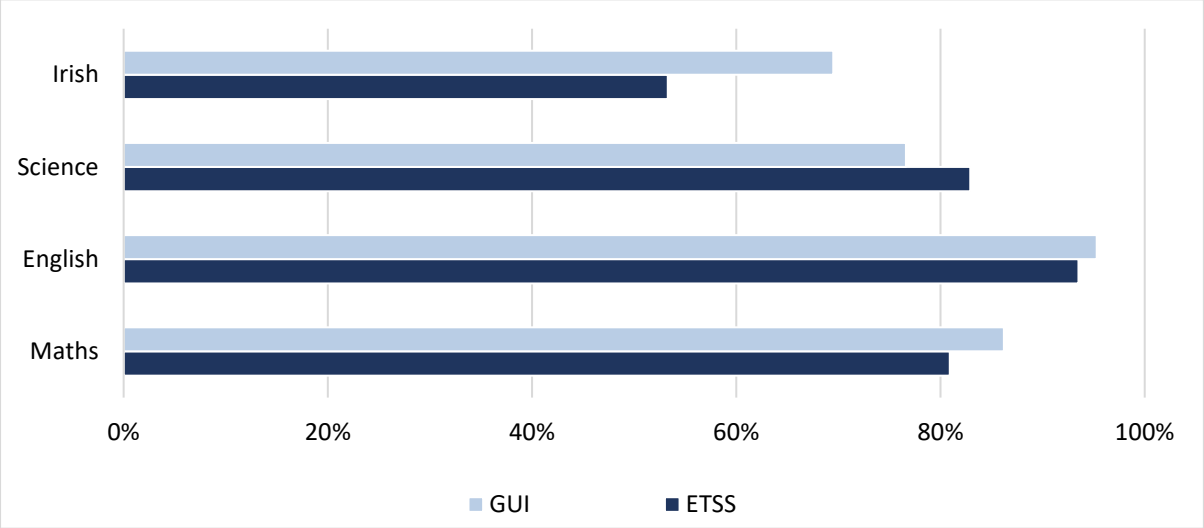
FIGURE 5.5 EXTENT TO WHICH RESPONDENTS FIND SUBJECTS DIFFICULT (ALL SCHOOLS)



Source: Survey of first- and second-year students at ETSSs.

The difference between the GUI cohort and the ETSS student survey cohort in terms of perceived subject difficulty is much smaller than the differences recorded on the interest question. Overall, a slightly higher share of ETSS students appear to find Science to be either 'OK' or 'not difficult' than GUI respondents. For both English and Mathematics, a marginally smaller fraction of ETSS student survey respondents found the subjects to be either 'OK' or 'nor difficult'.

FIGURE 5.6 EXTENT TO WHICH RESPONDENTS FIND SUBJECTS OK OR NOT DIFFICULT ETSS-GUI COMPARISON



Source: Survey of first- and second-year students at ETSSs and *Growing Up in Ireland*, Child Cohort, Wave 2 (at 13 years).

5.6 WHAT HELPS STUDENTS LEARN AND WHAT MAKES A GOOD TEACHER

In focus groups, students were asked what helps them learn and what makes a 'good teacher'. Students had relatively divergent yet complementary answers to the question 'what helps you learn'. In contrast, students seemed to be in greater agreement regarding what makes a good teacher. In many ways, each student indicated that they learn in a slightly different way. Some students preferred listening and having quiet classrooms, others indicated they prefer reading and writing things down, whereas having visual references were important for another subset of students. Some students preferred interactive lessons, hands-on approaches, gamified contents, the use of anecdotes and personal stories, team-work, when teacher broke down 'big lessons' into smaller units, and outdoor lessons. These examples provided by students are indicators that students generally preferred active teaching methods. Student preferences were very much in alignment with the teaching approaches preferred by teachers. At times, when students discussed how they best learn, they provided examples based on their experience at school.

> *'(Name of teacher) brought us out into the yard last year and we had chalk and we like made like sets and stuff, what we were doing in Maths. We were doing Venn diagrams, so we had to draw them and basically we were doing the exact same thing we do on paper, but we were doing it outside in chalk.'* (Focus group participant)

More frequently students appreciated having choices in how to address a problem (particularly in Mathematics). Students also appreciated the patience of teachers

when they explained things multiple times or in different ways. At the same time, it was important for students that teachers balance offering further explanations to students who require it with providing additional work to students who understood the concepts at hand – students appreciated differentiated teaching.

> *Participant 1: 'And the teachers, they have no problem going over stuff, so like they're really patient with everyone in the class and they make sure they're all up to speed to everything, they make sure that every single person in the class understands it before they move on, which I think is really good. Because like sometimes you'd like be halfway through a lesson and someone would still not understand the start of a lesson, so I think it's very good that they take their time and they make before -- they do every subject really well, instead of rushing through and trying to get it all done quickly.'*
>
> *Participant 2: 'Yes, but if like there was a student that was like really getting it and there wasn't others, the others they probably like teach them that again but for the ones that are getting along well, they may give them like an exercise or something to do like while they're waiting. So, the person who think -- they think may be able to go faster doesn't have to wait for a long time.'* (Focus group participants, School Hawthorn)

Some students also felt they learn well when they teach their peers or they learn from their peers, signalling an appreciation of peer learning.

> *Participant 1: 'Like sometimes we'll work in teams, make a PowerPoint, and then teach the class ourselves. I feel like whoever does the best PowerPoint we get like a prize at the end. It's like that's a really good thing because then we kind of engage. We're like, "Okay. We want to do the best", so we then teach and then we're also learning ourselves when we're teaching others. So I think that's a really good factor as well.'*
>
> *Participant 2: 'And you get respect for them, teachers teaching you. You're like, oh no, this is actually harder than it looks.'* (Focus group participants, School Chestnut)

Notably, students also generally agreed that the use of technology has a positive effect on their learning. Some students suggested that personal devices enhanced their engagement with learning, in line with recent research (Coyne and McCoy, 2020). More notably, the use of technology facilitated the involvement of students for whom English was not their native language. One focus group participant described that they used their tablet to translate subject material into their native language. This is also something that the research team noticed during the school visit. Several students who took the ETSS student survey translated either sections

or the entire survey into their native language. More details on the use of technology at ETSS is provided in Section 5.7.

In interviews, the majority of parents agreed that the learning needs of their children were met within the school. Parents praised teachers and most parents indicated their children are getting on well academically within the school. Several parents mentioned they appreciate the balance between 'academic rigour' and 'personal formation' in the school. A few parents indicated that they were somewhat concerned that their children are not challenged enough in school. This aspect is further discussed in Section 7.3.

A good teacher was primarily described by students as 'nice', 'friendly ', and 'fun'. Yet equally important, good teachers were also 'fair' and maintained an orderly classroom environment. Notably, the centrality of respect between teachers and students – a key feature of the student experience at ETSSs and the school ethos, as discussed in Section 4.3 – was also mentioned as an attribute of good teachers. This attribute is aptly captured by the exchange between focus group participants below.

> *Participant 1: 'This is what like our tutor said at the start of the year, "… After being in second year you want to be able to talk to us, like we're like adults… we need to develop that skill for you". And so I think as much as we should respect the teachers, if I respect a teacher a certain amount I want just as much respect back. They can still give out to me and like punish me for -- if I'm misbehaving, which is like fair but I still want respect if I'm giving them respect, which I think is fair enough.'*
>
> *Participant 2: 'And I think they do give us the respect that we…'*
>
> *Participant 1: 'Yes.'* (Focus group participants, School Hawthorn).

5.7 ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

On arrival at many of the case study schools, the researchers were immediately aware of the central place of technology, both at a classroom level and among students, as students used tablet PCs in many of the schools. As the Blueprint for ETSS envisaged,

> *'traditional teaching approaches, based on direct instruction and textbook learning alone, will not adequately develop in students these capacities and improve achievement'.*

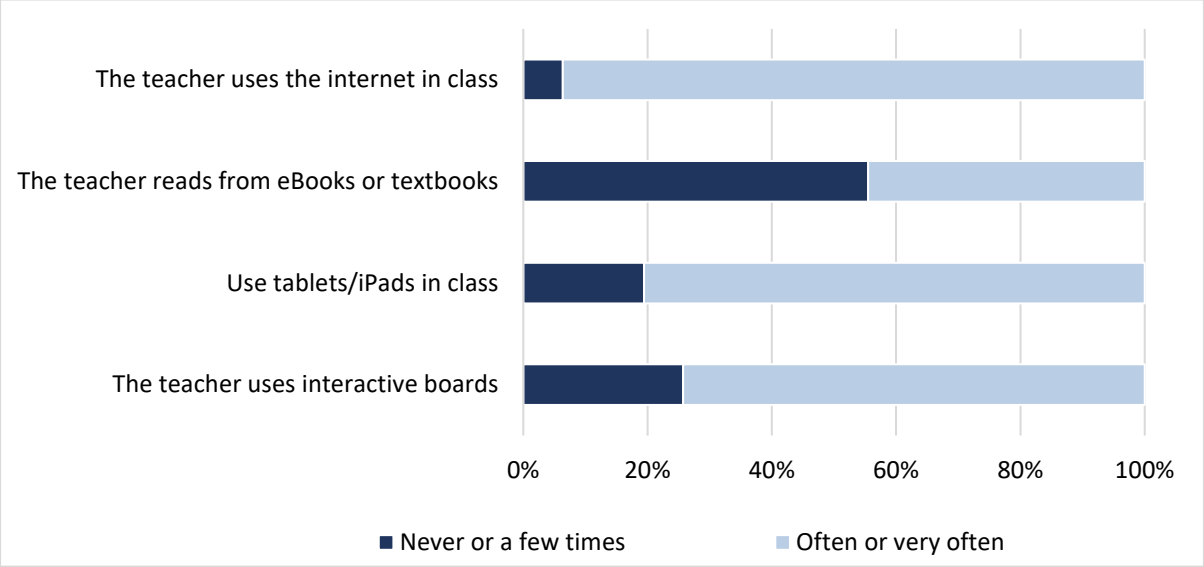
Why the use of technology in teaching matters

Overall, the potential for digital technologies to enhance student learning, within and outside the classroom, has been shown both in the Irish context (McCoy et al., 2016) and beyond (Balanskat, 2007). Most recently, Coyne and McCoy (2020) show that tablet PCs provide another way to actively engage students. This is only achieved with the right infrastructure – including conditions such as reliable school and home Internet, teacher's skills and competency and technical support (McCoy et al., 2016). However, evidence shows that students' experience of technology varies hugely, as school autonomy allows some schools to market themselves as 'tech driven', while others take a blended or even traditional approach. It has also been noted that in these more innovative schools, teachers typically create their own online resources, work that is often done in a piecemeal manner without the necessary resources (Marcus-Quinn et al., 2019; McCoy et al., 2016). Principals report that guidance on the integration and use of ICT from the Department of Education and Skills has not kept pace with developments in technology (McCoy et al., 2016). Marcus-Quinn et al. (2019) also note that the lack of clear policy by the Department of Education and Skills has led to resistance by many stakeholders in embedding the use of technology into schools, and particularly teaching and learning. In this context, it is important to assess student's and teacher's perspectives on the role and impact of technology at Educate Together schools.

Student views on the use of technology at school

Both survey data and focus group interviews revealed that digital technologies assumed a central place in teaching and learning across ETSSs. Across nearly all of the schools, students used tablet PCs in class, in the vast majority of cases the devices were bought and owned by the students (or their parents). Figure 5.7 illustrates that 94 per cent of students reported that their teacher used the internet in class 'often or very often', and 74 per cent reported that their teachers used interactive whiteboards in class this frequently. Eighty-one per cent indicate that they used tablet devices in class 'often' or 'very often', a very high figure by national standards. The use of more traditional, didactic teaching methodologies, for example the teacher reading from a (e-)book, varied with 45 per cent of students indicating that this occurred 'often' or 'very often'.

FIGURE 5.7 FREQUENCY OF TECHNOLOGY-RELATED TEACHING PRACTICES (ACROSS SCHOOLS)



Source: Survey of first- and second-year students at ETSSs.

Almost all of the schools had a 'no mobile phone' policy, phones have to be left in the student's bag, powered off, or in their locker. In discussing this, students were largely accepting of these rules.

> *'But I think it's fair enough that there's a very strict no-phones policy because you wouldn't know what people would be posting on like anything [social media]. And it -- then they do give you chances, like if your phone does go off in class on accident, they do give you a few chances before they like have to like get your parents to come collect your phone because they realise sometimes mistakes do happen like that. But they are quite strict on no phones.'* (Focus group participant)

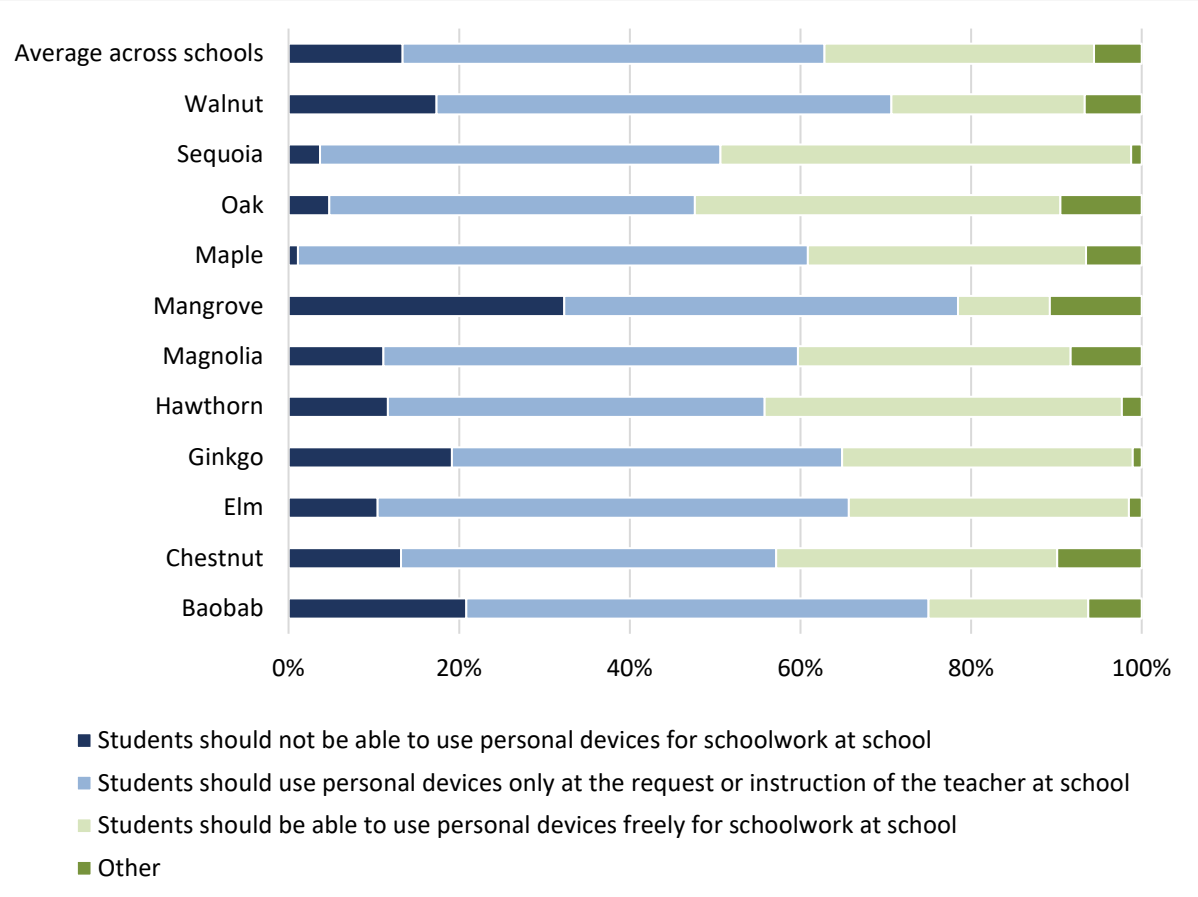
However, survey data showed that students varied somewhat in their views of the extent to which access to all personal devices – (smart)phones and tablets – should be restricted. While one-third of students in Mangrove held the view that students should not be able to use such devices in the classroom, this view was held by less than 5 per cent of students in Oak, Sequoia and Maple (Figure 5.8). In contrast, a large share of students at Hawthorn (42 per cent), Oak (43 per cent) and Sequoia (48 per cent) felt that students should be able to use personal devices freely while at school.

