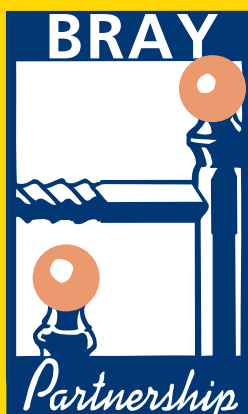


Being heard...?
Being heard...?
Being heard...?
Being heard...?

Being heard...?



**Young People in
Bray on Education,
the Community
and Citizenship**

Being heard ...?

Young People in Bray on Education, the Community and Citizenship

*"I think kids should have a say in our school
(we attend it) and our community(we live in it)"*

Survey participant

The active participation of young people in decisions and actions at a local and regional level is essential if we are to build more democratic, inclusive and prosperous societies. Participation in the democratic life of any community is about more than voting or standing for election, although these are important elements. Participation and active citizenship is about having the right, the means, the space and the opportunity and where necessary the support to participate in and influence decisions and engage in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society

– Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, Council of Europe, 2003

**Report Commissioned by
Bray Partnership Ltd
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- The Co-ordinators, Principals, teachers, managers and project staff who facilitated and organised groups and venues for the consultation which was undertaken throughout 2005 and early 2006
- Jack and Jessica who worked with 80:20 in writing up the findings of this consultation
- Jennifer D'Arcy and Lorna Lafferty from Bray Partnership.

Foreword

This report presents the findings of a youth consultation process that took place with young people from the Bray area. This consultation initiative, which commenced in March 2005 and was completed in May 2006, focused on young people and education.

The development and implementation of initiatives through the Bray Local Area Action Plan have highlighted the need to engage young people in planning and developing youth orientated programmes. Target groups engaged in this programme include disadvantaged young people, young people at risk, early school leavers, young Travellers, and young people with disabilities. It is the learning from this work that has suggested that a sizeable number of young people are feeling excluded from the educational system with severe consequences in terms of absenteeism, early school leaving and anti-social behaviour.

This youth consultation initiative has enabled Bray Partnership to have direct dialogue with young people in the Bray area about issues of mutual concern – specifically education and being part of a community. The consultation process has resulted in a wealth of information on the ideas, opinions and aspirations of young people from the Partnership area in relation to education (both formal and informal) and Bray as a community.

This research could not have happened without the assistance and support of the local schools, training centres and youth organisations that facilitated the participation of young people in the consultation process (listed on the following page). In addition, the Bray Partnership Children, Youth & Family Support Working Group has played a pivotal role in guiding the direction of this initiative to date.

This research report documenting the findings of the consultation process is the first step in an on-going process to engage young people in participation and decision-making processes locally. Following the consultation process and the publication of this research report, we in Bray Partnership are more committed than ever to realising the potential of the Bray Youth Consultation Initiative in providing insights and solutions to address the issues identified by actually involving young people in the process. We look forward to working with young people, local schools, communities, youth organisations, and local and regional agencies in developing this initiative in the future.

Jennifer D’Arcy
Education Co-ordinator
Bray Partnership

Participating Schools & Organisations

■ Schools

St. Fergal's Senior National School
St. Philomena's National School
St. Kieran's Junior School for Traveller Children
Marino School
St. Cronan's Boys School
St. Thomas's Community College
St. Kilian's Community school
Loreto Secondary School
Presentation College
St. Brendans
St. Gerards
Colaiste Raithin

■ Education/Training Centres

Bray & North Wicklow Youthreach
St. Kieran's Education Centre

■ Youth/Community Organisations

Bray Travellers Community Development Group
Bray Youth Service
Little Bray Youth Development Project
The Marian Centre
St. Fergal's Youth Development Project

■ School Completion Programmes

Bray North School Completion Programme
Ballywaltrim School Completion Programme

■ Children, Youth & Family Support Working Group

Bray Gardai
Bray Lakers
Bray Youth Service,
Health Service Executive
Home School Community Liaison Scheme
Lucena Clinic
The Marian Centre
Wicklow County Childcare Committee

Key conclusions and recommendations summarised

Conclusions

- Overall, young people in Bray strongly welcomed being asked their views on issues affecting them directly, in this case education and the community. They were anxious to engage, to offer their views (and to discuss them) and exhibited a striking maturity in their responses as well as in the practical suggestions and proposals they put forward. Having expressed their views, they now expect appropriate feedback and action.
- Those consulted have definite views when it comes to talking about their local community and the town in which they live. These opinions are, to a significant extent, positive – they were very clear about what they liked about Bray and about what they wanted for Bray. They were also strongly negative – clear and precise about what is wrong and what is missing.
- Negatively, they commented on class divisions in Bray, the environment (litter and derelict sites), safety, drugs and substance abuse, bullying and discrimination against certain individuals and groups, traffic congestion, relations with the Gardai and the urgent need for improved youth facilities. Positively they valued the local environment, the seafront, some facilities and amenities, the attitudes and actions of some teachers and youth leaders and the ‘reasonable size’ of the town (in that it facilitates meeting with friends etc.).
- Young people in Bray do not feel they have an effective input into local community issues and decision-making and that there are few structures or opportunities for such input. They do feel that they have better opportunities for input in schools but here also, there is significant scope for improvement.
- There are significant and ongoing problems for certain groups of young people – those with disabilities, those from easily identified disadvantaged areas within Bray, young Travellers and the growing number of students from ‘minority’ backgrounds.
- Those consulted outlined clearly a number of key educational issues that are causing difficulties and that require appropriate action - the physical environment of schools, facilities (especially for PE), the transition from primary to post-primary, supports for students as regards homework and exams, discipline, the attitudes of some teachers and the need to improve subject choice.
- Young people lack accurate information about additional courses and training options open to them and expressed strong interest in accessing opportunities in areas such as computers (which are still inadequately available), political studies, psychology, and youth leadership.
- Many young people in Bray are directly involved, to a significant degree, in voluntary or charitable activity through a range of local and national organisations and activities but there is significant scope for such involvement to increase.

Recommendations

- Regular, meaningful and ongoing consultation with young people on local and national issues in both education and community life should become the norm. This is not just the responsibility of 'youth' organisations but is the responsibility of all organisations, structures and sectors within Bray, especially those that view themselves as providing leadership. Each and every organisation and event should review its policies and practices as regards the involvement of young people and amend them as necessary.
- Bray Partnership, along with other education and youth related appropriate bodies, should involve young people in identifying and addressing local issues through an Annual Youth Forum. This should go beyond school and community groups to include those young people not currently engaged. The Forum should address the need for a representative Youth Council.
- Those who participated in this survey should receive feedback from the consultation with an indication of initial actions being considered or implemented. The outcomes of the survey should also be made available publicly.
- Bray Partnership and relevant partners should initiate a number of activities including the development and dissemination of a youth resource addressing many of the issues raised, greater use of peer education initiatives and volunteering, additional courses on specific issues (involving other local organisations) and an audit of subject choice in local schools with a view to maximising choice and the effective use of available resources.
- The lack of adequate emphasis and opportunity for physical education needs to be addressed as a matter of some urgency. Local schools along with community groups and Bray Partnership should prepare a local audit of available facilities (within both schools and the community), identifying gaps and problems as a basis upon which to lobby the Department of Education and Science as well as other relevant Departments, local politicians and the local business sector.
- Schools should maximise the opportunities for young people to voice their opinions and to be appropriately involved in planning and policy through an effective student council and meaningful communication. Each local school should review and, where necessary, take action on a number of issues raised by students including:
 - ensuring effective supports for those transferring from primary to post-primary
 - that a mentoring or buddy system is in place to support first years
 - involving young people in developing school policies on bullying and racism and renewing such policies regularly
 - effective interventions in support of students from marginalised groups and disadvantaged backgrounds.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The Bray Youth Consultation Initiative commenced in March 2005 with a research project commissioned by Bray Partnership designed to ascertain the views of young people on education and on their community.¹ The consultation process was undertaken by 80:20 Educating and Acting for a Better World and focused on the following areas:

- Young people and training
- Young people on the curriculum
- Young people on being consulted
- Young people on transferring from primary to post primary school
- Young people on the school environment
- Young people on communities and on being from Bray
- Young people on what they would do if they had the power to change education

The research with young people aged 7 to 18 years was undertaken with a view to achieving the following results:

- the findings would provide baseline information on the views of young people on education and community life in the Bray area
- these findings would feed into the appropriate policies and plans of local and national statutory agencies including the Department of Education, Wicklow County Development Board etc.

■ The Consultation and Methodology Used

The development and implementation of initiatives through the Bray Partnership Local Area Action Plan has highlighted the need to engage young people in planning and developing youth orientated programmes. Target groups engaged in this programme include disadvantaged young people, young people at risk, early school leavers, young Travellers, and young people with disabilities. It is the learning from this work that has suggested that some young people are feeling excluded from the educational system with severe consequences in terms of absenteeism, early school leaving and anti-social behaviour.

