Report of the

Review BEACONS Event

Ennistymon

22 November 2019

An Teach Ceoil



Participating partners

St Joseph's CBS: Scoil Mhuire: Vocational School: Scoil Mhainchín NS: North West Clare Family Resource Centre

with

The Teaching Council & Burren College of Art

Review of Inaugural BEACONS Event



The Stage is set

Settling in

Purpose – 'so what': At the first Prototype BEACONS event in Ennistymon in May 19 students were high in their appreciation of this new initiative which was the fulfilment of a long-held vision of the Director of the Teaching Council (TC) to catalyse a conversation process among parents, teachers and students in their local areas to allow them say what's important – what's in their hearts – about the future of education in a safe, inclusive, inspirational way. However the students present also called for accountability – would anything change as a result of this novel conversational model, would their views be reflected in real action within their schools and in the wider education system? An undertaking was given that another Beacons event would be held before the year end to allow this 'so what' question to be answered.

Participants: As with the original event, the review was shaped by the participating schools with four of the original five schools participating together with the North West Clare Resource Centre. There was no need for an ice-breaker session with participants diving straight into the conversational process from 9.30am. The participants included, 6 from the National School, 5 from CBS, 5 from Scoil Mhuire, [] from the Vocational School and 7 from the Family Resource Centre as well as 8 representatives from the Teaching Council, DWEC, Burren College of Art and other observers hoping to host similar events. The participants included 3 principals, 2 teachers, 2 parents, 4 primary students, 6 second-level students and 8 'observers'. Máirin Ní Chéileachair of DWEC provided the efficient back-up administration. As in the previous BEACONS Chris Chapman was the facilitator as part of the Burren College of Art team.

This Report: What follows is (i) a summary of the main themes emerging; (ii) a report of what participants had to say about changes since the first BEACONS and what they wanted to discuss further and (iii) reflections from the Director of the Teaching Council and (iv) the harvest of documents from which the report derives.

Summary of Main Themes

A primary purpose of this event was to review whether the inaugural event held in May had made a difference in the lives of the school community. It was a response to the 'so what' question posed as to whether the BEACONS process would make a difference locally and more generally? It was the fulfilment of a promise to reconvene before the end of the year to see what had changed.

The conversation around the topic of change revealed not only the major advances that had been made but also the areas which continued to be problematic. The challenge of how to sustain change was also prominent in the conversation.

Positive Change: There was a strong feeling that the BEACONS process had had a significant positive impact both qualitative and practical:

- It had brought about a change in the dynamic of teacher/student relationships with the institution of a dialogue café in at least one school to facilitate freer communication;
- There was a perception of better mutual understanding between teachers and students – with students being surprised at how much teachers really cared. Staff were providing feedback on staff notice-boards. One student changed his mind on moving schools as a result of his perception of his teachers;
- Student voice was being heard and there was more support from teachers and principals. Barriers were breaking down.
- Culture was changing with less bullying and more friendly encounters there was greater awareness of the power of a smile from a TY buddy to transform the experience of a first year student;
- The concern with environmental issues that was evident in May had resulted in real changes with one school winning a green flag and water fountains being installed externally and internally to obviate the need for plastic water bottles. There was serious engagement with recycling;
- The 'why' of subjects was being addressed;
- In the national school there was an increase in the range of activities and homework had decreased.

Not changed enough: The May BEACONS experience had not magically solved all the nitty-gritty challenges of school life:

- A bullying issue in at least one school was resisting easy resolution. However honest
 conversations during the course of the day seemed destined to facilitate resolution.
 Already there were plans to engage a BEACONS-style conversational process with
 creative suggestions as to how one might use non-verbal communication to
 transcend barriers to mutual hearing;
- Neither had anxiety and stress disappeared, nor discipline. The paradox of CBA's
 and orals being a source of stress was an ongoing reality. There was a request for
 greater support in dealing with anxiety and learning emotional literacy.

Sustaining change: The need for ongoing engagement with thorny issues was evident from the choice of subjects chosen for discussion - student voice, stress, bullying, social media, the environment and inclusion. A search for 'space' and less homework also claimed attention. Education on social media safety awareness reflected concerns voiced in all BEACONS.

