BEACONS Conversation in D10 Schools

28 April 2021

'Listen to our Story'

| St Dominic's PP | Kylemore College PP | St Gabriel's PS | St Louise de Marillac | St Raphael's PS | Carritas College | St. John's College Ballyfermot |

Dublin West Education Centre
Ionad Oideachais Bhaile Átha Cliath Thiar

BEACONS
Bringing Education Alive for our
Communities On a National Scale

Contents

Foreword

The Dublin West Education Centre (DWEC) has been working with DEIS schools in Ballyfermot (D10) for some time and it was agreed that a BEACONS* event should be convened to explore issues of common concern to D10 schools.

This would help identify emerging themes for future projects and feed into a national conversation about DEIS that would draw attention to issues experienced by their schools on a daily basis.

This report is a faithful account of the richly textured BEACONS conversation that took place online on 28th April 2021 engaging students, teachers and parents of eight DEIS schools in Ballyfermot. This conversation reveals the thoughts, feelings and aspirations of the Ballyfermot community for how education can best serve the needs of their children and the community.

Before diving into the fascinating account of what the community had to say about what education needs to be in a Ballyfermot context – part II of the report – the opening part I sets out the context of the BEACONS conversation – the work of the D10 School Leaders Network.

* BEACONS stands for Bringing Education Alive for our Communities On a National Scale. It is an innovative model of conversation developed by the Teaching Council with the aim of building stronger school communities. BEACONS helps to facilitate better conversations between parents, teachers, and young people at local community level, allowing diverse groups to engage in a safe and welcoming space. It also seeks to foster a virtuous feedback loop between local community conversations and national consultation processes.

PART I
D10 School Leaders' Network

Background

The D10 School Leaders Network was established in 2017 and has been facilitated by Dublin West Education Centre (DWEC) in cooperation with Maynooth University since then. The network meetings have been chaired by Professors Anthony Malone, Maynooth University Department of Education, (2017) and Professor Maire Mc Loughlin, Froebel Department Maynooth University (2017-2021). The network is currently chaired by Niamh Fortune, Associate Professor and Head of Department, Froebel Department Maynooth University. Secretarial and other services are provided by DWEC.

The Key Priorities of the D10 Schools Leaders' Network are set out below and in the context of these, particularly item 5: **National DEIS Forum.**

Key Priorities

1. High levels of social deprivations leading to higher incidence of emotional/behavioural and psychological issues

2. Insufficient funding

3. Attraction and retention of staff

4. Review of Pupil-Teacher Ratio in DEIS schools

5. National DEIS Forum

There is a need for a national forum on DEIS which will provide opportunities for all stakeholders to share information, engage in dialogue towards addressing the particular needs of DEIS schools both at primary and post-primary level. The original DEIS Plan was an excellent initiative. However, the model needs to be revised in light of more current social and educational needs. The circular as it stands set out aspirational goals without any concrete supports and actions which support the realisation of the ambitions.

It was decided to engage with the BEACONS process to begin the national conversation the school leaders feel is necessary to highlight the issues experienced by their schools on a daily basis.

Key Priorities of D10 School Leaders' Network

1. **High Levels of Social Deprivation: Higher Incidence of Emotional/Behavioural and Psychological Issues:**

More supports need to be put in place to tackle the social (addiction; unemployment and homelessness), emotional, psychological and behavioural issues presenting amongst children in the local schools. Some suggestions include: *early family and individual therapeutic intervention; additional social workers; speech and language therapists; behavioural therapists; school-based behaviour support teachers; additional HSCL teachers; ready-access to school-based clinical and educational psychologists;* Support for mental health issues, particularly anxiety and depression and assessments for learning support, is urgently required. There is a need for enhanced co-ordination of local services to improve efficiency and effectiveness in the supports required for the pupils in schools. Children are presenting with complex needs which require streamlined, integrated and holistic support systems – not disjointed; There is clearly not enough support for DEIS schools in dealing with these serious issues. These issues represent serious barriers to teaching and learning. In attempting to deal with these issues, the principal is distracted from the core business of instructional and curriculum leadership.

2. Insufficient Funding

DEIS schools are not sufficiently funded. Schools in other more affluent areas have the advantage of supplementing Department of Education (DE) funding with local fundraising which is not an option in DEIS areas. Children/students in DEIS schools do not have access to curriculum in the same way as those from other more affluent schools. Additional funding would provide for on-going maintenance and replacement of obsolete equipment such as IT equipment and software. It would provide the schools with flexibility in sourcing additional supports for students for example individual assessments; counselling; therapy, access to additional support for books. Currently, DEIS schools are barely surviving on DE funds to cover operational costs. An increase in the capitation grants to cover basic overheads for maintenance and repairs is necessary to enhance the infrastructure. This would make the learning environment more attractive and modern. Additional secretarial and caretaking supports paid by the DE are also needed.

3. Attraction and Retention of Staff

There is a need to attract and retain the best teachers for these schools considering the challenges that present amongst children. Due to the dearth of teachers in the system at the moment, DEIS schools are finding it more difficult to recruit and retain staff. DEIS schools are less attractive for many reasons; Firstly, the challenges presenting amongst children and families and complex are manifold in socially and educationally disadvantaged areas. This makes the role of a teacher in DEIS schools considerably more challenging than in other contexts. Secondly, the same budget and resources have been in place for DEIS schools for a number of years. Therefore, in many of the schools in D10, the basic infrastructure within the schools is in need of investment to upgrade and modernise facilities. Rent and house prices are prohibitive and hence teachers are often travelling long distances to work in the D10 area. When opportunities arise, they seek jobs outside of Dublin. This leads to increased attrition in staffing which in turn leads to a lack of academic continuity for the children and fragmentation in the school community. Some suggestions include: *Long-service increments for teachers; Allowances for teaching in DEIS schools; Job-sharing for principals; Sabbaticals for teachers/ principals teaching in DEIS schools; Appointment of principals for a term-of-office; Making step-down option for principals more attractive;*

4. Review of Pupil-Teacher Ratio in DEIS schools

Two years in a row, pupil-teacher ratio in mainstream schools was lowered but DEIS has been left static. Pupil-teacher ratio in DEIS schools needs to be lowered proportionately and retrospectively.

5. National DEIS Forum

There is a need for a national forum on DEIS which will provide opportunities for all stakeholders to share information, engage in dialogue towards addressing the particular needs of DEIS schools both at primary and post-primary level; The original DEIS Plan was an excellent initiative. However, the model needs to be revised in light of more current social and educational needs.

Terms of Reference of D10 School Leaders' Network

The purpose of this network is to:

- Build relationships between schools across primary and post-primary sectors
- Share information and good practice in order to learn from each other in a supportive and safe environment
- Build capacity for dealing with DEIS-related issues through professional development and/or information sharing
- Collectively consider and address some of the predominant challenges facing DEIS schools
- Contribute to the development of local and national policy related to DEIS matters (as appropriate)
- Explore opportunities for greater collaboration and collegiality
- Advocate for the communities that DEIS schools serve as a united voice

Structure

Convenor/Administrator: Dublin West Education Centre (DWEC)

Facilitators: Marie McLoughlin and Anthony Malone – Maynooth University

Lead Principals: Anne Marie Leonard (Post-Primary) and Loretta Dunphy (Primary)

Membership

Primary		
Loretta Dunphy	Primary	St. Gabriel's NS
Maria Bourke	Primary	St Michael's School
Maria Curtin (Acting)	Primary	St Raphael's NS
Sean O'Shea	Primary	Mary, Queen of Angels 2
Alma Quinn	Primary	St Louise De Marillac PS
Gary Jones	Primary	St Ultan's NS

Post-primary		
Ann Marie Leonard	Post-Primary	St. John's College De La Salle
Deirdre Nolan	Post-Primary	Kylemore College
Sandra Doyle	Post-Primary	Caritas College
Sarah Green	Post-Primary	St Dominic's Post-Primary School

Comments from Principals of D10 Schools on the BEACONS Process

Before turning to the report of the BEACONS conversation in Part II below the following are the comments of the Principal Teachers present at the event about the event itself and the report which resulted from the conversations and engagement on the day:

- "I just read the draft report – well done. I think it really captures the essence and outcomes of the day."

- "The BEACONS event provided an opportunity for all stakeholders to come together to discuss the successes and challenges they find and face on a daily basis attending and working in a DEIS school. It was wonderful to hear the student voice and hear the really worthwhile suggestions they made."

- "As a principal I am a member of the D10 principals' network, which provides huge professional and personal support for me. The role of principal can be isolating at times, so it is wonderful to have a community of cross sectoral principals to work with. Relationships between the schools have enhanced as a result of the network."

- "It was really refreshing to hear how much the pupils and parents value the school and how they view it as a positive influence in the community."

- "As a school leader the lack of resources and lack of access for children to mental health services, OT, SLT and CAMHS is really frustrating. The Beacons event highlighted the importance of addressing our mental health crisis, which has been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a lot of lip service to wellbeing by the Department of Education & Skills but we need to see the follow up. Parents and children need to be able to access resources and services within a reasonable timeframe."

- "This is a really good summary of the opinions shared and the issues discussed on the day….we look forward to continuing the conversation."

