

Putting Children First: A Case Study Exploring the Perspectives on Child Protection and Safeguarding in Thirteen North Dublin Primary Schools

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Declaration page

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.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kate Shanahan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end of the name.

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Explanation
1GAT	First Generation Activity Theory
2GAT	Second Generation Activity Theory
3GAT	Third Generation Activity Theory
4GAT	Fourth Generation Activity Theory
ACE	Adverse Childhood Experience
BOM	Board of Management
CHAT	Cultural Historical Activity Theory
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CPP	Child Protection Procedures
CPS	Child Protection and Safeguarding
CPSMA	Catholic Primary School Management Association
CPSIs	Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES	Department of Education and Skills/Science
DDLp	Deputy Designated Liaison Person
DLP	Designated Liaison Person
DOE	Department of Education
DOHC	Department of Health and Children
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
HSE	Health Service Executive
INTO	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
IPPn	Irish Primary Principals' Network
PDST	Professional Development Service for Teachers
SPHE	Social Personal and Health Education
UK	United Kingdom
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

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Abstract

Kate Shanahan

Putting Children First: A Case Study Exploring the Perspectives on Child Protection and Safeguarding in Thirteen North Dublin Primary Schools

Given the length of time children spend in school and opportunities to observe them there, literature on child protection universally allocates a crucial role to schools (Gilligan, 1998; Laskey, 2008; Buckley & McGarry, 2011; Walsh et al., 2011; Nohilly, 2019b; Treacy & Nohilly, 2020). In Ireland, this view has been further emphasised by the multitude of high profile reports, inquiries and cases that investigated child abuse and questioned the responsibility of schools with respect to child protection and safeguarding (CPS). In response to the culmination of such discourse, the expectations placed on schools and school personnel for CPS expanded very significantly in 2017 when the *Children First Act 2015* was enacted. Together with its auxiliary policies and procedures, this legislative change has positioned schools and school personnel as being at the fulcrum of CPS work. Despite this, there is no national research to reveal the perspectives of school communities towards their CPS responsibilities or to reveal what, in their view, are the factors that enhance and impede schools' capacity to protect and safeguard children. This study addresses this gap in the literature. Using a mixed-methods but primarily qualitative case study, the researcher sought the views of principals, chairpersons and teachers during three phases of data collection using questionnaire and focus group methodology.

From the participants' perspective, this study identifies the factors that enhance and impede schools' capacity to protect and safeguard children. These findings underscore the efficacy of the 'Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017' (Department of Education and Skills, 2017a) and the introduction of Mandatory Reporting as factors that have enhanced the safety and protection of children. Conversely, this research identifies a range of factors which, according to participants, limit schools' capacity to protect children from harm. These factors, which are categorised by the researcher into micro, meso and macro-level impediments, include: issues applying the 'Threshold of Harm' principle; the influence of fear on CPS action; the relationship between socio-economic factors and risk posed to children; the bureaucratisation of CPS work; as well as issues relating to children's services and the Child and Family Agency, Tusla. In addition, the researcher, after reflecting on the findings of this study and considering them in relation to their context, history and the relevant literature, problematises another issue. That is, the pervasiveness of an adult-centric orientation of CPS practice whereby the needs of the individual 'being' child become a peripheral and secondary goal within the school's CPS system.

Chapter One: Introduction

The Context of the Study

In the Irish educational system, the area of child protection is determined by legislation—the *Children First Act, 2015* which sets out the specific child protection statutory obligations imposed on certain categories of persons who now have mandated responsibility to report child protection concerns over a certain ‘threshold’ to the Child and Family Agency, Tusla. In line with this legislation, statutory guidelines offered through ‘*Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children*’ (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2017) and the ‘*Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*’ (Department of Education and Skills, 2017) clearly delineate the expectations placed on schools and school personnel for Child Protection and Safeguarding.

According to Whelan (2018), the main elements of the *Children First Act, 2015* are aimed at raising awareness of child abuse and neglect; providing for the mandatory reporting of child abuse by key professionals; improving child protection arrangements in organisations providing services to children and providing for inter-agency working and information-sharing in relation to assessments by Tusla. In line with these aims, the *Act* places certain statutory obligations on certain professionals (including teachers and hence, principals) and upon particular institutions (including schools) regarding CPS. Under the *Children First Act*, all teachers (and hence, principals) registered with the Teaching Council of Ireland are considered ‘mandated persons’. These persons, who are defined as those who have contact with children and/or families and who, because of their qualification, training and/or employment role, are in a key position to help protect children from harm, have two main legal obligations under the *Children First Act*. First, to report the ‘harm’ of children when it is judged to be ‘at or above’ a defined ‘Threshold of Harm’, and second, to assist Tusla, if requested, in assessing a concern that has been the subject of a mandated report (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2017).

Mandatory reporting of child abuse is the law in a large number of nations, but not in the majority of nations worldwide (Matthews, 2015). Three early adopters of mandatory reporting laws include the USA, Canada and Australia. In all three of these countries, while mandatory legislation is provided by way of national legislation, jurisdictions within the countries have their own sets of policies, procedures and response activities. Nevertheless, teachers are subject to mandatory reporting laws in all three of these countries and grounds for reporting in these countries, like in Ireland, are usually worded as “belief ” or “reasonable belief ” of a child’s need for protection, “information or suspicion of abuse or neglect” or “knowledge of or probable cause to suspect” that a child has been abandoned or abused. Moreover, in all three countries, legal penalties, including fines and prison terms, exist for mandatory reporters who fail to report the suspected or known abuse of children (Matthews, 2015).

Across the United Kingdom, there is no current legal requirement for those working with children (e.g., educational staff) to report known or suspected child abuse or neglect. Instead, there exists statutory guidance operating across Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England (HM Government, 2018). This states that “anyone who has concerns about a child’s welfare should make a referral to local authority children’s social care and should do so immediately if there is a concern that the child is suffering significant harm or is likely to do so” (pg. 15). Moreover, while this statutory guidance does not impose an absolute legal requirement to comply, a number of professional regulators and bodies, (such as those in the health care, education and social care sector) require their members to report any concerns about a child’s safety or well-being. Consequently, a professional’s failure to adhere to such standards or codes of conduct may result in misconduct or fitness to practise proceedings against them.

In 2012, the draft *Heads of Child First Bill* (Government of Ireland, 2012) set out the Irish Government’s intentions regarding the introduction of mandatory reporting legislation and its remit. Buckely and Buckley (2015) describe the provisions in this document as being ‘extremely broad’, with proposals that this

legislation apply to a wide range of institutions and individuals that provide a service to children. Moreover, it was proposed that there be a penalty of up to five years imprisonment for those who failed in respect of their child protection reporting duty. Following the publication of this document, several organisations submitted their concerns about the breadth and sanctions associated with these proposals, which led to a considerably watered-down version of the initial proposals (Buckely & Buckley, 2015). For example, the number of services to be included was reduced and the sanctions section was deleted. Consequently, following enactment in 2017, the *Children's First Act, 2015*, does not impose criminal sanctions on mandated persons who fail to make a report to Tusla. However, if after an investigation it emerges that a mandated person (e.g., a teacher or principal) did not make a mandated report and a child was subsequently left at risk or harmed, Tusla can make a complaint about this person to the Teaching Council of Ireland or pass information about their failure to make a report to the National Vetting Bureau of An Garda Síochána.

When considering Ireland's position on mandatory reporting alongside the countries referenced, one may surmise that uncertainty and perhaps reluctance exists to commit fully to statutory child protection provision, as is evident in other nations. Although Ireland has placed child protection on a statutory footing like the USA, Canada and Australia, it has not followed their lead by outlining clear penalties for failure to comply with such legislation. Rather, similar to Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland and England, sanctions imposed in Ireland relate mostly to the potential downfall one may experience if a current or future employer finds out that one has failed to report the harm of children to the relevant agencies. Nevertheless, the enactment of *Children First, 2015*, along with the introduction of auxiliary policies and procedures, has positioned schools and school personnel as being at the fulcrum of CPS work in Ireland. With its enactment, teachers, principals and schools are now required, by law, to take account of their statutory child protection responsibilities. Despite this, there is no national research to reveal the perspectives of school communities concerning

their CPS responsibilities or to reveal what, in their view, are the factors that are enhancing and impeding their schools' capacity to protect and safeguard children.