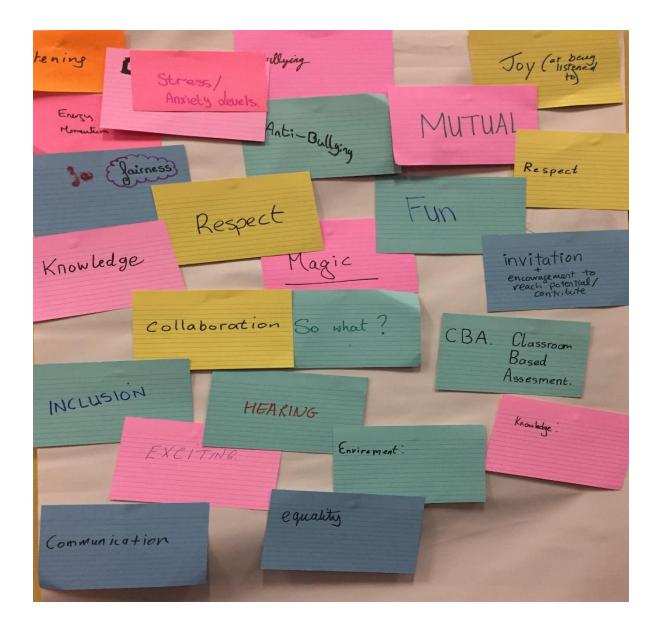
An interesting question was how to institutionalise the gains from the BEACONS process? The experience itself was hugely positive but then students and teachers returned to a school context where a majority had not had the benefit of the experience. How to rectify this by having a BEACONS process as part of the school culture - of SSE/SIP, of staff, student, parent and Board meetings? There was a need for champions among all the constituent elements of the school community – principals, teachers, students and parents. Could student agency be reflected in the composition of school boards? There was need to promote greater awareness that student voice and agency were now governing concepts at policy level.

The overwhelming sense of the day was the value for all parties of being part of an open, safe conversation process that allowed everyone to feel heard, to say what needed to be said and to be part of a process of democratic change.

The Opening

Opening the event Chris indicated that the focus would be on reviewing what had happened since the first BEACONS event, there would be space to raise any questions that were live for participants now and we would be looking to the future. We were learning by doing – by hosting conversations that allowed people to feel heard, to collaborate with others and to join the dots at local level and between the local and the national. Tomás (Director of the Teaching Council) put the event in the wider context of the two other BEACONS that had followed Ennistymon in Baltinglass, Co Wicklow and North East Inner City Dublin and there would be a year-end evaluation event in the Teaching Council on 13th December which would aim to connect the three local events to the national policy space. He was very conscious of the question from students in Ennistymon and elsewhere as to whether this process would change anything? He was also conscious that the process had a life of its own and that he was in service of what was seeking to emerge.

Opening – Invitation to name a word you remember from last May or a word you want in the conversation?

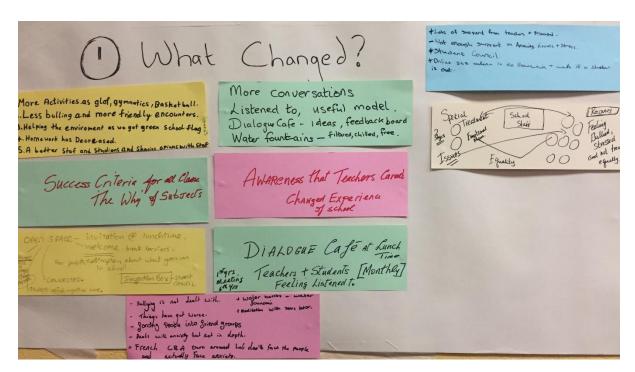


Video of Inaugural Beacons

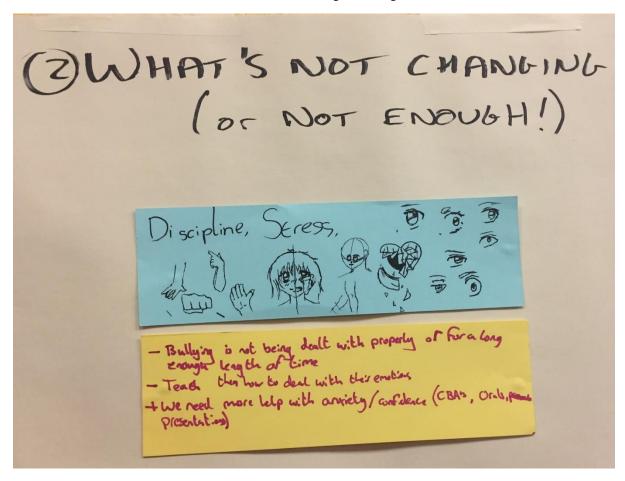
The <u>video</u> of participants' responses to the original BEACONS event was shown:

- The intention was to replicate the preceding Burren College or Art symposium with school communities, where the emphasis shifted from the keynote speaker to the central importance of listening;
- Students emphasised the importance of being listened to, of not feeling alone and of having an opportunity to speak with teachers on a different basis;
- 'All our opinions are respected';
- A lot of people wanted to change things beacons of hope in our system;
- Things were already happening in schools.