The aims of consulting with young people from Bray were to give them a voice in matters of education and community life and to help towards the planning, prioritising and delivery of better educational services.

Initially, it was decided to choose a number of groups that would be representative of young people locally with a number of considerations taken into account including age, geographic spread, gender, those within the formal education system and those who had left the formal system including marginalised groups such as young Travellers and young people with disabilities.

The consultants met with over 200 young people living in the Bray area. The research involved seven secondary schools, three primary schools, one special needs school, one school for Traveller children, and two training centres. In addition further consultations took place with young people involved in a number of formal and informal education initiatives operating locally.

Consultation began in March 2005 with an initial direct focus on correspondence and meetings with local school Principals prior to the circulation of an agreed questionnaire (designed by the researchers and 6 young people attending three of the local secondary schools). As regards age and gender, different schools provided groups in different age ranges and where schools were mixed, an equal number of males and females were requested.

For the focus group meetings, a letter of introduction was provided and schools contacted parents for their consent. Time and place of interview were agreed with the principals/transition year co-ordinators. Again, the researcher asked for particular age groups and specifically focused on young people who would be comfortable speaking to someone they did not know. Each group was asked by the teacher/principal if they were more comfortable to meet the researcher with a teacher present or on their own. All groups were happy to meet without a teacher present.

Each of the focus group meetings took place in the locations that young people would be familiar and comfortable with – in school, in their training centre or project premises.

¹ The initiative is managed by the Bray Partnership Children, Youth and Family Support Working Group. The Working Group comprises representation from Bray Youth Service, Bray Lakers, Home School Community Liaison Scheme, Wicklow County Childcare Committee, Health Service Executive, Marian Centre, Lucena Clinic and Bray Gardai.

Before each focus group began, it was explained that the researcher would be the only person who would have access to the recordings carried out for the consultation and that she would write up the findings into a report that would be circulated to a number of different organisations especially in the Bray and Wicklow areas. The report would list all of the schools and organisations that took part in the consultation, but it would not be possible to tell from the final report who said what.

In each focus/interview group, the researcher introduced the consultation in terms of who was involved and who the report would be circulated to. Many of the group interviews were recorded but only with the permission of the group. Before beginning the formal part of the consultation, young participants were asked if they had any questions. The main questions were around why talk to young people, confidentiality, how the report would be used, what would happen as a result of the report and could change be guaranteed.

The survey questionnaires were forwarded to each of the local secondary schools with a list of instructions – age, gender specific. The researcher then collected these. In total, 82 young people responded this way. The focus group interviews with young people went relatively well with active engagement by all participants. The main difficulty was time – there was just too much to say and debates were often just starting when the bell would go or the time was up.

For those groups outside the formal education sector, the consultation meetings also went well. It was a little more difficult to access the groups due to their very active timetables but once this was overcome and the project explained to them, the consultation got underway without difficulty.

It was also agreed that when the final report was completed, follow-up meetings would be organised with these groups to feedback results from the research.

■ Why Consult Young People

Children and young people learn that they can make a difference when they influence what happens in their own communities and in society. This promotes stronger democracy and healthier communities

(The National Children's Office, The Children Rights Alliance and the National Youth Council of Ireland, June 2005, Young voices: guidelines on how to involve children and young people in your work: 14)

Today we live in a world that may have become smaller due to technology and travel but it is one that is far more diverse and provides broader opportunities and choices than ever before. Young people especially are increasingly adapting to new opportunities, new ways of working and thinking.

Young people make up a sizeable part of the population and we ignore their opinions and voices at our peril. Much research has been undertaken into the importance of involving children and young people in consultation and decision making processes. Overall, it has been documented that when young people are actively involved they develop new skills including debating, decision making - individually and in groups. They learn how decisions are made and how to contribute to this process. Their self-confidence and self-esteem benefit when they see their voices are heard and taken on board. There is some evidence that academic achievement improves through participative processes which directly involves and acknowledges the opinion of the young person.

The 'one size fits all' model of formal education has been challenged on many occasions and by many critics and it is now generally accepted that schools need to regularly take into account - during their curriculum and extra-curriculum planning – a number of key issues including the changes taking place within our communities, the need to consult more with students and to include them in appropriate decision making in order to ensure that they do not disengage and become disinterested with resulting negative consequences for society.

According to the National Children's Advisory Council in their policy recommendations to the Minister for Children, consultation can 'be defined as a mechanism for involving children and young people in decision-making'. The characteristics of consultation include:

- Adults formulate, design and run the initiative
- Children / young people are provided with the opportunity to contribute
- Children / young people are given the information they need to make informed decisions and contributions
- Adults listen actively to participating children / young people and are committed to taking their views seriously
- Adults decide what to do with the material generated through the consultation
- Adults provide children / young people with feedback

Young people have often been consulted on issues relating to the school shop and uniforms. However, over the last number of years, consultation with young people has broadened and become more meaningful. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Children's Strategy as well as the introduction of active Student Councils has supported the growth of consultation with solid outcomes.

An Ireland where children are respected as young citizens with a valued contribution to make and a voice of their own; where all children are cherished and supported by family and the wider society, where they enjoy a fulfilling childhood and realise their potential

(National Children's Strategy, November 2000, Our Children – Their Lives: 2)

School is an institution in which young people not only spend a considerable proportion of their lives and where they undertake a formal educational programme; it is also a place where many of their views and perspectives on life are shaped. It is essential that young people learn about participation and democracy while in school and that courses on democracy, participation and citizenship are available and properly resourced. However school must also be a place where young people experience democracy in action and where their participation in decision-making is supported, promoted and is seen as effective.

(- Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, Council of Europe, 2003: 16)

Jamison and Gilbert argue that until children's views (and by extension, young people) are incorporated into the policy development process, especially as far as policies that impact directly on children are concerned, decision-makers do not have the benefit of:

- Understanding children's perspectives of the problem
- Hearing children's suggestions about how the problem might be solved
- Receiving information from children about the impact that each suggested option for solving the problem may actually have on children
- Knowing what children think should happen

(Gray, A., June 2002, Increasing the participation of children, young people and young adults in decision making: a literature review, Ministry of Social Development and Ministry of Youth Affairs: 6)

For many reasons, it would be a lot easier to decide what young people want and what they need. The arguments for not consulting young people might include:

- Young people must learn to take responsibility before they can be granted rights
- Parents/guardians should exercise young people's right to be heard on their behalf
- The interests of young people are already articulated by their representative organisations
- Giving young people a right to be heard in relation to decision-making curtails their childhood by foisting adulthood on them prematurely

- Children/young people do not want to be consulted
- Consulting young people is not part of the organisation's remit
- Children/young people lack the maturity, knowledge and skills to make meaningful contributions to decision-making, especially decision-making relating to public policy development and service provision
- It is not possible to accommodate consultation with children/young people within existing decision-making structures
- Affording children/young people the opportunities to be heard will undermine their respect for adult authority and that of their parents/guardians
- Public policy and political processes are of no interest to children/young people. Young people are alienated from and cynical about politics
- There are no guidelines or training courses in place to facilitate consultative work with children/young people
- There are insufficient resources available (money, personnel and/or trained personnel, time) to consult with children/young people

(McAuley, K, & Brattman, M., (2002), *Hearing Young Voices*, Open your eyes to Child Poverty Initiative: 57-58)

However, there is an overall movement towards consulting and encouraging the active involvement of young people in decision-making. It must be noted though that "young people" do not make up a homogenous group. There are many different 'types' and 'classes' of young people. There are difficulties in including all young people particularly those who have begun to disengage from society and school, and this is an issue that must be kept in mind when undertaking any consultation, or in any endeavours to facilitate the participation of young people in decision making processes. Young people who become disengaged can include those who have dropped out of full time education or who are at risk of so doing, those who have left school but who have not taken up any employment or training opportunities, those who have lost contact with local support structures and who effectively have fallen off the radar and those who are experiencing difficult personal circumstances.