In common with recent research (Coyne and McCoy, 2020), across the focus groups the majority of students held the view that tablet PCs supported their learning and they explained this in different ways. Having access to subject material and notes simultaneously on video and personal device was seen by students as helpful, making it a more 'interactive experience'.

Participant 1: 'They [teachers] keep us really engaged, so you're never sitting in class without something to do, and you're never bored. I suppose they -- we have big TVs, so [name of teacher], the Maths teacher, if he's writing something on his iPad, it'll show up on the TV and our iPads, so you always know what he's doing.'

Participant 2: 'Yes, I think they've got a lot of tech involved at the moment, which is really good. I find I learn a lot in Maths class, and that's probably due to [name of teacher] being really tech-savvy, so he's able to -- he has the whole thing where it shows up on our iPad whenever he writes something on the OneNote. So you're able to have the notes in front of you that he's taken down, and you can look over them when you're done.' (Focus group participants)

FIGURE 5.8 HOW SHOULD YOUR PERSONAL SMART PHONES AND TABLETS BE USED FOR SCHOOLWORK AT YOUR SCHOOL?



Source: Survey of first- and second-year students at ETSSs.

For some, the technology supported project work and the preparation of presentations allowed them to better engage with the subject content.

> *'Like, the computers really do help. Like, it helps you organise, like with all the folders on OneNote. It helps you organise everything and it's where you can see that the teacher puts things. On Teams it gives you notification when you have an assignment so you don't -- you won't miss it.'* (Focus group participant)

For others, translating subject material into their own language was important in supporting their learning. A number of students highlighted being able to access more up-to-date information than might be available in a textbook.

> *'Yeah, everything's much more up to date than like some books are because they'll get like published in 2012 and stuff. And you're still using them and some of the facts might have changed.'* (Focus group participant)

Students also noted the physical benefits of carrying a tablet PC, rather than a heavy bag, also highlighted in recent research (Coyne and McCoy, 2020). While students in general were in favour of having tablet PCs, some would also like to have physical textbooks, but they appreciated the cost having both would entail. Indeed, earlier research has highlighted the financial difficulties that can be created from the requirement to purchase tablet devices (Coyne and McCoy, 2020). Technical problems with the school-provided laptops also appeared to be prominent across few schools, a significant issue also reported in the recent Dunne et al. (2020) review.

> *Participant 1: 'Everyone's always like, "Oh, yeah, mine goes dead too quick. Mine keeps on glitching, it just keeps on turning off".'*
>
> *Participant 2: 'There's always problems with the laptops.'*
>
> *Participant 3: 'Yeah, there's not one class, or, like, one day without a problem with one laptop.'* (Focus group participants)

The recent review of tablet devices in Ratoath College also highlighted distraction as one of the key themes that emerged from the review (Dunne et al., 2020). This aligned with a number of international studies which also reported that the iPad and similar devices can be major sources of distraction for students (Alhumaid, 2019; Karsenti and Fievez, 2013; Dempsey et al., 2018). Students in our research also felt the devices allowed some students to drift to other non-academic activities, but in some cases it was also accepted that these students are likely to be less focused with or without the technology.

> *Participant 1: 'I think the iPads have helped. They can lead to a lot of distractions for the students that aren't willing to put in the effort and like, not play games. But if you're willing just to actually do your work it's very helpful.'*

> *Participant 2: 'I think the people who don't want to focus aren't going to focus regardless though, whether you've an iPad or not. They will find a way to just distract the whole class. At least with an iPad they're just doing it by themselves.'* (Focus group participants at one school)
>
> *Participant 1: 'But some people in class they always, like… they mess around.'*
>
> *Participant 2: 'They mess with it [the tablet], like, because we have Minecraft on it. Like, we use Minecraft for Geography sometimes, so they just use that, like, in different classes when they're not supposed to. Some people watch YouTube videos and they just, like, mess around and they, like, just do whatever and they don't listen.'*
>
> *Participant 1: 'Go on to things they're not supposed to during class time when they're supposed to be concentrating.'* (Focus group participants at a different school)

The technology can also allow students to impact on other student's focus and 'get other students into trouble', for example by dropping inappropriate content onto their device.

> *'It's [the tablet PCs are] good but then sometimes in class people airdrop you, and then you can get in trouble, and then you get a yearbook [a note in yearbook].'* (Focus group participant)

When working at home, the potential for distractions was seen as greater for some students:

> *'I guess I sometimes dislike the iPads, because I feel like it can sometimes hinder the learning at home. Say one is to do homework or research on an iPad, some might -- some might use it to their advantage and go on to an online app, such as YouTube, and get completely derailed from the task.'* (Focus group participant)

However, not all schools had a policy where students bought their own tablet PCs. In one school, where laptops were provided by the school for students to use in class, the issue of the maintenance of the equipment arose.

> *'Like, I do appreciate the fact that there's laptops and everything for us to use but I don't know how you'd do this but to just like maintain them… better to make sure that there isn't, like, a keyboard that has like an F key missing and then you can't press it and it gets really annoying.'* (Focus group participant)

This was a significant issue in the large-scale McCoy et al. (2016) study following the roll-out of high-speed broadband across second-level schools – an investment which removed a significant barrier for schools, namely inadequate and unreliable internet connection for schools. However, other infrastructural issues became more salient (such as internal school network reliability, ICT equipment quality, the availability and accessibility of online resources, capacity to meet the requirements of the reformed junior cycle and technical support). Recent research in the context of COVID-19 has further highlighted the challenges for schools, and families, in having the appropriate technological resources (devices and high-quality broadband) to support learning (Mohan et al., 2020). Further, given that some of our case study schools were located in temporary (often unsuitable) accommodation, it was perhaps not surprising to find that the quality of the WiFi severely hampered the integration of technology in teaching and learning. In some of the schools one teacher took on the role of providing technical support for students using their tablet PCs.

> *'We have this system where if our iPads break down we can just send this IT ticket to him [teacher], and he'll just come any time of the day and just fix your iPad for you.'* (Focus group participant)

Across many of the schools, teachers looking after technical support in their school generally also took responsibility for ensuring that restrictions were placed on all devices so that non-educational sites could not be accessed. These restrictions were usually implemented following consultation with parents. This issue was raised by McCoy et al. (2016) who noted that teaching staff are frequently over-burdened with technical issues and troubleshooting, often in the absence of external technical support services. Further, McCoy et al. (2016) found that while many schools now have ICT coordinators, their role is often limited to a technical role rather than guiding future developments in ICT integration and pedagogical change.

Students generally regarded teachers as well versed in using the technology effectively across the schools, with newer teachers sometimes taking a period to adjust to the high-tech environment.

> *'I think for the most part [teachers use technology well]… we have got two new teachers this year and they're not as good with the technology. But like most of the -- all the teachers we've had from last year, for me anyway, are really -- like they're really good at it now. So I think it just takes a little bit of practice, but like for the most part it's organised and everything's uploaded and whatever.'* (Focus group participant)

Teacher views of technology

Teachers too were attracted to the value placed on technology in ETSSs, and this was cited by some as a reason for applying to the school. In describing the characteristics of their school, the terms 'innovative' and 'technology-based' were referenced by some teachers.

> *'I would say it's [the school is] very dynamic. It's very innovative and I think in the last 18 months I've done more around technology than I have in my previous school in ten years.'* (Teacher, School Oak)

Across both induction and CPD provision, 'there was a considerable focus on technology… of course, because it's an iPad school' (English teacher, School Chestnut). This focus on technology was largely viewed positively by teachers at the 11 schools.

> *'I think I love having the iPad, like it's amazing, so like it's just such an aid in the classroom for the students and for you as a teacher, having like the TV is amazing, just all the resources that are available; that's one of the -- I love that about this school in particular is having those resources.'* (Teacher, School Mangrove)

Teachers also felt technology gave them the opportunity to vary their approach and meet student needs more effectively.

> *'It's not all about the technology but the technology does aid that engagement, it does keep it very relevant to them and then they can access it their way. So you'll have some students that -- there's sometimes when I'll say: "Right, this is a copy, you know, we're using it, we're writing" because obviously that's a very important skill but there there's sometimes I'm able to say: "You can decide what you want to do, you can write your copy, you know, you can take a screenshot of it, you know, do it on your iPad, create a doc, you can create a slide, it's completely up to you." So it gives -- yeah, it gives you freedom to allow them to do that.'* (Teacher, School Ginkgo)

Teachers varied in the way in which technology was used, sometimes reflecting different subject areas or different topics. In many cases, teachers felt that a balanced approach was important in terms of students engaging in writing activities and working on their tablet.

> *'It just depends on the lesson and it depends on the subject. Like obviously I like to strike a good balance so their literacy skills are not compromised. So it could be 50:50. It could be 50 per cent maybe them writing in their hardback and then it could be 50 per cent they're doing*

like a task on their iPads. So it varies from lesson to lesson but I do integrate a lot of the iPads into their learning.' (Teacher, School Oak)

Teachers also noted that they expanded the ways in which they use technology as they gained more experience and built up resources, often sharing resources within subject departments at their school. But finding time to learn about technology and resources is seen as more challenging as these starter schools grow and reach capacity, and is likely to become a more significant issue in the coming years.

'I think it's -- as we're growing, as we're getting bigger, that is something that we're finding a little bit more difficult to scale up, so like when we first opened our doors we had plenty of time, we had only, you know, about eight teachers, so we had a lot of time to kind of invest in training ourselves and training each other… we had five or six new teachers join us this year and it's going to take them a little while to kind of get up to the level of the other teachers, but by showing them what is possible, bringing it up at staff meetings… and constantly coming back to, "Okay, here's how you can use a bit of technology, here's how you can use a bit of technology" we will get there, but it's probably going to be a difficult thing as we scale up, when we're a 1,000 student school.' (Teacher, School Elm)

Many teachers repeatedly reiterated the value of technology, and student personal devices in particular, for undertaking their role.

'So it's great, I find it amazing, I actually don't know how I've taught before having the technology like, especially with music because there's so many learning outcomes that need to be achieved and it just makes it so much easier by having the iPad. Like I feel so sorry for some teachers who have like very limited technology in their classrooms, I just don't know how they're -- I wouldn't know how to do it without the technology. Like it's just brilliant.' (Ethical Education teacher)

Overall, technology is seen as another resource with which to engage students, not something to be used continuously.

'Like I use it in every class but again it's just -- it's another resource… they are not sitting there on their screens for an hour by any means. So if it's like lots of games, lots of active learning, like quizzes, things like that, there's lots of little -- you know, it might be a starter activity that you can use technology for.' (Teacher, School Walnut)

Finally, teachers also noted that a more traditional approach was generally followed for senior cycle students given the nature of the high stakes Leaving Certificate examination. This was also noted by McCoy et al. (2016) who found that the centrality of the Leaving Certificate examination served to limit opportunities for more interactive teaching approaches drawing on ICT and online resources, particularly in the pre-examination period.

> *'But also I think just with the Leaving Cert unfortunately there is just - - with the current Leaving Cert there's just no substitute for just writing from a book, unfortunately.'* (Teacher, School Baobab)

5.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided an in-depth analysis of teaching and learning at ETSSs. The 11 case study schools have attracted dedicated teachers that resonate with the Educate Together ethos and have a keen interest in utilising active and innovative teaching approaches. Teachers make use of a variety of tools to support their differentiated teaching. These include working as part of teaching teams and offering choices to students – within the boundaries of the National Curriculum and in alignment with learning objectives. The teaching practice at ETSSs strongly aligns with how students indicate they learn and what students consider to be a good teacher. Teachers at ETSSs want to instil both a responsibility for their own learning in their students – a feature valued by parents – and a life-long commitment to learning.

Teachers suggested there is a mixed interest in learning among students at ETSSs. This finding is corroborated with insights from student focus groups and the student survey. However, teachers also emphasise that this is a reflection of the inclusive school policies at ETSSs. Notably, the majority of interviewed parents believed that the learning needs of their children are met within the school. ETSSs also make extensive use of technology in teaching. Eighty-one per cent of respondents to the student survey indicated they use tablets/iPads in class. While some challenges emerged in the use of technology – particularly in relation to the need for teachers to develop resources and the potential for student distraction – teachers and students believe technology can be a valuable tool to support student learning. The next chapter focuses on the provision of Ethical Education at ETSSs.

CHAPTER 6

Ethical Education

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Ethical Education is a school subject taught across school years at ETSSs. The subject aims

> *'to encourage and provide a space for students to develop awareness of different perspectives, reflect on their own views and biases and to think critically, question, and take action on equality and justice issues in their communities.'* (Educate Together n.d.)

With some variation between junior and senior cycle, the Ethical Education curriculum centres around nine strands: values; making moral and ethical decisions; beliefs and worldviews; different teachings and perspectives; diversity in Ireland; migration; power and participation; gender equality; and global citizenship education. While students at ETSS learn about religious and non-theistic belief systems as part of the Ethical Education curriculum, the schools do not engage in specific religious formation (Educate Together, n.d.)

The breadth, status, and even the subject name 'Ethical Education' varied across the ETSSs visited. However, values associated with the Ethical Education curriculum were covered across all schools. Teachers across subjects provided extensive examples on how they embed Ethical Education in their classes. This section includes an overview of how Ethical Education is taught at ETSSs, how it is embedded across the school curriculum, and how students view Ethical Education. The ETSS student survey included measures of the global citizenship and global outlook of students; outcomes aligned with the Ethical Education subject. These measures are included at the end of this chapter.

6.2 PROVISION OF ETHICAL EDUCATION

Ethical Education teachers specifically, and teachers more broadly, believed that the provision of Ethical Education is supported extensively by Educate Together. One Ethical Education coordinator described that different curriculum documents have been developed for the junior and the senior cycles. Whereas the junior cycle curriculum has nine strands, the senior cycle includes six strands. Ethical Education teachers receive a curriculum document for junior cycle and a teacher guide for senior cycle. There are also vast online resources available to teachers on the Educate Together website,[21] as well as school developed resources, as both schools and teachers were encouraged to tailor Ethical Education content to the needs of

[21] Educate Together https://learning.educatetogether.ie/course/view.php?id=26#section-2 [Accessed on May 27, 2020].

the students. Teachers at ETSSs can also access an online course on Ethical Education and attend various professional development events aimed to support their teaching of the subject. Among others, Ethical Education teachers mentioned having been engaged in professional development activities about global citizenship and the promotion of sustainable development goals. One science teacher recalled a professional development day that included meeting with other ETSS subject teachers to discuss how to include Ethical Education in their subject areas.