What changed – even a sense/feeling - following the first Beacons last May?



What hasn't changed enough?



Feedback in relation to Change

The general consensus was that a lot of positive things had happened as a result of the first BEACONS but some issues were yet to be dealt with satisfactorily. On the positive side:

- Less bullying and better support from principal;
- Better relationships between students and teachers; less homework;
- Stuff was being dealt with because child could speak to teacher (parent perspective);
- Better management of stress related to CBA's; more physical exercise and sports;
- More conversations and model for handling bullying between parents, staff and student;
- Inception of 'dialogue café' where students can raise any topic with teachers and questions to staff can be replied to on notice board – helps understand why something not happening;
- 'Success criteria' stipulated for subjects so we know the 'why' we need to learn stuff;
- Welcoming parents in September helped bridge gap with school;
- Outdoor and indoor fountain of filtered water no need for plastic bottles of water;
- I had awareness that teachers cared it transformed my experience of school.

On the 'more-to-do' side were:

- Bullying hadn't been satisfactorily resolved in one context;
- How to have accountability to reinforce the BEACONS model in school need to build in a feedback session at least once a year;
- You leave BEACONS with motivation but back at school they don't have the insights you've had and this can lead to cynicism;
- CBA introduces two assessments systems with attendant stress but no additional resources;
- Talking about 'wellbeing' in class won't
- bring it about.



'Sos Beag' – where the best conversations happen & time for a selfie

(Participants host Conversations on Subjects they care about)

FIRST ROUND.

A. Student Voice A. How to make ideas stick?

B. Environment?

B. How to make ideas stick?

C. Stress + Anxiety C. How to make space?

D. School Sport D. How to agoreciate yourself?

E. Bullying?

E. How can conversational spaces

Summary of Actions from Open Space Dialogue

Student Voice:

- Disseminate information about the emerging policy initiatives in relation to student voice;
- Give greater agency to student voice through Board of Management membership;
- Use Lundy Model for effective student voice;
- TY students need to be heard cultivate a buddy-system culture smile/use of name in the corridor;
- Provide feedback to TY co-ordinator on TY students buddying with 1st years.

Environment

- Slow down, take care, think before we do;
- Have storage space for bikes;
- Get advice on what may be recycled and install recycling bins;
- Support banning of all single-use plastics and reduce printing/use of paper.

Stress & Anxiety

- Develop relationships and an awareness throughout the school of the importance of relationships;
- Have "one good adult" each student can rely on;
- Make connections between teachers and students and between CSPE/SPHE and life skills:
- Get out each day to 'walk & talk'.

School Sport/Recreation

- Introduce gymnastics and golf;
- Getting out and being fit are important; team-based activity creates friends and builds confidence; encourage other to try sport out.
- Have opportunity once a week to showcase other skills dance, art, drama, baking, debating, jewellery-making, poetry, board games, quizzes.

Bullying

- This can be challenging to handle and requires space where different/difficult perspectives can be heard and empathy developed;
- Plans to use conversational BEACONS-style process;
- How about creative non-verbal methods?

Social Media

- Have safety awareness classes how to spot fake profiles etc;
- Create alternative channels for 'cries for help' seeing online can be stressful;
- Build resilience because we can't control online bullying;
- Need to make bullies aware of their 'why'.

How to make BEACONs process/good ideas stick

- Make BEACONS process part of school culture;
- Incorporate into SSE/SIP;
- Identify champions among principals, teachers, parents and students;
- Have it part of agenda of meetings of student council, staff meetings, parents' council and Board of Management + part of school reporting + spreading BEACONS awareness nationally.

Homework

- Introduce more kinaesthetic learning learn by doing e.g. measure things for maths;
- If doing experiments in class let reflection on the process be the homework such that the learning sticks;
- Study within the class work not using the book;
- Creative homework/study e.g. watch the news and come back with three questions.