PART II
Report of the BEACONS Conversation

Purpose

The Dublin West Education Centre (DWEC) has been working with DEIS schools in Ballyfermot (D10) for some time and it was agreed that a BEACONS event should be convened to explore issues of common concern to D10 schools. This would help identify emerging themes for future projects and feed into a national conversation about DEIS.

Participants & Format

Some sixty-three parents, teachers and students from three primary and four post-primary schools attended (Annex 16) together with members of the Teaching Council as the sponsoring organisation of BEACONS and observers from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and others with an interest in the process. For a second time (out of eight BEACONS events to date) the process was conducted via Zoom due to the constraints of COVID-19 with participants meeting for two sessions of two-hours duration.

The emphasis was on creating a relaxed atmosphere in which all participants could feel comfortable and safe in sharing their thoughts.

Organisation for the event was provided by the Dublin West Education Centre (Mairín Ní Chéilleachair) with facilitation by Chris Chapman, technical support by Ali Warner and reporting by the ReSource centre at the Burren College of Art (Martin Hawkes).

Structure of Report

The report is comprised of:

- An executive summary which seeks to identify the key themes of the conversation;

- The report which follows and summarises the contours of the conversation

- The annexes which set out the full content of the conversations arranged thematically.

Caveat: The report follows as closely as possible the actual words of the participants themselves, except where the context requires otherwise as, in the executive summary. As such it needs to be read as the articulation of diverse opinions rather than an attempt to assert a single definitive narrative.
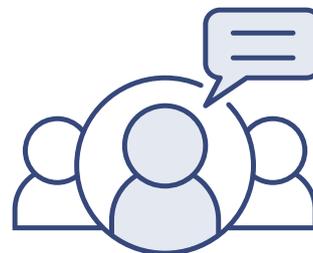
The emphasis was on creating a relaxed atmosphere in which all participants could feel comfortable and safe in sharing their thoughts.

Executive Summary – 'Listen to our Story'
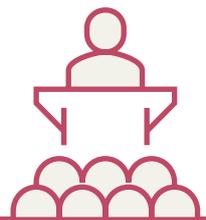
Voice

The BEACONS session allowed seven DEIS schools in Dublin 10 to share their experiences of education not just among themselves but to an outside audience. They sent messages that spoke loudly and coherently to the strengths and needs of their own context. In so doing they seemed to be speaking to the larger system as well as the direction of travel that it needed to take.

The Context

The context of D10 described by participants was of a community beset by drug and alcohol addiction and a mental health crisis compounded by increasing racial diversity and the dislocation of the COVID-19 pandemic which was still an existential reality. What also resonated strongly was the strength of community solidarity, the pride of school principals in leading their schools and the palpable bonds of reciprocal regard and support between students, teachers and parents – bonds that had been strengthened by the experience of COVID-19.

Challenges/Symptoms – as viewed by different Actors

School challenges in D10, articulated by the different actors in the system, combined to provide a mosaic that reflected common problems from diverse perspectives:

- **Principals:** For principals the feeling was of being swamped and frustrated by the depth of student need – poor self-image, substance abuse, emotional issues, social media - relative to the dearth of service provision as well as the challenge of attracting and retaining staff;

- **Primary Teachers:** Reported to be suffering burnout and felt inadequate to the needs of their students – they were not clinicians, yet much of their work was that of social workers for which they were ill-equipped;

- **Second level teachers** were aware that mental health challenges were acute and the curriculum did not provide the holistic balance between school and life beyond school that the context required;

- **Junior students** welcomed the safety, structure and friends that being back at school provided – and yearned for more outdoor learning;

- **Second level students** felt the pressures of an overly-academic system - and not everyone having space and IT infrastructure during COVID-19 - the lack of full understanding for the context from which they came, the pressure of competing time demands and issues of disability, racial injustice and discrimination;

- **The observer group** was noticing the depth of the mental health crisis, the importance of relationships, the need for parity of esteem for non-academic pathways as well as the need for a more child-centred education that put disadvantage and DEIS back on the agenda.

Amelioration – Transformation

Proposals to address the challenges facing D10 schools fell into two broad categories – a not unexpected demand for a response to the perceived deficits in service provision in D10 and, more surprisingly perhaps, the call for a systemic reordering of priorities in what school should be about, a call with potential relevance well beyond D10.

Enhanced Service Provision

The mental health challenge/crisis was acknowledged by all and needed to be viewed for the normal part of life it had become. There was need for much greater service provision across Speech and Language Therapy (SLT), Occupational Therapy (OT) and mental health services such as counsellors to help with re-engagement with school.

There should be welfare officers and guidance counsellors to speak to. Waiting times for the National Education Psychological Service (NEPS) and other mental health supports needed to be reduced. Substance-abuse interventions are required as are early interventions and assessments services. While the value of the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) scheme was acknowledged there is a need for wrap-around services and funding commensurate with school needs.

Transforming School

When it came to what would make the greatest difference to engagement with education the focus was on reordering what school should be about, in a direction that was more compassionate and relevant to real life. In particular:

- **Holistic approach:** It was time to recognise that the system is broken and a more holistic approach is needed that attended to the individuality and wellbeing of students, staff and parents. Understanding diversity and disability and facilitating accessibility is essential;

- **Relationships:** The quality of relationships, particularly with teachers, is key – relationships of equality and real listening, time and space for conversations that really mattered together with inclusion and non-judgmental acceptance. Managing the mood music of the school could make all the difference to students choosing to attend;

- **Preparing for Life:** Equally the focus on exams and the academic needed to be balanced by concern with life beyond school – learning to live, not just earning a living. School needed to be more relevant to real life, provide greater subject choice and reasons to be enthusiastic. The school model should shift to continuous assessment and empowering the students' desire to contribute. Schools should build creative capacity and allow for much more engagement with the outdoors;

- **Wellbeing/Listening:** Schools should give greater focus to wellbeing and life-skills as well as personal and leadership development for students – why not create a wellbeing post in schools? Wellbeing required listening to student voice – and recognising the mental health needs of teachers also. There should be greater focus on learning how to deal with conflict, bullying and discrimination.

- **Communicating:** Improved communications between schools would assist students in transitioning between primary and post-primary school while improved collaboration between teachers would facilitate professional development. Improving communications with, providing supports for and affirming the role of parents would release pressure on teachers and enhance student development.

Other Messages to the Wider System

- **Process:** Participants were constantly surprised by the power of a simple conversational/communications process to reveal the degree to which the different actors in the system were thinking and feeling the same things even if expressed differently. The process needed to be mainstreamed in schools;

- **Mood Music:** The school's 'mood music' has the power to transform the educational experience. Slowing down, making the time and space to really listen, share, communicate, express gratitude and appreciation, allow for more celebration and inspiration, smiles in the corridor and much more constituted the elements by which the context of teaching and learning could be transformed;

- **Student Empowerment:** A recurring theme was the importance of listening to the voice of students, their wisdom and idealism as well as encouraging risk-taking and creating a positive context for cultivating their capacity for leadership and agency;

- **Inclusion:** In an increasingly multi-racial community/society there is a need to wake up to issues of racial injustice and exclusion as well as disability and discrimination;

- **Community – time for Action:** In addition to listening to the voice of students, policy-makers need to spend time getting to understand DEIS schools and the needs of the communities they serve. Only by understanding the reality of the contexts in which students live could the level of their needs be understood and properly addressed. There was need for a national conversation on the needs of DEIS schools. The time for action was now.

Report of the Conversation

The following report mirrors the contours and design of the conversation as it unfolded with the output from break-out groups being harvested by participants onto Google Docs and comments in plenary sessions being posted in 'Mentimeter' and the zoom chat function. This report is a condensed version of the comments which are set out in full in annex.

In both the report and the annexes the material is arranged under thematic headings for ease of assimilation. The choice of themes and the allocation of comments under thematic headings is necessarily subjective but is hopefully supported by how these themes recur and build in texture and coherence over the course of the conversation.

Design of the Conversation

To facilitate reading the report it's useful to have a guide to the design of the event which stretched over two hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon – with some participants dropping off in the afternoon and new members joining.

Morning session

- **Welcome:** participants had an opportunity to list one word they wanted in the conversation;

- **Sharing experiences/agendas:** in small affiliation groups (parents, teachers and students) there was an opportunity for participants to list what they would like others to know about their experience and what they'd like to discuss more;

- **Six of the Best:** setting up a positive frame, this exercise allowed mixed groups to list three good things about their current reality, two areas for improvement and one concrete suggestion;

- **Morning harvest:** the ideas stimulated by the morning's discussions were harvested using a number of question prompts – what was staying with participants; what issues, if addressed, would make the biggest difference to engagement and wellbeing and what questions were they interested in now.

Afternoon session

- **Welcome back:** as new participants joined, mixed groups met to discuss positive stories; key words surfaced and were shared;

- **More positive stories:** mixed groups considered what might readily be done to make school experience more positive;

- **Afternoon harvest:** building on the conversations about making educational experience better, participants got to address a series of question prompts about what was good to share; improving home/school communication; enhancing transitions between primary, post-primary and other levels and what messages needed to be shared nationally.