As will be discussed in Chapter Two, the specifications articulated within this *Act* were undoubtedly influenced by national discourse highlighting the inefficacy of the national child protection system and which remarked explicitly on the role played by the Department of Education, schools and by school personnel in CPS. Hence, the recent statutory and non-statutory requirements set out for schools and school personnel (Government of Ireland, 2015; Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2017; Department of Education and Skills, 2017a; 2019b) could be viewed as an attempt to reduce the disparity between the requirements expected of schools and school personnel in CPS and practice on the ground. However, some have questioned the projected efficacy of this compliance strategy (Buckley & R. Buckley, 2015; Whelan, 2018; Treacy & Nohilly, 2020), suggesting that failures in respect to one's CPS duties need to be considered in relation to the factors that make CPS work 'complex and unwieldy' (Buckley & R. Buckley, 2015). Moreover, these factors appear to be enduring deterrents even in other jurisdictions with similar CPS legislation (Kenny, 2001; Laskey, 2008; Skivenes et al., 2011; Baginsky, 2008; Matthews, 2015).

Within research relevant to CPS a common consensus exists. That is, the understanding that protecting children and keeping them safe from harm is not as simple as one might first assume (Skivenes et al., 2011; Baginsky, 2008; Ferguson, 2012; R. Buckley, 2015; Matthews, 2015; Richards, 2018; Whelan, 2018; Nohilly, 2018). Rather, the decisions and behaviours of those who are expected to uphold legal and/or ethical CPS responsibilities are influenced by a myriad of factors that, in turn, impact the ways in which CPS concerns are responded to (Kenny, 2001; Bunting, Lazenbatt & Wallace, 2009, Bourke & Maunsell, 2016; Richards, 2018). Considering these perspectives alongside the goal set out in *Children First Act*, which is to make further and better provisions for the care and protection of children, it is in the best interests of children to explore the efficacy of current arrangements for CPS in primary schools. This research addresses this necessity,

in part, through a mixed-methods case study conducted with thirty-six participants across thirteen school communities in North Dublin. Together and individually, these participants answered the following three research questions that necessitate consideration to make further and better provision for the care and protection of children in Ireland:

Primary Research Question (PRQ): What are the perspectives of principals, chairpersons and teachers toward child protection and safeguarding?

Secondary Research Question One (SRQ1): According to the participants, what factors enhance schools' capacity to protect and safeguard children?

Secondary Research Question Two (SRQ2): According to the participants, what factors impede schools' capacity to protect and safeguard children?

Synopsis of the Research Findings

The responses to PRQ highlight the complexities of CPS, as understood from the distinct perspective of principals, chairpersons and teachers. For instance, broad themes relevant to the principal cohort revealed principals' varied experiences of being a principal and a Designated Liaison Person (DLP) for child protection. In line with national (e.g., Nohilly and Treacy, 2022) and international literature (e.g., Richards, 2018), it appears that particular aspects of this role, such as being responsible for liaising with external CPS agencies are very challenging. With respect to the chairpersons' perspectives, data analysis revealed a view that the CPS system has been strengthened since the enactment of *Children First, 2015*. Nevertheless, several chairpersons in this study still identified a need for additional school training for CPS, which is a theme relevant across CPS international literature relevant to schools (Crenshaw et al. 1995; Baginsky, 2008; Laskey, 2008; Bunting et al. 2009; Bryce, 2018; Frost, 2020). In relation to the teacher cohort, broad themes revealed the challenges associated with caring for vulnerable children and highlighted the emotionality of CPS work in schools, which is a theme that has been identified across national and international literature (e.g., Baginsky, 2008; Fletcher-Campbell, 2008; Treacy & Nohilly, 2020; Nohilly & Treacy, 2022; Frost, 2020). In addition, responses to PRQ revealed the variance

with which individual participants construct the aims of CPS and how one's role shapes this construction. For instance, it appears that teachers construct the aim of CPS in relation to their care role as it relates to specific children, whereas this is not the case for chairpersons who tend to construct the aim more objectively, relating it to the need to 'oversee' and 'check' for the sake of children in a plural sense. For principals, it seems that they must bear the burden of both perspectives, thinking of the aim of CPS in both general and specific terms.

The responses to SRQ1 reveal a broad consensus that two significant factors have enhanced schools' capacity to protect and safeguard children in recent years. These are, the efficacy of the current '*Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017*' (Department of Education and Skills, 2017) (Hereafter, the CPP) and the introduction of Mandated Reporting in 2017 (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2017). First, many participants believe that the CPP document offers clear directives of what CPS actions are necessary and in which situations. Second, many participants think that the introduction of Mandated Reporting in 2017 removed some of the complexities associated with reporting CPS concerns.

The responses to SRQ2 revealed one of the most significant findings of this research study. That is, a view that protecting some children from harm is a challenging task due to a multitude of interrelated factors including: difficulty interpreting the 'Threshold of Harm' principle (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2017), the influence of fear on reporting and disclosure behaviour; the significance of socio-economic factors that may place children at increased risk of being harmed; the bureaucratisation of CPS work; and the perceived limited capacity of wider systems involved in CPS work. From the participants' point of view, this research considers the impact of these factors on schools' capacity to protect and safeguard children and highlights how wider system issues, such as Tusla's own capacity to respond to CPS issues, directly limit schools' capacity to protect children from harm.

The researcher, after reflecting on the findings relating to the PRQ, SRQ1 and SRQ2, and considering them in relation to their context, history and the relevant literature, problematises another issue. That is, the pervasiveness of an adult-centric orientation of CPS practice that is oriented toward society's CPS responsibilities and conceptualises children in a general sense. Accordingly, this study necessitates a refocusing of CPS objects in order to prioritise the specific, singular child and consider this human being in reference to his/her immediate needs, realities and context. Hence, rather than asking what 'I' must do in reference to this child, focus instead is oriented toward how this child's immediate needs are being met and by whom or what structures.

The Structure of this Thesis

Chapter One sets the context for this study and explains why this research is both necessary and timely. The research questions are provided, and the primary findings that emerged in response to these questions are outlined. Following this, a definition of key terms is provided and the structure of this thesis is detailed.

Chapter Two reflects on the philosophical view on the child and acknowledges the significance of children's rights, as related to this research study. After this, the chapter considers the influence of historical reports, inquiries and cases investigating child abuse on the current legal framework for CPS and then outlines the existing CPS requirements placed on schools and school personnel. Next, the training that has been made available to principals/Designated Liaison Persons (DLPs), chairpersons and teachers for their CPS role is considered before identifying what is known about them from the relevant literature base. The importance of caring practices in schools is then emphasised, and the chapter concludes by providing a rationale for this research study.

Chapter Three explicates and defends the decision to apply Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) as an appropriate theoretical framework for this

research study. Using this theoretical framework in tandem with the perspectives offered by the participants, this chapter outlines how it was possible to detect where specific tensions within schools' CPS systems may be precluding the aims of CPS.

Chapter Four begins by explicating the philosophical assumptions underlying this research study. It then describes the research paradigm within which this study is located and defends the mixed-methods case study design to seek the research aims. The sampling procedure is outlined, and the participant profiles are detailed. The data collection tools are then described before the processes utilised to maximise validity and generalisability are explained. The piloting phase is detailed and ethical considerations relevant to this research are debated. Finally, an outline of the data analysis concludes the chapter.

Chapter Five reports on the findings that emerged during the three phases of data collection. This chapter provides an overview of the quantitative findings and considers these findings in relation to two distinct hypotheses that were tested using SPSS¹. Following this, the findings and themes that emerged in relation to PRQ, SRQ1 and SRQ2 are presented.

Chapter Six discusses the findings in relation to the key literature identified in Chapter Two. This discussion is framed within the theoretical framework guiding this research and hence, the terminology and constructs of CHAT are used to help reveal tensions within schools' CPS systems.

