

# **A Mixed Methods Study into the Leadership and Enactment of the Curricular Component to Child Safeguarding in Special Schools**

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Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the  
Requirements for the Award of the  
Degree of Doctor of Education

Dublin City University  
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August 2022

## Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Education is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Signed: Barry C. Morrissey ID no.: 18213604 Date: 13<sup>th</sup> August 2022

## Acknowledgements

My long-held wish to complete doctoral research could not have come to fruition without the dedicated support of so many people.

I would like to sincerely thank my supervisors, Dr Fiona King and Dr Seline Keating, for their support and mentorship throughout my scholarly journey. Their expertise in all things related to special education and child safeguarding was matched by their patience in providing helpful feedback at all stages of the research. Sincere thanks also to Ben Meehan for his expert advice in using NVivo. The camaraderie of my fellow doctoral scholars in the School of Inclusive and Special Education was a great support over the last number of years and I cherish the memories of our impassioned debates on all things related to inclusion.

I am indebted to the principals and teachers who eagerly participated in this research. They selflessly gave me their time and their wisdom, as I endeavoured to make sense of their contexts. It was a pleasure working with them all.

I am fortunate to have amazing friends who were always a phone call away to provide laughter and distraction on days when that was needed. I am so thankful for these friendships and I am looking forward to having more time to enjoy them now. In particular, I want to acknowledge my dear friend, James Kelly, for reading earlier drafts of this thesis and offering his sage advice.

I want to thank my family for their enduring love and support. In our house growing up, my mother, Hannah, and my father, Gerard, always attached the highest value to education and made many personal sacrifices to ensure that I could attend university. I will forever be grateful for these sacrifices and for the belief that they have always had in me. I want to thank my sister, Fiona, for all of her encouragement throughout my studies.

Finally, I owe the greatest thanks to my fiancé, Val, for his constant support from the beginning of this doctoral journey until the end. He kept me motivated, made me laugh, proofread my writing and was always understanding of the many hours I had to spend away working on this project. This research belongs to us both.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

<b>CPD</b>	Continuing Professional Development
<b>CPSI</b>	Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspection
<b>CSL</b>	Centre for School Leadership
<b>DE</b>	Department of Education
<b>DLP</b>	Designated Liaison Person
<b>DP</b>	Deputy Principal
<b>ECHR</b>	European Court of Human Rights
<b>IEP</b>	Individualised Education Plan
<b>ISM</b>	In-School Management
<b>JCSP</b>	Junior Certificate School Programme
<b>MGLD</b>	Mild General Learning Disability
<b>NABMSE</b>	National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education
<b>NCCA</b>	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
<b>NCSE</b>	National Council for Special Education
<b>PDST</b>	Professional Development Service for Teachers
<b>PLC</b>	Professional Learning Community
<b>QQI</b>	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
<b>RSE</b>	Relationships and Sexuality Education
<b>SET</b>	Special Education Teacher
<b>SN</b>	Special Needs
<b>SNA</b>	Special Needs Assistant
<b>SP</b>	Severe to Profound
<b>SPHE</b>	Social, Personal and Health Education
<b>SPSS</b>	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNCRPD</b>	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

## Abstract

### A Mixed Methods Study into the Leadership and Enactment of the Curricular Component to Child Safeguarding in Special Schools

Barry Morrissey

The *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools* (Government of Ireland, 2017a) render the teaching of the *Stay Safe* programme (MacIntyre and Lawlor, 2016) mandatory for all primary and special schools in Ireland. *Stay Safe* is a personal safety and abuse-prevention programme which aims to reduce children's susceptibility to abuse by proactively teaching preventative knowledge and skills. The programme is developmentally structured over four age-levels which correspond with the class bands of Ireland's *Primary School Curriculum* (Government of Ireland, 1999). This organisational format presents as a challenge for special schools, as many children are not at the same cognitive level as their typically-developing peers. There is a dearth of knowledge on how such schools reconcile the mandatory requirement to teach *Stay Safe*, with this practical reality.

Employing a mixed-methods, two-phase, explanatory-sequential design, this doctoral study addresses the knowledge gap in relation to the enactment of *Stay Safe* in special schools. Shower's (2010a) theoretical framework for curriculum approaches underpinned the research, and particular interest was shown to the role that leadership plays in the enactment process. Phase 1 incorporated a questionnaire sent to every special school principal in Ireland (n=133) via Qualtrics. Phase 2 used the data collected from the questionnaire to inform an embedded case study with three special schools – a Mild, a Moderate and a Severe-Profound General Learning Disability School. Moseholm and Fetters' (2017) Explanatory Bidirectional Framework was used to weave data from both the quantitative and qualitative phases to illustrate the minutiae of the enactment process.

The findings evidence that whole-scale curricular differentiation takes place in special schools in relation to *Stay Safe*. The Mild and Moderate case schools took a 'curriculum development' approach, while the Severe-Profound case school took a 'curriculum making' approach (Shower, 2010a). Leadership emerged as important in the enactment process with positional authority and experience in special needs deduced as key leadership premia. Although derived from the special school context, the findings have relevance for all educational settings, as the drive towards 'inclusion' has resulted in mainstream schools with children of diverse cognitive, social-emotional, and physical abilities. Extensive support and advocacy for children with special needs is required in enacting the curricular component to child safeguarding and this study recommends that a 'Support' aspect be considered for inclusion in Norwich's (2010) seminal curriculum model to increase access to the 'common curriculum'. The research concludes by recommending, *inter alia*, a new *Stay Safe* topic framework to increase applicability and accessibility for children with special needs.

# Chapter 1: Introduction

*‘Child abuse has no boundaries...The role of schools in prevention education is imperative’*

(MacIntyre and Lawlor, 2016, pp. 1–2).

## 1.1 Introduction

Child safeguarding is a key priority for researchers and policy-makers across the Developed World, with the knowledge landscape continually evolving in response to emerging needs (Buckley, 2003; Daniel, 2008; Canavan *et al.*, 2021). This study is focused on the role of curriculum in the safeguarding process and probes how teachers in special schools teach a personal safety and child abuse prevention programme<sup>1</sup> in their classes. Schools have a critical role to play in ensuring that children develop safeguarding skills to allow them to safely participate in society (Baginsky, 2008). For children with special educational needs (SEN) and/or a disability<sup>2</sup>, that safeguarding role takes on added importance, as research demonstrates that they are more likely to be victims of abuse (Putnam, 2003; Davies and Jones, 2013), with some evidence indicating that the likelihood is three-to-four times that of their typically-developing peers (Sullivan and Knutson, 2000; MacIntyre and Lawlor, 2016). Child safeguarding programmes are the vehicles through which teachers develop skills that minimise the risk of abuse and increase child knowledge of preventative behaviours (Zwi *et al.*, 2007; Chen, Fortson and Tseng, 2012; Brassard and Fiorvanti, 2015; Bustamante *et al.*, 2019). This research endeavour centres on how one such child safeguarding programme, *Stay Safe* (MacIntyre

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<sup>1</sup> Henceforth in this thesis, for the purposes of brevity, the term ‘child safeguarding’ will be used instead of ‘personal safety and abuse prevention’.

<sup>2</sup> Henceforth in this thesis, the term ‘special needs’ will be used broadly to refer to children with special educational needs and/or a disability, unless otherwise stated. In the same vein as Miller and Raymond (2008, p. 68), in this study the term ‘special needs’ encapsulates ‘learning disabilities, autistic spectrum disorders, sensory impairments, physical impairments, mental health needs and emotional or behavioural difficulties’.

and Lawlor, 2016), is enacted in the special school sector in Ireland. It aims to establish the curriculum approaches used to teach *Stay Safe* to children with special needs (SN) and elicit the role that leadership plays in that process, given that it has been identified as a ‘critical contributor’ (Harris, Jones and Crick, 2020, p. 1) to success in this area.

This opening chapter will provide the rationale for the research and preview some of the complexities associated with enacting such a programme in the special school context. It will spotlight the key policy points pertinent to child safeguarding and analyse them through an SN lens. The importance of leadership will be flagged, as well as the influence of oversight which can further complexify the curriculum enactment process (Priestley, Alvunger *et al.*, 2021). The chapter will conclude with an overview of the specific research questions pursued in this study. Before engaging with these issues, a review of the Irish policy context is needed.

## **1.2 Policy Context**

The policy landscape for child safeguarding in Irish schools is complex, with significant levels of procedural guidance and oversight from the Department of Education (DE) governing schools’ provision (Government of Ireland, 2017a, 2019a). Policy development in this arena should be viewed against the backdrop of Ireland’s troubled history in child safeguarding (O’Mahony and Kilkelly, 2014) and the subsequent legal architecture that resulted from historical lessons learned on how to keep children safe (Morrissey, 2021a).

### **1.2.1 Historical Background**

The systemic failure to adequately deal with repeated ‘incidents of sexual abuse’ in schools throughout Twentieth Century Ireland left its mark on broad swathes of Irish society, including the current education system (McGuinness, 1993; Murphy, Buckley and

Joyce, 2005; Murphy, Mangan and O’Neill, 2009, 2010; Ryan, 2009; Gibbons, 2010; O’Mahony and Kilkelly, 2014, p. 323). It is argued that a historically ‘deferential and submissive’ attitude from the DE towards schools ‘compromised its ability to carry out inspection and monitoring’, and that this *laissez-faire* approach enabled child abuse to occur unabated in education settings (O’Mahony, 2009, p. 319). In essence, schools were sole traders with little-to-no oversight of their management or curriculum in the safeguarding sphere. The experience of those with SN within them was particularly harsh, with ridicule and humiliation frequently used to denigrate and disparage their intelligence, appearance and mannerisms (Ryan, 2009). Some of these children were physically and sexually abused; the experience aggravated by the fact that many lacked the language or cognitive capacity to disclose what was happening (Ryan, 2009). Those children that did were frequently ignored because of the veil of silence that enveloped matters of morality and many more were ‘punished and further abused’ as a consequence of their disclosure (Ryan, 2009, p. 253). Revelations about the scale and magnitude of Ireland’s child abuse problem influenced change at system level.

### **1.2.2 Legal and Legislative Influences**

For much of the 1900s the Irish Constitution provided the only legal framework for child safeguarding (Nohilly, 2011), with the Family centralised as the ‘fundamental unit’ and the means through which children were to be kept safe (Government of Ireland, 1937, sec. 41). The role of schools was not delineated, as the rights of parents as the ‘primary educator’ were deemed to be ‘inalienable’ (Government of Ireland, 1937, sec. 42). The 1990s saw some developments with the passage of the Child Care Act (1991) and the first iteration of the *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* at the end of the decade (Government of Ireland, 1999a). While these guidelines were not on a statutory footing, it was anticipated that they would be applied

‘consistently’ by organisations providing services to children (Nohilly, 2011, p. 10). Despite this anticipation, the evidence suggests that the actual application was ‘inconsistent’ (Government of Ireland, 2009, p. xiii).

Further developments emanated from the courts, as abuse survivors sought damages for the maltreatment they experienced in schools (*Louise O’Keeffe v Leo Hickey, the Minister for Education and Science and the Attorney General, 2006*). While the State argued that the principle of vicarious liability did not apply because of the fact that it outsourced schooling to individual patrons, this argument was rejected by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) (*O’Keeffe v Ireland, 2014*). The ECHR established that Ireland had, in European law, an ‘inherent positive obligation’ to protect its children from abuse or harm (*O’Keeffe v Ireland, 2014, p. 41*). If the State was going to outsource the provision of education to private bodies, then it should have had mechanisms in place to monitor and mitigate risk, according to the Court (*O’Keeffe v Ireland, 2014*). This was a significant intervention because it conferred a legal responsibility on the State, for the first time, to protect children while they were in school (O’Mahony and Kilkelly, 2014). Attention soon turned to how it would discharge this responsibility from management, organisational and curricular perspectives. Legislation and statutory guidance were key in that regard.

### ***Children First Act (2015)***

In 2011, a revised edition of the *Children First Guidelines* were published which provided greater detail for organisations dealing with children on the protocols they needed to put in place to ensure child safety (Government of Ireland, 2011b). This precipitated the publication of the first iteration of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* (Government of Ireland, 2011a) which outlined how the *Children First Guidelines* (2011) should be applied in education settings. This first iteration replaced



previous sets of non-mandatory, best practice guidelines, which had been used in many schools hitherto (Government of Ireland, 2001, 2004). This was followed four years later by the passage of the Children First Act (2015) – a landmark moment for child safeguarding in Ireland, which created ‘new obligations’ for professionals working with children (Hanly, 2020, p. 145). Its passage through parliament conferred the status of a ‘mandated person’ (sec. 14) on all teachers, obligating them to report to TUSLA – Ireland’s Child and Family Agency – any ‘knowledge, belief or suspicion’ that a child has been harmed, is being harmed or is at risk of being harmed. To particularise these new requirements, Ireland’s Department of Children and Youth Affairs published a further updated set of *Children First Guidelines* (2017) to support organisations working with children. These are the guidelines currently in operation nationally.

***Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2017)***

The current *Children First Guidelines* (2017), issued in accordance with Section 6 of the Children First Act (2015) outline, *inter alia*, the legal implications associated with child safeguarding roles generally and of being a mandated person particularly (Government of Ireland, 2017b). Importantly, four types of child abuse are clearly outlined – neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse – and the ‘legal obligation’ on mandated persons to report concerns that have reached the ‘legal definition of harm’ is delineated (Government of Ireland, 2017b, p. 19 – 20). The legal jeopardies associated with ‘non-reporting’ by a mandated persons are also elaborated on (Government of Ireland, 2017b, p.26):

- Tusla reserves the right to make a complaint to the Fitness to Practise Committee of the regulatory body of which the mandated person is a member of (in the case of teachers, *The Teaching Council*)

- Tusla may pass information about a mandated person's failure to make a report to the National Vetting Bureau of An Garda Síochána (*Irish Police*). This information could therefore be disclosed to current or future employers

The Guidelines observe that 'many employers consider a failure to report a child protection concern to be a disciplinary matter' (p.27). It is also noted that, in addition to the consequences of non-reporting arising from the Children First Act (2015), mandated persons may also be subject to the provisions of the Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information on Offences against Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act (2012), where they fail to report a concern that has reached the defined threshold of harm. All of these legal jeopardies complexify child safeguarding in the Irish context and may (knowingly or unknowingly) lead to a conflict of interest for teachers when enacting a mandatory child safeguarding curriculum, such as *Stay Safe*. This will be explored further later in this thesis.

In addition to the legalities of child protection in the Irish context, the Guidelines also underscore the importance of each Cabinet Minister enacting 'sectoral implementation plans' in order 'to ensure compliance' with the provisions of the Act, in the sector over which they have jurisdiction (Government of Ireland, 2017b, p. 51). In 2017, a revised edition of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools* was published by the DE to provide a roadmap for schools on how to implement the updated *Children First* in their settings (Government of Ireland, 2017a).

### ***Child Protection Procedures (2017)***

The *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*<sup>3</sup> (Government of Ireland, 2017a) attempted to address many of the historical failures highlighted earlier

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<sup>3</sup> Henceforth the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* (Government of Ireland, 2017a) will be referred to as the *Child Protection Procedures (2017)*.

and align with Harman's (1984) view of policy as a response to a problem. They put in place clear guidelines, which were absent in the past, for dealing with child abuse (Morrissey, 2021a), in order to operationalise the core value of *Children First* that the safety of minors be prioritised (Government of Ireland, 2015). Organisational and reporting procedures were clearly outlined and 'significant leadership skills' were identified as fundamental in ensuring 'oversight and compliance' at school level (Government of Ireland, 2017a, p. 76). In addition to this, the procedures mandated the proactive teaching of personal safety skills as a key protective factor in minimising risk to children. This 'curricular component' to the procedures (Morrissey, 2021a, p. 12) is a feature of all primary and special schools (Government of Ireland, 2017a).

### **1.3 Child Safeguarding Curriculum**

In Ireland, the general teaching of child safeguarding skills occurs through the *Social, Personal and Health Education* (SPHE) curriculum (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999). This curriculum was published in 1999, with its implementation commencing in 2003, following an intensive period of training provided to all primary schools (Stack, 2009). However, while the SPHE curriculum addresses child safeguarding in a broad sense, the *Stay Safe* programme explicitly deals with the teaching of relevant child safeguarding skills in a focused and systematic way (MacIntyre and Lawlor, 2016). It is mandatory in every primary and special school in Ireland (Government of Ireland, 2017a), although some equivocation arises in relation to how it is characterised.

#### **1.3.1 *Stay Safe*: a Programme or a Curriculum?**

While *Stay Safe* is commonly referred to as an SPHE curricular programme (Stack, 2009; PDST, 2018), there are at least two strong reasons for why it may be construed as a curriculum in its own right. First, it unequivocally represents the centrally prescribed

knowledge, skills and sequentially planned learning experiences (Eisner, 1990; Ellis, 2004; Priestley and Philippou, 2019; Priestley, Alvunger *et al.*, 2021) in child safeguarding, that teachers **must** provide the children in their classes with. It is not optional, in the way that all other curricular programmes are in the Irish context, and is subject to explicit external evaluation in its own right (Government of Ireland, 2019a). In other words, *Stay Safe* is not designed to support teachers in the teaching of knowledge and skills outlined elsewhere in a separate document. Rather it is state-sponsored, self-contained and designed on the basis of ‘expert opinion’ (Ellis, 2004, p. 4), with psychologists and teacher educators taking the lead role in its design. Second and most importantly, while *Stay Safe* is commonly taught as part of SPHE and can be mapped to it, it stands fully independent of that curricular subject. If the SPHE curriculum did not exist or was withdrawn, the necessity to enact *Stay Safe* would still be there because its mandatory status derives not from the SPHE curriculum, but from the *Child Protection Procedures* (Government of Ireland, 2017a, p. 75).

While the categorisation of *Stay Safe* as a programme or a curriculum has been the focus of some practitioner debate, which this researcher has been partied to (Morrissey, 2021b, 2022), it is notable that Brassard and Fiorvanti (2015, p. 44) characterise it as the ‘*Stay Safe* curriculum’ in their international review of fifteen school-based child abuse prevention programmes. This research will follow that precedent and henceforth will treat *Stay Safe* as a curriculum in its own right, for the purposes of review and evaluation in this study. To commence, a brief overview of its development and evolution is warranted.

### **1.3.2 *Stay Safe*: Overview and Development**

*Stay Safe* was first introduced to primary schools on a phased basis in 1991, in response to a growing awareness of the need for child-focused prevention education (O’Reilly and Carr, 1998). Its pre-existence to the SPHE curriculum again reiterates its standalone

status. It was designed developmentally so that content explored at each class level was age-appropriate to children at that level (MacIntyre *et al.*, 2000). Enactment of *Stay Safe* was not mandatory at the time and parental consent was viewed as essential good practice before engaging children with it, given the sensitivity of the content (MacIntyre *et al.*, 2000). In 1996, a supplementary guidebook entitled, *Stay Safe: Personal Safety Skills for Children with Special Educational Needs*, was made available which contained five additional modules aimed at children with specific needs (Cullen, 1996). This supplement followed the same topic areas addressed in the core book but adapted them to suit the needs of children with various levels of SN. There are no data available on how this adapted version was received or enacted.

*Stay Safe* became mandatory with the publication of the first edition of the *Child Protection Procedures* (2011) and was revised in 2016, when the teaching points and scenarios were updated to reflect a more modern Ireland (MacIntyre and Lawlor, 2016). The newer edition, which will be examined in further detail in Chapter 2, was more explicit in the language used. The number of lessons comprising it also increased. Curiously, while the previous edition contained supplementary material for children with SN, the revised edition contained no such supplement. It was left up to schools themselves to interpret the core material and enact it in a manner that is both consistent with the *Child Protection Procedures* (2017) and suitable for their cohort of children. There is some jeopardy for special schools in negotiating this fine line, given the *Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspection* (CPSI) framework requires them to demonstrate that they have ‘planned appropriately for the implementation of...*Stay Safe*’ (Government of Ireland, 2019a, p. 20). But questions abound about what constitutes ‘appropriate’ in a special school context, in particular given the broad spectrum of schools that have this designation.

## 1.4 Special Schools in Ireland

While both national policy documents and education legislation are silent on providing a formal definition of what a special school is (Ware *et al.*, 2009; Merrigan and Senior, 2021), the *National Council for Special Education* in its booklet for parents provides some signposts (Government of Ireland, 2019b). It demarcates special schools as educational facilities that:

...support students with more severe and/or complex special educational needs in cases where a full time mainstream placement would not be in the student's best interest...In order to be placed in a special school a child must have a professional report stating that he/she has a special educational need and that this need is of such complexity that a special school placement could be considered (Government of Ireland, 2019b, p. 17).

The explication that these schools ought only to be considered when other options have been exhausted has led some to categorise them as the 'placement of last resort' for children with certain SN (Ware *et al.*, 2009, p. 7). There is contestation on the exact number of special schools in this jurisdiction because of the lack of a policy or legislative definition (Ware *et al.*, 2009). Officially there are 15 special school categories (Blain, 2011, p. 38)<sup>4</sup>, although in recent times these categories have become somewhat blurred with a broader range of need presenting in many individual schools (Ware *et al.*, 2009). When these 15 categories are applied to the DE's school database, the official statistical return for the 2019-2020 academic year indicates that there were 133 special schools registered with the Department. Very little is known about these schools and how they operate at a practical level, with the amount of published research available almost negligible. A recent study attempted to 'capture the voice of the special school principal'

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<sup>4</sup> The report on *The Future Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland*, commissioned by the National Council for Special Education and completed by Blain (2011) identifies the 15 categories of special school as follows: Physical Disability, Hearing Impairment, Visual Impairment, Emotional Disturbance and/or Behavioural Difficulties, Mild General Learning Disabilities, Moderate General Learning Disability, Severe-Profound General Learning Disability, Autism Spectrum, Specific Learning Disability, Multiple Disabilities, Travelling Community, Hospital School, School attached to Detention Centre, Special Care Unit and High Support Unit.

in relation to inclusive practice (Merrigan and Senior, 2021, p. 1) but wider scale research on the curriculum and how it is led has proved to be more elusive.

#### **1.4.1 The Curriculum in Special Schools**

Special schools in Ireland have traditionally enjoyed considerable autonomy in relation to the curriculum they offer to children (Ware *et al.*, 2009). As they are officially designated as primary schools (Blain, 2011), many special schools opt to adapt the primary curriculum to suit their cohort (Special Education Department, 2007). There is a knowledge gap on how this curriculum is adapted in practice - although from an international perspective, Norwich (2002, 2010) has theorised different design options containing curricular aspects that are common for all children and aspects that can be modified depending on child need / capability. While not dealing specifically with SN, Shower (2010a) has proposed a framework of various different approaches to curriculum that provide some guidance on how curricula might be enacted at classroom level. These design options and frameworks will be examined in Chapter 2 to determine their applicability to the curriculum under investigation here.

Further international perspectives suggest that children with SN benefit from curricula that are vocational in nature (Kirjavainen, Pulkkinen and Jahnukainen, 2016) and emphasise the skills ‘most important to their futures’ (Kauffman and Badar, 2016, p. 58). It would seem that few skills could be more important for children than those aimed at improving their safety (Cullen, 1996), as they attempt ‘meaningful participation in their community’ (Stone-MacDonald, 2012, p. 255) and, in some cases, prepare for possible employment post-school (Aron and Loprest, 2012; Lee and Carter, 2012; Wong *et al.*, 2021). The data illustrate that special schools may be successful in this sphere, with Hornby (2021, p. 1) demonstrating ‘better outcomes’, in terms of employment and

participation, for children who have left school from special education settings than ‘those who completed their education in mainstream schools’.

The role of the teacher in mediating the curriculum for children with SN in special education contexts has emerged as a key consideration (Ware, Julian and McGee, 2005) and some teachers are more adept than others at making provision for those with complex needs (Kauffman and Badar, 2016). There is a high turnover of teachers teaching these children and the level of support such teachers receive in school – including from their principals – is crucial in determining whether they remain in post (Ware, Julian and McGee, 2005). With special schools now ‘at the crossroads of inclusion’ (Merrigan and Senior, 2021, p. 1), the criticality of the principal’s role in articulating the importance of the special school in facilitating ‘tailor-made’ curricular provision has been reiterated (p. 14). Notwithstanding this acknowledged importance, the role of the principal in these contexts – in terms of the curriculum and more generally – is vastly under-researched and this lack of attention forms part of the rationale for this study.

## **1.5 Rationale for Research**

There were multiple motivations for undertaking this research project and rooting it in the special school sector. These motivations span both the personal-professional and the policy.

### **1.5.1 Personal-Professional Rationale**

As a special education teacher (SET) working with children with a variety of SN, the researcher experienced first-hand the challenges of teaching a mandatory child safeguarding curriculum which had been practically devised for the typically-developing child. The process of adapting approaches and methodologies to increase child understanding was arduous and, even at that, there was some personal doubt as to whether this adapted curriculum was meeting the statutory requirement outlined in the *Child*



*Protection Procedures* (2017). There was a lack of support on how to practically differentiate the curriculum and for the most part the researcher had to exercise his own leadership, seek out colleagues for advice and guidance, and engage in professional learning with a view to optimising curriculum enactment.

Subsequent to working in the SET role, as a full-time seconded advisor with Ireland's *Professional Development Service for Teachers* (PDST), the researcher supported a significant number of special schools, on the implementation of all aspects of child safeguarding – including the curricular component. The challenges of implementing a highly prescribed, mandatory child safeguarding curriculum in special schools were observed, as confusion emerged from both principals and teachers as to the extent they were permitted to differentiate it. Many principals believed that because the *Child Protection Procedures* (2017) conferred mandatory status on *Stay Safe*, they were not enabled to differentiate it at all. In some cases teachers' plans indicated that they were completing the curriculum without any modification, but in practice were differentiating it to suit the needs of their children. The discourse of inspection was prominent in many special schools, as teachers wanted to ensure that their practices stood up to the scrutiny of a CPSI, while also ensuring that their pupils' needs were met to the greatest extent possible. There was no literature available on how teachers struck a balance between the needs of the child and the perceived all-important oversight requirement.

While the researcher's professional experiences – both in the classroom and 'on the road' as a PDST advisor – provided a signpost to the emerging issues, this was no substitute for empirical evidence illuminating on the specifics of how this curriculum was experienced in special schools generally. Data were needed to illustrate how teachers balance competing priorities in a context where oversight is prominent and diversity of need is broad. This doctoral journey provided the opportunity to fulfil the personal and

professional ambition of remedying that dearth of data and shedding light on a key aspect of mandatory curricular provision in special schools. The furnishing of this data would provide a significant service to the broader special education community – in Ireland and internationally – beyond the special school sector.

### **1.5.2 Policy Rationale**

Child protection policy in Ireland is still evolving apace, as the State continues to learn from mistakes of the past. While the publication of the *Child Protection Procedures* (2017) was a seminal moment in that evolution, their implementation is vastly under-researched. There are currently no published scholarly data – from any school type, special or otherwise – on how the curricular component is enacted. This is a significant gap, considering this curriculum’s mandatory status. The experience of special schools in negotiating the fine line between procedural compliance and curricular suitability is also a significant lacuna in the scholarship. This lack of data presages a low likelihood of any evidence-informed improvements that might optimise the curricular experience and skills of children with SN. Such a lack of progress and development is unconscionable, when children with SN have been identified as more vulnerable in this area (Sullivan and Knutson, 2000; Putnam, 2003; Davies and Jones, 2013; MacIntyre and Lawlor, 2016).

The particular focus on special schools is deliberate. The special school sector has been identified as an under-researched domain in the Irish and international educational arenas (Government of Ireland, 2020c), as the global trend towards inclusion appears to have resulted in a research focus that prioritises SN in mainstream (Bossaert *et al.*, 2013; Shevlin, Winter and Flynn, 2013; Florian, 2014; O’Rourke, 2015; Spratt and Florian, 2015; Merrigan and Senior, 2021). This does not serve those children who attend special schools well, in particular when many have argued that ‘schools for all’ (Florian, 2009, p. 533) may neither be inevitable nor desirable (Hornby, 2014; Kauffman and Badar,

2014, 2016; Kauffman, Ward and Badar, 2016). Indeed, while the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UNCRPD) (2008) establishes the right to inclusive education, subsequent guidance on its implementation has underscored that in a limited number of scenarios, inclusion can be conceptualised as something other than education taking place in mainstream settings (United Nations, 2016). This research attempts to address the extant data void in relation to special schools, as one of those possible non-mainstream settings. The study assumes an ‘expert role’ for special schools in education policy where key pedagogies, approaches, strategies and methodologies for children with SN are established and nurtured, to be subsequently shared with all other schools (Ware *et al.*, 2009; Blain, 2011; Carpenter, 2016). In this way, special schools are innovators and enablers of best practice on how to provide greater care, inclusion and curricular accessibility for children with SN. In view of that, this study, by virtue of the data it will yield, has transformative potential for general education provision.

## **1.6 Research Questions**

This research will probe how the curricular component to the *Child Protection Procedures* (2017) is enacted in special schools in Ireland. Specifically, it will address the following three overarching questions, which also contain embedded components:

- How is the child safeguarding curriculum, *Stay Safe*, organised at whole-school level in special schools?
  - Explore the five key topics and how they are taught in the special school context;
- What key curriculum approaches are used in special schools to enact *Stay Safe*?
  - Determine whether teachers in special schools are acting as curriculum transmitters, curriculum developers or curriculum makers (Shawer, 2010a) in relation to *Stay Safe* and;

- Illustrate the processes at play in undertaking these differing curriculum enactment roles;
- What role does leadership have in the curriculum enactment process?
  - Discern the leadership role exercised by those in formal management positions in school;
  - Discern the leadership role exercised by those who are not in formal management positions in school.

While all three of these questions relate to curriculum enactment, the first two deal with it more explicitly. The final question relates to leadership and how it interacts with curriculum enactment – what Harris, Jones and Crick (2020, p. 1) might refer to as ‘curriculum leadership’. The resolution of these questions will shed significant light on a key area of mandatory curricular provision in the Irish context and will offer insights to an international audience who have to deal with similar challenges, given the widespread use of child safeguarding curricula across the continent and beyond (Barron and Topping, 2013; Brassard and Fiorvanti, 2015; Walsh *et al.*, 2018).

## **1.7 Concluding Remarks**

All schools in Ireland are required to comply with the *Child Protection Procedures* (2017). This includes special schools, of which there are between 130 and 140 in the State, depending on the criteria used to define them. This research aims to establish how special schools enact the curricular component to the procedures. This first chapter has provided the context for the current study. It has highlighted the historical and legal influences and flagged the key curricular issues in relation to special schools. Chapter 2 will overview pertinent literature in relation to child safeguarding, special schools and leadership. It will delve into the detail of curriculum approaches and spotlight key considerations in relation to curricula for special schools. Chapter 3 will outline the

methodology used to address the research questions, including the two-phase mixed-methods procedure for data-gathering and the thematic approach to data-analysis. Chapter 4 will present the findings of this research under two overall themes related to the research questions – Curriculum Enactment and Curriculum Leadership – and a number of pertinent sub-themes which underline key data abstractions. Chapter 5 will discuss the findings and situate them within current discourses related to special education, curriculum studies and child safeguarding. It will propose a possible modified curriculum model for use in the SN context and explore the potential of an adapted *Stay Safe* topic framework for children who need more tailored support. The final chapter will present the study's conclusion and mark out what should happen next to improve provision in this sensitive area.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

*‘...it is critical to examine and understand how teachers approach curriculum’*

(Shawer, 2010a, p. 173).

### 2.1 Introduction

The overall aim of this research was to probe how the curricular component to child safeguarding is enacted in Irish special schools and explore the role that leadership plays in the enactment process. Research literature on ‘curriculum leadership is less well developed’ than other conceptualisations of educational leadership (Harris, Jones and Crick, 2020, p. 1) and this study presented the perfect opportunity to probe it, given that all special schools are required to enact *Stay Safe*. Widening accessibility to curricula such as this is fundamental to robust child safeguarding systems (Coppard, 2008) and teachers have a key role in ‘navigating barriers’ (Olson and Roberts, 2020, p. 161) that children may experience in gaining access (Thijs and van den Akker, 2009; Shawer, 2010a; Baird and Clark, 2018; Priestley, Philippou, *et al.*, 2021). This chapter is geared towards delineating the literature in this area to provide contextual depth to the research project. Following an overview of the literature selection framework, the chapter will be divided into three parts:

- **Part A** will provide a brief overview of the special education sector in the Irish context. This outline is necessary because the nuances of the research arena can impact on both policy and practice at school and system level;
- **Part B** will explore curriculum enactment using both broad and narrow lenses:
  - First, it will provide a broad critique of how difference is accommodated within curricula for children with SN and the ‘dilemmas’ that often emerge in facilitating that accommodation

(Norwich, 2010, p. 113). It will then illustrate a variety of general approaches to curriculum enactment, based on Shaver's (2010a) theoretical framework;

- Second, it will narrow in on the *Stay Safe* curriculum and examine the features of effective child safeguarding curricula, using Irish and international literature;
- **Part C** will examine the role of leadership in the special education sector generally and specifically in relation to curriculum enactment. Given the principal's central role in whole-school curricular policy-making in the Irish context (Drea and O'Brien, 2002) and the teacher's perceived role as a 'street level bureaucrat' in classroom-level policy enactment (Taylor, 2007, p. 555), a critique of pertinent leadership approaches will be presented.

Framing the literature exploration in this structured way will facilitate greater synthesis and analysis in later chapters.

## **2.2 Framework for Literature Selection**

The literature review for this thesis took a narrative form and was strengthened by an initial systematised search feature (Ridley, 2012). This *modus operandi* allowed sufficient flexibility to select and braid material relevant to the multiple facets under investigation (Grant and Booth, 2009; Paré *et al.*, 2015). To improve rigour, Ring *et al.*'s (2008) approach to literature selection was used to identify suitable research material, as its efficacy has been underscored in the Irish context for reviewing theoretical perspectives on children's learning. This approach encompassed two strands.

The **empirical strand** consisted of an initial systematised search of the electronic databases outlined in Table 1 to identify suitable peer-reviewed material for examination

(search strings outlined in Appendix A). This strand was supplemented by a two-part hand-search incorporating:

- Identification of relevant peer-reviewed material from the reference lists of articles located through the initial database search;
- Identification of relevant peer-reviewed material from the combined expertise and experience of the researcher and his supervisory panel.

Hand-searching is widely considered an important component of conducting comprehensive literature reviews, insofar as it reduces the likelihood that important studies will be overlooked due to poor indexing (Higgins *et al.*, 2019).

The **expert strand** consisted of reports, reviews, professional guidance, legislation, legal judgements and advice documents from domain specialists. These emanated from web searches, library searches and documents in the researcher’s possession as a result of his professional practice as a former advisor in this curricular area with the PDST and a practicing primary school principal.

**Table 1: Literature Selection Framework (Adapted from Ring *et. al*, (2008))**

<b>Empirical Strand</b>	<b>Expert Strand</b>
<p>The following electronic databases / sources were used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ ERIC</li> <li>▪ EBSCO</li> <li>▪ SAGE</li> <li>▪ Google Scholar</li> <li>▪ PsychINFO</li> <li>▪ PsychArticles</li> <li>▪ DORAS Thesis Repository</li> </ul>	<p>The following expert material sourced online and in libraries was used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reports from commissions of investigation</li> <li>▪ Court judgements and legislation</li> <li>▪ Guidance documents from professional bodies and government agencies</li> <li>▪ Books written by disciplinary experts</li> </ul>

In general, the timespan for literature selection and inclusion was from 2000 to 2021 - although exceptions were made for seminal articles, material attesting to the historical



context for child safeguarding and special education in Ireland, and items identified in the hand-search, where more up-to-date material was not available. This approach to literature selection ensured that a comprehensive range of material was available to inform this study, into what is a very specific aspect of SN provision in Ireland.

## **Part A – Special Education Provision in Ireland**

The provision of special education in the Irish context occurs along a continuum with special schools on one end and mainstream schools on the other (Rix *et al.*, 2013). Despite a movement towards inclusion and an increasing number of special classes in Irish mainstream schools, the number of special schools has actually increased since 2011 (Banks and McCoy, 2017; Government of Ireland, 2020c). While the focus of this thesis is on these special schools, evaluating their provision without contextualising the discussion within the broader trend towards inclusion would prove limiting, because contemporary special education discourse is predominantly concerned with how children with SN are included in mainstream schools (Lindsay, 2003; Shevlin, Kenny and Loxley, 2008; Ainscow and Sandill, 2010; Monsen, Ewing and Kwoka, 2014; Florian, 2019; Azorín and Ainscow, 2020). This follows the identification of ‘inclusive schooling’ as an educational priority in the United Nations’ *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action*<sup>5</sup> (UNESCO, 1994, p. 7), the UNCRPD Treaty (United Nations, 2008) and the *Education 2030 Framework for Action* (UNESCO, 2016). Educational inclusion is a contested concept, however, because of ‘the various social and political values’ connected to it (Norwich and Koutsouris, 2017, p. 1), and debate has arisen around its encapsulation

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<sup>5</sup> For the purposes of brevity, henceforth the *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action* agreed by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1994 will be referred to as the *Salamanca Statement*.

(or not) of special schools (Ainscow and César, 2006; Terzi, 2010). Before delineating that conundrum, a brief exploration of the historical background to special schools in Ireland is warranted.

### **2.3 Development of the Special Schooling in Ireland**

The development of schooling opportunities for children with SN in Ireland occurred in a slow and piecemeal fashion, since the foundation of the Irish state in 1922 (Coolahan, 1981; Shevlin and Banks, 2021). In the early years of independence, children with disabilities were inconspicuous within the education system – confined for the most part to institutions established on a voluntary and charitable basis, to cater for their needs (Griffin and Shevlin, 2011). Over time, and with the influence of national and international reports, the special school sector began to develop (*Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Mental Handicap*, (1965a); *Investment in Education Report* (1965b); *Warnock Report*, (1978); *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, (1989)). By 1990, there were approximately 100 special schools operating in Ireland, catering for children up to 18 years, with a variety of special needs (Government of Ireland, 1993). The publication of the *Special Education Review Committee Report* (Government of Ireland, 1993) was the impetus for further development, as parents and lobby groups pursued a determined litigation strategy (Whyte, 2015) which culminated in legislative recognition (*Education Act*, 1998) for the ‘automatic entitlement’ to educational provision for all children (Ware *et al.*, 2009, p. 33). While the formative legal battles concerning children with SN hinged on whether the state had an obligation to provide them with schooling opportunities (*Paul O’Donoghue V. Minister for Health and Others*, 1993; *FN V. Minister for Education*, 1995; *Jamie Sinnott V Minister for Education*, 2000), the question soon turned to the type of schooling they ought to receive.

### **2.3.1 Evolution of Special Education and Emergence of Inclusive Schooling**

Ireland's adoption of the *Salamanca Statement* (UNESCO, 1994) was a considerable milestone because it was 'arguably the most significant international document that has ever appeared in the field of special education' (Ainscow, Slee and Best, 2019, p. 671). It identified the 'practice of 'mainstreaming' children with disabilities' as an 'integral part of national plans' (UNESCO, 1994, p. 9), in an attempt to instil the concept of inclusive education as a 'global policy vision' (Magnússon, 2019, p. 678; Hernández-Torrano, Somerton and Helmer, 2020). This vision was built upon and strengthened in the UNCRPD Treaty where the 'right to inclusive education' was legally enshrined for countries who were signatory to it (United Nations, 2008, sec. 24). As Ireland ratified the treaty, legal remedies could now be pursued where those with SN were prevented from laying claim to that right (United Nations, 2016). While differing perspectives on the meaning of *inclusion* 'reveal a fundamental disjuncture between underlying conceptual frameworks' (Gallagher, 2001, p. 637), in the Irish context it had predominantly been 'thought of as an approach to serving children with disabilities within general education settings' (Ainscow and Sandill, 2010, p. 401). In more recent times however, the *Inclusive Education Framework*, in addition to placement, points to the importance of 'active participation' and progress in school for each child (Government of Ireland, 2011c, p. 14). A renewed focus on outcomes (Goodall, 2015), and 'inclusion in society post-school' (Hornby and Witte, 2008; Kauffman and Badar, 2014; Hornby, 2015, p. 239, 2021) has ensured that 'special schools continue to be valued placements' (Tynan, 2018, p. 90) because of concerns that mainstream might not be 'special enough' for children with complex needs (Tynan, 2016).

### 2.3.2 Can Inclusion Conceptually Incorporate Special Schools?

In addressing questions on whether special schools are inclusive, scholarly debate tends to sidestep the substantive point, in favour of a focus on the morality or ethics of special schools' existence from a rights' perspective, rather than their potential for contributing to inclusion as a process (Kauffman and Hallahan, 2005; Ware *et al.*, 2009, p. 27; Kauffman and Badar, 2014; Hornby, 2021). A recent policy review of the *Salamanca Statement* indicates that the 'amalgam of ideals' constituting it, allows for 'a variety of interpretations of inclusion', which enable special schools to be justified in many circumstances (Magnússon, 2019, p. 677). Combining Baachi and Goodwin's (2016) *Post-Structural Policy Analysis Framework* with Popkewitz's (2009) *Systems of Reason*, Magnússon (2019) argues that the Statement contains numerous contradictions that render inclusion a 'vacuous' (Goodall, 2015, p. 306), malleable concept. For example, in addition to the practice of mainstreaming, he deduces an instruction from Salamanca that:

...the organisational features of inclusion...must take the individual's needs and characteristics into account....At least from a hypothetical point of view, it could be argued that individuals may exist that need specific educational provision and pedagogies alternative to those [*provided in mainstream*] (Magnússon, 2019, p. 683).

Magnusson's (2019) deduced multiple exegeses leave an opening for special schools to offer that provision because they associate educational inclusion with need and equity – resonant with the 'equitable and participatory learning experience' in an 'environment that best corresponds to...requirements and preferences' espoused in the UNCRPD (United Nations, 2016, p. 3). This is significant because as de Valenzuela (2014, p. 296) argues, educational 'equity recognizes that equal treatment is not the same as equal opportunity to learn'. In essence, the '*real possibility of an equality of outcomes*' (Nieto and Bode, 2014, p. 9) may require more equitable placement, as opposed to equal placement. Drawing on Sen's (2003) Capability Theory, Terzi (2014, p. 479) agrees that the location of educational provision must be subordinate to the real possibility of

children having ‘genuine opportunities to achieve educational functionings’, in accordance with the aims of a just society. While Norwich and Koutsouris (2017, p. 3) suggest that arguments such as these may set up ‘education as in tension with inclusion’, *Salamanca* makes clear that special schools do ‘represent a valuable resource for the development of inclusive schools’ (UNESCO, 1994, p. 7). Hornby (2015, p. 247) concurs with this standpoint in his *Inclusive Special Education* theory and fully endorses the ‘continuum of placement options’ (Table 2). There is a paucity of data on the special school option, however.

**Table 2: Inclusive Special Education Continuum (Hornby, 2015, p. 248)**

↓ Mainstream class with differentiation of work by the class teacher
↓ Mainstream class with guidance for the teacher provided by a specialist teacher
↓ Mainstream class with support for the pupil from a teaching assistant
↓ Mainstream class with some time spent in a resource room
↓ Special class within a mainstream school
↓ Special class that is part of a special school but is attached to a mainstream school
↓ Special school which is on same campus as a mainstream school
↓ Special school on a separate campus
↓ Residential special school on its own campus

### 2.3.3 Data on Special Schools and their Role

Internationally, notwithstanding the acknowledged role for special schools on the continuum of provision (Kauffman and Hallahan, 2005; Terzi, 2010; Winter and O’Raw, 2010; Rix *et al.*, 2013; Kauffman and Badar, 2014, 2016; Hornby, 2015; Kauffman, Ward and Badar, 2016), they remain relatively ‘unscrutinised’ (Hedegaard-Soerensen and Tetler, 2016, p. 256) - especially in Ireland (Douglas *et al.*, 2016). This is surprising because despite the trend toward inclusion, there is no assurance that in any future reconfiguration of the education system, ‘there will be no place for separate settings’ (Norwich, 2002, p. 499). On the contrary, Shaw (2017, p. 292) suggests that special

schools are ‘likely to remain a feature of the inclusive education system’, with Carpenter (2016, p. 1) further arguing that:

Their role should be ground-breaking, innovative and creative...to transform a child’s life for the better, and equip them to enjoy active citizenship in 21st century society.

What this innovation and creativity looks like in terms of *specific* practices, pedagogies and curriculum approaches is less clear, although the incorporation of active citizenship would indicate that child voice is important (Long *et al.*, 2012; Prunty, Dupont and McDaid, 2012) or at the very least that children should be ‘empowered through consultation’ (Coates and Vickerman, 2010, p. 1517) and holistic participation (Lundy, 2007). While the extent of their creativity in this domain is an open question (Long *et al.*, 2012), there is broad expert acknowledgement that in providing effective differentiation, special schools do appear to have success in catering for many categories of SN (Allan and Brown, 2001; Hornby and Kidd, 2001; Hornby and Witte, 2008; O’Brien, 2019).

In their landmark *Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland*, Ware and colleagues (2009, p. 11), confirm that special schools are successful in providing education for children with complex needs ‘and should be enabled to continue to do so in the absence of evidence that Irish mainstream schools could provide a better education for these students’. The authors suggest that a future function should incorporate ‘Outreach and Inreach support for mainstream schools’ in providing for children with SN, although they caution that ‘not all Irish special schools currently have the capacity to fulfil this role’ (p.11). The report found a lack of multi-disciplinary support to complement the work of teachers and recommended more professional development opportunities for all personnel working in them.

### 2.3.4 Personnel in Special Schools

The number of special needs assistants (SNAs) exceeds the number of teachers in special schools (Government of Ireland, 2020b), which can cause difficulty in the safeguarding sphere given that it results in more non-mandated than mandated personnel working with children with SN (Morrissey, 2021a). SNAs' responsibilities are rooted in the care sphere (Lawlor and Cregan, 2003; Logan, 2006; Government of Ireland, 2014; Morrissey, 2020b), with teachers occupying the preeminent role in curriculum enactment. Despite the importance of teachers' curricular role, data on how they discharge it or the factors that affect its delivery are sparse in the literature. Ware *et al.* (2009) point to the importance of having 'access to experienced and qualified specialist teachers' as a contributor to child success – signalling the importance, perhaps, of **both** tacit and explicit knowledge in how the teacher's role is undertaken.

#### *Tacit and Explicit Knowledge*

'Tacit' or implicit knowledge, first conceptualised by Polanyi (1966), is the idea that a person can know more than they can explain or codify based on their personal experiences (Ray, 2009). Elliott (2011, p. 85) argues that it is context and experience-derived:

...it is acquired without a high degree of direct input from others. Learning takes place not primarily from instruction from others but, rather, results from the individual's experience ... Tacit knowledge is more than a set of abstract procedural rules, however; it is context-specific and concerns appropriate action in given situations... tacit knowledge is intricately bound up with one's own goals.

In a school it might refer to the knowledge gained as result of working in that context, getting to know different children over time and then using the learnings from these experiences to inform pedagogical and curricular decisions going forward (Schön, 1992).

Explicit knowledge, on the other hand, is the knowledge gained as a result of formal education (Ray, 2009; Elliott *et al.*, 2011). It can be codified, stored and easily articulated (Olaisen and Revang, 2018). For a teacher in a special school it might refer to the expert

curricular knowledge gained as a result of a professional development course or undertaking an additional qualification. The Irish Teaching Council (2016, p. 9) in its *Cosán: Framework for Teachers' Learning* has recognised the importance of teachers continuing to expand their explicit knowledge and continually improve 'aspects of practice that benefit their pupils'. Tacit knowledge can be 'transformed' into explicit knowledge under the right circumstances (Olaisen and Revang, 2018, p. 295) and it would appear that professional learning communities (PLCs) may be one way of going about this in terms of enhancing overall capacity within the school (Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin, 2011; O'Sullivan, 2011; Wilson, 2011; Hairon, Goh and Chua, 2015; Donnelly *et al.*, 2019; Brennan, King and Travers, 2021).

While a discussion on the various types of knowledge at play in the SN sphere reveals some interesting and important insights, of greater significance is how this knowledge is leveraged to influence the 'dynamic processes of interpretation, mediation, negotiation and translation' (Priestley, Philippou, *et al.*, 2021, p. 1) of the curriculum. It is to that area of scholarly debate that Part B of this chapter turns its attention to.