What you'd like in the Conversation? – Annex 1

As a warm-up exercise participants were invited to share one word they would like to have in the conversation. The central themes were:

- Wellbeing and relationships;

- Inclusion and equity;

- Challenges posed by COVID-19, bullying, learning and substance abuse;

- Future-facing challenges and opportunities;

- Modes of learning, creativity and self-awareness.

What you'd like other people to know? – Annex 2

For this conversation participants were organised by group affiliation:

o **Principals:** wanted to share about the impact of social media, poor self-image and the social issues confronting their students as well as their own sense both of pride in leading schools in D10 and of overwhelm at the magnitude of the challenges they face with constrained financial and psycho-social supports;

o **Primary Teachers:** reported on the challenges of being not just teachers but untrained social workers faced with huge social and emotional needs;

o **Post-Primary Teachers:** called attention to the need for wrap-around services in dealing with mental health challenges and a more holistic approach in a system that doesn't fit all students, in particular the non-academic; there was a gap between the reality and perception of what teachers did;

o **Primary Students:** were delighted to be back to school and really appreciative of the understanding shown by their teachers – hoping things can get back to normal;

o **Post-Primary Students:** were feeling the pressures of online study for which not everyone is well resourced; mental health difficulties and balancing the demands of school and life outside school; a social context of drug/alcohol use and racial challenges – while appreciating that teachers need support too;

o **Guests:** BEACONS as a bottom-up process of engaging on education policy and implementation; how the process works online; the importance of relationships from the perspective of students; the foregrounding on the inclusion agenda for those on the margins.

What you'd like us/others to talk more about – Annex 3

Organised by group affiliation, participants were asked where they would like attention to focus:

o **Principals:** wanted more discussion of the mental health services and the challenge of attracting and retaining staff as well as the lack of substitute teachers;

o **Primary Teachers:** were interested in issues of burnout, feeling unqualified to deal with the challenges they faced and the need for teachers to share and learn from one another;

o **Primary Students:** were worried about catching COVID-19, would like to have someone to talk to about anxieties and wanted more outdoor learning;

o **Post-Primary Students:** wanted more discussion of mental health, the effects of alcohol and drugs, more focus on life ahead whether in college or the work-place as well as more attention to issues of inclusion, equality and racial justice;

o **Guests:** conscious of the mental health crisis in many schools; they were interested in onsite mental health supports, action in place of talk, multiple pathways with parity of esteem, the importance of student voice and a more student-centred education generally.

In plenary reflections, the dominant themes were stress, anxiety and mental health, the challenge of being a teacher, feeling inadequate and how the role of the teacher was misperceived, the impact of social media and how appreciative students were of their teachers going the extra mile.

> Primary Teachers reported on the challenges of being not just teachers but untrained social workers faced with huge social and emotional needs.

What's best and what can be improved? – Annex 4

In small mixed groups participants were invited to identify three good things in school, two things that could be improved and one new suggestion.

What's good

- **Relationships:** relationships underpinning education; improved communications and relationships as well as computer skills as result of COVID-19;

- **Safety:** safety of schools during COVID-19; the stability of school environment;

- **Community:** importance of a strong sense of community, and an enhanced mutual understanding around keeping students in school and securing improved completion rates; the solidarity of the Ballyfermot community;

- **Supports:** family-based support agencies in D10; parental support

- **Teachers:** Good teachers, respect among school partners, relationships between students and teachers; support of teachers; quality of teaching; staff commitment;

- **Other:** appreciation for the work of schools; the opportunity for parents/students to be heard; appreciation for seeing friends again; communications.

Areas for Improvement

- **School agenda:** more subject choice; improved literacy/communication; life-skills and leadership development in students; inclusivity;

- **Cooperation:** improved cooperation between schools, and advice on transitioning to post-primary school;

- **Services/supports:** better/more school-based services with parental access in areas of conflict/ substance abuse/mental health/ life-skills; improved mental health resources; better awareness of supports; better access to services, particularly mental health - and at an earlier age; affirm and resource parents to help students at home taking the pressure off teachers;

One New Suggestion

- **Wellbeing & life-skills:** Include wellbeing/life-skills in the curriculum with welfare/guidance support; pay more attention to real-world issues that students are concerned with such as mental health and when we leave school; ensure that personal development is catered for alongside the curriculum;

- **Services:** All schools to have access to Speech and Language and Occupational Therapy supports; how about creating school as host for services to ensure early intervention

- **Support teachers:** Teachers need mental health support also and a more collaborative approach;

- **Communication:** Increase communication between students and government and teachers about the Leaving Certificate during COVID-19.

Harvesting Reflections from the Morning Session

Based on the reflection of participants within their affiliation groups, the last session of the morning was devoted to eliciting individual reflections using the 'Mentimeter' tool.

What is particularly staying with you from today so far? – Annex 5

The themes that were most alive for participants were:

- **Mental Health:** this was a central issue, exacerbated by CCOVID-19, which needed to be spoken about and addressed as it was at crisis levels and affected not just students, but teachers and parents as well;

- **Community and Relationships in D10:** there was recognition of the strong bonds and positivity uniting the D10 community and the solidarity between teachers and students that had grown during the pandemic;

- **Student Voice and Awareness:** the strength, clarity, coherence of the student voice in proceedings impressed itself on many – as well as their acute awareness of issues;

- **Shared understanding:** the fact that students, teachers and parents were asking the same questions and caring about the same things resonated strongly;

- **Supports:** there was strong agreement on the need for additional supports and funding commensurate with the challenges being faced;

- **Inclusion and Disability:** there were voices calling for greater attention to issues of race, inclusion, disability and discrimination;

- **The Power of Process:** the power of a simple conversation process to include all members of the school community was impressive;

- **Transitions and Action:** we need to pay attention to transition to post-primary and we need action.

Engagement in school/education - what would make the biggest difference, if addressed? - Annex 6

When invited to reflect on what, if addressed, would make the greatest difference, some central themes asserted themselves:

- **More human relating:** there was a yearning for more human relationships with time and space for real listening to what mattered, creating a better basis for student learning, bonding and leadership;

- **Better Balance between the Academic and Preparing for Life:** there was a strong demand for a better balance between school and preparation for life beyond school, more attention to personal development, more engagement with the outdoors and creativity;

- **Disability and Inclusion:** there was need for greater attention to awareness building around issues of disability, diversity, discrimination and inclusion;

- **The system:** there needs to be acknowledgement of the systemic issues confronting DEIS schools with a holistic response working together supported by Continuous Professional Development (CPD) ;

- **Supports:** There was a very loud call for additional resources: psychology, Occupational Therapy, counsellors etc. to deal with the mental health crisis; early education interventions and better funding for school-based services generally.

Wellbeing and happiness - What would make the biggest difference, if addressed? – Annex 7

Focusing specifically on wellbeing and happiness, participants identified the following measures as having the potential to make the most difference:

- **Listening:** Deep listening and recognising that everyone has something to contribute;

- **Holistic Approach:** the call was for greater balance between the academic and the non-academic; less focus on exams; more attention to physical and mental health; as well as the wellbeing of teachers and students; a suggestion of a dedicated wellbeing post in each school;

- **Mental Health Resources:** the need to normalise mental health, enable students to self-regulate, support teachers to decompress so they can better support students and have access to the necessary support services;

- **Outdoors:** perhaps reflecting pandemic restrictions, there was a strong need for greater access to the outdoors as a locus for learning;

- **General:** wellbeing would be supported by less social media, building student self-esteem, more extra-curricular activity and preventative strategies for bullying.

What questions are you particularly interested in now? – Annex 8

In bringing the morning session to a close, participants reflected (in 'Mentimeter') on the questions that were most salient for them now:

- **From Conversation to Action:** there was a need for a national conversation about the needs of DEIS schools and how to convert findings into action; what model of education was needed for the country with a shift in focus to ongoing assessment and contribution;

- **Supports:** how to get access to on-site supports of psychologists and therapeutic services? What supports are currently available in the area and how to secure funding for those services which are lacking? How do we make change happen? In a pandemic context how to support families through the disruption to their lives and the impact on exam-level students?

- **Wellbeing:** how to help students feel good about themselves whatever their academic ability; and are teachers getting the support they need?

- **Other:** how to explore racial injustice, sexism etc. through SPHE and what is best practice in hiring principals?

As the session wound down for lunch some comments shared in the chat included:

- It's so important to bring the students **outside** as much as possible - it gives them a change of scenery and a chance to move around and learn in a different environment;

- I feel with the masks students might feel shut out and no want to speak up so I feel we should be reminded that we are not alone and **nobody should suffer in silence;**

- Thanks - it shows how much **we need fully trained professionals** other than teachers in schools to deal with anxiety stress and other mental health issues for students;

- I think **self-awareness** might be a better label than happiness. Happiness is more-often-than-not fleeting, and very difficult for any of us to achieve;

- **CPD** and specifically qualified professionals are really needed in schools;

- Many thanks for all the **sharing and honesty** this morning. Great to hear so many perspectives;

- I think we need to help students help themselves and not feel the onus to FIX everything but **equip our young people with skills!!**

Afternoon session

With some new participants joining and others dropping off there was an opportunity for some opening comments from those present:

- Good to hear different voices – often **similar things in different ways;**

- Amazed **how informed the students are,** in particular the younger students – they just needed the opportunity to speak;

- Didn't know what to expect and **I'm delighted to be chosen by school to be here;**

- I knew little of **mental health in primary school** but now that I'm much better informed there needs to be more discussion of the subject.