How to Make Space

- Take responsibility who leads?
- Create physical and mental space for conversations, to hear and listen, for time out, to give time to breathe; students should have a safe/sanctuary space;
- Strategies 'nurture/nature rooms', calm quiet spaces, collaborative conversations for all to engage and understand.

How to appreciate yourself

- Time for students to journal about their week;
- Learning how to compliment and accept compliments;
- Give everyone a chance to do what they are good at;
- Relaxation.

Inclusive Education

- Having everyone together; talking to not about;
- Can't be forced to include create activities requiring participation;
- Be kind to each other;
- Greater clarity about ways of behaving and working;
- Relaxing more will create more openness.



Lunch time & time to catch up with emails

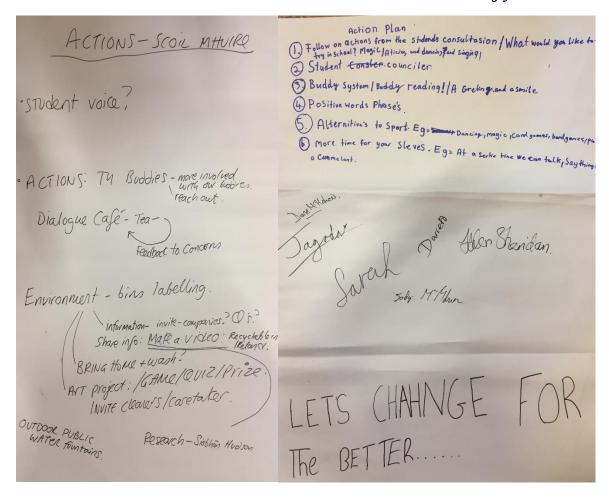
Schools/Observers discuss what's most useful for their contexts

Mixed Group (Scoil Mhuire + Vocational School) - Friendship



Scoil Mhuire

Scoil Mhainchín NS - Let's Change for the Better



CBS [To be completed on Monday!

Other/Observer Group - Now what?

- Beacons will vary with local need while based on common processes such as openspace technology;
- We need an inclusive understanding of communities e.g. new principals, schools, geography;
- Students need to see actions, even small actions resulting;
- 'Start somewhere, follow everywhere' making space, making connections, beginning the conversations;
- Why not use some of the wellbeing time for Beacons process while avoiding its being another thing to be done?
- Capacity-building is essential a professional community of learners learning how to facilitate;
- Thematic BEACONS: using networks such as IPPN and NAPD connect electronically (e.g. mentimetre) with, say, 100 schools; show them a video of a BEACONS event and deploy a simple questionnaire to ascertain what they'd like to explore they set the agenda.

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Closure – Open Forum

Messages to the System

- There needs to be more engagement with the environmental issue;
- There is too much talking and too little action.

Closing Comments

- Thanks to all the students for their honesty;
- It's great to realize teachers care they're here today;
- Our voices were heard; we need to get other teachers' perspectives;
- We could express how we feel we felt like we had a voice;
- Thanks to Tomás and Chris for coming and hearing;
- **Tomás**: Thanks to DPER and Teaching Council for funding this, to Chris for facilitating and Burren College of Art for gestating the concept. Thanks to the students, to the teachers for their courage and to my colleagues. We will review progress to date on 13th December with the three BEACONS communities and with 50% participation from the policy space and will explore how to take this forward. I love how the original vision that grew at BCA is developing.

Reflections from Teaching Council Director, Tomás Ó Ruairc

It is always good to return to the place where something had its beginning.

Normally, much time has elapsed before such revisiting – many people have moved on, it has almost been forgotten, and people gather, typically in circles, to remember, commemorate, and perhaps even celebrate.

To return to a place where something began mere moments after that beginning is a rare privilege and joy. For we found in Ennistymon that the same people were engaged in the process; we gathered in the same place, but at a different time. And we had conversations that both echoed those we had in May, but also harked forward to an exciting, ever unfolding future — a future emerging from our hearts and shared humanity.

There were a few reasons why we returned to Ennistymon. Firstly, the school community declared it to be so – they wanted to reconvene to hold themselves to account, a powerful and practical example of local agency. Secondly, we were invited. BEACONS has exemplified from its very gestation the inclusion of diverse voices from other places – reflecting how each of us cherishes our own sense of place, which is an element of our shared humanity. Yet that personal sense of place is also distinctive and striking. We therefore amplify our shared humanity when we share our common yet distinct perspectives on this world and our lives - #paradox.

