Appendix 8 (2)

Interview schedule with four principals and focus group interviews with one group of teachers and two groups of pupils (Appendices 3 & 4). Questions and answers given to the ten questions put to principals, teachers and pupils.
Q1 (Behaviour Support Needs at School-Level) (similar to Q2 in Research Proposal and Q6 Principal/Teacher, and Q4 Pupil Questionnaires)

I: What help/supports are needed to manage behaviour at school level?

Principal 1 Well, you need co-operation between staff and parents so that they’ll both have a good understanding of what’s required, similar values, similar aims in behaviour, similar boundaries between staff and parents and among the staff themselves. Yea?

Principal 2 I suppose the first thing I would notice or mention is to have a very watertight policy on codes of discipline and approaches towards it and the recording of indisciplines and major indisciplines. Having said that much then, you also need to approach discipline from various angles, there’s no point in having a set of sanctions only because from where I stand, a lot of the indiscipline in our school would come from children, their behaviour is driven from something outside of the child, whether it be, just immediately outside of themselves - in the home in their environment or even in their learning environment, that behaviour can be highly driven and we just don’t have enough information, that kind of information is not given to enough of teachers, parents, children themselves even that there is a reason for some of the behaviour other than just the person being indisciplined, or whatever so I think information should be given to teachers, parents, and to the general educational body around about why behaviours are as they are.

I And do you feel that the teachers are trained enough on behaviour?

Principal 2: Almost not at all, unless people specifically pick up on summer courses and doing psychology courses and things like that. Teachers aren’t aware of it at all. They just have a discipline policy. You tick boxes and the child is either disciplined or indisciplined. There is no step or looking into what drives that behaviour or misbehaviour

Principal 3 To manage behaviour at school level, I think that it is essential that there would be a whole-school agreement which would involve parents, teachers and children as a tool for managing behaviour or assistance that would be put in place and I think that it is essential that it would be at whole-school level because sometimes different teachers do a lot of wonderful things in each classroom but unless a staff agree together what we, as a group of people feel we need in place in the school for the school to be an effective organisation. Sometimes children go from class to class and different rules apply and there can be some confusion and a lot of information can cause either confusion, frustration, or anger because of different types of management….

I: Yes….

Principal 3: ….essential that a school would agree exactly what kind of tools they want to put in place.

Principal 4 Am……I would say to manage behaviour at school level, am….a whole-school policy on behaviour, number 1 would be imperative. You’d also need….am….to devise a means of approaching parents and calling them in if there was an issue with regard to behaviour in the school. Am…I think that’s where a very strong home school link would be imperative, that the home were aware what the acceptable behaviour was at school and they could impart that information onto
their child…in a positive way and…..that’s what I feel - a whole school approach and continuity also, between one class and the next - what’s accepted in one class or what’s unaccepted is the same in the next class.

I: Consistency among staff…

Principal 4: Consistency among staff in their approach, yea, yea.

Teachers Focus-Group:

T1 (Resource): Well, school rules are essential. School rules need to be democratically selected when the children come in and I suppose that everybody would be informed about them – parents, pupils. I always think that it is extremely important to teach proper routines around a school, and respect. Also for new staff members, for somebody to go through the school rules because they can be interpreted differently so with new staff, you need to have a run-through on how the rules are actually implemented. We also have a system of people with posts of responsibility take on a pastoral care role and responsible for behaviour within a class groupings so every person with a post of responsibility would be a year head for a different year and then co-ordinate any behaviour difficulties. So that is the first line for the teacher to go to and then if the teacher and the year head couldn’t sort it out, then the Principal or the Deputy Principal would sort it out. So that would be the systems that we have.

T5 (class T): would that be a big school?

T1: Yes, a very big school. We have streams of two and sometimes three.

T4 (Class): And when would that happen, between the teacher and year-head, would be after school?

T1 (R): Yea, after school, usually. It would be their first port of call for advice and help in dealing with a behaviour issue. That would be the niggling on-going behaviour issues. There are certain behaviours that, straight away, the Principal is involved in, extreme behaviours – we wouldn’t have extreme disruptive behaviour really, a major disruptive behaviour in the school but that is one of the systems we have to try and prevent and deal with those behaviours. It’s part of our new code of discipline. It really is working very well. We put a lot of work into developing our code of discipline, with parents. It’s on-going, it took a lot of work. I think for most schools difficulty arose, when it came down to, like the positive element, everything was about the positive element, but when something happened and something had to be done about it, that’s the sticking point in every code of discipline, having a workable solution.

T2 (Resource): It’s about prevention.

T1 (R): Yes, prevention is the main aim of it. Sanctions are the difficult bit. We had the problem that children did something and sanctions were given out. Parents came in giving out about the sanctions. But we said, listen, we sent you home this code of discipline, you signed it, you agreed to it. When it’s signed, it makes it a lot easier for you to do what you have to do.

T6 (6th class T): I think what is significant is that all the children understand that they can be corrected by all the teachers. Sometimes they think that they can be corrected only by their own teacher and I think that has to be
put in the code of behaviour. I think and if they accept that and if a child of mine offends another teacher, I take it as if I have been offended. I deal with it in that manner. I think that is very significant.

T2 (R): The flip side of that is that you get other teachers who get insulted almost that somebody else is telling off their child.

T6 (6th Class): That’s right.

T2 (R): so you need to be aware of that. I went on a school trip yesterday and I got the feeling that some teachers weren’t happy that I was instructing their children about what to do, so I think you have to work on that.

T6 (6th Class): I think that it is the Resource teachers that children think they have no authority.

T1 (R): Sometimes with younger teacher, you know older children think they can pull one over on them. I think collective responsibility, that has to come from the top. In order to foster that, we do what we call rules mornings and everybody takes a different class, so we have a rota, so maybe I go to Junior Infants today. Say every month, we do two mornings. Different teachers than the class teacher goes into the class and we have a script, say this month, we are working on say: manners and going in and out of the school gate and we do it from 20 past 9 to ½ 9 to try and get that message across. We are all working, all the teachers are working on the same rules. It doesn’t always work out that way, say parents let children away with things, some teachers tend to let children away with things.

T2: Yea, lack of consistency.

T1: Yea, I think in any human situation, you are going to get that — lack of consistency. People tend to see things differently you know.

T6: I think that it is the little things that eventually break down. If you correct the little things, you are half way there. Begin as you mean to go on.

T4: I think for yourself as well that other teachers would pick up on the kids who are misbehaving. Sometimes you seem to be the one who is always correcting. It would be good if there was another teacher.

T1: I think that you notice it very much when people are doing yard duty. Some teachers are out there correcting. Other teachers just stand there with their arms folded and don’t get involved. Teachers have to be constantly, teachers have to be constantly reminded that all teachers are responsible for all behaviours.

I: Actually that came up in the children’s focus-groups about behaviour. They said that the older teachers always correct them and the younger teachers tend not to and they say, we’ll get you the next time.

T2: What you need is consistency. You need a behaviour management group as such. In a school I worked in, we had a whole-school behaviour policy and all teachers were talking from the same page. All kids knew the rules and what the consequences would be. It worked so well, partly because of the head teacher. When she left the next head carried it on.

T1: When I worked in Dublin, we used discipline for Learning. I mean it’s mostly used in schools where there would be major problems, mainly disadvantaged areas. It’s very time consuming to maintain. In the school where I worked there was a person whose post of responsibility
was Discipline for Learning so every week, you got your sheet to nominate your child who would receive a reward. Detention was part of it, you know that the children would receive detention and the Principal had to oversee that detention. It was very strict. No other system of punishments were allowed. Children had books, they got little cards that they got stamps on for prizes and that. You had to use it exclusively. It was used extensively in schools in Tallaght.

T5: We use it in our school now. Actually it’s working really well. But you are rewarding kids that are always going to be good. You ask why are the kids being good, are they doing it for themselves, I mean altruism or is it for the stamp. But it does work as well. It’s a nice way of being consistent. It work all the way from Infants to 6th class but it does take a lot of time.

T1: It demands really really constant work. It was devised for schools where there are particular behaviour problems. At the time, the learning wasn’t happening because of the discipline problems. But it has stood the test of time. I mean that’s nearly 30 years ago now that it was devised. But as you say, it does take up a lot of time, you have to say - do you need it? In our school, we don’t need that level of constant support, you would need it if it was impacting on the learning in the school. It is only the odd child, that would be, you know………… There is a lot of work with it, yea, stamps pile up and you might have 3 or 4 days stamps to do. It works but everybody has to be on the same page. There’s staff training for it, you know in Dublin. Staff were trained in the system and it was operated very rigidly. I did see when I visited the school in ___ and it is still operating there.

Pupils Focus-Group 1

Q1 (Behaviour support Needs at School Level)

Interviewer: If you were the Principal, what do you think is needed in the school to make sure everyone behaves well?

Pupil 1: School Rules are enforced and are put into practice

Pupil 2: It would probably help if all classrooms had their own school rules, like each pupil made up a classroom rule, about 5 of them, and then that would probably help better to keep all the rules intact.

Pupil 3: If there are like, children behaving, and the principal is up to his eyes with work and he’s getting sent children down to him all the time for misbehaviour and the teacher can’t deal with him, try and get someone in to help the teachers deal with behaviour.

Interviewer: We are talking now about rules for the whole school:

Pupil 4: More discipline and punishments.

Pupil 5: Maybe if the parents at home encouraged good behaviour.

Pupil 1: Maybe if 6th class acts as prefects and stopped all the bullying and that.

Interviewer: OK, to be on the watch-out.

How could the teachers help?

Pupil 4: Maybe if there were more teachers, like on yard duty, if there were two teachers and even if they were on one side of the yard, they can’t be looking over.
Pupil 1: Or even if there were 2, they always walk together, and maybe if they were like that (showed them opposite and going clockwise), walking around the school separately, it would be better.

Pupil 3: Maybe if the principal employed a counsellor to help the children with behaviour problems.

Pupils Focus-Group 2
Pupil 1(b): I think we should be rewarded more because we get in trouble for a lot more things than we do. If we were rewarded, we wouldn’t get in as much trouble.
I: So more rewards, you think.

Pupil 2: (b) We should have more leeway. People get in trouble because they want to get in trouble because it’s risky. They wouldn’t be cheeky or go out in the yard if they didn’t think they’d get in trouble for it.

Pupil3: (b) There needs to be stricter rules and punishments. People get in trouble and they don’t really care. If there were stricter rules, and stricter punishments, they’d stop, sooner.
I: OK, so we said stricter rules, rewards, and punishments and you said something...

Pupil 2: More leeway.
I: So you said stricter rules and you said more leeway.. ha, ha.
I: Why do you think you need more leeway?

Pupil 2: Because, when you get in trouble you hardly ever get in trouble. Well if you go to the yard, people wouldn’t go to the yard if they get in trouble. Some people want to go to the yard if they get in trouble. They think they are funny and want to get in trouble. If you didn’t want to get in trouble for going to the yard, nobody would do it.
I: So you said, going in the yard, is it?

Pupil2: If you don’t go near the oil tank...
I: If you don’t go near the oil tank? Oh, I see, so there’s a certain part of the yard that you are not allowed go to, is it?

Pupil2: Yea, but everybody still goes.
I: And why would they go when they are not supposed to go, do you think?

Pupil2: To get in trouble.
I: And do they mean to get in trouble?

Pupil2: Yea, some of them do to try and be cool.
I: Oh, I see, yea. So you think people go over there to get in trouble because it’s cool. Is that what you are saying?

Pupil2: Yea.
I: Would you all agree with that?
Pupils together: Yea
Q2: (Behaviour Support Needs at Classroom/Group Level)
(similar to Q2 in Research Proposal and Q13 Principal/Teacher, and Q11 Pupil Questionnaires)

I: What help would support teachers in the classroom to manage behaviour so that the teacher can carry on teaching?

Pr1: Well, I know in schools where there is serious misbehaviour, they have a Support teacher and I know that works well in Secondary Schools. Some schools don’t need that though and misbehaviour is easily dealt with and it doesn’t distract the class too much. It could be a learning process for the child who is misbehaving and for the other pupils. You don’t have to eliminate the child who is misbehaving, you can use it as a learning process.

I: And when you say the support teacher, do you the Learning Support teacher?

Pr1: No, no. There’s a specific job, a Support Teacher for behaviour.

I: Oh, right.

Pr1: Yea, some schools have that. You know that, do you?

I: Well, yes, I know they have it in the North but I didn’t know there is such a job here.

Pr1: Oh, yea, there is such a job in ____, in ____ Primary School, and children are withdrawn from the class because of their behaviour. They need it in some schools especially in Urban and disadvantaged schools. Every school should have a Support Teacher. They call them support Teachers, they’re not Learning Support or Language Support, they’re just called Support, but they are Behaviour Support teachers.

P2: I think an understanding - same as the first one, an understanding of the behaviour itself would be the first great help and then working along and having some way of recording it, and building a body of information about this behaviour and if it were possible at all then that some outside agency could deal with the reasons for the behaviour because certain children suffer an awful lot. Their suffering is manifested further then in certain misbehaviours and they are punished further for suffering and there is a kind of circularity going on there which drives misbehaviour inside their own environment and that is being caused by something else besides themselves, so I don’t know how to intervene there. I think again it’s all around information and taking up some sort of course that would assist us to intervene and counsel children setting up some kind of system, to intervene and help children in some way and help the children and help the people who work with them as well to understand.

I: You mentioned outside agencies, you mentioned counselling……

Pr2: Well, I think……well, it could be from inside school but it would be better if it were people from outside if they could come in and interpret this behaviour and give us a plan to deal with it, whether it is behaviour modification programmes or behaviour analysis to understand it, modification to change it and also behaviour support. Most children would try to be good but they need support in being good. They are coming from a different background.
Essential I think that every class would have a list of class rules and
essential I think that they would be drawn up in conjunction with the
children and that people would..........children would understand that
this is the reason that rules are in place, it’s for the protection and the
welfare of everybody and not just for the teachers or the Principal but
that it’s so that the school can be an effective organisation as I was
saying already. And I think essential to that, is when the rules are
drawn up, and posted in the room, that every day, the attention of the
children would be brought to them, because I think that we do
wonderful work and sometimes set it up and then forget about it but
that the discipline and the programme would be part of school life -
everyday school life, the same as coming in in your uniform or having
your homework done, that this is the way we operate in the classroom
in this school.

Within the class…..yes…..to establish classroom rules….the ground
rules are established from the very early stages and then
continuity…that there’s no lacking in that, that the children are very
very aware of their limits and the limitations….am.. and then a reward
system as well, I mean ….that the rules are kept and the teacher could
on a particular day acknowledge that reward…for commitment to the
school….to the classroom rules. I find, talking to my class, repeatedly,
about the fact that I’m disappointed, I find by telling them that I am
upset….what is happening in the class has really made me feel quite
upset……it taps into their emotion but it does…am .bring the
behaviour right back to a very basic level of acceptance am -
unacceptance really.