Chapter Seven concludes this thesis. It starts by reflecting on the focus and research aims of this case study. Following this, the limitations of this research are outlined and a summary of the research approach is provided. The researcher then outlines her view on this study's contribution to the literature base relevant to

¹ SPSS is a program used for statistical analysis.

CPS. Suggestions for future research and key considerations for stakeholders involved in CPS are then proffered before this thesis is concluded.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Introduction to Chapter

Given the length of time children spend in school and opportunities to observe them there, international literature on child protection universally allocates a crucial role to schools and teachers (Gilligan, 1996, 1998; Laskey, 2008; Buckley and McGarry, 2010, 2011; Walsh *et al.*, 2011; Nohilly, 2019b; Treacy and Nohilly, 2020). In Ireland, this view has been further highlighted by several high profile reports, inquiries and cases investigating child abuse and questioning the function of schools in protecting children and keeping them safe (e.g. McGuinness, 1993; Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs [OMCYA], 2009; Gibbons *et al.*, 2010; European Court of Human Rights, 2014). The culmination of such national discourses alongside a wider global movement across English-speaking countries of reshaping children's services, including that of child protection (Buckley, 2009), saw the expectations placed on teachers and schools expand very significantly in 2017 with the enactment of the *Children First Act, 2015* (Government of Ireland, 2015).

The *Children First Act 2015* places certain statutory obligations on certain professionals (including teachers and principals) and upon particular institutions (including schools) in relation to Child Protection and Safeguarding (CPS). In addition to these statutory requirements, schools are also required to take account of numerous new, non-statutory, requirements in respect to CPS (Department of Education and Skills, 2017a; 2017b; 2019a), including a new model of school inspection called Child Protection Safeguarding Inspections (CPSI) that focuses on school compliance with key aspects of the child protection "in an in-depth way" (Department of Education and Skills, 2019, p.2). Consequently, the legislative and policy landscape regarding CPS in schools has changed very dramatically in recent years. Despite this, little attention has been paid to the specific and crucial role schools play in CPS (Richards, 2018), and as of yet, there is no national research to reveal the perspectives of school communities with

respect to their CPS roles and responsibilities. Consequently, this study is both timely and necessary.

The Structure of this Chapter

Before reviewing the literature, this chapter identifies the philosophical view of the child and considers the distinct rights of children most pertinent to this research. Following this, the terms ‘child protection’, ‘child abuse’ and ‘safeguarding’, as used in this study, are explicated. After this, the chapter is divided into three sections. The first section traces the historical context of current child protection requirements. This discussion, which begins in 1991 with the enactment of the *Child Care Act* (Government of Ireland, 1991) considers the influence of high-profile reports, inquiries, and court cases on the current legislative framework for CPS. This discussion follows with a description of this legislative framework. The second section of this chapter outlines the roles and responsibilities of key school personnel² in CPS. Consideration is given first to the unique role each of these individuals plays in the pursuit to protect children and safeguard them from harm. Following this, the training that is made available to these personnel for their distinct role in CPS is considered, before identifying what is known about them from the relevant literature base. Finally, the third section underscores the importance of caring practices in schools before acknowledging the influence of wider educational trends on the affective domain of care.

Conceptions of the Child: ‘Being’, ‘Becoming’ or Both?

Conceptions of children as ‘becoming’, rather than of ‘being’, have more frequently dominated historical discourses on children and childhood (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998; White, 2002; James & James, 2004; Jenks, 2005). These discourses conceptualise children as ‘adults in the making’, lacking the universal skills and features of the ‘adult’ they will become. The child is perceived as progressing from a state of vulnerability to sophistication, from an earlier lack of skills to possession of abilities (Richards, 2018). Borne out from this conception is

² In this research, the term ‘key school personnel’ is used when referring to chairpersons of Primary School Boards of Management (BOMs), primary school principals and teachers.

a view of children as incompetent and incomplete, inspiring interest not so much for what they are intrinsically but for the sake of the adults they will become (White, 2002). This future-orientated conception of the child has been criticised for understating the existent significance of the child and childhood by focusing on what the child *will be*. As put by Rousseau, “nature wants children to be children before they are men” (1762, p.258) and future-orientated perspectives of the child fail to recognise the present day competencies of children (Archard, 2015) or to acknowledge the everyday realities of being a child (White, 2002).

These everyday realities of being a child are acknowledged in discourses that conceptualise the ‘being’ child (James et al., 1998). These perspectives stand in opposition to the construction of the ‘becoming’ child in almost every way (Uprichard, 2008) by viewing children as social actors in their own right, who have views and experiences about being a child and who are actively constructing their own ‘childhood’ (White, 2002). From this perspective, conceptions of the child do not have to be approached from an assumed shortfall of competence, reason or significance (James et al., 1998). However, as if earlier criticisms of the ‘becoming’ child were being mirrored, conceptions of the ‘being’ child have been criticised for neglecting the future experiences of becoming adult because, while focusing on the ‘being’ child, the temporality of the ‘becoming’ child has for the most part been lost (Uprichard, 2008).

This research is underpinned by a perspective that necessitates the viewing of the child as simultaneously ‘being’ and ‘becoming’. While there are unresolved tensions between the two perspectives, they can provide a framework that allows for a consideration of the child across past, present and future timescapes (Uprichard, 2008). This perspective acknowledges the vulnerability of children and their need for protection while also recognising that each child has his/her voice, experiences, reality and agency. Considering the scope and aims of this research, assuming this hybrid conception of the child as ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ is deemed both useful and necessary for two reasons. The first and most crucial is, because child abuse has potential immediate and long-term- effects on abused children

(Buckingham and Daniolos, 2013), any exploration of this area necessitates a view of the child as 'being' and of 'becoming'. Children who have been the victim of child abuse can experience a variety of negative feelings such as isolation, fear and distrust (Gilligan, 1998). Moreover, those who have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) can suffer lifelong social, emotional and behavioural consequences (Frost, 2020).

The second factor necessitating the conception of the child as 'being' and of 'becoming' relates to the positioning of CPS discourse. As this research will discuss, historical events and discourses have not only shaped the current objectives sought for CPS, they have influenced the laws, policies and procedures created in pursuit of these objectives which regulate and direct future practices for CPS. Hence, the dimensions past, present and future, and of children as 'being' and of 'becoming' are inherently linked to any discussion around CPS. However, it should be noted that the focus of CPS discourses is most often located at either end of the past/future continuum. This highlights the historical failings of the retrospective 'being' child through accounts given by individuals who have 'become' hurt adults. In turn, the accounts shared by these individuals create a future-oriented discourse pointing toward what needs to be done to better protect children from harm in future. While such Janus-faced perspectives are necessary and important, so are realities of the 'being' child within today's society. Nonetheless, this perspective is largely absent from the relevant literature. This research aims to address this in part. While the voices of children will not feature in this research, those charged with legal, professional and ethical duties concerning CPS will offer their perspective on how current arrangements for CPS are serving the needs and shaping the lived experiences of children in their school communities.

Children's Right to Protection and Education

When reviewing the conception of the child it is almost certain that one will be drawn into the literature relevant to children's rights and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), as these fields of

literature are necessarily intertwined. For example, White (2002) maintains that the UNCRC not only brings together conceptions of the 'being' and the 'becoming' but necessitates the simultaneous existence of these concepts. The UNCRC provides a common framework for all governments, organisations and professionals working in, or associated with, child protection (Gray, 2015) and hence, is recognised as the "most important international instrument" on the treatment of children (Kilkelly, 2012a, p. 30). Since the proclamation of the Rights of the Child through the UNCRC in 1989, children have become conceptualised more widely as *subjects* with rights of their own rather than as *objects* in need of protection (Zermatten, 2010, emphasis added). This changed philosophical orientation recognises children as rights holders and provides them with individual rights (Sandberg, 2018). However, given their standing in society, children are very often unable to assert their own rights, meaning someone other than the child usually has to implement or advocate for the fulfilment of these rights (Hunt Federle, 2000; Peterson-Badali *et al.*, 2004; Cherney and Shing, 2008 as cited in Bourke, Morris & Maunsell, 2020).