Ethical Education teachers believed that the subject they teach is valuable to students. In particular, teachers felt that the subject increases students' awareness about their personal values, thus facilitating self-discovery. At the same time, some teachers mentioned that students might not be aware of the importance of Ethical Education.

> *'Building a robust citizen is probably the best way I can think of it, enabling them to have that empathy for other people, not just in the context of people in school, but the wider community, trying to make them have a global citizen aspect… they're learning about wider issues, migration, integration into society, cultural changes, etc. It's a fantastic subject to teach and I'm fortunate to have taught it last year and would have been enjoyable I think if I'd learned it in school as well, but it's definitely a cornerstone of the school having that ethical approach to our teaching and then the foundation with these embedded ethical lessons.'* (Ethical Education Teacher)

Ethical Education teachers and coordinators also mentioned a few challenges associated with teaching the subject. While teachers believed broadly that the '*resources around Ethical Education are strong*', for one Ethical Education teacher not having a textbook was a challenge. While this teacher acknowledges that there are many resources available, they explained that not having a textbook results in needing more time to prepare lessons. A few Ethical Education coordinators also mentioned that, at times, they have difficulty gaining buy-in from other teachers at the school to either teach the subject or embed it into their own subjects. At one school, tutors were responsible for teaching Ethical Education. This arrangement proved to be difficult, as some tutors used the time for other tutor activities. At another school, the Ethical Education coordinator felt that colleagues viewed the subject as less important, partly owing to the fact that it is a non-exam subject. At times, teachers felt somewhat uncomfortable about teaching the subject – this was particularly true for newly hired teachers – or teaching more sensitive components of the Ethical Education curriculum. Across schools, there was wide variation in the perceived support from school management for the subject. For some Ethical Education teachers, this was seen as a challenge.

> *'I think I'm really lucky, and this is not the same in other Educate Together schools because I've spoken to other Ethical Education teachers, because Ethical Education is so -- such an important subject and probably a core subject in the school from the very beginning. It's highly regarded, which I'm very fortunate about because I know that in some schools it's kind of lumped in with SPHE or kind of only done by DIPs or PMEs and it doesn't have the same impact. So I'm really lucky here. The principal is really supportive of Ethical Education and he drives it and it's really, really good. I'm fortunate.'* (Ethical Education Teacher)

6.3 EMBEDDING ETHICAL EDUCATION ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Ethical Education played different roles at different schools. At most schools, Ethical Education was a key component of the curriculum, while at other schools it had a more limited role. Some of these variations were linked to the size of the school and others were linked to the different management body arrangements. However, due to the small number of schools included in the study, it is not possible to attribute variation in ethical education provision to any specific factors. Several teachers described how the provision of Ethical Education featured in the school hiring processes. At most schools, curriculum development and planning processes actively prompted teachers to think about how Ethical Education can be embedded in their teaching. In addition, aspects of the teaching philosophy across schools – including student centred learning and the importance of respect – were also aligned with Ethical Education.

All teachers interviewed were asked how they integrate Ethical Education in their classes and across the curriculum. The majority of teachers provided a breadth of examples on how Ethical Education is integrated across the curriculum. Science and English lessons often included discussions on ethical dilemmas and a deeper understanding of the human condition. Examples provided by teachers included discussing views of different religions on the use of in-vitro fertilisation in a Biology class, debates about body positivity in online environments in a Wellbeing class, and linking migration in a lesson on Shakespeare. While Mathematics teachers mentioned that they find it more difficult to embed Ethical Education in their teaching, one Mathematics teacher recollected facilitating a class discussion on how different countries' finances allow resilience in the face of climate change.

Ethical Education was not only part of the classroom experience, but other school aspects. One teacher described engaging their tutor group in case study discussions on prejudice. A few teachers explained how Ethical Education guides school trip planning. School policies more broadly were developed using the principles of Ethical Education.

> *'What is really unique about this school is that the Ethical Education curriculum is deeply embedded in everything that we do. So even things like policy writing, board meetings, assemblies, Ethical Education always come into that. We have our (identifiable structure for Ethical Education) for Ethical Education and it kind of weaves in and out of all the subjects, it weaves in and out of, as I say, policy writing and meetings that we have. It seems to be a very good framework for us to operate under. I think it's really useful for us to have as well as a subject because even recently now when we were planning our school trip, for example, we had a look at the Ethical Education curriculum and we tried to see how the school trip could fit in with the Ethical Education. So, whether that was migration or diversity, we try and bring all of that into our school trip... So I find it a really useful kind of framework to have within the school.'* (Ethical Education Teacher)

At the same time, some teachers recognised that the integration of Ethical Education across the curriculum is very much a work in progress. In at least one school, the integration of Ethical Education across the curriculum lagged behind other areas, because other policy areas took priority in the new school, indicating that the integration of Ethical Education across subjects requires ongoing active work and commitment at a whole school level.

6.4 HOW STUDENTS VIEW ETHICAL EDUCATION

Across schools and school years, students believed that learning about ethics mattered for their lives, in and out of school. Students described a breadth of topics and ideas they are exposed to as part of Ethical Education classes. Students mentioned learning about broad concepts such as different values and how to respect diversity, what equality means and how to include others, rights and responsibilities and how they differ across cultural and geographic regions, and humanitarian problems and how to make a difference in the world. They also mentioned learning about specific conditions such as obsessive compulsive disorder and the importance of not mocking people that suffer with this. At its core, students believed that Ethical Education is about learning to make good decisions and being better persons.

> *'I think it's just learning about the decisions you are going to have to make when you're older, and seeing what you think you should do, and what's right.'* (Focus group participant, School Hawthorn)

Students provided examples that suggest Ethical Education lessons have been helpful both within the school context and outside the classroom. Within classrooms, Ethical Education allowed one student to conceptualise the simple act

of raising one's hand before talking as a way to respect and value everybody's opinion, to '*let everyone have a right to speak'*. One student discussed how Ethical Education allowed her to rethink her behaviour of pushing people away when they wanted to help. In another focus group, one student mentioned that, due to Ethical Education classes '*two of the girls; they found €50 on the floor and took it into the office*.'

At the same time, students had a mixed view of Ethical Education. At one school, students found the class 'boring', largely because the teaching approach did not involve classroom interactions and projects. Respondents across focus groups indicated they felt that Ethical Education overlaps with other subjects, particularly Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE). The examples below are from focus groups across different schools.

> *'CSPE I just find is exactly the same as ethical ed and SPHE.'* (Focus group participant, Second Year)
>
> *'We have (acronym for name of Ethical Education in the school), which is (name of Ethical Education in the school), so I think that -- we also have SPHE and CSPE and they're all kind of to do with like the world and how that kind of works and how to treat other people as well. So, we'd have it like three classes a week but to say it's only three classes I think would kind of be silly because in each class they kind of teach you everything to do with the world.'* (Focus group participant, First Year)

In a different focus group, asked if they noticed any overlaps between Ethical Education and other subjects, one student said

> *'Yeah… Not like bad. I just think it's kind of nice to have some – most classes are tied together.'* (Focus group participant)

Overlaps in the content covered by Ethical Education and other subjects were also reported by teachers and school leaders. A few school leaders mentioned they would have preferred to have Ethical Education in lieu of SPHE at the school, rather than both subjects. Several teachers that taught both Ethical Education, SPHE and CSPE tried to avoid overlaps through their planning. More broadly, teachers did not view overlaps as a significant problem. One teacher mentioned that allowing select content to be covered in different ways across multiple classes '*develops more critical thinking skills'.* Another teacher suggested that as the new ETSSs evolve, teachers will be able to better differentiate between Ethical Education, SPHE and CSPE.

> *'I would say they would, yeah. I've definitely experienced students saying, "We've already done this, you know, in SPHE" or whatever. So, I think that they do notice it, so it's finding a way and then, of course, when the school starts up, it's so busy and teachers are so busy that it's very hard to link back in again like you could at the beginning of the year, to find that time to link back in to figure out a way. We're getting better. I think because the school is new, it's a little bit harder because teachers are still finding their way with their subjects, so -- but I do find that there's a bit of a, yeah, there's definitely a bit of repetitiveness about it.'* (Ethical Education Teacher).

Student views of Ethical Education were mediated by their views of their Ethical Education teacher. At one school where students were somewhat unhappy with the subject, several focus group participants admitted that their views about Ethical Education were different in a previous year, when they had a different teacher. In another school students spoke positively about Ethical Education, in large part due to their teacher, as described by the exchange in the following excerpt from a focus group.

> *Participant 1: 'I find it great and a new understanding of the world.'*
>
> *Participant 2: 'Yeah, and like, ethical ed is one of our classes with (name of teacher) and, like, he -- like, sometimes he'll say, like, a small, little detail and it'll change your whole viewpoint on something. And it's just really interesting and cool.'*
>
> *Participant 3: 'He makes us at the start of a class do, like, do kind of questions.'*
>
> *Participant 1: 'Philosophical questions.'*
>
> *Participant 3: 'Yeah, like, they're very, like, they kind of -- like, they change the whole class. Like, you get stuck on it. Like, he starts it and then we all answer the question and then new answers to the question keep going through our head and he's like, "Okay, we have to move on" but we're like, "No, 'cause we need to -- we need the actual answer". And he's like, "There's no right or wrong answer to the question." But it just -- it really -- like, it starts the class off really well and it, like, it gets our heads working.'* (Focus group participants)

Parents were also asked about their view of Ethical Education as a subject. The majority of parents did not have a detailed understanding of the subject or how their children viewed it. However, most parents were aware their children studied the subject and welcomed the idea of teaching students Ethical Education. They mentioned they think the subject is a 'great idea', 'a very good class for them', and 'an important subject to study'.

6.5 GLOBAL COMPETENCY ACTIVITIES AND RESPECT FOR PEOPLE FROM OTHER CULTURES AMONG ETSS STUDENTS

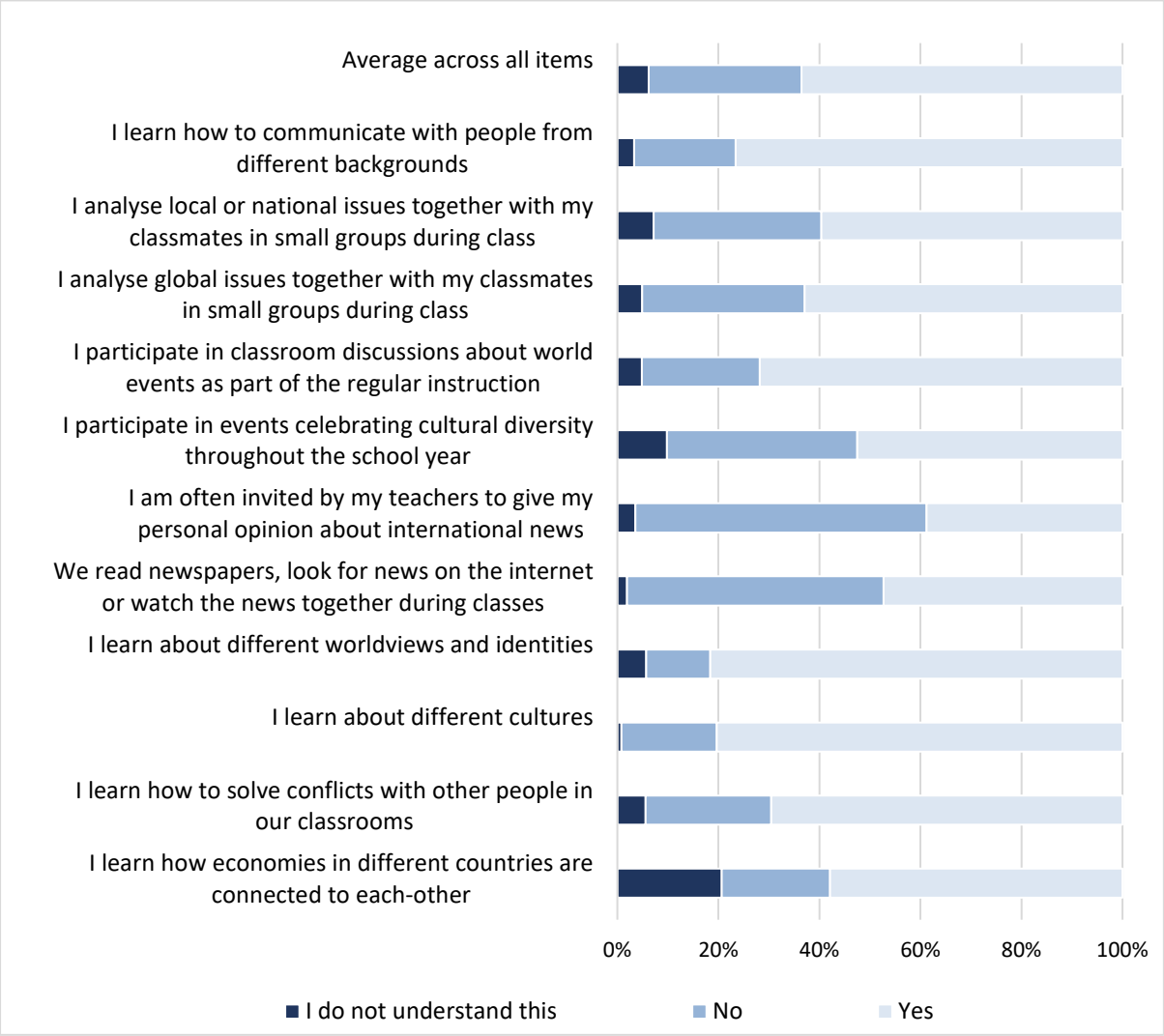
A key component of democratic ideals, and also prominent within the Educate Together equality framework, relates to the area of global competence, which is a multidimensional capacity. Globally competent individuals can examine local, global and intercultural issues, understand and appreciate different perspectives and world views, interact successfully and respectfully with others, and take responsible action toward sustainability and collective wellbeing (OECD, 2018). As part of the ETSS student survey, students were asked how often they engage in global competency activities at school and if they respect people from other cultures, a key component of the Ethical Education curriculum. The OECD notes that schools can provide opportunities for young people to critically examine global developments that are significant to both the world at large and to their own lives. They can teach students how to critically, effectively and responsibly use digital information and social media platforms. Schools can encourage intercultural sensitivity and respect by allowing students to engage in experiences that foster an appreciation for diverse peoples, languages and cultures (Bennett, 1993; Sinicrope et al., 2007; OECD, 2018). Schools are seen as uniquely positioned to enhance young people's ability to understand their place in the community and the world and improve their ability to make judgements and take action (Hanvey, 1975). These outcomes are strongly connected to the aims and practice of Ethical Education at ETSSs.

The scales used for measuring global competencies draw on the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) global competency questionnaire (OECD, 2018). Notably, the PISA assessment is taken by 15-year-olds, and as such has some limitations when applied to 13-year-olds – the average age of the ETSS student survey respondents. While Ireland participated in the 2018 edition of PISA, it did not participate in the optional assessment of global competence. The global results for the 2018 competency assessment are scheduled to be released in October 2020. As such, no comparative figures can be provided for these metrics.