Just like Question 1 there, I think it’s important that at the very start of
the year the children and yourself make up the rules and each year, you
have to be consistent yourself, especially with staff. But it is very easy
to feel sorry for somebody and if they do something wrong, that you
don’t deal with them in the same way as somebody that usually carries
on like that. And children understand what are the consequences if
they don’t behave properly and those consequences must be the same.
I think the teaching of routine is very old fashioned but they have stood
the test of time. If you actually teach children how you want to
manage your classroom because it might be different from the way the
teacher managed it the year before - what happens when the bell rings,
what happens when they get their coat, what happens on a wet day, and
if you teach it and consistently enforce it for the month of September,
the room operates in an organised way. I think though that it has to be
taught, you can’t presume that it’s going to happen. Each year, it
needs to be taught.

I think if the carrot is big enough, you won’t need a stick at all. If what
they’re deprived of is really what they’d like to have, if that is what
you’re depriving them of for example fun and games, if that is what
you are depriving them of, that really gets to them.

They really need to care about it though.

They really do.
Some of the teachers in our school, operate, you know, Golden time, Jenny Moseley Golden Time. You know they lose their minutes of Golden Time individually you know and they might have lost a 10 minute of a 20 minutes slot so they have to do work when others are involved in Golden Time. That really gets to them. Some people operate you know- homework passes and you can get with so many points and you can redeem it for a homework pass and you can use your homework pass, you can use it, you know any night. You can save it up if you want to go somewhere.

I: That’s a good idea.

We used the same, you know the Jenny Moseley behaviour as well. We used the yellow card, and red card fairly rigidly. The kids knew they were getting a warning when the yellow card was placed on their table. It was almost like a silent warning. You could see with a lot of them that, like, their shoulders just dropped if you put a yellow card on the table. Then with the red, their hearts really nearly stopped and for most kids, that was the view. I remember one time that I had a boisterous 20 6th class. We, myself and the other teacher went through the behaviour policy with them. We actually taught them the behaviour policy that other troublesome kids had never actually seen. We showed them the responsibilities that they had, we showed them what their sanctions would be, what they would be expected to fill out and I think that it worked because they knew exactly what was going to happen. We would question them at the Golden Time, what was going to happen now and they knew exactly. It was almost like putting them on a level, like an adult. Like you waste so much time the Jenny Moseley thing, that is very silent….you are not like, interrupting because like, that’s the big thing.

Yea, like you waste so much time. I had a blue one and it had a sad face on it and it said ‘I will speak to you later’ on it. You just put it on the table without kind of saying anything.

Q2 (Behaviour support Needs at Classroom/Group Level)

Interviewer: If you were the class teacher, what help would you need from your pupils and from others on behaviour so that you can carry on teaching?

Pupil 1: You need other pupils, like, not to encourage them by laughing, saying well done, that was funny, encouraging them. Saying maybe ‘well done’, Don’t give them praise, don’t notice it, like, just ignore it.

I: If they misbehave, is it?

Pupil 1: Yea, or like if they are trying to look for attention, just ignore them.

I: So if you were the class teacher, what would you need from your pupils?

Pupil 3: You’d need respect from your pupils and they should encourage good behaviour too.

I: Good

Pupil 3: And every pupil would participate in all the work, in the games and everything.

I: Say that again.

Pupil 3: It would give the teacher an easier time if every pupil like participated in like Science, and PE and everything.
I: In all the subjects?
Pupil 3: Yea.
I: Instead of maybe misbehaving, is it?
Pupil 6: If the pupils were obedient and paying attention to all the subjects, then pretty much the school would get on better and the teacher would probably get on a lot better with the students and probably give them no homework maybe once a week.

Pupils’ Focus—Group 2

Pupil 4: More respect for the teachers
I: Yes, everybody needs respect.
Pupil 4: Yea, if a teacher gives respect to you, you should give respect back
Q3  (Behaviour Support Needs for Pupils at Classroom/Group Level
(similar to Question 2 in Research Proposal but with emphasis on the
pupil in the classroom)
I:  What help would support pupils in the classroom so that they can
learn?
Pr1:  Well, as you say, it is a learning thing. They have to be taught the
rules. They have to be explained to, not just at the beginning of the
year but regularly. They have to be helped to understand the rules,
maybe to create the rules for their own class, maybe not for the whole
school, but for their classroom. And when they do misbehave, it has to
be explained how they misbehaved and the consequences. So there has
to be clear understanding and clear communication.
Pr2  Again, I think a good programme set-up, that they are given a bit of
information about their behaviour, that it can be changed. Behaviour
modification programme can be set up then and run and they have
input into it, particularly over half of the school that the child would
have a say in the plan first of all but in looking back over a week’s
behaviour, that they will be able to say why they did this and why they
did that and they get an understanding of their own behaviour because
a lot of the behaviour is totally outside a child’s understanding unless
they examine it or analyse it someway.
I:  Do you think that well-planned lessons would come into that?
Pr2:  It would, yea. But I was talking of our context here, where you find
that almost all of the misbehaviour has an environmental basis, that
there is something going on in the child’s environment whether it is
home issues, monitory issues, people losing work, in the family, illness
in the family, marriage break-downs, things like that, manifesting in
behaviour and the children don’t have a clue about what is going on.
Now, a very structured classroom would work alright. Not always.
Pr3  I think that the rules would be put into force so that people realise well,
the rule about working quietly at that particular time is for everybody,
it’s to allow people to concentrate, it’s not to ruin your fun at school,
it’s to…..that .each rule applies to a different stage, and it’s there for the
welfare of each child and I think the children would need to be taught
that and particularly children maybe who have difficulty around their
behaviour for whatever reason, maybe because of a named condition or
maybe …..for whatever reason that there is a poor pattern of
behaviour, I think they need to be taught carefully the rules and taught
why they’re there and maybe supported in…in establishing those rules,
whether that would be a reward system, and I think the one that works
best is, you know, catching them when they are being good as the old
saying goes.
I:  Mm mm, and do you feel that the teacher has input there, you know
for example, well-planned lessons, otherwise the children might get
bored and mightn’t behave……
Pr3:  Oh, absolutely, I think, you know, essential for every class teacher to
come in well-prepared because children are very clever at spotting the
day that you’re winging it and it makes some children uncomfortable,
it gives other children a reason to….you know, carry on so I think,
essential that you come in, you know, ready for the day’s work, you
know, a plan for the day and all the things you are going to need to put
that plan in place.

Pr4: Le me see - children - I would say ....I’d say this is where an
individual education plan would come in.... am.....obviously for
academic work also but for behaviour and to pinpoint maybe one
particular behaviour that the child is consistently carrying out in the
room, that is unacceptable and that again, like, a reward system would
be put in place and that his good behaviour would be acknowledged -
so a very targeted approach, to a child, and a meeting with the mum
and to identify what is happening in the class that is upsetting the rule
of things, that is interfering with his learning and perhaps even
distracting others in the class.....so a very very targeted approach, a
very clear cut and realistic.....a very .realistic set of objectives for each
child.

I: And for the pupils, in general, in the classroom, what would they need
so that their teacher can carry on teaching ....you know, rather than the
individual child in the class, the class as a whole, what do they need,
do you feel?

Pr: A structured time-table - children love routine .....make it very very
clear to them what is happening - what is happening at 11 o’clock,
what is happening at ½ past 11, and if they’re told in advance I feel
.....you know, later on today, we have PE and if there is a shift in the
time table that they are informed .....for some reason, for example if
the halla (hall) is not available or if it’s raining outside, well, that that’s
explained to them and not just all of a sudden, well, we’re not going to
PE.....you know that they are actually informed if there is a change in
the time table...... they need routine and continuity.

I: And what should they expect from their class teacher, you know in the
line of lessons?

Pr4: Well, differentiation, absolutely, you know, to cater for each person.
We’re lucky here in that we have small numbers per room and that’s
not to say that we’ve no issues either but just, you know, by scanning
the room, you can pick out the groups, you can see whose on routine
and who has needs extra support and then you’d always have children
who need to be challenged, who need to be occupied...they have to be
.kept on task. They could be at the opposite end of the scale and that
their needs are also catered for, they are as much in need of an
Education Plan I feel....so they don’t get bored and switch off....that
they are constantly challenged.

Teachers focus-Group

T2: I think you need to teach social skills because it is a big, big thing and
it is what children are lacking. From having done critical skills, I don’t
know if it is over here but basically I qualified in Jersey. You would
give a group...... there is a lot of group work. It was a project, say the
Vikings as an example and they had to do a poster project between
them and every person had a role, say you were the timekeeper,
another the resource person, you know there was a role for everybody
so they had that sense of responsibility. They had to problem solve
together, they had to discuss, they had to listen, and you had to teach
all these skills individually beforehand, but, you know, what would
make a quality project, etc, and you would have all these pinned up on
the wall before you even started the project so the kids would know
what we have to do, discuss it and that. You know it takes a good
month to teach the skills in themselves but once they had the skills, and
you put a challenge in front of them, they would be able to do the
challenge. Then you would have a report at the end but they would be
able to play their role. It just worked really really well.

T1: The thing that we had like that is co-operative groups, you know that
girl in Galway that did the work. Everybody gets a card and each
group has a role and you teach the role very consistently before they do
the work. It’s something like that. I think differentiated work in a
class also. You know every child purposefully engaged. I think a lot
of the misbehaviour comes from children who are bored. Some of the
work put in front of them is either too hard or too easy and they are
looking for challenge really. I think really proper differentiated work
adds to…..

T4: I think with the grouping and co-operative work, it’s something that
has to come up through the school as well because you know at senior
level, you’re trying to introduce it and if they haven’t been doing it
before, so I think like a whole-school programme where everybody is
doing the same.

T6: You’ll get a particular day when you find that this child just doesn’t
want to do work. On that day, I think that the child has to be
withdrawn and for a teacher to understand that that facility is there for
them. I think that’s significant as well.

T1: I think that teachers need to feel supported. I’ve had a junior infant
child who had really extreme behaviour. I just couldn’t manage her at
all. She trashed all round her. She ended up having to go to a special
school for behaviour difficulties. I felt vulnerable really and I’d hate if
my colleagues had judged me, but I used to say ‘Will you please come
in and help me, this child is really frightening me’ or whatever but I
think the support of your colleagues, you really need to feel supported
and non-judgemental of your teaching skills or of your management
skills.

T4: I feel sometimes when you look for help, especially with senior
teachers, it’s expected that you should be able to get on with it and
when you go for help sometimes, it’s not fair, you do feel on your own.

Pupils Focus-Group 1

Q3 (Behaviour Support Needs of Pupils in the Classroom)

I As pupils, what do you need from the teacher and from others so that
you can learn?

Pupil 4: You need a quiet atmosphere, it’s hard like and you need the teacher
not to be interrupted, like when she is interrupted, she loses her train
of thought and it can make it harder as well.

I: That’s a good idea.

Pupil 5: respect from your friends and that in the class and them not to be
interrupting when the teacher is trying to explain something.

I: Ok, that’s good.
Pupil 3: Maybe if there is someone misbehaving in the class and you can’t get on with your work, or maybe behind the teacher’s back, just tell the teacher, maybe send them to the corner where they can think about what they have done wrong, and come back and say sorry.

I: Like kind of time-out, you mean?

Pupil 3: Like let them think about what they have done wrong.

I: Yes, that’s good.

Pupil 4: Maybe tell someone in the classroom a problem.

I: Maybe be able to talk to someone, is it?

Pupil 1: Yea, there is something like that in Secondary, yea, like a Year Head, like 6th Year.

Pupil 1: If someone is writing on the blackboard, and if someone comes in to the class and watches the class while he is writing and someone is talking, he’ll get caught easy.

Pupil 4: More discipline so you could learn more in the classroom.

I: So he or she needs to be strict on discipline?

Pupil 5: We get away with too much in the classroom.

I: Do you? You feel that there should be stricter rules.

Pupil 5: Yea, let’s say we are doing a test and everyone needs to be quiet so we can concentrate……

I: Say that again

Pupil 5: Say we are doing a test and everyone needs to be quiet and they are all messin and that.

I: Yes, you need quietness for a test. Anything else that you need from your teacher and from others so that you can learn?

Pupil 6: If a child like keeps misbehaving, say you are doing a subject, and they keep misbehaving, they should be sent to a different room if you start messin or something.

I: Ok,

Pupil 3: If you are in our class and you get in trouble, you get sent to a black line.

I: You get sent to……...

Pupil 3: A black line.

I: A black line on the floor?

Pupil 3: Yea, which really doesn’t do much to stop you.

I: Oh, right. I’m just throwing it out there that if you get sent to another room, is that interfering with another class?

Pupil 1: Yea, but there’s no one to mess with.

I: There’s no one to mess with, so you think that it’s a good idea.

Pupil 3: Or you could be sent to the staff-room.

Pupil 2: But you still have to do your work, you have to bring your work with you.

I: But if you went to the staff-room, who is in the staff-room?

Pupil 7: There’s always someone in there.

Pupil 3: Just say someone got in trouble for talking, they go back and do it again as soon as the teacher turns around.

I: So are you saying that the penalties are not enough?

Pupil 3: Yea.
Q4 (Behaviour Support Needs at Individual Level)

I: What help would support individual pupils with behavioural difficulties in school to enable them learn?

Pr1 Well, some children definitely need to be withdrawn for a chat or a bit of Counselling, listening to them to know what their problems are, and I think the Learning Support Teachers could work on that and the Principal teacher if she or he is free, to have individual sessions with children who continually misbehave.

I: Right, OK.

Pr2 I think the individual needs support from the class teacher, from the Principal, perhaps from an outside agency as well to understand what they are doing and give them hope that there is a change in their behaviour. About half of misbehaviours, the ordinary day-to-day routine ones change immediately but the ongoing ones, the recurring ones, are the ones that we need to get a hold of some kind of programmes to work with.

I: And the individual pupil, where would they get that help. Would they get it within the classroom, or would it be outside of the classroom.

Pr: I would prefer if they got it in a kind of holistic thing - both inside classroom, outside classroom, within the school in general, with their parents, with their home and that is a matter of a lot of information, we are able to give the home and we are able to give our community a lot of information about other school issues - the revised curriculum, about sporting things, just about everything except behaviour and just castigating children just because they misbehave on a continual basis, and without having the full information and the knowledge about how behaviour is driven. I think it is unfair both to the school and to the child. So I would think an information dissemination would be very very important, why behaviour show themselves the way they are.