Actively involving children and young people when making decisions sends a powerful message that children and young people of all ages are citizens too and should be listened to. It supports the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – Article 12, it recognises children and young people as major stakeholders in society with important contributions to make in their education and how services are designed and

delivered, and is a great opportunity for children and young people to see how rights go hand in hand with responsibilities

(Department for Education and Skills, July 2003, *Working Together: Giving children and young people a say consultation document*: 4)

Young people should be consulted as:

- The service/policy being planned is for children/young people
- Adults do not (necessarily) know what children and young people think and / or what children and young people like/want/need
- What children and young people have to say matters
- All people, including children and young people, should be treated equally
- The experience of being consulted is beneficial to children and young people
- Children and young people have a right to have a say
- Children and young people are the adults of the future and decisions taken about them now will affect them in the future
- Children and young people are more likely to use and respect services provided for them if they have been involved in their creation
- Consulting children and young people will help to create services that benefit all children and young people

(McAuley, K, & Brattman, M., (2002), *Hearing Young Voices*, Open your eyes to Child Poverty Initiative: 67)

Young people can benefit from participating in decision-making by being able to exercise their rights in society; by gaining an improved understanding of social policy and decision-making processes; by increasing their connection to communities; by developing increased confidence, skills and knowledge; and by gaining experience that can be put to use in future employment and an extended social life

(Gray, A., June 2002, *Increasing the participation of children, young people and young adults in decision making: a literature review*, Ministry of Social Development and Ministry of Youth Affairs: 6)

Consultation with young people however, must be undertaken in a fair, genuine and non-authoritative way – winning the confidence and respect of the participating young people. There is a clear difference between supporting the consultation of young people and supporting the participation of young people. Consultation involves people expressing their views and opinions whereas participation involves a greater involvement in decision making

Consultation is therefore regarded as a process where views are sought but not necessarily taken on board by the consultant(s) whereas participation is regarded as a process where there is a real engagement, according to age/ability, in all stages and development of a programme, from conceptualisations, through operation to evaluation

There is clearly a need to develop a national strategy for the development of mechanisms and structures that ensure the full participation of children and young people in Irish society. Such a strategy, while sitting parallel and enhancing developments in the area of consultation, focus on a distinct and imperative aspect of the social inclusion of children.

(http://www.ncac.ie/online_documents/voice_of_the_child_report.pdf: 2)

Participation does not simply happen; it requires champions at national, local and organisational level. In particular, strong leadership is needed within organisations to initiate and extend opportunities for real and active participation by children and young people.

(The National Children's Office, The Children Rights Alliance and the National Youth Council of Ireland, June 2005, *Young voices: guidelines on how to involve children and young people in your work*: 8)

Chapter 2

Profiling Bray

Bray is the largest urban concentration in Co. Wicklow. Situated in the northeast of the County, it is on the margins of the County's administrative and political boundaries. It is also just over the southern boundary of the Greater Dublin area. The proximity of Bray to Dublin and its unique location within the County of Wicklow impacts upon local people's sense of identity and has specific implications for both policy and service development.

- Total population in the Bray Partnership area was 16,725 in 2002
- 42.1% of the population in the Partnership area registered as being 29 years or younger. The National figure was 45.5%
- 33.7% of the population were aged 0-24 in 2002
- Rapid status – parts of Bray were deemed to be among the 25 areas of greatest concentration of disadvantage in Ireland
- According to the 2002 Census, the Bray Town area had a population of 26,244 people – 12,532 males and 13,712 females
- The Dependency ratio nationally was 49.2%. Bray has a dependent population of 44.6%, with approximately 65.6% of the dependents being young.
- 20.2% of the total population in Bray are aged 14 years or under (Rathmichael 28.2%)

District	1996	2002	2002	2002	Change in Population 1996-2002	Change in Population 1996-2002
	Persons	Persons	Male	Female	Actual	%
Bray No 1	1557	1619	786	833	62	4
Bray No 2	5870	5972	2770	3202	102	1.7
Bray No 3	6954	6684	3256	3482	-270	-3.9
Rathmichael	2516	2450	1157	1293	-66	-2.6
Kilmacanogue Part	8355	9519	4563	4956	1164	13.9
Bray Town UDC	25252	26244	12532	13712	992	3.9

DED	0-14	15-64	65+	Total	Dependency Ratio %
Bray No 1	245	1136	238	1619	42.5
Bray No 2	821	3914	1237	5972	52.6
Bray No 3	1086	4886	712	6684	36.8
Rathmichael	691	1561	198	2450	57.0
Kilmacanogue Part	2471	6647	401	9519	43.2

■ Education

- 11.8% of people living within the Bray area left school before the age of 15 years
- 23.9% of people in the Partnership area aged 15 and over left education at or before the age of 15 years. This was higher in percentage terms to that of County Wicklow (20.9%)
- 22.6% left education at or over 20 years of age which was higher than the County overall (21%) and the National figure (20.5%)
- In the area, in 2002, 21.4% of people aged 15 years and over had no formal or primary education. This figure was higher than the County Wicklow figure of 19.7%, and lower than the State at 22.2%
- In 2002, 26% of the overall Irish population aged 15 and over whose full-time education had ceased, had received a third level education. The comparable figure in the Bray Area Partnership Company was 28.5%
- Approximately 26.9% of the total unemployed population in the area had no formal education or were educated to primary level only. This is comparable with 27% in County Wicklow and 29.5% in the State
- In Bray 1 and Rathmichael, 35.7% and 36.4% respectively left school with no formal or with primary education only (17.8% is the national average)
- 18.9% of the population in Bray 1 and 6.85% in Rathmichael went to 3rd level education (40.5% national average)
- 28% of unemployed men had either no formal or primary only education in Bray. In Bray 1, there was 47%. In Rathmichael, 26% of unemployed women had either no formal or only primary education

■ Local Schools

There are twelve primary schools, seven post-primary schools, one Youthreach centre, two special needs schools for young people with disabilities and two special schools for Travellers.

■ Youth Services and Youth Initiatives

There are a number of specific youth initiatives operating through both the formal and informal education sector. There are two School Completion Programmes operating in the area and three youth initiatives operating within the three Community Development Projects; Bray Travellers Community Development Group (DAISH Project); Little Bray Family Resource Centre (Little Bray Youth Development Project and St. Fergal's Resource Centre (St. Fergal's Youth Development Project). Homework clubs are also provided by the Community Development Projects and The Marian Centre.

The Bray Youth Service provides direct support to all of the youth initiatives in the Community Development Projects in addition to working with a range of youth groups operating locally. New Directions is a Garda Youth Diversion Project operated by Bray Youth Service. Bray Youth Service also provides training programmes for young people focused on issues such as leadership, team building, life skills and bullying. There are also two dedicated Drug Education Workers who deliver drug education to sixth class pupils, whilst also supporting the Bray Drug Awareness Forum. The Bray Youth Information Centre provides information and advice to young people on education issues, employment issues and a range of other topics, as well as offering an outreach service to youth groups and schools. A new Youth Centre, which is operating as a Health Café/ Drop-In, is located in the centre of the town.

Bray Partnership also supports a number of educational youth initiatives including a Mentoring and Achievement Support Programmes in Bray Travellers Community Development Group and the Little Bray Family Resource Centre.

Significant levels of resources have been secured for the development of youth initiatives locally through the Bray Local Drugs Task Force and the Young Peoples Facilities and Services Fund.

In addition to the initiatives outlined above a plethora of community based and voluntary youth and sporting organisations also operate within the town.

DED	No formal or primary education only %	Lower Secondary %	Upper Secondary %	3 rd level education %
Bray No 1	35.7	25.8	19.6	18.9
Bray No 2	13.5	19.4	27.6	39.5
Bray No 3	19.6	25.4	26.1	28.9
Rathmichael	36.4	37.8	19.0	6.8
Kilmacanogue Part	17.8	18.3	23.4	40.5

Chapter 3

Consultation Findings

This chapter forms the core of the report and summarises the main views and opinions of those consulted around the agreed themes. The quotes presented are representative of the range of views expressed and are quoted verbatim not only to give a flavour of the content of the responses but also its style. No one quote is considered more important than another – we trust that the selection we have made is appropriate and fair.

■ Views on being consulted

Young people who participated in this consultation either through the survey or in the focus groups welcomed their involvement and agreed that there should be more interaction between community, school and young people.

When asked whether young people would be interested in additional opportunities to learn about issues such as racism, drugs, poverty and discrimination, the response was very positive. A number of suggestions were made around issues they would like to learn more about and be consulted on.

- Alcohol, drugs
- Bullying policy, drug procedure
- What school/community is doing
- Political and social issues
- Poverty, fair trade, international debt etc
- Racism
- Littering, environment
- Issues concerning people my age and my area
- Discrimination of the young by the Gardai
- Improving computer literacy around the community

It was felt that students are generally kept well informed of what is happening in school in a number of different ways through student/pupil councils as well as intercoms, school newsletters and magazines and talking with the Principal and teachers.

One key outcome of this consultation is the stark contrast between young people's views that they have a say in their schools but, largely, do not have a corresponding say in their communities. Responses to current and possible community participation and having a voice there, elicited an overwhelmingly negative response - in stark contrast to those responses in relation to such participation in school.

This significant difference can be explained in three ways - being heard (opportunities to speak and be heard), being consulted (procedures and/or opportunities for consulting young people) and participation (structures and procedures through which to participate in a meaningful way).

The majority of responses relating to school were positive, respondents felt that they do have a say in their school. There are different opportunities available to them to give their opinion be it through direct or indirect participation on the student council, speaking with teachers or the principal or making suggestions through the suggestion box.