## **Part B – The Curricular Landscape**

The term 'curriculum' is most commonly associated with the learning prescribed for children in schools (Ellis, 2004) – practically mediated through the teaching of different subjects (Marsh, 2004). Cuban (1995), in his seminal work, argues that there are four types of curriculum:

- (i) The *official curriculum* – the written document detailing what teachers are expected to teach;



- (ii) The *taught curriculum* – what (and how) teachers actually teach in their classrooms. Eisner (1990, p. 63) denotes this as the ‘operational curriculum’;
- (iii) The *learned curriculum* – what children learn arising from what teachers present to them;
- (iv) The *tested curriculum* – what children are tested on from the official curriculum. In the SN sphere it has been suggested that this can narrow the experiences ultimately provided to children (Douglas *et al.*, 2016).

In more recent times the concept of the ‘hidden curriculum’ has gained traction (Myles and Simpson, 2001; Shulman, 2005; Moyses and Porter, 2015). This concept refers to the underlying values, traditions, beliefs and customs which are unspoken within the school but which everyone is ‘assumed to know’ (Myles and Simpson, 2001, p. 279; Sullivan, 2018).

## **2.4 The Primary School Curriculum**

In Ireland the official *Primary School Curriculum*, mandates the teaching of six curricular areas, divided into eleven different subjects (Government of Ireland, 1999b).<sup>6</sup> This curriculum is currently in the midst of a review phase, with the process deemed ‘consultative’ as the *National Council for Curriculum and Assessment* (NCCA) elicits the views of children, parents, teachers, trade unions and management bodies (Government of Ireland, 2019c, 2020a). It is suggested that the participation of stakeholders such as this democratises the curriculum formulation process (Broom, 2016) – an effort, perhaps, to address concerns identified by Popkewitz (2009) on the control typically exerted by a

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<sup>6</sup> The curricular areas are as follows: (i) Primary Languages (Irish and English); (ii) Mathematics; (iii) Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (History, Geography, Science); (iv) Arts Education (Music, Visual Arts, Drama); (v) Physical Education; (vi) Social, Personal and Health Education.

small number of designers around what is included in the official curriculum and what is not. Control of design decisions can directly impact on how curricula are mediated in special schools.

#### **2.4.1 Curricula for Special Schools**

Special schools in Ireland have traditionally enjoyed considerable autonomy in relation to the curriculum they offer (Ware *et al.*, 2009). As they are officially designated as primary schools (Blain, 2011), many special schools opt to adapt the primary curriculum to suit their cohort (Special Education Department, 2007). They are supported in this process by the NCCA, who have produced a set of guidelines for each subject area, complete with exemplars and resources that teachers can use to craft schemes of work.<sup>7</sup> The prerogative to tailor curricula has been identified as an advantage of the special school system, as the needs and capacities of individual children can be considered in the flexible delivery of suitable content (O’Keefe, 2004; Kenny *et al.*, 2006). This apparent autonomy and agency to adapt the curriculum highlights the extent to which teacher leadership may play a role in the professional practice of teachers in special schools (Wenner and Campbell, 2017; Nguyen, Harris and Ng, 2019), as will be explored later in this chapter. However, Shevlin and colleagues’ (2008, p. 148) research, which points to a potential ‘lack of positive teacher expectations’ of some children in special schools, and Hart and Drummond’s (2014, p. 439) warning that such children could be ‘vulnerable to determinist beliefs about ability’, raises questions around the ultimate virtue of this curricular flexibility. Parents have also expressed some concern that their children should continue to have maximum ‘access to the same curriculum as their mainstream peers’ if

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<sup>7</sup> These guidelines are available for children with Mild Intellectual Disabilities (Government of Ireland, 2007a), Moderate Intellectual Disabilities (Government of Ireland, 2007b) and Severe and Profound Intellectual Disabilities (Government of Ireland, 2007c). They can be viewed by following this link: <https://www.sess.ie/resources/curricular-material>.

they are able for it (Kerins, 2014, p. 52). The extent to which this is happening is not fully clear, although recent design developments introduced with the new *Primary Language Curriculum* have provided tentative pathways towards facilitating this access (Government of Ireland, 2020d).

### ***Pathways for Learning***

The *Primary Language Curriculum* Pathways (Table 3) provide a spectrum of seven categorical language experiences based on each child’s unique capacity to engage with the core curriculum (Government of Ireland, 2020d). The pathways become incrementally more challenging as the continuum progresses, with ‘experiencing’ a learning environment emphasised in the initial pathway and the ability to generalise expected in the final one (when it is assumed that the child can do more, internalise more and apply some skills independently).

**Table 3: Primary Language Curriculum Pathways (Government of Ireland, 2020d)**

SEN Paths	The child...
Experiencing	is present during a learning activity, s/he is exposed and/or awake and/or exposed to the learning environment. S/he is beginning to acclimatise to the learning environment such as objects, people, sounds and other sensory experiences.
Attending	becomes attentive to and/or engaged with the learning activities presented by changing gesture, posture, vocalisation, eye gaze, movement etc. S/he is acclimatised to the learning environment.
Responding	demonstrates capacity to actively or purposefully take an interest in the learning environment. S/he begins to indicate likes, dislikes or preferences. S/he actively responds to a learning activity with or without support.
Initiating	shows curiosity about the learning environment. S/he actively and independently seeks opportunities to engage with and/ or influence that environment.
Acquiring	demonstrates that knowledge, a concept or a skill is being learned. S/he explores and participates in the learning.
Becoming Fluent	moves towards fluency and accuracy in familiar learning contexts. S/he independently and consistently demonstrates recall mastery of the skill /concept / knowledge learned.
Generalising	transfers and applies learned skills, knowledge or concepts to familiar and unfamiliar contexts.

This pathways approach stimulates teacher agency by allowing teachers the autonomy to craft suitable schemes of work for their children (Government of Ireland, 2020d). To aid teachers in crafting these schemes, language milestones pitched along progression continua have been provided within the *Primary Language Curriculum*, to break down learning further into more manageable steps. While these pathways may enable curricular access at individual levels, at present this approach is limited only to the teaching of language (Government of Ireland, 2020d). The curricular area being explored in this study is rooted more in the social sphere, where a less nuanced approach to difference currently prevails.

#### **2.4.2 The Social, Personal and Health Education Curriculum in Special Schools**

The SPHE curriculum encompasses, *inter alia*, the so-called ‘controversial’ areas, which typically include *Relationships and Sexuality Education* (RSE) and *Stay Safe* (O’Sullivan, 2014, p. 12). The manner in which these areas are explored should be outlined in the school’s SPHE policy (Stack, 2006, 2009), although international evidence suggests that some school-level policies often lack this kind of detail (Vanderlinde, Dexter and Braak, 2012). The supplementary curriculum guidelines for SPHE highlighted in Footnote 7, underscore the importance of teaching these areas according to the needs of individual children. *Stay Safe* itself, while professing to cater for the ‘wide diversity of learners and learning styles’ in all schools, embraces the fact that some children may need more ‘targeted individual adaptations’ (MacIntyre and Lawlor, 2016, p. 3). However, ambiguity exists as to how targeted these adaptations ought to be and how to negotiate the ‘commonality-differentiation’ balance underpinning curriculum adaptation decisions for children with SN (Norwich, 2010, p. 132). In other words, to paraphrase Norwich and Lewis’ (2007, p. 127) ‘most basic and perplexing’ question: *how specialised should the*

*teaching of this group of children be?* Varying conceptions of curriculum are central to that debate.

## 2.5 Common and Different Curricula for Children with SN

In the drive towards ‘universalizing curricula’, Norwich and Lewis (2007, p. 127) suggest that there have been few attempts to ‘clarify the nature’ of what a completely universal or common curriculum might actually look like. To address this conceptual vacuum four basic ‘aspects’ are proposed as a structure for curricula (Norwich, 2010, p. 133):

- General principles and aims;
- Areas of learning (for example subject areas);
- Specific programmes of study;
- Teaching practices.

Under this construction, commonality occurs along a spectrum with five different design options (Table 4) based on the nature of each of the four curricular aspects in particular circumstances. In between the completely common (Option 1) and completely different (Option 5) curricula, there are what might be referred to as hybrid curriculum options with degrees of commonality and difference. In essence, this spectrum can act as a structural assemblage for teachers who ‘want to have it both ways as far as possible’ (Norwich, 2013, p. 66).

**Table 4: Curriculum Design Options (Norwich, 1991, 2010, p. 133; Norwich and Lewis, 2007)**

Design options	Principles	Programme areas	Specific programmes	Teaching
1	Common	Common	Common	Common
2	Common	Common	Common	Different
3	Common	Common	Different	Different
4	Common	Different	Different	Different
5	Different	Different	Different	Different

For example, Option 3 of Table 4 illustrates a curriculum that is not fully common but has common aims and areas of learning. Programme objectives and teaching strategies to achieve those aims are different based on the abilities of children. It represents a tendency towards curriculum differentiation (Norwich, 2013) but it also highlights that there are different options available to structure the approach to the commonality-difference dichotomy at school and system level. This flexibility is particularly useful in the context of empirical evidence from the Irish context which suggests that teachers experience significant difficulty in facilitating meaningful access to the general curriculum for children with severe learning difficulties (Ware *et al.*, 2011). In taking steps to improve or increase access, ethical dilemmas abound (Norwich, 2013).

### **2.5.1 Dilemmas of Difference**

Deciding whether or not to differentiate the curriculum, and to what extent, presents teachers with two significant dilemmas that have to be negotiated, according to Norwich (2010, p. 119):

- If children with a learning difficulty are afforded the same learning experiences as other children, are they likely to be denied the opportunity to have learning experiences relevant to their individual needs?
- If children with a learning difficulty are **not** afforded the same learning experiences as other children, are they likely to be treated as a lower status group and denied equal opportunities?

Teachers are aware of these dilemmas and of the choices that must be made in addressing and resolving them (Norwich, 2010, 2013). While teachers generally favour maximising the common curriculum, many also believe that specific learning experiences ought to be planned for children who need more tailored support (Norwich, 2010). Getting the

'balance' right (Norwich, 2013; Norwich and Koutsouris, 2017) is central to facilitating meaningful participation according to Ware (2014, p. 463):

If curriculum is the way in which schools attempt to equip children of all abilities with the knowledge and skills required for adult life, participation is the object of the exercise, the nub of the whole thing. The more severe the child's difficulties, the more acute the problems with regard to meaningful participation in both the academic and the social life of the classroom become.

Debate around facilitating participation – or even 'partial participation' as Baumgart *et al.*'s (1982, p. 17) seminal paper characterises it – in the context of difference, often hinges (again) on understandings of equity and equality, and how both manifest themselves within so-called inclusive school systems (Wilcox, 2020). Equal treatment – in this case a completely common curriculum – might not ensure equity for some learners, despite the best intentions of those facilitating that treatment (Hornby and Kidd, 2001; Hornby and Witte, 2008).

Research in four special schools for children with Mild General Learning Disabilities (MGLD) largely corroborates the existence of dilemmas of difference in the Irish curricular context (Kerins, 2014, p. 56):

... dilemmas exist with regard to the identification and placement of pupils with MGLD and in relation to curricular provision.

The parents in Kerins' (2014) study believed the general mainstream curriculum to be limited in its applicability to the needs of children with MGLD and also contended that 'teachers' knowledge of SEN' in their approach to curricular delivery is superior in special schools (Kerins, 2014, p. 53). In view of this, a broader discussion on curriculum approaches would prove instructive at this point.

## **2.6 Approaches to Curriculum**

Although macro-level research into school curricula is vast, data on how teachers practically 'translate' curricula (Cook-Sather, 2009, p. 219) at the micro-level is more limited. Smagorinsky, Lakly and Johnson (2002), Shower (2010a, 2010b) and McCarthy

and Woodward (2018) all suggest a broadly similar three-part theoretical framework for describing how curriculum is approached at classroom level. Table 5 illustrates that framework to provide comparisons with the language used by different scholars to describe processes and approaches that are, in essence, the same. The terms used by Shaver (2010a) to describe these curriculum approaches are more reflective of those used in the literature around personal safety skill instruction and child safeguarding. They also align more closely with the lexicon employed in the *Dilemmas of Difference* discussion, in relation to children with SN.

**Table 5: Approaches to Curriculum**

	<i>Terms used by: Smagorinsky, Lakly and Johnson (2002)</i>	<i>Terms used by: Shaver (2010)</i>	<i>Terms used by: McCarthy and Woodward (2018)</i>	<i>Description of approach</i>
<i>Approach 1</i>	Curriculum acquiescence	Curriculum transmission (or fidelity)	Faithfully following the curriculum	<i>Teachers teaching the curriculum as the official written document sets out.</i>
<i>Approach 2</i>	Curriculum accommodation	Curriculum development	Adapting the curriculum	<i>Teachers amending the written document to reflect personal beliefs and individual child needs.</i>
<i>Approach 3</i>	Curriculum resistance	Curriculum making	Rejecting the curriculum	<i>Teachers eschewing the official curriculum and teaching a self-designed curriculum, based on child needs and personal beliefs.</i>

Shaver’s (2010a) framework emerged from a qualitative case study of ten teachers in England, who were observed teaching language lessons between nine and twenty-six times. General individual interviews, group interviews and pre and post-lesson interviews also formed part of the data-gathering process (Shaver, 2010a). The resulting curriculum



approaches theorised are highly relevant to this study, as they provide an assemblage through which an answer can be adequately provided to one of the central research questions: *how do teachers approach Stay Safe with children with SN in the context of a wide gamut of need?* Shawer's (2010a) three-part theoretical framework will be critiqued in the coming sections, with the work of other curriculum specialists used to interrogate its efficacy. The transmission approach will be evaluated first.

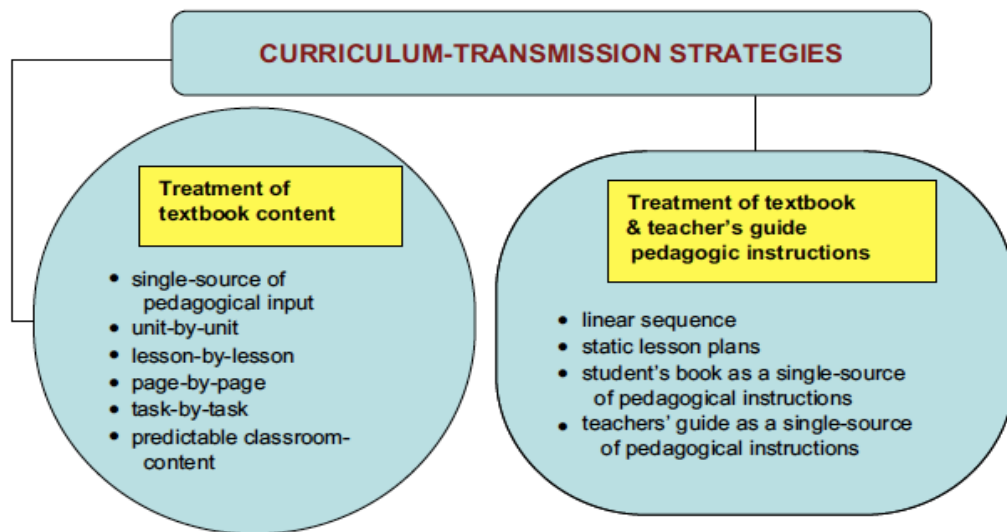
### **2.6.1 The Curriculum Transmission Approach**

The curriculum transmission approach (Shawer, 2010a) is typically understood as implementing the curriculum with fidelity, in adherence with what is laid out in the official written document, in order to achieve a set of desired outcomes (Durlak and DuPre, 2008; Pence, Justice and Wiggins, 2008; O'Donnell, 2008):

External experts define curriculum knowledge by determining what teachers should teach.... teachers are transmitters who follow classical humanism aimed at delivering static information (Shawer, 2010a, p. 174).

To analogise with Norwich (2010), this approach would mean utilising the same principles, programme areas, specific programmes and teaching approaches as those designated in the official curriculum. As part of this approach, teachers as transmitters implement curriculum stabilisation strategies, where a textbook or guidebook typically becomes the single source of pedagogical input. Curriculum delivery is linear and teaching content is predictable. Figure 1 details some of the strategies utilised by teachers adopting this stance, which includes a systematic unit-by-unit, lesson-by-lesson method of content delivery. This delivery format correlates closely with the typical expectation set for *Stay Safe*, where teachers are envisaged to start at Lesson 1 of Topic 1 and work their way, in sequence, to the final lesson on Topic 5 (MacIntyre and Lawlor, 2016).

**Figure 1: Curriculum Strategies Associated with the Curriculum Transmission Approach (Shawer, 2010a, p. 181)**



Evaluating fidelity is complex and is often dependent on qualitative judgements or observations, which may be vulnerable to subjectivity (Smith, Finney and Fulcher, 2019). In general, a three-part metric is employed for measuring the concept (Pence, Justice and Wiggins, 2008, p. 332):

- (i) *Differentiation* – the extent to which the core distinguishing features of the curriculum are present in delivery;
- (ii) *Adherence* – the extent to which the core curricular components are delivered as prescribed;
- (iii) *Delivery* – the extent to which teachers implement the curriculum with preparedness and ardour.

These three dimensions are seen as vital because often programmes have passed through multiple iterations of testing and any deviation in the dimensions can ‘violate theoretical maxims’, that may in turn undermine the veracity of child reception and engagement (Dusenbury *et al.*, 2003, p. 251). Teachers adopting the transmission approach tend to be inexperienced, with limited access to professional development (McCarthy and Woodard, 2018). There is also tentative evidence to suggest that their affinity for this

approach may be influenced by monitoring arrangements in place to evaluate implementation of the official curriculum (Salvio and Boldt, 2009; Wyse and Torrance, 2009). This points to the potency of Cuban's (1995, p. 5) 'tested curriculum' for determining teacher practices, and also to the role of superiors in influencing teachers' approaches.

There is some contestation on whether the transmission approach ought to be construed positively or cynically (Dusenbury *et al.*, 2003). Tentative, non-longitudinal evidence exists suggesting that benefits accrue when adopting this approach with school-based prevention curricula - such as childhood obesity (Little *et al.*, 2015), mental health disorders (Greenberg, 2000) and child safeguarding (White *et al.*, 2018). Beyond these, which are broadly situated in the health education domain, research on curricular fidelity has been comparatively neglected (Stains and Vickrey, 2017). From a general, instructional approaches perspective, however, it can clearly be extrapolated from other scholarly material, that differentiated provision has a positive impact on outcomes for children with SN (Westwood, 2015; Tiernan, Casserly and Maguire, 2020). There is also some evidence suggesting that absolute fidelity approaches, prohibiting any adaptation, curb teacher autonomy (Yurdakul, 2015). Context also impacts on fidelity (Domitrovich *et al.*, 2008; Durlak and DuPre, 2008). Where the principal is a proponent of the concept, teachers are more likely to adopt it in their approach to curriculum (Kam, Greenberg and Walls, 2003; Gregory *et al.*, 2007; Little *et al.*, 2015). There is also evidence of principals using their 'formal authority...to get teachers to comply with the pace and sequence' of curricula (Dulude, Spillane and Dumay, 2017, p. 383). The stakes are higher when these curricula are mandatory and, in the case of *Stay Safe*, where the principal has an important oversight function (Government of Ireland, 2017a) which can be subject to external evaluation (Government of Ireland, 2019a).

### ***Mandated Fidelity***

In many jurisdictions, standardised curricula are mandated for implementation in the classroom, although data on the extent to which they are implemented with fidelity is somewhat limited (O'Donnell, 2008) and in many cases rates of fidelity are determined by self-reports (Stains and Vickrey, 2017) which can be less objective and less reliable (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). Nevertheless, it is instructive to look at an example for illustrative purposes. In the United States, Eisman and colleagues (2020), in their recent case study research, examined the implementation of the *Michigan Model for Health* – the official high school Health Education curriculum for the state of Michigan. Although schools are required to teach this curriculum with at least 80% fidelity, Eisman *et al.* (2020) have established that 68% of teachers do not meet this fidelity standard. The main barrier appears to be difficulties with applying the curriculum to suit children's individual needs (Eisman *et al.*, 2020). To mitigate this barrier, they recommend 'flexibility to adapt curriculum materials and tailor elements to school context, student needs, and teaching style, while maintaining fidelity to the core components' (Eisman *et al.*, 2020, p. 454). This notion of modifying content while maintaining fidelity to the core theoretical principles appears to accord with Dulude *et al.*'s (2017, p. 382) suggestion that mandated curricula should have 'negotiable and non-negotiable' elements,

pressing teachers to comply with the nonnegotiable topics (e.g. the sequence and pace of curriculum, the state standardized test) and leaving some room for negotiable topics (pedagogical methods, scope of curriculum).

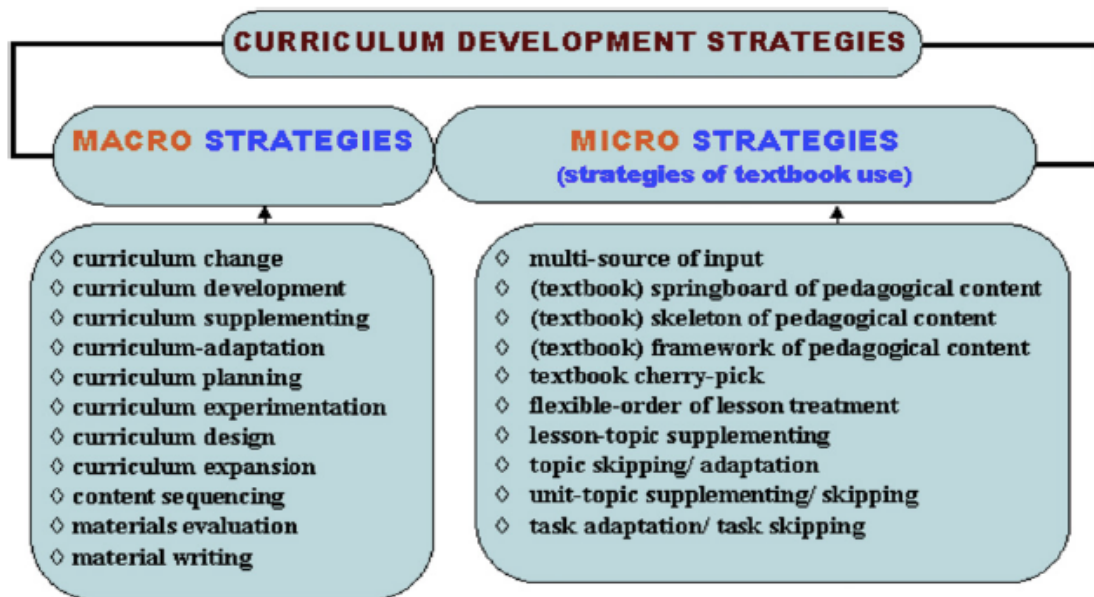
This resonates with many of the key ideas advanced by Norwich (2010) in the curricular commonality-differentiation debate, highlighted in Section 2.5. These negotiable and non-negotiable elements to mandated curricula might overcome contextual obstacles because absolute fidelity is difficult to accomplish and some element of modification - planned or incidental - is almost inevitable (Ringwalt *et al.*, 2003) and in many cases

desirable (Westwood, 2015; Yurdakul, 2015). While fidelity is not described within *Stay Safe*, it acknowledges that some children with SN will need adaptations to ensure accessibility (MacIntyre and Lawlor, 2016), prompting the need for a discussion on the curriculum development approach, as theorised by Shaver (2010a).

### 2.6.2 The Curriculum Development Approach

The curriculum development or ‘adaptation’ approach ‘enfranchises teachers to shape the curriculum according to their contexts’ (Shaver, 2010a, p. 174), prognosticating perhaps the significance of teacher leadership associated with it. In Norwich (2010) parlance, it would mean varying the principles, programme areas, specific programmes and teaching approaches depending on the child. To facilitate this curricular variation, both macro and micro-strategies are utilised at classroom level, as Figure 2 illustrates.

**Figure 2: Curriculum Strategies associated with the Curriculum Development Approach (Shaver, 2010a, p. 178)**



Macro-strategies are those broad pursuits used by teachers to translate the official ‘intended curriculum’ into the taught ‘operational curriculum’ (Eisner, 1990, p. 63). They include expanding the curriculum to include material not directly encompassed by the official document, modifying instructional approaches for context applicability and

amending the design and sequence of content to suit priority learning needs (Shawer, 2010a). Micro-strategies are used by teachers to operationalise the macro-strategies and are underpinned by the utilisation of multiple sources of content, to custom-craft appropriate schemes of work, specific to the group they are teaching (Shawer, 2010a). Skipping unsuitable curricular topics is a common micro-strategy, as is the practice of using activities from a plethora of class textbooks and teacher guidebooks as a springboard for ideas and pedagogical content (Shawer, 2010a). Teachers who are curriculum developers tend to be more experienced and have support systems in place in their school (McCarthy and Woodard, 2018), providing evidence to reinforce the concept of a distributed framework where multiple ‘levels of leadership’ converge to provide direction to the school (Gronn, 2009, p. 381). Under this approach, teachers mobilise their own personal beliefs and draw on the expertise of other experienced colleagues to ‘navigate’ the curriculum (McCarthy and Woodard, 2018, p. 70).

School-based curriculum development is not without its critics however, with doubt expressed about the capacities and qualifications of some special school teachers to engage in it effectively (Ware *et al.*, 2009). While there is acknowledgement in general education discourse of the importance of teachers utilising ‘evidence’, ‘data’ and ‘research’ to inform decision-making (Godfrey, 2016; Sheard and Sharples, 2016; Brown and Zhang, 2017; Brown, Schildkamp and Hubers, 2017; Guldborg, 2017), in the special education domain there is some concern that:

the perceived absence of good research evidence has prompted educationalists and teachers to draw on their expertise and professional experience in the selected field, to make hypotheses or claims for the importance of particular features of pedagogy (Norwich and Lewis, 2007, p. 147).

These hypotheses can lead to teachers making decisions on the basis of ‘common sense’ because they see themselves as the ‘experts on SEN’ (Peacey, 2005, p. 4). The difficulty with common sense amendments to curricula is that if improperly executed they can

involve irreconcilable changes to their underpinning theoretical bases (Dusenbury *et al.*, 2003). There is preliminary evidence suggesting that teacher support systems can provide the necessary assistance to improve success levels (Son and Kim, 2016), pointing again to the importance of teacher leadership, at a distributed level when providing for children with SN.

### ***Curriculum Development and Special Needs***

Despite the trend towards inclusion, there is general acceptance that children with SN require tailored support to access the official curriculum and to meet learning targets (Broderick, Mehta-Parekh and Reid, 2005; Allan, 2007; Tiernan, Casserly and Maguire, 2020). While some have suggested that the optimal approach for facilitating differing needs is a *Universal Design for Learning* approach (Hall, Meyer and Rose, 2012; Meyer, Rose and Gordon, 2014), where a general framework is designed with the intention of facilitating every child (Novak, 2014), the utilisation of this in the Irish context has not been sufficiently examined (Heelan, 2015). Furthermore, Ireland's *Primary School Curriculum* has not been designed with that concept in mind (Government of Ireland, 1999b). A differentiated approach to instruction is more common (Travers, 2011), where topics are taught differently 'according to certain important differences among learners' (Westwood, 2015, p. 161). This involves using different instructional methodologies, employing additional resources to aid understanding, selecting alternative learning activities and possibly identifying different learning outcomes compared to typically-developing peers (Duquette, 2016). In terms of adapting the official curriculum, Westwood (2015, p. 163) suggests:

Curriculum content to be studied may be increased or decreased for some students in terms of depth and complexity. The core concepts and skills within a topic are still covered, but at different depths. Key aspects of the curriculum may be reduced to manageable units and presented in smaller steps for students with learning difficulties.

Westwood's (2015) approach allows for general learning activities to be customised to suit children's priority learning needs and allows for their existing skillset to be considered in curriculum enactment. This way of doing things aligns closely with what the various SN subject guidelines, outlined in Footnote 7, espouse.

Ethical dilemmas arise with this approach, however. Notwithstanding the merits of making content more applicable to all learners and their needs, some have suggested that it may disadvantage children with SN in the long term, by increasing the gap between them and their typically developing peers (Schofield, 2010). This school of thought however, sidesteps the fact that many of these children - because of the severity of their SN - may never have the capacity to attain the same level as those peers (Warnock, 2010). This is because educational needs are just one aspect of their disability; medical needs may also arise, restricting their educational capacity and limiting the extent to which they can meaningfully engage with the curriculum (Warnock, 2010). Ignoring this reality has led to trenchant and emotive criticism from Warnock (2010) that inclusionists do not sufficiently consider the facts in relation to the most severely disabled children. These children may require the custom-making of an entirely different curriculum.

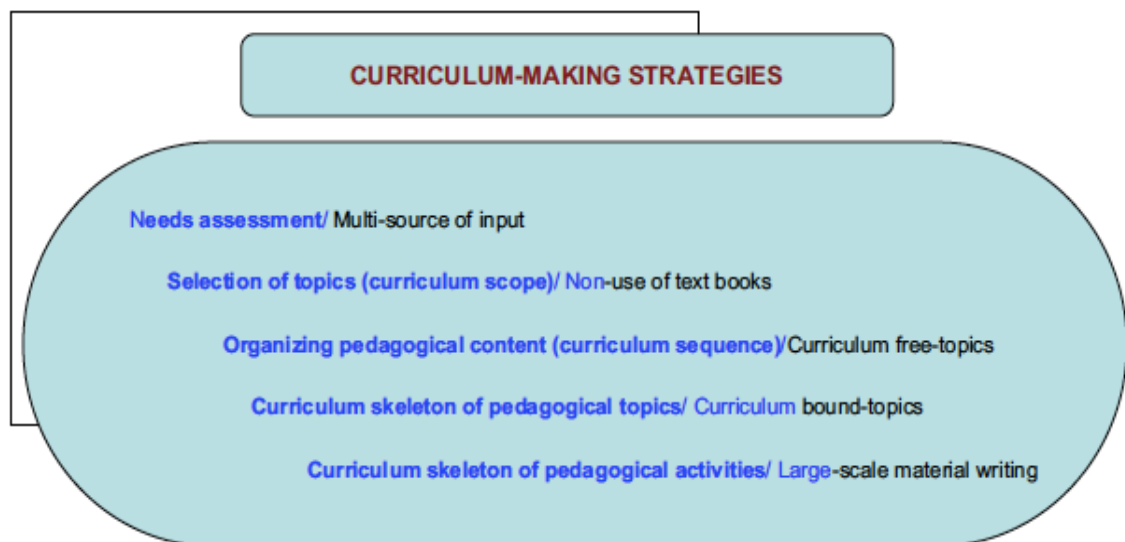
### **2.6.3 The Curriculum Making Approach**

The curriculum making approach is rooted in process-based, social constructivism 'where students explore worthwhile educational areas relevant to themselves and community, rather than teaching pre-specified objectives that hardly address their needs or abilities' (Shawer, 2010a, p. 175). In other words teachers enact a completely different curriculum (Norwich, 2010) that is more-or-less self-designed. Teachers adopting this stance can be thought of as curriculum makers because they select content in collaboration with their pupils, taking account of their skills and interests - spotlighting, it appears, the importance of pupil voice (Coates and Vickerman, 2008) and participation (Lundy, 2007) in the



process. They use many of the strategies that curriculum developers utilise, such as supplementing and skipping, but crucially they also engage in ‘curriculum-design and material-writing on a large scale’ to cater for *their* pupils in *their* classrooms (Shawer, 2010a, p. 179). As Figure 3 illustrates, content and pedagogy is informed by an initial needs assessment and this is used to construct a ‘portfolio curriculum’ from multiple sources (Shawer, 2010a, p. 181). This approach aligns very closely with what O’Keefe (2004) articulates takes place in many special schools in Ireland.

**Figure 3: Curriculum Strategies associated with the Curriculum Making Approach (Shawer, 2010a, p. 180)**



Teachers using this approach are typically teaching for a considerable amount of time (Shawer, 2010a; McCarthy and Woodard, 2018) because they need to have acquired a certain amount of ‘capital’ within the profession to ‘act out’ against the official curriculum (Smagorinsky, Lakly and Johnson, 2002, p. 207). There is no evidence suggesting, however, that length of service results in any appreciable impact on pupil learning (Ladd, 2008; Graham *et al.*, 2020; Rice, 2020). Crucially, adoptees of this approach do not feel that their practice is being monitored by management and are sometimes actively encouraged to be creative with their curriculum approach (McCarthy and Woodard, 2018). This points again to the criticality of shared leadership and

collaborative problem-solving (Woods and Roberts, 2018) in engendering the autonomy needed for teachers to develop their own authentic, context-specific approach to curriculum.

Questions arise in relation to the efficacy and feasibility of this approach, however. First, it is not clear how teachers negotiate the ‘incommensurable boundaries’ that exist between what the children need to know ‘to make sense of their worlds’, and what officialdom says they ought to be provided with in school (Craig, 2006, p. 289). Second, there is a lack of data on whether teachers have the skill, experience and real-world autonomy necessary to engage in such a delicate negotiation. Third, although social constructivism underpins the idea of this approach in a broad sense, it is difficult to assess how theoretically informed the myriad curricula that could result from it are in individual classrooms. This has all the more pertinence in the context of evidence suggesting that instruction arising from this approach can lack ‘coherence and an underlying philosophy’ (McCarthy and Woodard, 2018, p. 56).

#### **2.6.4 Trends in Curriculum Approaches**

Having considered the three most common approaches to curriculum (Smagorinsky, Lakly and Johnson, 2002; Shaver, 2010a; McCarthy and Woodard, 2018), the following key trends can be summarised:

- Curriculum development can be identified as the most common approach employed by practitioners. Half of the teachers in Shaver’s (2010a) study and three-fifths of those in McCarthy and Woodward’s (2018) study approached the curriculum in this way;
- School leadership and management can have a significant bearing on the approaches employed by teachers. Where the principal is a proponent of fidelity, teachers are more likely to adopt the transmission approach (Kam, Greenberg and

Walls, 2003; Gregory *et al.*, 2007; Little *et al.*, 2015); where shared leadership is present and teachers are given autonomy over the approach, they are more likely to either adapt or make their own curriculum (McCarthy and Woodard, 2018);

- Teaching experience also has a determining role in the approach adopted. Teachers who are more experienced are more likely to have the confidence to adapt the curriculum (Smagorinsky, Lakly and Johnson, 2002), although that observation should be qualified by noting that all curriculum transmitters in Shaver's (2010a) study had over eight years' experience;
- External monitoring of the curriculum is also influential, with teachers more likely to adopt a transmission approach where it is the subject of evaluation (Salvio and Boldt, 2009; Wyse and Torrance, 2009), indicative of the influential role that the tested curriculum has on teaching practice (Cuban, 1995).

These trends offer an interesting insight into how teachers approach the curriculum generally. The question now turns to a specific curricular area – its merits, how it is enacted and its applicability for children with SN.

## **2.7 Child Safeguarding Curricula**

School-based child safeguarding curricula or programmes are a feature of many education systems in the Developed World (Zwi *et al.*, 2007) and are an important tool in the prevention of child maltreatment (Kenny and Wurtele, 2012). Frequently referred to as child sexual abuse prevention curricula (Topping and Barron, 2009), their purpose is to proactively develop personal safety skills to attenuate the risk of victimisation and exploitation (White *et al.*, 2018). The empowerment of children is a fundamental objective of their enactment (MacIntyre and Lawlor, 2016), leading some to question the level of responsibility they place on young people for protecting themselves (Briggs and Hawkins, 1994b, 1994a). This section of the chapter will explore the features of these

curricula and highlight their importance for vulnerable groups (Brassard and Fiorvanti, 2015).

### 2.7.1 Rationale for Child Safeguarding Curricula

Broadly speaking, child safeguarding curricula can be divided into the following three distinct categories (Topping and Barron, 2009):

- **Primary prevention curricula** are focused on providing an intervention to all children within the school population – the strategic objective which the *Child Protection Procedures* (2017) envisage for *Stay Safe* in the Irish primary context (MacIntyre and Lawlor, 2016). They are the most common type of safeguarding curriculum utilised (Wurtele and Kenny, 2010);
- **Secondary prevention curricula** are aimed at those with a higher risk of being victimised. Children with SN have been identified in that category (Turner *et al.*, 2011; Chan, Lo and Lp, 2018);
- **Tertiary prevention curricula** are directed at those who have already been harmed, or those who have harmed others. Although they represent a key ingredient in the strive for prevention, they are not the focus of this research and available data on their effectiveness are sparse.

The efficacy of primary prevention curricula for promoting preventative behaviours is well-established in empirical research studies (Chen, Fortson and Tseng, 2012; Zhang *et al.*, 2014; Dale *et al.*, 2016; Jin *et al.*, 2017; Citak Tunc *et al.*, 2018; White *et al.*, 2018; Bustamante *et al.*, 2019; Nickerson *et al.*, 2019). In their systematic literature review, Topping and Barron (2009) examined twenty-two studies investigating eighteen different curricula – including *Stay Safe* (MacIntyre and Lawlor, 2016). Although a lack of replication research was highlighted, the majority of studies reported an increase in children’s safeguarding knowledge and personal safety skills post-intervention (Topping

and Barron, 2009). At a basic level, this means that if children who experience one of these curricula encounter a scenario that could compromise their safety, they are more knowledgeable in how to deal with it (Gibson and Leitenberg, 2000; Ko and Cosden, 2001; Bustamante *et al.*, 2019) – although this increased capacity does not mean that they will successfully prevent the scenario from resulting in harm (MacIntyre and Carr, 1999).

### **2.7.2 *Stay Safe*: A Primary Prevention Curriculum**

*Stay Safe* is a primary child abuse prevention curriculum, originally designed in 1991. It was introduced in response to increased reporting of child sexual abuse in the preceding decade and heightened awareness of the need for a preventative strategy to mitigate the trend (O'Reilly and Carr, 1998). While other prevention curricula were available, most of these were designed for a North American audience, limiting their cultural applicability to the Irish context (MacIntyre *et al.*, 2000). Furthermore, those that were available tended to be short in duration (Nibert *et al.*, 1989), which conflicted with research evidence suggesting that interventions of longer duration were more effective (Finkelhor and Browne, 1992). Following a review of theoretical and empirical literature, the creators of *Stay Safe* contended that a multi-systemic curriculum 'which targeted children, their family systems and their schools' was required (MacIntyre *et al.*, 2000, p. 201). Despite vigorous complaints from the various churches, who contended that teaching in this area would impede on the role of the family (O'Toole, 2002), *Stay Safe* was ultimately introduced on a phased basis (MacIntyre *et al.*, 2000). As time passed, it was recognised that the curriculum was of limited suitability for children with SN and five supplementary modules were introduced to support children with the following different needs (Cullen, 1996, 2009):

- Cognitive learning difficulties
- Physical disability

- Hearing impairment
- Visual impairment
- Emotional and behavioural difficulties

These supplementary modules adapted some of the key messages of the core curriculum to facilitate the provision of a ‘more intensive and individualised approach’ for children with SN (Cullen, 2009, p. 2). There was a strong endorsement of the notion that while the core *Stay Safe* curriculum ‘may prove adequate for some children with disability, a more needs-specific approach is required for most children in special education’ (Cullen, 2009, p. 2).

### ***The Current Stay Safe Curriculum***

In 2016, the original *Stay Safe* was updated to reflect societal changes that occurred over the preceding quarter of a century. This newest iteration follows a broadly similar structure but contains a suite of multi-media resources to support teaching content and enable teachers to monitor pupils’ responses to specific stories – the teacher having to read stories limited the ability to do this with the previous iteration. *Stay Safe* is presented over four age-levels:

- Junior and Senior Infants (5-6 year olds)
- First and Second Class (7-8 year olds)
- Third and Fourth Class (9-10 year olds)
- Fifth and Sixth Class (11-12 year olds)

There are five topics in each level, with a number of prescribed lessons per topic, as Table 6 illustrates. The curriculum is language-rich with vocabulary progression stipulated across the age-levels. Teaching and learning is underpinned by the *Stay Safe* slogan, *Say NO, Get Away, Tell Someone!*, and the core objective is to ‘empower’ children with both knowledge and skills (MacIntyre and Lawlor, 2016, p. 2). It is advised that *Stay Safe* be

taught ‘in its entirety...consecutively, beginning with Topic 1 and working through to Topic 5...in one block’ (MacIntyre and Lawlor, 2016, p. 7) - reflecting, it would appear, a preference for the curriculum transmission approach (Shawer, 2010a).

**Table 6: Schedule of Topics and Lessons in Stay Safe (2016) (PDST, 2020)**

Stay Safe Topic	Number of Lessons			
	J. Infants S. Infants	1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup>
Feeling Safe and Unsafe	3	3	3	3
Friendship and Bullying	3	5	6	6
Touches	2	2	2	2
Secrets and Telling	1	1	1	1
Strangers	1	1	1	1

The rationale for each topic is provided in the handbook and it is recommended that work is completed on feelings and emotions before *Stay Safe* topic delivery (MacIntyre and Lawlor, 2016). Although there is a remarkable lack of research around the practical teaching of these topics, they deal with areas that may be considered complex for some children with SN to comprehend:

1. *Feeling Safe and Unsafe*: There are some doubts as to how children with severe SN could have the level of understanding to access concepts such as feeling safe and feeling unsafe, let alone deploy the skills necessary to actualise that understanding in a practical scenario (Miller and Raymond, 2008);
2. *Friendship and Bullying*: Making friendships has been identified as a ‘protective factor’ against bullying and victimisation (Bollmer *et al.*, 2005, p. 701). This

protective potential is especially relevant for vulnerable groups such as those with SN (Twyman *et al.*, 2010; Turner *et al.*, 2011; Fink *et al.*, 2015, 2018) and those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT+) (Loftin, 2015; Higgins *et al.*, 2016; Neary, Irwin-Gowran and McEvoy, 2016). Even though children with SN find it exceptionally difficult to make friendships (Foley *et al.*, 2012; Rowley *et al.*, 2012; Pinto, Baines and Bakopoulou, 2019), *Stay Safe* does not provide an evidence-informed route to improving their success in this area;

3. *Touches*: Many children with SN experience difficulties in understanding their bodies and in deciphering the appropriateness or inappropriateness of touches (Wrobel, 2003; Hartman, 2013). Yet the current *Stay Safe* curriculum, even in the early years, assumes an advanced level understanding of that concept;
4. *Secrets and Telling*: The language issues that many children with SN experience render the making of a disclosure exceptionally difficult (Miller and Raymond, 2008). While this is acknowledged in *Stay Safe*, a cogent mitigation strategy has not been articulated;
5. *Strangers*: The difficulties that children with SN experience in making friendships present the same problems in deciphering strangers. It is plausible that such children are too trusting, which may partly be the cause of their increased susceptibility (Brassard and Fiorvanti, 2015).

Compounding the complexity of these topics for children with SN, is the recommendation that the teaching of them be condensed into one school term – typically Term 2, between January and March (PDST, 2018). The timebound approach is assumed to facilitate oversight and monitoring arrangements, so that school management can confirm that the curriculum is being completed in full, in accordance with requirements (PDST, 2018; Government of Ireland, 2019a). While parents can opt their children out of *Stay Safe* this



is generally discouraged because of its importance in terms of child safeguarding (PDST, 2020). There are no reliable data available in relation to how many parents exercise an opt-out. While training is made available by the PDST on the best approaches for teaching *Stay Safe*, the uptake level from teachers in special schools is not clear. This research will probe that point.

Notwithstanding the data vacuum in relation to *Stay Safe*, it is generally acknowledged to encompass many of the evidence-informed features of effective child safeguarding curricula, deduced from international research studies (Barron and Topping, 2013; Brassard and Fiorvanti, 2015; Walsh *et al.*, 2018).

### **2.7.3 Features of Effective Child Safeguarding Curricula**

Effective child safeguarding curricula focus on the development of both knowledge and skill (Citak Tunc *et al.*, 2018). Typically, their content addresses and centres around the following core themes (Topping and Barron, 2009):

- Recognition of different forms of abuse, including sexual abuse
- Distinguishing between appropriate and inappropriate touching
- Telling the difference between good and bad secrets
- Saying ‘no’ to avoid unwanted approaches
- Telling an adult about situations / experiences that they are uncomfortable about
- Knowing that they are never to blame when something inappropriate is done to them

Sexuality education often occurs in parallel with teaching in this area, as body awareness is recognised as a key element of personal safety (Goldman and Bradley, 2011; Collier-Harris and Goldman, 2017; Middletown Centre for Autism, 2017). Identifying trusted adults and enhancing self-esteem are also key objectives (Bustamante *et al.*, 2019), as offenders typically target those with low self-esteem (MacIntyre *et al.*, 2000). The

teaching of ‘rules’ is central to many topics (Chen, Fortson and Tseng, 2012; Daigneault *et al.*, 2012; Kenny, Wurtele and Alonso, 2012; Walsh *et al.*, 2018), as rule-based messages have long been deemed more effective than feelings-based approaches (Wurtele *et al.*, 1989). This spotlights the importance of pedagogy.

#### 2.7.4 Pedagogical Approaches

A wide array of pedagogical approaches is utilised in child safeguarding curricula, although they generally tend to be atheoretical in nature which can prove problematic in terms of characterising the underpinnings of core components (Topping and Barron, 2009). Walsh *et al.* (2018) identified role-play and discussion as the most common pedagogical approach, with rehearsal and audio-visual material also highly utilised. Curiously, pictures were only identified as an approach in one study, as Table 7 illustrates.

**Table 7: Pedagogical Approaches Utilised in Child Safeguarding Curricula (Walsh *et al.*, 2018)**

Pedagogical Approach	Number of programmes utilising this approach	Pedagogical Approach	Number of programmes utilising this approach
Role-play	14	Praise	2
Discussion	14	Behaviour modelling	2
Film/video	10	Story	2
Rehearsal	8	Shaping	2
Modelling	7	Guiding of attention	2
Feedback	5	Lecture	1
Questioning	4	Problem-solving	1
Instruction	3	Game	1
Reinforcement	3	Song	1
Review	3	Comic books	1
Theatrical Performance	3	Homework handouts	1
Articulation of strategies	3	Colouring book	1
Structured activities	2	Group master of skills	1
Using the child’s viewpoint	2	Pictures	1

This lack of deployment of pictorial approaches conflicts with emerging data attesting to the potentiality of picture books to ‘significantly’ improve children’s safeguarding skills by enhancing their knowledge on what is appropriate and what is not (Huang and Cui, 2020, p. 448). Picture books using human characters have been shown to be more effective than those with anthropomorphic characters (Huang and Cui, 2020) – contrasting with the approach utilised for *Stay Safe*, where pictures of all characters take the latter form. Awareness of this finding is critical, given the importance associated with visuals in teaching children with SN (Westwood, 2015) and their likely incorporation into how curricular content is taught.

### **2.7.5 Child Safeguarding Curricula and Special Needs**

Despite the increased risk to children with SN (Putnam, 2003; UK Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009; Davies and Jones, 2013) there is no secondary prevention curriculum in the Irish school context geared towards addressing their specific vulnerabilities. The available literature implies an apparent preference for specialists in child psychology to take responsibility for this area (Brassard and Fiorvanti, 2015). A leadership role is envisaged, whereby psychologists would provide training and support to teachers on differentiation, managing uncomfortable feelings, evaluating effectiveness and dealing with parents (Woods *et al.*, 2011; Brassard and Fiorvanti, 2015). Yet, there is no empirical evidence in the Irish context to suggest that this psychological piece, curricular input or leadership role is a feature of their service to special schools in the safeguarding sphere. This is in spite of the well-established general benefits for teachers of working in a ‘multi-disciplinary collaborative’ context with other professionals (Doveston and Keenaghan, 2010; Travers, 2020, p. 67).

Curriculum enactment – whether specifically in this child safeguarding sphere or more broadly – is often different in every special school, depending on contextual factors

(O’Keefe, 2004; Carpenter, 2016). The role that leadership plays in the enactment process is under-researched (Harris, Jones and Crick, 2020) and it is to that area that focus must now turn to.