Pr3 I think they would need to work with their resource teacher or learning support teacher to actually first of all understand the rules and the reasons for them and then if the child has difficulty around it, maybe tailoring the school programme but keeping it very much as part of a school programme that they wouldn’t be a separate programme for them but a tailored programme built around the existing programme, otherwise you might be setting them apart and I think they feel themselves that if they are set apart that they are different so it establishes well, maybe that they don’t really need to behave as well as others so as far as they are capable of behaving, we have to support them and demand that they do.

Pr4 Yes, highlighting the particular behaviour. I suppose, Kay we have to go back to the root also, there could be an underlying issue that may not present itself verbally from the child, why he’s upset or acting out - that’s where the home-school link is important. In a case here, where the child had a particular health complaint and as a result, it was stressful on him and by talking with mum, we established what was the root of it and we are aware now of this particular issue which is stressful and it definitely is the root of all his anger, his aggression, his
defiance, we can put it all right back to this particular condition that he
has and by talking about it I’m sure his parents are aware of it at
home but in school….he can now leave the room ….to use the
bathroom, we say ‘don’t worry if you have to leave the room’. He
has come on in leaps and bounds. We had a visitor to the school
recently and he personally thanked me for organising the visit and that
wouldn’t have been the same child a few months ago. So I think….am…children, I don’t feel they are not born with this behaviour but
they don’t learn this aggression, you know what I mean, I don’t think
it’s fair to say ‘Oh, he’s like that and there’s no reason for it and we’ll
move on and try and cope’ but well do everything we can and go right
back to the issue and in so doing, the child has the opportunity to
perform and achieve on the same level as everybody else and not to be
a target for this negative behaviour.

I: Yes, and what do you put in place for that individual child with
behavioural difficulties?…What supports are in place for a child with
behaviour problems?...

Pr: We have a particular programme operating here…the name of the
programme escapes me but it’s where the child fills out what he’s good
at…

I: Oh, yes, strengths and needs.

Pr: Yes, strengths and weaknesses. This is the child’s opportunity to focus
on his positives.

I: Does he go out separately with another teacher or does he do it as part
of his class work?

Pr: Am…

I: What steps are there for a child like that?

Pr: This child that I am thinking of doesn’t leave the class but there are
other children in the school that have to leave the room, yes.

I: And who would they go out to?

Pr: Another teacher, sometimes the secretary might just speak to him.
Sometimes, he just needs some quiet time away from the class, he just
needs to be out of the classroom situation. And it’s difficult because
you can’t always provide that, and we’re lucky because we have the
School Completion Programme here as well and we have a project
worker and where children have missed out, the project worker can
step in and take the child one-to-one, obviously with the consent for
the parents, and build confidence and address key learning issues that
he’s missed in the time he’s been away.

I: What is the School Completion Programme?

Pr: School Completion is a targeted approach to children who would be
considered at risk of not competing secondary school….

I: Although this is primary school…..

Pr: Yes, they target the primary level…..

I: From about what age?

Pr: We are currently working with a boy in Junior Infants who is working
with the project worker, employed under School Completion. He
missed a significant number of days, and there were concerns over his
home environment as well, his confidence is very very low and he is
quite aggressive in himself also. With regard to School Completion,
then, that facilitates that child, the fact that he’s out of synch in the class, he’s missed so much, so this is his opportunity to shine….am….he’s given his one-to-one, whatever the timetable allows.

I: Is that teacher here every day?
Pr: She’s not a teacher, she’s a project worker. She’s here 15 hrs. a week.
I: Like a carer, is it? What qualification has she?
Pr: She’s a Special Needs Assistant, a Classroom Assistant…. is her background.
I: Oh….yes.
Pr: Well, on the School Completion then and the fact that attendance is monitored ….she would be monitoring attendance in a way of informing who her next client/child would be. We have an after school club as well and she is involved in that.
I: that’s good, everyday is it?
Pr: Well, she’s here Monday to Friday but no, after school club ….the girls come down from the girls’ school every Tuesday and there’s cooking, there’s games, sewing, crafts, different times, different times, it depends on what’s available.
I: And is there after school club for boys as well?
Pr: Well, this is our school and the girls come down to us.
I: And the boys do it too.
Pr: Yes, the boys do it as well, 3rd, 4th and 5th class, and next year I’m hoping that we’ll have a computer club here on a Wednesday. My background is IT, I’m completing a Master’s in IT. So what I’m hoping to do is use IT as a means of, just attracting children who might not engage as well in a classroom and in my research, I’ve discovered that IT is an outlet, a literacy that they might engage in a bit more…..and to support their learning in the classroom as well. I have a few ideas that I have put together,….. am….school web site, uploading our pod cast or our blogs which is uploading documentation that they have done per day…..am….small groups,….group activity,…..and when I mentioned School Completion, we will be targeting the children that we would like to involve, it will be open to everybody but we will ensure that Johnny and Frank, that they would definitely benefit from it and we would contact parents and parents would be involved and they would be reminded of the benefits of it.
I: And is that every week?
Pr: My hope is that we will have the ‘computer club every Wednesday and it will be suitable for the boys here.
I: Or girls?
Pr: Well, I suppose my preference is that I would just have it for the boys here on a Wednesday because they will have the opportunity for them to mix with the girls on a Tuesday. So Wednesday will be just the computer club.
I: And on the Tuesday, you mentioned that there’s crafts and cookery, is that for boys and girls?
Pr: Yes.
I: and do you find that the boys take on those topics?
Yes, and when I’ve gone down there, I have observed some of our boys from 4th class and they were all given a plain pillow cushion and some embroidery thread, and they decided to do maybe the first initial of their name, some did flags, more did the colour of their jerseys- their favourite football team etc. And I’ve noticed obviously the girls were concentrating a bit more but the boys were trying to get the hang of it as well so I sat with some of the boys and I put dots on the pillow cushions - I gave them a little guide. Yea, yea, there was cookery as well and the boys would engage in the cookery also.

Teachers Focus-Group

(Behaviour Support Needs at Individual Level)

I: We’ll look now at behaviour support needs at Individual level: What help would support individual pupils with behavioural difficulties in school to enable them learn?

T1: I suppose analysis of the behaviour difficulties - an assessment of why, you know, are there behaviour difficulties or……..Most behaviour difficulties are driven by a need…….All behaviour I suppose is driven by a need…..Well, constructive behaviours in general and then there are problems, something within the child like ADHD, Asperger’s or that, and which need outside professional help or maybe environmental issues, something gone wrong at home or something gone wrong in the child’s environment so I feel that it is one of the biggest needs we have is an understanding of the child’s behaviour and what’s causing it. I think that if we kind of know whether the child can’t really control because of maybe a brain dysfunction or a neurological difficulty like ADHD. The only thing is we would deal with it differently if we have the background knowledge about environmental issues, say disruption in the family or a death or even, you know some sort of a dispute in the home, then we are able to look at it differently. We might still follow the same procedures for dealing with it but we may also be able to access help from outside for dealing with it.

T5: You know you said about analysing their behaviour, it could be the time of the day, they could be fine in the morning and then in the afternoon, they just go …..mad. At the start, earlier, you were talking about when are they going to go out for resource, when are they going to go out for……..well, you need to take them out for those times, they are not able to be in the classroom. If they are going to go out, I suppose it is important to analyse it beforehand.

T6: I think there are some dysfunctions that you can’t remEDIATE at all. There are children who are coming from very troubled backgrounds, they’re not responding to anything.

T2: I think you need to have a very good relationship with the parents, you know as far as you can to work together on it. Children think they can get away with it, in certain environments. Consistency again across the different divides need to be maintained as well. Sometimes all you need is a quick phone call home.

T6: But sometimes the parents are in open conflict and it is the staff at the school that they are in open conflict with.

T1: I think sometimes if you have an SNA (Special Needs Assistant), sometimes children have to be removed, children with severe
behaviour difficulties but to let other children in the class learn and not be intimidated by them. Sometimes there has to be someone there to take the child from the class, either the Principal or the SNA, or somebody, you know to bring them out to the school garden and letting them dig. We also have a sensory room where we take them if they really need to calm down.

T6: We had an interesting one in our school lately. One teacher was recently doing her Diploma and the Inspector requested that two children be removed from the classroom because they were disruptive. The inspector said that the teacher couldn’t perform her duty and couldn’t qualify herself with the presence of the two children. Of course, the children are back in the classroom today, and yesterday and will be again next week. You don’t always have the convenience of doing that some days, we don’t all have back gardens and that.

T2: We did have a Support person in one school that I worked in, and her timetable was set up so on a specific day, and time, she would go to specific classes and take a group, you know a mixture of all the classes and she would do an activity with them, some type of behaviour-related self-esteem kind of work, but then you know, in some ways, the kids thought that that was a reward as well for misbehaviour in class, you know, they were going to get their treat at the end of the day. And then the other kids see them taken away and say ‘that’s not fair, they are getting rewarded’.

Pupils Focus-Group 1

Q4 (Behaviour Support Needs at Individual Level)

I: And what help does a pupil who is inclined to misbehave need so that they can learn?

Pupil 6: A counsellor.

Pupil 3: Maybe if don’t get enough attention off the teacher, they feel that they are not getting enough attention, and while we are all working, the teacher could go over and have a chat with them and ask them what is going on.

Pupil 2: Maybe if the Principal informs the parents, the parents should encourage good behaviour at home.

I: Good idea, ah, hum.

Pupil 6: Pupils who misbehave, they do it for attention, they crave that. Maybe they need one-to-one time so that they get their full attention. If they get attention at home, they wouldn’t be craving it so much in class.

I: Ok, so you are saying give attention to them, one-to-one.

Pupil 6: Yea.

I: And who would give them that attention, would the class teacher have time or should it be someone else?

P3: The class teacher doesn’t really have time.

Pupils Together: There should be someone special, someone else.

Pupil 5: A counsellor.

I: We don’t really have Counsellors in Primary schools.

Pupil 1: Well, someone who is well experienced. Maybe someone else.

P5: Someone that deals with behaviour.

Pupil 1: Or maybe someone with a degree

P3: Or maybe a psychologist.
I: So a psychologist could help in that way?

Pupils Together: Yea,

Pupil 4: Or maybe someone coming in once or twice a week.

I: So somebody besides the class teacher?

Pupils Together: Yea.

I: Could it be the class teacher?

Pupil 3: Well, it could be but it could make things awkward, like they would be giving out to them in the middle of the class.

I: So you are saying that pupil needs attention from someone besides the class teacher.

P3: Yes, he or she could step out of class and the other person talks to them.

Pupils Focus - Group 2

Pupil 7: well, if they are really in trouble, for doing all the stuff they do, they should have someone to help them calm down and all and go off on their own. They should still be doing the work that they should be doing. But like,……. they should be getting help for getting in trouble but then, they shouldn’t be getting in trouble either.

I: And who would give them the help?

Pupil 7: I don’t know, maybe someone like a helper or a teacher or something.

I: And when you say teacher, do you mean somebody like a class teacher, or somebody outside of the class.

Pupil 7: Somebody outside the class because the teacher has the rest of the class to be getting on with.

I: Alright, and can you think of anybody who could help outside of the class?

Pupil 5: A counsellor.

I: A counsellor if you had a counsellor so you would have to bring in a counsellor. Anyone else?

Pupil 8: The Principal, the boy’s Principal could ….help the children that misbehave an awful lot.

I: Ok, and how could they help do you think?

Pupil 6: Tell them like that they can’t keep doing it or they’ll get in serious trouble when they are older.

I: So you mean have a chat with them.

Pupil 6: Yea.
What is needed most according to Principals, Teachers and Pupils

I: Results from the questionnaires in Phase 1 showed that Principals said what was needed most in school was Consistency among teachers, and Behaviour Training for teachers. Teachers said what was needed most in school was: Consistency among teachers. However, Pupils said the most important thing was: Respect. What do you think of these comments and what are your thoughts?

Pr1: Well, I would agree with all three. Respect as the pupils say is important. Teachers have to respect the pupils and sometimes teachers have to earn respect. They can’t just control the class just because they are the teacher. They earn children’s respect and they earn children’s respect by giving the children respect. So the children are correct in saying that.

The teachers are correct in saying Consistency among teachers. Teachers’ hate getting a class from a teacher who has been completely different in their behaviour difficulties and how they treat them in their classroom management difficulties. Of course, we are not all the same. We are all different with our own idiosyncrasies but there has to be a school consistency, among rules and such and for that to happen, the Principal I suppose there has to be a bit of training for teachers. So all three are correct.

Pr2: Well, I think the behaviour training would be higher for me. I would find that we have probably a lot of consistency in that we have a code of discipline and indisciplines are recorded and then as they accumulate, we get a look at why, to try and find an underlying reason for indiscipline. I think that behaviour training, our understanding would be very important. Consistency always works of course for the less significant indisciplines. Consistency would work well there but what I am talking about is persistent misbehaviour and problems.

Pr: Well, I think the behaviour training would be higher for me. I would find that we have probably a lot of consistency in that we have a code of discipline and indisciplines are recorded and then as they accumulate, we get a look at why, to try and find an underlying reason for indiscipline. I think that behaviour training, our understanding would be very important. Consistency always works of course for the less significant indisciplines. Consistency would work well there but what I am talking about is persistent misbehaviour and problems.

Pr: Well, I suppose every school will have a Code of Discipline. It’s a matter of laying down a set of expectations, a set of positive behaviour...
initiatives to drive on positive behaviour. At the same time, there are going to be times when there are children misbehaving, there has to be some set of sanctions, some protections for maybe other people. Then again, you might have more serious issues like bullying in school and a school would have an anti-bullying policy, to approach complaints of bullying, a recording system first of all, some way of intervening and the reasons for bullying.

I: The Code of Discipline - would parents get it when they first come to the school?
Pr: They would get it. It would be published. In our case, it is published on the school’s website. Most parents would have access to the Internet.

Pr3: Well, my experiences would be that, yea, consistency is vital and I would have noted, you know, where we have changes in staff, maybe, for whatever reasons, you know, unless the system is brought to the attention of the new teacher and absolutely gone through with her or him, that it can go awry, and once the inconsistency......, the plan becomes less and less effective and all you need is for one class not to be on board, I think that it is absolutely essential that everybody is on board and because they’re on board and have agreed the set of rules, that the rules are then kept so you have more cooperation from parents, from teachers.

I: I would agree with that about the respect and I think that’s the reason why children need to be part of the setting up of the system. They need to.....you know,......in as far as is possible, they need to be part of the agreement about what rule, ....rules are important in a school and why we have them, you know that there are rules everywhere, you know as part of a society, we have to keep a certain number of rules for our safety and for that of others. I think if they’re brought on board, when a rule is broken, they’re more inclined to cooperate with a sanction that’s put in place, ah.....and inclined to feel pride when they’re rewarded because they have been part of the process and the setting up.