The global competence activities scale asks students to indicate if they engage in a series of activities aimed to promote global competence at their school. The only answer options provided in the original scale are 'yes' and 'no'. Due to the age difference between target student population PISA and ETSS student survey respondents, the authors have decided to include 'I don't understand this' as one of the answer options. Two additional items were added to the original scale: (1) I learn about different cultures and (2) I analyse local or national issues together with my classmates in small groups during class. The scale has been tested for reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.746).

Overall – with the exception of two activities – more than 50 per cent of students stated they engaged all global competence activities included in the scale. Notably, a vast majority of respondents said they learn about different cultures (80 per cent) and about different worldviews and identities (82 per cent) at school. While 21 per cent of respondents indicated they did not understand the meaning of the statement 'I learn how economies in different countries are connected to each other', students overall understood the meaning of most activities listed in the scale. On average, 6 per cent of students did not understand the meaning of the listed activities, 30 per cent indicated they did not engage in the said activity at school, and 64 per cent indicated they had (Figure 6.1).

FIGURE 6.1 GLOBAL COMPETENCE ACTIVITIES AT SCHOOL (ALL SCHOOLS)



Source: Survey of first- and second-year students at ETSSs.

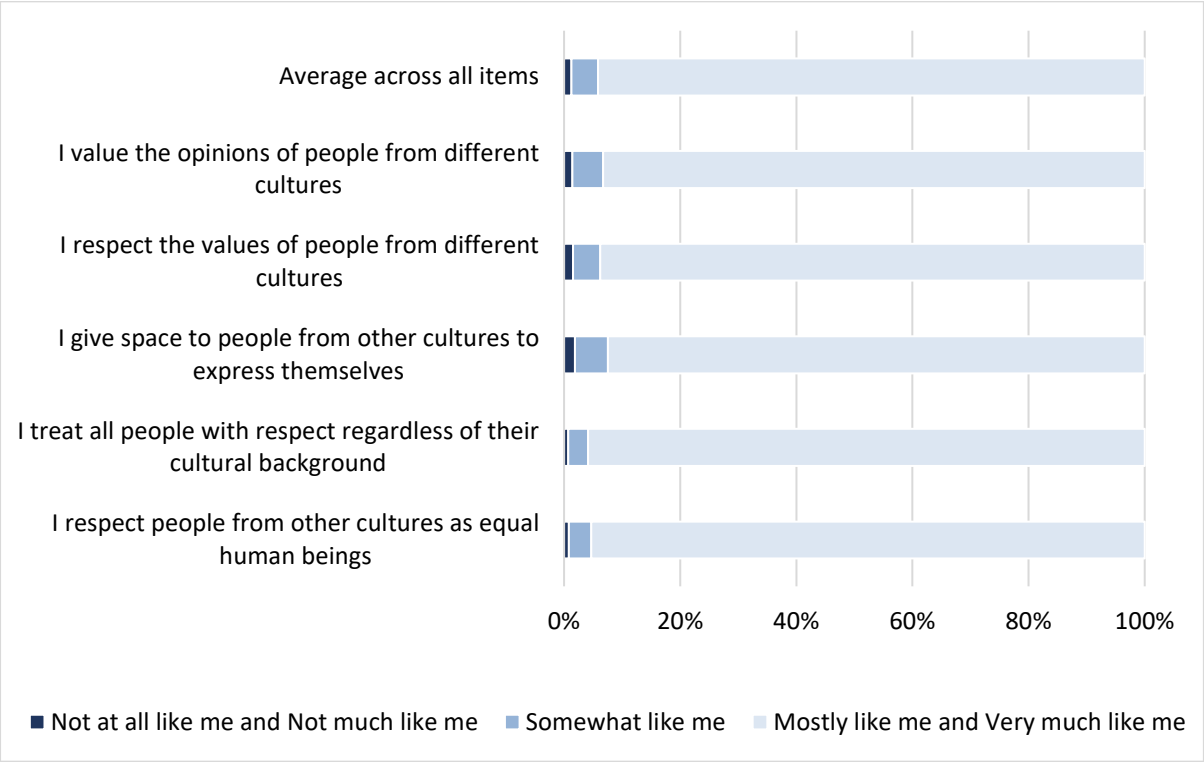
ETSS student survey respondents were also asked to self-evaluate on a number of statements aimed to measure the respect they have for people from other cultures. The respect for people from other cultural backgrounds scale from the

2018 PISA global competence survey was used for this purpose. No changes or adjustments were made by the researchers to the scale. The scale has been tested for reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.90).

Almost unanimously, students across ETSSs indicated they respect people from other cultures. Overall, 94 per cent of survey respondents indicated that they 'value the opinions of people from other cultures', 'respect people from cultures as equal human beings'. In contrast, only 1 per cent of students indicated that these statements are 'not at all like them' or 'not much like them' (see Figure 6.2).

Overall, students across ETSSs seem to be engaged in activities that promote global competence and consider themselves as being respectful towards people from other cultures. While this research is unable to directly link these positive social attitudes among ETSS students to the provision of Ethical Education, the findings are consistent and aligned with the Ethical Education curriculum, corroborated by the positive attitudes towards diversity illustrated by students in the focus groups, and success of school integration policies suggested by belonging measures.

FIGURE 6.2 RESPECT FOR PEOPLE FROM OTHER CULTURES ACROSS SCHOOLS (%)



Source: Survey of first- and second-year students at ETSSs.

6.6 CONCLUSION

Ethical Education represents the signature subject at Educate Together schools. This subject aims to expose students to key values aligned with the Educate Together ethos. Its provision is supported by Educate Together through extensive professional development and a detailed online repository of resources. Discussions with teachers illustrate that the provision of Ethical Education does not stop in the weekly class but is embedded across the curriculum and school practices. Students were able to provide examples that support the impact of Ethical Education in their lives within and outside of schools. Notably, some students, teachers and school leaders identified some areas of overlap between Ethical Education and subjects such as SPHE and CSPE. A few school leaders mentioned they would have preferred to have Ethical Education in lieu of SPHE at the school, rather than both subjects. Student views of Ethical Education were mediated by their views of their Ethical Education teacher.

Students at ETSSs were asked to report how often they engage in global competency activities at school and if they respect people from other cultures, drawing on scales used by PISA. These measures indicated a strong presence of global competency activities at ETSSs and a remarkably high self-reported rate of respecting people from other cultures among ETSS students. While this research is unable to draw a direct link between the provision of Ethical Education and these pro-social attitudes, the results are consistent with, and speak highly on, the successful implementation of the Educate Together ethos.

CHAPTER 7

Leading Educate Together second-level schools

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is focused on the experiences of school leaders and the challenges they report in their school leadership roles. Ten principals and one deputy principal were interviewed – one leader from each school was included in the study. The label 'school leader' is used to refer to these 11 interviewees. Additional interviews were undertaken with members of Boards of Management across six schools and representatives of three management bodies. Evidence from these interviews is also included in the chapter. This chapter starts by providing an overview of the profiles of school leaders. It then focuses on the challenges associated with leading ETSSs. The next sections discuss governance variations between ETSSs, specifically in relation to patron and management body status and the relationship between ETSSs and Educate Together as a patron body.

7.2 SCHOOL LEADERS AT EDUCATE TOGETHER SECOND-LEVEL SCHOOLS

ETSSs are not only diverse in terms of their student body, but also in the breadth of prior experience and the profile of school leaders. School leaders previously worked across all sectors of Irish second-level education. A few have some international experience. About half of the school leaders interviewed have served in a leadership capacity at a different school prior to taking up their current role. The remaining school leaders have extensive experience, in a variety of roles. These experiences informed the clear and strong visions school leaders brought to their schools, as well as a strong level of awareness of what is unique about ETSSs.

When asked why they applied for their current positions, school leaders described two leading motivations. First, they were motivated to apply primarily because they personally strongly resonate with the Educate Together ethos. In fact, a few school leaders specifically mentioned they would have not been interested in becoming a principal at a non-Educate Together school. As such, Educate Together selected school leaders that are likely to uphold the school ethos.

> *"People would've said to me over the years, "Oh, did you ever think of principalship?" and I would say, "No, no, don't want to go there. Don't think that's a good fit for me". But when Educate Together came on in the space of where kind of it might have a possibility of patronage and there was a sense that maybe if they did that they might try and do something, something a little bit differently, right?… I could've gone for several other principalships the previous year and I didn't; I*

> *exclusively applied to Educate Together… And, that said, I would never claim that we could be entirely different. Because we're a public-funded school, we have to meet all the kind of outcomes for the students, or address the possibility of those outcomes for students, like every other school. But what I would feel it, what attracted me is that it gave me an opportunity maybe to see could you do those things a little bit different.'* (School leader)

> *'I wasn't dying to become a school principal… But I thought, "Okay, I've a contribution to make but if I'm going to make it I want it to be in an Educate Together school… I'm passionate about, I suppose, what Educate Together is trying to do.'* (School leader)

Second, becoming a school leader for a new school was a similarly important motivation to apply for their current roles. School leaders were excited at the prospect of creating 'a new school with a new culture' and were less interested in joining a school 'with an established culture'. As discussed in the next section, the most significant challenges associated with leading ETSSs are linked to their new school status. As such, this particular motivation allows school leaders to better cope with the reality of their roles and responsibilities.

Members of Boards of Management also shared a commitment to the Educate Together ethos.

> *'I always thought their ethos was amazing and it's the type of school that I wanted my kid to be educated in. I thought the equality-based, student-centred… the performance of the children that I actually had met that were part of Educate Together, I was astonished by. Their confidence in themselves, in their education, I just thought it was a wonderful and fantastic school for children to grow in.'* (Chair of Board of Management)

They repeatedly noted the distinct and positive ethos of the Educate Together schools and the positive relationships across all stakeholders.

> *'I'd say it's a very innovative school. There is a very positive culture. There is a very strong relationship between the teachers and the students and the parents and the wider school community. It's an open, very inclusive, the emphasis on kindness and it's about ensuring that each student does the best that they can in themselves, whatever that may be.'* (Chair of Board of Management)

As with other stakeholders, and reflecting a substantial evidence base in education more broadly (see for example McCoy et al., 2016), strong leadership was seen as

central to the success of ETSSs. Such leadership was pivotal to building a successful school community from the first day of the school opening.

> *'I think that there is an enormous energy and enthusiasm with a new school to get it right. I think that there is excellent leadership by the principal, huge commitment by the teachers to really give the best learning and teaching experience for all students of all capabilities and that it's open and it's looking to become the leading practice in terms of teaching.'* (Chair of Board of Management)

Such effective leadership was seen to create the respectful, supportive ethos that was evident in the schools the researchers visited. As noted by a chair of a Board of Management:

> *'There's a very encouraging and quite innovative staff there, that students are given the respect and given the encouragement to learn and to try things out and, you know, certainly from my interactions with the parents through the staff association that also I've got good feedback, you know, from that. Yes, I think there are issues, of course, but my general understanding of the culture of the school is that it's very respectful.'* (Chair of Board of Management)

A strong and supportive relationship between the principal and members of the Board of Management was also seen to underpin effective leadership across the schools. One Board of Management chair noted the centrality of the ethos of the school in all deliberations and discussions between the Board and school leaders.

> *'... Very, very [cohesive] -- myself and [name of principal] and the rest of the Board members all have been selected very well and we've had no conflicts whatsoever. We've had discussions, we've had disagreements, but they've all issued out, they've all turned out unbelievably and again with the ethos of the school and with the protection of the school as always is our priority.'* (Chair of Board of Management)

7.3 CHALLENGES FACED BY SCHOOL LEADERS

All school leaders showed a clear vision for their school, are highly regarded by school staff and students alike, and have shown strong leadership skills and competencies. At the same time, they face significant challenges. Some of these challenges primarily derive from setting up and running a starter school. While all school leaders believe that their role should centre on promoting teaching and learning within the school, aspects connected to the new school status demanded a great deal of their time. Several school leaders mentioned the safety and security of students and staff was a key priority, particularly in light of the precarious

(temporary) accommodation status of some of the schools. Indeed, for some school leaders at newer schools, securing permanent accommodation was the most salient component of their role. Prior research has also highlighted that school building is one of the aspects where principals feel they have least influence over (Darmody and Smyth, 2013). Across both newer and older ETSSs, school leaders indicated their roles are complex and strongly shaped by compliance requirements, mirroring the role of leaders at typical second-level schools in Ireland. However, school leaders also reported challenges that appear to be more specific to Educate Together schools.

School accommodation

Stakeholders interviewed mentioned significant challenges associated with being located in temporary accommodation – a challenge faced by several schools included in this study. As discussed in Section 3.3, the temporary accommodation status at these schools impacted on the experience of students in several key ways, including impacting on the temperature in the school, the quality of specialised classrooms, and implications for commuting times for students (as well as teachers). One representative of a management body described some of the schools as 'inhabiting ghost buildings'. Teachers too expressed concern at the standard of accommodation of some of the schools.

> *'We need a new building… we haven't even got an idea of when that's going to happen. And we are under a huge amount of stress, because you've got a lot of the practical subjects… There's nowhere to store equipment, there's nowhere to store exam students' work, and they get damaged… We value students' work here, but it's really hard to protect it because the school is so full, and every room is being used for so many different reasons, for so many different purposes… That's what I find is the biggest challenge.'* (Teacher)

School leaders discussed the multiple implications of the precarious state of accommodation. For some school leaders, securing permanent accommodation was the most time-consuming aspect of their jobs. A few schools have changed location multiple times since opening. At times, schools received very late notice on the location of their next temporary accommodation. On a few occasions, planned temporary accommodation sites did not meet the requirements of the school in terms of the intake of students for the next academic year. Sharing a school building with an existing school created sensitive situations that leaders needed to monitor and address. The physical layout of some temporary accommodation sites made supervising students outside of class time difficult for teachers. School leaders needed to address diverse maintenance issues including a lack of heating, water leaks, and even the presence of mould. At one school in temporary accommodation, WiFi challenges meant that students were unable to use their individual tablet PCs at school. One school leader indicated they would

advise prospective school leaders to accept the position only if the school has already secured permanent, suitable accommodation. More broadly, school leaders emphasised that the need to focus so much of their attention on accommodation matters detracts from their ability to focus on teaching and learning – an aspect all school leaders considered to be the central responsibility of their position.

> *'My biggest responsibilities are the safety of my children first, the education of my children second. I have to make sure at all times my children are safe and working on a building site is very difficult, or working in prefabs like you would have seen, it's not good enough... Only then can I look to the education of children. So rather than trying to lead learning, which is what a principal should do, that has become second to the nature of what I am doing as a principal, and to me that's very sad, you know.'* (School leader)

Chairs of Boards of Management also noted their frustrations in spending considerable time attempting to address delays in securing permanent accommodation. They noted the challenges around securing planning permission and extended periods between the Department of Education purchasing sites and building work commencing. They also noted a 'disconnect' between projecting demographic demand and delivering the appropriate level of school accommodation.