## Part C – Perspectives on Leadership

While there is some broad scholarly preoccupation with the role of *head teacher*, school leadership is generally not interpreted in unitary terms (Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008) and principal teachers ‘are certainly not the only leaders in the special education milieu’ (Cobb, 2015, p. 213). In terms of leadership of the curriculum the ‘idea of the teacher as a leader is far from new’ (Harris, Jones and Crick, 2020, p. 1) and the expertise that they have in leading effective pedagogy has been tentatively recognised (Garcia-Martinez *et al.*, 2020). For this reason conceptions of leadership that incorporate ‘shared modalities’ between teachers and formal leaders are preferred, as there is recognition that such sharing enables school improvement and greater inclusion for all children (Martinez and Tadeu, 2018, p. 1). Before particularising that discussion, an examination of leadership definitions in school terms is warranted.

### 2.8 Defining Leadership in Schools

As international school leadership discourse continues to evolve apace, contestation has emerged in arriving at one overarching conceptual understanding (Leithwood *et al.*, 2006; Spillane and Healey, 2010; Bush, 2011; Yukl, 2013; Bush and Glover, 2014). Generally, it is regarded as a three-dimensional construct incorporating the capacity to *influence* others (Spillane and Coldren, 2011) in accordance with a clear *vision* and a strong set of underlying *values* (Bush and Glover, 2014). Taking these dimensions into consideration,

Yukl (2013, p. 23) neatly summarises the definition of leadership adopted in this study as:

...the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives.

Fundamentally, this represents a collaborative approach (Harris, 2011; Hauge, Norenes and Vedøy, 2014; Spillane *et al.*, 2015) which is broad (Spillane and Healey, 2010) and discerns leadership as an ‘activity and practice’ rather than a phenomenon rooted only in ‘role and status’ (MacBeath *et al.*, 2018, p. 87). Any member of the school community can exercise leadership under this formulation regardless of their position (MacBeath *et al.*, 2018). This does not mean that the roles occupied by individual ‘formal’ leaders within the community are insignificant because, as Gronn (2009, p. 381) points out, ‘levels of leadership’ operate at school level with ‘qualitative differences among leading units’. These differences arise because, in practice, there is no ‘clear cut division between management and leadership’ (MacBeath *et al.*, 2018, p. 100) and accountability issues often impinge on influence and vision (Harris, 2011). This position is copper-fastened in the Irish context where the national quality framework for schools adjudges ‘leadership and management as inseparable’ (Government of Ireland, 2016, p. 7). This framework incorporates special schools.

### **2.8.1 Leadership in Special Schools**

Current leadership debate in special education is predominantly concerned with the concept of ‘leadership for inclusion’, as leadership is regarded as fundamental to the actualisation of inclusive school systems (McGlynn and London, 2013, p. 155). While scholarly preoccupation with delineating this concept has resulted in a dearth of data on other pertinent conceptualisations, it can be deduced that leadership in a special education context must be a broad tent, due to the diversity of learners involved and the complexity

of their varying needs (Donnelly *et al.*, 2019). It is argued that ‘sharing responsibility’ (Lashley, 2007, p. 180) and ‘collaborative, distributed, and collective forms of leadership’ (Billingsley, 2007, p. 163) are crucial, in order to access multiple wells of experience to create an efficacious school experience for children. To this end, distributed leadership has been researched and written about extensively (Scribner *et al.*, 2007; Harris, 2012; Spillane *et al.*, 2015; Bush, 2018). Its breadth allows it to encapsulate leadership of the curriculum, exercised by (Garcia-Martinez *et al.*, 2020):

- teachers with management positions (e.g. principals, deputy principals, SPHE coordinators)
- teachers without management positions (e.g. unpromoted teachers)

The next three sections of this chapter will be devoted to a typological exploration of teacher leadership, positional leadership, and distributed leadership, using an SN lens. It will commence with the latter, as this can sometimes act as the structural frame for exercising the former typologies (Bush and Glover, 2014).

## **2.9 Distributed Leadership**

Distributed leadership has ‘become the normatively preferred leadership model’ of Twenty-First Century educational communities (Bush and Glover, 2014, pp. 559–560), and is explicitly identified by government circulars as the model under which all Irish schools should be run (Government of Ireland, 2018). Theoretically, it is generally regarded as ‘emergent’, as opposed to fixed (Bush, 2018, p. 535), where multiple ‘leaders’ and ‘followers’ pool their expertise and collaborate to make decisions in relation to given ‘situations’ (Spillane, Halverson and Diamond, 2004, p. 10). In its purest form, as Harris (2012, p. 8) notes, it involves a ‘shift’ in how the principal’s role is traditionally construed:

This shift is quite dramatic...It implies the relinquishing of some authority and power, which is not an easy task, and a repositioning of the role from exclusive leadership to a form of leadership

that is more concerned with brokering, facilitating and supporting others in leading innovation and change. It will require a different conception of the organisation, one that moves away from the bureaucratic to the collaborative.

While consensus-making may occasionally form part of it (Scribner *et al.*, 2007; Humphreys and Rigg, 2020), crucially distributed leadership is not underpinned by majoritarianism where the will of the majority rules (Erbes, 2006). Despite its well-chronicled potential for developing leadership capacity (Tian, Risku and Collin, 2016; Huggins, 2017; Amels *et al.*, 2020), discord has emerged around the robustness of its theoretical frame.

Hatcher (2005), Woods (2007) and Lumby (2013) ponder the dynamic that exists between distributed leadership and managerial power – *is it too simplistic to think that they can exist in harmony and in tandem, and that the latter would not have an influence on the teachers enacting the former?* In their meta-analysis of distributed leadership from 2002 to 2013, Tian and colleagues (2016, p. 156) have underscored this problem and highlight the ‘absence of research that tries to illuminate the use and misuse of power’ within this leadership formulation. Following on in the same vein, Hairon and Goh (2015, p. 707) have suggested that distributed leadership may merely be construed as ‘bounded empowerment’, because as Torrance (2013, p. 355) notes, the distribution of such leadership can be ‘in the gift’ of the principal. If that is the *modus operandi* of the distribution, then it might be more accurate to describe it as ‘licensed leadership’ (King and Stevenson, 2017, p. 657), which raises more questions around its authenticity and the management purpose it serves. Reducing it to such a purpose is often characterised as the ‘dark side of leadership and management’ with ‘submissive employees’ doing their superiors’ bidding (Harris and Jones, 2018, p. 475). Thus, as Harris and DeFlaminis (2016, p. 143) articulate: ‘distributed leadership is not a panacea; it depends on how it is shared, received and enacted’. Concrete data attesting to its sharing, reception and

enactment in terms of application to the curriculum is minimal however (Harris, Jones and Crick, 2020), with its prevalence in the special school environment in need of particular investigation (Keating, 2008; O'Mahony, 2011).

### **2.9.1 Distributed Leadership and Special Needs**

There is some evidence that SETs have low-level experience of distributed leadership and that they themselves view the 'provision of cognitive and emotional support to colleagues as their most important leadership role' (Al-Zboon, 2016, p. 1). Research from Canada indicates that when deployed effectively distributed leadership can be used to support a 'pyramid of intervention' approach to differentiated learning for children with SN (Howery, McClellan and Pedersen-Bayus, 2013) – a model which closely aligns with Fitzgerald's (2019) provision mapping approach to catering for individuals' differing needs. In the Irish context, it has been strongly argued that distributed and integrated leadership systems are essential for 'promoting a collective approach to inclusive special education' (Fitzgerald and Radford, 2017, 2020, p. 1). This approach promotes leadership as the outcome of shared problem-solving and the interaction of people's differing intentions, whether they are in a promoted management position or not (Woods and Roberts, 2018). What is clear is that teachers are central to any such collective, distributive approach, because as Bush (2015, p. 671) notes, they are 'highly likely to be the people to whom leadership is distributed' – be that in relation to curricular or organisational matters.

### **2.10 Teacher Leadership**

The term teacher leadership implies that teachers occupy a 'central position in the ways schools operate and in the core functions of teaching and learning' (York-Barr and Duke, 2004, p. 255). They have a critical role in leading the curriculum (Harris, Jones and Crick, 2020) and Shaver (2010a) has identified the importance of their influence on curriculum



enactment. Teacher leadership has been the focus of extensive research over the last twenty years, although the majority of studies are marred by a failure to sufficiently define the concept (Neumerski, 2013) or delineate its theoretical underpinnings (Wenner and Campbell, 2017). In their systematic literature review of teacher leadership, which replicated and extended on York-Barr and Duke's (2004) seminal work, Wenner and Campbell (2017) take up the challenge and define it as a five-part construct:

- Teacher leadership is *influence that goes beyond individual classrooms*. Teacher leaders must be responsible for leading more than their own students and bringing change to their school. The narrowness of this proposed definitional criterion, however, is rejected by Nguyen, Harris and Ng (2019) who envisage a broader conceptualisation. They argue that 'teacher leadership can happen within and beyond the classroom, and that teaching and leadership are integrated' (Nguyen, Harris and Ng, 2019, p. 61). What teacher leadership looks like, when restricted to the classroom is less clear, although Stewart (2012) and King *et al.* (2019) provide some insights in terms of their advocacy role in supporting children's learning. This points to a potential role for teacher leadership in making curricula more accessible at classroom level and highlights the importance of ensuring that formal school leadership systems 'give weight to teachers' voices', to enable them to carry out this function (Frost, 2008, p. 342);
- Teacher leadership is *underpinned by professional learning*, as a means for developing capacity. The importance of this has been emphasised in the Irish policy context with the Teaching Council (2016) establishing professional learning as a right **and** a responsibility. On a practical level this may translate to the creation of PLCs (Hairon, Goh and Chua, 2015; Hairon *et al.*, 2017; Brennan and King, 2021; Wilson, 2011; Newman, 2019; Kise and Russell, 2010; Newman,

- 2019), engaging in ‘award bearing’ professional development (Kennedy, 2014a, p. 339) or implementing collaborative approaches to supporting teachers, such as coaching and mentoring (Hunzicker, 2012; Kennedy, 2014b). The emphasis on collaborative professional learning corroborates Baker-Doyle’s (2017) suggestion that the sharing of innovative teaching practices is central to teacher leadership. Questions do arise however, in relation to how best to structure PLCs, with Brennan and King (2021) offering some signposts in the Irish context and Wilson (2011) spotlighting the role of school management in establishing good systems;
- Teacher leadership is the exercise of *influence in policy-making and decision-making* through adopting a dialogic, collaborative, problem-solving approach to emerging issues (Nazareno, 2013; Woods and Roberts, 2018). Teacher leaders do this by carefully navigating ‘the horizontal channels of influence and relationship, as opposed to the vertical channels of hierarchy and positional power’, to mobilise, support and motivate colleagues (York-Barr *et al.*, 2005, p. 211). This indicates a recognition that while school hierarchy is an ever-present, inescapable reality, practice-level influence over curricular policies is not fully dependent on placement within that hierarchy (Smagorinsky, Lakly and Johnson, 2002). It again centralises the importance of teacher voices however, in particular the extent to which they are actively listened to (Frost, 2008);
  - Teacher leadership is associated with *systematic school improvement* through ‘initiating and facilitating the process of change’ (Nguyen, Harris and Ng, 2019, p. 67);
  - The ultimate objective of teacher leadership is the *improvement of pupil learning outcomes*. The focus on this in any definition is confounding, given that Wenner and Campbell (2017) were unable to locate a single study where the impact of

teacher leadership on pupil learning was empirically tested. Notwithstanding this gap, the focus on outcomes again centralises the role of curriculum where specific learning is often prescribed.

The findings from research studies on teacher leadership are not without their flaws and deductive interpretations ought to be tempered by noting that the vast majority of data (74% of studies) are qualitative in nature (Nguyen, Harris and Ng, 2019) and emerge from small-scale, convenience-sampled case studies (Wenner and Campbell, 2017). In addition, the research focus has hitherto been oriented towards establishing the factors that inhibit or promote teacher leadership (Wenner and Campbell, 2017). The central question that future research studies must address is: ‘How is teacher leadership enacted?’ (Wenner and Campbell, 2017, p. 164), in particular in relation to the curriculum. King and Holland’s (2022) research provides some indication of how PLCs can be used for such enactment, in their application of Grudnoff *et al.*’s (2017) Facets of Equity to engender leadership for inclusion in early career teachers in Ireland. Data on the processes involved in teacher leadership in relation to curriculum enactment are very limited. In addition to this gap, theoretical issues also arise. While the ease with which this leadership model sits within a distributed framework has been acknowledged, due to the fact that leadership is frequently distributed to teachers (Bush, 2015), this distribution from above would appear antithetical to the anti-hierarchical, purist conception of the construct envisaged by Silva *et al.* (2000), York-Barr *et al.* (2005) and latterly by Wenner and Campbell (2017). In addressing this point, King and Stevenson (2017, p. 666) have proposed an ‘organic’ model of leadership where power in the form of influence can be exercised ‘as the outcome of a more collaborative process of co-construction between formal and informal leaders’. The emphasis on collaboration here highlights the potential

applicability of this model to the SN domain, given the multiple actors involved in ensuring successful provision for children with SN.

### **2.10.1 Teacher Leadership and Special Needs**

While the volume of research investigating teacher leadership in a special education context is limited, there are some data that point to its efficacy (King and Holland, 2022). The central role of SETs, in striving for equity for children with SN and mentoring less-experienced colleagues, has led York-Barr and colleagues (2005) to recast their work as teacher leadership. Many programmes of support for children with a disability operate on ‘fragile’ footing and are sustained by the ‘personal commitments’ and ‘professional advocacy’ of special educators (York-Barr *et al.*, 2005, p. 213). These personal and advocacy dimensions are critical because they enable teachers to promote quality, needs-specific education for all, as envisaged by the United Nations’ *Education 2030 Framework for Action* (UNESCO, 2016).

#### ***Advocacy***

Advocacy, in an interpersonal context, is generally defined as the practice of ‘speaking and acting on behalf of’ someone else to address their needs and preferences (Trainor, 2010, p. 35) – the notion of voice seemingly central to the concept. Historically, it has been regarded as a key responsibility of those caring for children with SN (Wolfensberger, 1977; Turnbull and Turnbull, 2000; Athanases and Martin, 2006; Strassfeld, 2019), leading Trainor (2010, p. 34) to characterise it as a ‘special type of participation’ with parents playing a crucial ‘collaborative partner role’. It is seen as essential to Hornby’s (2014) *Inclusive Special Education* theory. A central underpinning of the concept is the notion that the person being advocated for is ‘incapable of representing themselves’ and that advocacy enables equity for them (Wolfensberger, 1977; Fazil *et al.*, 2004, p. 390; Trainor, 2010; Islam and Cojocar, 2015; Burke, Lee and

Rios, 2019). It can range from unobtrusive ‘actions in the classroom’ (Linville, 2016, p. 98) to more clearly overt measures such as speaking for a child or applying a skill on a child’s behalf outside of school (Wolfensberger, 1977; Athanases and Martin, 2006). Staehr Fenner (2013, p. 4) has suggested that the term ‘scaffolded advocacy’ may be more appropriate because at some point, children may be able to advocate for themselves depending on their level of need and their progression.

Potentially, when advocacy goes awry, it could mean adults doing too much for children with SN or making assumptions that they cannot do something, when they might be able to. Fazil and colleagues (2004) have recognised this risk and argue that advocacy should be weighed up against the importance of empowerment, because both concepts are key to building success for children with SN. Collaboration between all stakeholders, including parents, is fundamental to getting the balance right (Turnbull and Turnbull, 2000). Kerins (2011, p. xi), however, has raised concerns regarding the ‘subordinate role in the decision-making process’ that parents occupy in certain domains - with children’s transition between primary and post-primary education a particular flashpoint. When viewed in the context of Scanlon and Doyle’s (2018) similar finding that parents also lack practical knowledge about educational choices available to them post-school, it calls into question the extent to which parents have the kind of accurate information that effective advocacy depends on (Fazil *et al.*, 2004; Islam and Cojocaru, 2015; Burke, Lee and Rios, 2019). Formal positional leaders in schools have a role in addressing this deficiency.

## **2.11 Positional Leadership**

Detaching the positional management component from any conception of school leadership, while ‘theoretically possible’ (Durrant, 2005; Bush, 2015; Torrance and Humes, 2015, p. 795) is, in practice, exceptionally difficult (Spillane *et al.*, 2007; Torrance and Humes, 2015). This is because schools (MacBeath *et al.*, 2018, p. 8):

...tend to be hierarchical places....Position brings with it discretionary and institutional power so that on occasions when hard and uncomfortable decisions have to be made, teachers have to be reminded...that “this is not a democracy”.... Each layer of the system is upwardly accountable and commonly held in place by some form of inspection or review.

The positional power vested in those at senior levels on school management hierarchies affects ‘how leadership activities are construed at lower levels within those hierarchies’ (MacBeath *et al.*, 2018, p. 90), including in relation to curriculum enactment. The principal is assumed to be at the top of this hierarchy (Harris, 2012; Bush, 2018) and it is assumed that other promoted teachers such as deputy principals, assistant principals or promoted subject coordinators also exercise considerable power and influence (Drea and O’Brien, 2002; Tian, Risku and Collin, 2016; Leaf and Odhiambo, 2017; Government of Ireland, 2018; Sibanda, 2018), over those without such posts in their schools. International evidence suggests that the role of the SPHE coordinator can be an important school leadership position, with some potential influence on whole-school policies in this area (Brown *et al.*, 2011; Willis, Clague and Coldwell, 2013; Goddard, Smith and Boycott, 2014) and the capacity to determine how much prominence is afforded to specific programmes (Day, Sahota and Christian, 2019).

This type of ‘leadership from above’ (King and Stevenson, 2017, p. 657) is a particular feature of the Irish context (Drea and O’Brien, 2002; Government of Ireland, 2016, 2018) because a hierarchical approach to school leadership has been legislated for, which requires teachers to work ‘under the direction of the principal’ (Government of Ireland, 1998, sec. 22). Teachers are obliged to complete tasks – curricular or organisational – assigned to them by the principal to facilitate effective teaching and learning (Government of Ireland, 1998, sec. 22). The Leadership and Management circular for Irish primary schools (Government of Ireland, 2018) empowers the principal to devolve any of these functions to other members of the in-school management (ISM) team – including deputy principals and assistant principals. Where decisions are not being

reached, the principal's problem-solving skills to facilitate a solution are viewed as important (Ward, 2011; Hamlin and Patel, 2017). There is tentative evidence to suggest that they can have a role in bridging the 'research-practice gap' at school level (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2005, p. 424), although the practicalities of doing this effectively in an SN context are less clear.

### **2.11.1 Positional Leadership and Special Needs**

The heavy administrative burden associated with SN (Fitzgerald and Radford, 2017) and the level of accountability now required of school principals (Drea and O'Brien, 2002), render leadership from management a quasi-necessity in the Irish special education context. Morrissey (2021c, p. 27) has identified a selection of the statutory functions related to SN that formal school leaders must undertake, and argues that while, in practice, some may be delegated to others, it 'does not alter the fact that they are still functions of managerial leadership...whether the teacher completing them has a management position or not'. While this may provide some evidence to support the presence of a distributed leadership framework in some schools, leadership distributed in this way may only provide credence to King and Stevenson's (2017, p. 657) hypothesis of 'licensed leadership'. Positional leadership in the child safeguarding arena presents more complications.

### **2.11.2 Positional Leadership and Child Safeguarding**

The climate of accountability that synonymises child safeguarding (Morrissey, 2021a) has recently been exacerbated by the introduction of a compliance framework mediated through CPSIs (Government of Ireland 2019). This framework, with a total of ten 'overarching checks' and in excess of sixty 'sub-checks', monitors schools' compliance with the *Child Protection Procedures* (2017) from a leadership, management, organisational and curricular perspective (Government of Ireland, 2019a, p. 3). There is

evidence to suggest that this framework encourages a management focus on ‘compliance around paperwork’ over and above the implicit elements of effective school-based child safeguarding practice (Treacy and Nohilly, 2020, p. 6). There are no data available, however, on how this management push for compliance might impact on teachers’ leadership of the curricular component, within a distributed framework, although there are some reasons to suggest that there may be some conflicts of interest.

### ***Potential Conflicts of Interest***

There are at least two possible conflicts of interest that may impact teachers’ work in this curricular sphere – although the literature is remarkably silent in dealing with them directly. First, as the *Stay Safe* curriculum is mandatory for all primary and special schools in Ireland, teachers in those settings **must** teach it; it is not optional (Government of Ireland, 2017a). This responsibility associated with ‘professional role’ (Forbat and Atkinson, 2005, p. 331; Morgan, 2011, p. 214) comes into tension with the limits that severity of SN may impose on the learning potential of their pupils (Broderick, Mehta-Parekh and Reid, 2005; Allan, 2007; Ware, 2009; Warnock, 2010; Tiernan, Casserly and Maguire, 2020). In essence, the reasoning that many children, because of the nature of their difficulties, may never be able to access *Stay Safe*, conflicts with teachers’ mandatory obligations to teach it. This conflict is crystallised in the following plausible dilemma:

- Should teachers fulfil their statutory obligation and try to teach *Stay Safe*, even when the evidence suggests that children will not be able to access it, or should they set that obligation to one side and focus on the provision of a preventative programme that children may be able to access?

Given the jeopardies for teachers associated with all aspects of child safeguarding (elaborated on in Chapter 1), this represents a clear conflict of interest. In addressing the



conflict, it is not unreasonable to postulate the possibility of teachers' tilting the balance in favour of fulfilling their statutory obligations, over and above what the child actually needs or is able for.

Second, while teachers are expected to teach *Stay Safe* with the strategic objective of providing children with skills that may prevent abuse or harm (MacIntyre and Lawlor, 2017), the inherent assumption that the teacher will not be the perpetrator of said abuse or harm is problematic and leads to an obvious conflict of interest. This is exacerbated by the fact that the children in these contexts are more vulnerable and more dependent on adults to ensure their safety (Miller and Raymond, 2008). These conflicts highlight the complexity of teaching in this sphere and highlight the importance of multiple 'levels of leadership' (Gronn, 2009, p. 381) to ensure that children's rights are vindicated.

## **2.12 Co-Existence of Teacher and Positional Leadership in a Distributed Framework**

All models of school leadership, including the three discussed here, are partial and on their own do not 'provide a complete picture of school leadership' (Bush and Glover, 2014, p. 564). The distributed model as a bedrock is appropriate because, depending on how it is configured at local level, it allows for 'degrees of co-existing individualism and collectivism' (Gronn, 2016, p. 168). The hybridity of leadership construed in this way, allows for elements of positional and teacher leadership to coincide, to varying degrees, within the one framework. This is notable because both are important in ensuring a positive curricular experience for children with SN. A cursory look at Morrissey's (2021c, p. 22) 'triadic leadership typology' illustrates for researchers and practitioners how such a distributed construct can be assembled and how it might impact on the school community. While theoretical explorations of this approach are plentiful, practical investigations testing their efficacy within a special education context, are scarce. It is

also not fully clear how leadership construed in this way impacts on the curriculum enactment process – in particular in special schools. The leadership role of the principal, the leadership role of the teacher and the interaction between both in terms of administering curricula has not received due attention to date, especially in the Irish context. This research will attempt to address that dearth.

### **2.13 Concluding Remarks**

The enactment of child safeguarding curricula in special schools is a complex multi-faceted endeavour, influenced by mandatory requirements, child ability, teacher capacity and school leadership. Chapter 2 has presented some of the key literature to be considered in researching this area; this literature informed how this study was undertaken. The chapter has provided contextual depth to the study by overviewing the special school landscape in Ireland and by giving an account of different curriculum enactment processes relevant to special schools. The importance of *Stay Safe* was highlighted and the pedagogies used to teach sensitive areas like this were delineated. Concepts such as ‘inclusion’ and ‘difference’ were explored as these have emerged as key factors in debates around the education of children with SN. Leadership was examined from a distributed perspective, with the dynamic between teacher leadership and positional leadership spotlighted. Following this review, a number of key gaps in the research are apparent:

- How is the curricular component to child safeguarding enacted in the special school context in Ireland? Is it enacted in all special schools? What curriculum approaches are used to enact *Stay Safe* for a group of learners who are not at the same level as their typically developing peers?
- How does leadership impact on the enactment process in the special school context? What new insights can be developed in relation to how leadership of the curriculum plays out in special schools?

The objective of this thesis was to probe these areas. The next chapter will detail the methodology utilised in going about that work.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

*'Methods are always the servants of substance, not vice versa'*

(Greene, 2007, p. 15).

### 3.1 Introduction

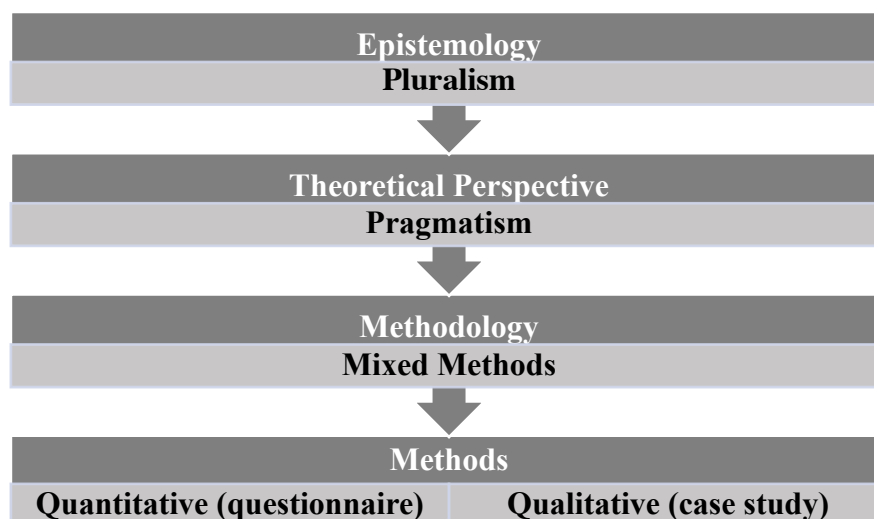
The overall objective of this study was to establish how the curricular component to child safeguarding was enacted by teachers in special schools in Ireland, with a particular focus on probing the impact that leadership had in the process. Resolving that question required a two-phase, mixed-methodological approach to data-gathering because there were multiple facets that needed to be deconstructed (Greene, 2007; Onwuegbuzie and Collins, 2007). Before exploring the nuances of the enactment process at the micro level, a broad sketch of the macro-level experience was warranted in order to provide signposts to *ad rem* matters in need of further exploration. This required a quantitative approach. Having established the general enactment experience of special schools, a qualitative dimension was needed to illustrate the 'complex picture' of that enactment process (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 182) and anatomise the role of leadership in it. This chapter of the thesis will detail how the overall research apparatus was constructed, outline the sampling procedure, elucidate on the methods selected and discuss some of the pertinent ethical issues that arose throughout. The chapter will commence with an overview of the philosophical assumptions underpinning the research, to aid the reader in understanding the researcher's perspective.

### 3.2 Philosophical Assumptions

Scholarly debate around the nature of the social world, the nature of being and the nature of knowledge continues to preoccupy the academic community with age-old conundrums still relatively unresolved (Coe, 2017). At the centre of that debate is the prescient

question of whether conflicting paradigms can be mixed within the same research endeavour (Schwartz and Revicki, 2012; Taber, 2012; Dodge, 2015). A paradigm is ‘an integrated set of assumptions about the nature of the social world, about the character of the knowledge we can have about the social world, and about what is important to know’ (Greene, 2007, p. 15). In addressing the central philosophical contestation, the researcher aligns himself with the Deweyan thinking adopted by Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003), Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) and Greene (2007). This eventuates in a practical belief that the ‘meaning of human experience...resides neither exclusively in the objective real world nor exclusively in the mind of the knower, but rather in their interaction or transaction’ (Greene, 2007, p. 84). In essence, social research can benefit from the insights provided by a multitude of philosophical paradigms to flexibly address some of the pressing research questions of our Age, with solution-focussed determination (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). This perspective acknowledges the possibility of an objective reality but regards that reality as partial without exploring the interaction or dialogues between it and those who experience it (Greene, 2007). To adequately describe the granular detail of this research philosophy, Crotty’s (1998) *Four Research Elements* framework has been applied to this study (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Four Research Elements (Crotty, 1998)**



The next four sections of this chapter will delineate those elements, commencing with the epistemological stance.

### **3.3 Epistemology**

In their seminal work exploring paradigmatic blending, Miles and Huberman (1984, p. 21) contend that ‘epistemological purity doesn’t get research done’ and that a more nuanced view of reality is required to generate new thinking. This school of thought provides the flexibility that social research requires because it rejects the notion of two mutually exclusive dualisms (Greene, 2007) - that on one hand the social world exists independent of our knowledge of it and on the other hand the social world is constructed based on our interpretation of it. This research endeavour was underpinned by epistemological *pluralism* because it allowed for recognition of ‘the natural or physical world as well as the emergent social and psychological world that includes language, culture, human institutions, and subjective thoughts’ (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 18). The priority with pluralism is not a purist attachment to an either/or philosophy; rather it represents a ‘moderate’ (Fielding, 2009, p. 427) ‘third wave...that moves past the paradigm wars by offering a logical and practical alternative’ to historical epistemological hegemonies (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 17).

In relation to this specific inquiry, a pluralist epistemological stance meant that it was possible to construe that a majority of special schools enacted the mandatory child safeguarding curriculum, *Stay Safe*, and that it was feasible to empirically establish that reality. But, from an ontological perspective (the study of being), it also meant that this reality was only partial because such an absolutist, numerical approach to the nature of the social world was unlikely to provide valuable information on *how* it was enacted in the practice arena. This required an ‘alternative’ theoretical perspective (Greene, 2007, p. 82).

### 3.4 Theoretical Perspective

Pragmatism provides the ‘workable solution’ for addressing the partial reality question (Greene, 2007, p. 83). It approaches each research question on a case-by-case basis, where truth is ‘temporal’ (Biesta and Burbules, 2003, p. 50), where understandings are ‘emergent’ (Greene, 2008, p. 18) and where knowledge is ‘viewed as being both constructed and based on the reality of the world we experience and live in’ (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 18). Emphasis is placed on the interactions that occur between the natural world and the constructed world (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). On a practical level it emphasises both quantitative and qualitative approaches (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). It differs from other perspectives in that it allows ‘freedom’ for both of these approaches to work in tandem (Clarke and Visser, 2019, p. 462) and to dialogue with each other in order to find research solutions (Hesse-Biber, 2010, p. 458). Its practical application to this research study was clear: the pragmatic approach allowed acceptance that in the real world the majority of Irish special schools enact *Stay Safe*, but that that enaction may be constructed differently in individual schools. For those that advocate the ‘incompatibility thesis’<sup>8</sup> (Howe, 1988, p. 10; Hathcoat and Meixner, 2017, p. 433), it would only be possible to partially infer this reality because such theorists could only rely on **either** the realist **or** constructivist strands of knowledge in arriving at their resolution. Pragmatism utilises all of the theoretical perspectives at its disposal to find reasonable resolutions to individual research questions, thus enabling it to employ a broader array of methodological approaches (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Greene, 2007, 2008; Onwuegbuzie and Collins, 2007).

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<sup>8</sup> The *Incompatibility Thesis* is the philosophical argument that ‘mixing quantitative and qualitative methods is inconsistent and hence inappropriate’ (Hathcoat and Meixner, 2017, p. 434).

### **3.5 Methodology**

Pragmatism is typically associated with mixed-methods research because the various different strands to pragmatic reality require an eclectic mix of investigative tools to uncover (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Biesta, 2017; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). While some of the actors entrenched in the paradigm wars argue that this methodological approach is underpinned by an ‘immense open philosophical question’ (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018, p. 36), its benefits have been established in contemporary research discourse (Margolis, 2003). Instead of approaching research with fixed theoretical positions and pre-determined methodological approaches, each research question is tackled individually, on its own merit and with an open mind on how it might be resolved (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). The priority is addressing the question at hand and crafting the most suitable apparatus to resolve it (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). This resolution comprehends both qualitative and quantitative dimensions which can be undertaken concurrently or sequentially (Greene, 2008; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). In this case, exploring curriculum enactment without deploying both quantitative and qualitative methods would have restricted practical research colloquy, thereby reducing the scope of insight required to illustrate a holistic picture of the enactment process in special schools. There is no required set ratio of qualitative to quantitative dimensions; some studies may be predominantly quantitative with minor qualitative dimensions and *vice versa*, as Figure 5 illustrates (Onwuegbuzie and Collins, 2007). Similarly, when data is collected it can be used for either triangulation or expansion or for other purposes aimed at enlightening the research question (Greene, 2007).



**Figure 5: Approaches to Mixed Methods Research (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 22)**

		Time Order Decision	
		Concurrent	Sequential
Paradigm Emphasis Decision	Equal Status	QUAL + QUAN	QUAL → QUAN QUAN → QUAL
	Dominant Status	QUAL + quan QUAN + qual	QUAL → quan qual → QUAN QUAN → qual quan → QUAL

The mixed-methods approach adopted for this research study maintained that data from both dimensions ought to be able to ‘dialogue’ in equivalence with each other to generate new insights (Hesse-Biber, 2010, p. 457) on curriculum enactment and leadership. In this conceptualisation, a pragmatic perspective extended beyond the ontological and methodological. It also encapsulated how the data was treated when gathered (see Section 3.9), insofar as the analysis of particulars went beyond superficial comparison (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Onwuegbuzie and Collins, 2007). Instead, both the quantitative and qualitative dimensions were used to shed greater light on each other and weave a narrative around what was happening in relation to the enactment of *Stay Safe* in special schools. The range of possible mixed-methods available to elicit this narrative was broad.

**Table 8: Non-Exhaustive List of Mixed Methods Research Tools (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018)**

➤ Questionnaires	➤ Visual analysis
➤ Experiments	➤ Interviews
➤ Use of secondary statistics	➤ Focus groups
➤ Observation	➤ Case studies
➤ Personal constructs	➤ Action research
➤ Diary entries	➤ Observation

### 3.6 Methods

Table 8 identifies a non-exhaustive list of some of the most frequently used methods in the mixed-methods domain. For the purposes of probing the research questions here, an equal-status, ‘explanatory sequential’ design was adopted (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 218). In practice, this meant a research apparatus with an initial quantitative phase used to particularise a subsequent qualitative phase. This design was informed by the extensive literature review presented in Chapter 2, particularly Shower’s (2010a) theoretical framework for curriculum approaches and Norwich’s (2010) dilemmas of difference, as well as additional scholarship in the methodological sphere cited throughout this chapter. This ensured that the study was rigorous, practically-informed and theoretically-robust. The first phase of data-gathering involved the dissemination of a questionnaire to special school principals; the second phase incorporated a multi-site embedded case study.

### 3.7 Phase 1: Quantitative Data Collection

The questionnaire administered in this study (Appendix B) was primarily intended to collect descriptive statistics. These were important for at least three reasons:

- From a macro-perspective, at the time of data-gathering there were no statistics available on the enactment of *Stay Safe*, post-enactment of the *Child Protection Procedures* (2017). These statistics were important to give the study contextual breadth;
- From a meso-perspective, it was not empirically clear whether special schools were actually enacting *Stay Safe*, given that it was psychologically designed for the typically developing child. Establishing the fact that a majority do enact the curriculum – at whatever level – provided an important rationale for looking in-depth at *how* special school teachers do this effectively, to benefit other teachers in the broader special education sphere. This would go some way towards

fulfilling the expert role envisaged for special schools by some scholars (Hornby and Kidd, 2001; Ware *et al.*, 2009; Hornby, 2021);

- From a micro-perspective, the results of the questionnaire were used to tailor the approach for conducting the case study aspect of the research because it provided valuable information on what needed to be probed further in the qualitative domain.

### **3.7.1 Sample**

The questionnaire was distributed to the full sample of principals of special schools in Ireland (n=133). Principals were chosen to complete the questionnaire because the *Child Protection Procedures* (Government of Ireland, 2017a, p. 22) indicate that it ‘is expected that the DLP [*Designated Liaison Person*] will normally be the principal’ and thus the key ‘resource person to any member of school personnel’ in relation to child safeguarding. In addition, their formal leadership role within the school meant that they were likely to have the information being sought for the purposes of this research. Designing the questionnaire to maximise information yield from this group was key.

### **3.7.2 Quantitative Instrument Design**

The questionnaire was designed using Qualtrics digital software. As a structured questionnaire (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018), it was predominantly designed to generate descriptive statistics (Pallant, 2016) in relation to *Stay Safe* enactment (e.g. *What percentage of schools enact Stay Safe on the basis of different enactment approaches? What percentage of schools have an SPHE coordinator?* etc). Generally speaking there were three question types:

- Basic questions requiring a Yes / No / Unsure answer (e.g. *does your school have an SPHE coordinator?*) **or** ranking statements on the basis of applicability;

- Questions requiring respondents to indicate their agreement with a statement (e.g. *There is a culture of distributed leadership in this school*);
- Questions offering respondents the opportunity to justify a closed answer (e.g. *If your school has an SPHE coordinator, please provide a sentence on what the role entails*).

The nature of the items on the questionnaire is detailed on Table 9 below.

**Table 9: Questionnaire Instrument Items**

Item Number	Focus
1-6	Demographic information about the participant and school
7-12	Organisation of SPHE in the school
13-17	Organisation of <i>Stay Safe</i> in the school
18 - 22	Enactment of <i>Stay Safe</i> in the school
23-25	'Dilemmas of Difference' applied to <i>Stay Safe</i>
26	Curriculum and Distributed Leadership
27	Curriculum and Teacher Leadership
28	Curriculum and Managerial Leadership

Question logic was built into the questionnaire so that it was tailored to individual respondents (e.g. if a respondent indicated that they did not have an SPHE coordinator in their school, the question on what the role entailed was not displayed). This function was a significant benefit of Qualtrics and enhanced the logical validity of the instrument. While the main objective was to collect descriptive statistics to inform Phase 2, interactions between some pairs of variables were analysed where interesting and relevant trends might be extrapolated (e.g. was there a correlation between the category of special school and enactment strategy?). This analysis was conducted using the *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (SPSS, version 27), by applying the crosstabulation function.

### **3.7.3 Pilot**

Piloting is an important part of the administration of any questionnaire in order to improve its practicability, validity and reliability (Krosnick and Presser, 2010; Dillman, Smyth and Christian, 2014; Owen, Fox and Bird, 2016). When the questionnaire designed for this study was approved by the DCU Research Ethics Committee, it was piloted with three primary principals who had at least one special class in their school. This ensured that the pilot was drawn from a different population group than the target population group, but at the same time ensured that the pilot participants had a significantly similar insight into the special education domain as the target population. Amendments were made to the questionnaire following feedback from the pilot respondents to improve clarity and eliminate redundant items (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). For the most part these changes related to sharpening the language and the order of questions based on feedback.

### **3.7.4 Distribution**

The questionnaire was disseminated via an emailed Qualtrics link in January 2021, as schools typically enact *Stay Safe* in Term 2 of the academic year (MacIntyre and Lawlor, 2016). Shaver (2010a) has shown that researching teachers at a time when they are engaged in the actual enactment process, generates more useful insights. The distribution list was composed of all special schools (n=133) identified on a publicly available database from of the Department of Education<sup>9</sup> from the 2019-2020 academic year. A number of measures were taken to increase the response rate (Starr *et al.*, 2015; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018):

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<sup>9</sup> See: <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Data-on-Individual-Schools/>

- In advance of the dissemination of the questionnaire, the National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education (NABMSE) promoted the questionnaire to their members;
- The questionnaire was designed to be completed within 5-10 minutes on either a computer, smart phone or tablet;
- A three week window was provided for the submission of the questionnaire, with an email reminder provided to principals at the end of the second week. On the third week NABMSE sent a reminder that the questionnaire was live and encouraged participation;
- The researcher promoted the questionnaire on his social media platforms and engaged his wider professional network to encourage participation.

These measures ensured that the response rate was optimised.

### **3.7.5 Response**

Of the 133 questionnaires disseminated, 49 were returned, constituting a 37% response rate. To be included in the dataset two inclusion criteria were set:

- Each participant had to have answered the demographic questions (this was essential for classifying data);
- Each participant had to have at least 50% of the remainder of the questions answered (the rationale for setting this rate at 50% was that a small number of participants opted to skip the section on leadership and just answered on the curricular elements. With such a dearth of data available on curriculum enactment in special schools, excluding valuable information that would illuminate it would have been imprudent).

When these inclusion criteria were applied, six of the responses were excluded from the data corpus. This left 43 questionnaires for analysis, representing a 32% valid response

rate. This is considered a good response rate by a multitude of benchmarks, for a questionnaire administered online (Van Horn, Green and Martinussen, 2009; Pedersen and Nielsen, 2016; Fowler *et al.*, 2019).

Respondents categorised their special school on the basis of the 15 extant classifications advanced by the NCSE (Blain, 2011). Respondents who were unable to categorise their school selected an ‘Other’ option and provided a textual description, which was subsequently coded and allocated to one of the 15 NCSE classifications<sup>10</sup>. It is notable that 12 out of the 43 principals (28%) selected the ‘Other’ option, providing succour to the contention that many pupils in special schools have ‘more complex needs than...the disability indicated by the category label’ (Ware *et al.*, 2009, p. 37). Of these 12 ‘Other’ schools, seven consisted of schools for children with a Mild OR Moderate OR Severe-Profound General Learning Disability AND Autism comorbidity. Three of the ‘Other’ schools involved categories where there was a behavioural or medical issue comorbid with another category. The textual data provided by two respondents were not sufficient to confidently allocate their school to a category. To protect the integrity of the categories and the data comprehended by them, these two responses remained categorised as ‘Other’. Following this coding process, the spread of designations encompassed nine categories, as Table 10 (overleaf) illustrates. A close evaluation of the responding categories demonstrates that the majority of special schools cater for children with intellectual disabilities, as distinct from other forms of disability. The number of schools for children with autism was also particularly high, substantiating evidence from elsewhere (McCoy *et al.* 2014; Banks and McCoy, 2017) with regards to the growing prevalence of educational provision for children with this diagnosis. While this response

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<sup>10</sup> To optimise the coding for categorisation process and to ensure that it was as rigorous as possible, other parts of the questionnaire which required textual inputs by respondents were also surveyed for any evidence providing a signpost of what category the school might fit into.

statistic is notable, it still only captures part of the picture with regards to the ubiquity of facilities for children with autism in this jurisdiction. This is because the changing nature of the special education landscape in Ireland (Ware *et al.*, 2009) has seen the proliferation of special classes in mainstream schools in recent years, the overwhelming majority of which cater for children with autism (McCoy *et al.* 2014; Banks and McCoy, 2017).

**Table 10: Categories of Respondents' Special Schools**

School Category	Frequency	% Frequency
Physical Disability	1	2.3%
Visual Impairment	1	2.3%
Mild General Learning Disability	9	20.9%
Moderate General Learning Disability	10	23.3%
Severe-Profound General Learning Disability	4	9.3%
Autism Spectrum	8	18.6%
Multiple Disabilities	4	9.3%
Hospital School	3	7%
Special Care Unit	1	2.3%
Other	2	4.7%

Of the valid respondents, 34 were female and 9 were male, with the majority (56%) over the age of 50. The range of principalship experience was broad, although the majority (58%) had less than ten years' experience in the principal role as Table 11 (overleaf) demonstrates. The richness of the data gathered from these respondents provided an important launch-pad for the case study phase of the research.



**Table 11: Experience Levels of Respondents**

<b>Principalship Experience</b>	< 1 Year	1–10 Years	11–20 Years	21–30 Years
<b>Frequency</b>	3	22	14	4
<b>% Frequency</b>	7%	51%	33%	9%

### **3.8 Phase 2: Qualitative Data Collection**

The qualitative dimension to this research consisted of a multi-site ‘embedded’ case study (Day Ashley, 2017, p. 114). This approach, as well as looking at each school (case) as a whole, allowed in-depth examination of case units and engagement of ‘multiple sources of evidence’ to arrive at conclusions (Robson, 2011, p. 136). Three cases were selected for examination as this is generally regarded as a ‘sensible number...to balance an in-depth understanding of each case with the breadth of understanding gained by investigating multiple cases’ (Schofield, 1990; Day Ashley, 2017, p. 118). For this endeavour, there were four units within each case:

- Documentary analysis of the school’s SPHE policy;
- Interview with principal teacher;
- Interview with SPHE / Wellbeing Coordinator (in a promoted position within the In-School Management Team);
- Focus group of three or four teachers.

Given that a key objective of this research was to explore the role of leadership in the curriculum enactment process (specifically in relation to *Stay Safe*), this selection of sub-units was appropriate. Although SNAs, parents and pupils have an important role and voice in the process, they are not charged with the responsibility for enacting curricula in the same way that registered teachers are (Government of Ireland, 1999b). For this reason, they were excluded as research participants. The interviews with a cross-section of the teaching personnel (those who were in formal management positions and those who were

not in formal management positions) facilitated an exploration of the extant ‘layers’ of leadership (MacBeath *et al.*, 2018, p. 105) and their influence and interplay in relation to curriculum enactment in each case. It enabled a probing of *how* leadership operated in relation to the child safeguarding curricular component and *how* management and non-management leadership levels operated and dialogued within a broad framework. Crucially, this approach enabled follow-up of elements that emerged in the quantitative phase and an examination of *why* certain curriculum enactment approaches might be favoured within special schools.

### **3.8.1 Sample**

Three schools were selected, on the basis of non-probability, purposive sampling. This approach enables ‘researchers to handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgement of their typicality or possession of the characteristic(s) being sought’ (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018, p. 218). This ‘handpicking’ was important because it allowed sufficient flexibility for the data collected in the first phase to inform the second phase. One school for children with Mild General Learning Disabilities, one school for children with Moderate General Learning Disabilities and one school for children with Severe-Profound General Learning Disabilities were selected.<sup>11</sup> The rationale for this selection was two-fold:

- Principals of schools for children with Mild and Moderate General Learning Disabilities constituted the highest number of returned questionnaires during Phase 1;
- Although principals of schools for children with Autism were the third highest responders to the questionnaire, such a setting was not selected as the third case

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<sup>11</sup> Henceforth, for the purposes of brevity these schools will be referred to as the Mild School, the Moderate School and the SP School.

study site. The reason for this was simple: when the questionnaire was issued a number of schools for children with Severe-Profound Learning Disabilities made contact indicating that they did not want to complete it, as *Stay Safe* was not suitable for their setting. Ultimately one of these schools expressed an interest in taking part in the case study phase, at the researcher's invitation. Having such a school as a case study site enabled a probing as to why *Stay Safe* was not suitable for their context - such a probing presented an opportunity to examine the school-level curriculum designed in its stead and in doing this allowed insight to be gained on SETs as 'curriculum makers' (Shawer, 2010) in the child safeguarding sphere. In addition, examining a school for children with Severe-Profound Learning Disabilities had the added benefit of ensuring that the research had coverage of the entire general learning disability spectrum, from mild to profound, in circumstances where data on this area are paltry.

Teachers (units) from each school were selected for the interview / focus group on the basis of non-probability 'snowball sampling' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018, p. 220). In practice this meant each principal approaching the SPHE coordinator in their school and gauging their interest in participating in the research. The principal was also required to approach three or four teachers with experience of enacting *Stay Safe* and invite them to participate. Where prospective participants indicated an interest, their contact details were then provided to the researcher who subsequently made contact with more information on the research and the data collection instrument.

### **3.8.2 Qualitative Instrument Design**

Interviews, in one form or another, generally constitute a core part of many case studies (Yin, 2018). They generate thick descriptions in relation to an interviewee's experience of the case under investigation and allow the researcher to 'record what that person has

experienced, what he or she thinks and feels about it, and what significance or meaning it might have’ (Mears, 2017, p. 183). For the purposes of this research, in-depth semi-structured interviews using an ‘interview guide approach’ were utilised (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018, p. 510). This meant that items to be covered in each interview were decided upon in advance but the sequence and working of questions into the general flow of conversation was determined as the interview was live (Kvale, 2007; Brinkmann and Kvale, 2014). There were benefits and limitations to this approach as Table 12 demonstrates. It was suitable for this context as it allowed for greater flexibility in following-up with participants on interesting points of note.

**Table 12: Benefits and Limitations of Interview Guide Approach (Patton, 2002; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018)**

<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Limitations</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Increased richness of data, while maintaining elements of systematicity;</li> <li>➤ Conversational approach putting participants at ease and prompting greater candour;</li> <li>➤ Gaps in data can be foreseen and settled by the interviewer.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Salient topics can be unwittingly omitted or forgotten by the interviewer over the course of the interview;</li> <li>➤ Different responses can be recorded by participants because of variations in how the wording of questions was formulated in a conversational style.</li> </ul>

The interview schedules (Appendix C - E) were composed on the basis of findings emerging from the questionnaire and gaps in the extant literature, reviewed in Chapter 2. The significant volume of data generated from the interviews were analysed with the aid of NVivo (full analytical procedure detailed in Section 3.9).