I: So you’re saying that they are going to buy more into it because they have been part of.....
Pr: Absolutely, and I would find as well with parents, ......we have set up a programme here and we called the parents in and talked to them about it and ..........even though there were some teething problems about people signing up to it, once people signed up to it and realised well, this is what’s in place, you know, .......I will know if my child has a sanction, the reason for it, how it came about, so they tend to buy into it more.

Pr4: Oh, I definitely agree with that, absolutely, consistency among teachers. Behaviour training - I suppose that’s no harm either, for newly qualified teachers, that they would be given some training and the implementation of a school policy, whether it would involve role play or a course where they would have to physically act out the policy
as opposed to a policy that up on the shelf. If they were engaged in a workshop that would allow them to demonstrate the effects of policy.

I: And do you feel that there is a need for behaviour training for teachers who have been teaching for years, you know like, in-service for those teachers?

Pr: Well, if I observe our setting here, we’re a relatively young staff. Now one of our teachers have 30 years’ experience, teaching in an all-boys school so I don’t fear for him, that behaviour training would be an issue and in fact, he’d be the one who would be able to give the behaviour training if you get my meaning. He’s just perfected the art of establishing respect in his class. It’s definitely a parallel, he is respecting them and equally he is getting respect.

I: But is he getting respect because he is male?

Pr: I feel he is.

I: Gender come in to it.

Pr: Yes, it does.

I: And as you were saying, 30 years’ experience as well.

Pr: Yes, the experience as well. Well, as principal now, I would threaten if this continues, you will have to spend lunchtime in the male teacher’s room and there is a fear there.

I: It’s funny that you should say that but as part of my project here, I’ve gone to two all-male schools, all boys schools and in both cases, the principal was female and there was only one male teacher in the school and both said the same thing - that children are sent to the male teacher in the school for their behaviour.

Pr: And I don’t see it as a shortfall but there is just something there. I remember when I was young as well, my mother used to say to myself and my sisters ‘well, I’ll tell your father’. Well there was a fear there, you know, he was the male, it’s a gender thing and I don’t know if we should try and fight it all that much, it’s just the way things are. It really is.

I: Yes, ok

Pr: Sorry, on that point as well, I do feel that in a primary school, I think that it is imperative, I mean it is not always the case and it can’t be always the case either but that children would have the experience of being taught by a male and a female and its the profession does not lend itself to as much males as females...

I: Because they are not coming in to the profession....

Pr: No, they’re not and it’s unfortunate and I know that my own uncle had three boys in primary school at one time and he was quite put out by the fact that they would go through all their primary years with no male teacher.

I: Why aren’t the men coming in to primary education in your opinion. What is stopping them?

Pr: I don’t know and there’s people that I know, who would be very very well suited to it as well. Am.....whether it is a misconstrued notion as well that it is only for women only...

I: Because the pupils are younger, is it, because there are more men in second level schools.
I: Yes, and mind you, I know people as well who teach in a primary school, one male who has taken juniors all the way up to 6th class....am....whether it should be part of the training or experience that in training, that a teacher would be given the opportunity to just select one -the junior end or the senior end and perfect the art of teaching at that end....am....it might be a feeling that they just couldn’t cope with maybe snotty noses or a wet pants at a particular level.

I: I trained in England and that’s what we did. We were given the choice of training for infants, primary or secondary level.

Pr: Yes, and I know that the male teacher in this school has senior classes for the most part of his teaching career and that’s just his niche.

I: He takes the older ones.

Pr: Yes. Not that it’s a no go area either. I’m sure there would be negotiation if somebody wished to step up as well. But in our own setting, I think the boys are best served with a male for 5th and 6th class before they head off.

I: Ok, and consistency you said was important there.

Pr: Absolutely.

I: The most important thing according to pupils was respect.

Pr: Yes, the fact that they wouldn’t feel it. I’m thinking of my own case here, as Principal or even as class teacher, that you’re so busy that you might not have the time, you know, you are trying to present the curriculum and you are trying to meet all of the different criteria, IEP’s, special needs, everything, school completion, home/school, NEWB, there are different things on our plate so I wonder if children kind of feel ‘oh, she’s not listening’ although I did have a little boy in today with a picture of his dog and I got very excited because he had talked about these dogs for the last few days and all of a sudden they were there in a photograph form so I feel he got something out of that.

I think, as teachers, there’s something that we should be aware of - the background that children are coming from as well. I think there is a lot of cross talking, where, somebody used the phrase recently of barking at the child. One word of barking or two words ‘get that’, close that’, open this, sit down, and there’s no real conversation and children do like to share their stories and an opportunity should be provided for them too.

**Teachers Focus-Group**

T6: I think all 3 are correct.

T2: I think particularly the last one, pupils said respect because it works both ways, if you don’t give the pupils respect, they are not going to give you respect and if you are constantly picking at one pupil the whole time, you’re not going to win them over.

T6: If you are consistent and fair, they will respect you.

T1: I think even the adults working in a school need to respect one another. I think respect has to permeate the whole school system. All people working in the school, from the caretaker to the Principal, there should be respect shown to everyone.

T6: Certainly reminding them that this is a civilised society, and what makes it civilised and so on, because a lot of them are coming from a
dysfunctional, uncivilised background, that’s my experience of it. I think they appreciate that, the fact that it’s civilised and it’s ordered.

Pupils’ Focus-Group 1

P1: I think respect is well needed because if you wanted consistency and Behaviour….like you said……

I: Behaviour Training.

P1: Behaviour Training. Now, that would be very good for the teachers because not all of them know how to handle pupils that are so bold and unwell mannered basically.

I: So what do they need then. What do the Principals and the teachers need if they don’t know how to handle pupils?

P1: They need behaviour teaching.

I: Behaviour Training?

P1: yea, Behaviour teaching, a course, from experienced people.

I: Very good.

P3: I definitely agree with the fact that it should be consistent, like all the teachers having the same rules because if one teacher tells a child off for doing something wrong and another teacher doesn’t, the child will get very confused and won’t know which is right and which is wrong and it start going on for a lot longer then.

I: So you are saying consistency is important.

P3: Yea.

P4: I agree with behaviour training. There should be, like a course during the summer for teachers who don’t know how to handle behaviour.

I: OK, that’s good.

P4: I agree with the consistency but I think you need to be tougher on older classes because if you’re not tough and if it’s an equal amount of how you am… am…practice the rules, then, I think, as you get older, you need to practice them a lot more than when you are in other classes.

I: OK

Pupil 5: I think, like from the time you start in Junior Infants and the school opened and the school rules didn’t change every year, they would be consistent and you didn’t have to learn them every year, it would be confusing every year and changing.

I: So it’s better to have consistent rules, from beginning school in Junior Infants to when you leave school in 6th class.

Pupil 5: Yea.

I: Now what do you think about what the pupils said, that the number 1 need was respect? Can we talk about that?

P3: Everyone has to have respect for everyone or the school will go totally backwards because everyone will be running around screaming and if you don’t have respect for your classmates and especially your teachers, you are not going to learn anything or get educated.

I: So respect you think is very important.

P3: Yea.

I: Anyone would like to add anything to that?

P7: I think respect is important because if a teacher likes one student better than the other, the good student might do something wrong and not get in trouble and the bad student might do something wrong and get suspended or something.
I: So you think respect is about treating everyone the same. That’s a good idea.

Pupil 4: I agree because especially if am.. if they do the exact same thing and one gets in trouble, that’s completely out of order, they should both get in trouble.

P2: I agree as well because if one person, the teacher’s favourite done something bad and got in trouble and the bad student could get in trouble and be expelled. That teacher’s favourite, who got in bad trouble could actually keep on causing trouble and keep on getting away with it scot-free. They deserve punishment.

I: OK, and do you feel that you are respected at the moment and do you think that teachers’ are respected at the moment. Tell me whether you feel respected and whether you think teachers are respected.

P3: I think everyone is respected but I think that people who have behaviour problems don’t really respect the teacher and the pupils.

I: OK, anyone like to add anything to that?

P3: That’s the one rule that all the teachers definitely enforce with all the children, to have respect and because it’s consistent, it is actually working. The parents have respect for the teachers, teachers have respect for the pupils and pupils for the teachers and the school is going well because everyone is respecting each other.

P7: Yea, but respect is important in school. Most people have very good respect in school but when pupils go home, they don’t respect anyone, it’s just when they go to school sometimes.

I: OK.

P4: Respect is very important because if we are like sheep, because if one person disrespects someone behind their back, and they all follow, well that would lead them down a very bad path.

Pupils’ Focus-Group 2

P3: The older teachers in the school are more consistent than the younger teachers. The younger teachers lets us away with nearly anything and the older ones just let their presence be known.

I: ok, so do you agree that all teachers should be consistent?

P3: Yes.

P1: Just say, if…..our teacher does this sometimes. If we got in trouble, for throwing stuff across the classroom and another day, she throws something across the classroom, like ……it should be fair.

I: Ok, so the first time, would they get in trouble?

P!: Yea, they’d probably be put over to the black line for throwing something and then, she’d probably throw something over as well, the teacher like. She might laugh if someone was being cheeky and then she might get someone in trouble for doing the same thing.

I: Ok, so in other words, you need consistency and it’s not happening at the moment.

P1: Yea, need more fairness.

P2: Just about the last question, you should be….like, there should be someone to help you with behaviour, to go off somewhere, because some teachers, when you are like misbehaving in the classroom, they bring you outside the classroom and they start shouting at you, in the
hall, and that kind of disturbs the other classrooms from working and
kind of puts you off.

Pupils in unison: Yea, ha ha.
P1: If someone was in trouble, our teacher would bring you outside the
door and start roaring and shouting at you, but that does not make any
difference because it only disturbs the class.
I: so it doesn’t help the person who has got into trouble, by getting cross
with them.
P1: Yea, our teacher never wants to be wrong for some reason. I
remember one time I heard her saying something and then when she
took us outside the door, she said that she said something else.
I: So your teacher doesn’t want to… what did you say…wrong?
P1: Yea, she never wants to be wrong, she always wants to be right.
P5: And like _____ said, the other teachers, say like you went out to the
yard, the older teachers might put you in the Yard Book that we have.
But the younger teachers might say, oh, look, I’ll put you in if you do it
again but if you went outside again, they still wouldn’t put you in, and
they’d say the same thing
I: Alright.
P6: I think all the teachers should have the same method of instructions,
like you get in bigger trouble if you don’t obey the rules.
I: So you’re saying you need consistency in the school.
I: And what about the other thing that Principals said, they need
Behaviour training for teachers, what do you think of that?
P1: That would be a good idea because like, you have someone
misbehaving and disturbing the class, the teacher might not know what
to do to them.
I: Ok, if they got help to know how to manage.
Pupils together: Yea.
P1: Yea, if they got help instead of shouting at them at the door……..black
line.
I: Say that again?
P1: Putting people on the black line and shouting at them outside the door
doesn’t make a difference.
P3: They’re going to do that again.
I: It's not going to help the pupil or the class.
P1: If you put them out at PE or something …
P4: Yea, something that they enjoy doing.
I: So you think that they should be stopped doing that, something they
enjoy doing?
P1: Yea.
P4: Some teachers like…am……I forgot what I was going to say.
I: We were talking about PE, stopping pupils doing things that they like
to do.
P4: I forget….
I: Not to worry, it will come back to you.
I: Teachers said what was needed most in school was consistency, in
other word, they were agreeing with Principals. Now, pupils said what
was needed most in school was respect, what do you think about that?
Yea, the teacher roars at us and we get in really big trouble if we even
go near to roaring at her. She roars at us from like a metre away.
Pupils in unison: Yea, ha, ha.
We can hear her clearly if she can talk normal and if we are higher than
our voice, she starts saying loads of stuff and sends us to the
Principal’s office. One time she said to me and my friend we were
only taking the P I S S.
We are talking about respect. So are you saying then that….
That like,…..if we are not allowed say something to her , she shouldn’t
be allowed say stuff to us. Sometimes she gives out to us for arguing
with her but she argues back at us.
So you think that there should be the same rules for everybody.
And respect, come back to respect, what are you saying about respect?
So if we give her respect, she should give us respect.
Ok, that’s fair enough.
I remember what I was going to say. Some teachers are good for like,
teaching Maths and Irish but they are not very good at teaching
children how to behave, so maybe they should go on a course to help
them.
Q6 (Usefulness to a Whole-School Behaviour Support Programme)

I When asked if there was a need for a Whole-School Behaviour Support Programme in their school (supporting management, teachers and pupils on behaviour, managed by a Leadership Team in each school who decide on rules, emphasis is on the positive with rewards & consequences), most principals and teachers said yes. What are your views on the usefulness of such a programme?

Pr1: Well, the latest document from the Department of Education is good on that, support and behaviour policies. It is positive and the whole school should discuss that, a whole-staff. Maybe there should be a Leadership Team. Maybe the principal should be part of that Leadership Team, or the deputy principal, maybe lead it. Every school should look at behaviour policies and behaviour support.

I: And do you think that there should be one programme, one programme that would go all the way from Infants up to 6th class.

Pr1: Yes, we would have a programme in place and it would be all the way up to 6th. But of course, you don’t implement some parts of it in the younger classes because it mightn’t be relevant but it’s there in case it’s relevant.

I: Like you mean, you have rules for the whole school.

Pr1: We have rules for the whole school, the same rules, the same policy, you know like a child gets sent to the principal, what happens, at what stage you would involve the parents. We would have a set programme in place. It wouldn’t be just for senior classes, it would be for the whole school. So every teacher, no matter what class they are in, what class they are teaching, they know they have this support behind them, if certain steps have to be taken. But of course with the younger children and of course with the older children they don’t have to be taken but they’re there in case. So in other words, for example, before a parent is ever called in, there’s a stage before that stage where they get a letter home. Those stages are carefully followed that the letter comes first, letting the parent know that we are having a problem with behaviour. Then another letter goes home after that that continues, saying would you come in and talk to the teacher. The next stage is would you come in and talk to the principal. So there are definite stages and that’s for the whole school.

Pr2 It would be absolutely vital, yea, a whole-school approach, you mentioned already consistency but a whole-school approach to behaviour would be vital that every teacher who comes across an issue will deal with it similar to the other teacher, we’ll say. Some would just ignore it and some would get over heated about it. I mean if you have a situation where some teachers are getting overheated about a particular issue and others just turning a blind eye to it, that would be the worst scenario. There is no chance there for the perpetrator or the misbehaving child to understand what is going on because one time it is interpreted as ok, another time it is interpreted as horrific so there has to be a whole-school approach which is based on a consistent, ongoing and you know similar treatment of everybody.
I think it is essential to have a whole school programme and as I was saying before, you know, once you have all the interested parties in the school on board, you have much more chance of the programme working. Am……yes, the leadership team would be very interesting and I think it’s important that there would be a team there to take it on board and that we’d all be there to support teachers because even if they’re doing it in their classroom, we have to have a team to monitor it, review it and make sure that it’s consistent throughout the school. Now I would have taken that on board myself but I would find the need there, for another person to liaise with, who might be working more closely on the ground floor at times, and to monitor and review,……teachers as a group…..I think there’s a need there to spend more time on it and it would become part of ……..almost like the curriculum…….that it would become part of school life.

