Response to
Consultation on Tackling Bullying in Schools

Date: 29 June 2012
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*This document represents the personal opinion of both individuals above and the organisations which they represent*
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Response to Consultation on Tackling Bullying in Schools
1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Document
The purpose of this document is to record the requirements, specification and concept overview for our response to the Department of Education & Skills’ (DES) open call for submissions to the Working Group to address the issue of Bullying and Cyber Bullying in schools in Ireland.

1.2 Intended Audience
This document is a business level document intended for the Working Group and key stakeholders selected by them.

1.3 Definitions, Acronyms and Abbreviations
DES Department of Education & Skills
NEWB National Educational Welfare Board
ISP Internet Service Provider/s
ISPAI Internet Service Providers Association of Ireland
NCTE National Centre for Technology in Education
CB Cyber Bullying
VWT VideoWeb Training
CTBS Consultation on Tackling Bullying in Schools
1.4 Response to issues raised in CTBS

1. What changes to existing practices and policies in schools would improve how bullying can be tackled in schools?
   - Having National enforceable Guidelines on how to tackle the issue of Bullying in Schools
   - Providing the option for students to be credited for studying and being successful in their learning at State Examinations of this subject matter; both at Junior and Leaving Certificate levels.
   - Including the subject matter on the curriculum

2. How can awareness of bullying and its effects be raised at school level?
   - Ensuring the teaching of this subject matter is a requirement – to evaluate this, sporadic audits could be carried out.
   - Having a 'Road show on the effects of Bullying behaviour', this could take the form of a Play, which can be rolled out nationally; in this way consistent messaging will be conveyed.
   - Developing a library of 'Case Histories', showing the effects of Bullying. This which be located in the teacher’s hub of information. This library will address all aspects of bullying and most specifically CB which exacerbates the sustained and lasting experience of bullying for the individual.
   - Students need to experience the effects which bullying can have on an individual in order to have any sort of appreciation of the issue. Specifically cyber bullying has changed bullying significantly making it more subtle. Cyber bullying is not as blatant as physical bullying and students take part in CB without even realising the effect of what they are doing.

3. Have you been a victim of bullying? If so, what helped you to deal with it or what would have helped you to deal with it? Please note parents are also welcome to share their experience of bullying on behalf of their child.
   - CM. I have had some experience of bullying behaviour when a junior executive. However this was prior to the technology revolution and therefore when I left the office, I left the problem behind me.
   - SB. My daughter has experienced CB which started within the school but, by the very nature of CB, spread to the home through mobile phones and Google Buzz. While there was no one single bully, the nature of comments being made by multiple friends drastically affected her mental state as she was too young (11yrs at the time) to deal with the emotions which the comments were causing.
4. What are the key priorities that need to be addressed, including actions to be taken by the Department of Education and Skills, other government department and agencies and school communities?
   - A new resource needs to be developed which will take into account the subtle nature of cyber bullying as well as traditional bullying using media that young people are familiar with, interactive media, video role plays etc.
   - Providing the option for students to be credited for studying and being successful in their learning at State Examinations of this subject matter; both at Junior and Leaving Certificate levels.
   - Including the subject matter on the curriculum
   - Having National enforceable Guidelines on how to tackle the issue of Bullying in Schools

5. Are there any practical steps that can be taken in the short term to improve how schools approach and tackle bullying?
   - A pilot scheme of the resource we are proposing in the attached document could be run within a year and some of the methodologies made available on a limited basis.
   - Agreeing a National set of Guidelines on how to tackle Bullying behaviour, with a particular emphasis on CB, will give a framework from which Principals and Teachers can work. It could prove to be their roadmap on how to engage firstly, the victim, secondly, the bully and thirdly the parents.

6. Are there any exemplars of effective practice, drawn from Irish or an international context that you consider could be usefully introduced in our schools?
   - A system which is being piloted in Tallaght currently appears to be having a positive effect; this is called Restorative Practice.
   - Globally there are many approaches, though it appears that there is no clear example of Best Practice evident.

7. Are there further areas which should be highlighted? If yes, please elaborate.
   - IT Industry needs to be included in this process. We would propose interacting with the ISPAI for thoughts on best practice as they have a vested interest in helping to solve this issue. We also believe that a resource such as we are proposing should be part funded by the ISP’s. In this way they will feel an ownership and obligation to the project; it will therefore be in their best interests to ensure that this project is sustainable, which is often a drawback when new processes/projects are developed. As technology continues to evolve at an exponential rate, having a ‘joint venture/collaboration’ could only benefit this project and ensure that the DES is at the coalface of new innovations and technologies
2 Identifying the Need

2.1 Concept Overview

The proliferation of advanced web based technology among the general public, and in particular among those of school going age, has raised a number of significant challenges both for young people and those working in education in Ireland. While bullying in itself is an issue that schools are familiar with and have been dealing with for many years, the advent of smartphones and widespread internet access has created a new and complex dimension to this challenging behaviour. Throughout the following document we will outline the various elements which we feel may assist schools, students and parents in dealing with this issue. These views are based on initial research amongst stakeholders and one set of end users.