In advance of conducting the interviews, each case’s SPHE policy was subject to ‘documentary analysis’ (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018, p. 325). This provided details of the various school contexts, their policy approach to curriculum enactment in

this area and informed the interview schedules. This was a critical part of the research process because it got to the root of the ‘compliance’ question and the role of leadership (Treacy and Nohilly, 2020, p. 1). Essentially, was there a difference between what was occurring ‘on paper’ and ‘in reality’ regarding the enactment of *Stay Safe*?

### **3.8.3 Pilot**

In advance of conducting the three case studies the proposed approach was piloted with a mainstream school with special classes, known personally to the researcher. Their SPHE policy was reviewed and this was followed by interviews with the principal, the SPHE coordinator and a group of three special class teachers. On foot of this process a number of amendments were made to the order and phrasing of questions. Some of the questions were also omitted to ensure that the focus group concluded in 90 minutes. This ensured that the case study approach being adopted was fit-for-purpose and a suitable instrument for addressing the core research questions. Although piloting is often ‘neglected’ in many qualitative studies, Malmqvist and colleagues (2019, p. 1), in their research comparing educational inclusion in Sweden with Ireland, conclude that it is essential including ‘in case study research where semi-structured qualitative interviews are used.’

### **3.8.4 Recruitment**

A recruitment notice (Appendix F) was disseminated with the questionnaire in Phase 1 requesting that schools express an interest in participating in Phase 2. In selecting schools, there were three main inclusion criteria:

- Case schools that were designated as catering for children with either Mild, Moderate or Severe-Profound General Learning Disabilities;
- Case schools that had an SPHE coordinator in a promoted management position;

- Case schools that had at least three teachers with experience of teaching at the primary end of the special school.

To ensure rigour, one exclusion criterion was set:

- Case schools where the principal did not have ‘permanent’ status.

Four schools expressed interest following the recruitment notice but only one of these schools met all three inclusion criteria – a Severe-Profound School. This school was selected as one of the case study sites and the other three schools were excluded. In the absence of valid expressions of interest from designated Mild or Moderate schools, the researcher composed a list of four schools under each category based on his professional knowledge and made contact with each of the principals directly. The principals were known professionally to the researcher as a result of his former role as a Health and Wellbeing advisor with the PDST and his current role as a practising principal teacher in Ireland. While ethical issues arise here in relation to positionality, as this chapter will explore later (Section 3.13), accessing the researcher’s professional network was vital in securing participants with the knowledge necessary to provide deep, rich data around the experience of delivering this aspect of the curriculum in special schools. The first school on the moderate recruitment list agreed to participate in the research; the fourth school on the mild recruitment list agreed to participate in the research.

There was a good geographic spread between all three schools selected – one school in Dublin, one school in the east of Ireland and one school in the south of Ireland. Table 13 (overleaf) provides a limited overview of the participants from these schools. The additional information provided for each school has been restricted to participant role and gender because the number of schools in these categories with these characteristics is very small - great care needed to be taken to preserve the identity of schools and their participants.

### 3.8.5 Conducting the Interviews

Due to restrictions in place as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic at the time of Phase 2 data-gathering, only essential visitors were permitted entry to schools. Even without this official stipulation, from a research perspective it would have been ethically questionable to conduct in-person interviews in circumstances where public health experts were requesting citizens to limit their social contacts. For this reason, all of the interviews were conducted online via Zoom. Recent research has established that a majority of participants interviewed using Zoom found it ‘highly satisfactory’ and rated it better than

**Table 13: Overview of Participants in Phase 2**

<b>Role</b>	<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>
<b>Severe and Profound School</b>		
<i>Principal</i>	Helen	Female
<i>SPHE Coordinator (Deputy Principal)</i>	Rachel	Female
<i>Participating Teachers</i>	Kathleen	Female
	Miriam	Female
	Nicola	Female
<b>Moderate School</b>		
<i>Principal</i>	Nora	Female
<i>SPHE Coordinator (Deputy Principal)</i>	Maureen	Female
<i>Participating Teachers</i>	Evelyn	Female
	Harry	Male
	Jack	Male
	Martin	Male
<b>Mild School</b>		
<i>Principal</i>	George	Male
<i>SPHE Coordinator (Assistant Principal II)</i>	Denis	Male
<i>Participating Teachers</i>	Catherine	Female
	Wendy	Female
	Donna	Female

'alternative interviewing mediums such as face-to-face, telephone' and other online platforms (Archibald *et al.*, 2019, pp. 1–8). It is also notable that Zoom technology has developed even further since Archibald *et al.*'s (2019) research was undertaken, in response to a migratory trend to online platforms because of COVID-19. The interviews were recorded and transcribed using the in-built transcription function on Zoom. Transcriptions were re-read while listening back to the recording to ensure that the transcription was accurate. Where errors arose, these were amended. When fully transcribed, the transcripts were returned to principal and SPHE coordinator interviewees for 'member-checking' to 'enhance trustworthiness' of the data (Birt *et al.*, 2016, p. 1802). This process is where participants re-read their words to ensure that they accurately reflect their views (Lincoln and Guba, 1991; Lincoln, 1995). Member-checking did not occur in relation to the teacher focus groups because amendments that individual participants might make to the transcript would affect the logic of subsequent comments made by other participants, given that the focus group took place as a conversation flow. Insights gained from these flows of conversation were crucial in providing illustrations during the analysis phase. Member-checking in these circumstances may not necessarily have increased the trustworthiness of the data (Silverman, 2000); rather, it may only have increased its volume, as participants may have wished to provide justification for conflicting points of view (Mercer, 2007).

### **3.9 Merging Quantitative and Qualitative Data for Reporting and Analysis**

One of the main practical challenges associated with mixed-methods research centres on how accumulated data is treated, reported and analysed (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2006; Greene, 2007; Bazeley, 2012; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The simplest approach is to report and interpret the quantitative and qualitative phases separately but doing this, according to Greene (2007, p. 144),



undermines the ‘intentional *interaction* among different sets of data’ that ought to be the hallmark of mixed-methods. Had such an approach been adopted here, it would have run the risk of ‘permitting the study to decompose into two or more parallel studies’ (Yin, 2006, p. 41) – a prospect which was anathema to the pluralist, pragmatic theoretical perspective underpinning the project. Instead flexibility governed how data were brought together for analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994), insofar as individual integrating determinations were inquiry-specific and resided ‘in the cognitive processing of the inquirer’ (Greene, 2007, p. 143). A variety of strategies and frameworks are available to support the integration process.

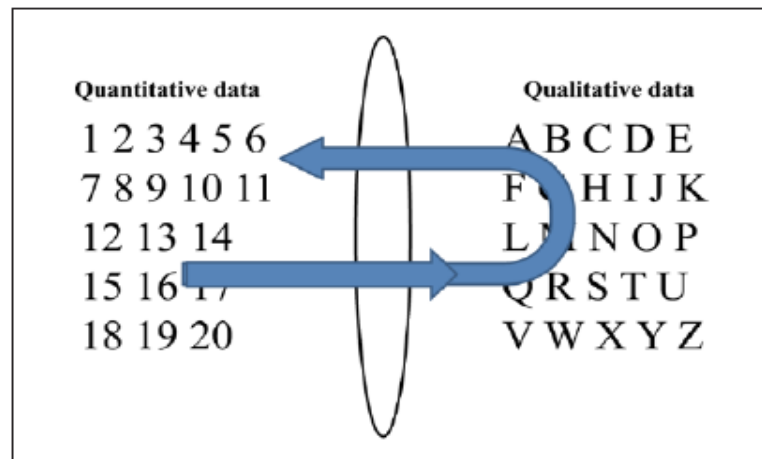
**Table 14: Frameworks for Integrating and Analysing Data from Mixed Methods (Moseholm and Fetters, 2017, p. 7)**

Typology	Explanatory unidirectional	Exploratory unidirectional	Simultaneous bidirectional	Explanatory bidirectional	Exploratory bidirectional
<b>Description</b>	Quantitatively framed approach, enhanced with qualitative findings for the final interpretation	Qualitatively framed approach, enhanced with quantitative findings for the final interpretation	Simultaneous quantitatively and qualitatively framed approach drive the final interpretation	Initial quantitatively framed approach is followed by a qualitatively framed approach before reaching the final interpretation	Initial qualitatively framed approach followed by a quantitatively framed approach before reaching the final interpretation

### 3.9.1 Applying a Mixed-Methods Analytical Framework

Moseholm and Fetters (2017) delineate five different frameworks for integrating and analysing data from different phases in mixed-methods studies (see Table 14 above). Their explanatory bidirectional framework (Figure 6, overleaf) was used to integrate data for this research project because it facilitated an ‘iterative approach’ to data analysis (Moseholm and Fetters, 2017, p. 8). Phase 1 findings were analysed first and ‘p priori codes’ developed from this analysis were used to inform Phase 2 (Moseholm and Fetters, 2017, p. 8).

**Figure 6: Explanatory Bidirectional Framework (Moseholm and Fetters, 2017, p. 6)**



The findings from the second phase were then analysed and the emerging themes were used ‘to look for corroborative data from the quantitative dataset’ (Moseholm and Fetters, 2017, p. 8). An account of the minutiae of each analytical iteration is presented over the coming pages (and subsequently visually represented in Figure 7).

#### ***Iteration 1: Initial Treatment of Quantitative Data***

When invalid questionnaires were excluded (in accordance with the criteria outlined in Section 3.7.5), the remaining responses were inputted to SPSS. This process is referred to by Greene (2007, p. 144) as ‘data cleaning’. Next the cleaned data were analysed, with frequencies and descriptive statistics generated to make sense of what was collected – an exercise referred to as ‘data reduction’ (Greene, 2007, p. 145). Reduced data were then studiously evaluated for trends and other exceptional points that needed to be probed further. Some of the key questions that guided this ‘data transformation’ (Greene, 2007, p. 145) procedure included:

- a) What category of special school were the key respondents from? (This information was vital in order to arrive at a conclusion as to what categories of special school should be sought for the case study);

- b) What valuable information was garnered in relation to the enactment of the curriculum under discussion? What impact did leadership have on the enactment? Were there differences between school categories? What needed to be probed further? (This information was important in order to structure interviews and focus groups to facilitate maximum data yield in relation to curriculum enactment).

It should be noted, however, that not all quantitative data collected were ultimately utilised or advanced to the next analytical iteration. The reason for this centred on the three schools selected for Phase 2. As the case study schools were categorised as Mild, Moderate and Severe-to-Profound (the rationale for this selection is outlined in Section 3.8.1), the quantitative data utilised for analytical purposes to aid the illustration of the curriculum enactment process predominantly emanated from these three categories. This meant that corroboration between both data sets was possible which enhanced reliability. If, for example, quantitative data from autism schools had been used to a greater extent, this would have diminished the robustness of the study's findings overall because of the lack of qualitative corroboration (as there were no autism schools selected for Phase 2). This research decision should not be seen to take from the value of the excluded data; rather it should be viewed as a pragmatic approach to addressing the research questions in a specific and focused way.

This initial evaluation of quantitative statistics ensured researcher familiarity with the data and framed the points for examination in Phase 2.

### ***Iteration 2: Treatment of Qualitative Data***

Data collected from the case study were inputted to NVivo data analysis software. Braun and Clarke's (2021a, 2021b) updated step-by-step guide for thematic analysis, which reframed and refined their original seminal work (Braun and Clarke, 2006), was used to

structure the analytical procedure. This incorporated six stages. The first three stages were undertaken during Iteration 2, while the remainder were undertaken during Iteration 3:

*i. Data Familiarisation*

Familiarisation with the qualitative data was achieved during transcription and immediate post-transcription. This was attained by ‘reading and rereading...data to develop a deep and familiar sense of the detail’ (Braun and Clarke, 2021a, p. 133). It involved reflecting on assumptions / expectations and noting observations, while at the same time maintaining a position of distance from the data.

*ii. Data Coding*

Data coding is the ‘ascription of a category label to a piece of data, decided in advance or in response to the data that have been collected’ (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). In this stage a total of 102 codes were generated from the qualitative data during open-coding (Appendix G). In establishing these codes Question B identified under Iteration 1 was borne in mind to ensure that the data served the key questions that needed to be addressed. As the codes were emergent, it was not known initially what codes were going to be significant or insignificant.

*iii. Initial Theme Generation*

Codes were then separated on the basis of their substance. Some codes were removed from the dataset because they ultimately proved either irrelevant or insignificant. Other codes were combined and/or renamed on the basis of the fully coded dataset generated. When the codes were reaggregated according to the key points they addressed, they were classified into the following candidate themes:

- Whole-School Organisation of the Curricular Component to Child Safeguarding
- Enactment of the Curricular Component to Child Safeguarding
- Dealing with and Supporting Difference in Curriculum Enactment

- Conceptions of Leadership
- Leadership Linked to Independence and Inclusion in Society
- External Influences on Leadership

Appendix H sets forth the codes underpinning each of these candidate themes.

If this was a purely qualitative study then at this point it would be usual to immediately go on to the next coding stage. However, to ensure that both the qualitative and quantitative phases of research sufficiently dialogued with each other, in this case it was necessary to revert back to the tentative quantitative findings to consider how the research picture was evolving in relation to the core research questions set.

***Iteration 3: Joint Treatment of Quantitative and Qualitative Data***

In the third iteration of data treatment the emerging candidate themes from the qualitative element were examined against the quantitative dataset for corroboration (Moseholm and Fetters, 2017, p. 8). In this iteration, although the candidate themes were important, they were ultimately subservient to the core research questions. If an emerging theme was judged as not sufficiently illuminating the research questions, it was either removed or reconstituted. This frankness informed the undertaking of the next three analytical stages:

*i. Developing and Reviewing Themes*

Candidate themes were reviewed and combined. This resulted in the generation of two overarching key themes:

- Curriculum Enactment
- Curriculum Leadership

The development of these overarching themes was ultimately anticipated because the questionnaire and interviews were designed explicitly in two parts to probe these specific areas. Under each overarching theme, sub-themes were identified to granularise the

exposition (Appendix I) and to address the research objectives in a very direct and unequivocal manner.

*ii. Refining Themes*

At this point, while the overall structure for analysis had been arrived at based on the two overarching themes and sub-themes, it was now necessary to ‘determine the exact story’ to be told under each theme (Braun and Clarke, 2021a, p. 141). This required the formulation of a thematic map (Appendix J), which was arrived at by delineating themes that were already refined after corroboration between data sets. This ensured a robust structure for the final analysis.

*iii. Write-Up of Thematic Analysis*

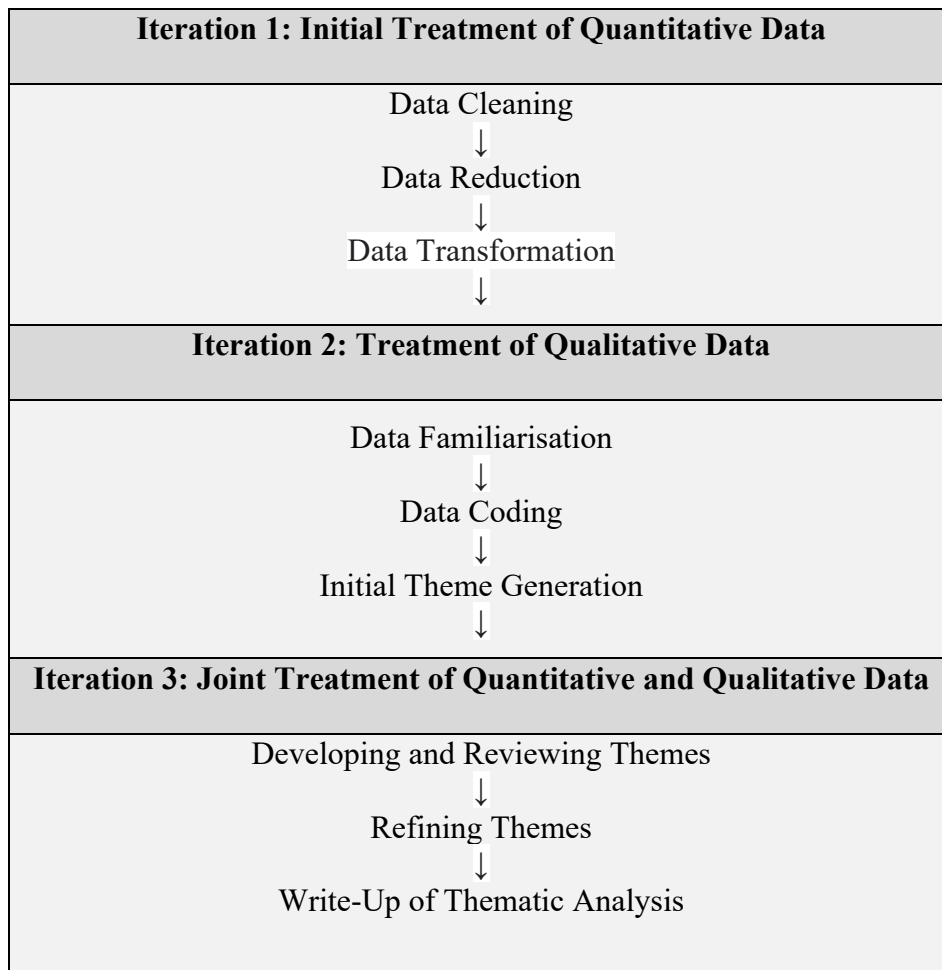
The final stage of this process involved writing up the integrated analysis on the basis of the thematic structure. This analysis took a narrative form and aimed to tell the ‘story’ of the resolutions to the research questions set (Braun and Clarke, 2021b, p. 117).

This thorough analytical process (visually represented in Figure 7 overleaf) ensured that the findings arrived at were logical and in keeping with the theoretical framework adopted for this research.

### **3.9.2 Shower’s (2010a) Theoretical Framework as an Analytical Lens**

Shawer’s (2010a) theoretical framework for curriculum approaches underpinned the analysis of data in this inquiry. Fundamentally, this research aimed to identify whether teachers in special schools were curriculum transmitters, curriculum developers or curriculum makers, in line with the three approaches that Shawer (2010a) identifies (explored extensively in Chapter 2). The presence of the strategies associated with each approach in the collected data, was used to classify the schools into the roles that Shawer (2010a) theorises. For example, if data from a school indicated that teachers regularly

**Figure 7: Iterative Data Analytical Procedure**



skipped curricular material or supplemented the curriculum with other material, then the teachers from that school were categorised as curriculum developers (Shawer, 2010a) for analytical purposes. The attributes of each theorised role were also used as a scaffold to illustrate the processes at play in the *Stay Safe* enactment process, so that the resulting abstractions and deductions were theoretically robust.

### **3.10 Procedures to Maximise Quality and Credibility**

Assessing quality and credibility in mixed-methods research has been the focus of intense scrutiny in recent times, with a range of methodologists offering competing insights (Onwuegbuzie and Johnson, 2006; Bryman, Becker and Sempik, 2008; O’Cathain, Murphy and Nicholl, 2008; Bryman, 2014; Fàbregues and Molina-Azorín, 2017;

Fàbregues, Molina-Azorin and Fetters, 2021). General discussions in the quality sphere broadly revolve around the concepts of validity (the extent to which the research apparatus measures what it intends to measure) and reliability (consistency and replicability of the findings over time), as these have been accepted as the established benchmarks (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). However, Onwuegbuzie and Johnson (2006, p. 48) – two of the preeminent mixed-methodologists of recent times – suggest that the concept of validity be replaced by the term ‘legitimation’ in mixed-methods research. They argue that this concept more accurately encapsulates the considerations involved in braiding together quantitative and qualitative research components (Onwuegbuzie and Johnson, 2006, p. 48).

### **3.10.1 Legitimation**

Onwuegbuzie and Johnson (2006) outline nine different legitimation types aimed at improving the quality and consistency of mixed methods research (Table 15, overleaf). These techniques were used to varying degrees in this research to optimise legitimation:

- i. Sample integration:* The Phase 1 questionnaire was circulated to the full sample of special school principals and the response rate was good. This ensured that the broad descriptive statistics generated from it were generalisable. Given that the number of schools in individual special school categories was relatively small however, prudence should be exercised in making categorical generalisations. Where Phase 1 statistics were illuminated with thick descriptions from Phase 2, these were for illustrative as distinct from meta-inferential purposes;
- ii. Inside-outside:* The outsider (i.e. the researcher) only used insider (i.e. participant) descriptions to illustrate data that were corroborated by questionnaire statistics. Where there was a discrepancy, this was pointed out explicitly in the write-up;



**Table 15: Mixed-Methods Legitimation Types (Onwuegbuzie and Johnson, 2006, p. 57)**

<b>Legitimation Type</b>	<b>Description</b>
Sample Integration	The extent to which the relationship between the quantitative and qualitative sampling designs yields quality meta-inferences.
Inside-Outside	The extent to which the researcher accurately presents and appropriately utilizes the insider's view and the observer's views for purposes such as description and explanation.
Weakness Minimisation	The extent to which the weakness from one approach is compensated by the strengths from the other approach.
Sequential	The extent to which one has minimized the potential problem wherein the meta-inferences could be affected by reversing the sequence of the quantitative and qualitative phases.
Conversion	The extent to which the quantitizing or qualitzing yields quality meta-inferences.
Paradigmatic Mixing	The extent to which the researcher's epistemological, ontological, axiological, methodological, and rhetorical beliefs that underlie the quantitative and qualitative approaches are successfully (a) combined or (b) blended into a usable package.
Commensurability	The extent to which the meta-inferences made reflect a mixed worldview based on the cognitive process of Gestalt switching and integration.
Multiple Validities	The extent to which addressing legitimation of the quantitative and qualitative components of the study result from the use of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed validity types, yielding high quality meta-inferences.
Political	The extent to which the consumers of mixed methods research value the meta-inferences stemming from both the quantitative and qualitative components of a study

*iii. Weakness Minimisation:* Due to its quantitative nature, Phase 1 was unable to delve deeply into the minutiae of the curriculum enactment process; Phase 2 was designed specifically to minimise that weakness by elucidating ‘thick descriptions’ of it (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2006; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). Phase 1 was able to provide a broad picture of the curriculum enactment process – this mitigated the lack of useful signposts that would otherwise have existed in determining the issues in need of deeper exploration in Phase 2;

- iv. *Sequential*: While the data-gathering sequence did not change, the data-gathering phases did ‘oscillate’ (Onwuegbuzie and Johnson, 2006, p. 58) in three iterations which improved corroboration (Section 3.9.1);
- v. *Conversion*: A detailed codebook (in multi-phases) was maintained which quantified codes and outlined how themes were formed (Appendix G - I). While care must be taken to ensure that over-emphasis is not placed on sheer numbers, at the expense of interpretation (Greene, 2007), this level of detail added to transparency and thus improved legitimation. Quantitative data was qualited by writing up detailed narrative descriptions, which served as a quasi-emergent template through which qualitative analysis took place;
- vi. *Paradigmatic Mixing*: In-depth, detailed paradigmatic blending was undertaken in preparation for this research, as illustrated in Sections 3.2 and 3.3;
- vii. *Commensurability*: As detailed in Section 3.4, the researcher adopted a fully pragmatic perspective in this research and engaged in Gestalt switching<sup>12</sup> and integration, as illustrated in the iterative data analysis process (Section 3.9.1);
- viii. *Multiple Validities*: Both the quantitative and qualitative phases of this research were piloted (as outlined earlier) and this pilot included subsequent sample data analysis. For the quantitative phase, questions were simple, specific and direct, with a view to generating descriptive statistics and frequencies only. The majority of questions were closed and for some questions, participants had the optional opportunity to justify their answers. For the qualitative phase, interview schedules were arrived at out of an extensive literature review (including Shawer’s (2010a) theoretical framework for approaches to curricula) and emerging quantitative

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<sup>12</sup> *Gestalt switching* refers to the capacity to change perspectives (and constructs) when engaging with different types of data (Guthrie, 2017).

data. Member-checking was used for interviewees to ensure their data was an accurate representation of their perspective. Data was triangulated between both phases to maximise rigour. The researcher maintained a research diary to facilitate reflexivity in his approach;

- ix. Political:* Convincing consumers of the value of mixed-methods research is an ongoing, highly political, process. Tentative findings and reviews from this research have been shared at multiple national and international conferences (Morrissey, 2020a, 2021b; Morrissey, Keating and King, 2021; Morrissey, King and Keating, 2021). While the researcher has a role in convincing consumers of its value, through explicating the rigorous research process that underpinned it, ultimately full acceptance lies in the mind of each individual consumer (Onwuegbuzie and Johnson, 2006).

### **3.10.2 Reliability**

Reliability refers to the consistency of the research over time and includes the minimisation of bias (Merriam, 1998). Phase 1 of this research involved the full sample of special school principals and as such had a high degree of reliability and generalisability. Issues of positionality, which may give rise to bias, did arise however and Section 3.13 illustrates how this was dealt with. Non-response bias must also be considered:

- *Unit non-respondents:* This refers to the intended participants who were sent the questionnaire but who did not complete it (Daniel, 2012). While almost two-thirds of recipients did not return the questionnaire, over 30% did revert which is considered good (Van Horn, Green and Martinussen, 2009; Pedersen and Nielsen, 2016; Fowler *et al.*, 2019);

- *Item non-respondents*: This refers to respondents who did not respond completely to all questions (Daniel, 2012). Strict criteria were put in place to manage this and determine those responses that were still valid and those that were not (Section 3.7.5).

An audit trail was kept to maximise reliability and ensure that the write-up was as detailed as possible so that the study could be repeated by researchers in the future (Yin, 2018).

### **3.11 Ethical Issues**

Paying close attention to ethical considerations is a hallmark of good quality scholarly work – all aspects of this project were fully approved before data-gathering began, by the DCU Research Ethics Committee. Respondents to the questionnaire in Phase 1 completed a DCU anonymous informed consent form (Appendix K) to allow their anonymised data to be used in the study. Respondents were informed that when the questionnaire was submitted, they would be unable to withdraw their participation - the questionnaire did not contain any identifiers and it would have been impossible to determine who completed individual questionnaires to facilitate withdrawal. Phase 2 of this study was underpinned by the principle of informed consent and participants were enabled to withdraw their participation from the study at any time. An online informed consent form (Appendix L - O) was provided to all interviewees attesting to this. Each participant in both phases was provided with a plain language statement (Appendix P - T) so that they could make an informed decision regarding their participation.

The conflict of interest that teachers inevitably experience in enacting a child safeguarding curriculum that is mandatory (as explored in Section 2.11.2), was an important ethical consideration over the course of this research. In theory, teachers should not be ‘curriculum makers’ in this space because such a stance would undermine their statutory requirement to enact the official *Stay Safe* curriculum. This reality potentially

decreased the likelihood of participating teachers conceding that they ‘rejected’ *Stay Safe*, in favour of an alternative, more suitable, curriculum. To mitigate this risk of ‘response bias’ (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 157), participants were assured that their contributions would be anonymised. This is unlikely to have eliminated the risk entirely and this should be considered in reviewing the findings of this research.

### **3.12 Anonymity and Confidentiality**

Maintaining participant confidentiality was a key priority. Questionnaire respondents were not identifiable. Case study schools were not identified beyond the provision of their category. Interviewees were similarly anonymised. Where necessary, certain information provided by the interviewees was removed where it could potentially have identified the interviewee or the school. In both Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 the category of school was not attributed to individual principal and SPHE coordinator insights and viewpoints, in a very small, limited number of instances. These instances generally referred to areas around leadership, where identifying the school category could have identified the principal / SPHE coordinator to other participants in the schools, in circumstances where such identification might have negatively impacted them amongst their colleagues. Interviewees were reminded that this research was focused on the curricular component to child safeguarding and was not concerned with the reporting component. They were reminded that the *Child Protection Procedures* (2017) precluded them from sharing information with third-parties regarding ongoing child safeguarding matters, without the consent of Tusla. In advance of each interview, this point was reiterated to participants to reduce the risk of any unwitting, unauthorised disclosures while discussing matters related to the child safeguarding curricular component.

### **3.13 Positionality**

During Phase 2 data-gathering, researcher positionality within the study was an important ethical consideration. Reflexivity refers to the extent to which researchers identify their ‘biases, values and personal backgrounds’ and how these may impact upon the matter under consideration (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 184). It is especially important in interview research, given that the researcher is situated within the data-gathering apparatus (Locke, Spirduso and Silverman, 2013). Creswell and Creswell (2018, p. 184) argue that reflexivity requires researchers to explicitly identify how ‘past experiences’ might impact on the data collected and how these experiences might also ‘shape interpretations’.

#### **3.13.1 Past Experiences**

In this research some of the interviewees were known professionally to the researcher and may have considered him as an authority on child safeguarding matters. This may have given rise to a power dynamic, where participants may have felt that they had to give what they deemed to be the right answer to questions, as opposed to what they really felt (Mellor *et al.*, 2014). To mitigate the risk of this, participants were made aware that the researcher had vacated his position as a PDST advisor and was now a practising principal teacher. It was also made clear to participants from the outset that there were no right or wrong answers to questions and that the researcher was conducting the interview as a doctoral researcher, keen to learn more about curriculum enactment in this area. While this may have mitigated the impact of researcher positionality on interviewees, it is unlikely to have eliminated it entirely (Hopkins, Regehr and Pratt, 2017).

#### **3.13.2 Past Experiences Shaping Interpretations**

As a PDST advisor, the researcher was involved in designing resources to make curricula more accessible for children with SN and argues that curricular accessibility can be

increased in almost all areas. Having taught children with a variety of special needs, the researcher also contends that teachers have the capacity to do this. To minimise the influence that this ‘baggage’ could have on the research project, a number of Knowles’ (2006, p. 393) strategies were implemented:

- ‘Difficult informants’ with alternative viewpoints were not avoided over the course of the project. When they were encountered in interviews, the researcher tried to get inside their world to understand their perspective. They were allowed to speak freely and share their views. Their perspectives were deemed valuable because they shed a light on practitioner experiences;
- Interviewees were actively listened to and their perspectives were revisited to them to ensure they were understood and recorded accurately;
- As a pluralist, the researcher entered the data-gathering arena with an open mind fully expecting to hear perspectives that differed to his but that were just as valid nonetheless. The *raison d’être* for this research was to gather and embrace those perspectives to make sense of the curriculum enactment process in this area.

The implementation of these strategies improved the rigour with which this work was undertaken.

### **3.14 Concluding Remarks**

Chapter 3 has described the methodological approach to this mixed-methods study, rooted in a pragmatic theoretical perspective. The philosophical assumptions underpinning the research were highlighted and the way in which they informed the research apparatus was explored. Subsequently, the quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (multi-site case study) elements to the research design were explored in detail, as well as the procedure in place for bringing both sets of data together. The ethical issues and how these were dealt with was examined, including researcher positionality within

the study. Chapter 4 will detail the findings from the application of this research apparatus to the practice arena. It will highlight important data and trends that were extrapolated when both sets of data were merged.



## Chapter 4: Findings

*'If we truly believe in an inclusive society, there must be room for difference'*

(Principal, School for Moderate Intellectual Disability).

### 4.1 Introduction

This study gauged the experiences of special school principals and teachers in leading and enacting *Stay Safe* – the curricular component to child safeguarding. To unveil these experiences a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods was employed over two phases to gather the necessary data. In the best tradition of mixed-methods research, this chapter will report on the findings of both data-gathering phases together, ‘not-layered or offered separately or sequentially; rather...[*in a way that is*] interwoven, interconnected’ (Greene, 2007, p. 188). Such a marbled, as opposed to stratified, approach captures the ‘messy world of people, relationships and obligations in their full rich complexity’ (Shulman, 2007). To facilitate this marbled presentation of findings, Chapter 4 will be split into two substantive parts, corresponding with the two major themes generated to address the research questions:

- **Part A:** Curriculum Enactment
- **Part B:** Curriculum Leadership

Sub-themes will be used to bring granularity to the findings, and these will be supported using data emanating from both the quantitative and qualitative phases.<sup>13</sup> Before

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<sup>13</sup> To ensure maximum transparency and ease of interpretation with regards to the evidence supporting themes advanced, each participant quotation in this chapter will be cited using the following format:

- a) Quotations taken from the Phase 1 questionnaire responses will be cited based on the category of special school of the principal responding.
- b) Quotations taken from Phase 2 interview responses will be cited using the pseudonyms outlined for each participant in Chapter 3. To contextualise the quotation a label indicating the role and school category of the participant will also be provided e.g. T-Mod = Teacher in the Moderate School; P-Mild = Principal in the Mild School; C-SP = SPHE Coordinator in the Severe-Profound School etc.

delineating the role that school leadership plays in the curriculum enactment process, it is first necessary to illustrate how that enactment process plays out in a general way.

## **Part A – Curriculum Enactment in Child Safeguarding**

This research has established that *Stay Safe* is enacted with varying degrees of systematicity and coherence in Irish special schools. Before exploring the curriculum approaches used *vis-à-vis* Shaver (2010a), an overview of how *Stay Safe* is organised at school level is warranted, to contextualise data on the enactment processes. The SPHE policy emerged as critical in this regard.

### **4.2 Special School Curricular Policies in SPHE**

Phase 1 of this study indicated that the overwhelming majority (93%) of Irish special schools had an SPHE policy. 85% of these policies had been reviewed in the last three years – since the introduction of the *Child Protection Procedures* (2017). The substance of policies, as they related to *Stay Safe* varied, however, following documentary evaluation during Phase 2:

- The SPHE policy of the Severe-Profound (SP) School explicitly rejected the formal enactment of *Stay Safe* because its aims were ‘not within the cognitive reach’ of SP pupils. While this rejection appeared to render teachers curriculum makers (Shaver, 2010a), the policy did acknowledge that the school addressed ‘some of the fundamental aspects’ of the curriculum by:
  - Supporting the children with communication;
  - Teaching strategies to express feelings;
  - Having a personal care policy that ensured best practice with regard to touches (especially during the provision of intimate care);

- Ensuring adequate supervision of children at all times.

Although it was not directly stated in the policy, mediating these ‘fundamental aspects’ appeared to be at the teacher’s professional discretion, as the teacher was regarded as the best judge of what would work for individual children;

- The SPHE policy of the Moderate School was more generic, replete with policy-speak and absent of detail on how *Stay Safe* was enacted, beyond identifying that it was mandatory. This lack of specific detail meant that deciphering the enactment approach from the policy alone was impracticable. There was no information on when *Stay Safe* would be enacted each year or whether teachers enacted it at the same time across the school, as recommended. In this way the school was out of kilter with the approach taken by the majority of special schools, with the questionnaire indicating that 55% had a time-bound policy. It should be noted that the principal of this school acknowledged that they were currently reviewing their provision to address these areas;
- The SPHE policy of the Mild School was very light on policy-speak but provided significant detail on when different areas, including *Stay Safe*, were enacted during the school year. It was time-bound and provided details on the resources available to support the curriculum. It was clear that the policy envisaged a curriculum development approach (Shawer, 2010a) from teachers in the school, with their experience valorised and apparently equipping them with the skills necessary to undertake this work.

#### **4.3 Organisation of *Stay Safe* in Special Schools**

A majority of special schools in this research disregarded the recommendation that *Stay Safe* be taught over one school term (MacIntyre and Lawlor, 2016):

- 44% of special schools enact *Stay Safe* over three school terms;

- 22% of special schools enact *Stay Safe* over two school terms;
- 11% of special schools enact *Stay Safe* over one school term;
- 22% of special schools enact *Stay Safe* in less than one term.

While the guidelines advocate that the curriculum be taught consecutively from Topic 1 to Topic 5 in one block, this was not established practice in any of the case schools. Instead the key messages were reinforced all year long and lessons were interspersed with other SPHE content. Teachers argued that this flexibility was required for pupils with SN because learning needs emerge at different times:

You might have a general guideline of when we cover all those topics across the year, but we cannot say you know ‘we’re going to put bullying down towards the end of the school year’ or ‘we’re going to look at appropriate behaviour in terms of understanding your body at the beginning of the year’. You know those sort of things are happening every day here. We are dealing with them but it’s more of an incidental, organic approach rather than a structured time-bound approach (Jack, T-Mod).

Having an established timeframe of when topics were covered, while laudable, was said to be impractical in special schools and this was apparent even in the Mild School, where the level of need was the least severe of the three schools and where the timebound requirement was most explicitly articulated in the SPHE policy. This points to a potential gap between what is articulated on paper as school practice and what might be happening in classrooms in reality on a daily basis. Curiously, school policy documents made very little reference to the role of parents in how *Stay Safe* was enacted.

#### **4.3.1 Parental Opt-Outs from *Stay Safe***

While parents can opt their children out of *Stay Safe*, this research has established that the occurrence of this is relatively low in special schools. 75% of respondents to the questionnaire had no pupil opt-outs the last time the curriculum was completed in their school, while the remaining 25% of respondents indicated that they had ‘between 1 and 3’ pupil opt-outs. Curiously, schools for children with Mild General Learning Disabilities were the most likely to have a pupil opt-out (44%), followed by schools for children with

Autism (33%), followed by schools for children with Moderate General Learning Disabilities (13%). Schools for children with Severe-Profound General Learning Disabilities were the least likely group to have a pupil opt-out (0%) – although it is important to reiterate that only four such schools participated in Phase 1 of this study. These trends were borne out in the case study schools. There was no evidence of pupil opt-outs from the Moderate School, while the incidence of opt-outs in the Mild School was said to be very low. In elucidating what would happen in the unlikely event of a parent applying for an opt-out, the SPHE coordinator in the Mild School explained:

In a situation like that we try and phrase it that say...lessons 1 to 6 are really about friendship and values and stuff like that - how good values and friendship translate to good relationships or whatever like that. And they might be happy having discussed it to go 'look, I'll go with lesson 1 to 4, because that's just about this' and they mightn't want their child to get into the nitty gritty of the more sensitive stuff, you know (Denis, C-Mild).

That the overwhelming majority of parents are happy for their children to participate in *Stay Safe* lessons may suggest that schools are successful in making it applicable for the cohort of learners that they have. An alternative explanation, however, may be that the enactment approach is being communicated to parents inaccurately, or at the very least in a way that lacks clarity. The disparity between the lesson-sequence approach articulated by the SPHE coordinator earlier and the more custom-designed, needs-based approach outlined by teachers in the same school provides succour to this argument. It raises some questions about whether the approach being reported to parents as established practice, is the approach that is being executed in reality. In view of this, monitoring arrangements would appear key.

#### **4.3.2 Monitoring Arrangements for *Stay Safe* Implementation**

Monitoring and evaluating the implementation of *Stay Safe* is identified as a key priority of the *Child Protection Procedures* (2017). The majority of participants in this study had monitoring arrangements in place in their schools. As Table 16 illustrates, Phase 1 data

indicated that the most popular monitoring arrangement was the examination of teachers progress reports and planning documents. Case study schools confirmed the popularity of this method, with checklists also used in all sites in one form or another. One-third of respondents indicated that ‘other’ monitoring arrangements than those listed in the questionnaire were in place in their schools and these other arrangements were coded as follows:

- Requiring parents to sign *Stay Safe* worksheets;
- Undertaking self-evaluative exercises revolving around *Stay Safe*.

**Table 16: Monitoring Arrangements for *Stay Safe* in Special Schools**

Topic	Mean Ranking
Examination of progress reports / planning documents	83%
Completion of pupil tests / tasks	56%
Maintenance of pupil portfolios	53%
Parental Feedback	22%
Observation of teachers	11%
Pupil questioning from someone other than their teacher	3%
Other	33%

In the Moderate School the principal frequently went into classes and ensured she was monitoring enactment in this way and through regular dialogue with staff:

I'm in the classes every day...I know that *Stay Safe*, RSE, SPHE are being done in the school because I see what they're doing and we're following the plan. I also look at the Cuntas Míósúils [*Irish term for 'progress reports'*]...But we'd also talk about it as a staff group. We would talk about what's working well or what we can improve on (Nora, P-Mod).

A different approach was adopted to monitoring in the Mild School where teachers' experience, 'professional judgement and professional trust' (Wendy, T-Mild) was relied upon to ensure that *Stay Safe* was completed:

I leave all of that up to the teachers. I don't get involved in micro-managing what they are teaching...we have over 20 classes in the school. I have to place my trust in the teachers that they

will implement what is best for the children. I pass that responsibility on to them and say ‘lads, look, this is what I’m asking you to do but I can’t be checking ye every five minutes to see is it being done’ (George, P-Mild).

In all case study schools, SPHE coordinators had no role in monitoring the enactment of *Stay Safe* at school level, beyond providing reminders to teachers that it needed to be completed. This mirrored the questionnaire finding that the SPHE coordinator was the ‘key person’ in relation to this aspect of the curriculum in only 14% of special schools.

Curiously, Phase 1 identified that in many instances ‘monitoring methods may not result in findings’ around the efficacy of the school’s curriculum enactment because of the nature of need in some cases. This was probed in Phase 2, where the following extracts illustrate why this might be the reality:

Our problem is trying to get the children to understand stuff, to internalise what they're learning and then to be able to generalise it in every context and that's the difficulty for us (Maureen, C-Mod).

...something is taught one week and it could be gone the next week. So don't be surprised if you ask questions on content that is covered and the kids don't know it, because that's just the nature of our kids you know (Denis, C-Mild).

So while the curriculum might be taught to the children, the extent to which it empowers them with the key protective messages is questionable, with even Mild schools dubious about the feasibility of pupil retention without ongoing adult support. Case study principals pointed to the importance of training in this regard but difficulties were also associated with this.

#### **4.3.3 Training for *Stay Safe* Enactment**

Notwithstanding general recognition that the enactment of *Stay Safe* was an important tool in improving the protective potential of children, more than half (53%) of Phase 1 principals indicated that whole-school training on it had not been provided. This was probed during Phase 2 and at least three reasons for the lack of training can be hypothesised:

### ***1) Lack of appropriately qualified personnel***

Both the SP and Mild schools reported significant difficulties in getting access to trainers with the appropriate expertise in SN to ‘deliver something that is suitable’ (George, P-Mild) for their contexts. In particular for the SP School, there was the sense that the expertise needed by teachers for their cohort was not considered in planning training events and this was borne from their past experience:

...like being called for training...And then ‘oh, we forgot about your kids sorry about that we will add them in now, we’ll put them in as an after-thought’, and then they put them in and then we go back and do training. It's piecemeal because...what they were training us for... actually we were the ones telling them (Helen, P-SP).

The idea of special schools being an ‘after-thought’ emerged many times across all three case study schools and this notion was not just limited to the training sphere. There were some examples of teachers coming together in ‘focus groups’ (Jack, T-Mod) to problem-solve for pupils in their contexts but by and large this approach was limited to the Moderate School. This will be explored further in Section 4.9.1.

### ***2) Feeling that Stay Safe is unsuitable***

Over a third of principals (36%) felt that special schools should have ‘an entirely different *Stay Safe*’, as opposed to differentiating the existing one. In some quarters there was a strong sense that this safeguarding curriculum was geared towards mainstream and that training in it would not add to teachers’ expertise in delivering it to children with SN – this idea was prominent in the SP School.

### ***3) Necessary expertise already available in the school negating the need for training***

As the pupils that teachers in special schools cater for have very specific (often complex) needs, there was a strong practitioner feeling that the best expertise for how to teach them lies collectively in their own setting, as opposed to at a generic training event – ‘we are the experts in identifying what the needs are and meeting those needs’ (Maureen, C-Mod).



This notion of greater expertise was prominent across all case study schools and will be discussed further in Section 4.6.2. The leveraging of teachers’ accumulated experience was regarded as the critical component in optimising curriculum enactment. The usefulness of Shower’s (2010a) research in interpreting the enactment process cannot be overstated.

#### 4.4. *Stay Safe* in Special Schools: Curriculum Enactment Approaches Utilised

Respondents to the questionnaire were provided with the key enactment strategies associated with Shower’s (2010a) theoretical framework for curriculum approaches and asked to identify which strategies, if any, were used in their school in relation to *Stay Safe*. The responses were revealing, as Table 17 illustrates.

**Table 17: *Stay Safe* Curricular Enactment Strategies**

<b>Curriculum Transmission</b>	Lesson by lesson teaching in accordance with prescribed <i>Stay Safe</i> sequence	28%
<b>Curriculum Development</b>	Use of supplementary programmes	89%
	Skip <i>Stay Safe</i> lessons	64%
	Skip <i>Stay Safe</i> content	69%
	Skip <i>Stay Safe</i> tasks	89%
	Adapt <i>Stay Safe</i> lessons	100%
	Adapt <i>Stay Safe</i> content	100%
<b>Curriculum Making</b>	<i>Stay Safe</i> used only as a guide	50%

##### 4.4.1 Curriculum Transmission

While Phase 1 of this study established that 28% of special schools taught *Stay Safe* ‘lesson by lesson, in accordance with the sequence of lessons in the manual’, Phase 2 found no confirmatory evidence to suggest that any of the case schools could be construed as curriculum transmitters. A practice disconnect was apparent between what formal

positional leaders assumed was happening in classrooms and what classroom teachers were describing. For example, while the Mild and Moderate case school principals agreed that their school followed the general sequence of lessons in the curriculum, the teachers in those same schools offered varying different perspectives on how their approach was not necessarily lesson-by-lesson but instead was more thematic:

I think that just becomes very artificial for us when we try to sit down and say 'today we're going to be talking about touches' or 'today we're going to be talking about strangers'. So I like the fact that here we can work on that thematic approach across the day, across the week... That's why *Stay Safe* becomes a process of us taking what needs to be covered, that's mandatory in terms of our obligations and putting it in a way that works for our students. So really when it comes through our filter it comes out looking nothing like what its meant to look like in the book (Jack, T-Mod).

Phase 1 established that schools for children with Severe-Profound Learning Disabilities were the least likely category of school to adhere to the prescribed lesson sequence, with none of those schools indicating that they followed the sequence. This was borne out in Phase 2 and although the SP case school eschewed *Stay Safe*, an integrated approach was taken to explore some of the relevant concepts underpinning it.

### ***Integrated Teaching***

There was a strong sense from teachers in all case schools that the key concepts underpinning *Stay Safe* should be taught in an integrated way (both within and without SPHE), as opposed to a prescribed, transmissive, lesson-by-lesson approach. It was argued that this embedded approach was more effective than explicit teaching because it was more reflective of the way in which children with complex needs learn best:

*Stay Safe* is an ongoing thing... We are constantly teaching it because, like the children, our age group here in school, they find it very difficult making friendships, understanding what's safe and unsafe, what's bullying, what's touching, things like that (Catherine, T-Mild).

...when we're planning our lessons and our timetable, all of the subjects are really quite interlinked and in a lot of lessons, like you're covering different subject areas in the one lesson inevitably, and I think SPHE comes up in a lot of lessons really and you're constantly looking for the pupils to be able to show us what they like and what they don't like and kind of respecting their choices and finding out how they're showing us, 'yes' or 'no', so it's really linked into everything (Nicola, T-SP).

The idea that *Stay Safe* was something that practitioners would just be ‘pulling out of the drawer once a week’ (Evelyn, T-Mod) to teach a lesson was anathema to teachers in the case study schools.

### ***Incidental Teaching***

Similar to integrated and embedded teaching, using incidental moments to reinforce key concepts was regarded as highly effective. For example, touches would always be taught ‘in the context of intimate care’ or ‘as they arise’ (Maureen, C-Mod). Social activities were used as a springboard for the incidental teaching of key concepts:

You can come across it and teach it indirectly every day in the playground. If Johnny goes over to Mary and gives Mary a hug. And Mary comes over and says ‘I didn’t like that hug’ you’d be kind of saying ‘Johnny you have to ask Mary for a hug. Does she want a hug, does she not want a hug you know?’ (Donna, T-Mild).

...we can teach it as a topic in isolation but actually incidental teaching is a huge part of it with the nature of our children...stuff is always being built upon and it's never really that you just do it once, put in the box and you forget about it. For us, with the children we have, it's always ongoing (Evelyn, T-Mod).

...I mean it's not something we would sit and read a story about...it's really just as you encounter things as they're going along (Miriam, T-SP).