I definitely would find a usefulness for that. It would create awareness among staff of emerging issues, unacceptable behaviour that would be filtering through, that may not have been an issue the previous year. Such a management support role would allow for EBD to be identified and would devise a plan or even discuss how to address them. So it doesn’t mean that you would be working all the time and we wouldn’t be a case of well, we’re not concerned with this anymore. I suppose our numbers come into this here. We are a small school, with 87 on roll. Let me think of the effectiveness of such a programme….Yes, even if it was a chart and the people involved would update and follow through on the number for example being referred to the office or put by the wall or told to stay inside for safety reasons at break time - no harm in that at all. I would definitely encourage parental involvement as well.

Teaching Focus-Group

T4: Well, a whole-school programme would work better, it would be consistent. We have nothing like this. Individual teachers are on their own.

T2: Our school is similar. From the principal’s point of view, he says we don’t have behaviour problems.

T3: From the consistency point of view, I think the leadership has to come from the principal, from the top, you know……

T5: I suppose if the school is larger, you have to evolve into systems whereas if the school is smaller,……

T4: I know but you still need something before you can evolve into something.

T6: That’s right.

T2: If you look at negative issues, I think there’s a big need for the quality side of things, you know the code of behaviour and that. You know, we never have get together time, we never have whole-school assemblies or consistency. You always feel that you are on your own, and that’s because they have no systems, you know the whole-school behaviour thing.

T1: I think the whole-school behaviour programme is essential and I think it does evolve as the school gets bigger. We don’t have the physical
resources to bring the whole school together because we are all in
prefabs all over the place but what we do, we haven’t set out the
pastoral care for next year, but what we do now is say, the person
responsible for 4th class once a month will bring three fourth classes
together. Another system we have is the teacher on yard duty, each
yard bag has a yard book in it so the yard book is in the bag and there
are 10 yard behaviours which can be entered in the yard book. Let’s
say a child is in the toilets without permission, that is entered in the
yard book. Once a month, it is a teacher’s responsibility to go through
the yard book and pick out the children that have appeared in it more
than 3 times. Their names are entered into a Red Book. If their names
are in the Red Book more than 3 times, their parents are called in for
their behaviour. So it’s like a tracking system for behaviour because
the school is kind of big. The thing we notice about it is, we could
actually now foretell who’s going to be in that next year because the
children that we know have behaviour difficulties, the children that
have difficulties following rules, because it’s the same children who
come in again and again and again. We think that those children need
something extra. They need a differentiated behaviour plan and that’s
cause a lot of difficulties among staff because you know, myself, I
ask are we doing them any favours for differentiating behaviours
because if they go out in the street, it won’t be differentiated.

I: But I think the whole idea of a whole school plan is that it wouldn’t be
differentiated. I think that is a disadvantage of the plan. I think that if
the rule is there, children will see if you are consistent with it.

T1: Say, you have special needs children throughout your school, say you
have a Down’s Syndrome child with an IQ a Moderate handicap, and
she does something to you....... 

T6: Well, she wouldn’t actually do something to you for obvious reasons.

T1: Yea, but for the exact same reasons, you have a child who creates
mayhem at home, you know, he may not be able to behave
appropriately in the yard. If somebody thumped him, he’d thump them
back straight away or if somebody does, something, he’ll thump...... I
think you have to make room for the special needs child.

T6: I suppose there’s always room for discretion.

T1: I think you have to make room for discretion.

I: What happened Mary in your school when you had the whole-school
behaviour support plan, did you differentiate for special needs
children?

T2: I don’t think we did. I think we set up the special support group and
they were the children, you know who were.......We had a good few
children who were in care and you know, one of the boys in my class,
he was in care and his elder brother was in care and they were wild.
The other brother disclosed that he was abused by his dad. I don’t
know whether it was because of.......and when things happened, you
did deal with things as sensitively as you could.

Pupils Focus-Group 1

Q6 (Usefulness of a School Programme on Behaviour)

I: Principals and teachers thought it was a good idea to have a school
programme on behaviour for the whole school. All classes would have
the same rules. Rules would be taught and practiced and pupils would
be rewarded for keeping the rules and penalised for breaking the rules.
How do you think this would be useful and why do you think it would
be useful?
P1: It would be good because everyone would have the same rules and
pupils wouldn’t have to learn new ones, like when they are going into
different classes.
P3: It would be good to have rewards and people would keep the rules
because they are getting rewards.
P4: It would be good to have penalties for breaking the rules because
everyone would know if you break the rule, you get a penalty.
Pupils Focus - Group 2
P2(g): I think it would be really good to have the same rules. They’d all like
have to keep to them and the teacher would have their way of keeping
their rules as well so no class would be different so everybody would
be the same and act the same.
I: Yes. So it would be a good idea.
P2: Yea.
P3: I think it would be hard if all the classes had the same rules, if 6th
and Junior Infants had the same rules. Junior Infants might break them
and be punished, they don’t know.
I: You think there shouldn’t be the same rules for all?
P3: Well, Infants up to 1st class could be the same rules, then maybe 2nd
class to 6th class, there could be the same rules - like they have more
sense.
I: Yes, or maybe you could have less rules for infants?
P3: Yea.
P1: Say if a person is misbehaving, they could have a reward say every
Friday and that would probably get them into a routine.
I: So they would miss out the reward on a Friday if they didn’t behave,
that might help them to behave?
P3: Yea.
I: On the topic of Behaviour Support, a Principal wrote: “In my experience, any case of serious misbehaviour was directly related to poor parenting skills. Such a pupil places massive stress on a school’s resources. Smaller classes and one-to-one withdrawal are the only solutions”. What is your view on this statement?

Pr1: Well, it’s not always related to poor parenting skills. Behaviour might be directly related to maybe a trauma in the family, it might be the parents’ split up, it could be a child being born. There could be a number of reasons why a child misbehaves so I wouldn’t say it could be directly related to poor parenting skills. Sometimes, it could be poor teaching skills as well.

I: Ha ha, OK

Pr: So such a pupil, ya, ya, when a child seriously misbehaves, whether it is because of poor management skills in the classroom or because of difficulties to the child’s experiences in his life. Of course this places stress on the class and on the teacher. Even if it’s a small class, I’d say it still places stress on them but the one-to-one withdrawal I mentioned earlier, the Support Teacher is helpful in serious cases.

Pr2 I wouldn’t agree it is poor parenting skills although it may look like that initially. Am…..I would be aware that some of our major misbehaviours and indisciplines in our school would come from families that have fantastic parenting skills but something breaks down in the system for them. Essentially the system breaks down, it can occur through illness, through marriage break-ups or things like that. There are always an underlying reason for what might be termed their poor parenting. Just pure poor parenting skills I don’t think is an excuse for , or a reason for most of them. There’s a reason for the poor parenting if you want to step back again.

Pr3 Yes, I think a lot of serious misbehaviour is directly related to poor parenting skills and I think in our society, there is an opt out for parents, out of their parenting skills. I think we do not expect enough from parents, that they have brought this child into the world, they owe it their full support, up to….. as far was they are capable and I think there needs to be a lot more work done there between parents with parents around parents who have weak parenting skills because I think it does place a lot of stress on schools. You have people coming in who just do not have the key components of how to be part of a group of people and ……they need to learn, you know……the rules of functioning within a society, am…..for the benefit of all…and for their own benefit as well. I think children come to school and they just have never been parented properly and for that reason, they’re lashing out at everybody. I’m not sure what appropriate responses are and…..yes, I do think it places huge responsibility on a school or huge stress. Yes, smaller classes…definitely, absolutely and as we all know, in a class of 20, you could have 20 different programmes running at any one time, indeed in a class of 10, and I think where you have one child who is particularly in need, it’s very difficult in classes of 30 plus to actually……respond to the needs of that child.
I: Mm ......and would you say that serious misbehaviour is always
directly related to poor parenting skills because I think that is what this
principal is saying that it’s always down to parents.
Pr: Mm......yes, I think......serious misbehaviour. Now, I’m not talking
about the once off thing that happens but I am talking about the sort
of....continuity ....I would say is directly related to poor parenting
skills and I think a lot of the time the parents just don’t have the skills
and the extended family is not a feature of society anymore so children
who might have their needs met by maybe an older member of the
household could....if there was a problem around parenting, that
support isn’t there for them anymore.
I: And can the school do anything about helping those parents then?
Pr: Again, I think if there was a whole programme in place, I think going
hand in hand with...the delivery of the curriculum. Now, I’m not
saying giving equal time but I think...given an identity, this is how
behaviour is expected......in the country, in the borough, in the town,
in the county, this is how we mange behaviour, this is....if you go to
school, you can expect that this will be part of your schooling
and......I think it has been quite haphazard in that, you know....you
went to school and I suppose a lot of behaviour was controlled up till
now and I suppose as a society.... we were a very controlled society
whether through religion or .....politics or however and now we have
moved away from that and....but I think that something needs to be put
in place because it doesn’t happen.....you know...normally that every
single child is going to come in, sit down beautifully and behave
so.....gone are the days when you can stand at the top of the class and
.....crack the whip......so there needs to be a system in there that
would guide schools, guide teachers and support them in incidences
where there is serious misbehaviour and where it can be traced or is,
obviously because of poor parenting skills.
Pr4 well, I suppose realistically and what I have observed here, we
definitely suffer the consequences of unsettled backgrounds,
disorganised homes etc. and in a lot of cases, parents find it difficult to
cope, am...so they’re suffering at their end as well. There’s definitely
truth in the statement about the massive stress placed on the school
resources as a result am....and quite recently we had an inspector here
carrying out an assessment for a teacher’s diploma, and one child was
actually requested by the inspector to leave the room based on his EBD
- emotional and behaviour disorder which the inspector would not have
known about and it might have served her well if she had a profile of
the class with just a little indication of the children in the room with for
instance ‘this is the explanation for this child’s behaviour, this is the
explanation for that child’s behaviour. I feel it would have equipped
her well, I mean to move him out, fair enough, I understand that the
inspector did want the teacher to shine, I suppose it was her day to
perform, and she worked extremely hard for her diploma but the reality
is - she can’t move him out on a day that he’s having a little episode.
Now we made arrangements and the child has a special needs assistant
and I happened to be on an administrative day so we could cater for
him but.....massive stress, it’s just one of those things that you are
trying to cater for all the time. So definitely the influence of the home background does have a negative impact on the school.

I Mm ……and the serious misbehaviour, is it always related to poor parenting skills?

Pr: Well, there is always the chance that the child may have a disorder so the parent cannot take responsibility for that so I wouldn’t say always.

Teachers’ Focus-Group

T4: I don’t know whether I would agree with it – that it’s all to do with poor parenting skills. It’s a bit extreme I think.

T6: Maybe inconsistency between parents could be an issue.

T1: Some children whose parents have wonderful parenting skills have behaviour issues driven by ADHD or what’s going on in the class or other emotional issues.

T2: Some children get a lot of attention at home and come to school and can’t cope. Sometimes younger children get more attention at home and play up but don’t play up in school.

T6: I notice now that we are coming out of a time of plenty, children benefited because they got a lot of the gadgetry and a lot of the gadgetry took away from the conversation. I think that children are reflecting now a lesser quality of parenting. I find that 6th class, they have quietened down and it’s infants that you dread to meet in the yard.

T1: I have noticed that, I have noticed a huge change, I suppose the way parents put their children’s wishes central to everything, you know children’s rights, parents think that everyone should be looking at these wonderful children, aren’t they fantastic. We’re meeting our junior infant parents today and one of the things that I will be saying to them, you know there are times that they will just have to do what they are told without any questions, get them used to that at home because that is what will happen here. Other things like, parents find it very hard to accept that their child isn’t the top of the class. It just goes across all sorts of boundaries, you know, even people who are professionals themselves say ‘how come he didn’t get first and they are blaming the teacher and they’re blaming somebody else.

T2: Yea, I’m coming from a time when you wouldn’t say boo to a teacher and now it’s a case of the parents saying ‘the teacher is wrong, and not the parents are wrong.

T5: That’s a big thing, you give out to a child now and you kind of think, what’s her parent going to say, am I going to have her tomorrow morning?

T4: Yea, sure.

T2: Yea, in my time, if I went home to my parents and said the teacher gave out to me, they would say’ well, you must have deserved it’.

T4: You get a sense from senior pupils, they go home and say what has gone on in school and parents say ‘oh, don’t mind her’.

Teachers together:Yea.

T1: I think that it’s imperative that we keep parents informed of the discipline practices in the school. They seem to accept that they have to obey the rules in secondary schools but in primary schools, they are more protected by the parents.
Teachers together: yea.

Pupils' Focus - Group 1

Q7 (Comments made about Behaviour Support)

I: A Principal in another school thought that when pupils misbehave, it is because their parents did not teach them how to behave well. **Why** do you think pupils misbehave sometimes and **what** is the best way they can be helped? So **why** do you think they misbehave?

Pupil 1: From a young age maybe, behaviour not being corrected at home and it just leads on to school and it just gets worse and worse as they go on.

P3: Maybe the child is not getting enough attention and because he is not getting attention, he’s looking for it and when he doesn’t get attention, he’s starting to get bad mannered and no respect for anybody, because he’s not getting attention from anyone.

P2: If a child misbehaves and he kind of does something really bad, he or she does something really bad, it’s probably fun to be talked about at a break and he might think it’s cool and she might think it’s cool and might go and do it again so that’s probably why they are misbehaving because they think it’s cool.

I: OK

P5: Maybe at home, he gets a certain amount of attention and when he doesn’t get it in school, he acts out to try and achieve it.

I: So what is the best way they can be helped then, a pupil who misbehaves?

Silence

I: The Principal thinks that it is because of their parents are not teaching them how to behave so what is the best way to help them?

P5: Maybe if their parents encourage it more at home and the Principal get somebody in to talk to them, to understand them.

P1: Maybe if the Principal lets the parents of that child know, bring them into school and let them see how they are acting in school and the parent could say that he’s actually not getting this from home, he must be getting it from some pupil here and that’s probably the reason and the Principal couldn’t be blaming the home and have to say sorry to the father or the mother.

P4: I think the Principal should do like a survey, put a camera in and if that child consistently misbehaves, show it to the parents and ask them where is he getting this, is he getting it at home or is he picking it up from school.

Pupils' Focus - Group 2

Pupil 4: I think maybe if they rang their parents and told them they were misbehaving, and got their parent to punish them, then I think they wouldn’t misbehave that often.

I: Ok, so help from the parents.

P5: If it was the parents that left them get away with it, they should fix it and then send them back to school.
I: Alright.