"People listen to you here and they respect your opinion"

"Because if you want anything done the Principal will announce it over the intercom for you and will do really whatever you need to be done"

"Students Council – we go to meetings once a month. With the Board of Management, the teachers and the principal. Any ideas that we'd have we tell the representatives and they tell at the meeting. You say an idea to the representative; they say it to the teachers and board of management. We actually have had a lot of things that have worked. We got new nets for the goals. Because we had metal ones and they were dangerous"

"We do not have much input in the running of the school and we do not have all of our ideas heard. We get to let people know how we feel and they take our opinion into consideration"

Student and Pupil Councils have allowed students greater control over decisions and ideas for change and progress within their schools - greater ownership and understanding of what is happening, why a decision has to be taken and the reasons for this. Recent research in this area has identified a strong correlation between student participation and attainment in terms of self-esteem, motivation, sense of ownership etc. Those involved in the Councils may not agree with the final decision but they are aware of the reasons behind a decision. The Junior Council in Bray seems to work in a similar way in terms of empowering young people in the community to take a greater interest and ownership of their area.

"I am a member on the Bray Junior Council so I feel I have quite a say in the community"

"Because in school you can get the Student Council to bring up issues at their meetings but in the community we can't even get people to get the grass cut"

"I feel we have a say in the school because we have the student council but it's different in the community because there are only adults on the residents association"

"There are young people representing people in our school but not in my community"

Despite the positive comments about school participation, there is still considerable unhappiness that students are not fully consulted on key issues, that too often they are not listened to and that, in some cases, student councils are perceived to be a charade. There are many students who, for a variety of reasons, do not participate in school councils and who complain about not having an effective say.

It was quite apparent from this consultation, that those involved, from the youngest to the oldest, all held strong personal opinions and views on a broad range of issues particularly those relating directly to themselves and their families. Young people also have a high threshold of expectation and having been consulted, immediately expect results.

■ Views on training

Exploring the training opportunities in Bray outside school proved to be one of the least comfortable subjects for young people. In both the focus groups and questionnaires, it was clear that there is mixed information about courses available to young people in the area.

Initial responses from some young people suggested that there were no courses or training available at all but after some prompting, a number of examples were given including FAS, Post Leaving Cert Courses, night school, apprenticeships, sports and youth clubs, music school, drama school, art classes, chess, computer classes, working locally and language classes.

When asked what courses/seminars that might be of greatest interest (from a list of headings), stated preferences were:

1. Sport
2. Film studies
3. Music
4. Mini Company
5. Arts and Crafts
6. Drama
7. First Aid
8. Money Management
9. Recycling
10. Youth Leadership Courses
11. ECDL

12. Sign Language
13. Debating
14. Shaping Spaces
15. Chess

Additional suggestions included cars and driving, computer courses, boxing, martial arts, classics, literature, political studies, bar management, fishing, cycling/mountain- fishing activity, photography, summer training, youth leadership courses, psychology, mechanics, lifeguard courses, nursing, caring for people, swimming, gardening and creative writing, fireman course, football coaching, carpentry and catering.

The majority of students who completed the questionnaire (67%) said that they or their parents would be willing to pay for such courses or training depending on cost.

■ Views on the curriculum

When young people were asked whether the curriculum covered everything they wanted, there was a mixed response. Many were happy with the choice of subjects on offer in their schools whilst also expressing a desire for greater subject choice. Additional subjects suggested included metal work, wood work, technology, agricultural science, more art classes, modules like transition year, computers, home economics, music, economics and engineering, Spanish, classical studies, psychology, technical drawing and public speaking.

Based on the responses received, it was evident that some schools have a greater range of subject choice than others and this, for some, is frustrating. One or two examples given raise serious questions about subject and career opportunities available to some young people. This is a situation that needs to be addressed.

An additional issue relating to the curriculum and subject choice is the allocation of schools depending on the area students come from. The population profile of Bray and that of its hinterland, means that most schools have no problem in filling places. However, one of the issues for young people is that they may not be able to attend the school of their choice and, as not all schools offer the same set of subjects; this can have negative consequences in terms of subject choice and availability. Therefore, there is an onus on schools to ensure the broadest curriculum and subject choice possible is available in their school.

"I wish that in the Leaving you could do applied maths in school and not go to the Institute"

"If you want to be a doctor then this isn't the school to go to. They don't do chemistry. There's no teacher"

“There is no PE after 3rd year and there should be. The LCA class do but 5th and 6th years don’t”

“We had to make a choice between art and geography. Some of us wanted to do art but were forced into doing geography”

“There’s no metal work anymore. We missed a year of geography when metalwork stopped because the teacher left. We’re in junior cert year now and have to catch up with the geography because we had been doing metalwork to start off with”

The LCA course was specifically mentioned on a number of occasions as being enjoyable and a course that was valued but one issue raised was the impossibility of attending college having completed it. It would appear that some young people and their families were not aware of this although others were aware having spoken with the Guidance Counsellor in their school.

“I knew because I went down to the Guidance Counsellor. But people have come up to the Centre and have said that it wasn’t explained to them”

Many female students indicated that they would like the opportunity to do the more ‘typical male subjects’ such as metal work, woodwork and technology. This is an important issue commented upon by many researchers and critics – the need to ensure that some subject areas do not become the preserve of one gender – this issue of subject choice and availability is an equality issue for all schools.

There was also a feeling that there was not enough emphasis on physical education and that more time should be made available for this subject along with more opportunity especially at senior level.

Most students expressed a wish to continue their education through either going to college, doing an apprenticeship, further training or employment. However, there were a significant number who had already left school after their junior cert or who were planning to leave because they felt that school was not for them. Some simply had difficulties in sitting in class because they found concentration difficult, had no interest in the subject or because their aggressive behaviour was unacceptable in class. One student spoke briefly about attending an anger management class. For those young people who had already made up their minds to leave by choice, they just wanted to get out and either access some training for, or go straight into, the world of work.

“I am going to FAS not because of money but because we’re Travellers and I get to mix with my own kind there”

“I didn’t like anything about school and couldn’t wait to leave”

■ Views on suspension

Suspension from school can affect a young person’s knowledge of the subjects they study and therefore long-term education and employment opportunities. Some of the reasons given for suspension included ‘having dyed hair’, ‘skipping school’, ‘cursing at the teacher’ as well as ‘messaging’.

Various comments on suspension included the following:

“Suspension is a fun day out. You just sit at home. Daddy gave out but that was it”

“You miss out on work and education”

“They think you’ll catch up but you don’t”

“Suspension – I got two weeks – you can stay in bed but it’s boring”

“There should be lunch time detention or you clean something...”

“At the start of the year we had a class of 21. There are only 15 now. People were sick of getting suspended. There was one lad in our class and it was like they waited for him to leave. We kept saying he’s left but they wouldn’t ring him”

It would appear that schools and students could benefit considerably from considering the development of a ‘reintegration’ programme following suspension as is the case in some schools. It was clear that young people who are involved in the School Completion Programme learned a lot from their experiences and involvement – some of the comments included:

“We get to talk it (the issue) over here and it helps”

“You learn stuff – not to take drugs, how it’s important to go to school everyday, we get to go on trips”

When asked if students would like more practical/interactive classes, 88% of survey respondents said they would. 67% thought schools deal adequately with sports and recreation. 50% felt that the school offers support in personal matters whilst 35% disagreed.

■ Views on transferring from primary to post-primary school

There was an almost even split in opinions when asked about being nervous about the transfer from primary to post primary school. Many reasons were given with knowing others transferring to the same school being the single most important variable in how young people dealt with the move.

Those who said they were **not nervous** when transferring felt this way because:

"I thought it was just some thing you had to deal with"

"I was happy and excited and I wanted to go"

"I was confident in myself during the transferral period"

"Because all my friends were there"

"Because my brothers previously went to the school and they enjoyed it"

Amongst those who expressed nervousness, the issues included being afraid or nervous of change, not knowing others attending the new school, longer hours, different teachers, and additional subjects.

"I was just nervous of change and worried that I'd lose contact with friends"

"Because it is a different thing than primary school"

"Because I had been in a mixed school and now an all girls' school"

"Yes because it's so different; it's a school where everything is new e.g. teachers, students, the school itself"

Additional issues included the new school hours, making new friends, getting used to the school and the different classes and teachers, exams, more homework in the evenings and over weekends.

There was a resounding "yes" when students were asked if the school was welcoming to incoming first year students. Some schools run induction weeks and other activities for young students to make them feel more comfortable and these were universally welcomed. Many of the issues raised in this report can be effectively dealt with through positive policies of inclusion – as is indicated by this response.

When speaking with a number of young Travellers, they felt that there should be no separation at primary level between Traveller and settled young people and all should go to the one school. When asked about transferring from Traveller primary education to "settled" secondary school, it was clear that some Travellers were not comfortable and did not settle and left school early.