And last but not least, we all came together to see if BEACONS would be what many other things still strive to be – a process, not a project. Would BEACONS be more than a one-off event? Could a community really unlock its creative and collective sense of local agency to make small changes in their own world?

BEACONS on 22 November declared quietly, loudly, proudly and humbly that yes, people can change their world, especially if they acknowledge their shared humanity.

There has been a palpable joy and energy in each BEACONS community when they begin to talk to each other and realise how much they share in common, and how little they understand about each other's world view. There has been an equally palpable hunger for these conversations to be heard at the national level. Take the example of the student in NEIC who asked me five times if this would make a difference at the national level!

Ennistymon was no different. I was particularly impressed by one student who complained about a bullying issue that had not been dealt with, but still valued BEACONS for giving her and her peers the opportunity to air these views and have further conversations. In this way she drew a nuanced distinction between the issues to be discussed, and the means in which they are discussed.

There was another student who summed up the views of his peers when he spoke clearly about the small yet important changes that were made immediately after BEACONS in May. Small changes, he said, can make a big difference.

As we conclude this phase of the BEACONS process, and look ahead to our Sharing Learning Day on 13 December, and beyond into 2020, this paradoxical linking of small with big seems a very appropriate note on which to close. That statement from a student was a powerful

declaration of the reality that while the challenges and issues of concern to us can sometimes seem so overwhelming, there is always so much that we can achieve in collaboration with each other.

This reminds me of the closing lines from Brendan Behan's poem, "Begin":

Though we live in a world that dreams of ending that always seems about to give in something that will not acknowledge conclusion insists that we forever begin.

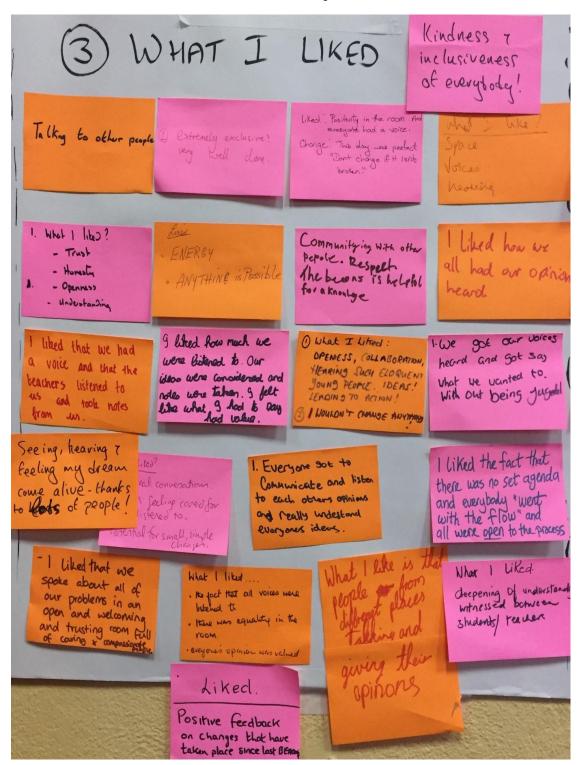
Let's keep beginning through BEACONS!

Tomás Ó Ruairc

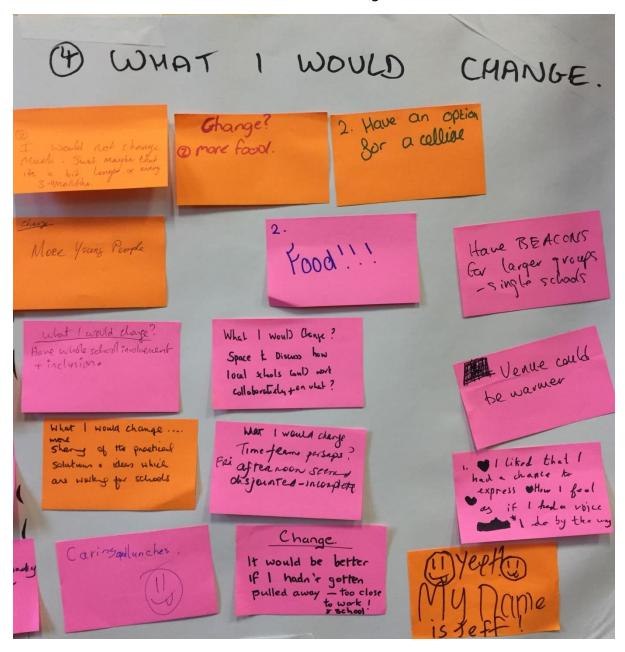
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Evaluation

What worked well?