Children's rights under the UNCRC are commonly divided into protection rights, provision rights and participation rights, and many provisions are directly relevant to child protection and/or education (Kilkelly, 2012a). However, given the scope of this study it is not possible to acknowledge or consider the full breadth of children's rights. Moreover, while child protection and children's rights are related, this research is not orientated from a children's rights perspective. Instead, it acknowledges the paternalistic perspective taken here, which seeks the view of adults concerning their perspectives on children. Nevertheless, specific articles contained within the UNCRC are pertinent to the findings of this research and hence, warrant acknowledgement.

Article 19.1 and 19.2 of the UNCRC:

1. States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child (UNCRC, 1989, p.5).
2. Such protective measures should, as appropriate, include effective procedures for the establishment of social programmes to provide necessary support for the child and for those who have the care of the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment described heretofore, and, as appropriate, for judicial involvement (UNCRC, 1989, p.5).

Article 19 recognises that children need protection and accordingly obligates state parties to prohibit, prevent and respond to all forms of violence presented above (Kilkelly, 2012a). However, to be realised fully, Article 19 necessitates an effective child protection system which, according to Sandberg (2018) includes the provision of adequate legislation, comprehensive policy, a coordinating body at national level and the allocation of adequate resources. As will be revealed during later chapters of this study, many participants believed that such necessities were lacking within the Irish child protection system and hence, children's rights in accordance with Article 19 were not always fully realised. The second Article highlighted as significant to this research study is Article 3.1.

Article 3.1 of the UNCRC:

In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration (UNCRC, 1989, p.2).

In accordance with Article 3.1, those who make decisions affecting children are required to consider how children's interests are or will be affected by their decisions and actions. From Zermatten's (2010) perspective, the 'best interests of

the child' principle serves as a 'rule of procedure' whereby, whenever a decision has to be taken that will affect a specific child or a group of children, the decision-making process must carefully consider the possible impacts (positive or negative) of the decision on the child/children concerned. While this is a seemingly straightforward principle in theory, when applied to practice, it can produce challenging issues that are not easily solved, as evidenced in the findings of this study.

In addition to these protection rights, children also have distinct educational rights. For example, Article 29 of the UNCRC outlines that the aim of education should be directed to developing the child's personality and talents; preparing the child for an active life as an adult; fostering respect for basic human rights; developing respect for the child's own cultural and national values and those of others; and developing respect for the natural (UNCRC, 1989; 2013). Evidently, the UNCRC, envisions the purposes and aims of education from a humanistic, child-centred perspective, emphasising the importance of a holistic education for the overall well-being of the child. At national level, this broad vision of education is encapsulated through policies aimed at advancing children's well-being in Ireland. For example, *'Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures'* (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2019) articulate the Government's commitment to improving the well-being of children and young people in Ireland. This overarching national policy framework sets out in five national outcomes sought for children, including one discretely related to health and well-being. In addition, the primary school curriculum in Ireland clearly acknowledges the role of the school in promoting children's health and well-being and notes, in particular, the Social, Personal and Health Education curriculum (SPHE) and its capacity to foster the personal development and well-being of the child (Department of Education and Science, 1999; Department of Health, 2015)

Understanding and use of the Term Child Protection, Child Abuse and Safeguarding

The term 'child protection' has been used in various contexts to denote different perspectives. For example, used from a historical perspective, the term can signify a social and a political movement, whereby the vulnerabilities of children and their need for protection grew in public awareness (Buckley, 1996). From a practice-based perspective, child protection often refers to the measures taken by professionals to act "directly as a barrier between children and significant harm" (Thorpe, 1994, p. 194). From a theoretical perspective, child protection is a term that has been socially constructed (Hacking, 1991; Parton, Thorpe, & Wattam, 1997), producing particular versions of childhood, discourses of child risk/resilience and vulnerability/protection" (Walsh *et al.*, 2011, p. 6). While recognising that the term 'child protection' can be used and interpreted differently, within this study, the term is used in reference to the action that is undertaken to protect children who are suffering, or are likely to suffer, harm as a result of 'child abuse' which here is used to denote any or all of the four main categories of abuse recognised within national legislation and policy (Appendix P). Like 'child protection', perspectives concerning the use and understanding of the term child 'safeguarding' are varied. In Ireland, the term child 'safeguarding' is used with reference to:

ensuring safe practice and appropriate responses by workers and volunteers to concerns about the safety or welfare of children, including online concerns, should these arise. Child safeguarding is about protecting the child from harm, promoting their welfare and in doing so creating an environment which enables children and young people to grow, develop and achieve their full potential (Tusla, 2019b, p. 3).

As evidenced by the above definition, safeguarding has two inherent and related dimensions. The first, which is akin to child protection, focuses on the actions and activities undertaken by organisations and/or individuals in order to reduce the risk of potential harm posed to children. The second, however, "is

looser, more about a moral responsibility to remove barriers to children's well-being and flourishing" (Fletcher-Campbell, 2008, p.58). However, this dual orientation of meaning should be considered in relation to a nation's unique history, ideologies and relatedly, position on child protection. This is considered furthermore in the subsequent section.

International CPS Systems: Ideologies and Orientations

Internationally, child protection systems have long grappled with competing ideologies related to what Parton (1991) first referred to as 'governing the family' represented through conflicting discourses seeking to answer which should take supreme consideration: children's individual rights and with that, their independent relationship with the State, or families' rights to bring up their children as they see fit. Relative to Continental European countries (e.g., Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands), Nordic countries (e.g., Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Norway), the USA, Australia and New Zealand, Ireland has been slower to implement CPS regulation (Skivenes et al., 2011; Whelan, 2018). From the perspective of Buckley (2003), this is partly because of the backdrop of constitutional and ideological reverence for the family in Ireland (Buckley, 2003) which is evidenced through the extremely strong protection ascribed to the rights of the family (i.e., Article 41 of the Irish Constitution) and the rights of parents (i.e., Article 42 of the Irish Constitution) within Irish law (O'Mahony, 2022). Consequently, unlike many other countries, Ireland necessitates high thresholds for State intervention into family life (Burns & McGregor, 2019) and requires that State interventions into the family domain must only be exercised in exceptional circumstances (Burns et al. 2017).

Connectedly, in a comparative analysis of international child protection systems conducted over twenty years ago, Gilbert (1997) identified two distinct child protection orientations, characterised by either a 'child protection or a 'family service' orientation (referred to elsewhere as a welfarist orientation). Broadly speaking, Gilbert (1997) suggested that nations that adopt a 'child protection' orientation tend to frame child abuse as an act that demands the

protection of children from harm. Countries with such an orientation tended to respond in a highly legalistic manner. In contrast, nations that adopt a family service orientation tend to frame child abuse as a problem of family dysfunction arising from social and psychological difficulties. This orientation tends to assume that the issues or precursors to child abuse can be alleviated, or even eradicated, through support from relevant agencies. Hence, rather than initiating legal mechanisms as a first step, these nations tend more frequently to offer services, support and therapeutic responses to a family's needs. Skivenes et al. (2011), whose work builds upon and advances that of Gilbert (1997), suggest that nations' CPS orientation can no longer be appropriately categorised into either a 'child protection' or 'family service' orientation. This is because countries that have previously identified with a child protection orientation have taken on some elements of the family service orientation and vice versa. Consequently, there appears to be a blending of CPS approaches witnessed globally. This is evidenced in England and some states in the USA which previously were oriented more toward a child protection approach but have since adopted measures that seek to maximise family support and offer differential models of support including early support. Similarly, there is also evidence that countries which previously adopted a family service orientation, such as Finland, Denmark, Norway, Belgium Germany and the Netherlands, have "made resolute efforts to respond to increasing concerns about the harm to children" (Skivenes et al., 2011, pg. 252). Moreover, these same authors claim that an alternative, third orientation to child protection is emerging internationally. This approach, which the authors term as a 'child-focused orientation' concentrates on the child as an individual with an independent relationship to the state (Skivenes et al., 2011). Evidence of this approach is seen through the increasing number of international policies and programs which seek to go beyond protecting children from risk to promoting their welfare.