The preference for this kind of thematic, integrated and incidental teaching was the main reason for why a curriculum development approach prevailed in most case study schools.

### **4.4.2 Curriculum Development**

The questionnaire to principals determined that all special schools adapted *Stay Safe* from a lesson, content and task perspective – clearly signifying that SETs are at the very least curriculum developers. The case study confirmed that teachers in both the Mild and Moderate schools demonstrated all the hallmarks of curriculum developers. The level of development varied according to school category, with the Moderate School requiring higher levels of development than the Mild School, because the complexity of need was generally greater. It should be noted, however, that any development undertaken in these two schools was located in the teaching aspect and in the programmes used to support the enactment of *Stay Safe*; fidelity to the core curriculum principles was consistent in both

settings. The macro and micro-strategies used to vindicate this development approach varied.

### ***Adaptation Strategies***

Visuals were regarded as a fundamental adaptation strategy in all special schools. In the Moderate School in particular, some children were non-verbal and their main means of communication was through symbols. This was problematic because often a teacher might be using a junior level *Stay Safe* with teenagers, who could not relate or connect with the visuals of children who were five or six years old:

...we're trying to take what's in place in *Stay Safe* for Junior and Senior Infant level and First Class level, depending on where they're working at, and somehow adapt that so that it's motivating, so that it's relevant and so that it's age-appropriate for them, so they're not looking at visuals and stories that don't resonate with where they are at for their age...the visuals that are provided in *Stay Safe* are not appropriate for them, because they're of younger children and they're meaningless for them, because they understand well that they're younger children (Jack, T-Mod).

Adapting visuals and sourcing age-appropriate visuals to accompany lessons was crucial in this regard. Photographs of family members and familiar objects to teach key messages were used by most teachers so that children could connect them with their own lives – the cartoons utilised in *Stay Safe* were deemed too abstract. Individualised teaching was also a key adaptation strategy – instead of teaching content in a group or class context, making it specific to a particular child:

...when we're talking about appropriate touches and inappropriate touches we'd say 'okay when you go to the bathroom you might need somebody to help you'. You wouldn't be doing this in front of the class. It would be individualised (Maureen, C-Mod).

There were occasions in both the Mild and Moderate schools when children would be grouped according to gender or ability:

With the seniors, students are grouped together, so there might be a boys group and a girls group...there might be a mix of classes, a mix of students. They might have a varied age profile, but they would have the same level of understanding of the content. They would be grouped together according to ability, now that's not to say you're going to have 18 year olds and 10 year olds – that would not happen (Nora, P-Mod).

Well I am in the older corridor and what we would do...is streaming...I could have a boy who's talking about Telly Tubbies and I could have another child who's talking about going to a teenage disco at the weekend. So historically we have made three different groups and then you would differentiate your *Stay Safe* based on that you know, particularly the RSE aspects of it. And you'd have three different teachers then and they'd each take a group (Wendy, T-Mild).

The main criterion for organising groups or streams ‘wouldn’t be age, it would be social dynamic’ in general terms (Wendy, T-Mild). In order to make content ‘simpler’ (Denis, C-Mild) and more accessible for children, case study participants identified the strategies outlined in Table 18 as being useful.

**Table 18: Strategies Used to Adapt Stay Safe**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Guest speakers</li> <li>▪ Circle Time</li> <li>▪ Drama and Role play</li> <li>▪ Music and singing</li> <li>▪ Audio-visual material</li> <li>▪ Trips to the community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Use of anatomical dolls</li> <li>▪ Conversation cards</li> <li>▪ Use of SNA</li> <li>▪ Use of parents</li> <li>▪ Social Stories</li> <li>▪ Thought-tracking</li> </ul>
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Some of the adaptation strategies used also involved significant elements of curricular skipping in order to tailor content appropriate to children’s needs and abilities.

### ***Curricular Skipping***

The significant majority of Phase 1 principals indicated that their schools engaged in curricular skipping and that this encompassed content, tasks and full lessons, as Table 19 illustrates. Schools were more likely to skip individual tasks, with teachers finding alternative tasks to teach the same prescribed content. There were no major trends extrapolated when the schools were broken down into individual categories, although it was notable that schools for children with Mild General Learning Disabilities were the least likely category to skip lessons. A majority (56%) of principals in the mild settings indicated that their schools did not omit any lessons, compared to 75% of principals in the moderate settings who indicated that their schools did. All schools for children with Severe-Profound General Learning Disabilities routinely skipped lessons from *Stay Safe*, according to respondents. The nature of curricular skipping varied according to the case schools.

**Table 19: Curriculum Skipping in Special Schools**

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Unsure</b>
Skipping Content	70%	19%	11%
Skipping Tasks	89%	3%	8%
Skipping Lessons	64%	28%	8%

For some children the material was too difficult and doing it would merely amount to a ‘tokenistic’ pursuit that would not lead to new learning (Kathleen, T-SP). Often some of the material was initially explored and a conscious decision was then made to discontinue when it got too complex:

...for example, ‘you do maybe up as far as Lesson Three because your children are too young to go any farther. You do, as far as Lesson Five then because your class can do more.’ Then if we had a particularly academic class or a bright class and they’re older we’d say go up as far as Lesson 10 with them (George, P-Mild).

Often material that was skipped would be completed in subsequent years – frequently when the child was a teenager. Among the more interesting findings to emerge from the questionnaire was that *Stay Safe* was marginally more likely to be used in the post-primary end of the school (where it is not mandatory) than the primary end of the school (where it is mandatory), as Table 20 illustrates.

**Table 20: Stay Safe in Primary / Post-Primary Classes**

	<b>%</b>
<i>Stay Safe</i> used at Primary Level	58%
<i>Stay Safe</i> used to craft lessons at Junior Cycle (Post-Primary)	61%
<i>Stay Safe</i> used to craft lessons in Senior Cycle (Post-Primary)	30%

Phase 2 established that when the content was explored at post-primary, most students – even in the Moderate School – were unlikely to reach the more advanced material in the higher levels of *Stay Safe* and it was therefore skipped:

...we use it all the way up to the senior end, but very few would ever get to the level of fifth and sixth class because of the level of understanding. But there is a small cohort in the senior end of the school that might eventually reach the fifth-sixth class level (Nora, P-Mod).

In the Mild School there was some reluctance amongst teachers to concede that they skipped material at all, indicating instead that they adapted everything. However when this was probed, it became apparent that certain issues were not adapted and were skipped entirely. This was most acute around issues related to sexuality and identity:

...I absolutely would not go there. I mean I think that all comes back to George and the DLP and the ISM team you know if the whole LGBT and this kind of thing should be introduced....At the moment, that section of the programme is not suitable to mine. But that is not to say that for the 12 and 13 year olds next year it won't be suitable for them. It's a very, very complex thing to pin it down and say 'yea it is suitable to 12 and 13 year olds in our school but it's not' you know....I do know, up the corridor with the teachers that are teaching 16, 17, 18 year olds all that LGBT kind of stuff would be discussed up there but it would not be suitable for us in the primary end (Wendy, T-Mild).

The case study established that the levels of anxiety that children with SN have is also a consideration for all special schools in deciding to skip some content because of the strong feeling that certain material would frighten pupils and cause them to regress:

For other students who have high levels of anxiety we would never dream of showing them that content because they would be terrified...They would expect doomsday everyday...that's just the level of anxiety that some of our students are functioning with (Nora, P-Mod).

In these circumstances the *Stay Safe* material acted as a guide to teachers in trying to find alternative material to craft a message that was developmentally more suitable for children to interact with.

#### **4.4.3 Curriculum Making**

Half of Phase 1 respondents agreed with the statement that teachers in their school 'only use *Stay Safe* as a guide' to design their own safeguarding curriculum for children with SN, while the other half either disagreed (28%) or indicated that they were unsure (22%).

In the case study, while participants in both the Mild and Moderate schools agreed that they used *Stay Safe* as a guide, they were also very eager to point out that they used the principles, structure and content as a means for teaching the children the key safeguarding messages. These schools were not making up their own curriculum; rather they were

simply complementing what was there with other material relevant to their pupils – a finding consistent with the 89% of principals in Phase 1 who indicated that their special school supplemented *Stay Safe* with additional programmes. A different approach was taken in the SP School where participants indicated that *Stay Safe* was not used – a reality consistent with their SPHE policy statement adverted to earlier:

I'm not going to be telling anybody who comes into the school that we're adapting it. It wasn't written for our children and I'm not adapting it, as it's not adaptable (Helen, P-SP).

I think the programme as it is, we can't really implement it, in this school anyway. But obviously I'm sure there are aspects of it that come up that we are doing...the fact that we are a different context than what the programme was designed for should really be acknowledged (Nicola, T-SP).

There was an explicit acknowledgement from the SPHE coordinator in the SP School that teachers there were curriculum makers in this area:

...we did not want to go down the curriculum-led approach because we find it very limiting for our kids. It is too top down and kind of focused on adapting the mainstream curriculum for our pupils...really like we're just looking at our own pupils and building a curriculum around them (Rachel, C-SP).

The approach that this SP School took in designing their own curriculum was that of creating 'Core Profiles'. These profiles were essentially the kind of 'portfolio' curricula that typify curriculum makers (Shawer, 2010a, p. 181). They encompassed all subjects, allowing children to learn in a holistic and integrated way. Samples of these profiles were produced during Phase 2 data-gathering and there was strong emphasis on SPHE-related areas, given the difficulties that many children in these schools experienced. The profiles generally contained five areas for development:

1. Communication Profile
2. Discovery Profile
3. Social and Emotional Profile
4. Movement Profile
5. Access Technology Profile



Under each of these areas, teachers selected skills and content specifically tailored for each child. Content relevant to *Stay Safe* generally came under the ‘Communication’ or ‘Social and Emotional’ profiles. It is important to note that teachers did not make a conscious attempt to factor *Stay Safe* content under these areas and where relevant content did emerge, it was by accident rather than design. To tease out the extent to which this curriculum designed by teachers covered *Stay Safe* areas, participants were invited to examine each of the five prescribed topics and explore what they might be doing in their core profiles that would link with these topics. The next section, which overviews the data collected from all schools on the applicability of *Stay Safe* topics, will include details of their responses.

#### 4.5 Teaching the *Stay Safe* Topics in Special Schools

Teaching the five key topics underpins *Stay Safe*. By a significant margin in Phase 1, ‘Feeling Safe and Unsafe’ was regarded as the simplest topic to teach, followed by ‘Friendship and Bullying’, as Table 21 illustrates. The final three topics were broadly clustered around a similar mean ranking, denoting a comparable level of complexity in teaching them. This broad trend was observed across all school categories in Phase 1. The case study revealed some interesting insights in relation to each topic – some of which discorded with the empirical picture.

**Table 21: Ranking Difficulty Level of *Stay Safe* Topics**

<b>Categorical Ranking</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Mean Ranking</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
1	Feeling Safe and Unsafe	1.60	0.604
2	Friendship and Bullying	2.03	1.175
3	Strangers	3.66	1.110
4	Secrets and Telling	3.77	1.060
5	Touches	3.94	1.110

#### **4.5.1 Feeling Safe and Unsafe**

While ‘Feeling Safe and Unsafe’ emerged as the simplest area to teach in Phase 1, when case study participants teased out the exploration of the topic in their settings, it quickly became apparent that they were actually teaching ‘feelings’ in a broad sense – happy, sad, funny etc. This differs in a subtle, yet significant way to teaching the two central concepts of feeling ‘safe’ and feeling ‘unsafe’, which were deemed too difficult to concretise for many children:

...this is a tricky one in the sense of it being kind of abstract. I would have to reframe it. Like for my class even identifying emotions, other than happy and sad, it’s very difficult for them. There’s one or two of them that could kind of identify the emotion of ‘scared’ and that’s probably as close as I could get. You know kind of ‘happy’ and ‘scared’ is probably as close as I could get to feeling ‘safe’ and ‘unsafe’ (Harry, T-Mod).

In the SP School, where an ostensibly curriculum making approach was adopted, the emphasis was on the children’s capacity to communicate in any way on any feeling that they may have, rather than communicating around their personal safety *per se*. A very individualised approach was adopted, with strong sensory elements:

...we try and help the child to understand where they are, who we are, the routine and structure of their day and investigate what are the things that that child really loves so that we can bring them into school. Do they need to hear mammy’s voice to feel safe? Do they need to have a scarf with mammy’s smell on it?...We might not actually write down ‘Feeling Safe and Unsafe’ in our plans but when you say it, it is exactly what we are doing. It is actually part of the fibre of what we do, but at the level of our children (Helen, P-SP).

There was more potential to explore the ‘Feeling Safe and Unsafe’ topic in the Mild School, with teachers indicating that a majority of pupils would understand the concept of safety.

#### **4.5.2 Friendship and Bullying**

Although ‘Friendship and Bullying’ emerged from the questionnaire as the second simplest topic for teachers to explore, when examined in detail in the case study schools, it transpired that in most cases only the ‘friendship’ piece was dealt with. Even at that, the key safety messages were challenging to inculcate because of the nature of the pupils’ social difficulties:

Well, it's always been the way you know with our kids. They think that if somebody just even says hello to them that 'he's my friend'...But really having genuine friendships is kind of rare because of the deficits that they have in language and...outside of school they rarely mix with other kids. If they have siblings then they might get to meet other people because they're coming into their house and they're with their brothers and sisters, but a lot of the time they just go home from school and they're on their own (Maureen, C-Mod).

In the SP School, developing and nurturing friendships was regarded as 'really important' (Nicola, T-SP) in organising children's core profiles. Generally, teachers supported children in developing friendships in incidental ways, through structured play and Circle Time™. There were more prospects of teaching children the skills for how to 'build a friendship' (Catherine, T-Mild) in the Mild School but in the two other categories the friendship building potential was more dependent on the efforts of the adults supporting the child.

Bullying was not taught in great depth in any of the case study sites because the typical response by schools was that 'we really don't have it [*bullying*] here' (Nora, P-Mild) – seemingly overlooking the possibility that children could be bullied outside of school or later in life. Participants in the SP School regarded the concept as 'way too abstract' (Kathleen, T-SP) for the cognitive capacity of their children.

### **4.5.3 Strangers**

Teaching the 'Strangers' topic and making the children more cautious of strangers was regarded as difficult because typically children with complex SN 'are coming across strangers all the time' with carers and therapists coming 'into their home that they may have never seen before' (Helen, P-SP). Getting the balance right between pointing out the caution with which strangers need to be treated and promoting children's engagement with regular social activities was often exceedingly challenging, even in the Mild School:

I'll give you an example, my children are making their First Confession on Friday...we haven't met the priest, and we've a new priest because our old priest has changed dioceses, but I have to try and explain to a child...this is a priest, this is what he does, you are going to be sharing X, Y and Z with him...we're meeting strangers, but you might not even know who you're meeting you know, does that make sense? It is very complicated (Catherine, T-Mild).

In the Moderate School, while the concept of ‘strangers’ was regarded as ‘teachable’, the question that arose was ‘is it relevant?’ (Harry, T-Mod):

...to them everyone's a stranger...even their own family members sometimes they have no interaction with...so we're trying to open that up and it would nearly be counterproductive in some ways to try and start teaching a concept that they won't grasp and might even set them back socially (Jack, T-Mod).

The mixed messaging, attached to teaching children about ‘strangers’, emerged as problematic with all units across all sites.

#### **4.5.4 Secrets and Telling**

There was general consensus among all participants in all case schools that ‘Secrets and Telling’ is ‘a really hard one’ to teach (Maureen, C-Mod). The SP School eschewed the topic entirely – ‘we don’t do anything around that here. That’s just way too abstract’ (Rachel, T-SP):

I don’t think it applies really. They’re not really telling anything. I don’t think it’s relevant at all. I don’t know how it could be (Miriam, T-SP).

The Moderate School explored it, if the pupils were verbal, socially interactive and capable of ‘telling’. The Mild School had every awareness of the importance of the topic, in terms of giving the child the skills to make a disclosure, but the extent to which it could be taught was dependent on ‘their intellectual and emotional abilities’ (Catherine, T-Mild).

#### **4.5.5 Touches**

Although the questionnaire indicated that ‘Touches’ was the most difficult topic of *Stay Safe* to teach in special schools, this was not fully borne out in the case study. While it was acknowledged as challenging, the importance of a team approach to internalising key skills in children was emphasised. Typically, formal lessons on the topic were not taught *per se*; instead embedded contexts like using the toilet (Moderate School) or going to the swimming pool (Mild School) were used to teach relevant skills. In both the Moderate

and Mild schools, 'Touches' was regarded as less abstract than 'Secrets and Telling', as the school environment could be used to mobilise key enactment strategies. In the SP School this area of the curriculum was closely aligned with RSE and was highlighted by the SPHE coordinator as an area that the school was 'not good on' (Rachel, C-SP). The emphasis was placed on 'teaching appropriate touch in school' (Miriam, T-SP) rather than dealing with any touches that might be inappropriate. Teachers felt that they, together with parents and other trusted adults, had obligations as the children's 'advocates' (Kathleen, T-SP) to prevent anything that was inappropriate from happening, as opposed to teaching the children a skill that they might never understand or be able to implement.

#### **4.5.6 Topic Trends**

Looking at data collected on all of these topics in the round reveals that while aspects of each topic can be taught to children with SN, the extent of that teaching is dependent on the complexity of each child's need. In other words, some children will have the capacity to internalise more of the key messages than other children; some children will not be able to engage with the topic, as currently constituted, at all. In all three case schools, the lesser the disability of each individual child the closer the content taught to them aligned with the official curriculum. Each teacher's SN experience was seen as the fundamental factor in matching the topic content with child ability. In a sense, it was seen as the only mechanism that teachers felt they could practically draw upon. This highlighted some interesting insights on how pupil difference impacts on curriculum enactment.

#### **4.6 Dilemmas of Difference**

Norwich's (2010, p. 113) 'dilemma' about the 'consequences of having either a common or differentiated curriculum for children with disabilities/special educational needs' was probed in relation to *Stay Safe* in this research. The purpose of this probing was to

establish what practitioners in Irish special schools perceived to be the best conceptual approach to curriculum, to enhance the school and learning experience for children with SN.

#### 4.6.1 Curricular Commonality-Differentiation Continuum

None of the respondents to the questionnaire believed that special schools should have to enact the exact same *Stay Safe* curriculum as mainstream schools, despite its mandatory status, as Table 22 elucidates. This demonstrates clearly that support for a completely common curriculum in this area is paltry. 36% of respondents believed that special schools would be better served if they had ‘an entirely different *Stay Safe*’, indicating some support for fully differentiated provision from a principal perspective. Principals from schools for children with Severe-Profound Learning Disabilities were most likely to hold this position, with all respondents from this category believing that this was the optimal scenario.

**Table 22: Special School Principals’ Preferences on a Different/Common *Stay Safe***

Preference	Preference Description	%
(a)	An entirely different <i>Stay Safe</i> (different general principles, topic areas, specific content and teaching approaches)	36%
(b)	A <i>Stay Safe</i> composed of common <b>general principles</b> (autonomy to vary topic areas, specific content and teaching approaches)	17%
(c)	A <i>Stay Safe</i> composed of common <b>general principles <u>and</u> topic areas</b> (autonomy to vary specific content and teaching approaches)	30%
(d)	A <i>Stay Safe</i> composed of common <b>general principles, topic areas <u>and</u> specific content</b> (autonomy to vary teaching approaches)	17%
(e)	An entirely common <i>Stay Safe</i> (same general principles, topic areas, specific content and teaching approaches)	0%

There was solid evidence to suggest, however, that a majority of practitioners eschewed a dualistic approach to curriculum and favoured a stance that observes degrees of commonality and difference. In Phase 1, 64% of respondents selected a hybrid option for *Stay Safe* that included curricular aspects that were both common and different, as Table 22 illustrates. The second most favourable individual scenario, after an entirely different *Stay Safe*, was a curriculum where the **general principles** and **topic areas** were the same but where teachers had the autonomy to vary the specific content depending on pupils (30%). Hospital schools (66%) and schools for children with Mild General Learning Disabilities (44%) were the most likely categories to select this option, again indicating that the lesser the educational need, the more potential that exists for curriculum commonality. It is notable that there was no overarching preferred curriculum approach from principals of schools catering for children with Moderate Intellectual Disabilities, with a 25% frequency being recorded for each option from (a) to (d) on Table 22.

Phase 1 empirical evidence was corroborated by extensive qualitative data gathered during Phase 2. From the Mild and Moderate schools there was strong support for the five topic areas acting as a framework for devising a curriculum suitable for children in their schools:

I think the five topics certainly should remain the bedrock, but there should be sub-sections within the topics for our cohort of students. While the *Stay Safe* content and resources are very good, we have identified that we do need to modify the content to reach the level of need of our students. So I certainly wouldn't be changing the topics...We have to pitch something that's such an important learning topic for our children, but we have to pitch it so carefully so as not to terrify them but also meaningfully so that it actually resonates with them and they learn from it (Nora, P-Mod).

Having the five topics was seen to bring 'a structure' and 'more cohesion' (Maureen, C-Mod) to the key issues in need of exploration. There was a well-articulated belief amongst the Mild and Moderate schools that having the same general principles was also important but that these needed 'to be updated more to reflect the prominence of social media in children's lives' (George, P-Mild). While there was broad support for common topic

areas and general principles in the mild and moderate settings, strong views were expressed across the board for the importance of teachers themselves deciding on the specific content to be explored, based on their experience:

...you can't be rigid in our place and say this has to be done and that has to be done because in your duty as a teacher you'd be failing them, because you'd be giving them things that aren't appropriate for them. (Denis, C-Mild).

I think there needs to be a level of flexibility and an acknowledgement that we are best placed to know our students, we're best placed to know what kind of areas...are going to be really important to them...I think, listening to a story about someone's neighbour touching them or whatever, like for them it's just not fair. (Evelyn, T-Mod).

While in both the Mild School and the Moderate School there was support for having common topic areas, the support was much stronger in the mild setting. In the moderate setting, depending on the child, teachers argued that topic areas may need to be omitted – although the existence of this practice was not conceded by either the principal or SPHE coordinator, both of whom argued vigorously for having common topic areas. In the SP School all research participants were strong proponents of an entirely different *Stay Safe* and intimated that there was no possibility for commonality in general principles, topic areas or content. Pupil factors, related to severe physical, mental, emotional and cognitive impairment, were the main reasons for this – all children in this context were non-verbal and many were non-ambulant. This reality provided the backdrop to passionate contributions on achieving equity for this cohort of pupils.

#### **4.6.2 The Equity-Equality Conundrum**

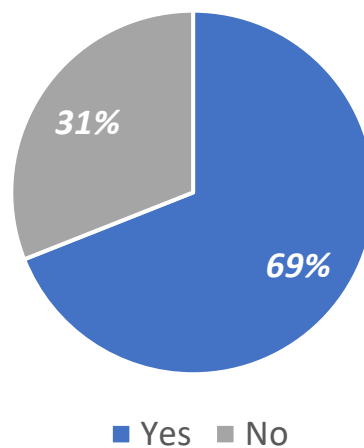
In determining how much of the curriculum to differentiate, teachers must negotiate the equity versus equality dilemma. Two areas were probed in relation to this, based on the work of Norwich (2002, 2010):

- 1. If children with a learning difficulty or special need are afforded the same learning experiences in Stay Safe as other children, are they likely to be denied the opportunity to have learning experiences relevant to their individual needs?*



Over two-thirds of principals in Phase 1 (69%) indicated ‘Yes’ in response to this question (Figure 8) – in essence they accepted the negative consequence of providing children with SN the same learning experience in *Stay Safe*, as their typically developing peers. The same broad frequency was recorded across all school categories – although it was notable that every principal from a severe-profound school answered in the affirmative.

**Figure 8: Equity-Equality Dilemma 1**



When asked to justify their ‘Yes’ answers with textual input, the resulting themes related to the children’s capacities for comprehension and the curriculum’s fit-for-purpose for children who may have very different life experiences to their typically developing peers. The following three extracts give an overview of the most common types of responses recorded:

There is no point teaching something all to be seen to be showing ‘equality’ if the children can’t access it (Principal, School for Mild General Learning Disability).

The stay safe application in our school is limited because the concepts are too difficult and the presentation does not match the needs of our children. However we do our best to implement what parts they might understand in various activities. I think its present formation is beyond the capacity of our children’s ability (Principal, School for Moderate Intellectual Disability).

If the content of the Stay Safe Programme was delivered as it exists in a setting such as ours, then the entire exercise would be pointless. Our pupils need a complete differentiated programme, not just at class level but at an individual level. Often the more sensory based 'lessons' of stay safe are easier for us to teach e.g. safe touch etc as these are concrete/rule orientated messages. The abstract lessons contained in the sessions on friendship/bullying/secrets etc are incredibly hard to teach to our cohort of students (Principal, School for Autism Spectrum).

The optional textual justifications provided by questionnaire respondents who indicated ‘No’ to the above-cited question, were relatively desultory (Table 23) and did not meaningfully justify their accompanying dissents.

**Table 23: Principal Textual Justifications (‘No’ Response)**

<b>Response</b>	<b>School Type</b>	<b>Children with SN are <u>NOT</u> likely to be denied the opportunity to have learning experiences relevant to their individual needs if they are afforded the same learning experiences in Stay Safe as other children.</b>
<b>(a)</b>	<b>Multiple Disabilities</b>	<i>The content of the lessons and the material has to be adapted to meet the child’s needs</i>
<b>(b)</b>	<b>Mild General Learning Disabilities</b>	<i>Adapting lessons is often key to learning in special schools. Opportunities and repetition of lessons are necessary. The revised Stay Safe programme has been fully addressed and adapted in our school. It is presented to meet the needs of our students.</i>
<b>(c)</b>	<b>Hospital School</b>	<i>In Hospital Schools we have transitory student population. Therefore no student is taught the full programme. Teachers choose the topics most appropriate to work on with that student at that time.</i>
<b>(d)</b>	<b>Moderate General Learning Disabilities</b>	<i>The most important aspect of stay safe is that children learn that they can ask any question and be given an honest answer.</i>

Despite their response that children were not likely to be denied more appropriate learning opportunities with a common curriculum, three out of four respondents (a – c, Table 23) still accounted for why differentiation was necessary. That teachers in special schools should be considered the best placed to be experts at delivering this differentiation was probed in Phase 2.

***Expert Role of Special Schools in Differentiated Provision***

Participants spoke passionately about how special schools had been ‘trailblazers in the delivery’ (Maureen, C-Mod) of adapted curricula for children with SN. Teachers had developed a mastery of the strategies that work for different children ‘by being in the

classroom’ (Donna, T-Mild) and their tacit experience of dealing with an evolving complexity of need daily. It was argued that this level of experience would not be available in mainstream settings, thus reducing the success with which sensitive material like *Stay Safe* is enacted:

I would see a special school really is up there in terms of expertise and in terms of knowing how to deliver the programmes to the cohort of children that we have. We really are the experts in identifying what the needs are and meeting those needs. We have so much experience of it and we are doing it day in and day out in all areas of the curriculum....Kids with special needs, really are so much more vulnerable in other ways and lots of ways than mainstream kids. I know everybody is vulnerable but ours have particular vulnerabilities that we cannot ignore and that we have to help them with (Maureen, C-Mod).

The Moderate School had pupils that eventually reached a point where they were enabled to transition to mainstream education, at least in part, it was argued, because of the expert teaching they received in the specialist setting. Participants strongly contended that special schools had a vital place on the inclusion continuum and that the flexibility with which they approached curricula such as *Stay Safe* was important in ensuring that they were enacted to facilitate optimal internalisation. This process of making the curriculum more inclusive and accessible was construed as leadership by participants because without the input of their expertise, children would not be able to access it. In essence, special schools were an equity instrument, which individual teachers refined based on individual pupil need.

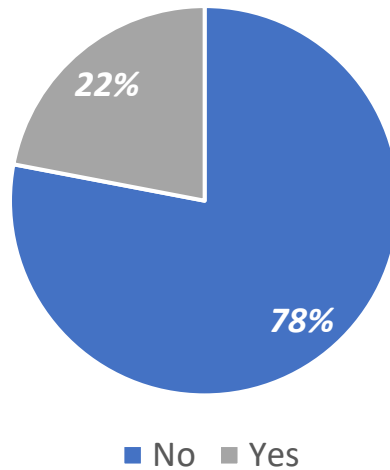
A second equity-equality orientated area was probed with research participants:

***2. If children with a learning difficulty or special need are NOT afforded the same learning experiences in Stay Safe as other children, are they likely to be treated as a lower status group and denied equal opportunities ?***

Over three-quarters of Phase 1 respondents (78%) indicated ‘No’ in response to the second question (Figure 9) — in essence they did not accept the negative consequence for children with SN of **not** having the same learning experience in *Stay Safe*. This general

frequency was recorded across all school categories, with principals from schools for children with Severe-Profound Learning Disabilities the most likely group to record ‘No’ (100%).

**Figure 9: Equity-Equality Dilemma 2**



The strength of feeling was laid bare in the optional textual justifications open to principals, with the majority of responses along the same vein as the following extracts:

This is a societal thing. Unfortunately, children with SEN have less opportunities because of their condition. Not because of what [we] teach them or don't teach them (Principal, School for Mild General Learning Disability).

Just because their experience is different does not mean it is less valuable. One size does not fit all. If we truly believe in an inclusive society, there must be room for difference (Principal, School for Moderate Intellectual Disability).

It is much more important to present the content in as accessible a manner possible than to concern ourselves with a notion of denied equality. The subject is just too important (Principal, School for Autism Spectrum).

When the quantitative data for this second question are looked at critically, side-by-side with the quantitative data for the first question, a stark picture comes into view in relation to *Stay Safe*. That the negative consequence of the first option was accepted and the negative consequence of the second option was **not** accepted, implies that teachers in Irish special schools do not fully recognise Norwich's (2010) dilemma overall, in relation to different treatment of this particular curriculum. While this may be due to its mandatory nature, it is nevertheless an important point of note, when data from elsewhere (as

explored in Chapter 2) indicates that teachers do recognise general dilemmas in relation to differentiated curricula.

Many of the principals who indicated 'Yes' in response to this second question did so in the belief that while in the short term pupils may be denied equal opportunities, in the longer term the skills gained because of different curricular treatment would accrue to their advantage:

They will be denied equal opportunities but they may get a more equitable service in the long run as they will have a programme that is better suited to their needs (Principal, School for Autism Spectrum).

There was also an understanding on the part of those saying 'Yes' that the reality of their circumstances could not be ignored in the enactment process:

The students with special needs should be afforded the same learning experiences in Stay Safe, but the context of the learning targets may be different, as students might have different experiences/social circumstances/high dependency requirements as a result of their disability (Principal, School for Autism Spectrum).

Phase 2 corroborated and provided depth of clarity in relation to these points. Implicit in participant anecdotes was the notion that children with SN are different and if they are treated as though they are the same, then learning will not accrue to enable them to reach their potential:

Well they're already disadvantaged...Like that's working in a special school....If I taught them Fifth and Sixth content for example, if they were Fifth and Sixth class age, most wouldn't get it. Then, wouldn't I be better off giving them second and third class content, so that they would have something they could understand rather than letting them go off with the general stuff for their age and having not understood it. Like they are decisions that are constantly happening here. In our place there's no one size fits all for us (Denis, C-Mild).

Again, school was treated as an instrument to facilitate long-term societal inclusion rather than short-term curricular equality:

When they leave us, particularly the more able children, we want them to have as normal a life possible. The general rule for us is it's how we adapt our curriculum to suit what they might be able to do. We have to give them as many of the life skills as possible to lead an independent life. We are thinking long-term as opposed to getting caught up with short term things about 'is this right or is that right or is this equal or is that equal'. It is all about what they will be able to do....our whole curriculum, our whole thinking has been since the foundation of the school, can we give them the independent skills necessary for living (George, P-Mild).

While the era of inclusion was welcomed by participants, disillusionment existed at how the concept was seen to be perceived by policy makers and macro-level curriculum

designers. It was argued from multiple participants that there was a tendency to construct ‘inclusion’ superficially as ‘we better mention special needs or throw in a picture of a wheelchair’ (Maureen, C-Mod) – not recognising the structural architecture (curricular and otherwise) that special schools were putting in place to facilitate longer-term systemic inclusion.

### ***Special Schools in the Era of Inclusion***

Participants in all sites in Phase 2 of this research spoke at various lengths on how ‘everything has changed’ (Nora, P-Mod) in special education since the turn of the millennium because of the ‘inclusion, inclusion, inclusion’ refrain (Maureen, C-Mod). The profile of children attending special schools has become noticeably more complex with the mild and moderate settings reporting greater incidence of Autism and extreme behaviours. It was argued that these pupils would experience significant difficulty, and many would not cope, if they had to attend a mainstream school full-time and engage with standard curricula like *Stay Safe*. Nevertheless, special schools had to put curricular structures in place to retain pupils, whose parents wanted to blend the best aspects of SN instruction and general inclusion:

...numbers were declining because of inclusion so...we revamped our school a certain amount on the best of both primary, secondary and special education. In other words, we were able to show parents who were looking for an alternative, a clear pathway through education for a child with special needs. I’d say that was probably because we have certain areas of the school - like we’ve a Leaving Cert Applied area, we’ve a QQI area, we have a JCSP area, we have a Junior Cert exam area, like every other mainstream school. But we have the best of special education in those areas as well (George, P-Mild).

These structural changes, in response to the global trend towards inclusion, were also seen in both of the other case study sites (albeit to lesser degrees). Practitioner insights demonstrated that while commonality in curriculum and general provision was the ideal scenario, in reality differentiated provision – with extensive adult support – must form part of practice if the overall objective is to optimise empowerment, increase independence and facilitate greater societal inclusion longer term. This is because

individual pupils often have specific conditions that impact their capacities and their ability to internalise, which ultimately can impede their acquisition of skills, if skill-development is not approached in a more tailored (often different) way. Participants in this research had an acute awareness of the huge tensions punctuating this debate on dilemmas of difference in the era of inclusion - leadership and leadership systems emerged as critical in finding and maintaining some degree of equilibrium, in particular in relation to the curriculum.

## **Part B – Curriculum Leadership in Child Safeguarding**

This study probed how leadership impacted on the enactment of the *Stay Safe* curriculum in special schools. Central to that discussion were practitioner-based insights on distributed leadership, as the prevailing model for leadership in Irish schools (Government of Ireland, 2016, 2018).

### **4.7 Leadership Shared or Leadership Distributed**

The overwhelming majority of Phase 1 principals (89%) contended that their school had a culture of distributed leadership, which permeated how it approached the curricular component to child safeguarding. However, when these figures were drilled into, some disparities emerged around how distributed leadership was conceptualised at professional practice level. Over 6-in-10 principals delegated tasks to teachers in relation to the curriculum under discussion (Table 24, overleaf), indicating that a majority of principals believed that top-down delegation was compatible with a culture of distributed leadership.

**Table 24: Leadership and Influence in Special Schools**

	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Unsure</b>
Curricular tasks are <i>delegated</i> by principal	61%	31%	8%
Principals and teachers <i>share</i> curricular tasks	64%	22%	14%
A hierarchy exists in the school with those on higher levels exercising greater influence over curricular policy	33%	61%	6%

When asked whether they shared leadership responsibilities, as distinct from delegating them, a similar majority figure was recorded indicating that sharing leadership and delegating it were viewed in similar terms by principals. This illustrates that whatever angle leadership is viewed from in relation to this aspect of the curriculum, the principal exerts some degree of control over who can exercise it. Yet, while that might be empirically deduced as the practice reality, there was some reluctance on the part of principals to concede that point in the abstract. When asked whether there were ‘hierarchical layers of leadership in the school’ with those in ‘higher layers’ exerting greater influence over this curriculum, a majority of respondents demurred (Table 24). It was clear from Phase 2, however, that hierarchical leadership was a feature of all three schools in one way or another – whether teachers and principals realised it or not.

#### **4.7.1 Control of Leadership**

In one case study school<sup>14</sup>, there was strong articulation from the principal of the importance of gaining staff ‘buy-in’ (P) in relation to the curriculum approach taken. In

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<sup>14</sup> In Section 4.7.1 and the earlier part of Section 4.8.1, the category of each case school has been withheld from the labelling of participant quotations to ensure that each principal cannot be identified by his/her colleagues. As noted earlier in the Methodology Chapter, this was necessary given the sensitivity of their comments in relation to their approaches to people management in their respective schools. If they were identified, it could conceivably cause them difficulties amongst the staff in their settings.



this school regular meetings were held so that the staff felt that they had input on their curricular offering:

Now, obviously the secret behind it was, we already knew what we [*senior management team*] wanted...Like the buy-in was key. We wanted them to feel that everything...was their voice, that they were heard, that we listened to every single staff member, so that ...they would go 'oh yeah we were involved in that. We were all there that day' (P).

There was an awareness from the principal that while this approach may have been unscrupulous it was also necessary to bring the school to where he/she felt was necessary to best support pupils:

I think from a leadership point-of-view...like, if you are actually just fumbling around hoping that everybody else comes up with a...consensus...you'll never get a consensus. I suppose, I suppose it's devious in a way (P).

The principal was adamant that staff had shared in the leadership process that allowed the school to arrive at their shared curriculum approach. In the focus group the staff agreed that they had input in the process and that they could make suggestions for change. They also agreed that the approach they had arrived at was considered 'best-practice' (T). There was a keen awareness, however, from all focus group participants that the curriculum approach was 'spearheaded' (T) by the principal and deputy principal in a very focused and systematic way.

### ***Evidence-Informed Decision-Making***

The principal of the Moderate School was the only participant in Phase 2 to explicitly mention 'data' in terms of decision-making. If a teacher wanted to bring about change to the curriculum approach that the principal did not agree with, the latter 'would acknowledge that [*desire for change*] and...wouldn't say no straight out' (P-Mod).

Rather, the principal would interrogate data to determine how to proceed:

So a proposal to make a change that I potentially didn't agree with, I would look into it, I'd certainly investigate it, I would collect data on why this change was necessary or not. Then, if it's data driven and I have the evidence to support the change, I will certainly make that change if I see that it's in the best interest of the children. But if I have evidence to the contrary I will explore that as well (P-Mod).

So, while the principal was open to staff members suggesting change based on their tacit experience, she would be the final voice in determining whether that change could occur, based on the explicit data she had access to. This was consistent with the questionnaire finding that 75% of principals believed that their formal leadership role afforded them greater influence in this curricular area – although this principal’s exertion of that influence was data-informed. She believed that her positional status afforded her the right and responsibility to leverage data in this way.

#### **4.8 Leadership Linked to Positional Management Roles**

69% of principals in Phase 1 of this research indicated that teachers in unpromoted positions had the same influence on curriculum enactment as those in formal management roles – a finding that tacitly contradicted principals’ earlier concession that a hierarchy existed in relation to influence over curricular policies. In the Mild School, this meant that a ‘majority rules’ frame-of-mind was adopted if there was contestation in some cases, because in the principal’s words ‘I don’t know everything’ (George, P-Mild). Despite all principals in the three case study schools agreeing that the influence was the same regardless of whether teachers were promoted or not, the evidence contained in Phase 2 participant anecdotes overwhelmingly indicated that those in formal roles were more influential and autonomous in all three schools. The more senior the role, the more influence and autonomy that accrued.

##### **4.8.1 The Deputy Principal**

In all three case study sites the deputy principal (DP) emerged as highly influential – on both the principal and the teachers. The DP provided credibility to the principal when she/he wanted to introduce curricular change:

...if it was me on my own, I would have to be asking teachers, you know, this is the next step you're going to have to pilot this for me because I'm not in a classroom. Where the deputy was able to...do that as a natural part of classroom routine and able to see then how things needed to

change...I think this is why it's important to have the DP who is a practitioner in the classroom, leading it in many ways, with me, because they can say you know 'I'm finding it easier in my planning', because if it's just me here in the office they'll say 'it's alright for you up there in the office' (P).

The impression was created that curricular change was more likely to be successful among teachers if they could see that a classroom practitioner, who was also a senior formal leader in the school, was practising what was being recommended. According to teachers this created the sense that the approach taken was 'very realistic in terms of what kind of curriculum really works for the school' (T). The deputy principal was also vital in building capacity in each school so that teachers had the confidence to deal with the sensitive issues that invariably emerge when teaching the *Stay Safe* curriculum. This was most apparent in the Moderate School where the deputy was deemed to be a 'natural leader' because of her 'level of experience' (Evelyn T-Mod) in differentiating SPHE for children with SN:

When I arrived here Maureen was already the SPHE coordinator and we all took our direction from her on *Stay Safe* and RSE because she is so informed on it and an authority on it...She started off a few focus groups.... on those kind of areas...and that allowed us as teachers to have our own little focus groups that we didn't need the SPHE coordinator there for....We then have the kind of guidance and confidence to lead that ourselves.... and then depending on what level our students are at we can direct where that goes ourselves, so it becomes a little bit more autonomous (Jack, T-Mod).

When pressed on whether it was her SN experience or her formal management role that made her such a leader in this area in the school, participants were more conflicted but agreed that it was 'probably 50-50' (Evelyn, T-Mod). It was noteworthy that in both the SP and the Moderate schools the deputy principal was also the SPHE coordinator, which may have impacted on the influence they commanded.

#### **4.8.2 Role of SPHE Coordinator**

In Phase 1 of this study, only 14% of principals indicated that the SPHE coordinator was the 'key person' in relation to leadership of this curricular area in their schools. Of the three case study sites, only in the mild setting was the SPHE coordinator not the deputy principal; instead, he occupied an assistant principal post on the in-school management

team and was the Designated Liaison Person for Child Protection. It is difficult to establish the extent to which this more reduced management status (as compared to the other two case study sites) impacted on how the role of SPHE coordinator was undertaken in the mild setting. The role appeared to have reduced visibility, with some participants in the focus group not fully sure who the SPHE coordinator was and identifying a different teacher as the SPHE coordinator compared to the designated postholder. This may have been linked to the fact that the current coordinator was only in the role for six months. There was also a sense that the coordinator did not have a leadership role because he was not someone that interacted with classes beyond the senior side of the school where he was teaching (and where *Stay Safe* was not mandatory).

This contrasted starkly with the SPHE coordinator in the Moderate School, who was also a teacher in the senior end, but whose influence, visibility and authority were readily apparent across the full span of classes. Since the SPHE coordinators in the SP and Moderate schools were the deputy principals, they met with the principal on a very regular basis – their relationships were ‘underpinned by professional conversations’ (Maureen, C-Mod). These relationships provided the SPHE coordinator with more access to ‘link with the principal’ (Rachel, C-SP) around curricular ideas that they wanted to progress. In the Mild School the SPHE coordinator had no regular formal access to the principal, beyond discussion at ISM meetings, when looking to change aspects of curricular policy. Instead, his role revolved around:

- Organising resources for SPHE
- Providing reminders when specific aspects of the SPHE policy needed to be covered
- Giving information around relevant courses

While the SPHE coordinators in the other two sites also completed these tasks, they additionally had a significant role in how this aspect of the curriculum was enacted. The SPHE coordinator in the Mild School did indicate however that the person occupying the role prior to him ‘developed his own programmes’ (Denis, C-Mild) for the school – suggesting that time-in-role might impact on how it can potentially be undertaken. As it stood, he relied heavily on collaboration and discussions within the ISM team to guide him and to bring about curricular change in the school.

#### **4.8.3 Role of ISM Team**

In the Mild School the role of the ISM team was seen to be very important in terms of curriculum enactment. Decisions would be made in collaboration at ISM meetings and the SPHE coordinator - who was a member of the ISM team - would then go about implementing and progressing the decision:

...the needs of the school would be dictated by what we see day-to-day in the school and that would be discussed by the ISM team and the programme would be developed out of those discussions...and further developed I suppose by the postholder...I could recommend things but ultimately it would be a team decision...like the postholders would all have their input and then come to a consensus on what was the best for the school (Denis, C-Mild).

While the principal and deputy principal would maintain a gate-keeping role in terms of ‘making the final decision’ (Denis, C-Mild) on whether a proposal was enacted, an openness to getting a fair hearing on it was apparent:

...we’d get our agenda at ISM and we talk about different things. The principal is generally good to throw things out there...if there's an issue we all talk about it, you give your opinion and some agree and some don't agree, and so on. But he has like 35 years' experience in the school and you're kind of leaning a bit on that (Denis, C-Mild).

This perspective on the influence of the ISM team was not as apparent in the Moderate School and the SP School. Despite more influence appearing to accrue with more managerial status, there was still space for unpromoted teachers to exert influence.

## 4.9 Leadership of Unpromoted Teachers

Phase 1 established that while a majority of principals saw their role as affording them more influence on SPHE curricular policy, a number of other important statistics were extrapolated (Table 25).

**Table 25: Phase 1 Teacher Leadership Statistics**

	Yes	No	Unsure
<i>Teachers are empowered to amend the official curriculum (including the curricular elements to child protection) to ensure that it is applicable to pupils in their class.</i>	83%	14%	3%
<i>Teachers support each other in amending the curriculum (including the curricular elements to child protection) to ensure that it is applicable to pupils in their class.</i>	97%	3%	0%
<i>Teachers in unpromoted positions have the same influence on curricular policy-making and enactment (including the curricular elements to child protection) as those in management positions.</i>	69%	28%	3%
<i>Teachers are empowered to exercise their own professional judgement in the enactment of the curriculum (including the curricular elements to child protection).</i>	75%	17%	8%

These statistics, which will be discussed over the course of this section, indicate the potential for teacher leadership in this domain. Phase 2 established that in all schools there was a culture of collaboration to varying extents and this collaboration served as a vehicle for many teachers to exercise leadership through influencing other members of staff.

### 4.9.1 Leadership as Influence Through Accumulated Teaching Experience

A premium was placed by participants in all the case study sites on experience in special education. Teachers with this experience were seen to bring value to the curricular decision-making process, were seen to know what approaches worked best for children with SN and were highly influential towards their less-experienced colleagues:

...it would be foolish of me...if I didn't go and consult or seek advice on things that I was unsure of from people that are here 25 or 30 years. And I'd say the same about someone who's just in the door. It can be daunting going into a special school....it's not a normal school is what I'd say.

You'd be very foolish not to take advantage of the experience that is here and built up over many years (Denis, C-Mild).

It was often easier for teachers to get advice from colleagues when these colleagues were not in management positions and at the same level as the majority of the staff. Teachers who were teaching children with similar needs or of a similar age, gravitated more naturally towards each other when seeking out advice:

...we seek out as well the teachers who have similar class profiles or are dealing with similar situations to ourselves... there's not one leader here as such. We're all kind of a support network to each other. It's not like if one person is not there, we can't rely on other people. So I think it's more shared leadership... (Jack, T-Mod)

This notion of teachers sharing expertise with each other was construed by teachers themselves to be a form of leadership and this construal was most prominent in the Moderate School where the principal had some element of leadership control but ensured that teachers were also empowered (by her) to exercise responsibility:

I would be very clear to give responsibilities to others as much as to postholders, as long as they're not too onerous or time-consuming because I know that can rebound as well. But if there are teachers who have that ability and capability of taking on another responsibility – they like that because it acknowledges their role within the school as well, and I think it's important to give everybody some responsibility (Nora, P-Mod).

This responsibility gave teachers a sense of being enabled to hone their expertise and use that expertise in collaboration with others to create 'focus groups' (Jack, T-Mod) – which for all intents and purposes were equivalent to PLCs – on issues that they needed some support on. The benefits of this collaboration were plain to see insofar as it enabled teachers to:

...see if other members of staff taught the same topic recently, so this works really well, this didn't work really well, and you know actively seeking out support as well is a very important part of a leader's role isn't it, to see how best to support the child (Harry, T-Mod).

This approach enabled teachers to be best equipped to support their pupils and to advocate for their needs.

#### **4.9.2 Leadership as Advocacy**

Phase 2 of this research revealed that in all case study sites teachers construed a very strong advocacy role for themselves in relation to their pupils and the curriculum under

discussion. This was most prominent in the SP School where teachers strongly felt that there was no pressing need to teach *Stay Safe* because it was up to them as the children's 'advocates' (Nicola, T-SP) to protect them, in circumstances where the pupils would never be able to acquire or implement personal safety skills independently:

It's for us as their advocates to keep them safe. They don't have the capacity for that themselves. We have to be their eyes and ears...because the children aren't vocalizing or verbalizing to us. They can't do it (Kathleen, T-SP).