Key words from positive Stories

Following sharing about positive stories in mixed groups participants shared some key words that were emerging from the stories:

- **Community:** words denoting connection, relationship, solidarity and community bonds were most prominent;

- **Appreciation and care:** gratitude, giving and receiving appreciation, kindness and care were hugely important;

- **Commitment:** going the extra mile;

- **Other:** nature, safety, happiness and freedom.

How to get more Positive Stories at School Level (mixed groups) – Annex 9

When asked to reflect in mixed groups on what seeds of the future might be possible at school level to generate more positive stories more often, participants suggested:

- **Gratitude/Appreciation/Celebration/Inspiration:** having a gratitude wall to post positive experiences; expressing gratitude; good-news Friday; wellbeing notice board; thank-you walls in classroom; positivity box; birthday board; inspirational quotes; climate-making board; group dance!

- **Listening/Sharing/Communicating:** slow-down - active listening to student voice, really hear; coffee mornings for students/teachers/parents; make student councils more meaningful; encourage honest parental feedback.

- **Suggestion Box:** there was real potential in suggestion boxes as a way to reduce isolation, empower students and surface creative ideas for group work and collaboration - give students more control but be available to help;

- **Extra-curricular/Fun:** cracking open subjects through practical and fun learning shouldn't be confined to transition year (TY) but should be more widely available e.g. music Friday, dressing-up for Halloween – make a list;

- **Walking/outdoors:** walking challenge; nature walks; learning outdoors – invite student suggestions on how to use the outdoor environment more;

- **Help with Transitions:** ice-breaker events; student mentors; induction programmes;

- **Wellbeing:** build on best current practice such as mindfulness;

- **Other:** free room to be booked for music/PE/art; hot lunches; more scope for student contribution.

In plenary feedback the talk was of coffee mornings where students/others could talk about their own lives; positivity boxes; the importance of gratitude, teachers believing in you, a smile in the corridor, sharing good news on school podcasts, staying positive and encouraging everyone.

What came up in the last session that is good to share? – Annex 10

Having reflected in school groups on 'what we need to take away from today', participants shared on 'Mentimeter' with the following themes emerging most cogently:

- **Empowerment/Student Agency:** the predominant sense was of empowering student contribution through positive atmosphere and feedback; harnessing student ideas; the power of active listening and small things; gratitude; allowing students to shine and take risks;

- **Open Communication:** space and time for open, positive, empathic communication between all the school partners and sharing with other schools;

- **BEACONS:** BEACONS process needs to inform school practice;

- **Outdoors:** more walks, fresh air and outside activity;

In plenary it was commented that 'it's all about relationship'; the same things are happening in all schools; the importance of conversation and how the teacher/student relationship can transform attitudes.

Is there anything you would like to say or ask about home/school communication? – Annex 11

- **Importance of good communication:** it is important for schools to work with students and their parents to help them support students particularly at times of high exam stress; good links with home are hugely important to student success;

- **How to Communicate:** need to check that communication is clear and understood; technology and apps add greatly to the potential for communication in the wider school community;

- **Impact of COVID-19:** communication improved hugely during the pandemic and needs to be sustained.

Is there anything you would like to say or ask in relation to transitions? (from pre-school to primary, primary to post-primary, post-primary to 3rd level) – Annex 12

- **Supports:** both parents and students need support at what can be a daunting time of changing school; schools need to work together and outside funding and support is also needed;

- **Communicating/working together:** schools should share best practice from their transitions programmes; school partners need to interact and support the transitions process; policy-makers need to listen to and understand the challenging contexts of many students.

- **Other**: more SPHE, 'early start' and mental health programmes; trust the wisdom, imagination and potential of children to grow and contribute.

What messages would you like to send to people nationally from today? - Annex 13

- **Listen to the Voice of Children:** it's time for the system to listen to the wisdom of student voice in relation to their potential for contribution as well as their needs as they perceive them;

- **Listen to needs of the Community:** policy-makers need to spend time with D10 schools/community to really appreciate their multifaceted challenges and needs - and provide resources to ensure they are not left behind;

- **Supports:** funding and support for assessment are needed; resources are needed not just for schools – teachers are not clinicians – but for mental health in the community; the pupils here today all spoke of mental health demonstrating that this is an urgent need, now;

- **Community and School:** community issues need to be addressed to support progression in education – life exists beyond the school; services are needed on-site and pedagogy needs to modernise;

- **Other:** always be kind; the D10 school community is fantastic; could the Minister come to BEACONS.

What are you personally taking from today? – Annex 14

- **Student Voice:** the power and clarity of student voice;

- **D10 Schools - one Community:** sensing we are all in the same boat as one community with wonderful bonds; learning about the needs and gaps in service provision;

- **Other:** appreciation for the struggles of others, respect for our students and recognising how teachers care for their students.

If we were running another event something like this, what advice would you give the Organisers? – Annex 15

- **More Breaks – shorter Day:** would like movement breaks throughout, longer lunch break, shorter day and less repetition of questions;

- **Break-out Rooms:** liked the breakout rooms – would like more with other people;

- **Other:** more focus on solutions e.g. interagency supports in the community; more parent and student voice; more time to master the technology.

- **Commendations:** Only advice is to continue with BEACONS events; great to work as a community – teach us how to do it ourselves; do in person; allow more students to take part; amazing event – thank you so much for the opportunity.

Closing Comments
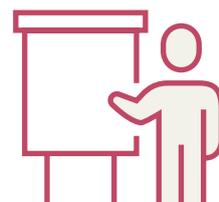
Director of Teaching Council – Tomás Ó Ruairc

- **Bonds:** Each BEACONS has its own theme; here the intergenerational bond is very strong – standing in a circle, all in it together;

- **Congratulations** to all involved for making it happen;

- **Solving problems together:** Apocalypse means not just a crisis but a process of unveiling and we are seeking to come to a better understanding of each other, of wellbeing and issues such as climate change by working things out together. As John O'Donohue said, solving multiple crises requires a community of people animated by creativity.

## Director of DWEC – Máirín Ní Chéilleachair

- Thanks to all the schools in Dublin 10 who participated;

- Hopefully this is the first step on a journey.

Parting words in the Chat

- Thank you all for participating today, we have started the conversation, hopefully we will have the opportunity to continue it;

- Thanks to everyone for sharing their thoughts, it was really interesting;

- It was nice talking to everyone; they were all so supportive;

- Thank you everyone I enjoyed this a lot today;

- If I don't talk to you amazing people again have a great life;

- Sincerest thanks Tomás for letting the Teaching Council host this forum today. Thanks to Máirín, Siobhan and the staff in DWEC for all the organising that went into today's BEACONS session. I hope that the new-found understanding will bear fruits in the next stages;

- I may never hear from some of you again but thank you for this amazing event;

- Well done to all the young people for using your voices today you are amazing, keep empowering each other.

27.5.21

Solving multiple crises requires a community of people animated by creativity.
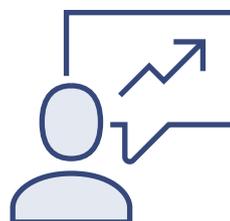
ANNEXES

Annex 1
One Word you want in the Conversation

Opening Session

Mental health (x4); Sadness; Anxiety (x2); [6]

Inclusion (x5); Equality (x3); Fairness; [9]

Challenges; COVID 19; Bullying; Disability; Learning difficulties; Support (x2); Drugs; Alcohol awareness; [8]

Wellbeing & Relationships: Friendship; Sharing (x2); Kindness; Nurture; Relationships with peers; Friends (x2); Empathy; Happiness (x2); Wellbeing; Care; Relationships; Sharing; Communication; Sharing; Playing (x2); Nurture via nature; Sport; Thanks; [21]

Future; Expectations; Progression; Career path; College; College courses; Possibility; Hopes; Opportunity; [7]

Awareness (x2); Figuring out who you are as a person; Mindfulness; [3]

Varied learning; Difference; More Varieties. [3]

Creativity [1]

Afternoon: Key words that were important

Sense of Community: Connection; togetherness; social interaction; Relationships (x2); Community (x6); strong sense of community; Community with solidarity; inclusive; cooperation; solidarity; people; friendship (x2); friends; social interaction;

Commitment: Dedication; Teachers going the extra mile; Controlling what we can control

Solidarity and Care: Gratitude (x2); kindness (x2); random acts of kindness; caring; students helping and caring for teachers; Positive support from teachers with COVID; Importance of thanks for both teachers and students; compliments; others picking up for others; Feeling appreciated; appreciation; Appreciation for each other's situations; hope; compliments (x2); Award;); Respect; Normality (x2);

Other: Relief; freedom; Nature (x2); COVID-19 impact; Ice cream; trips; Progress: Safe environment; hot lunches; hot lunches would be great; happy; Seesaw;

Togetherness DEDICATION SHARING People Sadness CONNECTION Expectations Inclusive ANXIETY Opportunity SHARING MINDFULNESS Equality Mental health COMPLIMENTS Fairness Challenges Awareness Gratitude Freedom CREATIVITY COVID 19 Kindness RESPECT SOCIAL INTERACTION FRIENDS Nature Caring HAPPY Trips Relief Hopes

Annex 2
What we would like others to know

R1+R4: Principals

Impact of social media on our pupils; amount of tasks is insurmountable; Social issues - drugs in the community; Lack of services or therapies available; we worry all the time about the pupils; mental health issues; Equal opportunities for all schools; Making sub/staff aware of children's disabilities; we really worry about the children. After the pupils go home we are still thinking about them even at the weekend! It is hard to switch off; we feel the burden of the lack of services for the pupils. It is very frustrating when there are long waiting lists for all services and therapies; there is a sense of pride and commitment in leading our schools and working in Dublin 10; financial worries are an ongoing challenge for schools; doing our best but the amount of tasks at the moment can be insurmountable; trying to bridge the gap between teaching and learning; responsibility on principals to support pupils with emotional difficulties, poor self-image, influence of social media.