> *'I suppose the question I would have is that this site was purchased in 2016. Why has it taken three years for the formal plans [planning application] to go through?… You know, the school was flagged that it was going to open in 2016, I think. There seems to be a long delay from when a school -- the Department of Education announces that it is going to open a new school and to actually having the correct facility and provision for that school.'* (Chair of Board of Management)

> *'I think that as much as the department has a plan and it has the idea of the demographics and all of that, there does seem to be a disconnect between the planning that they do and the actual delivery of the projects and… they have come through a time when the population going into secondary, they were aware that it was going to increase quite substantially, they were aware of that but at the same time coming through a time when budgets were quite tight they have found it difficult to I think both acquire the land at rates that they felt were good value for money for the taxpayer and also then trying to ensure that the different locations of the schools would serve well into the future.'* (Chair of Board of Management)

Challenges leading new schools

ETSS leaders were motivated to take their current position in large part due to the opportunity to lead a new school and shape its culture. Many teachers too were attracted to their current school due to the new school status, as discussed in Section 5.2. At the same time, aspects associated with running a new school and teaching at a new school were frequently discussed by school leaders and teachers when asked about the challenges they face.

School leaders and teachers indicated that resource allocations can be insufficient at new schools. In part, this is due to the use of school-level data from the previous academic year to determine allocations – particularly for special education teachers, Special Needs Assistants (SNA) and middle management allocations. These data are widely considered not appropriate for growing schools and a need for greater flexibility in the allocation of resources was widely cited. Chairs of Boards of Management were also acutely aware of this difficulty and highlighted the challenges as being particularly great for schools with an inclusive approach to enrolment.

> *'The process by which resources are allocated being on your numbers the previous year and then trying to guess, you know, what your proposed enrolment for the next year is going to be is a continuing challenge for the school and also it's a significant challenge in terms of having enough resources to meet the special needs cohort that are in the school.'* (Chair of Board of Management)

Management body representatives similarly noted the 'new school challenge', where 'most resources in education operate a year behind…in terms of a green field site that is growing rapidly, that is not appropriate'. Another noted that 'policy has not caught up with their reality', highlighting shortcomings in resource allocation across schools which are both in a start-up expansionary phase and attracting a very diverse cohort of students.

At one school, not having any allocation for middle-management positions placed a significant burden on the school leader. Multiple ETSSs indicated that their special education teachers, SNA and other resource allocations were insufficient to meet the diversity of student need. The adequacy of allocations for resources and staff appeared to be addressed over time, but required advocacy and additional effort from school leaders.

> *'Also in terms of inclusion, our admissions policy and our general ethos is quite inclusive but the department don't back that up with resources. So, last year we still had the same amount of resource hours that we had in our first year even though we had a 350 per cent*

> *increase in the number of students that needed help… I think in an established school it would be quite good because you would have the resources to distribute as you see fit obviously. But because we're a new school they didn't update our initial allocation, so we were still working on [the] year one allocation with masses of kids.'* (Teacher)

New schools have difficulty in providing full-time contracts to teachers and staff. At the present time, a full-time teacher contract requires 22 hours of teaching. Offering full-time contracts was viewed by school leaders as a way to attract and retain 'good teachers'. School leaders reported that they did not experience significant challenges in attracting and retaining teachers. However, in a few instances when teacher turnover was reported, it was often due to the quality of contracts. Offering 'good contracts' to teachers and staff was viewed by school leaders as a way to uphold the Educate Together ethos in the schools' relationship with staff, to show staff they are valued by the school. One of the ways schools were able to offer a full- or close to full-time contract ('good contracts') was by asking teachers to teach a diversity of subjects; some of these subjects could be outside of the teacher's area of expertise and this was seen as adding to the pressures faced by teachers.

For several teachers, the lack of a full-time contract was a significant challenge for them. One teacher reported that they had a lengthy commute as they could not afford to live closer to the school. For another teacher, the lack of predictability around contracts created financial insecurity. The quotes below are from teachers at different schools.

> *'I'm not on full-time hours, I would have a couple of extra part-time jobs as well… For me personally the challenge is trying to balance everything… try and provide the best lessons that you can in school is like my main priority. But then I also have -- I can't go home and just relax, I have to go to another job every day of the week, you know, so that's hard.'* (Teacher)

> *'I was on (part-time contract) last year and then my hours went down to (half of initial part-time contract) and before that – the reason that happened was because in a start-up school you tend to be kind of thrown in the deep end and you're teaching multiple subjects. And after a year our principal thought, you know, that it was important to get teachers qualified in subjects. So with that I lost quite a few hours, but in the last couple of months my hours built back up because the department have allocated some hours, so my hours have built back up so I'm on (initial part time contract) again. So it was challenging because obviously I took a pay cut and there's just the insecurity of it, you know, as well… That was hard.'* (Teacher)

One teacher suggested that the number of teaching hours required for a full-time contract should be lowered for starter schools. Given the greater administrative responsibilities teachers typically have in starter schools, reduced contact teaching hours could be justified. Teachers at new schools are involved in policy development and the broader process of setting up the school. The teachers we spoke to spent significant time helping their schools develop, grow and thrive.

Many teachers agreed that the challenges they face are often a reflection of the starter school status rather than the ETSS status of their school. For example, single teacher subject departments meant that some teachers did not always have someone to 'bounce ideas off'. A lack of initial policies and guidelines made the induction of new staff at new schools more difficult than would be the case at an established school. In the first few years in a school's development, teachers are required to teach their subject(s) to new year groups every year.

> *'I feel a little bit out of touch with senior cycle, so next year will be a bit more interesting, but I had never thought of that before I started here until it's looming now.'* (English teacher)

New schools also face unique realities in relation to the recruitment of students. For some students, the idea of attending a new school and being among the first cohort to attend the school was appealing. At the same time, the new school status, coupled with the reality of temporary accommodation, was seen as a risk which put some students off.

> *Participant 1: 'I mean, we all decided to go with it anyway. Like this whole school was a bit of a gamble kind of because no one knew what was going to happen or whatever. But everyone likes it now, I think.'*
>
> *Participant 2: 'I'm pretty sure there was supposed to be like a lot more students though.'*
>
> *Participant 3: 'Yeah, loads of people dropped out the first -- like a week before, they'd drop out and stuff like that. We were a back-up school for a lot of people.'* (Focus group participants)

The perceived risk of attending a new school is particularly felt by the first cohort enrolled at the school. The students themselves are aware of this and feel the first cohort experience a good deal of 'trial and error', providing a basis for valuable lessons guiding provision for future cohorts. This was emphasised by sixth-year focus group participants.

> *Participant 1: 'I just want to say being a new school like they didn't know when to kind of implement [career development initiatives], when to bring in the careers part. I feel we should have done a little bit more last year to really kind of put our heads down and to like realise,*

> *oh yes, that's where I want to go, because so many people are indecisive… I feel like if they introduced it earlier it would be much better.'*
>
> *Participant 2: 'The school is still developing, it's like still new, so like I'm understanding, but they still try and develop as much as possible.'*
>
> *Participant 3: 'But I guess, like, it's probably a good thing for them, because they'll learn that for next year, so it's a good learning curve.'* (Sixth-year focus group participants)

A few school leaders also emphasised that the training available for new principals was not designed to prepare them for the management required at new schools. They also suggested that mentorship and more targeted training would be useful to address the unique set of challenges that emerge in leading a new school.

The key challenge in leading a new school relates to the diversity of competing demands that need to be managed simultaneously. One principal described this as 'it's almost building the airplane while you're flying it at the same time'. Multiple key responsibilities need to be juggled at the same time, including staff and student recruitment, policy development, securing accommodation and infrastructural developments, preparing for expanding student intake, and managing stakeholder expectations. Chairs of Boards of Management were also acutely aware of the multiplicity of demands facing a new school.

> *'With this being a start-up school there's quite a lot more than your traditional setup functioning school, you know, that's been running for a good few many years. We've a lot -- we've all policies and procedures that we have to write up from the start…. in ten years' time, all these policies will already have been done, they just need to be updated, where we have to actually start them from scratch with blank paper and pen. We have a lot to do as well on the build of where the current pupils are in the school and also with the new build with the planning, we've had a lot of meetings with local councillors, myself as chair with…the principal, and with the Department of Education, overseeing the planning, all that kind of stuff.'* (Chair of Board of Management)

Challenges leading second-level schools

In many ways, leading an ETSS poses similar challenges to leading other second-level schools in Ireland. Several school leaders discussed the increased pressures of meeting audit and regulatory requirements. Commonly, school leaders suggested that they do not have sufficient time to address the diversity of competing demands they face. They devote extensive time to supporting and managing people and relationships with students, staff, parents and the broader community. School leaders suggested that the academic calendar for a principal

has expanded considerably in recent years. As a result, many report that they now have to work through much of the summer. This is further complicated by the fact that the day-to-day job of a school leader is often unpredictable. School leaders indicated that there is no such thing as a 'typical day'.

Wider education trends and developments also manifest in the remit and workload of each ETSS. In the context of a move towards inclusion (Kenny et al., 2020), ensuring that the needs of an increasingly diverse student population are met has rightfully become a significant part of the role of the school leaders, including at ETSSs. The diversity of the school population was emphasised by several school leaders who discussed not only the high incidence of SEN within the school (up to 40 per cent at some schools), but also the prevalence of students from families with Medical Cards (up to half in one school), and the unique challenges involved in serving students who are homeless and living in emergency (hotel) accommodation.

Other features of the wider education landscape also impact on schools; for example, teacher supply challenges in Ireland (O'Doherty and Harford, 2018) have resulted in difficulties in hiring teachers in a timely manner, particularly for 'high-demand' subjects. One Board of Management chair also highlighted the difficulties in teacher recruitment.

> *'One of the difficulties is recruitment. There are significant difficulties at the minute in terms of recruitment, which is impacting on the school's capacity to fill all the vacancies that it has, and that is a real challenge in the greater Dublin area and certainly in [name of locality] it is a significant challenge, especially when you're trying to fill for non-permanent positions such as maternity leave, parental leave. There really is a dearth of candidates at the minute in all of those, and it's really becoming across nearly all subjects. It's just really, really difficult.'* (Chair of Board of Management)

In a context of growing attention being placed on school league tables, school leaders also have to manage pressure from stakeholders in relation to academic achievement and higher education progression rates, challenges which have become all the more acute in the current COVID-19 context.

Challenges leading Educate Together second-level schools

The schools in this study face a double starter-school challenge. They are not only newly established schools, but they are also the first Educate Together schools to open at second level. School leaders acknowledge that they had to both live up to the expectations set for them and also to manage these expectations. In many ways, they were pioneers in the implementation of a school vision that was

innovative for the second-level landscape in Ireland. This in itself came with its own challenges. Most notably, school leaders and teachers discussed challenges associated with parental expectations, misconceptions about the tension between the Educate Together ethos and academic orientation, the disproportionate level of students with additional needs enrolled, and defining what is unique about the Educate Together ethos, as more schools in Ireland embrace a student-centred and inclusive approach.

For some school leaders, managing parental expectations was a particular challenge, as parents held high expectations regarding their involvement in school-level decisions, to a large extent stemming from the 'partnership' approach embodied in the Educate Together ethos. At times, school leaders had to work hard to secure parental buy-in on school decisions and the acceptance of some parents that 'boundaries, rules, guidelines' had to be put in place to ensure the success of the school.

A few school leaders and teachers discussed the emergence of conflict between the Educate Together inclusive ethos and the importance of the exam preparation of students. One school leader expressed concerns about some parents transferring their children into private education due to concerns over the extent of academic ethos and focus in the school. A minority of parents interviewed raised some concerns along these lines. A few parents indicated that – because the schools their children attend are new – they do not know how well prepared their children will be for the Leaving Certificate exam. Some other parents raised some concern about their child not being as academically challenged as they could be. However, overall parents said they believed the learning needs of their children were met. At all schools the academic development of students was a key priority for school leaders. Several school leaders discussed actively thinking about ways to ensure that all students at the school are 'getting the level of challenge that they should be getting'. For school leaders and teachers, the work in this space was not only about ensuring high-quality teaching and learning, and academic challenge for every student, but also about convincing stakeholders that academic success should not be simply reduced to examination performance.

> *'Sometimes you've got stuff like parental resistance to some styles of learning, some parents wish it to be more academic, some parents wish it to be less academic, but again that's buying in to the ethos of the school. It's nothing that can't be managed but these small little pockets here and there just keep you a little bit more busy than usual.'*
> (Teacher, School Elm)

The key to academic excellence at ETSSs is underpinned by the provision of high-quality student-centred and differentiated education. While all teachers noted that

they are strongly committed to the provision of student-centred education, as discussed in Section 5.4, teachers did not shy away from discussing the challenges associated with the provision of differentiated teaching, as well as their continuous work to facilitate this. Several school stakeholders indicated some concern that ETSSs are developing a reputation for being particularly effective in supporting students with additional needs, and hence are attracting a disproportionate number of students with such additional needs. They also cautioned that offering the best support for these students – which all ETSSs are committed to providing – is most effective when there is a balance in the student body in relation to student profile and need.

> *'Another big challenge as well is the mixability in the classroom. So in some of my classes in particular, more so than others, there will be very high achieving students and then there would be various students with a lot of needs, and having both of them in the classroom and like helping both reach their potential within the one room can actually be quite challenging as well. Now, having said that, it is beneficial at times when they're doing good work that you have different abilities together that can work together and bring themselves on, but in terms of planning it is very difficult to push the better students without leaving the weaker students behind…. that would be one of the biggest challenges that I would face in this school.'* (Teacher)

> *'We do have a much higher than average level of need, we have [over 30 per cent] level of need [students with additional needs] and that doesn't include undiagnosed and students with mental health issues. So that's big, you know, and that requires then -- as I said, we have a very caring team but that does require -- that makes your day harder in some ways, you know, because you're catering for a level of need that's not typical in your mainstream school'.* (School leader)

Chairs of Boards of Management also noted this feature of their schools and cautioned that this would need to be 'managed' into the future.

> *'It would be fair to say that the inclusive ethos of the Educate Together schools does -- you know, there is a tendency for parents with children with special needs to see the new secondary -- Educate Together secondary schools as a good fit for their son or daughter and that I think is a challenge… in the future are going to have to manage and to look at, because for any school you want a broad range.'* (Chair of Board of Management)

7.4 JOINT PATRONAGE AND DIVERSE MANAGEMENT BODIES

So far, this report has illustrated a number of variations across ETSSs. These variations span areas such as student body profile, accommodation status, and

school policies. This chapter illustrates an additional area of variation among ETSSs: their leadership and governance structure. ETSSs have varying patron and management body arrangements.

Whereas at the primary level Educate Together is both a patron and a management body, Educate Together is a patron body only at second level. In its patron body capacity, Educate Together has the following responsibilities:

- Establishing a new school, in consultation with the Department of Education and Skills;
- Directly appointing two patron nominees to an Educate Together school Board of Management, approving the selection of other members, and appointing the Chairperson;
- Appointing the Principal of a school;
- Approving the appointment of all teachers and SNAs;
- Laying down the fundamental ethos base of the school's Board of Management (Educate Together, n.d.).

While Educate Together is a patron for most ETSSs and a trustee partner of two schools, some ETSSs have a joint patron body. The management body structure of ETSSs also varies, including the Joint Managerial Body for Voluntary Secondary Schools (JMB), the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS), and Education and Training Boards (ETB). JMB serves as the management body for most ETSSs. The nature of the school governance arrangements emerged in the interviews with school principals. However, it did not appear to impact on, or vary in terms of the student experience or the experience of teachers at any of the schools included in this study. School leaders were asked about their relationships with management bodies and their relationships with a joint patron body, where applicable. Overall, school leaders spoke positively about joint patronage arrangements, where these were in place.