"It was difficult mixing with other people. If they were going to talk to you, you don't know what to say back"

"When I went to the secondary school first, I was there in the class by myself – we (her friend and herself) were put in separate classes. My friend has moved into my class now"

"Our national school was so different. Going to different classes was hard. We were used to 9/10 in our old school and then we moved to having 30 students in the classroom"

Suggestions made by young Travellers included:

"There should be mixed Travellers and settled in school"

"You should meet other young people before going to school maybe on Saturday"

Overall a number of suggestions were made on making the transfer easier including:

- Shorter school hours for 1st years
- Less homework for the first few months with an increasing workload
- A map of the new school should be provided in advance for new students
- More summer camps prior to going to secondary school to get to know each other
- Visiting their new school a few times before formally attending
- Specific events for first years – welcoming day, special introductory classes, be shown around the school so they can recognise class rooms
- Ensure that young people are comfortable, that they are informed of what other students are like, what is expected of them, what the atmosphere is like etc.
- Being placed in classes with their friends from primary school
- Encourage older students to look out for the younger one – mentoring or a buddy system where the 5th years would each 'adopt' a first year
- Where possible avoid moving classes about
- Looking at teaching methods that are more supportive
- Being able to pick the school you want to attend and not having to go to a particular school just because of location

■ On the school environment

Why young people go to school

The reasons given as to why young people go to school include:

- I want a better future
- I want to be well-educated
- I have to
- I want to learn
- To be with friends
- To be rich
- Grow up to be someone.

"We have to learn writing and maths and Irish"

"We want to be smart"

"I want to be an artist, to go to college and study and be an artist"

“Good for education – so later on you can read and you can write. Whereas in some countries people are not able to read and not able to write. We’re very lucky here because you could not go to school and not learn how to read and write”

“So that we can go and get certain jobs”

■ What young people like about school

Responses included a like of different subjects including P.E., art and history as well as the chance to meet friends and make new ones. The school choir was considered a very good thing by some students, as were school tours and outings.

In every school, young people were looking for more time to do PE, ‘break time’ was also important in that it allowed time to do your own “thing”. Some mentioned specific teachers by name, citing their kindness as something important.

“You are much more sociable in school. You have loads of friends so when you’re on break you get to talk to your friends”

“After school activities. You don’t just sit around doing books all the time. Sometimes you go outside and do stuff and that’s what I like about it”

“I like the way they teach in school, they make you understand it better and understand it in a better way. All the stuff they’re telling you. Like if your parents tell you, they have a different way of explaining it to you. Teachers have an easier way”

■ What young people dislike about school

A variety of issues were cited including the availability of subjects, having to wake up early and not doing enough computer based work. Many of the students didn’t like having Irish or Spanish lessons – they didn’t see the point in learning languages they wouldn’t use. The greatest amount of discussion involved homework - it wasn’t the homework itself directly but the amount and, at times, its difficulty. A number of specific subjects seemed to agitate students, especially German and Irish.

Additional issues included the local environment, local people, youth issues and school facilities.

“We have no facilities, we haven’t got proper classrooms”

“I find it really bad that the school could not have teachers at the ready to replace teachers with sickness/injury”

“There is a lack of respect for young people and you are not allowed to be the person you want to be”

“Homophobic taunts are seen as “normal” it’s okay to make them”

“I’d rather go to FAS than stay in school”

“The school needs to be cleaned. The classrooms are filthy. You can’t wear white to school! And the toilets smell so bad”

“Because of where we’re from, teachers listen to others more than us from Fassaroe, they choose the posh kids”

While bullying and discrimination against particular students or groups did not emerge as a major issue for all students, it remains an important issue for those affected and, in the instances where bullying or discrimination does occur, schools could do more to be effective in their responses. This research has highlighted the fact that Travellers, gay or lesbian students as well as students who do not ‘fit’ their peers’ norms can and do suffer from discrimination and instances of bullying.

■ Desired changes

There should be more sports and after school activities and better facilities, school rules should be negotiated with more subject choice, class sizes should be kept as small as possible, lockers for all students as well as more comfortable chairs in the classroom and especially in science labs where young people often spend double classes sitting on wooden stools.

There were different debates about uniforms even within the same school with strong views on both sides – pro and con. An additional equality issue that did unite one group was the wish to wear trousers as well as skirts especially on cold days.

Different groups and ages also highlighted the amount of homework to be completed of an evening or weekend. Other issues raised included:

“That we would have more space and sports”

“Get the swimming pool back”

“Be allowed to wear make-up”

“Should be able to do what you want with your hair – we just get into trouble. Women teachers come in with highlights in their hair and they don’t get into trouble”

“The Uniform skirt is uncomfortable and you have to keep it clean for a week”

“There is not much being done about graffiti on the walls and desks- racist comments written on desks have been ignored yet when a pencil case goes missing there is a full investigation”

“Trousers to wear instead of skirts because most people don’t like it”

"I think these problems arise from the home as parents teach their children what's right and what's wrong so it's strongly/mostly up to the parents to solve these kinds of problems"

"We should be able to do more interesting subjects like drama and computers – today we live around computers"

"Not enough after schools stuff like basketball, camogie, tennis, drama, arts subjects, yoga, marshal arts – kickboxing, self defence and gymnastics"

"Some teachers should watch their behaviour – they influence students and so give back cheek"

■ On homework clubs

Positive things about the Homework Club included the people they met there, both young people and the coordinators who ran the club, the various amusements – snooker, table soccer – as well as the food they were given. All the students agreed that they liked the support available at the Marian Centre for homework. Respondents had no complaints about the homework club except to argue that that it should be held more frequently (the students attended twice a week) and they didn't like the fact that some couldn't attend because they were on the waiting list.

■ On the school atmosphere

The majority of young people felt the school atmosphere was friendly due to friends being there, the school being small so young people tend to know everyone, good discipline and good atmosphere in the school and having teachers who respect their students.

Those who felt negative feelings towards the atmosphere in their school felt that there was too much messing and slugging, that if you were not into sport then you were "viewed as strange", that there isn't enough respect between teachers and students and that older students can intimidate younger students.

■ On the experience of Travellers

A focus group discussion was held in the Traveller Education Centre and a number of specific issues arose – those who were involved in the consultation had left school and gone to the Centre to do modules for the Junior and Leaving Certificate.

A number of differences between formal school and the Centre were referred to and these included being paid while attending, working in a different way and having smaller class sizes. However, some believed it to be just like school where rules have been laid down and they are still 'not allowed to wear things, do things'.

"Here you have more time to do the work than in school. And you have more help than you do in school"

"The sizes of the classroom are smaller"

"I learn better here"

"Some in school were grand but others weren't. Some of them would look down at you sniggering and telling you the state of the way you dress, look at you, go home and wash yourself. You might have washed better than them and you'd be clean like"

"Being called knackers"

The group made a number of recommendations as to how teachers and schools could help young Travellers in school. They believe that there should be more time made for Travellers including extra classes and more awareness training for teachers re Traveller issues. Travellers appear to be aware of the lack of effective role models amongst their community as regards progressing on from school and taking up posts as teachers for example. However, there are many positive examples even in Bray, but awareness of them does not appear to have filtered through fully.

"If Traveller children want to learn Irish and they don't know it then they should have an extra teacher"

"They should get more attention. Traveller people don't know as much as the country people know. Country people went to different schools. Most of us went to an all Traveller school before going to the secondary school and some of us went to an all Traveller secondary school as well. But they were in posh schools all their lives so they learned certain languages and that. But when we went to secondary we didn't learn the same. But they expect us to know the same as them"

"You know you never see a Traveller as a teacher. Travellers don't get half as much education"

"You rarely see a traveller going to college"

When asked if getting paid to attend was important, the answer was a resounding yes. The young people believed it to be the only way they would have money in their pockets on a Friday. When it was put to them that other young people attending formal school without getting paid might take up a part time job for pocket money, the following was the response:

"In school you can get a job if you want to. But people don't give us kind of people work. Travellers don't get as much a chance"

"They don't want to give Travellers jobs because they don't want to lose customers"

When asked about what they do now at the Centre, the young people who wanted to do more, suggested

“Childcare so I could work in a crèche”
“Hairdressing”.

They also made suggestions for what could be provided in the community including a swimming pool, discos, and a big hall for Travellers only and a shopping centre.

■ Views on school facilities

Young people can spend up to seven hours a day in the school grounds and it is therefore no surprise that they were quite vocal on facilities with the following positive and negative aspects mentioned.