R 2: Primary Teachers

The challenges of teaching the curriculum as well as the pastoral care that we need to give to the children; How diverse the community is- people from different socio-economic backgrounds etc; Huge sense of community- especially in Ballyfermot; Blurred lines between being a teacher and a social worker (without the training); Behaviour vs Curriculum; Huge range of social and emotional needs as well as SEN; Lack of prior knowledge of DEIS- not much emphasis in Initial Teacher Training (ITT); Hugely rewarding working in a DEIS school; Huge impact of COVID-19 especially on parental involvement in classroom.

R3: Post-Primary Teachers

Education system doesn't always "fit" all students - hard as teachers to look at that as there isn't really any alternative or the alternatives are very few and far between. Tougher than it looks - "public's idea" and especially in D10; much better to have a holistic approach - everyone involved needs to recognise all talents and not all just about school; Finding the space for "non-academic supports' – Challenging; School can bring about great structure and that is why it is important to create space for other activities; Limitations of teachers when it comes to mental health and the lack of supports available for students and the huge reliance on teachers and tutors in particular; Everyone that is working in this area do love their job and are passionate about what they do; Assumptions are made based on experience e.g. parents etc. as in times have changed and the resemblance is very few and far between; More training needed; Wrap around services on site needed like other countries.

R5: Primary Students

Things are very good here, teachers are very good and explain things; If we had a magic wand we'd like another buddy bench (social distancing); school is very understanding and my teachers are very nice, some benches would be nice to sit and chat and something like Aistear for senior classes; best thing is the teachers and staff, really good at doing their jobs. Great to get back after lockdown. School isn't just about learning, school is about friends; teachers are really understanding we really have to be understanding too; like to get back to the way things were before COVID, playing with our friends in other pods and classes; pupils are trying not to mess as much and be understanding too; my class are trying to be as good as they can be.

R6+7: Post-Primary Students

It would be great if teachers had a better understanding of mental health, and the demand on students; teachers could be more informed on racial injustice, discrimination; students have a very busy life outside of school. Exams and studying are not the only things in their life; more education around relationship awareness in schools would help everyone; A better understanding of the area in which we live. Ballyfermot has its own opportunities and challenges (drugs) so a better understanding of these issues is important; some students find some aspects of COVID easier than others. Having class online brings its own pressures, everyone is listening to everything you are saying, more pressure to be 'right' in your answer; Not everyone has their own space or devices to work at home; many students have a great respect for teachers. Students understand that teachers need help too. We understand their situation and we're here for them too; there are only so many hours in the day. Everything cannot be a priority.

R8

Stressful during exam time; mental health facilities could improve; education has been good; mental health is important and feelings; easier ways to go and get help if for example you have anxiety; more talk on drugs and alcohol; more talk on how our lives are going to change after school and not just based on English and maths and other subjects; Too much focus on curriculum and tests; how do I deal with alcohol and drugs; life is more than school and jobs; self-reflection in school is as important as curriculum; hobbies and extra-curricular activities are as important as curriculum.

R9+10: Guests

What are you curious about? OECD; modes of engagement on policy implementations and development - getting public buy-in; + how it feels to be in the room? D10 schools process design; getting direct experience of the process - bottom-up; curious about how BEACONS works online; having conversation transformed by the voice of children - the centrality of relationships and how this appears from the perspective of the child; Educational opportunity; networking Learning Leaders; inclusivity of learners of every background; to fight for those on the margins; breaking down barriers; identifying commonalities; Putting disadvantage/DEIS back on the agenda.

> It would be great if teachers had a better understanding of mental health, and the demand on students.

Annex 3
What you'd like us/others to talk more about

R1: Principals

Managing the higher incidents of emotional, social and psychological issues; Funding - better teacher allocation & funding for schools; Attraction & retention of staff to work in the area - severe lack of substitute teachers at present; DEIS staffing - provision of an extra deputy principal would really help; Accessing mental health services.

R2: Primary Teachers

Sometimes we feel unqualified to deal/help with some situations - we do it anyway because waiting lists are so long; NEPS: not enough support for the needs in schools; teacher burnout; Lack of time and opportunity for teachers to share experiences - it is something that is so valuable and important (support each other); Class size; strong DEIS community: we support each other!

R6: Primary Students

COVID-19….more information on vaccines, what is going to happen for children and young people…most of the time we feel safe but we are worried; sometimes we feel anxious and by yourself, good to have teachers around in the year. The classroom is safe, we worry about catching the virus in the yard; self-defence would good to learn, to keep safe when we're out and about; anxiety and mental health, someone other than a teacher to talk to, we have a therapist in school and it's great to talk to them when you need them. Most students would not be comfortable talking to the teacher if something is personal (confidential); more yard time, especially for senior classes, more outdoor learning. Outdoor classrooms please and outdoor shelters for rainy day; we should feel safe in school, we shouldn't worry about catching the virus, we need more information and reassurance.

R8: Post-Primary Students

Mental health; drugs and alcohol awareness and the effects; more preparation for the real world of college and getting jobs; missed out on work experience this year! more advice on how to finance college; during COVID missed out on talks from people who have gone to college; more discussion on access routes to college; more awareness on disability and inclusivity; how to deal with racial injustice and ensure equality; making school environment more accessible and inclusive to people with disabilities; schools don't speak enough about subjects such as mental health, drug use or racial things. Some people can find these subjects sensitive but I don't think it gets spoken about enough.

R9/10: Guests

With 150 out of 400 students in one (non-D10) school with suicidal ideation there is a mental health crisis; there is need for onsite supports, more training and more skills. Would eliminate current barriers; more access and more funding needed - external supports. It is a whole community endeavour. Action is needed and less talk!! Alternative routes, system not for All -- clear pathway for the students who cannot be in school; a better alternative that has no stigma and should be seen as a "norm"; concerns and worries, looking at outside spaces to use more for discussions; active listening to Student Voice; how we can harness that dedication and commitment of teachers; the power of play; workload vs. wellbeing; reform in second level for a more student centred education.

Annex 4
GS3: Six of the Best
(3good/2 to improve/1new suggestion)

The Good Things

- **Relationships:** Relationships and trust are as important as course delivery. Very understanding and accommodating of learning difficulties; Relationship with peers and teachers; Great communication during remote learning, improved relationships; the relationships that are established in schools amongst students and teachers; Level of appreciation of the work of the schools; Communicate face to face; great to see our friends, even if it is socially- distanced; respect amongst teachers, students and parents;

- **Community:** The sense of community in DEIS areas is very good; Sense of community and support for each other in Ballyfermot, the support of parents is great and we must remember their role as primary educators of their children; Great community; It is a privilege to work in a DEIS community;

- **Supports:** Within Ballyfermot, we have a lot of family-based support agencies such as 'Barnardos', Daughters of Charity etc. The role of the HSCL is so important, could every school have one? Great we are back in school; super support offered in our schools; huge support from parents towards teaching staff and a great spirit among teachers.

- **Teachers:** Good teachers; Teachers are very understanding and helpful; knowing that you can talk to teachers; Wonderful dedication and commitment of the staff working in DEIS schools. Much more challenging work but very rewarding; quality of our teachers in Ireland is second to none - great value.

- **Safety/Empathy:** How safe schools are - even during COVID-19; School provides a stepping stone out of difficult situations; Huge improvement in keeping students in school. School completion rate increased; Good environment; Pandemic has brought a greater appreciation of everyone's situation and empathy for individual circumstances;

- **Other:** Learning back in school; online learning built confidence and improved computer skills; lots of nice activities; it's great that we are here, it's great to have all the voices heard, especially students and parents; seeing friends;

Areas for Improvement

- **Educational and Mental Health Supports/ Services:** spread awareness of available services and people; educational supports - reduce the waiting lists for NEPS and other support services, in particular mental health supports. Can age restrictions be reviewed for accessing services? In the 2-3 years it takes for get a child diagnosed, the child has regressed and has suffered. Even a 'pre-diagnosis' could be considered; more reassurance; appropriate professional support in a timely fashion; mental health resources for entire school community; waiting lists for services; services in the community that children require - SLT, mental health services, substance abuse initiatives; school based services would work very well; parents attending school to avail of services; resources that pupils can access at home for academic support, sometimes teachers are overwhelmed in class and parents might not have the expertise; more opportunities to include music as an extra-curricular activity; this would have to be supported by resources;

- **School Agenda/Safety/Cooperation:** more focus on life skills (wellbeing); better skills for dealing with conflict and bullying – discrimination; more subject choice; increased safety for all students; inclusivity; show them how to live and not just how to make a living; train educators to encourage more leadership; creative expression; more school trips outside of school; more cooperation between all schools in Ballyfermot; communication - literacy is sometimes an impediment to staying on message.