Both of the other case study sites offered similar perspectives, although they were not as well-articulated as the SP School where teachers felt that their all-encompassing advocacy role was justification for eschewing *Stay Safe* – at whole-school and classroom level.

### **4.9.3 Leadership in the Classroom**

Teachers argued that the role they had in the classroom when it comes to differentiating *Stay Safe* and managing the pupils and other adults in relation to its enactment was tantamount to a significant leadership role. Their tacit teaching experience underpinned all of their work:

I think our leadership obviously comes from the fact that we know our students the best... it's your job, then, to decide how you are going to manage it – as a group or individually or deciding if the students can work together as a group. So, we have to kind of, well for me personally anyway, I have to decide what's the best approach. Is it something, a need, that needs to be addressed right away...(Jack, T-Mod).

Making these decisions at classroom level as to how the curriculum was enacted with specific children was seen as critical in order to ensure optimal learning for each child so that that they could acquire a suitable skillset. This involved directing / deploying SNAs in a targeted way to support teachers in enacting the curriculum:

I have three SNAs...So I think really the leadership role comes in here saying 'okay guys, this is what we're doing today, this is how we're doing it, this is the language that needs to be used around it, or this is the topic for this week' (Harry, T-Mod).

It was very clear that SNAs worked under the authority of the teacher and 'don't have a role in implementing' the curriculum (Denis, T-Mild) beyond assisting the teacher in the



delivery of specific lessons. In the SP School, *Stay Safe* was ‘not something that the SNAs would probably know of even’ (Rachel, T-SP).

Underpinning the teacher’s leadership role in the classroom enactment of *Stay Safe* was the sense of autonomy they had been provided with in their schools to enact it in a way that was suitable for their cohort - as determined again by their tacit knowledge. In all schools, the principal agreed that this classroom-level autonomy was important because:

Every teacher has a degree after their name. They're highly intelligent people. They have to be allowed that freedom to interpret the programme, while covering the main points of each programme. They need to have that freedom to interpret it and to implement it in new and even visionary ways (George, P-Mild).

...as special schools the resources that are available don't always hit the mark. For example, with *Stay Safe*, we want to get home the key messages in a very clear way but a lot of the stories that are built into their resources really aren't that relevant for us because it's very hard for our kids to make sense of somebody else's story (Maureen, C-Mod).

This autonomy led to the creation of relationships defined by ‘professional judgement and professional trust’ (Wendy, T-Mild), where each teacher was empowered to exercise the former because of the latter placed in them by the principal in relation to the curriculum:

Trust. It's all down to trust....as for rigorously checking it - I am not that kind of person. I would trust the staff... (George, P-Mild).

This trust balanced on a shared commitment by all in the school communities to prepare their pupils for increased independence and as much inclusion in society as possible when they got older. Outside influences can play a part in that process, however.

#### **4.10 External Factors Influencing Leadership**

Phase 1 of this research established that the oversight exercised by the Department of Education Inspectorate by way of CPSIs was not an important consideration in how *Stay Safe* was enacted - Table 26 illustrates that it was only the fifth most important consideration. These considerations were broadly corroborated in Phase 2, where principals indicated that inspections were more of a hindrance or ‘an insult’ or an exercise

in ‘ticking boxes’ (Nora, P-Mod), than a support in enacting this sensitive aspect of the curriculum for children with SN. It was conceded in the Mild and Moderate schools however that the prospect of a CPSI does put the ‘pressure on’ (George, P-Mild) in terms of planning documents.

**Table 26: Considerations in Enacting Stay Safe**

<b>Categorical Ranking</b>	<b>Consideration</b>	<b>Mean Ranking</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
1	Needs of each child	1.78	0.959
2	Professional judgement of teachers	2.64	1.175
3	Adherence to key <i>Stay Safe</i> messages	3.58	1.481
4	Input from parents	4.19	1.411
5	Department of Education guidance (e.g. CPSIs)	4.42	1.962
6	Input from child psychology	5.67	1.454
7	Department of Children and Youth Affairs guidance (e.g. Children First)	5.72	1.750

In the SP setting where the official curriculum was eschewed, there was a strong sense of pushback towards the Inspectorate, because it was felt that professional educators in schools were more expert than they were, at teaching and leading curricula for children with SN:

I have a huge amount of experience and background in working with these kids and the vast majority of inspectors haven’t a clue when it comes to SEN...I can stand over any of these decisions...I mean the curriculum to us has always been a guideline or a guidance document (Helen, P-SP).

This sense of superiority in terms of SN expertise is particularly noteworthy when viewed against the Phase 1 finding that input from child psychologists and professional guidance were the two least important considerations in enacting *Stay Safe* (Table 26). This is again indicative of the subservient status that explicit knowledge had compared to tacit knowledge, in terms of teachers’ perspectives of their importance.

#### 4.11 Concluding Remarks

Chapter 4 has presented the findings of this doctoral research over two parts. Part A illustrated the experiences of special schools in enacting the curricular component to child safeguarding. It demonstrated, *inter alia*, that the curriculum approach to *Stay Safe* was dependent on the complexity of need present in the school. Of the three case study sites, both the Moderate and Mild schools demonstrated the hallmarks of curriculum developers, while the SP School demonstrated the hallmarks of curriculum makers. The importance of teacher experience in deciding the suitability of curricular content was highlighted and the difficulties associated with teaching the five topics as they currently stand were foregrounded. The presence of dilemmas of difference was confirmed in relation to the *Stay Safe* curriculum, in particular for children who have severe-to-profound needs and who may need constant support and advocacy. In the current formulation of *Stay Safe*, teachers did not feel that this complexity was fully acknowledged. Part B of the chapter explored some of the key leadership considerations in how the *Stay Safe* curriculum was led at school-level. It spotlighted the tensions that exist between the leadership exercised by those in positional management roles and those who were not, in *de facto* distributed systems. The power of the principal's role was underscored but teachers could also exercise influence depending on their level of experience. The next chapter of the thesis will discuss these findings, highlight their implications and outline how they contribute to new knowledge.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

*‘...balancing is the way of resolving tensions and dilemmas of difference’*

(Norwich, 2010, p.133).

### 5.1 Introduction

This doctoral study examined how teachers in Irish special schools enact the child safeguarding curriculum, *Stay Safe*, and further probed the role that leadership played in that process. Shaver’s (2010a) theoretical framework for curriculum approaches was used to guide the research and aid interpretations. This chapter will bring together various strands of the research and spotlight emergent conceptualisations relating to curriculum enactment in SN. Following an analysis of the more bristly emerging questions in relation to child safeguarding curricula, Chapter 5 will highlight this study’s unique contribution to the discourse and specifically will:

- Particularise the complexities of balancing adult advocacy with pupil empowerment in the SN sphere;
- Propose a modified curriculum model and a revised *Stay Safe* topic framework to optimise learning for children with SN;
- Delineate the tensions that exist between teacher experience and evidence-informed practice in the SN curricular arena;
- Hypothesise two leadership premia at play in curricular decision-making in special schools.

### 5.2 Child Safeguarding Curricula: Relevance, Content and Structure

At the crux of the debate around the enactment of child safeguarding curricula is the elemental question of whether they should be enacted at all because of criticism that they place ‘too much responsibility on children for keeping themselves safe’ (Briggs and

Hawkins, 1994b, 1994a; Topping and Barron, 2009, p. 432). This contention was apparent with teachers in all case study schools and was exacerbated by ‘lower expectations’ (Shevlin, Kenny and Loxley, 2008, p. 142) which assumed that some of their children could never exercise such responsibility. However, the criticism informing this stance was ill-conceived because the objectives of child safeguarding curricula should ‘not be misconstrued to imply that children are responsible for protecting themselves’ or that the successful deployment of the incorporated skills would ensure that pupils were fully protected in any event (Walsh *et al.*, 2018, p. 52). Child safeguarding curricula exist to ‘empower’ children (MacIntyre and Lawlor, 2016), as one component of an integrated safeguarding arsenal; their function is not to eliminate risk, but to reduce it (Gibson and Leitenberg, 2000; Ko and Cosden, 2001; Walsh *et al.*, 2018). In considering these risks, the apparent challenge that exists in the Irish special school context is in negotiating the degrees to which child empowerment and adult advocacy can be woven together to ensure that children with SN receive a curricular experience appropriate to their cognitive capacity and their risk susceptibility.

### **5.2.1 The Empowerment – Advocacy Balance: Finding the Equilibrium**

The relentless focus on child empowerment in the existing curricular arrangements, at the expense of any acknowledged co-existing advocacy role for adults in this sensitive area, was problematic for many teachers in this research. The tension between these two relatively diametric perspectives has obscured the potential of a more pragmatic middle way that would incorporate the benefits of both child empowerment and adult advocacy.

#### ***The Teacher as an Advocate: A Special School Prerequisite***

*Stay Safe* centralises the importance of spoken language in order to empower children with the words necessary to say ‘No’ or to make a disclosure (MacIntyre and Lawlor, 2016). Some children with the most complex needs may never be able to do either of

those things because of intellectual or medical issues, so severe that they may even die in childhood (Warnock, 2010) – this point was borne out in all case study schools, with the issue being most acute in the SP School. While some scholars have criticised such ‘determinist beliefs about ability’ (Hart and Drummond, 2014, p. 439), the body of pertinent scholarship has not sufficiently established how this level of need can plausibly be ignored in practical terms, when planning for the best possible curricular provision for children with SN. The reality, as demonstrated by participants in this research, is that it cannot be side-stepped – even for curricula that are mandated. The best curricular provision for children with SN must recognise the need for ‘intentional and long-term’ advocacy (York-Barr and Duke, 2004, p. 280) on the part of their trusted adults, to enable application of even the most basic skills. Failure to properly acknowledge this advocacy role in curriculum models diminishes the core work of teachers in special schools and can lead to the sense of disillusionment that was apparent from many of the participants in this research. In the most acute circumstances this despondency ultimately leads to disengagement from the curriculum, as was observed in the SP School, and the feeling that teachers can do better for their pupils themselves because the ‘official curriculum’ (Cuban, 1995, p. 5) is out of touch with their lived experience. This contributes to a narrative that curriculum designers at a macro level, ‘out there’, do not fully understand the special education sector and the complexity of need that it caters for.

The argument is well-made that safeguarding curricula are about child empowerment (MacIntyre *et al.*, 2000) but this should not preclude advocacy from also playing a central role. This is because advocacy incorporates empowerment (Fazil *et al.*, 2004; Burke, Lee and Rios, 2019) – the most powerful advocates for children with SN aim to create the conditions necessary in order for them to be empowered (Islam and Cojocar, 2015). All

Phase 2 participants saw themselves as advocates but the extent to which they saw pupil empowerment as being comprehended by that is more questionable.

### ***Pupil Empowerment in the Special School***

A common thread running through the data in this research was the sense that there was so much of the current child safeguarding curriculum that children with SN *couldn't do* or *weren't able for* – the ability emphasis was on the deficit rather than the capability perspective, especially in the SP setting. For this reason, none of the schools operated as 'curriculum transmitters' (Shawer, 2010a, p. 173) as defined using the three-part metric for curriculum fidelity (Pence, Justice and Wiggins, 2008) outlined in Chapter 2. Teachers argued that to resolve the capability dilemma and to ensure relevance, 'some common curriculum areas have to be left out' for their children (Norwich, 2013, p. 66). However, greater consideration must be given to the parts of the curriculum that children with SN might be able to engage with because judgements about ability, albeit well-intentioned, can disempower (Hart and Drummond, 2014). In the rush to support children with SN, by engaging in curriculum development or curriculum making (Shawer, 2010a), there might be a tendency on the part of the adults to do too much and expect too little of their children – somewhat resonant with what Shevlin and colleagues (2008) have deduced as a possibility, as reported in Chapter 2. An example of this can be seen in the Mild School where teachers made a conscious adaptation decision to skip LGBT+ issues at the primary end because, in their 'common sense' view (Peacey, 2005, p. 4), such issues were too complex. This was very problematic because the evidence points to higher numbers of LGBT+ individuals within the ASD community in particular (Middletown Centre for Autism, 2017). That individuals who are LGBT+ are more likely to suffer discrimination and harm than their non-LGBT+ counterparts makes the omission more serious (Loftin, 2015; Higgins *et al.*, 2016) because not alone are they more likely to experience harm,

they are now less prepared to respond to it. Given the criticality of education on discrimination prevention in this area (Neary, Irwin-Gowran and McEvoy, 2016), consequential decisions to omit crucial aspects of the official curriculum for pupil capacity reasons must be made on a case-by-case basis, not by applying broad brush assumptions to a whole section of the school system. This is crucial to empowering children with SN.

Some scholars have offered other solutions as to how this child empowerment issue can be overcome, so that special schools can promote active citizenship in their cohort (Carpenter, 2016). Previous studies have shown that ‘consultation’ with children with SN can be used as an empowerment ‘tool’ and for gaining ‘a rich insight into their lived experience’ (Coates and Vickerman, 2010, p. 1517). This spotlights the importance of child voice (Coates and Vickerman, 2010) and/or participation (Lundy, 2007) in any conception of empowerment, and in vindicating the rights of children with SN as ‘key stakeholders...to play an active part in matters affecting them’ (Prunty, Dupont and McDaid, 2012, p. 29). While it might be suggested that some children with SN lack the capacity to articulate their voice, this stance ignores the evolving body of ‘creative methodologies’ that can be used to elicit the viewpoints of such children (Long *et al.*, 2012, p. 20). There were some examples of such elicitation methodologies in this research including the use of drama and raps (Mild School) and visual art techniques (Moderate School).

A broader conceptualisation of empowerment in the SN sphere that links with the advocacy piece and goes beyond the child themselves to focus on their support network, has been proposed by Hornby (2014). Under this model, empowerment incorporates the facilitation of ‘problem-solving and decision making abilities’ of parents and further proffers that the focus of interventions should be on (Hornby, 2014, p. 152):



...facilitating the development of the knowledge, attitudes, and skills which will promote the competency of all family members and strengthen overall family functioning.

While this doctoral study indicated that teachers envisioned a strong advocacy role for themselves in relation to *Stay Safe*, there was no evidence to suggest that they envisioned their role to include empowering the other adults in the child's life to be their advocates. This was compounded in relation to curricular provision in child safeguarding where there was very little consultation with parents around the material covered with their children. Teachers reported that parents generally trusted them to know what was suitable to explore with their children but in accepting this reality, teachers unwittingly disempowered parents from developing the skills they might need to be their children's advocates in the future. This was arguably counter-productive to the development of parent advocacy skills and did little to strengthen the family's capacity to support the child long-term, as recommended by Hornby (2014). In some schools there was also evidence to suggest that mixed messages were given to parents around how the curriculum was delivered, casting some doubt on whether parents knew what curricular provision their children were actually receiving in this area. This provides succour to findings emanating from elsewhere, illustrating that parents lack crucial information concerning their children's educational choices (Kerins, 2011; Scanlon and Doyle, 2018).

While it seems clear that advocacy **and** empowerment must form part of the school experience of children with SN, the potential conflicts of interests that may arise in balancing both from a teacher and parent perspective must be explored.

### ***Advocacy Roles and Conflicts of Interest***

Data collected in this research indicated that teachers did not recognise any conflict of interest in advocating for children with SN in this arena, even though they themselves were mandated persons and had legal obligations of their own to enact *Stay Safe*.

Similarly, in arguing that all parents should have a lifelong advocacy role for their children with SN, teachers did not recognise the potential conflict of interest that could occur in circumstances where parents themselves were mistreating a child. Discounting this possibility may exacerbate the risk to such children, when they have already been identified as more vulnerable (Sullivan and Knutson, 2000; Putnam, 2003; Davies and Jones, 2013; MacIntyre and Lawlor, 2016). For this reason consideration should be given to having an independent advocate, which would add another layer of protection for children with SN and enhance the vindication of many of their rights espoused in the UNCRPD (United Nations, 2008). From a UK perspective, Morgan (2011, p.208) has shown the powerful effect that the emerging role of ‘independent mental capacity advocate’ can have in identifying the ‘best interests’ and optimal ‘safeguarding measures’ for those whom they are advocating for. The function of this independent advocate in this context is to **represent** the views and wishes of their advisees, ‘as distinct from **acting** [*emphasis added to highlight the distinction*] in their best interests’ (Forbat and Atkinson, 2005, p.331). The presence of this independent advocate could also support calibrating the optimal balance between child empowerment and adult advocacy *vis-à-vis* teachers and parents/guardians, because this needs further research attention. Although this independent advocate model emanates from a social work sphere, it offers signposts to schools, as well as to families, on how to ensure that the ‘central tenet of independence’ underpins advocacy for those with SN (Forbat and Atkinson, 2005, p.331). While this might optimise advocacy in the social sphere, attention must now turn to conceptualising how advocacy and empowerment can be balanced and incorporated into a curricular model.

### 5.2.2 A Curricular Model to Support Children with SN

Norwich (2010, p. 114) has proposed a model for curriculum design (discussed extensively in Chapter 2) which attempts to balance curricular commonality and differentiation by modifying four different curricular aspects depending on the capacity of the child, as Table 4 (p.32) illustrates. This study corroborated the relevance of this model. The data collected suggested that extending the model to incorporate a ‘Support’ aspect could further narrow the gap between commonality and difference - in the child safeguarding sphere at least, where teachers, in theory, do not have the luxury of setting the official curriculum aside in favour of an alternative. The gap-narrowing arises from the Support aspect increasing the potential number of curriculum design options from five to six (Table 27). This additional aspect could conceivably vindicate and formalise the all-important advocacy piece (Fazil *et al.*, 2004; York-Barr *et al.*, 2005; Islam and Cojocar, 2015) which teachers spoke so passionately about in this research, while at the same time allowing children to be empowered to the greatest extent possible to access the curriculum.

**Table 27: Modified Model for Curriculum Design (adapted from Norwich (2010))**

Design Options	Principles	Programme Areas	Specific Programmes	Teaching	Support
1	Common	Common	Common	Common	Common
2	Common	Common	Common	Common	Different
3	Common	Common	Common	Different	Different
4	Common	Common	Different	Different	Different
5	Common	Different	Different	Different	Different
6	Different	Different	Different	Different	Different

In other words, the Support aspect levels upward the child’s capacity to engage with a curriculum that has greater degrees of commonality, by providing an adult scaffold with each of Norwich’s (2010) design options. It might be needed where the child requires a

level of adaption to the teaching approach so intense, that the qualitative difference is not just by degree of adaption but of kind. The support aspect might generally be regarded as needing another person (possibly an advocate) to action it. The provision of training to the child's family support network, which is important in empowering that network with the skills and knowledge needed to advocate for their child in this area (Trainor, 2010; Hornby, 2014; Strassfeld, 2019), might also be incorporated under this Support aspect. This would arguably facilitate greater fulfilment of the ultimate objective of the child safeguarding curriculum, which is to keep children safe by providing an extra lock towards the deployment of key skills. The straight-forward presentation of this additional Support aspect here should not be taken to mean that it has provided a simple resolution to a complex debate, however. On the contrary, it is accepted that conceptually the ultimate veracity of this model is an open question, until it has been empirically examined. Its purpose is merely to contribute to a long-running debate that others have started and many more will continue. While the potential efficacy of this model requires further probing, the enactment strategies advanced by Shaver (2010a) may be used to enhance its utilisation.

To illustrate the model's *potential* efficacy in practice, consider Option 2 on Table 27. The additional support aspect in this design would enable a child with SN to experience a curriculum with greater levels of commonality to their peers, thus empowering them with useful safeguarding skills in their regular environment. This curriculum might be suitable for children with difficulties on the mild end, in line with the finding of this research that the lesser the educational need, the greater the potential teachers see for curriculum commonality. Without the support element underpinning Option 2, accessing the curriculum may require different teaching altogether in order to ensure suitability for some children, thereby reducing the overall level of commonality (to Option 3). At the

other end of the continuum, consider Option 5. This option might be more suitable for children with severe needs – these children could access a curriculum with common principles to their peers but would require the teaching of skills and content in a different way, and extensive support from an advocate. The significant benefit of the Support aspect here is that it facilitates access to a curriculum with some level of commonality to their peers, where without it there would be no commonality at all. This approach resonates with Baumgart *et al.*'s (1982, p. 17) 'principle of partial participation' and which Ware (2014) has explored in relation to the most severely disabled children in the Irish context. According to the latter, this principle is helpful as a:

way of addressing the tension experienced by teachers attempting to teach the early stages of a skill to a pupil with profound learning difficulties who they were fairly certain was unlikely ever to master the complete skill, in situations where the skill is not useful until it has been fully acquired (Ware, 2014, p. 463).

The support element here attempts to give practical expression to that principle in relation to a child safeguarding curriculum, as a way of negotiating the inherent tension. While this theoretical elucidation clarifies the nature of what support might constitute in the abstract, some examples of what it might look like in reality would prove more instructive.

### ***Examples of the 'Support' Aspect in Classroom Practice***

As with the other curriculum aspects, the intensity of the support needed increases as the continuum of curriculum design options advances down from Option 1 to Option 6 (Table 27). The following are some non-exhaustive examples, for illustrative purposes only, of what might be covered under the Support aspect for Option 2 to Option 5:

- *Option 2:* an individual providing sign language to a child who is deaf, to enable him/her to access the same *Stay Safe* content and skills as his/her peers and where the same teaching approaches are used;

- *Option 3:* an individual supporting a child to engage with an adapted learning activity based on *Stay Safe*, but where the teaching has been different in a subtle, yet noticeable, way to enable the child to access some of the key curricular messages. The supporting individual may re-read a modified safeguarding story on a one-to-one level and provide additional visuals and prompts to promote internalisation and engagement with the task;
- *Option 4:* an individual supporting a child to engage with an activity broadly based on concepts explored in *Stay Safe*, but where the teaching has been substantially different and where the learning tasks have been sourced from other programmes designed specifically for children with SN. The supporting individual may have to break the adapted activity into steps and may have to further provide hand-over-hand support to the child to enable him/her to complete the task;
- *Option 5:* at this level, a child needs substantial support to access a *Stay Safe* curriculum where only the broad principles of child safeguarding guide the content and skills taught. The child is likely to be non-verbal. The supporting individual, at this level, may help the child to identify himself/herself in the mirror, may help the child to respond to stimuli, may help the child with mobility and so on. Children at this level will generally require the support of an advocate for a substantial part of their daily life.

### ***Advocacy***

Questions will surely arise as to what advocacy might look like under this model. For guidance on this, the work of Trainor (2010) is instructive. Advocacy must be viewed in broad terms as an equity instrument, with parents and teachers collaborating to facilitate the child's participation to the greatest extent possible (Trainor, 2010) – scaffolding their participation until they can participate themselves (Staehr Fenner, 2013). This scaffolding

may be major or minor depending on need (Wolfensberger, 1977; Athanases and Martin, 2006; Linville, 2016). Greater training is required for the individuals acting as advocates on the child's behalf, in particular parents (Strassfeld, 2019). In practice this means ensuring that they are fully aware of the key messages of *Stay Safe* and that they are provided with professional learning opportunities. Despite teachers in this research pointing to the importance of their expansive advocacy role in keeping children safe, none of them undertook professional development on what an advocacy role should incorporate – and there is no obligation on them to do so. Further, there is currently no formal system in the Irish context for parents or families to receive training for their advocacy role and so if it is to be built into a curriculum model, that blind spot needs to be addressed.

To respond to participant insights regarding *Stay Safe* content suitability and to optimise this modified curriculum model, a discussion is needed on how *Stay Safe* is structured.

### **5.2.3 Reimagining the *Stay Safe* Topic Framework**

The way in which *Stay Safe* topics and content are taught must be reviewed, to include every child at some level – with or without support. While the partial percentage fidelity threshold underpinning the *Michigan Model for Health* would facilitate teacher agency to adapt at some level (Eisman *et al.*, 2020), the ‘nonnegotiable aspects’ might present a barrier to customising material for children with SN (Dulude, Spillane and Dumay, 2017, p. 387). The new *Primary Language Curriculum's* ‘SEN Pathways’ and ‘Progression Continua’ offer better signposts for how the curriculum might be organised in terms of child safeguarding (Government of Ireland, 2020d). The pathways and continua approach also has the added benefit of aligning with how future curricular change in the Irish context is likely to be structured (Government of Ireland, 2020a), which enhances the feasibility of what is being proposed here.

### ***SN Pathways***

The *Primary Language Curriculum* Pathways presented in Chapter 2 (see Table 3, p.30) provide a spectrum of categorical experiences in language that could act as a template for how to do the same in terms of child safeguarding. In the initial pathways the child may only be exposed to the **experience** of a learning environment – for example, in this case sit amongst their peers while a safeguarding story is being read. The majority of the responsibility at this level is on the child’s adult advocate – they are facilitating the child’s ‘inclusion’ amongst their peers, as opposed to the child’s internalisation of a key message. The objective here is more about socialisation as distinct from the development of a child safeguarding skill *per se*. At the other end of the spectrum, in the generalising sphere, the child could be at the level of **generalising** a safeguarding skill, thus reducing the advocacy required. Adopting such a pathways approach would go some way towards legitimising the curriculum development (Mild and Moderate schools) and curriculum making (SP School) strategies that teachers in the case study schools utilised extensively. It would also go some way towards enhancing teacher autonomy which has been curtailed, or at least has the appearance of being curtailed, when it comes to teaching *Stay Safe* (Morrissey, 2021a) because of the extensive external oversight now in place (Government of Ireland, 2019a). To accommodate this oversight which is legislatively required (Government of Ireland, 2017a), a reorientation of the topic schedule, with explicit progression milestones that take cognisance of learners with SN is needed, to enable at least the possibility of compliance from special schools.

### ***Progression Continua for Stay Safe Topics***

Broadening the five *Stay Safe* topics and instituting a progression continuum for each topic akin to that which has been produced to support the *Primary Language Curriculum* would greatly enhance the feasibility of the safeguarding curriculum for children in



special schools – in particular for those on the more severe end of the spectrum. This approach would facilitate some children being able to engage with the topics at a more complex and advanced level (e.g. generalising); while other children would be enabled to engage at a more rudimentary level (e.g. experiencing) (Government of Ireland, 2020d). Table 28 (overleaf) illustrates the broadening of topics, in a proposed revised *Stay Safe* framework. This revision would realise the inclusive potential of each topic and render teachers more autonomous to craft general provision in accordance with need. The revised framework would also capture what teachers in the case study sites were exploring with their classes – at different levels.

**Table 28: Revised Stay Safe Topic Framework**

Current Topic	Proposed Topic
Feeling Safe and Unsafe	Feelings
Friendship and Bullying	Relating to Others, Friendships and Bullying
Touches	Body Awareness
Secrets and Telling	Communicating about Wellbeing and Consent
Strangers	People I Know and People I don't Know

The rationale for broadening each of the five topics in this way is as follows:

1. **Feelings:** All of the participants in this study acknowledged that understanding what it means to feel ‘safe’ or ‘unsafe’ is beyond the cognitive capacity of many children with complex SN – it is the role of their advocates to keep them safe (Miller and Raymond, 2008). Reconceptualising the ‘Feeling Safe and Unsafe’ topic to ‘Feelings’ would facilitate a more inclusive approach by enabling the teacher to pedagogically pitch curricular material more appropriately over a broader continuum. Using the SN Pathways as a guide (Government of Ireland, 2020d), those at the more advanced level of the continuum could explore the concepts of safe and unsafe and perhaps even *generalise* them, while those at the earlier end would focus more on *experiencing* happiness, being awake, being

asleep and so on. While this approach would orient towards a more curriculum making stance (Shawer, 2010a), it aligns very closely with what the overwhelming majority of teachers in this research are already doing, because experiencing all of these feelings is inextricably linked to the concept of safety;

2. ***Relating to Others, Friendships and Bullying***: This research indicated that bullying cannot be understood by those children with the most complex need – even though research indicates that it is more likely that they will experience it than their typically-developing peers (Twyman *et al.*, 2010; Turner *et al.*, 2011; Fink *et al.*, 2015, 2018). The data illustrated that teaching the concept of friendship was also challenging because of where some children are at socially, emotionally and cognitively. Modifying the ‘Friendship and Bullying’ topic to ‘Relating to Others, Friendships and Bullying’ would allow teachers greater scope to focus on all of the other interpersonal interactions that some children with SN may engage in, before being able to meaningfully access the concepts of friendship and then bullying. This approach affords greater prominence to the protective potential of positive relationships (Bollmer *et al.*, 2005), takes account of the additional support children with SN require in making friends and emphasises the most functional dimensions of interpersonal relations for them. Even though many teachers in this study found the concept of bullying inaccessible for their children, this reconceptualised topic approach does not preclude them from exploring it; indeed, teachers should be actively encouraged to do so where children have the capacity, because it is the next logical step on from friendship;

3. ***Body Awareness***: As the majority of teachers reported in this study, many children with SN have difficulties with awareness of their bodies (Wrobel, 2003; Hartman,

2013). Added to this, some children with SN require intimate care – this was a pervasive feature of provision in the SP School and presented to varying degrees in the Mild and Moderate schools. Even where there is some cognitive awareness, messages signifying that nobody should ever touch them on their private parts can be confusing and frightening, in circumstances where the support these children may need involves touching private areas. A focus on ‘body awareness’ as opposed to ‘touches’ would take account of this and ensure a more relevant curricular experience by addressing the content pertinence questions identified by teachers in this research;

4. ***Communicating about Wellbeing and Consent:*** Some children with complex SN are non-verbal and cannot communicate using words, let alone make a disclosure (Miller and Raymond, 2008). Many also have no concept of what a secret is – this was repeated time and again by participants in this study. A focus on the different ways in which they can communicate about their wellbeing and indicate ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ would plausibly be more suitable to the level that these children are functioning at, and would dovetail with the points made earlier in relation to finding creative ways to access SN pupil voice (Long *et al.*, 2012). While these possible ways are non-exhaustive, they could incorporate role play, visuals and so on;
5. ***People I Know and People I Don’t Know:*** The nature of need of many children with complex SN means that they regularly have to interact with new people who may be known to their parents but who are strangers to the children. Sometimes the interactions will involve children being ‘manhandled’ (Helen, P-SP), where they have little agency or autonomy to say ‘no’ to the stranger. They must rely on their advocates to make the right decision. A focus on helping them to


distinguish between the people they know (their advocates) and those that they do not know would smoothen these interactions.

A possible progression continuum for each of the topics, based on the available literature and the perspectives of teachers participating in this research, is presented in Table 29. Crucially, as well as stemming from the existing *Stay Safe* curriculum, the continua also incorporate the core themes of effective child safeguarding curricula deduced from the literature (Topping and Barron, 2009) and address both knowledge and skill (Citak Tunc *et al.*, 2018). There is a heavy focus on the child's own life and photographs are suggested instead of pictures to respond to the evidence signalling that human characters are more effective than anthropomorphic ones (Huang and Cui, 2020). The topic continua, which follow the template proffered in the *Primary Language Curriculum* (Government of Ireland, 2020d), are by no means exhaustive and should undergo extensive piloting before being taken further. They are being presented here as a sample to demonstrate the type of milestones that children with more complex SN might be able to reach in a reconceptualised *Stay Safe*, based on participant perspectives in this research. These perspectives were grounded heavily on the experiences of teachers, which brings both benefits and challenges in terms of how they are interpreted. This must now be discussed.

### **5.3 'We Know What They Need' – Experience v. Evidence in Curricular Enactment**

This research spotlighted the extant tension between the 'primacy' afforded by teachers to practitioner experience (Eisner, 1991, p. 15) and the empirically-acknowledged criticality of research-informed practice in schools (Godfrey, 2016; Sheard and Sharples, 2016; Brown and Zhang, 2017; Brown, Schildkamp and Hubers, 2017). The former was valued more than any other factor when it came to providing a curricular experience suitable for children with SN, while the latter was only seriously considered in one of the

**Table 29: Sample Stay Safe Continua Deduced from Research Participant Insights and Adapted from Existing Practice Guides** (Cullen, 1996; Wrobel, 2003; Wurtele and Kenny, 2010; Chen, Fortson and Tseng, 2012; Kenny and Wurtele, 2012; Kenny, Wurtele and Alonso, 2012; Hartman, 2013; Kenny *et al.*, 2013; Zhang *et al.*, 2014; Huang and Cui, 2020)

Topic	 <b>PROGRESSION CONTINUA</b>						
<b>Feelings</b>	Respond to a stimulus with a gesture (e.g. laugh/smile)	Deploy a comfort object for contentment (e.g. teddy bear)	Demonstrate understanding of happy and sad feelings	Identify things that conjure happiness and sadness	Identify other feelings	Recognise 'trusted adults'	Identify safe spaces
<b>Relating to Others, Friendships and Bullying</b>	Utilise gesture (e.g. eye contact) to signify familiarity	Utilise voice to signify familiarity	Engage in parallel peer play	Engage in structured peer play	Demonstrate understanding of the concept of 'friendship'	Engage in structured friendship making	Engage in self-directed friendship making
<b>Body Awareness</b>	Recognise self in the mirror	Move different parts of body in response to stimulus (eyes, hands etc.)	Touch the correct object on instruction	Touch the correct body part on a prompt	Utilise the toilet with partial independence	Utilise the toilet independently	Distinguish between good and bad touches
<b>Communicating about Wellbeing and Consent</b>	Utilise gesture (e.g. smile) to signify contentedness	Listen and respond to stimuli or other individuals around them	Imitate actions of another individual around them	Engage in a shared activity with another person	Understand 'yes' and 'no'	Deploy signals to indicate 'yes'/'no' in structured situations	Deploy signals to indicate 'yes'/'no' in unstructured situations
<b>People I Know and People I Don't Know</b>	Recognise self in the mirror	Recognise self in photographs	Recognise known persons	Initiate verbal / non-verbal communication with known person	Take an interest in engaging with person they know	Identify unknown persons	Differentiate between known and unknown persons

case study schools. Teaching experience and ‘tacit knowledge’ (Polanyi, 1966; Ray, 2009, p. 75; Elliott *et al.*, 2011, p. 83) were commodified by teachers and the accrual of these commodities amounted to credible expertise in the eyes of a majority of participants. Explicit knowledge was not fully valued by the majority of teachers even though they considered themselves to be ‘the experts’ in curricular decision-making for children with SN – echoing what Peacey (2005) has drawn attention to.

### **5.3.1 Teachers as Experts**

While accumulated experience is an important component in the development of teaching expertise (Schön, 1992), it is arguable that teachers in this study rated their experience too highly. Competence does not increase significantly further beyond the first five years of teaching (Graham *et al.*, 2020; Rice, 2020), with some evidence even suggesting a possible reduction in effectiveness over time (Ladd, 2008). While teachers may have twenty years’ experience, in reality it may be that they only have one years’ experience repeated over and over twenty times (Covey, 2020) – in essence, the demonstrable improvement in their expertise arising from their experience may be negligible, unless they are engaged in ongoing professional learning related to the field (King, Ní Bhroin and Prunty, 2018; Brennan and King, 2021). The valorising of teaching experience may also result in those with domain-specific expertise not receiving the appropriate recognition that would enable them to make a tangible difference to curricular provision for children with SN – this was observed here where a majority of Phase 1 principals regarded ‘teacher professional judgement’ as more important than input from parents, psychologists, inspectors, and guidance from state agencies in the selection of curricular content. When empowered to do so, these other non-teaching professionals can bring important expertise to the table as Irish research demonstrates (Travers, 2020) and their input is strongly recommended when devising child safeguarding curricula for children

with SN (Woods, 2007; Brassard and Fiorvanti, 2015). Their involvement can also develop teachers' expertise by encouraging and facilitating change to teacher professional practice in response to collaboratively deduced pupil needs (Doveston and Keenaghan, 2010). This kind of shared problem-solving, involving outside experts, was not a significant feature of any of the case study schools in this curricular area and in the SP and the Mild schools, teachers were operating mainly as sole traders in the enactment piece. While this fault may lie in the apparent shortage of such experts in the Irish context (Ware *et al.*, 2009), it was not fully clear how teachers in these schools leveraged their teaching experience to bring about the development of their expertise, without these specialists to support them. Teacher professional learning was only explicitly referenced in the Moderate School – coincidentally, the only setting where curricular adaptation was supported in a structured way by the SPHE coordinator who established 'focus groups' for that purpose.

### ***Professional Learning***

In the Moderate School professional learning had a significant impact on curricular provision. The focus groups referred to by participants in this school were akin to PLCs (Hairon, Goh and Chua, 2015; Hairon *et al.*, 2017; Brennan and King, 2021) and enabled teachers to access the expertise of colleagues in a structured manner. Crucially, this structure meant that teachers were not just relying on the experience of colleagues – as a group they were interrogating those experiences and seeing how they could apply the learning to their own classrooms in an effective way. To supplement this professional learning, the principal also acquired the services of outside experts. This occasional external support, coupled with the internal collaborative structures of the school, stimulated the tacit knowledge of individual teachers to be 'transformed...into collective explicit knowledge, allowing it to deliver innovative results' in terms of the curriculum

under discussion (Olaisen and Revang, 2018, p. 295). Such external support also mitigated the danger of an internal ‘collegial community’ acting in a way that ‘fails to challenge current teaching thinking and practices’ (Brennan and King, 2021, p. 2) – in particular where those practices were not working for those with SN. It was notable that the SPHE coordinator who initiated the PLC in this school was herself a part-time facilitator of continuing professional development (CPD) events with a national agency. This ensured that she had an appreciation for how such a collaborative support structure could work and build the capacity of all teachers in the school. The leadership in this case also demonstrated the importance of data-informed decision-making and balancing what teachers wanted with what the data suggested was best practice.

### **5.3.2 Evidence-Informed Decision-Making**

Careful dissection of the data collected in this study of special schools reveal a preference for consensus decision-making, based on teachers’ tacit knowledge, to the detriment of evidence-informed curricular decision-making in some cases. This was especially prominent in the mild and SP settings, where the ‘pitfalls’ of such an approach were clear (Erbes, 2006, p. 827). In some cases when a curricular consensus was not reached, the Mild School reverted to a ‘majority vote procedure’ which potentially could be divisive and based on ‘underlying assumptions’ that are often not fully fleshed-out (Erbes, 2006, p. 841). There is some evidence to suggest that in the Irish context there is too much emphasis placed on the kind of ‘brokerage’ that underpins finding a consensus (Sullivan, 2018, p. 9), at the expense of considering more objective evidence. It is arguable that in this study such an approach marginalised the voice of the child and their parents in determining what kind of curriculum children needed. It is also noteworthy that in both the mild and SP contexts, decision-making on what curricular content to cover was broadly decentralised to the teachers themselves, signifying a relatively minor role for



management in determining the minutiae of what was explored at classroom level. This underlines the theoretical concerns raised by Dusenbury and colleagues (2003) about the robustness of curricula designed and enacted in this way. The lack of oversight also runs contrary to what is envisaged for this aspect of the curriculum and evaluated under the ‘curricular check’ in CPSIs (Government of Ireland, 2019a).

In the Moderate School, where the principal exerted a tighter grip on how the curriculum was taught, it is arguable that better systems prevailed to take greater account of a broader swathe of evidence from different sources. Where changes were looked for by staff she demanded to see the evidence for them before making a decision, in an apparent attempt to bridge the so-called ‘research-practice gap’ (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2005, p. 424; Guldborg, 2017, p. 151). This demand for evidence was used as a ‘management tool’ to bring about curricular improvement (Sheard and Sharples, 2016, p. 668). Where the evidence did not support the change or where there was evidence to support a different type of change, she found strategic ways to benevolently and diplomatically resist it. This involved a delicate balance of not saying ‘no’ directly but instead sidestepping the issue and diverting the energy for change elsewhere to ‘aspects of practice’ that she felt would ‘benefit their pupils’ more (Teaching Council, 2016, p. 9). This proved to be a very effective leadership strategy because it ensured that teachers were not discouraged and continued to have ‘buy-in’ for the curriculum that they were enacting (Wilson, 2011, p. 103). It also ensured that the mandated curriculum was enacted in an adapted format, as opposed to the difficult bits being merely skipped. ‘Teacher voice’ was still accounted for through discussions at staff meetings and through the PLCs established by the deputy principal (Frost, 2008, p. 337). These forums were a vehicle for generating explicit knowledge by gathering teacher experience and subjecting it to critical analysis, as opposed to blind acceptance of it in a more casual format (Olaisen and Revang, 2018). In

essence, the process of factoring in teacher professional experience to curricular planning was more rigorous than the other two settings, which improved the overall capacity of teachers in this school to adapt the curriculum more coherently for learners. This ensured that adherence to the core tenets of the child safeguarding curriculum were strongest in the Moderate School because both professional learning and data-informed decision-making were a key feature of their provision. The formal school leadership team prioritised these features.

#### **5.4 Curriculum Leadership in Special Schools: ‘A Complex Character’**

This study took up the challenge from Harris and colleagues (2020, p. 1) and attempted to shed light on how ‘curriculum leadership’ is exercised in schools – in this case special schools. The data illustrated the ‘complex character’ of educational leadership (Bush, 2007) and emphasised two premia that came to the fore in terms of how influence was mediated over the curriculum. Principals had more power over how the curriculum was enacted at whole-school level by virtue of their position, primarily because schools ‘continue to operate a hierarchical system’ where those higher up can be more influential (Lumby, 2016, p. 165). However, long-serving teachers were also enabled to leverage their experience to bring about influence over their colleagues, in terms of the best curriculum approaches to adopt at classroom level. The principal and experience ‘premia’ will be examined later in this section. Before that, the prevalence of distributed leadership in special schools must be dissected given its status in Irish education policy as the preferred form of leadership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century schools (Government of Ireland, 2018). While distributed leadership was said to be a feature of all case study schools in this research, there were differences in how it was construed – reflecting the picture illustrated in current research literature.

#### **5.4.1 Distributed Leadership in Special Schools**

This research provided some interesting perceptions on the fault lines and ‘interactions’ (Harris and DeFlaminis, 2016, p. 143) between the ‘levels of leadership’ within distributed frameworks in special schools (Gronn, 2009, p. 381), as they apply to curriculum enactment. Broadly speaking distributed leadership was construed in either delegated or ‘licensed’ terms (King and Stevenson, 2017, p. 657) where those in management positions had power and influence over the leadership exercised by teachers. While this may give credence to the ‘bounded empowerment’ argument (Hairon and Goh, 2015, p. 707), caution should be exercised in making this generalisation because of the complexity associated with this particular curriculum, especially the policy requirement for principal oversight (Government of Ireland, 2019a). Notwithstanding this, a number of insights can be discerned in relation to the role of ‘leadership from above’ (King and Stevenson, 2017, p. 657) within these different distributed frameworks.

#### ***Role of Management in Distributed Leadership***

This research demonstrated that those within the formal school management structure can exercise significant influence over how a curriculum is enacted – although some chose not to exercise this influence. Where a curriculum development approach was adopted (Mild and Moderate schools), the more control exercised by the principal in the distributed framework the more likely it was that the curriculum adaptation was supported by professional learning (Table 30). This professional learning conceivably raised the likelihood of any resultant curricular adaptation being more robustly informed and more tailored to the child’s needs. This arguably vindicates the assertion that leadership from above can improve the ‘organisational capacity’ of schools by building up the expertise of unpromoted teachers (Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin, 2011; King, 2011, p. 149).

**Table 30: Comparison - Principal Control, Curriculum Adaptation and Professional Learning**

	<b>Principal Control / Oversight over Curriculum</b>	<b>Level of Curriculum Development</b>	<b>Professional Learning</b>
<i>Mild School</i>	Low level	Significant (with large portions skipped)	Low level (and unstructured)
<i>Moderate School</i>	High level	Significant	High level (and structured)
<i>SP School</i>	Low level	N/A (curriculum makers)	Low level

There was evidence in at least one of the case study schools that, on some occasions, the principal was unable to make the ‘shift’ (Harris, 2012, p. 8) and ‘let go’ of leadership when it came to making significant curricular decisions – a crucial characteristic of authentic distributed leadership (Hairon and Goh, 2015; Lumby, 2016; Harris and DeFlaminis, 2016). While this principal went to great lengths to give the impression that ‘teacher voices’ had been captured, in reality these voices were corralled in the direction of the decision that the principal had already made. While the actions of the principal were made in good faith, informed by the professional learning courses they had undertaken, the views of the teachers were not similarly *au courant*, disadvantaging them from a knowledge perspective in terms of making informed decisions. Teachers were simply following the direction of those more senior to them in the school, essentially acting as ‘technicians carrying out someone else’s policy’ unbeknownst to themselves (Priestley *et al.*, 2011, p. 269) – pointing, perhaps, to the possible presence of the ‘dark side of distributed leadership’ (Harris and DeFlaminis, 2016, p. 143). The principal was adamant that distributed leadership exercised under license like this (King and Stevenson, 2017) was required to bring organisational improvements on some occasions, adverting to some of the arguments made by Harris and Jones (2018). So, while there was an

awareness of the importance of teachers getting the opportunity to articulate their voices, in certain scenarios those voices were not actively listened to.

### ***Role of Teacher Leadership in a Distributed Framework***

Teacher leadership, as influence in curriculum enactment, was clearly evident in all three case study schools but it manifested differently and to different degrees. In the SP setting, while teachers had to work within the agreed school-based curriculum framework, teachers unequivocally argued that their advocacy role for children should be construed as leadership – supporting the argument from York-Barr *et al.* (2005) who have reframed the work of SETs as teacher leadership for this very reason. In the mild setting, teachers were empowered to make their own of the curriculum and while they did this to some degree, the extent to which they took up the invitation to be empowered was questionable, given that the principal largely provided them with *carte blanche*. It is arguable that, without a set-in-stone structure in place in the school as a vehicle through which they could make use of this empowerment, their space to exercise leadership was limited (Wilson, 2011).

It is reasonable to argue that teacher leadership was most pervasive in the Moderate School, which checked off many of the characteristics identified for it by both Wenner and Campbell (2017) and Nguyen *et al.* (2019):

- Teachers had influence both within their own classrooms and beyond them, with PLCs the vehicle through which this influence was exerted. These communities reduced the sense of isolation (O’Sullivan, 2011) and facilitated a problem-solving approach to curricular issues that arose in relation to differentiation (Wilson, 2011; King and Stevenson, 2017);
- Collaborative dialogue enabled teachers to have influence on policy-making (Woods and Roberts, 2018). Crucially, this influence did not descend into

majoritarianism where the most popular or convenient position became established policy (Erbes, 2006). Rather, the principal tightly controlled what ultimately became policy and used ‘data’ as the determinant for change;

- While this research did not probe the extent to which teacher leadership impacted on pupil learning or school improvement, participants were clear that these were the reasons they engaged with professional learning in this way.

It is noteworthy that while teacher leadership was most prominent in this setting, this was also the setting where the principal exerted most control over making the ultimate decision. Teachers could influence that decision through the structures in the school but the principal also considered other evidence. While it may seem counter-intuitive to expect such a high level of teacher leadership in that context, it underscores the veracity of Wilson’s (2011, p. 22) argument that the ‘organizational structure of schools can either hinder leadership growth or cultivate it’. Comparing this situation to the Mild School, where the principal exerted very little oversight or control but where teachers did not fully take up the invitation to lead, highlights a stark reality: ‘leadership from above’ (King and Stevenson, 2017, p. 657) is needed to provide the structure necessary in order for teachers to be empowered to lead in curriculum enactment. Talking about empowerment is not enough to empower; it needs a vehicle to make it happen.

These interactions between the different layers of individuals in schools (MacBeath *et al.*, 2018; Woods and Roberts, 2018) highlight the importance of ‘shared modalities’ in making change and getting things done (Martinez and Tadeu, 2018, p. 1). Notwithstanding the importance of leadership being exerted at all of the different levels in a school (MacBeath *et al.*, 2018), this study also highlighted that premia were afforded to certain characteristics in the exercise of leadership influence.