What I would change

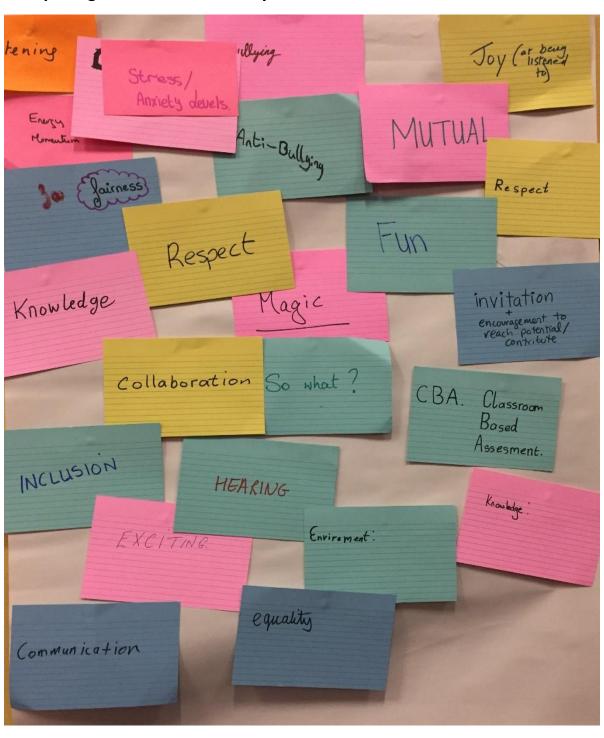


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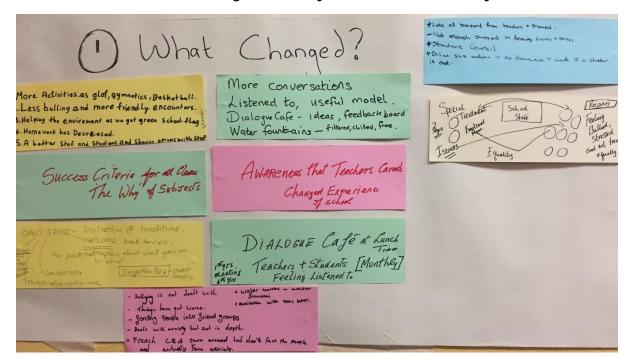
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HARVEST OF DOCUMENTS FROM THE REVIEW BEACONS IN ENNISTYMON

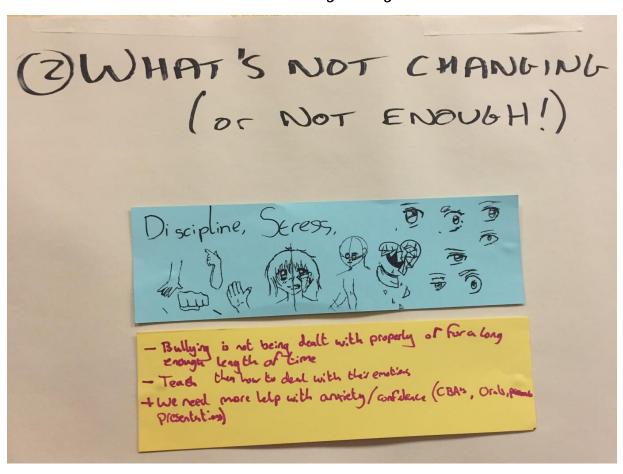
Opening: Words from last May or Words we want in the Conversation



What has changed since the first BEACONS last May?



What hasn't changed enough?