Buckley and R. Buckley (2015) suggest that the Irish child protection system never consciously adopted a strong or polarised orientation on which to develop, with aspects of both a child protection and a welfarist orientations apparent

across Irish legislation, policy and practice. For instance, while the *Child Care Act* was underpinned by “principles of early intervention, prevention, family support, and collaborative service provision” (Buckley & R. Buckley, 2015, p. 278), empirical evidence has previously suggested that, in reality, CPS practices in Ireland tend to be orientated more toward investigative approach at the expense of preventative services (Whelan, 2018). This perspective appears to be shared by Lamponen, Pösö and Burns (2019) who more recently described the Irish child protection system as “orientated toward protecting children from risks” (p. 2) as opposed to providing services to children at a low-threshold level like in other countries such as Finland. Nevertheless, the growth of child-focused national policies and programs over the last number of years may indicate that a more ‘child-focused orientation’ toward CPS is emerging in Ireland. This is evidenced through the publication of national policies such as *‘Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures’* (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2019) which is Ireland’s first overarching national policy framework for children and young people. While this policy framework considers the safety and protection of children, it does so in tandem to other markers of children’s welfare, including children’s overall health, learning, development, economic security and their connections to their community and society. Whelan (2018) argues that while Ireland strives to foster a welfarist and children’s rights approach to CPS through its broader policies and programs, a ‘forensic paradigm’ continues to endure in practice. This, she argues, is evidenced by an aversion to risk across child protection policies and the increased proceduralisation of child protection practices evidenced across the whole system. Similarly, Burns and McGregor (2019) suggest that, despite the welfarist ideologies evidenced within Irish law and policy, CPS practices are characterised by a more reductive and reactive position in practice.

As evidenced by the preceding discussion, Ireland’s approach to CPS does not easily align with either a child protection, welfarist or child- focused orientation. Rather, it exists as a blend of these orientations. Nevertheless, the degree to which legislation, policy and practice ascribe to each orientation does

appear to vary. From a legislative and policy perspective, Ireland appears to ascribe mostly to a 'welfarist' approach, although there is evidence of a child-focused orientation emerging through recent national policies (e.g., Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2019). Despite this, research by others may indicate that the impact of these orientations is limited in practice, where it seems that a 'child protection' and risk-aversion culture appears to endure (Whelan, 2018; Lamponen, Pösö & Burns, 2019; Burns & McGregor, 2019). This gap between policy and practice must be considered in relation to the Irish CPS system's unique developmental journey, as historical events have significantly shaped this nation's CPS system and along with it, its ideologies relating to children and child protection. Consequently, the section that follows considers this more closely.

The Influence of History on the Current CPS Requirements Placed on Schools and School Personnel

Although the child protection system in Ireland has been influenced by wider global trends (Buckley, 2009), it nevertheless has developed in its own unique way as it incrementally responded to systemwide issues highlighted as problematic in reports, inquiries and court cases that detailed the plight certain children and signalling a need for reform (Nohilly, 2011; Burns & Lynch, 2012; Kilkelly, 2012a; Whelan, 2018). For example, decades of revelations of sexual abuse of young children by the clergy (Department of Health & Children, 1996; Murphy, Buckley & Joyce, 2005; Office of the Minister for Children & Youth Affairs, 2009; Murphy, 2010), by their families (Western Health Board, 1996; North Western Health Board, 1998; Gibbons *et al.*, 2010), and by other persons in positions of trust (Department of Health & Children, 1996; Murphy, 1998; Office of the Minister for Children & Youth Affairs, 2009; European Court of Human Rights, 2014) combined critical attention on both the existence of child abuse as a serious problem in Ireland and on the State's failure to prevent it (Buckley, Skehill & O'Sullivan, 1998). Consequently, particular reports, inquiries and court cases prompted 'moral panic' (Burns & Lynch, 2012) and proved legitimacy for the introduction of the current legal framework for child protection and its function

in stipulating school personnel's CPS roles and responsibilities. In acknowledgement of the significance of history on the focus of this study, this section of the chapter traces some of the historical antecedents that proved legitimacy for the current legal framework for CPS in schools. While the scope of this study does not allow for a thorough review of events as is presented elsewhere (e.g. Buckley, Skehill & O'Sullivan, 1998; Burns & Lynch, 2012; Buckley & Burns, 2015; Burns & McGregor, 2019), some of the most significant antecedents are accounted for before being considered in relation to the aims and objectives of the current CPS system. This discussion begins in 1991, with the introduction of the *Child Care Act*.

The Child Care Act, 1991

The late eighties and early 1990s was a 'seminal reform period' for child protection and children's services across Europe, with many countries updating their child protection and welfare laws (Burns & McGregor, 2019). In Ireland, the introduction of the *Child Care Act* (Government of Ireland, 1991) was seen as a significant advancement for child care provision and represented the culmination of attempts to provide a modern legislative framework to deal with children at risk or who were being neglected (Buckley, Skehill & O'Sullivan, 1998). Not only was this *Act* the first legislation enacted since the formation of the State (Devaney & Gregor, 2017), under its broad remit it either incorporated, modified or repealed much of the existing legislation relating to children and hence was viewed as the first piece of legislation to deal with children in a comprehensive manner (Buckley, Skehill & O'Sullivan, 1998).

The *Act* placed a statutory duty on Health Boards, who were then the State's child protection service providers at the time, to identify and promote the welfare of children who were not receiving adequate care or protection and to provide a range of child care and family support services³ (Devaney & Gregor, 2017). While the changes necessitated within the *Act* were initially being

³ The Child and Family Agency (Tusla) now fulfil this duty.

introduced at a 'genteel pace' (Gilligan, 1993), the process accelerated considerably when the findings of the *Kilkenny Incest Report* (McGuinness, 1993) were published.

The 'Kilkenny Incest Report' (1993) and 'Kelly Fitzgerald, a child is dead Report' 1996

The *Kilkenny Incest Report* documented the circumstances surrounding the continued physical and sexual abuse by a father of his daughter over a 13 year period while also revealing that this family was known to a number of child protection professionals throughout this time (Kilkelly, 2012b). According to experts, this report was the first major inquiry into how the child welfare system had failed a child in the Republic of Ireland (Burns & McGregor, 2019) and triggered a widespread overhaul of the child protection services in the country (Nohilly, 2011; Buckley & Burns, 2015). Of relevance to this study, the *Kilkenny Incest Report* judged interagency communication between the Health Boards and this child's school to be unsatisfactory and interrogated why no extended family member, neighbour, school personnel, or police ever expressed concern for this child (R.Buckley, 2014). Moreover, it noted, in particular, the importance of teachers and schools in protecting children from harm while problematising the reality that, at the time, there was no "law requiring teachers, hospital staff or family doctors, who have grounds to believe that a child may be subject to abuse, to take any steps to protect that child or to report the matter" (McGuinness, 1993, p. 106). This report concluded with a recommendation that a mandatory reporting law should be introduced for such professionals. In response to this report, the government pledged significant investment to resource the operation of the *Child Care Act* and increased the number of staff working in the child protection services (Buckley & Burns, 2015). However, in 1996 public dissatisfaction with the child protection system of the time was further compounded when the '*Kelly Fitzgerald, a child is dead*' report was released (Western Health Board, 1996). This report detailed how the child protection system in Ireland had failed to protect Kelly Fitzgerald from her parent's brutality and neglect even though there were multiple indications that this child was 'at risk'.

The Madonna House Inquiry (1996), the Murphy Inquiry (1998) and the West of Ireland Farmer Case (1998)

Within a short period of time, three more inquiries raised public awareness of the vulnerability of children and the issue of child abuse in Ireland, necessitating the articulation of their need for protection within national legislation and policy. These inquiries included the following. The *Madonna House Inquiry* (Department of Health and Children, 1996) which highlighted an absence of effective disclosure structures for abused children. The *Murphy Inquiry* (Murphy, 1998) which necessitated clear child protection protocols for individuals who had a duty of care to children. The *West of Ireland Farmer Case* (North Western Health Board, 1998) which called for the introduction of legal structures to allow healthcare staff to interview and or medically examine children considered to be at risk in schools or elsewhere without parental permission.