Role of management bodies

The fundamental remit of management bodies is one of representation. The management bodies engage in negotiations with the Department of Education and Skills on behalf of the second-level sector. One management body representative described their role as follows.

> *'A meso organisation between macro policy and the micro… at school level. So we have a very important role in terms of bringing policy directions to schools and also bringing practitioner directions back up to influence policy. In other words, to make sure policy as it emerges… tends to emerge in a collaborative way, it is nuanced in favour of the*

> *realities of school management life.'* (Management body representative)

On a day-to-day basis, management bodies are in regular contact with school Boards of Management and principals, as well as providing support for middle leadership in the schools. Management bodies offer important training and development supports which include supporting the induction of new principals and deputy principals and Boards of Management training. They also provide a host of supports around leadership and advice (including child protection, legal advice, IR, HR, GDPR, audit matters). They note the particular role they play in supporting new schools, through new school management groups and services. Infrastructural advice is also noted, and the expert advice of buildings advisors is seen as a particularly important support available for some ETSSs.

School policies feature prominently in the advice provided, the most recent School Admissions Policy being particularly cited. While one management body representative noted that the Department of Education and Skills takes primary responsibility for professional development provision, the management body also provides additional learning opportunities for teachers. Most recently this has centred on supporting digital learning for teachers across their schools. The COVID-19 situation has created additional challenges for schools, and management bodies have played a central role in reporting on the additional information (both directly and through information bulletins), as well as running regional meetings and online webinars providing guidance on the Leaving Certificate Calculated Grading system, distance teaching and learning and planning for re-opening school buildings.

One management body noted that they also have a representative on Educate Together sub-committees, allowing them to connect directly with Educate Together. However, the minimum threshold of having patronage in at least five schools in order for Educate Together to be automatically entitled to a seat on the management body executive was raised as an issue.

Relationship between management bodies and school leaders

Across schools, school leaders agree that their relationships with management bodies are predominantly positive and supportive of the school. Principals provided positive feedback on all management bodies that support ETSSs. For the majority of school leaders, the management body is the first call in the event they need information, guidance or support. School leaders appreciated the timely practical information received from management bodies. Advice received was highly valued and considered to be 'based on extensive experience' and 'high level'. School leaders indicated that they sought advice on widely diverse issues

ranging from how to respond to parental inquiries, teacher recruitment, GDPR compliance, and policy development more broadly. School leaders also described the relationship with their management bodies as being 'open' and based on 'trust'. In one instance, a school leader appreciated the 'proactive' attitude of the management body towards the school, manifested by sending check-in communications.

> *'So, they're aware of us, but they're fantastically supportive whenever we need them. And when we need them it's always a case of high stress, and to be at the end of the phone with an expert answer at those times is all you could need from any agency, any management body.'* (School leader)

A few school leaders mentioned that, in the past, the relationship with their management body was at times affected by 'philosophical differences', but that these differences did not impact on the quality of the support received and that, over time, these differences have attenuated. A number of Board of Management Chairs also alluded to these differences and suggested that the 'fit' with the values of the JMB was perhaps not optimum. However, the bulk of interviewees within schools and management bodies did not experience any difficulties in this regard. JMB, in particular, was seen to work effectively across a wide diversity of schools (in terms of profile, denomination/ethos and organisational structure). Further they suggest that the voluntary secondary model 'suits' Educate Together in terms of their local autonomy, which is very important to them, and in terms of the services they receive.

Management bodies too note the positive relationships with school leaders. They are highly complementary of the quality of leadership in ETSSs, noting examples of excellent leadership. They attribute the success of ETSSs to 'the quality of leadership and the quality of the staff'.

> *'[The principal] has evoked an understanding built on the richness of his own understanding of teaching and learning and he has passed that on to teachers in the school who have themselves become leaders.'* (Management body representative)

Management bodies also highlight the implications of the inclusive ethos of ETSSs.

> *'[ETSSs] have a particular ethos around inclusion that is extremely broad and very attractive to many families… and they could be something of a magnet for parents of children with… particular education challenges around special needs… so one of the anxieties that I would have is in those small student cohorts that they necessarily have a disproportionate cohort of students with particular*

> *challenges… The issue is not around admission or access or complying with legislation, it's around that draw that certain schools have… in particular they need a better policy level response in terms of teacher allocations, special education teachers and special needs assistants'.* (Management Body representative)

They also note that the relationship with ETSSs is very much a developmental one and that ETSSs benefit from guidance on meeting national requirements;

> *'While they have an exciting approach to teaching and learning and they feel as well that they have the autonomy… Whereas we are not trying to stultify that initiative…but [they might need] hand-holding and advice… its really about not exposing schools to concerns that for example an inspector may have… [making sure they are aware of] initiatives that trigger funding lines'.* (Management Body representative)

7.5 SCHOOL LEADER VIEWS ON THE RELATIONSHIP WITH EDUCATE TOGETHER

All school leaders were attracted to their role as they had an affinity with the Educate Together ethos. Educate Together is responsible for the selection of the school leaders and maintains ongoing contact with the school leaders and other personnel within the schools. A few school leaders indicated that they have contact with Educate Together 'almost daily'. All school leaders were well acquainted with Educate Together and reported a positive professional relationship with Educate Together staff. School Boards of Management have Educate Together representatives, and all school leaders emphasised their strong, positive relationships with their Board of Management. School leaders valued the continuous professional development activities available to them and to the school staff more widely. Boards of management also noted positive relationships with Educate Together Head Office personnel.

> *'Very good, we've had a very good relationship with and communication with Educate Together head office, very supportive with us. You know, it's very much good communication with head office.'* (Chair of Board of Management)

School leaders note that Educate Together has been very supportive with specific requests from their school – including in the area of SEN provision, attending school events when invited, and lobbying on behalf of the school to address temporary accommodation issues. School leaders also appreciated the support received from their peer leaders at other ETSSs, facilitated by Educate Together.

> *'They sort out anything… So they would represent our interests with the department… site acquisition and the planning department. We have our principal network meetings and we have our national conference.'* (School leader)

At the same time, the relationship between schools and Educate Together as a patron body was complex. Principals viewed Educate Together as an excellent patron and management body in the primary school sector. However, Educate Together was seen by some school leaders as still learning what it means to be a patron body within the second-level education space. This was echoed by representatives of Boards of Management.

> *'I do think that one of the things that they [Educate Together] will have to work on is that, you know, I suppose their knowledge, their understanding of the secondary sector as opposed to the primary has I think coloured some of their processes and I think they need probably to try and build in more depth in terms of their overall understanding of the secondary sector.'* (Chair of Board of Management)

In part, this is accentuated by the start-up status of these schools, as new schools face many additional challenges regardless of patronage. School leaders identified a number of key areas that distinguished the primary Educate Together sector from the second-level sector. First, second-level schools are typically larger in scale – they have a larger body of teachers and students. The students are also at a more sensitive stage of development and identity formation, some manifesting less compliant behaviours. Some school leaders believed that these distinct features of the student body at second level necessitate additional structures and rules to ensure an orderly, effective learning environment for all, as compared with schools at the primary education stage.

Ireland is experiencing a temporary growth in demand for second-level schools. It is expected that between 2018 and 2024, the student cohort entering second-level education will increase yearly. In the Dublin region alone, this is expected to result in a 15.1 per cent increase in cohort size compared to the pre-2018 cohort. However, between 2024 and 2036, the cohort size is expected to decrease by 10.3 per cent (Department of Education and Skills, 2019). This demographic shift has created a unique and somewhat limited window for Educate Together – as a new patron body in the second-level space – to open new schools. At the same time, several school leaders at existing ETSSs suggested that there is a trade-off between the support Educate Together – as a small patron body – can offer previously opened schools and the focus on opening additional new schools.

School leaders indicated that Educate Together provides strong leadership on aspects connected to the school ethos. At the same time, a few school leaders

discussed the ethos of ETSSs in the context of broader changes in the Irish second-level sector. Underpinned by the new Framework for Junior Cycle, more and more schools are seen to embrace student-centred approaches and cherish diversity, including along religious lines. In this context, a few school leaders are seeking more clarity on what differentiates ETSSs from other schools.

> *'And the ethos of Educate Together is very generic in how it's articulated and it's an ethos and value system that's woven in one way or another into every school in the country: equality, multi-denominational, co-educational, learner-centred. But all those words are deeply embedded now into the literature around education policy, the expectations of the Department of Education and Skills, the expectation of society in general. They weren't there 20 years ago to the same extent, so in terms of the Educate Together ethos being very explicitly different at second level than other schools, the only major difference is that in my -- that I can see is that there's no religious element to it.'* (School leader)

> *'I'd like to be clearer in my own mind about what exactly sets us apart from other patrons, because other patrons have now started to take on the mantle of democratically run, "We accept everybody" so I'd like more clarity about that and that debate needs to be had in a very -- there needs to be time and space.'* (School leader)

School stakeholders were not specifically asked as part of this study 'what makes ETSSs unique'. However, conversations held with a variety of stakeholders across schools revealed a tentative answer to this question. Parents, teachers and school leaders were all attracted to ETSSs – to various degrees – due to the Educate Together ethos. It is precisely this selection effect that allows ETSSs to embed the school ethos both in the teaching and learning space and the school management space. Management bodies also noted the distinct ethos of ETSSs and the ethics programme they have developed and led. The Educate Together school ethos does not solely live in the Ethical Education curriculum, but in the everyday fabric of the school. This feature is contingent on attracting people committed to making the school inclusive in a non-tokenistic way and truly student-centred.

Commenting on the relationship between schools and Educate Together, school leaders offered several additional recommendations.

- Several school leaders recommended for Educate Together to include staff with recent experience in the second-level sector;
- Facilitate peer mentorship for new principals and first-time principals of ETSSs that complements the training provided by the Centre for School Leadership;

- Occasionally, organise meetings for school leaders outside of Dublin in order to ease the travel burden on non-Dublin based school leaders; a preference for CPD activities not to be held during weekends;
- Offer additional support to mediate requests and expectations from parents;
- Increase involvement and interaction with the management bodies in order to better facilitate the inclusion of the ETSSs;
- Have more frequent consultations with school leaders to better understand their needs; have additional check-ins with the school; occasionally attend Board of Management meetings.

7.6 CONCLUSION

While projecting competence and a strong sense of care and commitment for their schools, ETSS school leaders offered a clear and candid reflection on their experiences. Similar to the student body, ETSS leaders have very diverse professional backgrounds and experiences. Some have been principals at different schools before taking up their current position, others have progressed to their new roles directly from being teachers. A few school leaders had leadership experiences outside of school settings. Their experiences of the transition into the role of school leaders have also been diverse. Yet they also share strong similarities: the Educate Together ethos and the prospect of starting a new school attracted them to the role.

Leading an ETSS is seen as a challenging role. School leaders face challenges associated with the start-up status of their schools – particularly in the realm of accommodation. They also face challenges common to typical second-level schools in Ireland – such as teacher shortages and increased regulatory pressures. In addition, several challenges faced by the schools are more unique to ETSSs.

ETSSs are diverse in their governance arrangements and overall report positive relationships with their joint patron bodies and their management bodies. Representatives of management bodies concur. School leaders also offer a complex picture about their relationship with Educate Together as a patron body. Overall, ETSSs school leaders specifically, and school staff more broadly, have succeeded in creating welcoming schools where students are seen to thrive. Educate Together has been able to facilitate the creation of these schools by attracting school leaders and staff committed to making the Educate Together ethos come to life.

CHAPTER 8

Conclusion

8.1 SUMMARY

This report profiled the experiences of students, teachers and school leaders at Educate Together second-level schools. It is based on an in-depth mixed-methods research study conducted at 11 case study Educate Together second-level schools opened prior to 2019. Data were collected between October and December 2019. The report is informed by a survey with first- and second-year students (n = 877), 21 focus groups with students, interviews with 27 teachers, 11 school leaders, 36 parents, six Board of Management members, and four representatives of management bodies and patron bodies. Where available, nationally representative figures from the study *Growing Up in Ireland* are provided for comparative purposes.

The 11 case study ETSSs have been successful at embedding the core principles of the Educate Together ethos in the school fabric. The schools visited adhered to the equality-based and co-educational aims of Educate Together. Students, teachers, school leaders and parents describe the schools as 'diverse' and 'inclusive' and emphasise that relationships – particularly with teachers – are based on respect. The presence of respect in guiding relationships at ETSSs facilitates a stronger democratic culture and is supported by the use of restorative practices. The demographic characteristics of the respondents to the student survey indicate that ETSSs are indeed very diverse in their composition, and on some aspects more diverse than the typical Irish school. Data from the student survey reveal that irrespective of gender, special educational needs status and language spoken at home, students across ETSSs experience similar levels of belonging and engagement. Students at ETSSs have fewer of their primary school friends joining them in their second-level school. However, once they join their new ETSS, students are able to make a comparable number of friends as the typical Irish second-level student. Levels of bullying at ETSSs are consistent with and no higher than the national average. The equality-based and co-educational tenets of Educate Together are also supported by the provision of Ethical Education. Ethical Education is not only taught as a stand-alone subject but is also embedded across the curriculum by teachers of all subjects.

Students provided wide-ranging examples that suggest their schools are learner-centred and democratically run. Students are involved in school and classroom decisions through student councils, specialised committees, surveys, and through direct interactions with teachers and even school leaders. The processes underpinning such involvement varied across schools. Students are encouraged to

take responsibility for their learning and are often offered options on how to show their learning. The involvement of students in their learning is part of a broader focus within ETSSs on offering student-centred education, based on active teaching and following the principles of differentiated learning. The teaching practice at ETSSs strongly aligns with how students indicate they learn and what students consider to be a good teacher. Students are also consulted on aspects such as extracurricular provision, dress-code policies and other school policies. Teachers and school leaders emphasised that the involvement of students is age-appropriate and occurs within the overarching school norms and rules. The involvement of students in decision-making is facilitated by the strong respect between students and teachers.

The report also reveals variations between the schools visited on a number of aspects. All schools are co-educational, but the student composition varies across schools. Some schools have a higher level of student need and a larger share of students who primarily speak a language other than English at home. Schools also varied in terms of their size, accommodation status, policy provision and governance structures. The starter school status, particularly at schools in temporary accommodation, impacted the student, teacher and school leader experiences and has created additional challenges for ETSSs.

Educate Together has been able to facilitate the creation of innovative and welcoming schools where students are seen to thrive. As the number of ETSSs grows, it is important to ensure that both existing and new schools receive the support required, particularly in the challenging starter school phase. Attracting school leaders and staff committed to making the Educate Together ethos come to life has been key to the success of ETSSs so far. It will remain central to maintaining the unique features of the Educate Together ethos into the future.

8.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATE TOGETHER

The study has provided valuable insights into the experiences of students and other key stakeholders at ETSSs. Our examination of these experiences comes at a time when there is considerable change occurring in schools. For example, a review of senior cycle is close to completion, and a new junior cycle is now almost fully implemented. At senior cycle, new programmes and courses are being developed and implemented into the curriculum to help support subject choice, and a wider range of assessment methods/components are also being introduced. In addition, since these data were collected (in late 2019), the COVID-19 pandemic has raised wide-ranging additional challenges for schools, students and families (Mohan et al., 2020).