We are proposing the production of a web based resource centre which will allow teachers, students and parents’ access to various information and media to allow them to greater understand and deal with the issues associated with bullying and, in particular cyber bullying. In this document we will put forward a list of preliminary recommended features which are required to deal with the situations that schools encounter based on our initial research.

2.2 User Needs

The concept is required because the following types of people will want to use and benefit from using the application:

- Teachers educating students on the issues surrounding bullying
- School management seeking to implement a recommended and nationally consistent best practice policy on how to deal with bullying in all its forms
- Parents who wish to know what the process for dealing with bullying is within the school system and how children are being educated about this issue
- Students who need to find out what to do in the event that they are being bullied
- Students in the event that they know of a fellow student who is being bullied
- A combination of teachers, management, parents and students who are involved in a case of bullying and who require a clear pathway to follow in order to resolve the issue satisfactorily
2.3 Bullying Landscape

At present schools have access to several resources, including NEWB guidelines for schools on developing a code of behaviour (2008); DES guidelines on countering bullying behaviour (1993); DES template for developing and anti-bullying policy in post-primary schools (1991/2006).

However many schools appear to develop a specific bullying policy personal to their school to address this issue. Until relatively recently this was generally sufficient, meeting with mixed success in various schools. However, recent advances in personal technology devices has created an environment where bullying, which may initially present in physical interaction between peer groups or, more commonly, in the school environment; with technological advances this bullying behaviour, continues through cyber interaction beyond the school gates after school hours.

This recent occurrence leads to a conundrum for the school as the lines of demarcation have become blurred. Who is responsible for dealing with this issue when it occurs in an area beyond the schools ability to monitor or control?

Many schools have chosen to tackle the issue despite not having a clear responsibility to do so. However, they are poorly served when it comes to having educational resources to effectively do so. Many schools have had to turn to third party ‘experts’ to assist them in educating students on the issues and consequences around cyber bullying.

As a result this method of educating students has led to an inconsistency in messaging from school to school. There is no specific screening of these ‘experts’ or of the messages they are delivering.
3 Requirements Overview

3.1 Functional Scope

Based on the issues outlined above we initially conceived of a resource based website with the following requirements for the users i.e. teachers, school management, students and parents.

We would recommend extensive research in advance of detailed design of any resource to further validate the precise requirements for such a system. The details outlined in the following pages represent a starting point/example of what we feel should be involved in such a system.

Details on the development process and teams which we would use are available should there be an interest in further development of this concept.

3.2 Initial Requirements List

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<tr>
<td>IR-0002</td>
<td>To supply school management with a log in area with national policy guideline documentation &amp; best practice structures</td>
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<tr>
<td>IR-0003</td>
<td>To provide schools with a list of recognised ‘experts’ who will deliver a message which has been constructed with the input of all stakeholders; ISP, education and policy makers</td>
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<tr>
<td>IR-0004</td>
<td>To supply students with a log in area with literature, videos and forums</td>
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4 Validating the Need

4.1 Introduction
In order to validate the need for the resource VWT and Praxis carried out interviews with the following groups and individuals; ISPAI, NCTE, Teachers from 5 schools in various demographic areas

4.2 Interviews
Initial discussion in interviews led to the following information:

Teachers Interviews on dealing with bullying:

- CB is a very real problem for teachers and students, particularly texting and social media
- A national enforceable bullying policy for schools would be of great benefit to management & teachers. Firstly, to ensure a consistent approach when teaching the subject and secondly in dealing with parents.
- Dealing with parent responses to bullying can be extremely difficult; parents of either the bully or the victim.
- The classes in which the subject of bullying and its consequences is taught (SPHE/RSE/Religion) are perceived to have less importance with students. In second level the rationale for this appears to be the lack of points awarded in state examinations.
- CB has caused the experience of bullying to be more sustained and more difficult to manage

Teachers Interviews on the proposed resource and initial requirements outlined in point 3.2:

- Video’s which could be shown to the students would be particularly welcome as this format engages their attention. Having access to printable PDF’s and worksheets would be welcomed also
- Real Life case studies should be included to enable role plays. In this way students can interact in the classroom and come to understand the effects of bullying from both points of view
- An interactive element to the site, which could be used in the classroom setting would be beneficial for students; it would increase ownership and engagement.
- A tutorial specifically focused on how to relate the information would be seen as desirable by teachers
- Students should have their own log in area to the site, again encouraging ownership
ISPAI Interview:

- While some structured work is in place in Primary schools, there appears to be little or no consistent approach to deal with bullying in Second level schools.
- Second level schools are left to their own devices on tackling CB with many electing to use independent ‘experts’ to give seminars to students.
- These ‘experts’ are not using a consistent or approved approach and, in the case of one particular ‘expert’, delivering a message which the ISP’s consider to be sensationalist and misleading.
- Any approach taken to deliver a national policy and approach to bullying and CB in schools should include recommendations and expertise from the ISP industry.

NCTE interview:

- They’ve produced some resources for schools in an effort to address CB:
  - Webwise Primary Teachers’ Handbook
  - Be Safe Be Webwise – an internet safety lesson and resource Pack for SPHE Teachers.
- The challenge is to know how the information is delivered, or if it’s used at all. There appear to be no processes in place to evaluate the benefit or not of these resources.
- Their experience is that teachers reach out and ask for these handbooks.
- The Garda engage with schools to give talks about the issue of bullying and its’ impact. These interactions take place in 5th Class (Primary) and 2nd Year (Secondary). Again there doesn’t appear to be any specific general template in existence for these ‘talks’. The number of ‘talks’ given nationally are recorded in the Garda Annual Reports.
- There are individuals who give talks in various counties, e.g., Donegal (1 person), Sligo, (1 person).
- Childwatch engages with second level schools.
- There are no enforceable laws in Ireland related to bullying behaviour.
- Transition year could be an opportune place to focus the teaching of the impact of bullying behaviour on the victim, the bully and the wider society.
- McCann Fitzgerald are expert in the area of bullying/reputational issues.
4.3 Validation Results

The outcome of the validation process resulted in the justification of the requirements and the addition of functionality that interviewees deemed to be crucial to the success of the application. In addition the results showed that the proposition would add significant value to the application.

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<td>VR-0002</td>
<td>To provide teachers with tutorials on how best to use the resource</td>
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<td>VR-0003</td>
<td>To provide teachers and school management with coaching materials to enable them to more effectively with parents</td>
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<td>VR-0007</td>
<td>To provide teachers and students with real life case studies in video form and additional role play guidelines to ensure effective learning</td>
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5 System Requirements

5.1 Overview
In order for this proposed method of delivery to be effective a school must have a sufficient level of student and/or teacher access to internet broadband. This will enable the downloading of the various rich media which we propose should be included within the resource. Also, to enable students to access the resource they require internet access at a designated time/class period. Parents will require access to home broadband connection in order to engage with their specific site materials.

5.2 Security requirements
This resource site will have several separate log-in areas. As such a robust password/username system will be in place to prevent students or parents from accessing the school section of the resource site. We would also recommend rigorous testing of the security facilities to ensure that they system is secured against hacking attempts.

5.3 Localisation requirements
It may be desirable to provide any text content on the resource site in both the English and Irish Languages. It would not however, be feasible to produce all video material in any other language, other than English as this would result in excessive cost implications.

5.4 Accessibility requirements
It may be relevant to look at making the site accessible to those individuals with visual or aural impairments.

5.5 Monitoring requirements
Should it be decided to provide a student forum on the resource site, then a provision for the monitoring and mediation of any conversations and comments must be made.

5.6 Publication requirements
The website will require a printing or downloading function for all resource documents.

Response to Consultation on Tackling Bullying in Schools
6 Appendix

6.1 Claire Murphy, Director. BA (HONS); RGN; Dip Man.

With a background in Sales, Business Development, Business Management, New Product Development, Regulatory Liaison, Pricing & Reimbursement, Government Liaison, Outcomes Research and Economic Modeling, more recently, Claire was the Team Leader on several national & international award winning community and healthcare projects for Pfizer, including the Pfizer Health Connect Project. In addition to training in the areas of Health Economics, Project Management and General Management, Claire is a qualified General and Renal Nurse, as well as being a qualified Counsellor and Psychotherapist.

6.2 Stuart Boyle, Director. Dip Communications & Media Production

Stuart has over 12 years’ experience in broadcast and internet media production as a business development and production management director. In that time he has worked on the development of educational and training resources for both corporate clients and the educational system including a collaboration between the ISPAI, NCTE and Microsoft Ireland aimed at educating primary children on safe use of the Internet called The Internet; How to ensure it is a force for good in schools and homes. Stuart is currently studying Advanced Project Management for software development.