Burns and McGregor (2019) remark on the complex tapestry of child protection development during the 1990s. From their perspective, this decade saw a growing emphasis being placed on proactive childcare policy, with principles of prevention, inclusion, and early intervention being emphasised. However, the same authors remark that a more reductive and reactive position was being taken in practice. Making a similar argument, Buckley and R. Buckley (2015) claim that social policy analysts tend to classify child protection systems in terms of their orientation. They note that some countries have a 'welfarist' approach underpinned by universal services, early intervention, and family-focused solutions, while others appear to take a 'child protection' approach, based on residual service provision and a regulated, investigative approach. The same authors suggest that the Irish child protection system never consciously adopted a strong or polarised orientation on which to develop, with aspects of both orientations apparent across Irish legislation, policy and practice. For instance, while the *Child Care Act* was underpinned by "principles of early intervention, prevention, family support, and collaborative service provision" (Buckley & R. Buckley, 2015, p. 278), empirical evidence has previously suggested that, in reality, CPS practices in Ireland tend to be orientated more toward investigative approach

at the expense of preventative services. Moreover, this perspective appears to be shared by Lamponen, Pösö and Burns (2019) who more recently described the Irish child protection system as “orientated toward protecting children from risks” (p. 2) as opposed to providing services to children at a low-threshold level like in other countries such as Finland.

Report of the Eastern Health Board (1997) and a Case Study by Buckley, Skehill and O’Sullivan on Child Protection Practices in Ireland (1998)

In the late 1990s, this investigative orientation was evidenced by two national reports (Eastern Health Board, 1997; Buckley, Skehill & O’Sullivan, 1998) which highlighted how the majority of financial and social work resources were being used investigating reports and problematised the fact that inadequate resources were being directed toward early intervention services. From the perspective of Buckley and Burns (2015), this trend undermined “the philosophical basis of the Child Care Act which sought to promote the welfare of children” (p. 4). Moreover, with the likelihood of introducing mandatory reporting being placed firmly on the Government’s agenda, there was a growing concern that this investigative trend would continue to the detriment of other preventive and supportive responses. However, R. Buckley (2014) explains that the government at the time was in a perilous position. The exposure of years of abuse and violence portrayed the Government as unresponsive to crimes that offended the collective conscious of society. Hence, if the Government of the day was not seen to now be responsive by backing suggestions such as a mandatory reporting regime, it “may quickly have resulted in the erosion of political authority (R. Buckley, 2014, p. 57). The same author suggests that due to this concern many policies and practices developed at this time were made retrospectively to put right, to some degree, the State’s failures of the past.

Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children (1999)

On the cusp of a new millennium and after nearly a decade of revelations of historical abuse of children in institutions (Burns & McGregor, 2019), the first

major overhaul of child protection policy was published in 1999. The *Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children*, (Department of Health, 1999) (hereafter the *1999 Children First Guidelines*) were the first overarching and interagency guidelines applicable to all individuals and agencies dealing with children. These guidelines took account of the *Child Care Act* of 1991, the ratification by Ireland of the UNCRC, and the findings from previous inquiries into severe child abuse cases in Ireland (e.g. McGuinness, 1993; DOHC, 1996; Western Health Board, 1996; North Western Health Board, 1998). In essence, the *1999 Children First Guidelines* main objectives were to improve the identification, reporting, assessment, treatment, and management of child abuse; to consolidate inter-agency cooperation and promote mutual understanding amongst statutory and voluntary organisations about the different contributions made to child protection. As discussed in subsequent sections, these objectives have not changed significantly in two decades. However, the mechanisms aimed at ensuring compliance with these objectives have. Significantly for this research, the *1999 Children First Guidelines* set out the unique position of teachers (and hence also principals) in child protection and explicitly stated that this professional group has a ‘duty of care’ to children:

Teachers are particularly well placed to observe and monitor children for signs of abuse. They are the main care givers to children outside the family context and have regular contact with children in the school setting. Teachers have a general duty of care to ensure that arrangements are in place to protect children and young people from harm’ (Department of Health, 1999, p. 50).

In addition to this positioning of teachers as being ‘particularly well placed’ for child protection as ‘care givers’ and as a professional group with a particular duty of care, the *1999 Children First Guidelines* also clearly outlined the responsibilities of the school’s BOM stipulating that it must provide for: the planning, development and implementation of an effective child protection programme; the continuous monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of such provision; the effective implementation of agreed reporting procedures;

and the planning and implementation of appropriate staff development and training programmes (DOHC, 1999).

Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures (2001)

In 2001, an updated iteration of the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures (Department of Education and Science, 2001) (hereafter *CP Guidelines*) was published to take account of the *1999 Children First Guidelines*. These *CP Guidelines* provided explicit guidance for schools for child protection. A central element of the *CP Guidelines* was the requirement of the Board of Management (BOM) in every school to appoint a Designated Liaison Person (DLP) who would be responsible for receiving reports from school staff and passing them to child protection services. This replaced an earlier protocol whereby the Chairperson of the BOM, who was most often a member of the clergy, assumed responsibility for passing on such concerns (Buckley & McGarry, 2011). Mandatory reporting was being publicised around the turn of the millennium, to restore public confidence in the child protection system and voluntary organisations and advocacy groups continued to call for its adoption (Buckley, 2014). In the year 2000, the Government signalled its commitment to its adoption by drafting a White Paper on mandatory reporting of child abuse. However, no further action took place after this report and the surge of enthusiasm for mandatory reporting largely dissipated (Burns & McGregor, 2019) until the publication of the *Ferns Report* in 2005 (Murphy, Buckley & Joyce, 2005).

The Ferns Report (2005)

The *Ferns Report* was the first of four major inquiries into child abuse perpetrated by clerical members of the Catholic Church that highlighted incidents of gross noncompliance with the new *CP Guidelines*. In direct response to this report, the Department of Education issued Circular⁴ 0061/2006 (Department of Education and Skills, 2006) to all primary schools reminding them of the importance of their role in child protection, the necessity of full compliance with

⁴ A circular is a written statement that provides information and guidelines on laws and procedure.

the new *CP Guidelines* and the requirement for all schools, to implement and teach a child abuse prevention programme such as the Stay Safe Programme. The programme aims to ensure that children learn to recognise abuse for what it is, to know that it is wrong, that it is never their fault and most crucially that they learn to tell an adult who can help them about it (MacIntyre & Carr, 1999),

INTO Report on the Experiences of DLPs (2008), the National review of compliance with Children First Guidelines (2008) and Research on Newly Qualified Teachers (2010)

Despite clear directives from the Department of Education regarding the importance of full compliance with the *Child Protection Guidelines* (Department of Education and Science, 1999), indications of noncompliance were becoming evident. Buckley and McGarry (2011) claim that one of the first indications of disparity between departmental directives and practice ‘on the ground’ came to light in 2008 when a study by the Irish National Teachers’ Organisation (INTO) was published. This study, which sought to reveal the experiences of 330 DLPs in primary schools, highlighted a view expressed by DLPs that school personnel were not adequately trained for their child protection role (into, 2008). In the same year, a report by the OMCYA found difficulties and variations concerning the implementation of the *1999 Children First Guidelines* (OMCYA, 2008). Shortly later, research conducted by Buckley and McGarry (2010) again highlighted concerns over noncompliance. This research sought to ascertain the degree to which 103 newly qualified teachers (NQTs) understood their formal role and responsibilities for child protection. This study found that over a quarter of the NQTs reported that they had never heard of the CP Guidelines even though the aforementioned Circular 0061/2006 (Department of Education and Skills, 2006) stipulated that school management “should provide all new staff, whether teaching or otherwise, with a copy of the school’s child protection guidelines and ensure that they are familiar with the procedures to be followed” (p. 2). Other concerning findings from Buckley and McGarry (2010) include the finding that half of the participants were not aware that their school had a child protection policy

and, of those who were aware, forty-nine per cent had not read it; and less than half of the participants knew whether or not their school had a DLP.