P2: I think they should tell the parents as well because the parents probably have more control over them and they might be like...much stricter and they’d know what to say to them whereas the teachers don’t know them that well and don’t really know what they’re like, so I think tell the parents.

I: So parents are Number 1.

P1: Like if you shout at one child, they might get upset whereas the parents won’t shout at them, they’ll just talk to them and they’ll know how they are going to react to it.
And a teacher made the following comment on Behaviour Support:

“There is a need for whole-school behaviour support as the only support now is for juniors, and senior pupils who go to learning support. This leaves senior teachers isolated, stressed/overwhelmed”.

Can you comment?

I don’t really understand that comment. In our school, I think there would be support for Junior classes, Middle classes and Senior classes.

On behaviour?

So in your school, senior teachers shouldn’t feel stressed.

No, sometimes because the child is older and maybe less easy to bully by the teacher and they are now becoming young adolescents earlier, teachers in Senior classes sometimes find behaviour difficult but it’s just because a child is growing into a young adult, not because there is not support there, so you have to be more skilled in dealing with them.

Ha, ha, so it’s back to the teacher.

Yea, yea and the teacher getting support from the whole school.

I don’t fully understand how they mean for Junior school. I would have thought that Codes of Discipline are structured more to deal with children in the middle school and Senior School than in Junior school because we don’t apply our codes of discipline really to Infant classes first day because the children wouldn’t have ability to understand their behaviour or to deal with it themselves. So discipline is through the parents in all cases whereas in middle classes and senior classes, it is through the child, individually and sometimes in groups but no, I wouldn’t agree. I find that the focus, the main focus is around 3rd or 4th class. It used to be 5th and 6th class years ago but most of the problems seem to arise around 3rd, 4th classes and by the time they have got into 5th class, they have settled down and they seem to have matured and they seem to just fit into a system, learning to deal with the calls of daily life, becoming acclimatised to school. I mean senior classes are not too difficult anymore as regards discipline whereas 3rd, 4th classes are....

Yes, I would have looked at a lot of whole-school behaviour programmes and what I find is that there are some fabulous ideas for junior pupils but they are never the areas where there’s a problem. I find generally it’s easy enough to manage or set up a programme, where the greatest need I think is at senior level and there isn’t enough support there for teachers and even where you do put a programme in place, like the programme that we’ve put in place at the moment, there are still a lot of areas where it doesn’t actually address the age of the pupil. Now, it works beautifully at the junior level, no problem whatever, .... senior level would be much more difficult. What I have noticed is where we have started from the very beginning with the programme, in the infant classes, those children are currently in 2nd class, and they actually...now I would need to review it by the time they reach the senior level, but there has actually.....been a positive effect of the programme but I’d still be very interested to see...you know, by the time they reach....
...yea, how it pans out (laugh)

Yea (laugh)...that will be the proof of the pudding....

Yes, I can understand that, I suppose there is a focus on children who need support for learning but the ones who are in need of additional support for behaviour don’t get the attention, so there is a shortfall fall there, so you can see that it is a serious issue, yea, because it leaves those children unsupported. If there was a Whole-School programme in the school, she would feel supported.

Teachers’ Focus-Group

Throughout our whole school, we would have a social group, or children with diagnosed special needs and we would have what you would call a social group where they go and play games on social skills and sometimes we would put who have diagnosed behaviour problems but not special needs in with them, once or twice a week and it is a nice thing. It could be gardening......

Is that all classes?

Well, it would be 4-6 children together depending on each year. We use that programme ‘Talk About’ programme which teachers social skills and find it absolutely excellent. It’s a social skills education package for developing self-esteem. We teach that in that group and we find that it has really really paid off, it teaches them social skills.

Another one is the SALT programme.

Oh yea. We’ve just bought that. I tried it out the other day. It gives a scenario. The situation blows up. Then you get the added SALT which is stop, ask, listen and talk. And then you tell the story again and they can see the different. It’s really good. I liked it.

It’s to resolve conflict.

We use Circle Time throughout the school too.

Again Circle Time, doesn’t it have to work its way up?

Yea.

I find in 6th class, to start, it is very difficult.

It’s difficult, yea, but it does work, and I think we used it, exceptionally well with 4th class girls, we had a problem with 4th class girls, you know, the bitchiness of 4th class girls, people being bullied by people being left out, and by their appearance and their clothes and their hair. We did it, I’m not saying we sorted it all out but it certainly brought it into the open where it was you know.........

Yea, I used it in the younger classes but......

Yea, it does need to be developed, yea.

I find they can’t even listen to each other and they can’t respect someone else’s opinion. But I have to agree with what the teacher said in this statement. I myself feel overwhelmed sometimes being in the senior end of the school and having no support. The problem in our school is that nobody wants to come in to 6th class. I know you are saying a lot of the behaviour is at the junior end of the school. Everybody in our school dreads the senior end........ 6th class because of the behaviours and younger teachers don’t want to go in there.

Every year for the last 5 years we had a different person going in.

In ours, it’s totally different.
Yea, with 6th class.

Well, in a neighbouring school to me now, where the parents are in the majority middle-class well-to-do parents and it was very difficult to get anybody to take on 6th class.

And a lot of the time those parents cause problems.

Anyone who takes 6th class, they have great respect. I think, once you hit 6th class, you have huge responsibility. You help…. kind of run the school. You do the bell in the morning, 6th class helps run the school. They help out in the junior yard. They’re given huge responsibility and at the end of it, we have just come back from a trip from Holland. We just took 63 children to Holland two weeks ago and we didn’t have one issue of behaviour the whole time. Included in that were some with fierce behaviour….one girl had fierce behaviour problems……that trip is going on for the last 15 years, they know that that’s their reward if they behave maturely and responsibly you know. But it takes a huge amount of responsibility but the Principal takes that on as his responsibility.

We go to the Burren for our three days and like that, it’s the carrot but we did leave 3 people behind this because of serious behaviour and a member of staff did get hurt in the incident but it was a battle with the Principal to leave these children behind and a lot of the response is ‘Are you really going to get anywhere with them, why are you wasting all your energy. You know, I find all of that frustrating.

I would too, yea.

And then, the younger teacher that might be next door is getting no support and you go and say ‘now look, now is the time we need support up here, you know, it’s critical at this moment in time, it’s just……not addressed.

Yea.

A teacher wrote about the need for a school programme on behaviour because she says that right now, help on behaviour is only given by the learning support teacher to infants and to those who already go to learning support for English/Maths. No help is given to older pupils who have problems with behaviour. The teacher feels that a school programme on behaviour would help her. What do you think?

I agree with the teacher. Maybe the child… the teacher is not giving him much attention and like, the Learning Support teacher won’t take him. I think they should get help or have a programme.

So you think a programme would be helpful.

Yea, as they said there, it’s only the Learning Support teachers are trying to deal with behaviour but it’s not really their job. Like if you are there as well trying to teach children who are falling behind. They are still trying to teach children so they should have one specific person in to deal with behaviour alone and not Maths and English and the whole lot.
I think they should get in a special person and ask them what is going on at home, in case they are being abused and in school in case they are being bullied.

I: OK

I think some teachers have like, a favourite. But if the person that is misbehaving is not the favourite and he or she is not getting attention and the favourite is. So that would make the behaviour worse and worse.

Pupils’ Focus-Group 2

I: If there was a proper programme in school?

P1: Yea.

Well, this wasn’t really a programme but we used to have like a tree, a tree in our class, and like if you did something good, you got a golden leaf and you could put the leaf on the tree and everybody used to be really happy, like when we were in Junior and like senior infants, when they got a gold leaf, they were really happy.

I: ah, isn’t that nice.

P3: Like a reward for doing something good and if you behaved properly, you used to get a reward and they should still do that, if not a golden leaf.

I: So you used to get that in the Infant classes, is it?

Pupils together: Yea.

P1: But it stopped when?

P3: I think a couple of years ago. I don’t know……

I: Maybe it stops after a certain class.

Pupils together: No, all classes.

P1: No, it just stopped completely.

Pupils together: Yea.

I: Because it’s the class teacher stopped it, is it?

Pupils together: Yea.

I: Maybe different classes still have it?

Pupils together: No,

P3: No, I don’t think so.

I: You don’t’ think anyone has it.

P1: So you are saying people behave better when you are rewarded.

Pupils: Yea.

P1: Behaviour training for the older classes because 1st class might talk out of turn and sixth class might do something serious like fight or start cursing, different stuff, and 1st class, like they don’t know what they are doing whereas 6th class do.

I: So say that in another way, just to make sure I understand you.

P1: Behaviour support for older classes because they do more serious stuff and maybe if they got behaviour support, they wouldn’t do more serious stuff. 1st class, they don’t really need it that much.

I: So you feel that support is more needed for the older children than for the younger children.

P1: Yes.
I think that every week or every two weeks, if a teacher comes in and tells them about behaviour, support and that, what could happen if they carried on like this, where it would end up. Like a formal talk on behaviour, from, is it the Principal or the teacher? Well, if they got someone proper in school who knew about behaviour, someone experienced. Someone who knew about behaviour, someone to come in and give a talk every so often. Yea.

Something more serious than the Red Book. That’s just a book that they write your name in. Who uses the Red Book? If you get in trouble, you get in the Red Book, if you did something serious. They put your name in it. It’s supposed to be really bad if you get your name written in three times. OK

I think some teachers have like, a favourite. But if the person that is misbehaving is not the favourite and he or she is not getting attention and the favourite is. So that would make the behaviour worse and worse.
A pupil made the following comment on Behaviour Support:
“Our school should have a special teacher on behaviour”.

Can you comment on that?

Pr1: Well, certainly, the resources wouldn’t be there for that nowadays. As I said there are special teachers in some schools, in ________, I know there are two support teachers on behaviour in that particular school. If we were offered a teacher, a special teacher on behaviour, we would use it elsewhere because the teacher would be idle most of the day. (laugh), I would think. I know years ago, they used to have special teachers for travellers and then they withdrew that. And they are now withdrawing some special teachers and I would say in our school there is no need for them but I would say in certain schools there would be need for them. In most schools, there isn’t need for special teachers on behaviour.

I: I suppose this begs the question then, should Behaviour Support be part of the Brief of Learning Support/Resource teachers and if so, how would you prioritise between pupils who need academic support and pupils who need behaviour support? Alternatively, should there be a separate post?

Pr: No, I wouldn’t say it should be the job of the Learning support teacher or Resource Teacher to deal with misbehaviour because they’re there to….., they could be seen then as a teacher, as a person who children who misbehaves get sent to. It’s usually children to need academic support in literacy or numeracy or language is getting support and they shouldn’t be seen in a negative way that are sent to, for behaviour problems. They would also need training if they were used, that special training, because they are not trained to do that. So I would say at the moment, the way to do it, if you had serious difficulty, yes, have a special support teacher if the State can afford it. If you haven’t that, that the Principal and support staff as a team should help the classroom teacher to deal with behaviour and the parents, involving the parents, not having another layer, another teacher to do that.

I: OK, so you can’t see the point of the child going out to the Learning Support/Resource teacher for behaviour?

Pr: I can if it’s for listening, because to listen, because you know in a classroom, if it’s delicate or if it’s taking up too much time, that for some reason the child isn’t forthcoming and we know that there is a problem and we can’t get to the bottom of it and you don’t want the whole class to hear about it, or else the child won’t say it in front of the class. And if there is another member of staff, whether it is the Resource teacher, or the Principal or someone else that they trust and that they’ll talk to and we find out how we can help that child. We might send the child for Counselling because we are not really trained to do it. Yes, there is a need for a child to get support that way but I wouldn’t have a post designed for that. It would depend on the school.

Pr2 I think it is a fantastic idea if there is somebody highly skilled in issues around backgrounds to misbehaviours and indisciplines to guide both the pupils and the staff and support them because there are times when, if you were to work on behaviour modification plans, it does take some time to set them up, making sure that they are checked as you go along.
and interpreting what has happened. So if there was somebody skilled
and trained in that, a feature of school life, it would be very important,
some of the help that goes into special education. It would be a
fantastic idea. It would be a new resource required in a school and
would also require quite a bit of training not given to people at any
level inside the school. Boards of management don’t get that training,
Principal don’t and classroom teachers don’t. Special Ed. teachers
may get a bit of it in certain circumstances but not enough.

Pr3: I think there should be a separate post or certainly a post of
responsibility there where people have time and funds to manage a
behaviour support programme and I think it needs to be much more
formal and again, much more maybe national, or maybe at more local
level, that an agreed…..but actually I think at National level, we need
to look at behaviour and I think we need to start with children and I do
think that it would be money well spent to have a post in a school
where behaviour is managed through that post because what happens I
think through the learning support and special needs teachers, I mean
they have all the academic, that is a huge job, they also tailor the
existing programme within the school as far as behaviour is concerned
so I’m not sure that there is space there to give them an extra post but I
do think there should be a post, now whether it would be shared within
maybe a group of schools or whatever, but I do think, absolutely there
needs to be a post there.

I: Mm…and do you think that behaviour teacher…..him or her, do you
think they should go for training for that or
is something that, like,
they were Learning Support and that they just take on a new mantle?

Pr: No, I think there is a huge need within the country to look at types of
behaviour programmes…..ah….that have worked maybe, in other
countries..... or….and I am not saying that we are not perfectly
capable of coming up with our own …research...... and the types of
programmes that have been used in other countries and maybe tailor a
programme for our own country because I do think, especially at the
moment because I think the country is in transition and we’ve gone
from that huge control to now.....much less control and people are left
in a vacuum and I think you know, people need guidelines, as you
know…this is what’s expected, this is how you behave if you’re on the
street at 12 o’clock at night, this is how you behave when you go to
school and you are in a group where people are learning so I see a huge
need there and I would say training would be essential, research is
essential….ah….to look at how these programmes have worked or
what part or what components of these programmes have worked.

Pr4: Yes, in some instances, I can see that that definitely would be of
benefit to the children. ‘Right, this is the person that I have to talk to
with regard to my behaviour’. But you would hope that it would not
always be in a negative way either. You would hope that it would be
counteracted in as much in a positive way, for example, ‘You know, I
want you to talk to Mr. McGrath, I’ve been telling you about your
good work, I’m the class teacher so off you go now, go to Mr.
McGrath and talk to him’. I don’t know about Learning Support or
Resource but I know from my experience here, I would not put that
extra responsibility on a stressed resource person. Well, that’s here. In a bigger school it could be a different case. I feel that Learning Support and Resource have a place to play but it shouldn’t be their total responsibility. So I suppose that I am heading down the line of saying that it should be a separate post. The behaviour, a child’s behaviour, I feel that teacher’s would need training, they would benefit from that. I mean there’s your continuity again, I suppose if it’s a recognised post, there’s a particular role, it’s a particular job description and I suppose for the whole school to know what this person is about, it definitely would require training.