Open Space

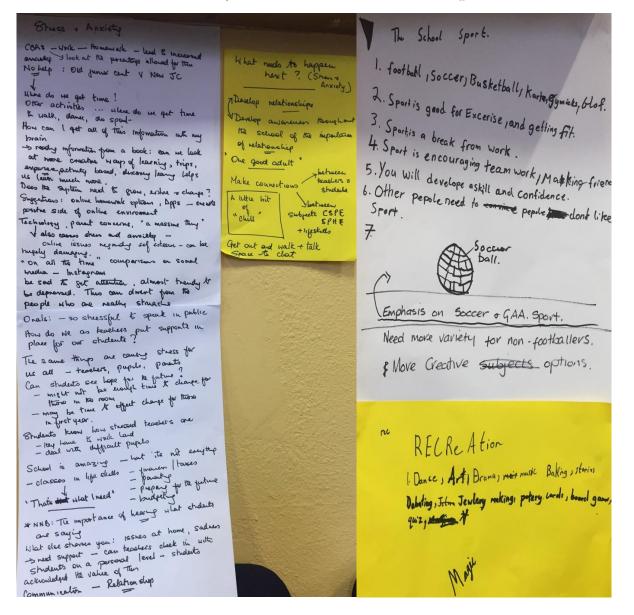
Discussion/Action on 12 Subjects we're interested in

Student Voice

Environment

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o Voice in Classroom	paper.	
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o Buddy-system Cultur	-) -) Fau	ove bion competitio
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o Spread Word About Emerging Policy in this area [Lundy Liste	N B	Environment.

School Sport



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How to Make things/dear Sigks · Beacons Needs to be part of school culture -> Habit in Franktype · Need Champions + Community of Ennistymen Champio · Not Another Have to be way of doing thing e, SSF/SIP 1.2. Attach to part of school Planwing Proass in AN organic way · Beacons on School BOM Agenda =) Principal Nuch to be one of the Champions + Parent Council · Connect to wider Community through Social Media + School Annual Report. Student Council communicate to student (A) MAKING good Ideas Stige What Needs to Happen? · Make Part of School Cultur · Incorporate in SSE/SIP: o Identify Champions (Teach Teach Teach Parent State) o Structurely: On Agenda 9 = BoM : Staff Weeting = Parents Council = Atulai - Council · Community Awarenos. Mse Social Medio + Annual Report o Nationally: Beacons Proces as PART of Best Partice in Execution

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- afraid to appear incompetent Gaelye - History: Watch the T.V. Walt a clocknessey. What needs to happen next. Take responsibility, with leads -3 - Create space (mental ? What happen next? (Homework) physical) · for conversations . to hear + to listen * Kinstelli learning . for time out #- Expring - Perforcion is though - Scious will - Masure they for multis . to give time to breathe * Study with Honewalk Strategues - Nurtue rooms Nature rooms - not the book - Calm quiet spaces * Creatin Homework/study - Collaborative conversation for all to engage and -Irid radio \$ telly understand

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to enable perspective to
be felt - empathy develop 3. Have a metime. 4. Do rice things for other people. 5. Listen to music. 6. Read a comic book. 7. Do what makes you happy. 8. play violingames 9. Winking in the Mirror and say everything is aswolm. 10. people makes you laugh. 11. Journey 12. > Time for students to journal about their week. → Give everyone a chance to do what they are good as > Relaxing

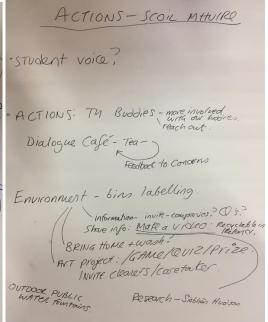
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What's most useful to do in my Context?

Mixed Group - Friendship

Scoil Mhuire





Scoil Mhainchín — Let's change for the better

Observer Group - now what?

Action Plan Action Plan Tollow on actions from the stodends consultation / What would you like to try in school project from the stodends are singled. Student Constant counciler. Buddy system Buddy reading! A Greting and asmile. Positive words Phase's. Alternitive's to Sport Eg. Dancing pragic part games, bordgames, pur a commandant. Project time for your sleves. Eg. At a serie time we can talk say thing
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LET'S CHAHNGE FOR THE BETTER

Now what?
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3 We need an inclusive understanding of communities \Rightarrow eq. new schools geographical etc. 4 Students need to see Start somewhere, taking space (follow everywhere. Regiming the conversations.)
Haking connections (follow everywhere. Reginary the conversations.)
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Protessional learning connuculty. 8) Themalic 15EAEONS -> video -> causult 100 MPPN MARTI Schools -> they watch video 7 then respond via confinence. Mendouseter -> all as same day 77!! Miligate lears -> what it
Only good can come of this "- Tack. > sequence is important. (A) No pre-set agenda-people most trust open space. THEN CO Thematic TITALONS

Evaluation of Event

What I liked



What I would Change