The Ryan Report (2009)

In May 2009, Ireland made international news headlines and shocked the nation (Ó Fátharta, 2019) when a ten-year-long investigation culminated in the 'Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse' (OMCYA, 2009). The *Ryan Report*, as it became to be known, was the second national inquiry into child abuse that was closely linked to the Catholic Church. Presented as a "massive five-volume tome" (Burns & McGregor, 2019) the report described in shocking detail, the scale of physical, sexual and emotional abuse suffered by over 1000 (then) children in institutions (including schools) run by the clergy but funded and inspected by the Department of Education. The report criticised the Department of Education on many accounts, including for its 'deferential and submissive attitude' towards Congregations running institutions and how this attitude compromised its ability to carry out its statutory duty of inspection and monitoring; the inadequacy with which the Department of Education dealt with complaints about abuse, as well as its 'fundamentally flawed' system of inspection. In addition, the report found that the State and religious congregations had lost sight of the purpose for which the institutions were established: to provide children with a safe and secure environment and an opportunity of acquiring education and training. As there was no clear, coherent policy for such institutions or orders at the time, culpability for these failings was also directed toward the State. In order to prevent this from happening again, the report strongly recommended that "childcare services must have focused objectives that are centred on the needs of the child" (OMCYA, 2009, p.28) and that adults "entrusted with the care of children must prioritise the well-being and protection of those children above personal, professional or institutional loyalty" (p. 28). Following on from this report, the Government vowed to learn from historical shortcomings and strengthen the central place of children within society (Government of Ireland, 2009).

The Ryan Report and its subsequent 'implementation plan' were likely to have been the primary catalyst that resulted in the establishment of the Child and Family Agency, Tusla (Burns & McGregor, 2019). Moreover, the report highlighted the potential for harm that can occur in the absence of regulation and accountability mechanisms (McGregor, 2014), and thus, placed the validity of introducing mandatory reporting back on the political agenda (Buckley & McGarry, 2011). Responding to increased pressure to introduce mandatory reporting, in 2009, the then Minister for Children and Youth Affairs at the time, Barry Andrews, acknowledged that, while guidelines for child protection have been adjudged to be robust, the implementation of these guidelines has been inconsistent. Implied within this statement is a judgement that continued failings in child protection were not due to a lack of national guidance but a lack of compliance from those expected to follow these protocols. To address this, Andrews pledged to "bring forward legislation to provide that staff of all publicly funded bodies will have a duty to comply with and implement these guidelines" (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2009, p. xii).

The Murphy Report (2009)

Later in the same year, the third inquiry into clerical child abuse was published. Known as the '*Murphy Report*' (Murphy, 2009), this publication revealed further sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin between 1975 and 2004. Findings included the Dublin Archdiocese's preoccupations in dealing with cases of child sexual abuse themselves to maintain secrecy, avoid scandal, protect the reputation of the Church, and preserve its assets. It highlighted that all other considerations, including the welfare of children and justice for victims, were subordinated to these priorities. Moreover, while the archdiocese told the Commission it was 'on a learning curve' regarding child abuse allegations, it was revealed through the inquiry that it had taken out insurance annually from 1987 against the risk of legal costs and damages arising from child sex abuse litigation (Murphy, 2009).

The Roscommon Child Abuse Inquiry (2010) and The Cloyne Report (2010)

As the first decade of the new millennium came to a close in 2010, two further inquiries compounded the rationale for introducing a legal framework for child protection with the first again centring the spotlight back on the role of schools and teachers. The *Roscommon Child Abuse Inquiry (2010)* was commissioned by the Health Service Executive (HSE) into child abuse involving a family in Roscommon and highlighted how the neglect of the six children was grossly mishandled by various professional groups, including teachers and, as a consequence, these children lived in circumstances of extreme abuse for over fifteen years (Gibbons *et al.*, 2010). The inquiry highlighted, in particular, the improbability that no teacher suspected the welfare of these children was being damaged and questioned the efficacy of the then *Child Protection Guidelines*. Within the media the culpability of schools and teachers was also questioned, citing the impossibility that teachers “did not notice that these children were not toilet trained, that they were crawling with head lice down their faces, and that they were unable to learn” (The Irish Times, 2009).

The *Cloyne Report* (Murphy, 2010) was the fourth and most recent report on abuse in Ireland’s Catholic Church. This report revealed that, contrary to repeated assertions on its part, the Diocese of Cloyne did not implement the relevant procedures for dealing with allegations of child sexual abuse. Following this report, then Minister for Justice Alan Shatter put in motion a new bill which made it “a criminal offence to withhold information about a serious offence, including a sexual offence, against a person under 18 years or a vulnerable person (Criminal Justice Act, 2012). In the same week, the Minister for Children, Frances Fitzgerald, responded with a statement that new ‘Children First’ national guidance would be published imminently and that a raft of measures would be in place for failure to comply with the relevant child protection code.

There was a sense of ‘déjà vu’ during this time (Buckley & Burns, 2015) as ten years previously the first major overhaul of child protection policy had been published in 1999 following the culmination of revelations of historical abuse of

children in institutions during the preceding decade (Burns & McGregor, 2019) . However, what had become seemingly apparent in the eyes of the society was that there was an issue of compliance with protocols devised for the relevant agencies and institutions when responding to allegations or suspicions of child abuse. Hence, introducing a legal system whereby noncompliance was a legal offence was thought to be an important mitigating factor in seeking to enhance the safety and protection of children. In addressing this problem, those involved in creating law and policy asked what could ensure full compliance; with a 'solution' offered by a new legal framework placing statutory obligations on schools and teachers (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2017). However, as this 'solution' was both non-negotiable and non-partial, one may judge there to have been a missed opportunity to ask why there were inconsistencies in the first place.

The Report of the Task Force on the Child and Family Support Agency

Burns and McGregor (2019) maintain that 2012 can be viewed as pivotal for the child protection and welfare system in Ireland and note, in particular, the publishing of the Report of the Task Force on the Child and Family Support Agency (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2012) which essentially "set the blueprint" (Burns & McGregor, 2019, p.115) for the establishment of the Child and Family Agency, Tusla as a separate State authority responsible for child protection and family support services.

Tusla is the dedicated State agency responsible for improving children's well-being and outcomes (Tusla, 2017). Its establishment in 2014 brought together several previously existing children's services within its current remit including the provision of support and guidance in all matters relating to child protection. The agency's establishment represented "an attempt by the government to ring-fence and raise the profile of child protection" (Buckley & Burns, 2015, p. 9). It was thought that this umbrella agency had the potential to "eliminate the fragmentation of services so often a feature of our past" (Tusla, 2014) and hence, could address issues with interagency communication and

collaboration problematised in the past. Considering that the inability to get disciplines and agencies to work together has been considered to be the 'root cause' of child protection failures for many decades (Buckley & Burns, 2015), this objective relating to interagency collaboration was not small.

The Case of O'Keeffe v. Ireland (2014)

In the same year as the establishment of Tusla, the case of O'Keeffe v. Ireland (2014) again centred the spotlight on the inadequacy of child protection measures and questioned the culpability of the State for its failure to introduce mechanisms to safeguard children adequately in school. This case described how Louise O'Keeffe was sexually abused as a primary school pupil by her school principal in 1973. Although numerous complaints were made against this principal, these were directed to the local priest meaning that the Department of Education never became aware of them. Consequently, this principal continued to teach for another 22 years. When eventually convicted, he was charged with over 400 counts of abuse on over 20 victims. Determined to highlight the State's role in allowing this abuse to continue for so long, Louise O'Keeffe sued the State for vicarious liability for Hickey's actions. In 2009, the Irish Supreme Court ruled against her because the principal, although paid by the State, was employed by the school BOM. Therefore, it was judged that the State bore no responsibility for the abuse. After losing in Ireland, O'Keeffe brought this case to The European Court of Human Rights, arguing that the State was directly liable for its inaction because no measures were in place that would effectively detect and prevent child abuse in primary schools. Had such measures been in place, in all likelihood, Hickey would have been removed from his position far earlier and his litany of abuse would not have been allowed to go as far as it did. In 2014, Louise O'Keeffe won this case. The significance of this was that, in the context of historical abuse cases, there is now an onus on the State to accept responsibility for its failure to implement effective measures to prevent pupils from being abused.