**Teachers’ Focus-Group**

T5: I think a lot of children who go to Resource have a good relationship with that teacher because they go in small groups. If something happened then in my class, I might say to the /Resource teacher, listen, would you ever come down and have a word because ….it’s another person talking to them.

T1: I think the academic end and behaviour go together. Teachers together: Yea.

T6: I would rather they accepted that everybody is responsible for behaviour management. (Teacher 6 addressed teacher 1): What you said about collating all those entries into a book..

T1: That’s a post of responsibility. But that person doesn’t have to deal with the issues, just collate…..The other thing I think about where learning support/resource….you know where a child with behaviour problems….. you always have an antecedent….you kind of know the things that trigger it and if you see it beginning……..we did that crisis management for a particular traveller child we had. The Board of Management paid for 3 teachers to train in it and it was where you watch out for the triggers and if you see him beginning to ……..and it might mean that you have to differentiate behaviours so for instance if you were in the yard and he had a bags of crisps and he wasn’t allowed, the teacher walked up and said ‘you know Paddy, you are not allowed those’ and he said ‘so what, and what are you going to do about it, he’d say like that so that triggers, if you kept going with him, he would lash out. So all the teachers were instructed then that when he did that, you just had to turn around and say ‘would you go and get Mrs. Dunne in the staff-room and then our role was to go out and say ‘Paddy, I need you to come with me, I want you to do something’ and then you removed him from the playground until he calmed down and then you dealt with the behaviour issue so that you didn’t allow it because it had turned in once or twice into a situation where he threw chairs and hit somebody and hurt somebody. That was what that Therapeutic Crisis was called. Now the first phase of that was: talking the children down. Now the next bit was manual handling, which is used in centres and places like that. We didn’t do that part of it but it was really really good training. It was very expensive but the Board of Management paid for it. We did it at a summer course one year.

T6: Manual Handling – are you talking about physical restraint?

T1: Physical restraint, manual handling the next bit was. At the minute, we have a little boy in junior infants, and when he flips like that, we
physically have to pick him up because he picks up all the lunchboxes and throws them. And it’s how to do that safely without injuring yourself or others. And also we have asked the parents to sign that when he behaves like that, that they are ok with us lifting him or removing him from the room or when he starts trying to run home that we physically try and take him away from the door. That was our Board of Management advice, that people would train in this, the same as first aid and that the parents sign up to you doing it.

T2: I had a similar situation with the boy I was talking about before, the one in care, and we were told if he starts, if the trigger starts to bubble, then you either try and you know, calm him down before you deal with the problem and sometimes it might end with him saying ‘F--- off you bitch’ and you say ‘right kids, up, we’re going’ and you leave the room and make somebody aware that you left him there…..you wouldn’t go too far but you would make sure that the children weren’t exposed to him going…..absolutely ballistic. So you would leave him there to cool down and then somebody would come and collect him and then we could go back to the class.

T1: You see all of that means that there has to be a kind of organised support and that’s what we miss in Irish schools in that there is nobody free to lead that support. Now, I’m a resource teacher and I try and leave myself free, as well as the Principal, with a little time for that sort of thing, and if someone……a teacher, sends up a child saying, the teacher really needs you’, I know that I have to go straight away because that child is kicking off, and before he has a chance to impact on other children. I think that is what we really need, is that somebody with that little bit of free time and I think that’s where resource or support teachers are needed. You just have to get somebody in and just…..remove the other children. We had a child who had to go to a special school. She had, on the day that the school psychologist, no….the psychiatrist came to do the school visit on her, she was sitting at the table and she obviously realised, she pushed the table so hard that she knocked three children back, I jumped up to catch children falling and I caught my toe in the flip chart holder and knocked it down on top of the psychiatrist.

Laughter

T1: The child jumped up on the window sill and got out the window. So….her behaviour was so extreme, the children who were with her are now going into 6th class and they still talk about her, and the parents would say that if they meet her in the street that they are still traumatised by her.

T6: That’s what is coming in now, children with very extreme behaviour.

I: How do they stand out in the class? How do you know?
T1: Well, they would be very very tired, very very edgy, you know……..and they also get a sore mouth from doing the glue, they get scabs around their mouth.

**Pupils’ Focus-Group 1**

P3: I think there should be a special behaviour teacher because a Learning Support teacher only teaches English or Maths and all the stuff that children are stuck on and a proper teacher just teaches. They should have a person who comes in and talks to them and helps them.

I: On behaviour?

P3: Yea.

P1: I think we need a different person to come in and help with behaviour because Learning Support teachers only help them on Maths and English when they are falling behind and they’re not qualified to help them with their behaviour or if they’re angry or something.

I: Right. So you think it’s about qualifications, it would be better if they were qualified on behaviour?

P1: Yea.

**Pupils’ Focus-Group 2**

P3: Yea, a special teacher on behaviour because there could be an improvement over a couple of weeks on their behaviour in school.

I: You think if they were supported, they would be better behaved?

Pu3: Yea, they might have a special little room and the teacher would send him up.

P1: It only takes one teacher to go on a behaviour course and they know about behaviour. Like if you did do something wrong and you were misbehaving, the teacher could go to the other teacher and say ‘What do I do?’ and they should get advice from that teacher.
Q10 (Gender)

I: Research tells us that boys tend to cause more behaviour problems than girls, and town schools tend to have more behaviour problems than country schools. What do you think or what are your experiences?

Pr1: Well, it is a generalisation but there’s some truth in it. But I think boys and girls shouldn’t be in separate schools. For a start, I think they should be together. I think when boys are on their own in a school, an all-boys school, the behaviour is worse than an all-girls school.

I: What about mixed?

Pr: In mixed schools, I think the boys behave just as good as the girls. Maybe in a different way, they misbehave than the girls misbehave, but both can misbehave.

I: and do you think that boys are helped by the girls?

Pr: And girls by the boys. But yes, why do the boys misbehave? They tend to …the more physical element comes out when they are herded into a school, (laugh) a single sex school. And I think it’s unnatural. It’s unnatural for the girls as well but maybe they misbehave in a quieter way. But certainly, the boys, it’s more obvious, when they’re herded together in single sex schools.

I: And town schools then have more behaviour schools than country schools? Would you have found that in your time?

Pr: I would have found that, yea, but again, you can get problems everywhere but maybe they’re more dense in a town school. Yea, often in a town school, they might come from a particular estate that has social problems or anti-social behaviour in a particular estate or something like that whereas in the countryside, very often there aren’t those estates and you don’t get this mass anti-social behaviour. that you get in towns.

Pr2: Well, We are a mixed school and we call ourselves rural but we are half rural and half urban at this stage. Am…Boys cause one kind of ……., a set of problems that are very open and very easy to spot whereas girls cause another range of problems that are a lot more hidden and a lot more discreet. We are very aware of problems that go on in 3rd and 4th class around girls, like leaving each other out and would cause as much problems as the issues around boys behaviour. Even if you were to itemise a list, there would be more boys involved in misbehaviours but very often they’re misbehaviours that are quite correctible and rather straight forward. We find that the girls issues, they can be very deep seated and take quite a bit of work and a bit of understanding and very hard to unroot and very difficult on parents as well, the girls issues, because this thing of people being left out and people being isolated and people being blamed for certain things. You get some very very deep rooted issues and very very upsetting for parents. So I’m sure that research shows that boys have more indiscipline problems than girls. I would thing that from where we stand, that the girls problems take us quite more time to sort out and often take up to 18 months to sort out rather than some of the boys issues, they can be sorted out in a shorter period, maybe 2 or 3 weeks.

The second part of the question……..

I: The town schools and country schools…..
Pr: I think that perception is there but I would have thought that rural schools in the past were smaller and there would be other factors besides, just, I would say on a percentage basis that behaviour is the same across the urban/rural divide.

I: Yes,

Pr: I don’t have any problem with it anyway. But around the gender issue, I think a lot of the research previously was too straight forward. People ticked off boxes about...somebody hit somebody and what girls and boys did, whereas more modern research, they get a background to some of the things and very often, girls would go quiet and the issues won’t manifest and it doesn’t come to the eye of the teachers so it doesn’t seem like a problem when in actual fact it is a huge problem to a particular family and to a particular child I think.

I: So you think that boys misbehaviour is more open.

Pr: It’s more open and more manifest and in your face whereas the girls thing, you have to be watching out for the girls misbehaviour. They’re inclined not to tell because quite a lot of it comes from people that would be perceived as their friends or their in-group, whereas a lot of the boys things are from out-groups and it is a lot easier for staff and that to see.

I: It’s more visual.

Pr: It’s very much a visual straight up frontal thing.

Pr3 I agree (laugh)...for the reason that I think that we are looking at two different types of people as in every classroom, you have ......you know..... girls do tend to be that bit more nurturing, do tend to have the sort of components you know, associated with girls. Boys tend to chance their arm a bit more and I know that is not a good way about saying it but they do tend to push the boundaries a bit more. Now girls know misbehave as well but it’s sort of more controlled, it might be equally hurtful- boys do ....am...tend to lash out but I do think that some of the more serious problems generally happen among the boys and I would find that within the school.

Am......The town schools, yes, I do think that there is something there and I think mainly because .....again, the loss of the extended family.....more where people have moved into a locality because of work, it tends to be the parents and the children together. Maybe in the country, people tend to maybe build houses close to grandparents and then you do get that extended family support. But also I think the children in the country have more free time or sorry, more space, they tend to be more active so ......I would always find the busier children are, the less behaviour problems there are so around that, I would say, yes, that is a feature and I would say, during my teaching career, definitely there is more of a challenge around behaviour that are totally male, that have males up to 6th class. I do think there might be more of a challenge for those schools.

I: Mm..... and here, you have a mixed school here, haven’t you?

Pr: I have a mixed school.

I: And about the boys behaviour, do you mean that it is more visual, more open than girls misbehaviour?
Yes, it can be more destructive I suppose…for whatever reason…..but then I would also say, hand on heart that girls can get involved in more verbal misbehaviour, with boys, it’s more physical…for whatever reason…..

But something that struck me that I hadn’t intended asking, is do you think that the gender of the teacher makes a difference. It’s just that in my past teaching career, in one school we used to have boys and girls in the infant school and then the boys left to go to a boys school after 3 years. Gradually we lost all the boys and one parent remarked that we weren’t ‘boy friendly’. I wondered was it because we were all female teachers. What do you think of that?

Yes, I do think there is something in that but I do think it’s about the quality of the teaching as well and the training of the teachers which is another area, that needs to be looked at around behaviour because it is a challenge that will come up for teachers. They tend to come out academically trained beautifully, but around behaviour management, I would find that there is a need there, especially younger teachers, I think, there is a lot of learning…..a huge learning curve there around behaviour management and I do think there is a gender issue in that I suppose male….you know, they do need……there is something they get from males that we females don’t provide and vice versa. And I think where you have a school, mixed gender I think it is essential to have some males on the staff.

…..because there is a male psyche that we need to acknowledge and I think where you have families where children appear…..especially in Ireland and I suppose it is an international thing, where families have broken up, the male tends to be the one who leaves the family setting and I do think the children then miss that male….that focus in their lives and in school, there may be no male person either. I do think there is a component there that can affect them.

Yes, when I was teaching I used to be in an all-girls school and then the numbers dropped and I went to teach in an all-boys school and the boys had totally different interests that I had. I was interested in all girly things. I found that I had to learn so much, I had to learn about cars, bikes, boats, engines, airplanes…..it was a real learning curve for me. Have you found that at all?

Yes, and there are some games that boys are naturally drawn to and you do need to …..to be respected by them because you know to actually teach them, you do need to earn a certain amount of respect rather than demand it I think. And I think you know the sort of respect that you get ….you know from understanding them and where they’re at is a healthier type than the one you might demand.

I would agree with the statement that there is a difference with regard to behaviour issues between town and country. Having attended a school in the country myself and then having done teaching practice in an urban setting, I definitely would see a difference. There’s more instances of behaviour issues than when I was in Primary school between the country and town. I think you could put it down to street wise. In a town, there is so much going on, they’re interacting constantly, the children in an estate, they’re grown up more in some
levels and I suppose in the country, they’re more protected or isolated.

I lived up a country avenue with my sisters and that’s where we played all summer long and there wasn’t the same interaction with the outside world and I suppose when we did go to school, we knew what we had to do. The difference is that the children are quieter in the country I would say, quieter in themselves, calm, not as hectic, I suppose more engaging with the school process as a whole. I know that that’s a very general statement but yes, definitely more engaging. The town children present different challenges, am…..the teacher is presented with different or more topics to cope with. It may be something that is said outside that a child has heard, maybe from an older boy sitting on a wall. It could be as simple as that, they come in with more, I suppose more adult information, the teacher has to address that while delivering the curriculum and you also have the issue with regard to parents, some parents may have heard of these instances, it definitely presents more challenges, different challenges.

I: And do you agree that boys cause more behaviour problems than girls?
Pr: Yes, I agree with that. There’s no question about that. I was taking to a girl in ---------- during the week who is doing some research and she said its 60/40 percentages, as regards boys presenting with learning difficulties, behavioural issues, it just seems to be that kind of a divide and she taught in a special needs school.

My query over that is from listening to three male teachers over the years who have taught in an all-male school, and from one male in particular, who have drawn up a list on how many of our past pupils would have gone down the line of jail, drugs, suicide, all of these things, there is a higher incidence of the males compared to the girls in a disadvantaged area and then as regards resources, they are divided out equally, for an all-boys school in a DEIS setting and an all-girls school in a DEIS setting. When you have that 60/40 divide, there definitely are more instances of behavioural issues. We have absent fathers here and we are trying to cope with children who, I won’t say depressed but definitely sad because their fathers are not around. Not necessarily army fathers, the army have support for that, you know for spouses who have partners abroad. I’m talking of children who have never known their father and maybe regard some particular man as their father and then discover that it’s not actually their father. Then you have other siblings who aren’t biological siblings of the same parents and that in my experience does cause serious issues for children as regards self-esteem and confidence and being comfortable in themselves so we have started ‘Rainbows’, it’s a little group set up for loss and separation. Am…we have targeted at least 20 boys and I have made phone calls to the mothers in question and said ‘you know, I feel that this is something that Johnny would definitely benefit from, I’ve observed him in the class and definitely there’s an issue when family comes up and he’s definitely negatively affected by it’. In my own experience, I have a friend whose boyfriend, at 30 years of age had not addressed the fact that his father had left him and the relationship finished. It all stemmed from the fact that he hadn’t addressed that absent father issue at that age and now it all comes back.
They were planning a family and he was worried that he wouldn’t be able to carry out his fatherly duties and his father didn’t either. Definitely there’s a serious need here and as Principal and looking at the resources and we are all so conscious that resources are tighter - thin on the ground now. That divide between girls and boys I think has to be recognised. There should be more support in a DEIS boys school than a DEIS girls school because of the 60/40 divide. And I’m basically quoting my past Principal when he said ‘just look at the graveyard and the prisons, they have come from here, those boys have come through this school and they have died and we are actually going to organise a plaque, just in their honour now. These boys had fallen in with the drugs crowd and ended up, you know, as a mule and carrying drugs for somebody or took their own life. You know, I haven’t got the exact figure or a number.