While focused predominantly on school process, rather than outcomes, the findings point to a number of areas Educate Together might fruitfully examine going forward. The results strongly reinforce the positive impact the Educate Together ethos has on all stakeholders, particularly students. While all schools displayed a strong democratic culture, many decisions and policies impacting on students were formed in collaboration with the first cohort of students (and their parents) enrolling at the school. These decisions should be revisited at regular intervals to ensure current student views are fully reflected in policies.

Case study schools made use of behavioural school policies that featured the use of restorative practices, allowing for a more reflective approach to managing student behaviour and a greater focus on positive relationships. Some teachers and students seemed to have some misconceptions on what restorative practice is and the role it played in the schools. In line with earlier research (Fives et al., 2013), it is important that teachers are adequately supported to facilitate such an approach, both in terms of professional development opportunities and sufficient non-classroom contact time. The innovative and learner-centred approaches to teaching and learning are a key strength in ETSSs and teachers clearly go 'above and beyond' to ensure they deliver for each student. While some challenges stem from teachers preparing relevant content and resources for the first time, greater cross-school information and resource sharing would be to the benefit of all. This is clearly a focus of Educate Together activities already and, as the number of schools grows, the potential benefits of regional clusters would provide valuable support across subject domains and in terms of school leadership.

While the Educate Together organisation is still in its infancy at second level, the findings of this study could provide a useful benchmark for subsequent research, as the numbers of schools and students grow. The school leaders conveyed that Educate Together is faced with a tension between balancing the opening of new schools with offering sufficient support to existing schools. Variations in student engagement and the prevalence of positive student teacher relationships across the schools suggest some schools would benefit from greater support from Educate Together. It is entirely feasible that the dual goals of supporting existing schools and planning new schools can be successfully achieved with adequate resources, perhaps entailing an organisational expansion. This expansion should include personnel with specifically second-level expertise, as the needs of second-level schools are distinct to those at primary level. This partly reflects differences in scale and organisation, but also that students are at a different stage in their development.

There is some indication that school leaders would like to see greater discourse about what makes Educate Together schools unique, particularly as more schools adopt more inclusive and learner-centred philosophies. This research suggests that

a strong and sustained selection effect for teachers and school leaders may represent one of the unique aspects of Educate Together. This selection effect makes the implementation of the Educate Together ethos more likely in the fabric of the school. The many variations across the 11 ETSSs visited illustrate that the Educate Together ethos is flexible. Conversations between Educate Together as a patron body, schools and other stakeholders should be sustained in order to ensure that the Educate Together ethos continues to respond to developments in the Irish education sector and serves students. The positive engagement of Educate Together with this study further illustrates their orientation towards self-reflection and improvement and their ability to continue these conversations.

Many ETSSs are starter schools. They are developing, learning and changing at a rapid pace. Despite the challenges they face, this report illustrates that the initial experiences across the 11 schools provide a positive outlook for the sector, and a promising potential to support the learning and holistic development of many more young people in Ireland into the future.

8.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL POLICY AND PRACTICE

The study also raises important implications for policy and provision for second-level schools more broadly. The Education Admission to School Act was signed by the President in July 2018, with new requirements applying to school admissions from September 2021 onwards. The Act provides that every school must make an explicit statement in its admission policy that it will not discriminate against an applicant for admission on any of a number of grounds specified. As yet it is unclear what impact the Act will have, and this will need to be monitored going forward. While the inclusive ethos of Educate Together schools creates a welcoming environment for all students, regardless of need, it is not clear that resources to support such needs are adequately targeted towards such schools. Policy developments to support students with additional needs, including a new resource allocation system and, most recently, the pilot School Inclusion Model, may well provide such targeted, specialised supports. However, it is also important that policy measures monitor and address disproportionate levels of need among students enrolling at some schools. Further resources to support the student population at some Educate Together second-level schools could be provided through the DEIS programme, which is currently being redesigned.

As noted by McCoy et al. (2019b), this research should be viewed in the context of increasing government concern with academic standards. Official educational policy discourse has increasingly been concerned with the relative international position of Ireland and the need to raise achievement in PIRLS, TIMSS and PIAAC. The official discourse surrounding academic standards and raising achievement is accompanied by a more progressive shift in assessment ideologies among

practitioners, which seek to promote student agency in assessment matters. At the same time, it is not clear that schools are adequately supported in this endeavour. Further, schools which adopt inclusive ideologies, welcoming and supportive of students with all levels of need, are likely to fare less well under such accountability. This further highlights the importance of creating a greater balance in school enrolments, and proportionate resourcing for schools which are truly inclusive.

The ethos at ETSSs highlights the important contributions students can make in terms of decision-making at the school level, allowing both greater student ownership of their school experiences and an opportunity for schools to reflect local need more closely in their approaches. Given the evidence, the student voice – and democratic ideals more broadly – should be central to decision-making across all schools, as highlighted by Coyne and McCoy (2020) in relation to the role of technology in schools. The recent challenges around decision-making on State examinations in the context of COVID-19 also highlight a need for the student voice to be firmly embedded at a national policy level.

The evidence shows newly established schools can experience lengthy delays in securing appropriate and safe accommodation for their students. Interim arrangements were far from satisfactory and at times worsened school experiences for students, as well as their teachers and school leaders. School planning and building processes were justifiably criticised in several schools, and securing permanent accommodation is the most salient component of the role of some principals, detracting from their ability to focus on the leadership of teaching and learning. While delays in securing planning permission constitute one tangible difficulty, further examination is required of school planning processes and timeliness in the awarding of school building contracts.

There is little doubt that ETSSs have attracted dedicated, conscientious and progressive school leaders, who display enormous commitment to their schools and students. The Centre for School Leadership is now fully operational, and the evidence reinforces a need for supports to be particularly targeted towards principals of new schools. Further, principals at ETSSs face a double starter school challenge – they are not only newly established schools, but they are also the first Educate Together schools to open at second level. Mentorship programmes are regarded as a valuable mechanism to provide such supports. More broadly, the research suggests newly established schools would benefit from enhanced resource allocations from the Department of Education and Skills, particularly for provisions which are linked to enrolments in the previous academic year. While enhanced teacher allocations are available for the first few years, there is evidence to suggest the supports available do not yet fully meet the needs of starter schools. Further consideration on how starter schools should be supported in the first few

years is needed. Similarly, increased pressures being placed on school leaders (across all schools) to meet audit and regulatory requirements, as well as a wide diversity of other responsibilities, perhaps highlights a need for greater administrative supports.

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APPENDIX: INTERVIEW SCHEDULES AND STUDENT SURVEY

FOCUS GROUP SCHEDULE

1. ***Warm up question***
   - 1.1. Did anything interesting happen this morning?

2. ***Students understanding of the Educate Together model and school choice***
   - 2.1. Did any of you attend an Educate Together primary school?
   - 2.2. How would you describe your school to a friend who does not know anything about it?
   - 2.3. As far as you know, how did you end up attending this school as opposed to a different school?
   - 2.4. Was this school your first choice? Why?
   - 2.5. How involved were you in the decision to attend this school? Did your parents consider your views?

3. ***Expectations from self and Educate Together***
   - 3.1. Is this school what you expected? Why?
   - 3.2. Give some examples about how your expectations were met, and some examples of how your expectations were not met.
   - 3.3. What do you hope to achieve this year?
   - 3.4. Have you talked to someone at your school about what you hope to achieve this academic year?

4. ***Student support structures***
   - 4.1. If you had a worry or concern, is there someone at your school you would be happy to talk to?
   - 4.2. Do you have a tutor or a year head? How do you get along with them?
   - 4.3. How is discipline handled at your school?
   - 4.4. In what way are you involved in the decisions made at your school?

5. ***Student satisfaction***
   - 5.1. What makes a good teacher?
   - 5.2. What helps you learn?
     - 5.2.1. How often does that happen in your class?
   - 5.3. What do you like about your school?
   - 5.4. Is there something you don't enjoy about your school?

5.5. What do you think about the technology available at your school?

5.5.1. Is it enough?

5.5.2. How well is it used?

5.6. If you were a principal of this school what would you change?

6. ***Interaction with peers and belonging***

6.1. How do you get along with other students at school?

6.2. Do you think your peers are interested in learning?

6.3. Do you feel you belong at this school? What makes you feel this way?

7. ***Ethical Education***

7.1. What does 'Ethical Education' mean to you?

7.1.1. If not covered in the answer: What does 'inclusion' mean to you?

7.1.2. If not covered in the answer: What does 'belonging' mean to you?

7.1.3. If not covered in the answer: What does 'active citizenship' mean to you?

7.1.4. If not covered in the answer: What does 'equality' mean to you?

7.1.5. If not covered in the answer: What does 'gender equality' mean to you?

7.2. Give us some examples about how Ethical Education came up in your lessons or interactions with teachers.

7.3. Give us some examples about how Ethical Education applies to the world outside of school.

8. ***Additional questions for year 6 students***

8.1. Are you happy you came to this school? Why?

8.2. In what ways has this school contributed to your development?

8.3. What changes have you observed in the school during your time here?

8.4. How well do you believe your school prepared you for life after school?

9. ***Other comments***

9.1. Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience at this school?

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE TEACHERS

1. Teacher history and hiring experience

1.1. For how many years have you been teaching?

1.2. Have you taught at other schools besides your current school?

1.2.1. If yes, what type?

1.3. What made you apply for a position at this school?

1.4. Did you have any concerns about working at this school before you started?

1.5. How would you describe the hiring and induction process at this school?

1.6. What subjects do you teach?

2. Teacher perception on school ethos

2.1. How would you describe your school to someone who has never visited it?

2.2. What is your understanding of the concept of *school ethos*?

2.3. How would you describe the school ethos at your school?

2.4. In your view, what are the key elements of Ethical Education at your school?

2.5. How do you think members of the public view the ethos of this school?

2.6. How do you think members of the public view the ethos of Educate Together schools?

3. ONLY Ethical education teacher/coordinator: Ethical education

3.1. What does your role as an Ethical Education coordinator entail?

3.2. Did you opt to take on this role?

3.3. What are the main challenges you face in this role?

3.4. What Ethical Education career professional development have you participated in, if any?

3.5. How is Ethical Education perceived by other teachers in this school?

3.6. How are teachers supported to include Ethical Education in the curriculum? Please provide some examples.

3.7. How are the learning outcomes of ethical education evaluated at your school? Please provide some examples.

3.8. What value do you think Ethical Education has in the school?

3.8.1. What value does it have for students?

3.8.2. What value does it have for other teachers?

3.9. How is Ethical Education perceived by your peers in other schools that are not part of the Educate Together network?

4. ONLY English and Science Teachers: Ethical education

4.1. What are the key values you want your students to learn?

4.2. In what ways, if any, do you integrate Ethical Education in your teaching?

Please provide some examples.

4.3. In what ways, if any, do you evaluate students on aspects related to Ethical Education?

4.4. How confident do you feel in teaching Ethical Education?

4.5. What support is available to you in providing Ethical Education? Do you have any suggestions on how this can be improved?

5. Teaching philosophy

5.1. To what extent do behavioural issues arise in your classes?

5.1.1. How do you address them?

5.2. What are your preferred teaching methods and why?

5.3. How much autonomy do you have in the classroom?

5.4. How much autonomy do your students have in your classroom?

5.5. How is discipline handled at your school?

5.6. Do you think your students feel empowered in your classroom?

5.7. Do you think students feel valued?

5.8. How do you show your students that you value them and their inputs?

5.9. In what ways and how often do you use technology and online resources in your teaching?

5.10. To what extent do you operate as part of a teaching team, how does this work in practice?

6. Teacher's perception on student engagement

6.1. How interested are students in learning in general in the school?

6.2. How interested are students in learning in your classes?

6.3. From your observations, what do students like about this school?

6.4. How involved are students in decision making at the school? Please provide some examples.

6.5. How involved do you think students should be in decision making?

7. Student support structures

7.1. Excluding the contents of your teaching, what are the most common requests or questions you receive from students?

7.2. What are the support structures available at your school for students with learning difficulties?

7.3. What are the support structures available at your school for students with behavioural difficulties?

7.4. What are the support structures available at your school for students with other additional or specific educational needs?

8. Teacher support structures

8.1. What are the main challenges you face as a teacher?

8.2. What support structures are available to address **mentioned challenges**?

8.3. What would be your suggestion on how the support you receive can be improved?

8.4. Do you think you face different challenges than teachers in non-Educate Together schools?

8.5. What professional development opportunities have you participated in, if any?

9. Teacher satisfaction

9.1. What do you like about teaching at this school?

9.2. What would make your experience as a teacher at this school better?

9.3. Do you feel you belong at this school and in the Educate Together network?

9.4. Would you recommend working in this school to a friend? Why?

9.5. Would you recommend working in an Educate Together second-level school to a friend? Why?

10. Perception of governance

10.1. To the best of your knowledge, who are the main actors involved in the management of the school?

10.2. In what ways, if any, are teachers involved in school governance?

10.3. How could the involvement of teachers in school governance be improved?

10.4. How would you describe the relationship between Educate Together and the school?

10.5. (Only a school with joint patronage) How would you describe the relationship between (patron) and the school?

10.6. How would you describe the relationship between the Board of Management and the school?

11. Other comments

11.1. Is there anything else you would like to add to this interview?

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE SCHOOL LEADERS

1. Principal's history and hiring experience

1.1 For how many years have you been a principal?

1.2 Have you been a principal at other schools besides your current school?

1.2.1 If yes, what type of school?

1.3 Why did you apply for the principal position at this school?

1.4 What did you teach?

1.5 What were the main challenges you faced in the transition from teacher to principal?

2 Principal's roles, responsibilities, and challenges

2.1 What are your main responsibilities as a principal?

2.2 What do you find rewarding about this job?

2.3 What are the main challenges you face in this role?

2.4 Is your school oversubscribed? If yes, to what extent?

2.4.1 What are the main challenges associated with enrolling students?

2.4.2 Besides oversubscribed students, were there any other students you did not accept this year? If yes, why?

2.4.3 Are there any types of students the school cannot accommodate?

2.5 What is the accommodation status of your school? To what extend is this an issue for your school?

2.6 Do you experience any issues with teacher turnover?

2.7 Would you recommend working as a principal in an Educate Together school to a friend?

2.8 Are their professional development opportunities available to you as a school leader?

3 Principal's perception on school ethos

3.1 How would you describe the school to a colleague at a conference?

3.2 How would you describe Educate Together to a colleague at a conference?

3.3 What is your understanding of the concept of school ethos?

3.4 How would you describe the school ethos at your school?

3.5 How important is Ethical Education at your school?

3.5.1 How important is it for students?

3.5.2 How important is it for teachers?

3.6 How are teachers supported to include Ethical Education in the curriculum? Please provide some examples.

3.7 How are the learning outcomes of Ethical Education evaluated at your school? Please provide some examples.

4 Principal's perception of student support structures

4.1 What are the most common requests or questions you receive from students and their parents?

4.2 What are the support structures available at your school for students with learning difficulties?

4.3 What are the support structures available at your school for students with behavioural difficulties?

4.4 What are the support structures available at your school for students with other special or particular needs?

4.5 How is the quality of these support structures evaluated?

4.6 How is discipline handled at your school?

5 Principal's perception on student and parental engagement

5.1 From your observations, do students feel happy at this school?

5.2 From your observations, do students feel they belong?

5.3 How is student belonging fostered in the school?

5.4 From your observations, do parents feel happy with this school?

6 Principal's perception of teacher support structures

6.1 How would you describe your relationship with teachers?

6.2 How would you describe the relationship between teachers at this school?

6.3 How would you describe the relationship between teachers and students at this school?

6.4 In your opinion, what are the strengths of the teachers at this school?

6.5 In your opinion, what are the main challenges faced by teachers at your school?

6.6 What support structures are available to teachers at your school? How can these be improved?

6.7 What are the professional development opportunities available to teachers at the school?

6.7.1 What are the professional development opportunities available to teachers at the school to specifically support SEN students?