■ Positive:

“There is almost every kind of sport to join, sufficient space to play them and most are in good condition”

“Facilities are fab and I like my school very much. It is a fun school and has good teachers”

“Because there’s tennis, badminton, basketball, hockey, peace and justice, amnesty and the drama club... there’s stuff for everyone”

■ Negative:

“No access for people with disabilities”

“Because most classes in the school are a wreck and it needs to be done up quick”

“The classrooms are a bit squashed and there are not enough fields or football nets”

“I think it would be so much more beneficial if we had a sports hall”

“Most of the facilities are adequate but the toilets are really disgusting- most of them are blocked and have no locks on the doors”

“Having two buildings down the road from each other causes danger to students who have to cross the road several times a day”

Among the **suggestions received for improving school facilities** were:

“We should have different coloured rooms”

“We should be able to design the classroom because we’re the ones staying in it for the year”

“We need better toilets – our ones are small, and the taps are broken. The toilets don’t lock in the boys toilets”

“We only get to cook once a month in home economics”

“They put the small classes in big rooms and the big classes in small rooms. It doesn’t make sense”

“We don’t get to make changes in the canteen. We were asked but nothing was done. At least it is cheaper than Spar”

“Football, basketball and fashion is on at the same time on the same day. This should be changed so that you have a choice of going to all of these”

■ On bullying and slagging

Most young people thought that bullying was not a major issue for the majority of students in their school but they readily recognise that it certainly does happen - verbal, physical and mental. It was felt that any bullying taking place was an act of a few individuals or small groups rather than a school-wide problem but most of those interviewed felt that not enough was being done to prevent it when it does occur. There was a general concern that teachers and Principals could and should do more to stamp it out.

“Slagging and exclusion, older students pushing 1st years around”

“Verbal; you’re pointed out for being in anyway different”

“Yelling the person’s name to taking their books/bags/even shoes!”

“Beating up and cursing”.

“On the toilet walls. Writing nasty comments on toilet walls”

“Intimidation”

One group of young people suggested that bullying and racism go hand in hand. As there are a number of young people from different countries attending their school, they felt that these students get left out and get picked on simply because of their colour or their language. The group made a number of suggestions - more awareness of different people and where they come from and more group activities where everyone can get involved

When asked if anything extra could be done by the school authorities to prevent bullying some suggestions were made:

- More support for children - tell all the students the adults are there if they need to tell them something
- More teachers on yard duty and walking around the corridors
- Greater punishment for people who bully
- Have a counsellor that would take action

- Run anti-bullying workshops
- Clamp down on slagging
- Teachers should be more attentive towards students who they know are trouble makers
- Involve bullies in sports teams and pastoral care teams etc

■ On Youthreach

The general response of the group on why they attend Youthreach was 'for the money'. Other reasons given were:

"Got kicked out of school. I heard about it"

"Nothing else to do"

"I had no choice to come here. I was only 15 so had to"

"If work experience works out well and they agree to keep us on then we'll stay"

There were a few noted differences between Youthreach and attending formal education.

"A lot easier, more laid back"

"Teachers in school - you can't say nothing or you'll get suspended. Teachers would sit me at the back of the class and wouldn't let me participate. Cause I answered them back. Here they will let you talk"

"You get on with people here more"

"I wasn't able for it. It was difficult – listening to teacher, sitting there, doing tests"

■ Young people on what they would change in education

Despite having many opinions and ideas on education, on training, on the curriculum, on being consulted, the overall feeling among young people was that they do not have the power to change the education system despite believing that they should.

Among the reasons for this are:

- not having a student council
- the system 'doesn't allow it'
- educators think they know best, and so don't have to listen
- students 'have to take what they are given'.

However, there were some who felt that they did have a voice and the power to change things. Possible methods for change include student councils, 'rate my teacher' website, strikes, helpful teachers, mobilising young people as a group - 'because if enough people speak, enough will be done'.

"Doing this survey, I'm changing education"

"Not let teachers over 50 teach"

"Students should have a greater say"

"We should have an assembly every month in school"

"We should have a debate on the school – on what we like and don't like"

"The Principal should be close to the students. I was able to speak to the last principal – had loads of problems – but I can't do this now"

The majority of young people believed there would be some difficulty with young people having the power to change education citing a number of reasons including being too idealistic, being lazy and not always taking things seriously.

Overall, if it were possible, they would instigate the following changes - more practical learning and a more casual approach, more P.E., a shorter curriculum, more discussion time and practical work, more field trips, no Irish in the Leaving Cert but compulsory to learn up to 3rd year, more computer based learning and a lot more practical subjects, a shorter school day, bigger buildings for all schools and recreational areas and more activities

■ Views on community and living in Bray

This was one of the most animated parts of the consultation with many varying views and opinions being expressed as to what is good and bad about being from and living in Bray or its environs.

■ What young people like

The seafront, Main Street and 'the area just up Bray Head' were all cited as places liked in the Bray area along with Chinese restaurants, the cinema and football pitches, the Dart, the amusements and the overall size of the town. Many students enjoyed the wide variety of youth clubs and community groups they could join especially the various sports clubs and associations. Many of the students thought that the promenade was beautiful, and that Bray Head was worth visiting. Many referred often to the local environment – the trees and forests, the view/pleasant scenery, the Sugarloaf, the large green area and open spaces.

Having friends and people they know was classed as very important and as Bray is relatively built up and compact in size, many spoke of living close to friends and being able to walk to each other's houses and so meet up regularly.

Community spirit was also mentioned - *"Close knit community", "It is a nice friendly estate and many people there are really nice", "It is quiet and there is no issue of anti-social behaviour", "I like the fact that neighbours look out for each other, people well most people are friendly and I have a lot of friends"*

"We have a youth club in our estate. It's something for us to do - the only thing to look forward to. These clubs aren't just about fun, there's drug education, telling us things, like school sometimes but better. We get information, it's a good atmosphere, we have our own say, we can talk to the youth leaders about anything. We're going on an Exchange to Latvia in the summer. We get choices of where we want to go - horse riding, cinema etc."

■ What young people do not like about where they live

Those consulted generally got very animated during this discussion – both in responding to the survey directly and also in the focus groups. It was difficult to summarise everything that was said such were the number of issues raised.

There was widespread disapproval of the amount of litter across Bray with many referring to previous national findings where Bray was labelled as the dirtiest town in Ireland. There is too much litter, especially towards the river, and there is a great deal of graffiti. The numerous abandoned or half-finished buildings were seen as eyesores. The issue of traffic congestion was also raised - there is too much traffic, with not enough car parks or parking spaces.

"Rubbish is dumped in the playground. There are two broken swings and what happens if someone falls off the swing? They could actually fall back the glass could go in their heads. There are baby swings there and there is glass all around it. You can't play in the playground"

"There is nowhere for young people to hang out without trespassing/being kicked out"

"Drugs are a big part of teenage life and underage drinking is also"

"Casual homophobia"

"Very little support for people who have/had an issue"

"Only a few bicycle lanes"

"Getting work experience can be difficult. A lot of foreigners are employed now instead of us"

"What about us – 13/14 year olds? There are discos for 7 year olds"

"There's the Star amusements, cinema, indoor football but you need money for all of these"

"Drugs are a big problem. Children are watching this going on"

"There's no litter warden up here. There are no bins in the estate either. No wonder it looks as bad as it does sometimes"

"We don't have a phone box in the estate"

"There is no shop in the actual estate. Where the shop is, is very dangerous for young people because they have to cross the main road."

"Joyriding happens often. Some people from the estate and others from outside are involved."

"60 young people attend the drop in at the Resource Centre on Tuesdays. There are 900 houses and only 2 youth workers. There's just not enough for everyone who wants to attend. There's a waiting list but no staff to take on the young people. Some are in school, some are not"

■ Young Travellers on living in Bray

Speaking with a group of young Travellers who live on a halting site provided a different view of what life can be like.

"We can't get NTL because of the trees"

"People dump rubbish and we get the blame – it's other Travellers and settled people. Our site looked like a dump and we couldn't drive our cars into the site. So they got cameras"

"We've got water rats which are different to ordinary rats"

"We have steel toilets and they are very cold. They (the Council) must think we are in Mountjoy! We have to go outside our trailer to use the toilet and the shower. This room attached to the trailer has no heater and is often like an ice cube. The boiler has gone since last year – there's no hot water"

"My sister has asthma and she can't really go out because of the sewerage in the river that is close to the area. They said years ago that they are knocking down the site and building bungalows. This hasn't happened yet"

"It is very dangerous because children can run onto the road. We can't close the gates because they are rusted"

"There's nothing for young kids to do – no swings, nothing. They usually just stay in the trailers otherwise they could go out on to the road and a car could run them down"

"There's a big mucky field which is like a swamp"

"Shopkeepers follow you around the shop – ask what size you are looking for..."

"Give us a chance – shopkeepers. Talk to us – give me a chance – I'm not going to steal things"

■ Young people with disabilities

Young People with Disabilities have identified a number of issues in the community that prevent them from actively participating in the life of the town and where, because of their disability, they are discriminated against. The following are some issues that need to be addressed:

- Footpaths need to change in some areas of the town because they are terrible for wheelchairs. There is a 'kerb crawler' on the chair but it is still hard to get up on the path.
- The doors to shops in the town are very narrow making access in a wheelchair almost impossible in some cases.
- There should be more activities for young people in wheelchairs.
- There is no lift in the local Bray Cinema and unless young people get carried up the stairs, they have to go to Dun Laoghaire instead.
- It can be difficult to get parking in the town sometimes despite there being a disabled car space on the Main Street.
- There should be a locally accessible pool facility.
- Local buses should have greater space for wheelchair users. If one wheelchair user is on the bus already, the space is taken and people have to wait for the next bus. Sometimes wheelchairs are in competition with buggies for the space on the bus!
- There is need for Wheelchair friendly public toilets as there are not enough in the town.