I: What age would they be?
Pr: Very few beyond 30. A few would have been accidents but very few. They would be in their 20’s.

I: Where would they have gone on to from here. I mean this is a boys school to 12 years.
Pr: Yes, school completion, the boys would have gone to the Post Primary up the hill here. I can’t say all but some. It’s a mixed school. Some would have gone to Kildare, some go to but the majority would have gone to the Post Primary up the hill.

I: Would the majority of pupils here be from the --------?
Pr: Yes, the majority would be but some are coming in. It was interesting recently, I was asked, as principal, and we are organising our budget for next year for school completion, to draw up an estimated figure of need, of children at risk. I spoke with our longest serving member of staff, the male teacher because he would be aware of the background, and I said, ‘you know, this child is damaged, do you feel that he will follow in his father’s footsteps and his two older brothers going into the army?’ and he said ‘yes, from my experience, that would be predictable, where he would go. And then there are twins in my class and he said ‘no, not one in that family went beyond 2nd, 3rd year so they won’t either. So we’re looking at it now and I have a lot of concerns. I heard a statistic, I can’t quote the exact figures but last night I had a conversation with a friend of mine with regard to this. It’s 600,000 predicted unemployed in the next 10 years and that would bring serious social and economic issues to families and as a result, schools and services are under pressure to cater for all of these people who don’t have jobs and opportunities so I think there is a desperate need to cater for the boys now. And I don’t know if we look at the teenage girls, the 18 year-old who may have had an early pregnancy, a young mother but there’s great supports there. There is a welfare system and there’s a district nurse and I’ve observed some of the mothers coming here, young mothers coming in here with their boys, ……they’re coping. Obviously there are some who don’t cope, I mean, don’t get me wrong, but I suppose it’s …..am…..it’s responsibility, it’s a way of life for them to get up and get their children fed and there’s order in their day, they have a purpose. But for a father who may have just become
involved with this girl for a short time and he leaves and then, this child comes along and the father feels ‘Oh my God, I do have responsibility over there and I can’t address it for whatever reason. I can’t provide, does that mean that I’m going to be the same as my father was’. There’s a cycle there, a disturbing cycle. And I spoke to somebody recently about the fact that the issues now at home, I mean even 10 years ago, a broken family did have a father and a mother, I mean ok, this week it’s me, next week it’s your father. And there’s other issues in the house where there’s a father, as I said before who is not the biological father and there are extra siblings coming in. I mean, there’s a child in my class who really doesn’t know where he belongs. We’ve a child in this school who left at Christmas time to go and live with his father and his new family as in two younger siblings, having left his mother and another sibling who is from a different father, so this child is really in the middle on his own. So he left, he left this school, he left a class of 6 boys, he left his comfort zone. He wanted to live with his father so the mother had to let him go to live with his father for 3 or 4 months but couldn’t fit in there. There was an established family unit. There was a mother and a father and two siblings and he was coming along and acting out. So he came back. And I spoke to the previous Principal and I said the child is back and he said he had to go and find out for himself what it was like. I mean it’s emotional, it’s upsetting. He had to go and find out what it was like to live with his father. His father was working long hours so he spent the day with this other woman, who wasn’t his mother. It’s disturbing, so now he lives with his mum and two other siblings. Now there’s a new baby in the family and the new baby is a boy and that seems to have focused his attention. He’s the older brother now with this child and he’s excelling here now and I think it was nice for him to come back to a group of 6 boys who missed him, who genuinely wanted him back and who never asked ‘where did you go? Why are you here?’. There was a general acceptance when he came in, sat down in his uniform. I knew he’d come back and I was delighted for him but you worry about him in 10 years-time. You worry about him in years to come when he sees a father attending the graduation of a sibling or a half-sibling. It’s sad, I mean even in a separated environment, men should have a contact, you know, a responsibility. Men should be presented with the long term effects of not being on call for a child. And it’s always been the case that the mother is left. It’s accepted as the case but …am…you would definitely need heightened awareness. I forget now but I’m going off on a tangent here but it’s a gender issue. That is a gender issue and there’s no point in fighting that. I mean I read recently in the paper that we are 25 years addressing disadvantage, you wonder about the effects of all this.

I: Are you saying that they still haven’t got it right?

Pr: I think the schools have done all that they can in catering for the needs but you have to go back to the roots - to where the needs started from. I mean the School Completion Programme is excellent because it is targeting them now and even today, there’s a group gone from the Post Primary school and there’s a girl, it just so happens that the
Coordinator for the 7 schools locally - Joe - I think it’s taking in Kildare, 1 school in ------- and schools in the --------- Camp, and this is her cluster of schools. She organising the After School Club and she’s putting the project workers in there, organising the funding and getting the coach to come in, and she’s getting someone to do the cookery, that’s going to be on a Tuesday. She’s involved in the school, say family fun week in the -------- with the Family Resource Centre. She’s constantly consulting the teachers and Principal with regard to project workers and the next child at risk, the next child that has missed days, she says ‘let’s put him into this lot’ and it’s great then because I’ve noticed even with one child, who’s working very successfully with the project worker, it’s working out very successfully. At first he wasn’t very interested at the beginning and we had to overcome that. He came from a very very disorganised background but I met the mum recently and it was very nice to be able to say to her ‘well, we will keep this in place and thanks for signing the form because that means that he is getting his half hour per day’. It was nice to be able to relay that information. His teacher is very happy that ….am….he’s made this progress. Then of course, we have the whole school. We have the Community Liaison Project as well. A teacher, based in this school is in the role of Coordinator of 3 schools in the ---------. So she meets with parents and one of the overall aims of the role is she is not going home with a negative story about attendance but is going home with something positive but I feel that needs to be addressed also. I feel from that my observations after 6 months is that the 2 groups, the School Completion and the Project workers in here, and they are facilitating the child. I think from my observations the home/school project workers see themselves very much involved with the parents but we are talking about the same family and this is where the issues arise because now I’m thinking well, Julie, do you want to maybe talk to the project worker and the teacher and see how well he is doing and actually go home with that information. That’s the ideal and that should happen as opposed to the home/school deciding ‘well, I only support the parents’. That divide cannot be there when it’s the one family, information has to cross, liaising is essential.

I: You mentioned the Coordinator, is she a teacher?

Pr: No, she is not a teacher. She has 15 project workers in different schools and she coordinates everything, including funding. We have a child here with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (EBD) and last year, she organised 3 play therapy sessions for him. The idea was that the mum would come in and observe the play sessions between the child and therapist but mum failed to come in each time. We cut the counselling then because other children could avail of this. Now the child is definitely in need but for maximum effect, mum needed to be involved. Again we had a child here who didn’t meet the criteria for Reading Recovery because he didn’t have the basics of reading but the Coordinator insisted that he be kept on. Reading Recovery is an excellent programme but you have to meet the criteria age wise and ability wise. Recently one of the children here came successfully
through the 20 week programme and he read at his First Communion Mass, and last year, he wouldn’t have been able to do that. Now we have Maths Recovery coming on board. One of our teachers has volunteered to do the training. This will mean 1st class targeted every single day with a structured maths programme because our results show that Maths, as much as literacy, needs attention. But this teacher has a split Senior Infants and 1st class, I have 2nd class but I have to facilitate the teacher by taking 12 Senior Infants when she is trying to do the programmes with 1st class. I have to do this because it’s a waste of resources, money and time, if it is not rolled out effectively.

**Teachers’ Focus-Group**

**T6:** I suppose boys tend to have a lot of energy that I suppose that you can channel into games and if you did channel it into games, it would certainly work. But that’s what they need, I think, they need lots of activities.

**T2:** I also think that it works well, you know with reading and things and if you want them reading, they think ‘aw. but with comics……..they are still reading at the end of the day and you ask ‘well, what would you like to read about, I find that that engages them at an academic level. Behaviour wise, girls can be boisterous as well. Boys are very honest with you. They say exactly what the problem is whereas girls can be nasty.

**T3:** If you correct girls, they look daggers at you.

**T1:** I think boys tend…..their behaviour is expressed more, and it’s more, kind of in a physical way, whereas girls can have very very significant behaviour difficulties and it’s kind of very introverted behaviour and it can be very kind of….damaging……bitching, and it can be a difficult bullying issue in girls….

Teachers together: Yea….

**T1:** And they can do a lot of harm with it and it kind of goes unnoticed.

**I:** And what about town and country schools? Is there a difference?

**T6:** There was a time when there was I suppose, but I don’t think it is as marked anymore.

**T2:** I’d say that is mainly to do with the TV, media and that. I was just saying the other day, it’s ridiculous, I’m not a parent at all but you get 7 and 8 year olds watching games that are only allowed for 18 year olds. They are so violent and they’ve got prostitution things in them. I can’t understand what parents would allow their children to do that, just to have an easy life. I think it has a lot to do with behaviour issues because they think that is fact. They’re aware of so much more.

**T1:** Our school would have traditionally been a country school and over the last, say, 8-9 years, it has grown up into a commuter belt so I think that you would get the odd country school, still far out the country who had kind of a native population where you would still get the same families coming through time and time again. We had that as one element of our school but there’s a much bigger mix to it now. So I think that has changed – the dynamic around behaviour. But I’m sure there are still country schools where the school is just part of the community and the behaviour issues there would be different. Ours was like that and parents would come in to you and say ‘you know, ……they wouldn’t
be interested in the academic, they would say as long as his behaviour is good. I’d say there are still schools like that – where the school is part of the local community only.

**Pupils’ Focus-Group 1**

P3: It really depends on the child. It’s not necessarily always the boys. It could be a boy or a girl at first and then the next child could follow on, carrying on, that could lead to a boy and a girl causing misbehaviour.
P4: On the part where the town schools and the country schools. In the town schools, there’s more criminals and ……

I: And you think that might make a difference?
P4: Yea.

I: In general though. Although, of course, a boy or a girl can cause problems, would you say, in general, that boys can cause more behaviour problems than girls or would you say that girls cause more behaviour problems than boys?

Children in Unison: Boys.
P3: Definitely boys.

I: And is that your experience here in this school?

Children in Unison: Yea.
P1 Boys talk non-stop. And the girls, well, the girls are quiet even though some of them is laughing. They don’t get in trouble.
P3 Most boys in the class talk about a football match, just gone on over the weekend and all the boys say which player is better than the other and they argue over football players.
P1 Yea, they have a debate across the classroom and to do your work is very very hard.
P5: After playing soccer, they start giving out to another person.

I: So this might happen in the classroom, is it?
P5: Yea.
P6 I think it’s mostly boys, because girls keep to themselves and are quiet.

I: And the boys make fun, is that what you are saying?
P6: No, they just want attention.

I: OK

P3 Boys tend to act out because they need to prove themselves. Girls don’t need to, they don’t need to do a certain thing. Lads, they’re more……competitive. they take everything seriously.

I: Who takes everything seriously?
P1 A couple of people in the school, like there will be a certain child nearly every day and if they do something wrong, they say, ah, sorry, but if he misses, some will give out.

I: Are you talking about boys?
P1: Yea, boys, they take everything seriously and if someone says something hurtful, they can attack back. And if you say something back, they can bate (beat) you up for it.

I: OK

P4: Boys are probably aggressive, what they see on TV, what they see on the streets and that.

I: So they look at what they see on TV and act that out.
P4: Yea.

I: The town and country schools, you were saying that because there are
more criminals in towns that there are more problems in schools, is that
what you were saying earlier?

P4: Yea, what’s going on in the streets or what is going on in TV.

I: On TV.

P4: Yea, you never see anything bad going on in the country. They may
think that’s the way they have to act.

P1: If a pupil moved from a town school, to a country school, they could
end up spreading bad behaviour or they could calm down. They could
go either way. they could calm down with the rest of the school or
they could raise behaviour.

I; That’s something I hadn’t thought about. Good.

I: Now would anything like to say anything else about behaviour or
behaviour support, anything that we left out?

P3: Just that respect and consistency is definitely needed in school.

Pupils’ Focus - Group 2

P1: I agree about the town and country schools because there is more bad
stuff happening in estates and everything, people throwing stones at
windows and everything and then the children come and do that to the
school.

I: Ok, and what about the boys causing more behaviour problems than
girls?

P4 (b): I’m not just saying this but like girls in our class cause more behaviour
problems than boys.

P1 Yea, they are always messing around, like laughin and sniggering
behind the teacher’s back.

P4: Another teacher always says ‘ah the girls’ are grand’ but sure they are
always laughin and sniggering when the teacher is not looking and
always whispering to each other so it’s not just the boys.

P1 In our class, boys are probably….. more misbehaved and say a boy
does something wrong, well, if say a girl did something wrong, the
teacher would hardly notice, teacher would hardly give out to them or
take any notice of it.

I: Would she see them doing it?

P1 Yea, and she wouldn’t take any notice.

P3 Yea, that always happens and it’s not fair on the boys.

P1 Say if we threw paper, we would get roared at, and say if they (girl’s)
threw paper, they would be asked to pick it up. That does happen.

P2 I think it’s like a stereotype, it’s not always that boys are more
misbehaved because we have about 21 boys in our class and we only
have 11 girls so the boys are going to get noticed more than the girls.

I: Because they are 2/3rds of the class.

P1 I think like if there’s some child that never misbehaves and they do
something wrong, the teacher says ‘ah, that’s ok because you’re
normally good’ and then they might do it again and the teacher says ‘
oh, it’s grand because you’re normally good’. Then they may get into
a habit so they should punish them, like they might get into the habit of
doing things.

I: So we are coming back to consistency again, the teacher should be
consistent in what she does.

Pupils: Yea.
there was a rule brought in this year in the school that make-up is banned but some girls wear make-up and the teacher notices but nothing is said to them and let’s say the boy was wearing combats and he wore them in, he’d get into trouble.

One of my friends got in trouble and he’s in trouble on and off, and a teacher or two asks him when he’s going to be off yard again, taking the mick out of him.

And off yard means he's not allowed play in the yard, is it?

Yea.

And like, he used be bold, the teachers still tease him over it.

they still think he’s like that and he’s trying to change.

ah.

Anyone like to add anything more to that?

Like the language of our teacher is sometimes pretty disgraceful, like she says ‘taking the mick’ and ‘the piss’ and I was saying it to my mam and my mam was saying it to the other parents that like her language was disgraceful and nothing was done about it really.

Thank you very much for helping and giving up your time, it is much appreciated