7 Principal's view on community and public perception

7.1 How do you think the local community perceive this school?

7.2 How do you think the public view Educate Together schools?

8 Principal's perception of governance

8.1 What are the main management actors at your school?

8.2 How would you describe the relationship between Educate Together and the school?

8.3 (Only for schools with joint patronage) How would you describe the relationship between the joint patronage body and the school?

8.4 How would you describe the relationship between the management body and the school?

8.5 In what ways, if any, are teachers involved in school governance?

8.6 In what ways, if any, are students involved in school governance?

8.7 In what ways, if any, could the relationships with these actors be improved?

9 Other comments

9.1 Is there anything else you would like to add to this interview?

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

1. *Personal history and involvement with the school*

1.1 For how many years have you served on the Board of Management of the school?

1.2. Have you served on other Boards of Management?

1.2.1. If yes, has it been for an Educate Together school?

1.3. What made you agree to accept this position?

2. *Roles, responsibilities, and challenges*

2.1. What are the main responsibilities of the Board of Management?

2.2. What are your main responsibilities as Chair of the Board of Management?

2.3. What are the main challenges faced by the Board of Management?

2.4. What are the main challenges you personally face on the Board?

2.5. To what extent is the school over-subscribed? What are the main challenges associated with enrolling students?

2.6. What is the accommodation status of your school? To what extent is this an issue for the school?

3. *Perception on school ethos*

3.1. How would you describe the school to a colleague who has never visited it?

3.2. What is your understanding of the concept of *school ethos*?

3.3. How would you describe the school ethos at the school?

4. *Perception on student and parental engagement*

4.1. From your observations, what do students like about this school? What are their concerns?

4.2. From your observations, what do parents like about this school? What are their concerns?

5. *Perception of governance*

5.1. How would you describe the governance structure of this school?

5.2. How would you describe the relationship between the principal and the Board of Management?

5.3. How would you describe the relationship between the patronage body and the Board of Management?

5.4. How would you describe the relationship between Educate Together and the Board of Management?

5.5. What are the main challenges you face in your relationship with these actors?

5.6. In what ways, if any, could your relationship with these actors be improved?

6. *Other comments*

6.1. Is there anything else you would like to add to this interview?

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE MANAGEMENT BODY

1. Personal history and involvement with the school

1.1. For how many years have you worked with (name of management body)?

1.2. What is your role within (name of management body)?

2. Roles, responsibilities, and challenges

2.1. What are the main responsibilities of (name of management body) in relation to schools?

2.2. In what ways, if any, do the responsibilities of (name of management body) towards Educate Together second-level schools differ from your responsibilities towards other second-level schools?

2.3. How many schools does (name of management body) support?

2.4. How many patronage bodies does (name of management body) support?

2.5. What are the main responsibilities of (name of management body) in relation to patronage bodies?

2.6. In what ways, if any, are your interactions with Educate Together different than your interactions with other patronage bodies?

2.7. What are the main challenges faced by (name of management body) in its relationship with schools broadly?

2.8. How would you describe your relationship with (name of Educate Together school(s))?

2.9. In what ways, if any, do the challenges faced by (name of management body) in its relation to (name of Educate Together second-level school(s)) differ from those with other schools?

3. Perception on school ethos

3.1. From your understanding of Educate Together second-level schools, how would you describe the Educate Together school ethos?

3.2. In what ways, if any, does the school ethos of Educate Together schools impact your relation to the schools?

4. Other comments

4.1. Is there anything else you would like to add to this interview?

EDUCATE TOGETHER SECONDARY SCHOOL SURVEY

Let us know if you agree to participate in this research

- I have read and understand the information provided on the information sheet.
- I understand that I do not have to take part in this study and can stop taking part at any time.
- I understand that I am being asked to complete a survey.
- I understand that I do not have to answer questions that I do not like.
- No-one (not even teachers, mother or father) will see the answers to my questions.
- I understand that if I tell the researchers something that makes them worried about me, or someone else, they may have to tell someone who can help.
- I understand that information collected will be kept for three years and then destroyed.

1. Do you agree to participate in this study? (Required question)

Yes
No

2. School Name:

_____

3. Have you attended an Educate Together primary school?

Yes
No
I do not know

4. Are you a girl, boy, or other?

A girl
A boy
Other – please specify _____

5. What language do you speak most often at home?

English
Irish
Other – please specify _____

6. What is your religion or belief?

None	☐	Hindu	☐
Christian	☐	Sikh	☐
Roman Catholic	☐	Buddhist	☐
Anglican/Church of Ireland/Episcopalian	☐	Atheist	☐
Other Protestant	☐	Humanist	☐
Jewish	☐	Agnostic	☐
Muslim	☐		
Other– please specify _____	☐		

7. Has your mother attended a university or an institute of technology?

Yes
No
I do not know
I do not live with my mother

8. Has your father attended a university or an institute of technology?

Yes
No
I do not know
I do not live with my father

9. How many of your friends from primary school are in your secondary school?

None
One
Two
Three or more

10. How many of your friends from primary school are in your class?

None
One
Two
Three or more

11. How many friends do you normally hang around with?

None => Go to Question 16
One or two
Between 3 and 5
Between 6 and 10
More than 10

12. How old are the friends you usually hang around with?

	None	Some	Most or all
A year or more younger	☐	☐	☐
About the same age	☐	☐	☐
A year or two older	☐	☐	☐
More than two years older	☐	☐	☐

13. How many friends do you normally hang around with?

None
Some of them
Most of them
I do not know

14. How many of your friends are girls?

None
Some of them
Most of them
I do not know

15. How many of your friends are boys?

None
Some of them
Most of them
I do not know

16. How do you feel about school in general?

I like it very much
I like it quite a bit
I like it a bit
I don't like it very much
I hate it

17. In general, thinking about all your subjects and teachers, how regularly do the following take place in your classes?

	Very often	Often	A few times	Never
We copy notes from the board	☐	☐	☐	☐
I can work in a group with other students	☐	☐	☐	☐
The teacher reads from eBooks or textbooks	☐	☐	☐	☐
The teacher uses a CD or DVD in class	☐	☐	☐	☐
We use computer facilities in class	☐	☐	☐	☐
We use tablets/iPads in class	☐	☐	☐	☐
The teacher explains things really well	☐	☐	☐	☐
The teacher does most of the talking	☐	☐	☐	☐
I can express my opinions in class	☐	☐	☐	☐
We do activities in class (debates, presentations, roleplays, games, discussions)	☐	☐	☐	☐
We have projects to do outside class time	☐	☐	☐	☐
We get homework	☐	☐	☐	☐
The teacher uses the internet in class	☐	☐	☐	☐
We learn from each other as much as from the teacher	☐	☐	☐	☐
We participate in project-based learning	☐	☐	☐	☐
We have a choice in how we show our learning (e.g. presentations, written piece, create a video/poster etc.)	☐	☐	☐	☐

18. My school is a place where…..?

	Very often	Often	A few times	Never
I really like to go each day	☐	☐	☐	☐
My teachers are generally fair to me	☐	☐	☐	☐
I learn to get along with other people	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel I am a successful pupil	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel unhappy	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other pupils accept me as I am	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel respected	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel that I belong	☐	☐	☐	☐
I know how to cope with the work across all of my subjects	☐	☐	☐	☐

19. On average how much time do you spend doing homework on a normal weekday during term-time?

0 to 30 minutes	2 to less than 3 hours
31 minutes to less than one hour	3 to less than 4 hours
1 to less than 1.5 hours	4 hours or more
1.5 to less than 2 hours	Don't do homework

20. On a normal weekday during term-time, about how many hours do you spend reading for pleasure (books, magazines, newspapers, novels, comics)? [DO NOT INCLUDE TIME SPENT READING AT SCHOOL OR DOING HOMEWORK

0 to 30 minutes	2 to less than 3 hours
31 minutes to less than one hour	3 to less than 4 hours
1 to less than 1.5 hours	4 hours or more
1.5 to less than 2 hours	Don't read for pleasure

21. On a normal weekday during term-time, about how many hours do you spend online at home (books, magazines, newspapers, novels, comics)? [DO NOT INCLUDE TIME SPENT READING AT SCHOOL OR DOING HOMEWORK

0 to 30 minutes	2 to less than 3 hours
31 minutes to less than one hour	3 to less than 4 hours
1 to less than 1.5 hours	4 hours or more
1.5 to less than 2 hours	Don't spend time online

22. For each of these subjects, please indicate if you find the subject Difficult, OK, Not Difficult or You Don't Take that Subject.

	Difficult	OK	Not difficult	Don't take
Maths	☐	☐	☐	☐
Irish	☐	☐	☐	☐
English	☐	☐	☐	☐
Science	☐	☐	☐	☐
History	☐	☐	☐	☐

23. For each of these subjects, please indicate if you find the subject Interesting, OK, not interesting, or you don't take that subject.

	Interesting	OK	Not interesting	Don't take
Maths	☐	☐	☐	☐
Irish	☐	☐	☐	☐
English	☐	☐	☐	☐
Science	☐	☐	☐	☐
History	☐	☐	☐	☐

24. Do you plan to go to university or an institute of technology after secondary school?

Yes
No
I do not know

25. How should your personal smart phones be used for schoolwork at your school?

Students should be able to use personal devices freely for schoolwork at school
Students should use personal devices only at the request or instruction of the teacher at school
Students should not be able to use personal devices for schoolwork at school
Other – please specify _____

26. Some students get extra help at school in some subjects. Over the last 12 months have you received any extra help within school in any subject?

Yes => Go to question 27
No => Go to question 28

27. If Yes, what subjects did you get extra help in?

English/Reading
Maths
Irish
Other _____

28. Do you have a special education need and/or disability?

Yes
No

29. Have you been bullied in the last 3 months?

Yes => Go to question 30
No => Go to question 33

30. How often did this bullying take place?

Once or twice
2 or 3 times a month
About once a week
Several times a week

31. What form did the bullying take?

Physical bullying	☐	Exclusion (being left out)	☐
Verbal bullying (name-calling, hurtful slagging)	☐	Gossip, spreading rumours	☐
Electronic (phone messaging, emails, Facebook, etc)	☐	Threatened/forced to do things you didn't want to do	☐
Graffiti / pinning up notes / passing notes in class	☐	Other please (specify)_____	☐
Taking / damaging personal possessions	☐		

32. What was the reason for the bullying?

Ethnicity / race / nationality / skin colour	☐	Physical appearance (clothes, glasses, weight, height, etc.)	☐
Physical disability	☐	Family background	☐
Learning difficulty / disability	☐	Seen not to conform to gender roles	☐
Religion	☐	Jealousy	☐
Class performance / seen as star pupil	☐	Other please (specify) _____	☐
Teacher's pet	☐		

33. In the last 3 months have you bullied someone?

Yes => Go to question 34
No => Go to question 37

34. How often did you bully someone?

Once or twice
2 or 3 times a month
About once a week
Several times a week

35. What form did the bullying take?

Physical bullying	☐	Exclusion (being left out)	☐
Verbal bullying (name-calling, hurtful slagging)	☐	Gossip, spreading rumours	☐
Electronic (phone messaging, emails, Facebook, etc)	☐	Threatened/forced to do things you didn't want to do	☐
Graffiti / pinning up notes / passing notes in class	☐	Other please (specify)_____	☐
Taking / damaging personal possessions	☐		

36. What was the reason for the bullying?

Ethnicity / race / nationality / skin colour	☐	Physical appearance (clothes, glasses, weight, height, etc.)	☐
Physical disability	☐	Family background	☐
Learning difficulty / disability	☐	Seen not to conform to gender roles	☐
Religion	☐	Jealousy	☐
Class performance / seen as star pupil	☐	Other please (specify)_____	☐
Teacher's pet	☐		

37. Looking to the future, if you had your choice, what job would you really like to get?

38. How well does each of the following statements below describe you?

	Very much like me	Mostly like me	Some-what like me	Not much like me	Not at all like me
I respect people from other cultures as equal human beings.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I treat all people with respect regardless of their cultural background.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I give space to people from other cultures to express themselves.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I respect the values of people from different cultures.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I value the opinions of people from different cultures.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

39. Do you learn the following at school?

	Yes	No
I learn how economies in different countries are connected to each other	☐	☐
I learn how to solve conflicts with other people in our classrooms.	☐	☐
I learn about different cultures	☐	☐
I learn about different worldviews and identities	☐	☐
We read newspapers, look for news on the internet or watch the news together during classes.	☐	☐
I am often invited by my teachers to give my personal opinion about international news	☐	☐
I participate in events celebrating cultural diversity throughout the school year	☐	☐
I participate in classroom discussions about world events as part of the regular instruction	☐	☐
I analyse global issues together with my classmates in small groups during class	☐	☐
I analyse local or national issues together with my classmates in small groups during class	☐	☐
I learn that how people from different cultures can have different perspectives on some issues.	☐	☐
I learn how to communicate with people from different backgrounds.	☐	☐

40. My school is a place where…..

	Very often	Often	A few times	Never
I feel like teachers listen to me when I share an idea or opinion	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel that I have a say in what happens at my school	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel that if I wanted to make a change to something in my school	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel that students are encouraged to take action on things that are important to them	☐	☐	☐	☐

41. Since you joined this school, have you

	Yes	No
Voted for a class or school student representative	☐	☐
Took part in decision-making on how the school was run	☐	☐
Became a candidate for class representative or member of the student council	☐	☐
Participated in a campaign or activity to change something in the school or introduce something new to the school	☐	☐
Participated in a discussion with others (students/teachers/principal) about school rules or other things related to how the school runs	☐	☐

42. The next set of questions are about how you have been feeling recently. For each question, please indicate how much you have felt or acted this way in the past two weeks. If a sentence was true about how you felt or acted most of the time, answer TRUE. it was only sometimes true, answer SOMETIMES. If a sentence was not true about you, answer NOT TRUE.

	True	Sometimes	Not true
I felt miserable or unhappy	☐	☐	☐
I didn't enjoy anything at all	☐	☐	☐
I felt so tired I just sat around and did nothing	☐	☐	☐
I was very restless	☐	☐	☐
I felt I was no good any more	☐	☐	☐
I cried a lot	☐	☐	☐
I found it hard to think properly or concentrate	☐	☐	☐
I hated myself	☐	☐	☐
I was a bad person	☐	☐	☐
I felt lonely	☐	☐	☐
I thought nobody really loved me	☐	☐	☐
I thought I could never be as good as other kids	☐	☐	☐
I did everything wrong	☐	☐	☐

43. Is there anything else you want to tell us about your experience at your school?

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