- **Other:** encouraging and affirming the role of parents in the education of their children (uptake on course etc.); More thought given to teachers in terms of vaccinations and working with COVID-19.

One New Suggestion

- **Wellbeing & Life-skills:** Changing the curriculum to include wellbeing (life skills); welfare officer for schools - guidance person for children to speak to; more collaborative approach is needed; also opportunities for teachers to talk within their schools and with others; to ensure that personal development is catered for alongside the curriculum; discuss things students are interested in, such as when we leave school, mental health or coping real world problems; I think we should be spoken to about these topics more if that makes sense; mental health supports for students - compulsory training for mental health; harnessing open spaces more for learning.

- **Services:** The school is the heart of the community; could the school be a host for all services? Bring the services (OT, SLT, psychologist etc) onsite to the school. This will bring an 'all in one' service to help early intervention. All schools to have access to SLT/OT supports.

- **Teachers' Needs:** teachers also need to be taken into account when it comes to mental health too, and support them too;

- **Communications:** the importance of listening to students' voice; increase communication between students and government/teachers about the Leaving Cert. during COVID-19;

Annex 5
What is particularly staying with you from today so far?

Mental Health

The need for investment in mental health services for pupils in D10; We all recognise the mental wellbeing of educators and young people needs to be front and centre; Level of stress, mental health issues, suicidal ideation – we need to pay attention; Mental health; Mental health anxiety; The clear need for help around the area of mental health…for staff, students and parents; COVID-19 and mental health; That mental health should be spoken more about and that some people don't realise how much pressure school can be and that we need time to ourselves; Mental health, injustices, guidance counsellor; Drastic need for mental health supports amongst teachers and students; Mental health supports; More support for anxiety; Stress on parents, pupils & students; If supports were in place to address mental health and anxiety life would be easier; How overwhelmed principals and teachers are; The effects of COVID-19 on our students.

Community & Relationships

School as community (x4); How much the students appreciate their teachers; The great relationship between pupils and teachers; How the students appreciate their teachers; Respect between teachers and students has developed as a result of COVID-1"; "school bond"; Communication between teacher and students; teachers' commitment; Friendships; Positivity and enthusiasm; that all people have different ideas how to improve but they care about the other people in their school such as teachers, students and staff; students can help out the teachers the way teachers can help students; How valuable schools are to teachers. The importance of relationships between teachers and students. New relationship of trust and respect between students and teachers. Sharing; How much the teachers worry about their students; the generosity of all; What Brendan said about the bond between students and teachers. Powerful; Teachers are a big help to get through life; Sense of teamwork; increased respect between teachers and students; If students feel connected to school, and in school, they are more likely to turn up. A guidance counsellor or a 'safe person' like Biddy said.

Student Voice & Awareness

Young people's voices; Listening to the young people's perspective and how it is similar to ours! The voices of children and the respectful conversations; How aware the children are of social issues; The student voices; How aware the children are about what is happening and vocal on what they need; the voice of students being heard; Student voice is great; The insightful comments of the pupils; students' ability to speak in the group is amazing; Self-reflection being able to live your life to the fullest, career path etc. Bond between your peers, trust, respect; The confidence of the students contributing; How mature and respectful and clued in the students are; Holistic education recognised; life skills for students.

The Same Issues Identified by All

The issues are the same for us all. This should make the solutions easier to put into action; As Loretta said, it's intriguing to hear the students and teachers and parents saying the same thing in different ways! A shared problem impacting on all stakeholders; Similar feelings and issues across board; We are all saying the same stuff; Everyone is saying similar thoughts in different ways; That everyone has a different opinion but they all lead to the same; Everyone's surprise at discovering how much they have in common - how much they care for each other; We've all been asking the same questions but apart from each other - now we need to unpack the answers together! We all care about the same things.

Supports

Need for outside schools supports for students; Lack of support; Positive relationships in schools yet a time of crisis requiring accessible support services; Lack of funding = lack of options; How schools are coping in spite of the lack of support and resources.

Inclusion & Disability

The school environment needs to be more inclusive for students of colour, with disabilities and mental health issues etc.; The need for more work on discrimination and inclusion; I feel that there could be more talk about discrimination in schools, sexism, racism etc.

D10

The positivity that we all share in D10! What a fantastic bond exists between the learning stakeholders in D10; Commitment and dedication of teachers in D10; Respect of pupils for teachers and vice versa; Burden felt by teachers to deal with mental health issues, anxiety, great conversation between people of different viewpoints; Great sense of community in D10.

Process

Good to talk to others in the group; Great to hear from all members of school community.

The incredible power and energy from simple conversations between diverse people.

Transitions

The hurdle that is to be jumped when you transition from Primary to Post-primary school.

Action

There is huge concerns let's have Action. We need ACTION.
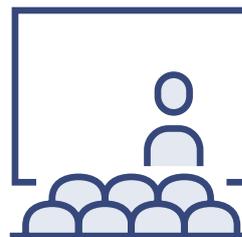
There could be more talk about discrimination in schools, sexism, racism etc.

Annex 6
Engagement in school/education - What would make the biggest difference, if addressed?

Relationships System

Relationships of greater equality with real listening; Space and time for people to have conversations with each other, across age groups, about issues of concern to them all; If students feel more connected in school or to the school, they're more likely to turn up. A guidance counsellor or a 'safe person' to talk to in school just like Biddy said; that everyone can accept people for who they are and not be judged and if people can understand each other; to join together as a community and help other school and work together; Seeing the potential for leadership and contribution in children; Creating a good bond with your teachers, you enjoy a class more if you get along well with your teacher; better communication between parents & teacher; I'm thinking that people understand more; "More meaningful engagement by all stakeholders, don't just pay lip service to our issues"; Leadership in change management for educators; To work together;

Better Balance between School and Life

Make exams less important; "learning that everyone has lives outside of school"; If the Junior Cycle Framework reforms were tapped more fully in the spirit in which they were authored - post-primary schools would reap a lot of the rewards students (and parents) are suggesting today; balance between learning to make a living and learning to live; Broadening the range of skills assessed; Less focus on exams and more on transitioning back to school; A higher push on SPHE and a re- enforcement of it in other high stress subjects; the balance between school life and personal development; Balance between school life and home life; fun activities, trips, music events, personal development for students to help them through their journey; focus more time on real life situations; being outside more; Higher Attainment in schools; A curriculum that reflects other than academics; Building creativity capacity at SS; More reasons to be enthusiastic; The academic subjects are too important; Being outside away from the masks;

Disability and Inclusion: Disability awareness for students; be accepting about learning difficulties; More awareness and communication of disabilities for students and teachers. So that everyone is included; Understanding diversity; more accessibility for people with all types of disability; better approach on mental health and bullying, discrimination, racism, homophobia etc.

The system: An acceptance of the brokenness of the current system; A holistic emphasis on education; Interagency; living in Ballyfermot we need to expect the unexpected; Schools working more closely together; CPD for teachers / principals working in DEIS schools; what's not working in our system;

Supports

Mental Health

Extra supports are needed, mental health and anxiety have been mentioned by everyone; Addressing children's anxieties; Extra supports for mental health to encourage re-engagement; school-based psychology services; that everyone has the choice to therapy for mental health; Effective provision of services such as primary psychology, OT, SLT etc; Investment in children's mental health services; A counsellor available to all schools;

Education

More funding for resources and to meet educational needs of students; "Additional supports - early interventions"; Funding to enable educators to meet to have conversations and plan best practice for the school community Support services; Early interventions (x2); More in class supports; Funding for assessments in schools; more help for teachers; Access to support and intervention;

Funding

More funding; funding and it used for the right supports; Funding, more school based services - parents attending school for services to encourage attendance at appointment; HSCL definitely helps; Additional in-class supports for pupils (so that it doesn't have to be shared/reduced); Address funding issues in DEIS areas; Funding; Tailoring resources to school needs; Additional funding; Wrap around services; More support from community care; funding; more awareness of disabilities/difference;

Miscellaneous

Thinking.

Annex 7
Wellbeing and happiness - What would make the biggest difference, if addressed?

Listening

Deep listening and recognising that everyone has something to contribute; More time to talk: huge pressure to complete the curriculum; Consistency - a shared understanding of what expectations are;

Holistic Approach

Holistic approaches to learning; consistently addressing the issue as a whole person, whole community endeavour. In other words, wellbeing of teachers, parents and students being supported at the same time. Ask how happy are we? Ask it often and reflect on the answers and engage with how to improve the level of happiness; I feel happy when I have friends and people around me that I know care for me; Holistic approach to education(x2); Less pressure from exams more emphasis on growth and development; Outside speakers/ learning; Less focus on exams and the curriculum. Balance - emphasise that everyone has their own characteristics, strengths and talents. Each one of us is enough; Emphasis around physical health as well as mental; Strive for balance in school, balance curriculum needs and well-being needs; not thinking about the future, you and thinking about the now; Balance workload with fun and enjoyment; Emphasis on extracurricular activities; mask breaks; more yard for the older kids to socialise; Need to stop labelling.