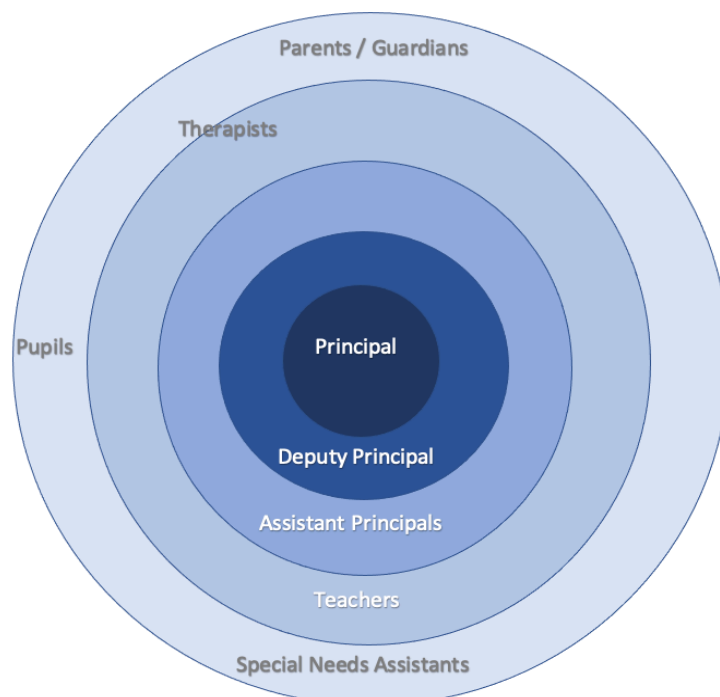
### 5.4.2 Leadership Premia

Two leadership premia can be deduced from the findings of this study which inflated the influence of those in possession of either or both of them. These premia related to the role of the principal and to the accrued experience of teachers which was construed as valid expertise.

#### *The Principal Premium*

The formal positional status of the principals enabled them to exercise more influence over how the curriculum was enacted, in line with what the broader body of scholarship has established in respect of the power attached to the role (Lumby, 2016; King and Stevenson, 2017; Bush, 2018; Harris and Jones, 2018; MacBeath *et al.*, 2018). The principal had the power to both cultivate and curtail teacher leadership depending on the organisational culture that he / she promoted in the school (Wilson, 2011). Curiously, this research also established that positional proximity to the principal also increased influence, as Figure 10 illustrates.

**Figure 10: Power and Positional Proximity to the Principal**



For example, both of the SPHE coordinators who were deputy principals (Mild and Moderate schools) had far more influence over how the curriculum was enacted, than the SPHE coordinator who was lower on the management hierarchy as an assistant principal. The latter had to rely on his own teacher leadership exercised through collaboration and brokerage (Harris, 2012) with colleagues on the in-school management team to influence curricular enactment. The positional closeness of the deputy principals to the principal on the management hierarchy brought access to the fulcrum of school power; this access brought influence over whole-school curricular policy-making, including directions over how the curriculum should be enacted by teachers at classroom level. While pupils, parents, SNAs and therapists (where they were available) might occasionally be able to influence the inclusion of certain content to the curriculum, this research found no evidence to suggest they had a role in how it was enacted beyond that. Depending on the structures established in the school, teachers were able to exercise some influence, with those most experienced exerting the most influence.

### ***The Experience Premium***

The more years' experience that teachers had in special education, the more credibility it provided them with in terms of the best curriculum approaches to adopt (it should be noted that what was referred to here was experience on its own; not experience equated with professional learning). This accords very strongly with Shaver's (2010a) suggestion that the more years' experience a teacher has, the more likely they are to adapt or change the curriculum entirely. The accrued credibility of experienced teachers brought influence among colleagues in terms of curriculum enactment at classroom-level, although generally it was mediated informally in an unstructured manner. This informal mediation rendered it a slightly weaker force of influence than the leadership exercised by those with 'positional authority' (MacBeath *et al.*, 2018, p. 90) or positional proximity to the



principal. Nevertheless, it does underscore how experienced teacher leaders in the SN sphere can utilise ‘horizontal’ relationships in school to channel their leadership potential over the curriculum (York-Barr *et al.*, 2005, p. 211), by adopting a dialogic approach (Nazareno, 2013).

The experience premium was most strongly linked with the strive for long-term inclusion and independence in society - the sense that the more experienced a teacher was, the more he / she knew what was needed to bring that inclusion about ‘post-school’ (Hornby, 2021, p. 1) and how the curriculum could be leveraged to furthering that purpose. This weighed heavily on the minds of many teachers, in particular those in the SP School who argued forcefully for an advocacy role for teachers to ensure that their pupils’ voices were heard. This resonates strongly with the connection that York-Barr *et al.* (2005, p. 213) make between the lifelong ‘personal commitments’ of individual teachers to inclusion and teacher leadership. A point to note however, is that many of those in positional authority were also very experienced in the special school domain. This means that disentangling the influence accruing because of their experience and the influence accruing because of their positional authority is difficult. It will be up to future research endeavours to determine whether an inexperienced principal in the special school domain can leverage the same influence over curricula as the principals taking part in this study.

## **5.5 Concluding Remarks**

This chapter has discussed the findings of this research over a number of distinct areas. First, it examined the curricular implications of the data collected for special schools and how child safeguarding is taught to children with SN. It spotlighted the balance that must be achieved between advocating for children and providing them with curricular experiences that promote their independence. The challenges associated with achieving this balance are immense, given the needs that many children in these settings have; to

support the process, a modified curriculum model, which builds upon Norwich's (2010) seminal work was presented for further exploration. To optimise the potential of this model, a revised *Stay Safe* topic framework that supports teachers in the prevailing curriculum adaptation approaches was proposed. This framework envisages a greater role for teachers and more autonomy over the curricular content selected, to address the expressed concerns of research participants that the overly-prescribed approach does not take account of their setting and their rich experience. Second, the chapter delved into that very issue of teacher experience. It showcased the reliance on tacit knowledge among teachers in terms of curricular decision-making and emphasised the benefits that professional learning could bring to the development of expertise. Finally, taking up the challenge from Harris and colleagues (2020, p. 1), the chapter addressed how leadership of the curriculum takes place in schools. It probed the 'levels of leadership' within a distributed framework (Gronn, 2009, p. 381), showcased the crucial influence of 'leadership from above' in the development of leadership capacity (King and Stevenson, 2017, p. 657) and spotlighted two leadership premia present in special schools with regards to curriculum enactment.

The final chapter of this thesis will bring together the various strands of this research, make a number of recommendations and signpost areas for further exploration in future research endeavours.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

*'The primary responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the well-being of children lies with adults, as does the responsibility to empower children'*

(Miller and Raymond, 2008, p. 73).

### 6.1 Introduction

This research study, which deployed a two-phase, mixed-methods data-gathering apparatus, investigated curriculum enactment in Irish special schools. The curriculum under examination was *Stay Safe* – the mandatory curricular component to the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools* (Government of Ireland, 2017a). This final chapter brings the study to a conclusion by synthesising the key findings, outlining how they contribute to new knowledge, considering the broader implications and proposing recommendations for future policy, practice and research. It will also reflect keenly on the limitations of the study so that the ideas presented here can be interrogated comprehensively for their quality (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018).

### 6.2 Research Summary

There were three overall research questions to this study, which were set forth in Chapter 1 (p.14). While Chapter 4 outlined the findings in detail, this section will recap on the main points in relation to each question.

#### 6.2.1 Organisation of *Stay Safe*

First, a general illustration of how *Stay Safe* is organised at whole-school level, in the special school domain, was sought. The findings illustrated that the overwhelming majority of special schools reference *Stay Safe* in both their SPHE policy and their Child Safeguarding Risk Assessment – giving recognition to the fact that its enactment is an important protective factor for all children (Government of Ireland, 2017a). When the

curricular policy documents were delved into with the case study schools, however, the depth of reference was rather shallow – in line with the tendency for some such documents to be either replete with general policy-speak or lacking in substantive detail (Vanderlinde, Dexter and Braak, 2012). An exception to this was the SP case study school which included a formal statement rejecting *Stay Safe* because of its putative unsuitability. Both phases of the research established that *Stay Safe* was not completed over the recommended one school term, with some schools spreading it out over the school year and extensively adapting each of the five topics. Added to this was the somewhat surprising finding that a sizeable majority of schools do not adhere to the core recommendation that the safeguarding curriculum be taught consecutively in one block from Topic 1 to Topic 5. This has significant implications because it flies in the face of recommended best-practice (MacIntyre and Lawlor, 2016), may violate the curriculum’s ‘theoretical maxims’ (Dusenbury *et al.*, 2003, p. 251) and indicates that there is a ‘knowledge-practice gap’ (Donnelly *et al.*, 2019, p. 28) in this crucial part of curricular provision in Ireland.

### **6.2.2 Curriculum Approaches in Special Schools**

Secondly, the study sought to ascertain the curriculum approaches deployed in these settings, using key literature mapped out in Chapter 2 as the basis for probing – Shawer’s (2010a) theoretical framework underpinned the study. The research findings confirmed that special schools exercise ‘great autonomy’ over the curriculum they enact (Ware *et al.*, 2009, p. 34) - even in mandatory curricular areas such as child safeguarding. There was no evidence whatsoever that teachers in special schools were ‘curriculum-transmitters’ (Shawer, 2010a, p. 173), administering *Stay Safe* as laid out in the official document. Rather, the study established that the overwhelming majority of special schools are at the very least ‘curriculum-developers’(Shawer, 2010a, p. 173), adapting

the ‘official curriculum’ as they see fit (Cuban, 1995, p. 5), in order to optimise its applicability for children with SN. The greater the special need, the more adaptation engaged in by teachers. Severe-Profound schools engaged in the most adaptation, with some of these schools conceding that even this was not enough. The SP School in the case study eschewed the curriculum entirely because it was deemed unadaptable for children with the greatest level of need. Severe-Profound schools who rejected *Stay Safe* in this way were ‘curriculum makers’ (Shawer, 2010a, p. 173), devising their own content based on the professional experience of their teachers and the availability of other supplementary programmes that were adjudged more suitable and which they took material from.

### **6.2.3 Role of Leadership in Curricular Enactment**

Thirdly, the research aimed to examine the role that leadership plays in the curriculum enactment process, given its status as a ‘critical contributor’ to success (Harris, Jones and Crick, 2020, p. 1). The findings illustrate that the optimal enactment of *Stay Safe* depends on leadership from teachers at multiple ‘layers’ (MacBeath *et al.*, 2018, p. 105) – both promoted and unpromoted. To this end, ‘distributed leadership’ is key (Harris and DeFlaminis, 2016; Lumby, 2016; Bush, 2018) but participants had differing understandings of how that concept was construed. Leadership ‘from above’ was important for putting structures in place to enable unpromoted teachers to exercise curriculum leadership ‘from below’ (King and Stevenson, 2017, p. 657). The Moderate School exemplified the potency of a data-driven, problem-solving approach to enactment within a distributed framework, where ‘teacher leadership’ (York-Barr and Duke, 2004; Bush, 2015; Nguyen, Harris and Ng, 2019) was complemented by the principal exercising some control over decision-making when it came to curricular change. While this curtailed the influence that teachers ultimately had over the curriculum, it also made

curriculum enactment more robust by fostering an approach whereby teachers – promoted and unpromoted – utilised each other’s expertise to make material more accessible to children. This ultimately increased the likelihood that more of the ‘official curriculum’ was enacted (Cuban, 1995, p. 5), verifying the critical role that principals have on bridging the gap between research and practice in relation to curriculum.

### **6.3 Contribution to New Knowledge**

When synthesised with existing research, the insights gained from this inquiry make an important contribution to the development of new knowledge. This section will delve into that and begin by unpacking the potential of the modified curriculum model presented in Chapter 5, as a means of responding to the identified needs of special schools.

#### **6.3.1 Maximising Curriculum Commonality: A Model Incorporating ‘Support’**

The extant scholarship indicates that curricula made up solely by teachers to suit their individual classes may lack theoretical underpinnings (Dusenbury *et al.*, 2003). This causes difficulty when the official curriculum is not suited to the capacity of individual children and some teachers decide to design a different curriculum on that basis. While this may suit *teaching in the moment*, it lacks the kind of vision and ‘learning framework’ that special schools of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century ought to provide (Carpenter, 2016, p. 2). As explored in Chapter 2, Norwich’s (2010, p. 132) curriculum design options present a ‘conceptual simplification’ for how commonality and differentiation can be reconciled with each other, by varying four curricular aspects depending on pupil need. While the efficacy of this model was broadly confirmed, it was suggested that its suitability could be sharpened further to take account of children who may always need adult support, in addition to varying any of the four aspects. An important outcome of this study was to propose a possible conceptual avenue for further exploration, which might go towards addressing that reality by presenting a modified model for curriculum design (Table 27,

p.153) that adds an additional ‘Support’ aspect to Norwich’s (2010) seminal model. The intended effect of this suggested addition is to increase the ‘schematic design options’ for curricula (Norwich, 2010, p. 132) from five to six, thereby narrowing the gap between a completely common and completely different curriculum. The provision of a Support aspect might enhance ‘partial participation’ (Baumgart *et al.*, 1982, p. 17) and facilitate ‘scaffolded advocacy’ (Staehr Fenner, 2013, p. 14), which this research indicates is already happening to a large degree in Irish special schools. While this modified model is not a panacea as Chapter 5 outlined, it factors these into the equation, where currently, from a curricular perspective, they are not.

Crucially, the proposed additional curricular aspect could open up another ‘route to enhancing the participation of pupils with severe disabilities...through the support of their non-disabled peers’ (Ware, 2014, p. 463). It also provides a possible template for involving parents, families and other professionals in the curriculum enactment process, in circumstances where the evidence gathered here suggests that they are not always included to the extent that they could be. This has the effect of providing some preparation for parents on making decisions for their children and advocating on their behalf in the longer term. The importance of parental empowerment to improving outcomes for children with SN has been referred to time and again in the literature (Morrow and Malin, 2004; Hornby, 2014; Hsiao, Higgins and Diamond, 2018). In essence, support for accessing the curriculum does not always need to come from the teacher, although Section 6.4.1 will address some concerns that might need to be considered where it is not. This proposed modified model could be enhanced in the child safeguarding sphere by a revised topic framework for *Stay Safe* that maximises the potential for commonality.

### **6.3.2 Revised *Stay Safe* Topic Framework: Pathways for Learning**

The findings evidenced the difficulties that children with SN have in accessing content that was designed for the typically-developing child, confirming the research available pointing to the complexity of teaching this area to such children (Miller and Raymond, 2008). The broadened *Stay Safe* topic framework presented in Chapter 5 (Table 28, p.158) takes account of this reality by being less prescriptive in the content that teachers should teach to children with SN. In doing this, it allows them to bring their experience to bear and utilise the ‘tacit knowledge’ (Olaisen and Revang, 2018, p. 294) that they spoke so passionately about in this research to craft lessons that are suitable for their pupils, within the parameters of the broadened topics. Adding to the functionality of the topic framework is the continuum of learning pathways to accompany each topic. The milestones along each continuum were selected on the basis of child safeguarding literature and practice documents / booklets (Cullen, 1996; Wrobel, 2003; Wurtele and Kenny, 2010; Chen, Fortson and Tseng, 2012; Kenny and Wurtele, 2012; Kenny, Wurtele and Alonso, 2012; Kenny *et al.*, 2013; Zhang *et al.*, 2014; Huang and Cui, 2020) around how children with SN might progress under each of the broadened topics (see Chapter 5). While the continua under each topic are not exhaustive, they offer a starting point for teachers to teach around. Crucially, the non-prescriptive nature of this proposed framework enables the involvement of parents, through the Support aspect of the modified curriculum model outlined above. This ‘team-based approach’ has the potential to be a powerful force in embedding key learning for children (Fitzgerald, Ryan and Fitzgerald, 2015, p. 199), in this case in the safeguarding sphere. It can act as the antidote for current practice which sees parents deferring to teacher expertise, with teachers acquiescing to this disposition - ultimately disempowering parents. In changing to new



approaches such as this, leadership continues to be a key contributor to success (Durrant, 2005; Amels *et al.*, 2020).

### **6.3.3 Curriculum Leadership in Child Safeguarding**

Effective child safeguarding is dependent on effective leadership at multiple levels (Baginsky, 2008; Baginsky *et al.*, 2019). This includes schools where principals and teachers have a crucial role with regards to the enactment of the curricular component, in the Irish context at least (Government of Ireland, 2017a, 2019a). A significant accomplishment of this study was to illustrate the complexity of leadership distribution in this area and to highlight the inherent tensions that other research endeavours have adverted to in relation to distributed leadership (Lumby, 2016; Bush, 2018). Where this research has gone further is in relation to the ‘leadership premia’ that have been deduced with regards to the influence exerted by the various ‘levels of leadership’ (Gronn, 2009, p. 381). Principals and those in positional proximity to them on the management hierarchy exert extraordinary influence. The role of deputy principal was seen as crucial in bridging the gap between the principal and unpromoted teachers, and they could be used as a sounding board and a support for those ‘above’ and ‘below’ them (King and Stevenson, 2017, p. 657) on the hierarchy. They were also used as a means to pilot curricular initiatives because, in essence, their dual position as a classroom practitioner and formal positional leader conferred ‘honest broker’ status on them. While the role of deputy principal is vastly under-researched, there are some tentative data emerging internationally (Leaf and Odhiambo, 2017; Sibanda, 2018) but more needs to be done in the Irish context.

The ‘Experience Premium’ highlighted how a teacher’s years’ experience in special education can bring influence in a special school, in particular among less-experienced colleagues – a finding that corroborated general research in this sphere (York-Barr and

Duke, 2004; York-Barr *et al.*, 2005; Billingsley, 2007). While this premium was a less potent force than the ‘principal premium’, it underscores the importance of nurturing experience and ensuring that it is maximised by having structured opportunities in place for teacher professional learning. This may increase the likelihood that teaching experience is informed by explicit knowledge, as teachers’ careers advance, and that the leadership accruing from this experience can be leveraged to bring evidence-informed curriculum approaches to the classroom (Olaisen and Revang, 2018).

This research has been insightful for revealing the actors who are not involved in distributed leadership in a special school, in as much as it has revealed those who are. Crucially, SNAs were excluded from exercising any leadership at all when it came to *Stay Safe*, despite their critical role in ensuring a successful school experience for the children they are allocated to (Lawlor and Cregan, 2003; Logan, 2006; Morrissey, 2020b; Griffin and Blatchford, 2021). In this particular area, their exclusion is all the more poignant because from a child safeguarding perspective they may be the ‘eyes and ears’ (Nohilly, 2018, p. 32) for children with SN – in addition to being their advocates. As a recent policy analysis of the *Child Protection Procedures* (2017) has demonstrated, this urgently needs to be reviewed in order to optimise protection for the most vulnerable pupils (Morrissey, 2021a). There was no evidence of either parents or children having a role in the distributed leadership framework – surprising perhaps, given the direction of travel with regards to the current discursive importance attached to their ‘voices’ generally. Although it should be noted that research on distributed leadership largely ignores the possible leadership role that these stakeholders could play in a school. While Brassard and Fiorvanti (2015) highlight the leadership role that psychologists should play in the enactment of child safeguarding curricula, this study found no evidence to suggest that this is happening in the Irish special school context. This must be addressed.

## **6.4 Recommendations and Implications**

In light of the findings, this study makes a number of recommendations in the research, policy and practice spheres. It also highlights their broader implications.

### **6.4.1 Research**

Four recommendations are made for further research. These recommendations centre around the dilemmas of difference and leadership premia theorised earlier, as well as the proposed modified curriculum model and the amended *Stay Safe* topic framework presented in Chapter 5.

#### ***Dilemmas of Difference in Child Safeguarding***

While the case is well made for curricula with high degrees of commonality and their possible contribution to inclusion (see for example, the *Inclusive Education Framework* (Government of Ireland, 2011c) in the Irish context), deeper questions must be asked about their applicability when it comes to sensitive areas such as child safeguarding. How do you balance the desire for including children in the regular mandatory safeguarding curriculum, with the fact that this curriculum – inclusive and all as it may be – might not be the optimal vehicle for teaching them the skills that are within their capacity to acquire? This is acutely in need of further probing from a multi-disciplinary perspective because this study has only acquired teacher insights on the matter. Research engagement with psychologists is badly needed because that is where the greatest expertise lies in relation to this (Brassard and Fiorvanti, 2015). In essence, this is not just an educational question, it is a psychological one too. Regardless of the potentiality of a common curriculum and without prejudice to what is explored in the next paragraph, it may be the case that the delivery of such provision for children with SN should be far more multi-disciplinary in nature - with psychologists possibly occupying a higher ranking role than teachers.

### ***Model for Curriculum Design***

Notwithstanding the psychological proviso outlined above, in order to increase the potential for a common curriculum that children with SN can gain access to, a Support aspect added to Norwich's (2010) seminal *Model for Curriculum Design* is worthy of trial. This modified model would need to be theorised further and empirically tested for its robustness in narrowing the gap between a common and different curriculum. Some key questions that need to be looked at include:

- Should multiple actors (e.g. class teachers, support teachers, other professionals, SNAs, parents, peers) be discharged with exercising the Support facility on behalf of children with SN and if so, how are these actors selected? Should it be limited to designated advocates?
- If multiple actors are involved in providing this curricular support to facilitate participation or 'partial participation' (Baumgart *et al.*, 1982, p. 17), what effect does this ultimately have on the theoretical consistency of the curriculum delivered? Perhaps with the right combination of actors there are no implications, but this should be examined in any event.

These are critical questions that may support the development of the proposed model and enhance its fit-for-purpose.

### ***Topic Framework for Stay Safe***

Chapter 5 presented a proposed revised topic framework for *Stay Safe*, which broadens the scope of the current topics to increase their applicability for the range of need of children with SN. However, this framework should not be treated as a *fait accompli* and should be extensively piloted, and amended accordingly, before being enacted in the classroom. The progression continua encompassed by the framework should also be evaluated and refined, with input from child psychology to ensure that the milestones are

appropriate. It is highly probable that following this process, milestones would be added and/or removed because the continua were presented as a stimulus for discussion and a signpost for how children with SN might be accommodated, as opposed to a finished product.

### ***Curriculum Leadership in the Special School Domain***

The leadership premia identified in this research need to be probed further. In particular, the experience phenomenon that was valued so highly raised some questions. For example, in the special school domain is an inexperienced teacher able to exercise teacher leadership at all? All of the principals who participated in Phase 2 of this research were very experienced, in terms of their years teaching, and their positions afforded them significant scope for leadership. But it was difficult to establish whether this scope was due to their experience or their position. Future research endeavours should attempt to disentangle these two variables, as there may be policy implications.

#### **6.4.2 Policy**

This study makes three policy recommendations centring around the *Child Protection Procedures* (2017), professional development for teachers and developing leadership capacity. While each of these recommendations are linked to each other, they will be explored discretely here.

#### ***Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2017)***

A full-scale review of the *Child Protection Procedures* (2017) is now warranted to ensure their applicability for special schools. This review should focus on all components – leadership, organisation and curriculum – to address the frequent criticism emanating from this research and elsewhere that special schools are too often an afterthought or ‘side-lined’ (Merrigan and Senior, 2021, p. 3) when it comes to policy formulation. Instead of ‘add ons’ to make the procedures applicable to special school settings, a

‘universal design’ lens (Hall, Meyer and Rose, 2012; Meyer, Rose and Gordon, 2014; Novak, 2014) should be applied that aims to give learners in all settings equitable opportunities. In addition to this, the CPSI framework should be amended to reflect that special schools may never be able to fully implement *Stay Safe* (Government of Ireland, 2019a, p. 22). At best, many special schools may be able to enact an adapted *Stay Safe*, that is custom-tailored to suit individual pupil needs.

### ***Professional Development for Teachers***

Enhanced professional development opportunities for teachers in special schools in relation to child safeguarding is needed, to ensure that teachers have the skills necessary to optimally enact this area of the curriculum and make evidence-informed decisions. This has implications for the Teaching Council’s (2016) *Cosán Framework for Teacher’s Learning*. It is critical that teachers and leaders make use of the framework to support professional learning so that their tacit experience can be harnessed to generate explicit knowledge, thereby improving their practice in the classroom (Olaisen and Revang, 2018). A frequent concern raised by teachers in this inquiry was the inadequacy of courses currently available and their inapplicability to teachers working in special schools. This identified teacher concern is worrisome because access to professional learning has been identified as important for attracting, retaining and developing effective teachers (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2005). To tackle the current inadequacy, both the NCSE and the PDST must reach out to teachers in all contexts (special schools and mainstream schools) and conduct an audit of what is needed to support all teachers catering for children with SN. These organisations also must prioritise the appointment of curriculum advisors who have practical experience in the special school sector, to address the frequent criticism of participants here that current advisors lack a contextual understanding of their setting.

### ***Developing Leadership Capacity***

Policy makers should establish a working definition for what distributed leadership means in the Irish curricular context and take steps to develop teachers' capacities to engage in it. The current ambivalence around how to optimise the balance between leadership 'from above' and 'from below' (King and Stevenson, 2017, p. 657) in distributed frameworks is problematic. There is a role for the Centre for School Leadership (CSL) in establishing a working group to deconstruct the concept and tease out how it should operate in the school context. Further, the CSL could examine how it can use its significant amount of leadership expertise to support providers in devising leadership courses that emphasise curriculum leadership or data-informed decision-making in relation to the curriculum. Currently, no providers have submitted courses for endorsement to the CSL in these areas - a surprising reality given their importance in terms of school improvement (Godfrey, 2016; Sheard and Sharples, 2016; Brown and Zhang, 2017; Brown, Schildkamp and Hubers, 2017; Guldborg, 2017). Perhaps, there is a role for the DE itself in funding such courses - there is precedence for such focused financial investments, with the Department fully funding the Post-Graduate Diploma in Special Education and part-funding the general Post-Graduate Diploma in School Leadership. At a minimum, as an interim measure, discrete modules on curriculum leadership and/or data-informed decision-making should be factored into both of these already-subsidised courses because the evidence shows that where tacit experience is complimented by objective evidence (Rämä and Kontu, 2012; Olaisen and Revang, 2018), there are benefits for both pupils and teachers – the Moderate School in this study provided an illustration of this. In essence, teachers need to be shown how to lead the curriculum and how to leverage data for that purpose, in order for it to happen effectively.

### **6.4.3 Practice**

This study makes three recommendations in relation to teachers' practices and these relate to PLCs, the involvement of parents and independent advocacy.

#### ***Professional Learning Communities***

This inquiry illustrated the power of PLCs to support teachers in differentiating the curriculum. The PLCs in the Moderate School were strengthened by the involvement of management who viewed them as valuable. All schools would benefit from having PLCs to support teachers in curriculum enactment. Further, where possible schools should train some members of staff to act as facilitators so that the benefits of PLCs can be fully realised (Brennan, King and Travers, 2021), in the same way that they were in the Moderate School where the deputy principal had experience in delivering CPD.

#### ***Parental Involvement***

To further parents' capacity to support and advocate for their children, it is strongly recommended that teachers involve them in the curriculum enactment process, in particular around the selection of content. Parents should be empowered with the skills necessary to determine what is appropriate for their children, so that post-school they are able to support them in making informed decisions. Schools should also give consideration to facilitating training on how parents can be effective advocates for their children – in child safeguarding and in other areas. If schools are not enabled to teach the full *Stay Safe* applicable to children's ages, then it should be delivered to their parents in its entirety so that they are well-informed.

#### ***Independent Advocacy***

To optimise advocacy for children with SN, to further empower them and to enhance their safety, serious consideration should be given to the usage of independent advocates in this arena. At the very least, the potential of the role could be further explored from a



research perspective, to identify possible policy changes that might bring about progress in the practice sphere. This role could, in the more extreme cases, act to mitigate the risk of teacher and parental conflicts of interest impinging on the rights and best interests of those with SN (Forbat and Atkinson, 2005; Morgan, 2011). In more routine cases, it could be used to calibrate the right balance between teacher / parent / guardian advocacy and child empowerment.

### **6.5 Implications of this Research Beyond Special Schools**

While the data informing conceptualisations, findings and recommendations from this study emanated from special schools, the insights here are relevant to all settings, as every primary school now has children with SN. As stated at the outset, this study has assumed an ‘expert role’ for special schools on the inclusive education continuum (Ware *et al.*, 2009; Ekins, 2011; Hornby, 2015). In observance of the best tradition of that expert status, the proposed modified curriculum model and the revised *Stay Safe* topic framework presented in these chapters have emerged directly from engagement with teachers in special schools. While further extensive piloting should be completed, this model and framework offer potential signposts to SETs in mainstream schools on how to adapt the curriculum. In doing this it ensures that the expertise of teachers in special schools goes beyond their immediate setting. This supports the longer-term ambition of increasing the likelihood of children having the skills to be included in society post-school (Hornby, 2021), and at the same time accessing a curriculum with the greatest degree of commonality to their peers. It also goes some way towards addressing the perception that special schools are a ‘placement of last resort’ (Ware *et al.*, 2009, p. 7) by demonstrating the teaching expertise found in them.

The insights gained in this research in terms of ‘curriculum leadership’ (Harris, Jones and Crick, 2020, p. 1) are also highly valuable. Principals from all schools will see the

importance of having structures in place to access staff voices in relation to the curriculum, while at the same time ensuring that data-informed practice is the key factor in making the ultimate decision. Teachers will see that their experience is highly valuable and that further value can be added when they engage in professional learning (Olaisen and Revang, 2018). It is clear that both promoted and unpromoted teachers have a key role to play in a distributed leadership framework and this research has showcased how the promoted-unpromoted leadership balance is different in each school. It is up to individual school communities to calibrate that balance in their own individual settings. The case schools here have provided signposts as to the benefits and challenges that different balances effectuate.

Notwithstanding the benefits of these signposts, there are limitations with every piece of research, and this inquiry was no different.

## **6.6 Limitations**

The sampling procedure employed in this research endeavour had its limitations - given the size of Phase 2 and its qualitative nature, no claims of generalisability can be made in relation to the findings (Biesta, 2017; Day Ashley, 2017; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). In addition to this, the snowball sampling procedure applied to recruit teachers during Phase 2 is not without its critics, with Heckathorn (2002, p. 11) suggesting that it is 'insufficient for statistical inference'. It should be noted, however, that this statistical purpose was not the objective of that part of the research. Browne (2005) points out that the snowballing approach relies heavily on social networks and so can exclude some participants who could make positive contributions. In this research, the sampling meant that principals occupied a quasi-gatekeeping role on those who participated in Phase 2 – while they were given the criteria that participants needed to meet, it is plausible that they may have chosen participants who were in the same 'loop' as themselves (Cohen, Manion

and Morrison, 2018, p. 221). This was certainly a shortcoming but without applying such a sampling technique, it would have been exceedingly difficult to gain access to a population that would otherwise have remained ‘hidden’ (Browne, 2005, p. 49). ‘Trade-offs’ akin to this are not unusual in academic research (Bailey *et al.*, 2007, p. 281) and sometimes need to be made to address core questions. This flexibility was another virtue of the pragmatic approach (Greene, 2007).

In addition, this was a cross-sectional study which meant that the findings were just a ‘snapshot’ of participants’ viewpoints in ‘one moment in time’ (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018, p. 349). The time that participants were involved in this research was a particularly challenging one for teachers – they had just re-opened their schools following a government-mandated school closure, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, this was referenced many times over the course of interviews and it should be borne in mind as an important contextual factor, in interpreting the findings and recommendations.

## **6.7 Concluding Remarks**

Protecting children from harm is one of the most fundamental roles of a school (Baginsky, 2008; Government of Ireland, 2017a). Ireland’s history in this regard is a chequered one, with repeated instances of failures throughout the Twentieth Century (O’Mahony, 2009; Kilkelly, 2012). These failures have influenced current policy in relation to schools (Morrissey, 2021a). *Stay Safe* is the mandatory child safeguarding curriculum for all primary schools in Ireland, including special schools. This study probed how *Stay Safe* is enacted in special schools, given that many of their children may be unable to access the key child safeguarding messages. The need to investigate this aspect of the curriculum became apparent through the researcher’s professional experience working as a special class teacher, a PDST advisor supporting special schools and latterly as a school principal. The study has provided interesting insights in relation to the challenges and opportunities

experienced by special schools in enacting this area of the curriculum. It has contributed to new knowledge by highlighting the potential of a modified curriculum model and a revised *Stay Safe* topic framework for use with children with SN in the safeguarding sphere. The pivotal role identified for leadership and the premia attached to certain characteristics will be useful to researchers and practitioners into the future, as signals for further research in all school settings.

Finally, undertaking this doctoral journey was both an honour and privilege for the researcher. While COVID-19 presented challenges, participants helped him to overcome those by their eagerness, enthusiasm and flexibility in engaging with the research. It is these same personality traits that teachers summon every day to provide the best curricular experience that they can for the children they are responsible for educating. These chapters will make a modest, but nonetheless important, contribution to supporting them in their roles.

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## APPENDIX A

### *Literature Review Search Strings*

The following different search strings were utilised for each of the three distinct parts of the literature review to systematise the **initial** search:

- **Part A:** Combinations of ‘special school’, ‘specialist school’ *AND* ‘disability’, ‘special educational needs’ *AND* ‘Ireland’ ‘Irish’;
- **Part B:** Two distinct searches:
  - Combinations of ‘curriculum approaches’, ‘curriculum strategies’, ‘curriculum methodologies’, ‘curriculum enactment’, ‘curriculum implementation’ *AND* ‘special education’, ‘disability’, ‘inclusive education’, ‘inclusion’
  - Combinations of ‘child personal safety programme’, ‘child personal safety curriculum’, ‘child safeguarding programme’, ‘child safeguarding curriculum’ ‘child sexual abuse prevention programme’, ‘child sexual abuse prevention curriculum’ *AND* ‘primary school’, ‘special educational needs’, ‘differentiation’
  - ‘teacher’, leadership’, ‘head teacher’, principal, *AND* ‘primary school’, ‘special school’, ‘special educational needs’, ‘differentiation’;
- **Part C:** Combinations of ‘school leadership’, ‘principal’, ‘head teacher’, ‘leadership teams’, ‘distributed leadership’, ‘teacher leadership’ *AND* ‘inclusion’, ‘disability’, ‘special educational needs’;

## APPENDIX B

### *Phase 1: Questionnaire to Special School Principals*

#### SECTION 1: Principal and School Profile

**Q1 Gender:**

- Male
- Female
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Q2 Age range:**

- 20 - 30
- 31 - 40
- 41 - 50
- 51 - 60
- >60

**Q3 Number of years as principal:**

- <1
- 1 - 10
- 11 - 20
- 21 - 30
- 31 - 40
- >40

**Q4** Number of years teaching in a special school (please include the years in which you have been serving as principal, in your total):

- <1
- 1 - 10
- 11 - 20
- 21 - 30
- 31 - 40
- >40

**Q5** The below options indicate the various designations provided to special schools by the Department of Education. Which of these options best describes the profile of pupils in your school? Please select one option (note the final option allows you to provide a description, where the preceding options do not adequately describe your school profile).

- Physical Disability
- Hearing Impairment
- Visual Impairment
- Emotional Disturbance and/or Behaviour Problems
- Mild General Learning Disabilities
- Moderate General Learning Disabilities
- Severe / Profound General Learning Disabilities
- Autism Spectrum
- Specific Learning Disability
- Multiple Disabilities
- Travelling Community
- Hospital School



- School attached to Detention Centre
  - Special Care Unit
  - High Support Unit
  - These designations do not adequately describe the profile of my school (please comment)
- 

**Q6 Designated Liaison Person (DLP) for Child Protection in this school:**

- I am the DLP
- I am the Deputy DLP
- I am neither the DLP nor the Deputy DLP

## SECTION 2: SPHE in Our School

**Q7 Does your school have a Whole School Policy for SPHE?**

- Yes
- No

*LOGIC - Display This Question:*

*If Does your school have a Whole School Policy for SPHE? = Yes*

**Q8 *If your school has an SPHE policy, does it indicate the time of year when Stay Safe is implemented in the school?***

- Yes
- No

*LOGIC - Display This Question:*

*If Does your school have a Whole School Policy for SPHE? = Yes*

**Q9** *If your school does have an SPHE policy, when was this policy last reviewed?*

- Within the last year
- Within the last two years
- Within the last three years
- Within the last four years
- Within the last five years
- Over five years ago

*Display This Question:*

*If Does your school have a Whole School Policy for SPHE? = Yes*

**Q10** *Do teachers in your school have the autonomy to initiate change to the SPHE policy?*

- Yes
- No

**Q11** **Does your school have an SPHE or Wellbeing Coordinator?**

- Yes
- No

*LOGIC - Display This Question:*

*If Does your school have an SPHE or Wellbeing Coordinator? = Yes*

**Q12** *If your school has an SPHE or Wellbeing Coordinator, please provide a sentence on what the role of SPHE or Wellbeing Coordinator entails.*

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### SECTION 3: SPHE and the Curricular Component to Child Protection (Stay Safe)

**Q13** Is *Stay Safe* noted in your Child Safeguarding Risk Assessment, as a means for reducing pupil risk?

- Yes
- No

**Q14** Is the *Stay Safe* programme a core part of SPHE provision in your school?

- Yes
- No

**Q15** Has whole-school training on the revised *Stay Safe* programme been provided to teachers in your school?

- Yes
- No

**Q16** When *Stay Safe* was last taught in your school, approximately how many parents opted their children out of *Stay Safe* lessons?

- 0
- Between 1 and 3
- Between 4 and 6
- Between 7 and 10
- >10

**Q17** Approximately, how many school terms does it take to complete the *Stay Safe* programme in your school?

- < 1 term
- 1 term
- 2 terms

- 3 terms

**Q18 Please select the statement(s) that best describes practice in your school, in relation to *Stay Safe*:**

- Stay Safe* is enacted with pupils in the primary end of the school (Junior Infants to Sixth Class age groups)
- Stay Safe* is used to craft lessons in junior cycle classes, in the post-primary end of the school
- Stay Safe* is used to craft lessons in senior cycle classes, at the post-primary end of the school

**Q19 Rank how important you believe the following aspects are when enacting the *Stay Safe* programme in your school (1 being the most important, 7 being the least important). The 'drag' function enables you to move around the various options into different ranks:**

- Professional judgement of teachers
- Adherence to key messages of each *Stay Safe* lesson
- Needs of each child
- Input from parents
- Input from child psychology
- Guidance documents from the Department of Education and Skills [e.g. *Child Protection Procedures* (2017), *Guide to Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections* (2019)]
- Guidance documents from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs [e.g. *Children First Guidance* (2017)] (7)

**Q20 Which of the following arrangements are in place to monitor the enactment of *Stay Safe* in your school?**

	Yes	No
There are no monitoring arrangements in place.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers' planning documents or progress reports in SPHE are examined, with emphasis placed on enactment of <i>Stay Safe</i> .	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers are observed when teaching some <i>Stay Safe</i> lessons.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pupils are questioned on the <i>Stay Safe</i> topics by someone other than their class teacher.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parents are asked for feedback on the children's learning in <i>Stay Safe</i> .	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pupils are asked to complete tests or tasks to demonstrate their understanding of key <i>Stay Safe</i> topics.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pupils maintain a portfolio of the work they complete in <i>Stay Safe</i> .	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other monitoring arrangements (please specify): _____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Q21 Rank the five *Stay Safe* topics in terms of teachers' confidence in teaching them (number 1 being the easiest topic to teach and number 5 being the most difficult to teach). The 'drag' function enables you to move around the various options into different ranks:**

- Feeling Safe and Unsafe
- Friendship and Bullying
- Touches
- Secrets and Telling
- Strangers

**Q22 Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements:**

	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
Teachers in our school teach the <i>Stay Safe</i> programme, lesson by lesson, in accordance with the sequence of lessons in the manual.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers in our school support the teaching of <i>Stay Safe</i> with additional supplementary programmes.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers in our school <b>skip</b> some of the <i>Stay Safe</i> <b>content</b> .	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers in our school <b>skip</b> some of the <i>Stay Safe</i> <b>tasks</b> .	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers in our school <b>skip</b> some of the <i>Stay Safe</i> <b>lessons</b> .	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers in our school <b>adapt</b> some of the <i>Stay Safe</i> <b>content</b> .	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers in our school <b>adapt</b> some of the <i>Stay Safe</i> <b>tasks</b> .	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers in our school <b>adapt</b> some of the <i>Stay Safe</i> <b>lessons</b> .	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers in our school only use <i>Stay Safe</i> as a guide to design their own child safeguarding programme for pupils.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Q23 Please select the statement that best represents your view:**

- Special schools, like ours, would benefit from an entirely different *Stay Safe* programme.
- Special schools, like ours, would benefit from a *Stay Safe* programme, where the **general principles** are the same as mainstream schools, but where teachers have the autonomy to vary the topic areas, specific content and teaching approach depending on the pupil cohort.
- Special schools, like ours, would benefit from a *Stay Safe* programme, where the **general principles** and **topic areas** are the same as mainstream schools, but where teachers have the autonomy to vary the specific content and teaching approach depending on pupil cohort.

- Special schools, like ours, would benefit from a *Stay Safe* programme, where the **general principles, topic areas** and **specific content** are the same as mainstream schools, but where teachers have the autonomy to vary the teaching approach depending on pupil cohort.
- Special schools, like ours, would benefit more from completing the exact same *Stay Safe* programme as mainstream schools.

**Q24** If children with a learning difficulty or special need are afforded the same learning experiences in *Stay Safe* as other children, are they likely to be denied the opportunity to have learning experiences relevant to their individual needs? If you wish you can provide a short explanation for the answer you have selected.

- Yes \_\_\_\_\_
- No \_\_\_\_\_

**Q25** If children with a learning difficulty or special need are **NOT** afforded the same learning experiences in *Stay Safe* as other children, are they likely to be treated as a lower status group and denied equal opportunities? If you wish you can provide a short explanation for the answer you have selected.

- Yes \_\_\_\_\_
- No \_\_\_\_\_

#### **SECTION 4: Leadership of Curricular Elements to Child Protection (Stay Safe)**

*This is the final page of the questionnaire. Thank you for your patience in staying with it.*

**Q26 Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the below statements. Please note that the curricular component to child protection, in this case, may include the *Stay Safe* programme or other aspects of the SPHE Curriculum relevant to child protection.**

	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
There is a culture of distributed leadership in this school, which extends to leadership of the curricular elements of child protection.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I delegate tasks to teachers based on the needs of the school, including in relation to the curricular elements of child protection.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I do not delegate tasks to teachers in relation to the curricular elements of child protection. Rather, I share responsibility for these tasks with other teachers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There are hierarchical layers of leadership in this school. Those in the higher layers of leadership exert greater influence over curricular policies, including the SPHE policy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Q27 Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the below statements. Please note that the curricular component to child protection, in this case, may include the teaching of the *Stay Safe* programme or other aspects of the SPHE Curriculum relevant to child protection.**

	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
In this school, teachers are empowered to amend the official curriculum (including the curricular elements to child protection) to ensure that it is applicable to pupils in their class.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In this school, teachers support each other in amending the curriculum (including the curricular elements to child protection) to ensure that it is applicable to pupils in their class.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers in unpromoted positions have the same influence on curricular policy-making and enactment (including the curricular elements to child protection) as those in management positions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers are empowered to exercise their own professional judgement in the enactment of the curriculum (including the curricular elements to child protection).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



**Q28 Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the below statements. Please note that the curricular component to child protection, in this case, may include the teaching of the *Stay Safe* programme or other aspects of the SPHE Curriculum relevant to child protection.**

	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Unsure</b>
In this school, my role as principal affords me greater influence in terms of curricular policy-making (including in relation to the curricular elements of child protection).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In this school, I take complete responsibility for overseeing and ensuring the enactment of the curricular elements of child protection.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In this school, I utilise my professional judgement in relation to the enactment of the curricular elements of child protection.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel confident in leading the curricular elements of child protection in this school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In this school, the SPHE / Wellbeing Coordinator is the key person in relation to leadership of the curricular elements of child protection.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

***Click the arrow at the bottom right to complete this survey.***

## APPENDIX C

### *Phase 2: Interview Schedule for Principals*

#### **Introduction / Ice-breaker**

1. Could you tell me a little bit more about your experience working in a special school and being the principal? What are the benefits and challenges? Is this your first principalship?
2. Have you taught in a mainstream setting before? Is this setting significantly different? How so?
3. Do you have good support from your ISM team? In particular, do you have an SPHE / Wellbeing Coordinator as part of the ISM team?

#### **Focus on Leadership**

4. How do you view the role of SPHE/Wellbeing Coordinator from a leadership perspective? **How** do you lead in this area in the school? Are there other people involved in leading this area with the SPHE/Wellbeing Coordinator?
5. Can you tell me a little bit about the nature of the professional relationship that exists between the principal and the SPHE/Wellbeing Coordinator? What does it look like on a day-to-day basis?
6. Do you collaborate with the SPHE/Wellbeing Coordinator? How do you do this?
7. Who has the autonomy to make decisions around policy making and policy enactment in SPHE in this school? What role do teachers have? Can they initiate change to policies? How do they do this here?
8. How does leadership operate in this school (with particular emphasis placed on curricular leadership in SPHE)? Are you the central player? Do you distribute/delegate/share leadership? Can leadership just emerge from amongst certain staff-members? How can this happen? Could you give an example?
9. Has leading in the area of SPHE changed in the last number of years? (follow up on *Child Protection Procedures* and *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice*, if not mentioned by interviewee)

#### **Focus on Curricular Component to Child Protection**

10. Can you explain a little bit about your role in the enactment of *Stay Safe* in this school? Are there any challenges with implementing it in a special school?
11. How is *Stay Safe* enacted here? Do teachers implement the programme as is? Do they adapt it? Or do they design a totally different programme to suit the pupil cohort? Is there much collaboration?
12. What kind of curriculum enactment approaches are used by teachers (curricular skipping, amending, supplementing etc.)? How do these approaches come about? Is it a whole-school decision, individual teacher decision or do certain staff members influence others in this area?
13. What is the role of the principal in the enactment of *Stay Safe* and the curricular approaches adopted at class level? How influential is the principal in this area?
14. Has there been any changes in how *Stay Safe* has been approached over the last number of years? (follow up on *Child Protection Procedures*, if not mentioned by interviewee)

15. Have the *Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections* being conducted by the DE Inspectorate impacted on how *Stay Safe* is enacted in this school? How?
16. Do you monitor the enactment of *Stay Safe* in individual classrooms? How? Is this important? Why?

**Conclusion / Check-In with Interviewee**

17. We are coming to the end of the interview now and I am wondering are there any other comments that you would like to make in relation to the enactment of *Stay Safe* in your school or special school generally? Maybe there is something that you feel I should have raised but didn't.

Thank you very much for your time. I am now going to switch off the recording.....  
How did you find that interview? Are you feeling well? Is there anything that I can do before we end the call? I will check in in a couple of days again.

## APPENDIX D

### *Phase 2: Interview Schedule for SPHE Coordinators*

#### **Introduction / Ice-breaker**

1. Could you tell me a little bit more about your experience working in a special school? What are the benefits and challenges?
2. Have you taught in a mainstream setting before? Is this setting significantly different? How so?
3. How did you arrive at being the SPHE/Wellbeing Coordinator?

#### **Focus on Leadership**

4. How do you view the role of SPHE/Wellbeing Coordinator from a leadership perspective? **How** do you lead in this area? Are there other people involved in leading this area with you?
5. Can you tell me a little bit about the nature of the professional relationship that exists between the principal and the SPHE/Wellbeing Coordinator? What does it look like on a day-to-day basis?
6. Do you collaborate with the principal? How do you do this?
7. Do you feel like you have the autonomy to make decisions around policy making and policy enactment?
8. Can you tell me a little bit about the nature of the professional relationship that exists between the SPHE/Wellbeing Coordinator and the rest of the staff? What does it look like on a day-to-day basis?
9. Do you involve other staff members in decision-making? What kind of decision making would they be involved in?
10. Has the role of SPHE/Wellbeing Coordinator changed in the last number of years? (follow up on *Child Protection Procedures* and *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice*, if not mentioned by interviewee)

#### **Focus on Curricular Component to Child Protection**

11. Can you explain a little bit about your role in the enactment of *Stay Safe* in this school? Are there any challenges with implementing it in a special school?
12. How is *Stay Safe* enacted here? Do teachers implement the programme as is? Do they adapt it? Or do they design a totally different programme to suit the pupil cohort? Is there much collaboration?
13. What kind of curriculum enactment approaches are used (curricular skipping, amending, supplementing etc.). How do these approaches come about? Is it a whole-school decision, individual teacher decision or do certain staff members influence others in this area?
14. What is the role of the principal in the enactment of *Stay Safe* and the curricular approaches adopted at class level? How influential is the principal in this area?
15. Has there been any changes in how *Stay Safe* has been approached over the last number years (follow up on *Child Protection Procedures*, if not mentioned by interviewee)
16. Have the *Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections* being conducted by the DE Inspectorate impacted on how *Stay Safe* is enacted in this school? How?