■ Major issues for young people living in the Bray area

A large number of diverse issues were raised which referred to personal security, local people, facilities, drugs and alcohol, the general appearance of the local area, exams and being young and fitting in.

"We don't have any play area around and the space that is available is full of rubbish, bottles"

"No skate park no swimming pool and an abundance of litter and skangers (who make it dangerous to enjoy places like Bray Head or the beach"

"It doesn't have many places to go which will increase underage drinking and other issues e.g. if we had an arcade or pool hall people wouldn't be forced to roam the streets. Also the Gardai give out for roaming the streets"

"There isn't a 24 hour fire service and sometimes, the fire brigade from Wicklow is faster than the Bray one. The Dublin/Dun Laoghaire Fire Service was called for some fires even though the Bray one was by far closer"

"They set the new playground on fire. They chopped the baby swings and pooped over the slide. The bottle banks were burned out after a couple of weeks. And the Slide was burned as well"

Additional issues mentioned included "troublesome" youths, hassles with the police, snobbery, ignorance, stupidity and racism, no swimming pool, The lack of things to do – "crowds of young people go to the field and drink there until the Guards come along", too many pubs in Bray and it leads to everyone going to the pub, not enough facilities for children, erratic public transport, less and less green spaces with people building everywhere they can, not enough or no lighting in some estates, not enough Gardai on the beat around the estates.

■ Young people and the Gardai

It would appear from this consultation that the relationship between young people and Gardai can be strained especially for those living in particular areas of Bray.

"There are so many guards and they don't do anything. We don't see them"

"Some Gardai are friendly. But only one or two"

"They come up over drinking in the fields but if it is something serious that happens it takes them ages to come up to us. Like the joyriding that happened the other night – they didn't come up for a long time after they were called"

"Even if you know you're rights it doesn't matter. They don't listen to you"

"Guards say go home and we'd tell them that we are sitting in own estate. We have to sit on the path or on the wall because there's nowhere else to go. They shine a big light in your face and say what's your name? Your Ma doesn't believe you when you say guards were hassling me"

"We've had guards who are very friendly in the youth club but then if you meet the same Gardai down the town, they can treat you very different"

"Once you say you're from Fassaroe they want to know what are you doing"

"Guards should be themselves and don't go on a power trip"

■ Describing an 'ideal Bray'

Many of the students want facilities where young people can 'hang out' without being harassed or moved on, more festivals, public celebrations and events (with rides on the seafront like those on St. Patrick's Day) bringing people together, a swimming pool that has been long promised as well as more tennis courts and skate parks.

Others want Bray to be cleaner and tidier where there are good shops, cheap transport and no graffiti or litter and no chewing gum on the streets. People should be educated about the environment and the importance of clean streets and clean rivers. There should be more and better employment opportunities (especially part time) for young people in the area. Any form of racism that exists should be stopped and there should be no fighting.

It was felt that transport could be better and cheaper and it should be safe for young people and all citizens to go where they want without fear at any time, day or night. The local gardai should be involved in this.

The people of Bray should be more supportive towards young people and it should be a drug free (drugs and alcohol) environment.

There was general agreement that several buildings needed to be renovated or completed. The students would increase the number of sports facilities available, as well as complete the half-finished shopping mall in the town centre.

“Somewhere for young people to go. Some of the things that are happening are happening in the estates. There should be something on the main street, or in the middle of Bray. Something for 12-18 year olds”

“Playgrounds for younger children should have bigger and higher railings or walls to protect them from vandalism”

“There is no healthy food place open past 5pm – cafes who sell proper food and at a rate for young people”

“There are always road works in Bray. They never seem to finish it”

“Every few months there is a clean up day in the estate but nothing is said in the newspaper about the good news story”

“Volunteers have to clear the pitch otherwise the young people wouldn’t be able to play on it. One of the best things we have is football”

“There should be security on the playgrounds. CE workers could do it”

“More full time youth workers”

■ Examples of youth involvement at local community level

During the research a wide variety of examples of youth involvement were given including the following cleaning up in the community, having a Fair Trade shop in my school, the Environmental week in Knocksink, Celtic Youth Bray, St. Vincent de Paul, Junior SVP, collections for things such as Heart foundation, Autism, Carers Association, bag packing, sponsored

walks, football tournament held for SVP, helped train Bray Lakers, taking inner city kids bowling, the Greystones Summer project (helper), helping kids, playing games and sorting out events for children, Bray Emmets summer camp, Enniskerry charity walk/ride., singing for the homeless, sponsored walk to help raise money for school and working in a Montessori school for the summer.

■ Some survey findings

94% of respondents aged between 12 and 18 years stated that they had a mobile phone

In terms of access to the Internet, the majority of young people who responded have access to the Internet at home. In addition, school, the library, and the local Internet café all provide access for young people. Others named their friends and relatives as possible Internet access providers.

24% of young people stated that they work on a part-time basis. The majority, 72% of young people, stated that they did not work part-time

Getting to school by car was the most popular way of getting to school followed by bus, walking and cycling.

80% of young people stated that they do have breakfast in the morning in comparison to 15% who said they do not.

Chapter 4

Conclusions

Below, we have attempted to summarise the main issues that arose during the consultations – we have avoided including views and opinions that were specific to individuals or to limited numbers of those consulted. The conclusions outlined below represent general trends and strands of opinion as expressed by many of those consulted.

■ General

- Overall, young people strongly welcomed being asked their views on issues affecting them directly, in this case education and the community. They were anxious to engage, to offer their views (and to discuss them) and exhibited a maturity of response in the ‘balance’ shown and their acceptance of a diversity of views on issues discussed as well as in the practical suggestions and proposals put forward.

However, as with many similar surveys elsewhere, having been consulted, the young people expect feedback and action to follow.

- It is also clear that those young people consulted have very strong opinions and perceptions when it comes to talking about their local community and the town in which they live. These opinions are, to a significant extent, positive – those consulted were very clear about what they liked about Bray and about what they wanted for Bray but they were also strongly negative – clear and precise about what is wrong and what is missing in Bray.
- Those consulted emphasised a number of key issues – strong awareness of class divisions in Bray, the environment and, in particular litter and derelict sites, safety, drugs and substance abuse and the need for significantly improved facilities especially for young people. They talked positively about the local environment, the seafront, certain facilities and amenities and, interestingly, about the ‘reasonable size’ of the town that facilitates meeting with friends etc.
- Broadly speaking, with the exception of the situation in some schools (where staff and management are ‘sympathetic’ and where effective school councils exist), there is a widespread view amongst young people in Bray, by virtue of their age and adult attitudes and actions towards them, have little or no say in community issues and decisions as well as in school policies and practices.

It is, however, important to note that those consulted have mixed feelings about their opinions being heard in the school and/or the community. Those who responded positively believed that through the local student and junior council some/many young people had a voice. Also, they felt that there were specific people in the community that could be spoken to if an issue arose. In direct contrast to this, many young people felt they did not have any voice and, because of age or perceived inexperience in life, would not have their opinions listened to.

- During the consultations, it became very clear that students of all ages and backgrounds have considerable interest in local, national and global issues, have strong views about them and would wish to hear and learn more about these if the opportunities were made available to them. The oft cited view that young people have little interest in such issues was strongly contradicted by this survey.
- There are significant problems for young people with disabilities which prevent them from actively participating in the life of the town and where, because of their disability, they are discriminated against. Examples include the footpaths, narrow doors throughout the town, activities for young people in wheelchairs, access to the Bray cinemas, local buses and toilet facilities.

■ Education

- When asked if they have a say in their school, the majority of young people consulted said they had – this is in stark contrast to their responses as regards having a voice in the community (see below). However, whilst young people feel they have some say in school, they recognise that they do not have the power to change education and believe strongly that they should be able to influence needed change.

Those consulted were pragmatic and realistic as regards the limitations or dangers associated with a greater say for students – they referred to people not taking it seriously, to the making of idealistic and unworkable rules (e.g. ‘no school on Mondays!’), the possibility that everyone might disagree and the results could make things worse but, tellingly, also added that adults don’t listen to young people anyway.

- Those consulted were quite clear that a number of things should, and need to, change as regards schools and education – the physical environment of schools, the provision of key facilities (especially for PE but also as regards litter, toilets, decoration etc.); teachers (listening more, avoiding favouritism, putting some students down, availability of substitute teachers etc.); exams and methods of assessment, transport and the types of punishment used.