Mental Health

Counselling supports (x4); any age can get mental health; possibility of mental health days; better access to mental health services; Mental help we need to help students HELP THEMSELVES!! Mental health needs to be made normal - we have good days and bad days but students need to learn how to scale their feelings and realise that it's not so bad and this time will pass; Balance of work; Access to services - psychologist being available on site in the school; Counselling supports in school; More space for teachers to decompress, happy teachers make happy students; Staff care; Cognitive Behavioural Therapy; Therapist in schools; Feelings seem to be very INTENSE for students.

Supports

More supports readily available - for students and teachers! More services in school; More support emotionally for students regarding family life, and more of a trusting environment rather than a official kind of scary place; Everyone is under huge stress this year. Teachers need support in wellbeing so that they can support their students better; How can we support each other and who can come to schools to support the children's anxiety and give talks; Guidance counselling; More Human Resources; helping out others.

Outdoors

More outside time; Learning outside to get students minds in the right place; Fun activity days outside; More outdoor learning; Outdoor and experiential learning; PE should be outdoors even if it is SNOWING!!; a bit more yard time for the older classes; Being able to read a book outside when your finished your work or something for 15 minutes or something;

Wellbeing Post

Allocation of a wellbeing post for schools to address area/areas it covers; Funding for a wellbeing teacher in each school; Find out what the students like to do to improve wellbeing and happiness as each person has different needs; staff CPD (x2);

Miscellaneous

Less reliance on social media - People would be more happy coming into school!! ⬛; Building up students' self-esteem; On-site interventions; more guest speakers.

Hobbies that are funded, music, educational trips - external events for students to look forward to; more preventative strategies to tackle bullying.

Action is needed.

Annex 8
What questions are you particularly interested in now?

Change and Making Change Happen

How to oil the wheels of change in how we all relate in the education system.

How do we encourage a national conversation about DEIS schools and their needs; How can we make a plan to engage meaningfully with these issues, how can we turn our ideas into action at local level; Can we see what and how DES are spending money on education and have the opportunity to respond to this information? How all schools in the area can work together to push what are common wishes and needs; How to bring this conversation forward in D10; What do you think is the best kind of education model for our country? We need to keep moving away from end of year exams and focus more on ongoing assessment and contribution.

Supports

What can we do to get on site supports? What can we do to improve supports?

When will our children get the access to clinical psychologists & the therapeutic services they deserve; Resources/supports for schools to continue delivering education and continue evolving as schools to provide structure, safety and security for their students; What supports are available in our area; A guidance counsellor could help; How can the government provide funding for the services required in our area? How to improve mental health services and make the school environment more inclusive? Can we have more supports for teachers who have had a really tough year with online learning etc; How to finance for college; How can we get therapists for our schools; Is there any plans to provide more services to DEIS schools; Who do we speak to in order to get the supports that we need?

COVID

What supports are there available to families where the pandemic has played havoc with their normal lives, with consequences for children? We need clarity and more support for exam level students who have been affected by COVID; when will our teachers get the vaccination?

Mental Health

Do teachers go through the same stuff as students? Are there counsellors for teachers to speak to if they are having a bad day; Wellbeing; mental health of students and staff; how can we as a student body help our teachers; Enabling pupils to feel good about themselves whatever their academic ability; Anxiety; We need to be more open and aware that it's ok not to feel ok - speak out – self-awareness is key and we need to help students help themselves, not just "fix" thingsl Well-being;

SPHE & Staff hiring

Social and political education, racial injustices and sexism. More of an exploration of them in schools; How come different education bodies hire educators in different ways? How do we decide how to hire Principals and can we agree what best practice is?

Annex 9
How to get more Positive Stories at School Level (mixed groups)

Gratitude/Appreciation/Celebration/ Inspiration

Gratitude Wall in the front hall where students post their positive experiences; expressing gratitude, and being supportive, a smile in the corridor makes a huge difference; teachers, believe in your students, this is very powerful. The power of a good relationship, especially with parents, is key to tapping into children's success (example of World Autism Day and inclusion...Word Kindness Day, Gratitude Day, give pupils a positive mind-set); 'Good news Friday' to encourage the sharing of good news. Wellbeing notice board, different classes contributed to the theme each month; Shout outs, cards and markers in the staffroom and a notice board, leave notes for the people who help you (Staff thanking staff) it was very powerful, thank you walls in classrooms, positive notes on lockers in post-primary schools have had a great impact; Award students for positive contributions to school life; award students for positive contributions to school life; have a 'positivity box' that students can write down stories about their weekend and can be shared over the intercom Monday afternoon; assign class time to have the conversations on positive stories; Birthday board - where all birthdays are recorded; 'Don't count the days, make the days count' - don't let the days pass you by. What can we all do to make the days count? Inspirational quotes placed around the school; create that climate and lead by example, posters to encourage this; good news guys, the power of good news over the intercom, could be resurrected again. Focus on what we can control, not on what we can't control, this gives us more power over solutions: brainstorm our issues and focus on what we can work on; getting the whole school involved in group dances similar to Jerusalema;

Listening/Sharing/Communicating

Small group work debates - positive stories; actively listening to student voice; more classes where you can chat, listen and 'slow down'; Mini BEACONS at school level- talking at school level to listen to everyone; Listen to students - hear what they want without assuming what they want or need; coffee morning for teachers, students and parents; send a link through SeeSaw for a school podcast that is available to students and parents; Connect more with home maybe through a Kahoot 'Family quiz' every so often; TRUST is so important among the groups in the school community, relationships between parents and school very strong during COVID despite lockdown; work with the student councils to make it a more meaningful forum where they can actually voice their opinions. Allow them to express their opinions. Encourage parental involvement and feedback on how they feel things are going.

Suggestion Box

Suggestion box that students put in ideas like "go for walk" "take a book outside during English".....; create a' suggestion box'; piece the 'suggestions' together so we can work in groups. Remove the isolation and empower the students with assistance from the teachers. It's okay to fail, it's how we learn. Anonymous suggestion boxes for students; Could be an idea for the student council to collect and collate the ideas from the suggestion box to use during dedicated tutor time; collaborative efforts between students, sharing learning experiences; interagency work.

Extra-curricular/Fun

"Other than sport" extra-curricular activities; Reintroduce extra-curricular activities; Fun stuff doesn't have to be exclusive to TY's; To crack open subjects to practical, fun activities (i.e. Ballyfermot Historical Society, Photography Society.); Have fun lunch options monthly; More fun/light hearted moments in school. Cost effective light hearted moments - playing music on a Friday before the bell goes; Giving the students a bit of fun - teachers dressing up for Halloween etc. Have a list of treat/activities and choose one each week.

Wellbeing

Building on what individual schools are already doing for mindfulness, wellbeing, mental health; Students handing out wellbeing quotes to other students.

Walking & being outdoors

 A set time/day to go for a walk. Something to look forward to; Fun optional challenges available to the whole school (walking challenge); More nature walks; School work done during a walk; more outdoor activities - Bespoke learnings for individuals; more outdoor activities/resources - school furniture, chairs; asking teachers/students for ideas on how to use outdoor environment more (Break from masks); Using outdoor space. Outside school assembly/ activities every week.

Help with Transitions

Ice breaker events to help students transitioning from sixth class into first year, e.g. student mentors, student council (mix of students from different years); various induction programs to help ease transition from Junior cycle to Senior cycle.

Miscellaneous

"Something for everyone"; Equal opportunity, treatment and behavioural standards for all students; increased amount of charity work and more involvement from students; hot lunches; free room - that can be booked by each class for PE, music, art; children could be a bit more understanding for the teachers...this is hard for the teachers too..5th and 6th only get one break, this is an issue; hot lunches- Starting soon! Restrictions within curriculum- Geography field study, Art etc.

Annex 10

What came up in the last session that is good to share?

Empowerment/Student Agency

Empowering student contribution; Positivity; small events/ideas to bring up the atmosphere in the school; Positive feedback from students; ideas from pupils to make more positive experience; In my room it was how can you make school better, new suggestions to make our school a better environment; Ideas for creating a positive environment; How the little things can make a big difference; anything can happen to anybody; promote more positivity; give out compliments; The power of active listening.; Good news Friday; Positive feedback to student; Promoting and empowering young people; The need for risk taking; wonderful to see and hear from such confident and engaged students; Students being pragmatic in terms of actions that must be taken; positive feedback; Providing opportunities for our students to shine; Student of the week; Support; teacher-student bonding; Some good practical ideas for spreading positivity, birthday boards, whole school assemblies, mini-BEACONS type events in schools; Suggestions to lift atmosphere in school around COVID; We plan to focus on gratitude for what we have, not focus on what we don't.