### **Conclusion / Check-In with Interviewee**

17. We are coming to the end of the interview now and I am wondering are there any other comments that you would like to make in relation to the enactment of *Stay Safe* in your school or special school generally? Maybe there is something that you feel I should have raised but didn't.

Thank you very much for your time. I am now going to switch off the recording.....  
How did you find that interview? Are you feeling well? Is there anything that I can do before we end the call? I will check in in a couple of days again.

## APPENDIX E

### *Phase 2: Question Schedule for Focus Groups*

#### **Introduction / Ice-breaker**

1. I'd like to welcome everybody to this Focus Group and thank you all for your time. I would like to go around the group and ask everybody to introduce themselves and give an indication of the class they teach.

#### **Focus on Leadership**

2. I'd like to begin with a discussion on how the SPHE curriculum is led in this school. Who are the key players (no names just roles)? Why are they the key players? How have they emerged as the key players? What exactly do they do in relation to leading the curriculum?
3. Do you see yourselves as having a leadership role in relation to the SPHE curriculum? Let us talk about that role.
4. How does leadership operate in this school? Is it related to positional authority or can anybody exercise leadership here? What is the role (if any) of the principal in relation to other members of staff exercising leadership?

#### **Focus on Curricular Component to Child Protection**

5. Can you explain a little bit about the enactment of *Stay Safe* in your classrooms in this school? Are there any challenges with implementing it in a special school?
6. How do you enact *Stay Safe* in your classroom? Do you implement the programme as is? Do you adapt it? Or have you designed a totally different programme to suit the pupil cohort? Is there much collaboration here?
7. What topics are the trickiest? Do you feel confident with all topics?
8. What kind of curriculum enactment approaches do you use (prompt and probe if they don't mention - curricular skipping, amending, supplementing etc.). How do these approaches come about? Is it a whole-school decision, individual teacher decision or do certain staff members influence others in this area?
9. What is the role of the principal in the enactment of *Stay Safe* and the curricular approaches adopted at class level? How influential is the principal in this area?
10. Has there been any changes in how *Stay Safe* has been approached over the last number years (follow up on *Child Protection Procedures*, if not mentioned by interviewee)
11. Have the *Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections* being conducted by the DE Inspectorate impacted on how *Stay Safe* is enacted in this school? How?
12. What role do parents have in the enactment of *Stay Safe* here?

#### **Conclusion / Check-In with Interviewee**

13. We are coming to the end of the interview now and I am wondering are there any other comments that you would like to make in relation to the enactment of *Stay Safe* in your school or special school generally? Maybe there is something that you feel should I have raised but didn't.

Thank you very much for your time. I am now going to switch off the recording.....  
How did everyone find that interview? Are you all feeling well? Is there anything that I  
can do before we end the call? I will check in in a couple of days again.

## APPENDIX F

### *Recruitment Notice (Via Email)*

Dear Fellow Principal,

My name is Barry Morrissey and I am principal of a 14-teacher primary school in Limerick, with a wide diversity of learners. At present I am also completing doctoral research at the Institute of Education in Dublin City University. The focus of my research, under the supervision of Dr Fiona King and Dr Seline Keating, is on the enactment of the curricular component to child safeguarding (i.e. *Stay Safe*) in special schools in Ireland. In my prior role as a PDST Advisor, I supported many special schools in this area and I am acutely aware of the challenges experienced in implementing this mandatory aspect of the curriculum in your contexts. I am contacting you today because the research that I am now undertaking seeks to shed more light on this area, and I would like your input. There are two phases to this research and if you were willing to participate in either or both, I would be most grateful.

The first phase of that research involves disseminating a questionnaire to principals of the 133 special schools in Ireland, in order to collect data on how this aspect of the curriculum is implemented in those settings. As principal of a special school, I would like to invite you to contribute your valuable insight in this area by completing the questionnaire located at this [link](#). The questionnaire takes less than 10 minutes to complete and will provide very valuable data on the unique challenges that you face in enacting this mandatory aspect of the curriculum in your settings. A Plain Language Statement is attached to this email to provide you with more information.

The second phase of the research involves conducting a case study in three special schools. As part of the case study, I would like to interview the principal and the SPHE coordinator in each school around the approaches used in their school to enact *Stay Safe*. This would be followed up by a focus group consisting of three teachers on how *Stay Safe* is enacted at classroom level. Given the current climate around COVID-19, these interviews/focus group would take place online via Zoom. The times for these interviews would be arranged to suit the school. More detail on this phase of the research will be provided if you would like to participate. If you think you would be interested in participating in this part of the project, please email me at this [link](#). I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my email. Your participation in either or both of these research phases would be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely

Barry Morrissey  
Doctoral Researcher  
Dublin City University



## APPENDIX G

### *Codebook: Open-Coding*

Code Name	Description	Sources	References
Adult Modelling	Adult modelling as an approach to teaching key personal safety / child-safeguarding skills	3	4
Adults as Advocates	The need for teachers to be the advocates for children with SEN to keep them safe	4	20
Adults Supporting Children	Adults in school needing to support children to access the curriculum	5	13
Behaviour	The impact of behavioural needs on the implementation of the curriculum	3	6
Child Protection Procedures	Any reference (explicit or implied) to <i>the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2017)</i>	3	4
Child Psychology	Any reference to psychological supports acquired to facilitate the design of personal safety / child-safeguarding programmes	3	3
Circle Time	Circle Time as an approach to teaching key personal safety / child-safeguarding skills	2	3
Compliance with Mandatory Obligations	Any reference to schools' mandatory obligations and their compliance with them	2	2

Code Name	Description	Sources	References
Conference Attendance	Conference attendance as a stimulus for change to curricular approach	2	5
COVID	Any reference to COVID-19	1	1
CSS RA	Any reference to Child Safeguarding Statement Risk Assessment	1	1
Curricular Framework for Stay Safe Topics	The use of the Stay Safe topics as a framework for curricular enactment	5	9
Curricular Skipping	Any reference to the use of ‘skipping’ as a curricular enactment strategy	7	23
Curricular Supplementing	Any reference to the use of ‘supplementing’ as a curricular enactment strategy	5	13
Curriculum Adaptation	Any reference to the use of ‘adaptation’ as a curricular enactment strategy	8	45
Curriculum for SEN	Any references to desire for a designated curriculum for children with SEN	8	39
Dark Side of Leadership	Any references that could be construed as being the ‘dark side of leadership)	4	7
Designing Curricula	Teachers designing their own tailored curriculum for their pupils	9	30
Developing Independence	Any reference to teachers supporting a child to develop independence	2	4

Code Name	Description	Sources	References
Developments in SEN	How special education has developed over participants' careers	4	10
Expert Role of Special Schools	Special schools as experts in curricula, approaches and methodologies for children with SEN	3	7
Family Feedback	Feedback from family as a guide to devising content	1	1
Frustration	Teacher frustration with curriculum	1	2
Future for Stay Safe	What Stay Safe might look like in the years ahead for children with SEN	4	9
ICT	References to ICT (including phones, tablets, computers, social media) and the impact it has on children	5	15
Impact of SPHE Coordinator	How the leadership of the SPHE coordinator impacts on the delivery of the curriculum in special schools	1	2
Individualised Teaching	Individualised teaching as an approach to teaching key personal safety / child-safeguarding skills	2	4
Inspections	The influence of child protection and safe-guarding inspections on the curriculum	7	15
Integrated Teaching	Integrated teaching as an approach to teaching key personal safety / child-safeguarding skills	5	20

Code Name	Description	Sources	References
Intimate Care	Teaching key personal safety / child-safeguarding skills during the provision of intimate care	7	10
ISM	The influence of the in-school management team	1	5
Lack of Outside Support	An absence of suitable external support on curricular enactment for teachers in special schools	2	3
Leadership as Decision Making	Construal of leadership as decision-making	2	5
Leadership as Expertise	Construal of leadership as sharing expertise	4	24
Leadership as Influence	Construal of leadership as exerting influence	3	4
Leadership Consensus	Construal of leadership as reaching a consensus	2	4
Leadership Delegation	Construal of leadership as delegating tasks	2	2
Leadership from Above	Leadership conceptualised as something that comes from management	8	39
Leadership from Unpromoted Teachers	Leadership exercised by teachers without management posts	4	6
Leading Change	The process of leading change in schools	3	7
Length of Service (Experience)	Leadership capacity accruing with length of service in the school	9	23
Life Skills	The development of life skills by teachers to support independence	4	10

Code Name	Description	Sources	References
Links with Primary Schools	Links established with primary schools to facilitate inclusion	1	1
Mainstream	References to children with SEN who access a mainstream curriculum	2	2
Message Ambiguity	Ambiguity of messages being taught in Stay Safe for children with SEN	1	3
Middle Leadership	The influence of postholders in schools	3	16
Non-Principal Leadership	Leadership exercised by a person who is not the principal	3	9
Other School Types Experience	Teachers experience of other settings apart from SEN	8	10
Outside Influences on Change	External factors that influence change in school	6	17
Paperwork	Completion of planning and paperwork associated with teaching the curriculum	8	49
Parents	Parents support of the curriculum being taught in school	8	34
Personal Commitment to SEN	Teachers' commitment to SEN rooted in personal convictions	3	3
Primary Post-Primary Dilemma	The dilemma associated with Stay Safe being mandatory in the primary end of the school and not being mandatory in the senior side of the school	3	6
Principal Leadership	Leadership exercised solely by the principal	5	6

Code Name	Description	Sources	References
Professional Conversations	Professional conversations guiding how leadership was exercised	1	2
Professional Judgement	Professional judgement of teachers being the main factor in determining what was suitable to teach children and what was not	3	8
Profiling Pupils	How a child's personal profile could impact on the curriculum enacted	2	4
Pupil Ability	How an individual child's ability affects how the curriculum is enacted with them	9	93
Pupil Assessment	Assessment of pupils in the personal-safety and child safeguarding skills	3	4
Pupil Communication	How an individual child's capacity to communicate affects how the curriculum is enacted with them	5	29
Pupil Comprehension	How an individual child's capacity to comprehend affects how the curriculum is enacted with them	5	7
Pupil Equality	The strive for equality for children with SEN	2	6
Pupil Needs	How an individual child's needs affect how the curriculum is enacted with them	8	37
Pupil Overlearning	Over-learning as an approach to teaching key personal safety / child-safeguarding skills	3	7

Code Name	Description	Sources	References
Pupil Self Awareness	How an individual child's self-awareness affects how the curriculum is enacted with them	4	17
Pupil Voice Being Heard	The child's voice being sought in relation to the delivery of the curriculum	1	2
Pupil Wellbeing	Pupil wellbeing as a consideration in terms of the curriculum being delivered to pupils	4	9
Qualifications	Additional qualifications impacting on teachers' enactment of the curriculum and leadership	4	6
Reducing Paperwork	Attempts made to reduce the volume of paperwork that teachers are expected to complete	3	8
'Regular' Curriculum	What teachers referred to as the 'regular' curriculum being taught to pupils	6	18
Relationships between Colleagues	How fostering relationships with colleagues can lead to leadership by way of influence	6	13
Research	Research informing curricular practice	2	2
Role Play	Role Play as an approach to teaching key personal safety / child-safeguarding skills	2	4
RSE	How Relationship and Sexuality Education links to child safeguarding and personal safety skill instruction	6	12

Code Name	Description	Sources	References
Sensory Needs	How an individual child's sensory needs affect how the curriculum is enacted with them	4	10
Social Stories	Social Stories as an approach to teaching key personal safety / child-safeguarding skills	1	3
SPHE Coordinator	General references to the SPHE Coordinator	7	23
Spiral Approach	A spiral approach to teaching key personal safety / child-safeguarding skills	1	1
SSE	The impact of School Self Evaluation on curricular enactment	1	1
Staff Buy-In	The importance of management gaining 'staff buy-in' for changes to curricular approaches	2	7
Staff Collaboration	The importance of staff collaboration in enacting curricular for children with SEN	9	50
Staff Voice Being Heard	The importance of staff views being heard	3	4
Stay Safe Post Primary	The explicit enactment of Stay Safe in post-primary	2	3
Streaming Pupils	Ability streaming pupils as an approach to teaching key personal safety / child-safeguarding skills	5	12
Support from Colleagues	Receiving support and advice from colleagues on curricular enactment	6	16



Code Name	Description	Sources	References
Teacher Autonomy	Teacher having the autonomy implement aspects of the curriculum in accordance with their professional judgement / expertise	8	21
Teacher Designed Resources	Teachers designing their own resources to support classroom level curricular enactment	3	10
Teacher Independence	Teachers acting independently to enact the curriculum	1	1
Teacher Leadership	Explicit references to examples of teachers having exercised leadership in their schools	7	18
Teaching Consent	Teaching the concept of consent to post-primary students	1	2
Teaching Strategies	General / generic approaches to teaching key personal safety / child-safeguarding skills	6	34
Therapists	Accessing the support of therapists to support curricular enactment in child safeguarding and personal safety	3	6
Time for CPD	The challenge of finding time for CPD	2	2
Time for Design	The challenge of finding time to design resources	2	4
Topic Feeling Safe Unsafe	Teachers' experiences of teaching the 'Feeling Safe and Unsafe' topic	6	18
Topic Friendship and Bullying	Teachers' experiences of teaching the 'Friendship and Bullying' topic	7	14

Code Name	Description	Sources	References
Topic Secrets and Telling	Teachers' experiences of teaching the 'Secrets and Telling' topic	5	7
Topic Strangers	Teachers' experiences of teaching the 'Feeling Safe and Unsafe' topic	7	14
Topic Touches	Teachers' experiences of teaching the 'Touches' topic	7	15
Training	The impact of training on teaching child safeguarding and personal safety	7	29
Visuals	Use of visuals in teaching key personal safety / child-safeguarding skills	6	20
Withdrawn from Stay Safe	Pupils who have been withdrawn from Stay Safe by their parents	2	2

## APPENDIX H

### *Codebook: Candidate Themes (with Underpinning Codes)*

#### Candidate Theme 1: Whole-School Organisation of Curricular Component to Child Safeguarding

Code Name	Description	Sources	References
Policy considerations	Notable points from school policies	3	14
Pupil Factors Impacting Organisation			
<i>Ability profile of pupils</i>	How an individual child's ability affects how the curriculum is enacted with them	9	93
<i>Need profile of pupils</i>	How an individual child's needs affect how the curriculum is enacted with them	8	37
<i>Pupils withdrawn from Stay Safe</i>	Pupils who have been withdrawn from Stay Safe by their parents	2	2
Professional Development Considerations			
<i>Training for the curricular elements of child-safeguarding</i>	The impact of training on teaching child safeguarding and personal safety	7	29
<i>Professional judgement of teachers in curricular organisation</i>	Professional judgement of teachers being the main factor in determining what was suitable to teach children and what was not	3	8

Code Name	Description	Sources	References
Principal monitoring of whole-school curricular organisation	Leadership exercised solely by the principal in monitoring teachers	5	6

### Candidate Theme 2: Enactment of the Curricular Component to Child-Safeguarding

Code Name	Description	Sources	References
The Stay Safe Topics			
<i>Topic Feeling Safe Unsafe</i>	Teachers' experiences of teaching the 'Feeling Safe and Unsafe' topic	6	18
<i>Topic Friendship and Bullying</i>	Teachers' experiences of teaching the 'Friendship and Bullying' topic	7	14
<i>Topic Secrets and Telling</i>	Teachers' experiences of teaching the 'Secrets and Telling' topic	5	7
<i>Topic Strangers</i>	Teachers' experiences of teaching the 'Feeling Safe and Unsafe' topic	7	14
<i>Topic Touches</i>	Teachers' experiences of teaching the 'Touches' topic	7	15
Curriculum Enactment Strategies			
<i>Curricular Skipping</i>	Any reference to the use of 'skipping' as a curricular enactment strategy	7	23
<i>Curricular Supplementing</i>	Any reference to the use of 'supplementing' as a curricular enactment strategy	5	13

Code Name	Description	Sources	References
<i>Curriculum Adaptation</i>	Any reference to the use of ‘adaptation’ as a curricular enactment strategy	8	45
<i>Designing Curricula</i>	Teachers designing their own tailored curriculum for their pupils	9	30
<i>Individualised Teaching</i>	Individualised teaching as an approach to teaching key personal safety / child-safeguarding skills	2	4
<i>Integrated Teaching</i>	Integrated teaching as an approach to teaching key personal safety / child-safeguarding skills	5	20
<i>Teaching Strategies</i>	General / generic approaches to teaching key personal safety / child-safeguarding skills	6	34
<i>Pupil Overlearning</i>	Over-learning as an approach to teaching key personal safety / child-safeguarding skills	3	7
<i>Role Play</i>	Role Play as an approach to teaching key personal safety / child-safeguarding skills	2	4
<i>Social Stories</i>	Social Stories as an approach to teaching key personal safety / child-safeguarding skills	1	3
<i>Streaming Pupils</i>	Ability streaming pupils as an approach to teaching key personal safety / child-safeguarding skills	5	12

Code Name	Description	Sources	References
<i>Visuals</i>	Use of visuals in teaching key personal safety / child-safeguarding skills	6	20
<i>Adults Supporting Children</i>	Adults in school needing to support children to access the curriculum	8	17
<i>Circle Time</i>	Circle Time as an approach to teaching key personal safety / child-safeguarding skills	2	3
<i>Role Play</i>	Role Play as an approach to teaching key personal safety / child-safeguarding skills	2	4
RSE	How Relationship and Sexuality Education links to child safeguarding and personal safety skill instruction	6	12
Profiling Pupils	How a child's personal profile could impact on the curriculum enacted	2	4
Teacher Designed Resources	Teachers designing their own resources to support classroom level curricular enactment	3	10
Intimate Care	Teaching key personal safety / child-safeguarding skills during the provision of intimate care	7	10
Message Ambiguity	Ambiguity of messages being taught in Stay Safe for children with SEN	1	3

Code Name	Description	Sources	References
Primary Post-Primary Dilemma	The dilemma associated with Stay Safe being mandatory in the primary end of the school and not being mandatory in the senior side of the school	3	6
Sensory Needs	How an individual child's sensory needs affect how the curriculum is enacted with them	4	10

### Candidate Theme 3: Dealing with and Supporting Difference in Curricular Enactment

Name	Description	Sources	References
Curriculum and Difference			
<i>Curricular Framework for Stay Safe Topics</i>	The use of the Stay Safe topics as a framework for curricular enactment	5	9
<i>Curriculum for SEN</i>	Any references to desire for a designated curriculum for children with SEN	8	39
<i>Designing Curricula</i>	Teachers designing their own tailored curriculum for their pupils	9	30
General Curricula			
<i>Mainstream Curriculum</i>	References to children with SEN who access a mainstream curriculum	2	2

Name	Description	Sources	References
<i>'Regular' Curriculum</i>	What teachers referred to as the 'regular' curriculum being taught to pupils	6	18
<i>Spiral Approach</i>	A spiral approach to teaching key personal safety / child-safeguarding skills	1	1
<i>Stay Safe Post Primary</i>	The explicit enactment of Stay Safe in post-primary	2	3
Independence, Inclusion and Equality			
<i>Developing Independence</i>	Any reference to teachers supporting a child to develop independence	2	4
<i>Life Skills</i>	The development of life skills by teachers to support independence	4	10
<i>Links with Primary Schools</i>	Links established with primary schools to facilitate inclusion	1	1
<i>Pupil Equality</i>	The strive for equality for children with SEN	2	6
<i>Teacher Independence</i>	Teachers acting independently to enact the curriculum	1	1
Factors Differentiating Pupils			
<i>Pupil Communication</i>	How an individual child's capacity to communicate affects how the curriculum is enacted with them	5	29
<i>Pupil Comprehension</i>	How an individual child's capacity to comprehend affects how the curriculum is enacted with them	5	7



Name	Description	Sources	References
<i>Pupil Self Awareness</i>	How an individual child's self-awareness affects how the curriculum is enacted with them	4	17
<i>Pupil Wellbeing</i>	Pupil wellbeing as a consideration in terms of the curriculum being delivered to pupils	4	9
Future for Stay Safe – Different or the Same?	What Stay Safe might look like in the years ahead for children with SEN	4	9

#### Candidate Theme 4: Conceptions of Leadership

Code Name	Description	Sources	References
Leadership as A Shared Process			
<i>Leadership as Decision Making</i>	Construal of leadership as decision-making	2	5
<i>Leadership as Expertise</i>	Construal of leadership as sharing expertise	4	24
<i>Leadership as Influence</i>	Construal of leadership as exerting influence	3	4
<i>Leadership Consensus</i>	Construal of leadership as reaching a consensus	2	4
<i>Leadership Delegation</i>	Construal of leadership as delegating tasks	2	2
Leadership Linked to Management			

Code Name	Description	Sources	References
<i>Leadership from Above</i>	Leadership conceptualised as something that comes from management (principal / deputy principal)	8	39
<i>ISM Leadership</i>	The influence of ISM team members in schools	4	21
<i>SPHE Coordinator</i>	How the leadership of the SPHE coordinator impacts on the delivery of the curriculum in special schools	8	23
<i>Dark Side of Leadership</i>	Any references that could be construed as being the 'dark side of leadership	4	7
Leadership from Unpromoted Teachers	Leadership exercised by teachers without management posts	14	33
Factors Affecting Leadership			
<i>Teacher Autonomy</i>	Teacher having the autonomy to implement aspects of the curriculum in accordance with their professional judgement / expertise	8	21
<i>Professional Conversations</i>	Professional conversations guiding how leadership was exercised	1	2
<i>Staff Buy-In</i>	The importance of management gaining 'staff buy-in' for changes to curricular approaches	2	7
<i>Staff Collaboration</i>	The importance of staff collaboration/relationships in enacting the curriculum for children with SEN	15	63
<i>Staff Voice Being Heard</i>	The importance of staff views being heard	3	4

Code Name	Description	Sources	References
<i>Leading Change</i>	The process of leading change in schools	3	7
<i>Length of Service (Experience)</i>	Leadership capacity accruing with length of service in the school	9	23

### Candidate Theme 5: Leadership Linked to Independence and Inclusion in Society

Code Name	Description	Sources	References
Developments in SEN	How special education has developed over participants' careers	4	10
Expert Role of Special School	Special schools as experts in curricula, approaches and methodologies for children with SEN	3	7
Personal Commitment to SEN	Teachers' commitment to SEN rooted in personal convictions	3	3
Adults as Advocates	The need for teachers to be the advocates for children with SEN	4	20

### Candidate Theme 6: External Influences on Leadership

Name	Description	Sources	References
Requirement for 'Paperwork'	Completion of planning and paperwork associated with teaching the curriculum	8	49

Name	Description	Sources	References
Reducing Paperwork	Attempts made to reduce the volume of paperwork that teachers are expected to complete	3	8
Outside Influences on Change	External factors that influence change in school	6	17
Inspections	The influence of child protection and safe-guarding inspections on the curriculum	7	15
Compliance with Mandatory Obligations	Any reference (explicit or implied) to <i>the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2017)</i>	6	7
Conference Attendance	Conference attendance as a stimulus for change to curricular approach	2	5
SSE Guidelines	The impact of School Self Evaluation on curricular enactment	1	1
Child Psychology	Any reference to psychological supports acquired to facilitate the design of personal safety / child-safeguarding programmes	3	3
Lack of Outside Support	An absence of suitable external support on curricular enactment for teachers in special schools	2	3

## APPENDIX I

### *Codebook: Overarching Themes and Sub-Themes*

<b>Overarching Theme 1</b>	<b>Curriculum Enactment</b>
<i>Sub-Theme 1</i>	Whole-School Organisation of Curricular Component to Child Safeguarding
<i>Sub-Theme 2</i>	Enactment of the Curricular Component to Child-Safeguarding in the Classroom
<i>Sub-Theme 3</i>	Dealing with and Supporting Difference in Curricular Enactment

<b>Overarching Theme 2</b>	<b>Curriculum Leadership</b>
<i>Sub-Theme 1</i>	Conceptions of Leadership
<i>Sub-Theme 2</i>	The Teacher Exercising Leadership
<i>Sub-Theme 3</i>	External Influences on Leadership

## APPENDIX J

### *Thematic Map*

<b>PART A: Curriculum Enactment in Child Safeguarding</b>		
<b>School Level Organisation</b>	<b>Classroom Level Enactment</b>	<b>Dilemmas of Difference</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Policy Issues</li> <li>▪ Parental Opt-Outs from Stay Safe</li> <li>▪ Monitoring Arrangements for Stay Safe Implementation</li> <li>▪ Training for Stay Safe Implementation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Enactment Strategies                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Curriculum Transmission</li> <li>○ Curriculum Development</li> <li>○ Curriculum Making</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Stay Safe Topics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Curricular Commonality-Differentiation Continuum                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Expert Role of Special Schools</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ The Equity-Equality Conundrum                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Special Schools in the Era of Inclusion</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<b>PART B: Leading the Child Safeguarding Curriculum in Special Schools</b>			
<b>Leadership as a Shared or Distributed Process</b>	<b>Leadership Linked to Formal Management Roles</b>	<b>Leadership of Unpromoted Teachers</b>	<b>External Factors Influencing Leadership</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Control of Leadership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Role of Deputy Principal</li> <li>▪ Role of SPHE Coordinator</li> <li>▪ Role of ISM Team</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Leadership as Influence Through Expertise</li> <li>▪ Leadership as Advocacy</li> <li>▪ Leadership in the Classroom</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Considerations in enacting Stay Safe</li> <li>▪ Inspections and Paperwork</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX K

### *Phase 1: Anonymous Informed Consent Form*

**Working Title:** A Mixed Methods Study into the Enactment of the Curricular Component to Child Safeguarding in Special Schools

**University:** DCU Institute of Education – School of Inclusive and Special Education

**Principal Investigator:** Barry Morrissey

**Supervisors:** Dr Fiona King & Dr Seline Keating

Dear Principal,

#### **Purpose of Research**

This research explores practitioner perspectives of the implementation of the curricular component to the Child Protection Procedures (2017) in special schools in Ireland. It aims to establish how special schools enact the Stay Safe programme with their pupil cohort and to unpack the curricular approaches adopted at practitioner level. There is an explicit focus on exploring the role that leadership plays in this curricular process.

**Please confirm the below particulars:**

	<i>Yes / No</i>
<i>I have read the Plain Language Statement</i>	
<i>I understand the information provided in the Plain Language Statement</i>	
<i>I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study</i>	
<i>I understand the information provided in relation to data protection.</i>	
<i>I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions</i>	
<i>I understand that my submission of this questionnaire is anonymous and that when it is submitted it cannot be withdrawn from the dataset, as the researchers will not be able to distinguish between the questionnaire submitted by me and those submitted by other respondents.</i>	
<i>I have read and understand the arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations.</i>	
<i>I understand that data provided by me will be retained until 2022</i>	
<i>I have read and understand confirmations relating to any other relevant information, as indicated in the Plain Language Statement.</i>	
<i>I consent to participate in this research study.</i>	
<i>I understand that data from this study may be used in published scholarly articles</i>	

## APPENDIX L

### ***Phase 2: Board of Management Informed Consent Form (Online)***

**Working Title:** A Mixed Methods Study into the Enactment of the Curricular Component to Child Safeguarding in Special Schools

**University:** DCU Institute of Education – School of Inclusive and Special Education

**Principal Investigator:** Barry Morrissey

**Supervisors:** Dr Fiona King & Dr Seline Keating

Dear Principal and/or Chairperson

#### **Purpose of Research**

This research explores practitioner perspectives of the implementation of the curricular component to the Child Protection Procedures (2017) in special schools in Ireland. It aims to establish how special schools enact the Stay Safe programme with their pupil cohort and to unpack the curricular approaches adopted at practitioner level. There is an explicit focus on exploring the role that leadership plays in this curricular process.

**Please confirm the below particulars:**

	<i>Yes / No</i>
<i>I have read the Plain Language Statement</i>	
<i>I understand the information provided in the Plain Language Statement</i>	
<i>I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study</i>	
<i>I understand the information provided in relation to data protection.</i>	
<i>I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions</i>	
<i>I have read and understand the arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations</i>	
<i>I understand that data provided by the Board will be retained for three years</i>	
<i>I have read and understand confirmations relating to any other relevant information, as indicated in the Plain Language Statement</i>	
<i>I am aware that participation in this study is voluntary</i>	
<i>I understand that the Board can withdraw from the study at any time and that if it chooses to withdraw from the study, data collected from the Board will be destroyed immediately.</i>	
<i>I understand that data from this study may be used in published scholarly articles</i>	



**Advice as to arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations**

Confidentiality of information provided in this study will be protected (within the limitations of the law and GDPR regulations). To this end, pseudonyms will be used throughout the study and no information will be included in publications relating to the study that would obviously identify either the participants or the school.

It should be noted that neither the school nor the proposed participants are under any obligation to take part in this research. Participation is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the study at any time. Should the Board wish to withdraw it may do so by contacting the Principal Investigator at this [link](#). The SPHE policies provided by the Board will be stored on a DCU drive, and will only be accessed by a computer protected by encryption. Any information retained at the end of the research study will be archived securely in a locked filing cabinet for a period of up to three years following completion of the study. It may be used in subsequent scholarly publications and will then be destroyed.

*I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researcher, and therefore, I consent to take part in this research project.*

**In lieu of your signature, please type your name, role and date.**

## APPENDIX M

### *Phase 2: Principal Informed Consent Form (Online)*

**Working Title:** A Mixed Methods Study into the Enactment of the Curricular Component to Child Safeguarding in Special Schools

**University:** DCU Institute of Education – School of Inclusive and Special Education

**Principal Investigator:** Barry Morrissey

**Supervisors:** Dr Fiona King & Dr Seline Keating

#### **Purpose of Research**

This research explores practitioner perspectives of the implementation of the curricular component to the Child Protection Procedures (2017) in special schools in Ireland. It aims to establish how special schools enact the Stay Safe programme with their pupil cohort and to unpack the curricular approaches adopted at practitioner level. There is an explicit focus on exploring the role that leadership plays in this curricular process.

#### **Please confirm the below particulars:**

	<i>Yes / No</i>
<i>I have read the Plain Language Statement</i>	
<i>I understand the information provided in the Plain Language Statement</i>	
<i>I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study</i>	
<i>I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions</i>	
<i>I understand the information provided in relation to data protection.</i>	
<i>I am aware that my interview will be audio-recorded</i>	
<i>I have read and understand the arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations.</i>	
<i>I understand that data provided by me will be retained for three years.</i>	
<i>I have read and understand confirmations relating to any other relevant information, as indicated in the Plain Language Statement.</i>	
<i>I am aware that my participation in this research study is voluntary</i>	
<i>I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time and that if I choose to withdraw from the study, data collected from me will be destroyed immediately.</i>	
<i>I understand that data from this study may be used in published scholarly articles and conference papers.</i>	

**Advice as to arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations**

Confidentiality of information provided in this study will be protected (within the limitations of the law and GDPR regulations). To this end, pseudonyms will be used throughout the study and no information will be included in publications relating to the study that would obviously identify either the participants or the school.

It should be noted that neither the school nor the proposed participants are under any obligation to take part in this research. Participation is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the study at any time. Should you wish to withdraw you may do so by contacting the Principal Investigator at this [link](#). The interview transcript will be stored on a DCU drive, and will only be accessed by a computer protected by encryption. Any information retained at the end of the research study will be archived securely in a locked filing cabinet for a period of up to three years following completion of the study, may be used in subsequent scholarly publications and will then be destroyed.

*I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researcher, and therefore, I consent to take part in this research project.*

- Yes
- No

**In lieu of your signature, please type your name and date.**

## APPENDIX N

### ***Phase 2: SPHE Coordinator Informed Consent Form (Online)***

**Working Title:** A Mixed Methods Study into the Enactment of the Curricular Component to Child Safeguarding in Special Schools

**University:** DCU Institute of Education – School of Inclusive and Special Education

**Principal Investigator:** Barry Morrissey

**Supervisors:** Dr Fiona King & Dr Seline Keating

**Purpose of Research**

This research explores practitioner perspectives of the implementation of the curricular component to the Child Protection Procedures (2017) in special schools in Ireland. It aims to establish how special schools enact the Stay Safe programme with their pupil cohort and to unpack the curricular approaches adopted at practitioner level. There is an explicit focus on exploring the role that leadership plays in this curricular process.

**Please confirm the below particulars:**

	<b><i>Yes / No</i></b>
<i>I have read the Plain Language Statement</i>	
<i>I understand the information provided in the Plain Language Statement</i>	
<i>I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study</i>	
<i>I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions</i>	
<i>I understand the information provided in relation to data protection.</i>	
<i>I am aware that my interview will be audio-recorded</i>	
<i>I have read and understand the arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations.</i>	
<i>I understand that data provided by me will be retained for three years.</i>	
<i>I have read and understand confirmations relating to any other relevant information, as indicated in the Plain Language Statement.</i>	
<i>I am aware that my participation in this research study is voluntary</i>	
<i>I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time and that if I choose to withdraw from the study, data collected from me will be destroyed immediately.</i>	
<i>I understand that data from this study may be used in published scholarly articles and conference papers.</i>	

**Advice as to arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations**

Confidentiality of information provided in this study will be protected (within the limitations of the law and GDPR regulations). To this end, pseudonyms will be used throughout the study and no information will be included in publications relating to the study that would obviously identify either the participants or the school.

It should be noted that neither the school nor the proposed participants are under any obligation to take part in this research. Participation is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the study at any time. Should you wish to withdraw you may do so by contacting the Principal Investigator at this [link](#). The interview transcript will be stored on a DCU drive, and will only be accessed by a computer protected by encryption. Any information retained at the end of the research study will be archived securely in a locked filing cabinet for a period of up to three years following completion of the study, may be used in subsequent scholarly publications and will then be destroyed.

*I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researcher, and therefore, I consent to take part in this research project.*

- Yes
- No

**In lieu of your signature, please type your name and date.**

## APPENDIX O

### *Phase 2: Focus Group Informed Consent Form (Online)*

**Working Title:** A Mixed Methods Study into the Enactment of the Curricular Component to Child Safeguarding in Special Schools

**University:** DCU Institute of Education – School of Inclusive and Special Education

**Principal Investigator:** Barry Morrissey

**Supervisors:** Dr Fiona King & Dr Seline Keating

#### **Purpose of Research**

This research explores practitioner perspectives of the implementation of the curricular component to the Child Protection Procedures (2017) in special schools in Ireland. It aims to establish how special schools enact the Stay Safe programme with their pupil cohort and to unpack the curricular approaches adopted at practitioner level. There is an explicit focus on exploring the role that leadership plays in this curricular process.

**Please confirm the below particulars:**

	<i>Yes / No</i>
<i>I have read the Plain Language Statement</i>	
<i>I understand the information provided in the Plain Language Statement</i>	
<i>I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study</i>	
<i>I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions</i>	
<i>I am aware that my interview will be audio-recorded</i>	
<i>I have read and understand the arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations.</i>	
<i>I understand that data provided by me will be retained for three years.</i>	
<i>I have read and understand confirmations relating to any other relevant information, as indicated in the Plain Language Statement.</i>	
<i>I am aware that my participation in this research study is voluntary</i>	
<i>I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time and that if I choose to withdraw from the study, data collected from me will be destroyed immediately.</i>	
<i>I understand that data from this study may be used in published scholarly articles and conference papers.</i>	

**Advice as to arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations**

Confidentiality of information provided in this study will be protected (within the limitations of the law and GDPR regulations). To this end, pseudonyms will be used throughout the study and no information will be included in publications relating to the study that would obviously identify either the participants or the school.

It should be noted that neither the school nor the proposed participants are under any obligation to take part in this research. Participation is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the study at any time. Should you wish to withdraw you may do so by contacting the Principal Investigator at this [link](#). The interview transcript will be stored on a DCU drive, and will only be accessed by a computer protected by encryption. Any information retained at the end of the research study will be archived securely in a locked filing cabinet at the primary investigator's home for a period of up to three years following completion of the study, may be used in subsequent scholarly publications and will then be destroyed.

*I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researcher, and therefore, I consent to take part in this research project.*

- Yes
- No

**In lieu of your signature, please type your name and date.**

## APPENDIX P

### *Phase 1: Questionnaire Plain Language Statement (Online)*

**Working Title:** A Mixed Methods Study into the Enactment of the Curricular Component to Child Safeguarding in Special Schools

**University:** DCU Institute of Education – School of Inclusive and Special Education

**Principal Investigator:** Barry Morrissey

**Supervisors:** Dr Fiona King & Dr Seline Keating

Dear Principal,

#### **Introduction to Research Study**

This research explores practitioner perspectives on the implementation of the curricular component to the *Child Protection Procedures (2017)* in special schools in Ireland. *Stay Safe* is the mandatory child safeguarding curricular programme for every primary school in the state, including special schools. This study seeks to explore how special schools enact the programme with their pupil cohort. It aims to unpack the curricular approaches adopted at practitioner level and explore the role that leadership plays in this curricular process.

#### **Details for Participants**

For this phase of the study, participants are invited to anonymously complete the following questionnaire exploring the curricular component to child safeguarding (*Stay Safe*) in special schools. This questionnaire takes less than 10 minutes to complete.

#### **Confidentiality and Data Privacy**

All necessary precautions will be taken to preserve the confidentiality of research participants. Confidentiality of information can only be protected within the limitations of the law - i.e., it is possible for data to be subject to subpoena, freedom of information claim or mandated reporting by some professions. This questionnaire is anonymous and no personal data is being collected in it. Anonymous data gathered in this questionnaire will be stored on a DCU Drive, will only be accessed using a password-protected, encrypted computer and will be destroyed after three years.

#### **Voluntary Participation**

Participation in this research study overall is voluntary and participants may withdraw at any point. However, the data collected from respondents to the questionnaire cannot be removed from the data set once submitted, because the questionnaire is anonymous and the researchers cannot associate returned questionnaires with particular respondents.

#### **Other relevant information**

There are no known potential risks to participants from involvement in the Research Study. This research has many benefits, both for participants and the wider community of teachers involved in special education. Research participants will get to reflect on their



practice in this important area and encourage dialogue in their schools about optimising the common curriculum. The wider community of special educators will benefit from the array of curricular approaches that this research will highlight, to increase accessibility to the curriculum for a marginalised group of learners.

**If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:**

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000, e-mail [rec@dcu.ie](mailto:rec@dcu.ie).

Thank you for your co-operation.

Yours faithfully,

Barry Morrissey

## APPENDIX Q

### ***Phase 2: Board of Management Plain Language Statement (Online)***

**Working Title:** A Mixed Methods Study into the Enactment of the Curricular Component to Child Safeguarding in Special Schools

**University:** DCU Institute of Education – School of Inclusive and Special Education

**Principal Investigator:** Barry Morrissey

**Supervisors:** Dr Fiona King & Dr Seline Keating

Dear Principal and/or Chairperson,

#### **Introduction to Research Study**

This research explores practitioner perspectives on the implementation of the curricular component to the *Child Protection Procedures* (2017) in special schools in Ireland. *Stay Safe* is the mandatory child safeguarding curricular programme for every primary school in the state, including special schools. This study seeks to explore how special schools enact the programme with their pupil cohort. It aims to unpack the curricular approaches adopted at practitioner level and explore the role that leadership plays in this curricular process.

#### **Details for Participants**

For this phase of the research, schools are invited to share their SPHE policies to aid in the undertaking of the case study exploring the enactment of the curricular component to child safeguarding (*Stay Safe*) in their schools. The SPHE policy will be the subject of documentary analysis using NVivo and will help inform the interviews undertaken with teachers, SPHE coordinators and principals in the schools.

#### **Confidentiality and Data Privacy/Retention**

All necessary precautions will be taken to preserve confidentiality of the school. The school will be provided with a pseudonym. It should be noted, however, that confidentiality of information can only be protected within the limitations of the law - i.e., it is possible for data to be subject to subpoena, freedom of information claim or mandated reporting by some professions. Data gathered from SPHE policies will be stored on a DCU Drive, will only be accessed using a password-protected, encrypted computer and will be destroyed after three years.

#### **Voluntary Participation**

Participation in this research study is voluntary and the school may withdraw at any point. For schools that withdraw, participation in the project will end at the point they withdraw, and data collected from them will immediately be destroyed.

#### **Other relevant information**

There are no known potential risks to schools from involvement in the research study. This research has many benefits, both for schools and the wider community of teachers involved in special education. Teachers in schools will get to reflect on their practice in this important area and encourage dialogue among colleagues about optimising the common curriculum in this area. The wider community of special educators will benefit from the array of curricular approaches that this research will highlight, to increase accessibility to the curriculum for a marginalised group of learners.

**If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person,**

**please contact:**

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000, e-mail [rec@dcu.ie](mailto:rec@dcu.ie) .

Thank you for your co-operation.

Yours faithfully,

Barry Morrissey

## APPENDIX R

### *Phase 2: Principal Plain Language Statement (Online)*

**Working Title:** A Mixed Methods Study into the Enactment of the Curricular Component to Child Safeguarding in Special Schools

**University:** DCU Institute of Education – School of Inclusive and Special Education

**Principal Investigator:** Barry Morrissey

**Supervisors:** Dr Fiona King & Dr Seline Keating

Dear Principal,

#### **Introduction to Research Study**

This research explores practitioner perspectives on the implementation of the curricular component to the *Child Protection Procedures (2017)* in special schools in Ireland. *Stay Safe* is the mandatory child safeguarding curricular programme for every primary school in the state, including special schools. This study seeks to explore how special schools enact the programme with their pupil cohort. It aims to unpack the curricular approaches adopted at practitioner level and explore the role that leadership plays in this curricular process.

#### **Details for Participants**

For this phase of the study, principals are invited to share their views (via online interview) on the enactment of the curricular component to child safeguarding (*Stay Safe*) in their schools. These interviews will take place over Zoom, will be audio-recorded only (no video) and will be approximately 1 hour in duration. The role of leadership (at various different levels) in curricular enactment will be a particular focus of the interviews.

#### **Confidentiality and Data Privacy/Retention**

All necessary precautions will be taken to preserve the confidentiality of research participants. Pseudonyms will be used for interviewees and their schools. All identifying information will be removed from interview transcripts. It should be noted, however, that confidentiality of information can only be protected within the limitations of the law - i.e., it is possible for data to be subject to subpoena, freedom of information claim or mandated reporting by some professions. Data gathered from interviews will be stored on a DCU Drive, will only be accessed using a password-protected, encrypted computer and will be destroyed after three years.

#### **Voluntary Participation**

Participation in this research study is voluntary and participants may withdraw at any point. For interviewees that withdraw, participation in the project will end at the point they withdraw, and data collected from them will immediately be destroyed.

#### **Other relevant information**

There are no known potential risks to participants from involvement in the research study. This research has many benefits, both for participants and the wider community of teachers involved in special education. Interviewees will get to reflect on their practice in this important area and encourage dialogue in their schools about optimising the common curriculum. The wider community of special educators will benefit from the array of curricular approaches that this research will highlight, to increase accessibility to the curriculum for a marginalised group of learners.

**If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person,**

**please contact:**

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000, e-mail [rec@dcu.ie](mailto:rec@dcu.ie) .

Thank you for your co-operation.

Yours faithfully,

Barry Morrissey

## APPENDIX S

### ***Phase 2: SPHE Coordinator Plain Language Statement (Online)***

**Working Title:** A Mixed Methods Study into the Enactment of the Curricular Component to Child Safeguarding in Special Schools

**University:** DCU Institute of Education – School of Inclusive and Special Education

**Principal Investigator:** Barry Morrissey

**Supervisors:** Dr Fiona King & Dr Seline Keating

Dear SPHE / Wellbeing Coordinator,

#### **Introduction to Research Study**

This research explores practitioner perspectives on the implementation of the curricular component to the *Child Protection Procedures (2017)* in special schools in Ireland. *Stay Safe* is the mandatory child safeguarding curricular programme for every primary school in the state, including special schools. This study seeks to explore how special schools enact the programme with their pupil cohort. It aims to unpack the curricular approaches adopted at practitioner level and explore the role that leadership plays in this curricular process.

#### **Details for Participants**

For this phase of the study, SPHE / Wellbeing Coordinators are invited to share their views (via online interview) on the enactment of the curricular component to child safeguarding (*Stay Safe*) in their schools. These interviews will take place over Zoom, will be audio-recorded only (no video) and will be approximately 1 hour in duration. The role of leadership (at various different levels) in curricular enactment will be a particular focus of the interviews.

#### **Confidentiality and Data Privacy/Retention**

All necessary precautions will be taken to preserve the confidentiality of research participants. Pseudonyms will be used for interviewees and their schools. All identifying information will be removed from interview transcripts. It should be noted, however, that confidentiality of information can only be protected within the limitations of the law - i.e., it is possible for data to be subject to subpoena, freedom of information claim or mandated reporting by some professions. Data gathered from interviews will be stored on a DCU Drive, will only be accessed using a password-protected, encrypted computer and will be destroyed after three years.

#### **Voluntary Participation**

Participation in this research study is voluntary and participants may withdraw at any point. For interviewees that withdraw, participation in the project will end at the point they withdraw, and data collected from them will immediately be destroyed.

#### **Other relevant information**

There are no known potential risks to participants from involvement in the research study. This research has many benefits, both for participants and the wider community of teachers involved in special education. Interviewees will get to reflect on their practice in this important area and encourage dialogue in their schools about optimising the common curriculum. The wider community of special educators will benefit from the array of curricular approaches that this research will highlight, to increase accessibility to the curriculum for a marginalised group of learners.

**If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person,**

**please contact:**

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000, e-mail [rec@dcu.ie](mailto:rec@dcu.ie) .

Thank you for your co-operation.

Yours faithfully,

Barry Morrissey

## APPENDIX T

### ***Phase 2: Teacher Focus Group Plain Language Statement (Online)***

**Working Title:** A Mixed Methods Study into the Enactment of the Curricular Component to Child Safeguarding in Special Schools

**University:** DCU Institute of Education – School of Inclusive and Special Education

**Principal Investigator:** Barry Morrissey

**Supervisors:** Dr Fiona King & Dr Seline Keating

Dear Teacher,

#### **Introduction to Research Study**

This research explores practitioner perspectives on the implementation of the curricular component to the *Child Protection Procedures (2017)* in special schools in Ireland. *Stay Safe* is the mandatory child safeguarding curricular programme for every primary school in the state, including special schools. This study seeks to explore how special schools enact the programme with their pupil cohort. It aims to unpack the curricular approaches adopted at practitioner level and explore the role that leadership plays in this curricular process.

#### **Details for Participants**

For this phase of the study, teachers are invited to share their views on the enactment of the curricular component to child safeguarding (*Stay Safe*) in their schools, as part of a focus group interview. These focus group interviews will take place over Zoom, will be audio-recorded only (no video) and will be approximately 90 minutes in duration. The role of leadership (at various different levels) in curricular enactment will be a particular focus of the focus group interviews.

#### **Confidentiality and Data Privacy/Retention**

All necessary precautions will be taken to preserve the confidentiality of focus group participants. Pseudonyms will be used for participants and their school. All identifying information will be removed from interview transcripts. While teachers will be asked to keep information shared by others in the focus group confidential, the researcher cannot guarantee that they will ultimately accede to this. It should be noted that confidentiality of information can only be protected within the limitations of the law - i.e., it is possible for data to be subject to subpoena, freedom of information claim or mandated reporting by some professions. Data gathered from interviews will be stored on a DCU Drive, will only be accessed using a password-protected, encrypted computer and will be destroyed after three years.

#### **Voluntary Participation**

Participation in this research study is voluntary and participants may withdraw at any point. For focus group participants that withdraw, participation in the project will end at the point they withdraw, and data collected from them will immediately be destroyed.



**Other relevant information**

There are no known potential risks to participants from involvement in the research study. This research has many benefits, both for participants and the wider community of teachers involved in special education. Focus group participants will get to reflect on their practice in this important area in a collaborative context, which may stimulate dialogue in their schools about optimising the common curriculum in this area. The wider community of special educators will benefit from the array of curricular approaches that this research will highlight, to increase accessibility to the curriculum for a marginalised group of learners.

**If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:**

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000, e-mail [rec@dcu.ie](mailto:rec@dcu.ie) .

Thank you for your co-operation.

Yours faithfully,

Barry Morrissey