A number of practical and workable suggestions were offered in a number of key areas – as regards the transition from primary to post-primary (shorter days initially, reduced homework initially, a 'buddy system' etc.), homework, classroom decoration and design, subject and curriculum choices etc.

- This survey has reinforced the view that there are a number of significant issues and challenges associated with the transition from primary to post-primary school and there is considerable anxiety amongst those about to undertake that transition.

Without question, change is challenging, regardless of age or status etc. In relation to school, the new timetable, new people, new teachers, new school, more homework, more subjects, more exams and more pressure can all lead to increased fear in transferring from primary to post primary school. Those consulted felt strongly that more could be done to ease the transition.

- Those consulted believed that bullying is not a significant issue for a majority of students in schools, however it clearly does occur with significant consequences for those affected and whilst schools are generally effective in dealing with it, more needs to be done to challenge and eradicate it.
- There is a strong desire for the availability of a broader range of subjects especially those deemed to be of practical relevance – computers, languages, home economics etc. It is a concern, expressed frequently in this survey, that some young people are unable to pursue the subjects that they are most interested in because of timetable clashes or teacher changes etc.
- From this survey, it is evident that young people are certainly open to additional courses and seminars that may not currently be provided in the formal education sector. They are only vaguely aware of additional training options open to them in the local community after school. Numerous suggestions were made in terms of other courses that young people would be interested in and these include computers, political studies, psychology, and youth leadership.

- From this survey, it is quite clear that young Travellers have a very different educational and community experience in comparison to settled young people. Young Travellers feel that they are not treated equally while in school and where they felt extra attention and support was needed, they did not receive it. They referred to name calling, exclusion, bullying and discrimination. Smaller classes appear to work better for such young Travellers.

There is a strong, ongoing belief amongst young Travellers that because of who they are, they suffer discrimination – in school, in shops, in service amenities, in the community.

■ Community

- The most striking outcome of this survey as regards young people and their communities in Bray is that whereas they feel they do have some say in school, they do not believe this to be the case in the community. The majority of those consulted felt that they had no say in the community at all – this was a general pattern of response. This was a source of frustration and alienation amongst those consulted.

This response may be explained by the number of student and pupil councils operating in local schools in comparison to the lack of similar youth forums or structures in the community. Reference was made to the Bray Junior Council but this would appear to involve only a very small number of young people.

- There are many different issues of concern for young people about their local area the greatest of which are litter and the environment, security, education, alcohol and drugs, perceived discrimination by Gardai, the lack of a central youth friendly facility where young people can hang out, bullying and racism.

Again, in contrast to their experience in school, bullying in the community has been identified as an issue by over one-third of respondents in the consultation. This should be a matter of considerable concern for Bray.

Logically, young people would like to be consulted much more widely on local and broader social issues such as alcohol and drugs, the environment, perceived discrimination by Gardai and, significantly, the provision of facilities.

- Many of those consulted had taken part in community, charity and/or volunteer activities and the range of such activities is very broad. Those consulted show a strong interest and commitment to being involved if such involvement is meaningful and negotiated.

Recommendations

- Regular, ongoing and systematic consultation with young people on all the issues covered in this survey and on life and community issues in Bray and beyond should become the norm. In order to develop greater citizenship, participation and ownership, young people should be provided with realistic and meaningful opportunities to engage with all of the major structures, organisations and events in Bray.

Such involvement and ongoing engagement is not just the responsibility of 'youth' organisations (although they should have a key lead role), it is the responsibility of all organisations and structures within Bray, especially those that view themselves as providing leadership. Each and every organisation and event should review its policies and practices as regards the involvement of young people and amend them as necessary.

- Organisations in the Bray Community Sector and Bray Partnership should address the under involvement of young people in their policy and decision making processes, review how these should be amended and begin the process of meaningfully involving young people. The Partnership and the community sector should then lobby other structures and organisations as regards their policies and practices.
- Bray Partnership and other relevant education and youth organisations should seek to involve young people in identifying and addressing local issues through the organisation and delivery of an Annual Youth Forum. This should go beyond school and community groups to include those young people not currently engaged and should directly include young Travellers, those who are out of school and young people with disabilities.
- The option of setting up a youth council should be explored given that there is a junior council in operation already. It should be possible to have representatives from each of the student/youth councils involved in such an overall council along with others attached to youth groups and other alternative education spaces.
- Those who participated in this survey should receive feedback from the consultation with an indication of initial actions being considered or

implemented. The outcomes of the survey should be made available publicly also.

- A multimedia youth resource, written and designed by young people, should be developed addressing many of the issues raised in this consultation and in additional locally focused research. An appropriate group within the Bray Partnership should support this and funding should be made available for such a resource that would then be available to those seeking election, to voters and also as an educational tool for young people. This might involve the setting up of a citizenship group in the town that would reflect in membership, those young people who live in the town and its environs.
- Local schools in collaboration with the Bray Partnership and other appropriate groups and organisations should set about working together to develop an initiative whereby young people can engage more with the courses they identified and expressed an interest in. Local groups with specific expertise should be encouraged to get involved in delivery of individual programmes such as Bray Youth Service (youth leadership courses), Bray MABS (money management), Bray Town Council (recycling and the environment) etc. A local showcase of available courses and training opportunities should be considered and should involve local colleges of education, guidance counsellors, FAS etc.

Bray Partnership and the Bray youth sector should work closer together on the supply and development of workshops/seminars for young people in areas of interest outside of those provided through the formal school curriculum.

- An audit of subject choice in local schools should be undertaken to establish the options available so that choices could be maximised and, where feasible, resources pooled in order to support student preferences and interests. An audit of availability should be considered by local schools.
- The lack of adequate emphasis and opportunity for physical education needs to be addressed as a matter of some urgency. Local schools along with community groups, supported by the Bray

Education Network and Bray Partnership should prepare a local audit of available facilities (within both schools and the community), identifying gaps and problems as a basis upon which to lobby the Department of Education and Science as well as other relevant Departments.

Local politicians and the local business sector should also be lobbied for support. Young people should be directly involved in the undertaking of such an audit as well as in the lobbying process.

- Schools should maximise the opportunities for young people to voice their opinions and to be involved in planning actions, policies and activities that are both school and community orientated. All schools should at the very least, have in operation, an effective student/pupil council and where decisions made go against those of the students, that these be explained in detail to encourage greater understanding and ownership. Each local second level school should review and, where necessary, take action on a number of issues raised by students including:
 - ensuring that a mentoring or buddy system is in place to support first years
 - the needs of students with disabilities
 - the need to develop more effective policies and actions on bullying, discrimination and racism and renewing such policies regularly.

This latter point needs particular attention in that it has significant and ongoing consequences for those affected.

- Greater emphasis by both school and community should be placed on peer education methodologies whereby young people educate other young people on a variety of issues. One possible way of doing this could be involving young people (possibly Transition Years) in any future local research surveys that may be undertaken by Bray Partnership. This would involve young people learning more about their local community and also developing research and consultation skills.
- Local schools and community groups need to work together more closely to facilitate the progression of young people from one stage of their education to the next. This should involve, as suggested in this survey, summer camps or participatory activities that will ease young people into their new environment and ease their fears and concerns. Some activities are already in place but these need additional support and involvement and need to be available to a wider cohort of students.

- The Department of Education and Science should provide funding to schools, community and youth organisations to plan and deliver effective transfer programmes that alleviate young people's fears and enhance their progression through the education system. Specific people should be employed to have responsibility for dealing with the transition period between primary and secondary schools. Particular but not sole attention needs to be focused on schools and areas that have been designated disadvantaged where there may be greater chance of non-transferral.

The additional costs, especially for families from disadvantaged backgrounds, needs to be examined with specific focus on the cost of books and uniforms.

Particular attention should be paid to young Travellers and ethnic minority young people who are transferring from primary to secondary level schools to ensure all is done to facilitate an easy move and possible encouragement of these young people to stay and complete their education to 6th year.

- Young Travellers expressed feelings of being discriminated against especially when it comes to getting employment in the local area. This is something that needs to be addressed in consultation with Bray Chamber of Commerce and the Bray Partnership.
- A large number of young people have participated in community and voluntary activities. However, an equally large number of young people have not. The Bray Volunteer Bureau has gone some way to address this issue by meeting with Transition Year Co-ordinators on the subject. Young people should be facilitated and encouraged to volunteer at all stages and ages. An overall strategy needs to be developed in this regard which may include local community groups hosting a special school and youth group day where young people attend and hear about the opportunities for volunteering available to them in the community and the value this has personally, socially but also vocationally.

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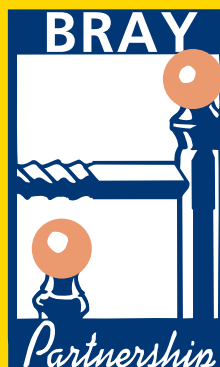
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