Open Communication

Positive communication; Providing a space and time for conversation is very important. We need to build it into the school day. It's more important than curriculum. There are pre-requisites to learning that require conversation. The empathy between everyone in the school community; Positivity and communication; The importance of communication, especially with parents and pupils; Learning about the school itself; Very impressed with the openness of everyone - obviously there is a lot of trust; good conversation between teachers and students; Good to see all schools sharing ideas and supporting each other; Working together; students' ideas and opinions being listened to;

BEACONS

BEACONS process needs to inform school practice; This is a good way of communicating, we could do BEACONS in school; Students being heard; Democratic conversation rather than consultation;

Outdoors

More use of outside space; More walks and getting outside even though we go outside for a few it is better to have a bit more fresh air; It was reassuring to talk to other students and see we all share the same concerns; Assemblies outside; More outdoors; Daily walks!

Miscellaneous

Improvement; post-primary students teaching Primary schools; Kindness day; Ice cream day!!

School refection; to help everyone; Teachers/ parents and students make the school.

Annex 11
Is there anything you would like to say or ask about home/school communication?

Student Support with exam stress

Exams and support; There is a lot of stress on students around exams. It's overwhelming at times. The stress can get to students; It is so important that we work together to support our students - vital in terms of sustaining relationships between school and home; It's so important. Vital to support students in education; For parents to feel supported in supporting their kids in education; Supporting needs at home; Students voices (x2);

What to Communicate about?

What would be considered an urgent thing that a school would "have" to tell home?

Good links are paramount to the success of the students; have people you can talk to;

How to Communicate

We shouldn't assume our messages from school are clear, we need to check this with pupils and parents regularly; Literacy and clear communication; Technology has real potential to facilitate communication in the wider school community. We had padlet which is a great app where you could send notes to everyone in my class; Excellent communication from both primary and post-primary schools my daughters attend; Interesting to hear other schools are facing similar difficulties.

Impact of COVID

I think there has been a lot more home school communication because of COVID; Well done to the teachers for their feedback and interaction through COVID; COVID opened communication channels, we need to keep them open; Well done to the teachers for their feedback and interaction through COVID;

> We shouldn't assume our messages from school are clear, we need to check this with pupils and parents regularly

Annex 12

Is there anything you would like to say or ask in relation to transitions? (pre-school to primary, primary to post-primary or to 3rd level)

Supports

More funding and supports for assessments for the children; Funding and supports for mental health a must! An overall support for students and parents around transitions identifying the new chapters and supporting peer led initiatives; Huge work done to support students; Support needs to be given to the parents at all levels as it's very daunting when your child moves on to a new school; Schools working together can make changes….but we do need support from outside….i.e. financially; The amount of amazing work that is already happening and support along with funding to continue this work.

Funding: Dublin 10 schools need funding and access to services; Importance of funding and not to be left behind; we need to provide funding to schools when required.

Communicating/working together

Now that the schools are talking to each other, can we keep this up please, especially for helping 6th class move up and settle in; working with others in groups from other schools; Schools to share what works well from their transition programmes; the people involved (teachers, parents and students) need space and time to interact with each other to support transitions for each other; excellent transition programme from St Louis junior to Caritas college; everyone has a right to speak so let them do it and hear the opinion; Listen; policy makers need to spend time in DEIS schools to gain insights into the realities of how schools operate; Listen to young people's voices; always be kind, it costs nothing; we are thankful for the opportunity to hear our voices; Children need to have their voices and opinions heard especially regarding exams and services to help others; engage with our community, listen to what we need not what you think we need; more awareness of challenges faced by some of our students in terms of family situation, economics, housing and cultural.

Miscellaneous

Should be less abrupt; educate yourself on as many issues you can and please share it - I think if we could be educated on the next level of school before it happens it could be more comfortable; for junior to senior, would there be more of a push on SPHE education; need extension of Early Start program to ALL DEIS schools; I think COVID will have an impact with transition to post-primary schools as students aren't getting the same programmes as usual; it's time to trust the wisdom and potential of children and give them space to grow and contribute - we need their wisdom, imagination and idealism; people have lives outside of school everyone should be mindful; if we are serious about Well-being and positive mental health then we MUST put therapists and psychologists in schools; ensure smaller class size.

Annex 13
What messages would you like to send to people nationally from today?

Listen - Potential/Voice of Children

It's time to trust the wisdom and potential of children and give them space to grow and contribute - we need their wisdom, imagination and idealism; Listen; Listen to young people's voices; Engage with our community, listen to what we need not what you think we need; System needs to listen to young voices; Listen to students more, we know what we need to reach our potential; we are thankful for the opportunity to hear our voices; Children need to have their voices and opinions heard especially regarding exams and services.

Listen to needs of Community

Policy makers need to spend time in DEIS schools to gain insights into the realities of how schools operate; Dublin 10 schools need funding and access to services; Importance of funding and not to be left behind; We need to provide funding to school when required; The amount of amazing work that is already happening and support along with funding to continue this work; everyone has a right to speak so let them do it and hear their opinion; Educate yourself on as many issues you can and please share it; More awareness to challenges faced by some of our students in terms of family situation, economics, housing and cultural.

Supports

Financial

Schools working together can make changes....but we do need support from outside....i.e. financially; more funding and supports for assessments for the children;

Mental Health

Funding and supports for mental health a must! We need supports services on site in schools; Teachers are not clinicians, we need professionals to support us and our pupils; Parents feel mental health is an issue too but we cannot rely on schools only to solve this, we need support in the community too; If we are serious about well-being and positive mental health then we MUST put therapists and psychologists in schools; Mental health resources need to improve due to COVID; there are so many more in need so the resources must increase to reflect this change; no matter what age people can go through a mental health crisis; If we are serious about children's wellbeing we must have professionals, psychologists and therapists in schools; The pupils here today all spoke about mental health, this shows what a live issue this is. We need help NOW.

Community and School

Address issues within our community to support progression in education; people have lives outside of school everyone should be mindful; More supports for teachers and schools; Support to challenge barriers that exist within households for access to education; help others; Improved facilities, move schools forward into modern-styles of learning; We need services for our children, waiting years for services is not good enough; On-site services such as play therapy! Art therapy etc; more training for students in ways to deal with stress and anxiety; Use skills and people within our community to deliver supports;

Miscellaneous

Always be kind, it costs nothing (x3); let us give back too; fantastic school community in Ballyfermot; equal opportunities for all schools; could the Minister come to BEACONS? More appreciation of the work teachers do, they are shaping the young people of the future.

Annex 14

What are you personally taking from today?

Student Voice

The power and clarity of student voice; Fantastic opportunity for students to have their voices heard; Power of student voice; Our students are fantastic representatives for each other, their families and their schools; Totally amazed at wonderful student contribution; Very impressed with the students;
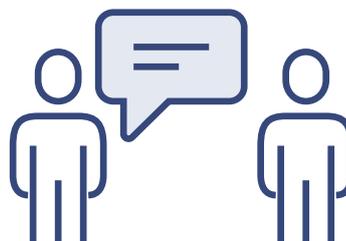
D10 Schools as one Community

We are all on the one side; it's so great to hear we all want the same things. By chatting to each other more we can understand each other more. And we can then work together to achieve a better education system :); the importance of community; All schools are in the same boat and feel the same re issues; the absolute fantastic thing was that people of D10 can come together!!; A clearer understanding of the gaps and needs within the community Real feeling of community; Relationships and communication; connections; so many people struggling with same issues; We are all doing our best; the bond between the parents, teachers and students is wonderful;

Miscellaneous

Everyone has struggles; Teachers care for their students; anybody can be going through something and we need better help; Respect for our students.

> By chatting to each other more we can understand each other more. And we can then work together to achieve a better education system.

Annex 15
If we were running another event something like this, what advice would you give the Organisers?

More Breaks – shorter Day

Movement breaks throughout; A movement break after each hour; Bit longer lunch break or short movement break but very good overall; A shorter day - some sessions were repetitive; more breaks; Energy seem to drain by the afternoon - shorten the day;

Break-out Rooms

I really like chatting in the breakout rooms. It was a bit awkward at the start but then it was fine; more breakout rooms; more breakout rooms with other people; liked the different rooms.

Miscellaneous

Provide some sample questions before the event; Make sure you take everyone's opinion into account and highlight not only issues but what could be done about them; Would like to hear more from parents; More student voices; Look at interagency supports within the community and how we can use skills and services best to meet the needs of our young people; Take more time over how to use the technology - thanks.

Commendations

Only advice is to continue with BEACONS events; Post those muffins to people who are participating from home!!!! LOL; It was great to work as a community; Do a follow up. Teach us how to do it ourselves; It would be lovely - and important - to do it in person. A pleasure to hear students' opinions! Amazing event - thank you so much for the opportunity; Loved the format; hearing and helping from other schools; Would be fantastic if these could be held more often to give more students the opportunity to take part; Thank you.

Annex 16
School Participants

St John's De la Salle (PP): Principal (Pr); Deputy Principal (DP); Teacher (T); School Completion Project Worker (SCPW); 3 Students (S) and 1 Parent (P);

Kylemore College (PP): Pr; 2 x T (HSCL); 4 x S; 3 x P;

St Dominic's (PP): Pr; HSCL; 2 x S; 2 x P;

Caritas College (PP): Pr; HSCL; 2 x S; 2 x P;

St Louise's Primary: Pr; 5 x T; 2 x S; 2 x P;

St Raphael's Primary: Pr; HSCL; 2 x T; 2 x S; 2 x P;

St Gabriel's Primary: Pr; HSCL/T; 4 x S; 2 x P;