The Children First Act, 2015

The *Children First Act 2015* (Government of Ireland, 2015) commenced in full in 2017. According to Whelan (2018), the main elements of the *Act* are aimed at raising awareness of child abuse and neglect; providing for the mandatory reporting of child abuse by key professionals; improving child protection arrangements in organisations providing services to children and providing for inter-agency working and information-sharing in relation to assessments by Tusla. In line with these aims, the *Act* places certain statutory obligations on certain professionals (including teachers and hence, principals) and upon particular institutions (including schools) regarding CPS. Under the *Children First Act*, all teachers (and hence, principals) registered with the Teaching Council are considered ‘mandated persons’. These persons, who are defined as those who have contact with children and/or families and who, because of their qualification, training and/or employment role, are in a key position to help protect children from harm, have two main legal obligations under the *Children First Act*. First, to report the ‘harm’⁵ of children when it is judged to be ‘at or above’ a defined ‘Threshold of Harm’. Second, to assist Tusla, if requested, in assessing a concern that has been the subject of a mandated report (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2017).

When a mandated person has a CPS concern that relates to neglect, emotional abuse or physical abuse they are required, by law, to determine whether they think that concern is at or above a defined ‘threshold of harm’⁶. This threshold is reached when a mandated person “knows, believes or has reasonable grounds to suspect” that the child has been, is being or is at risk of being maltreated “to the point where the child’s health, development or welfare have been or are being seriously affected, or are likely to be seriously affected” (Department of Education and Skills, 2017, p.27). This definition highlights the

⁵ Section 2 of the *Children First Act 2015* defines harm as: “assault, ill-treatment or neglect of a child in a manner that seriously affects, or is likely to seriously affect the child’s health, development, or welfare, or sexual abuse of the child” (Government of Ireland, 2015).

⁶ Within Irish legislation, concerns relating to sexual abuse are always deemed to have reached the threshold of harm and therefore must be reported to Tusla.

subjectivity of the threshold principle, as it is for the individual with the concern to determine whether the threshold has been reached. It could be argued that this is a strength of the principle itself, enabling those with concern to respond, even in scenarios where others do not share the same degree of concern. However, the threshold principle is not without flaws. First, the problem with 'believing' that a child is at risk involves holding an idea to be true, whereas, in the context of reporting CPS concerns "one is seldom *sure* that abuse has occurred but instead concerned that it *might* have occurred" (Levi, 2008, p. 135, emphasis in original). Also problematic, the utility of thresholds is based on the idea that they can be determined logically, which is most frequently not the case (Buckley, 2014; Kirk & Duschinsky, 2017). Moreover, relative to Continental European and Nordic countries, Irish law has always ascribed extremely strong protection to the rights of the family (i.e., Article 41 of the Irish Constitution) and to the rights of parents (i.e., Article 42 of the Irish Constitution) (Skivenes et al. 2011; O'Mahony, 2022). Consequently, unlike many other countries, Ireland necessitates high thresholds for State intervention into family life (Burns & McGregor, 2019) and requires that State interventions into the family domain must only be exercised in exceptional circumstances (Burns et al. 2017).

Under the *Children First Act*, organisations that provide services to children also have a statutory CPS obligation to keep children safe from harm while they are availing of those organisations' services. Accordingly, the *Act* places specific statutory obligations on particular institutions, including schools. These include obligations to ensure, as far as practicable, that children are safe from harm while availing of its services and to assess any potential for harm (referred to as a "risk") posed to a child while availing of the organisation's services. As part of these requirements, schools are legally required to create a Child Safeguarding Statement (CSS) and carry out a Risk assessment using mandatory templates (Department of Education and Skills, 2017a), which are aimed at supporting schools in identifying all potential risks posed to children while at school or engaging with school activities (Department of Education and Skills, 2017b). Following this, schools must prepare and publish a Child Safeguarding Statement

(CSS) which lists these risks and outlines the procedures/protocols put in place to address and alleviate potential risks posed to children in each respect. In addition to these statutory requirements, schools are required to take account of new, non-statutory, requirements concerning CPS (Department of Education and Skills 2017a; 2017b; 2019b). These include a new model of school inspection called Child Protection Safeguarding Inspections (CPSIs) that focuses on school compliance with key aspects of child protection "in an in-depth way" (Department of Education and Skills, 2019, p.2).

These new requirements set out for schools and school personnel in *Children First, 2015, Children First: National Guidance* and the *CPP*, can be viewed as deliberate attempts to ensure compliance with the appropriate CPS procedures and, prevent any reoccurrences of the historical failings discussed previously. Moreover, within these three documents there runs a core welfare paradigm that "the safety and welfare of children is everyone's responsibility" (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2017, p.2) and an understanding that children are dependent on adults for safeguarding their welfare and a positioning of schools as being at the fulcrum of child protection work.

Although the impetus for introducing a legal framework for child protection had been on the cards for over twenty years, with the argument for its necessity mounting with each publication detailing the mismanagement of child protection concerns, some experts in the field of CPS expressed trepidation about its value, fearing it could swamp an already overwhelmed child protection system. For example, Whelan (2018), whose study was conducted prior to the enactment of the *Children First Act*, considered the potential harm that mandated reporting posed if a sharp increase in reporting rates diverted even more attention and resources away from preventative services and more towards investigation. Highlighting a different issue, Buckley and R. Buckley (2015) claim that the move to introduce mandatory reporting has not been determined by what would be most effective for the majority of vulnerable children. Elaborating on this, these authors claim that, outside of the mishandling of child abuse concerns in the

Catholic Church, there is no empirical basis to support a view that mandatory reporting enhances the safety of children. Considering Tusla's most recent statistics relating to CPS referrals (Tusla, 2020) in relation to this argument made by Buckley and R. Buckley (2015) provides an interesting contextual perspective.

In 2020, Tusla received 69,712 CPS referrals. This equates to nearly 200 referrals per day or six for every hundred children living in Ireland. In order, the most common source of referrals for 2020 came from An Garda Síochána⁷ (23,209 referrals), social workers (5,840 referrals) and then teachers/principals (5,308 referrals). In addition, Tusla acknowledges that the number of CPS referrals from schools in 2020 was lower than in previous years due to the closure of schools during the Covid-19 pandemic. In comparison to these figures, Tusla reports that clergy members reported a total of 8 referrals in 2020 which equates to less than 0.06 of the total referrals made for the year. This contextual backdrop bolsters the argument made by Buckley and R. Buckley (2015) that mandated reporting may not be the ultimate remedy needed to close the gap between CPS policy and practice on the ground, as referrals made by clergy members account for such a limited source of referrals. Hence, a more comprehensive consideration of factors that impede full compliance is necessary. Due consideration of these factors is given in the next section of this chapter, where the discussion focuses on the unique role of chairpersons, principals, DLPs and teachers in protecting children and safeguarding them from harm.

The Roles and Responsibilities of Schools and School Personnel for CPS

This section outlines the CPS roles and responsibilities of chairpersons, principals, DLPs and teachers before acknowledging what is known about them from the relevant research base and considering the training that has been made available to them for their role.

⁷ An Garda Síochána is the state police force in the Republic of Ireland.

The Role of the BOM and its Chairperson

In Ireland, most primary schools are managed by a Board of Management (BOM). This management model emerged over four decades ago, in 1975, as an extension to the one-person manager that had previously dominated the national school system, and was at that time 'legislation-light' and 'partnership-free' (Irish Primary Principals' Network [IPPN], 2011). The context in which BOMs operate today is vastly different, with over twenty acts of legislation needing to be accounted for including the breadth and scope of the Education Act, 1998 (Gaffey, 2017).

Under the *Education Act, 1998*, the BOM is the body charged with a school's direct governance. BOMs are expected to manage the school on behalf of the patron body and are accountable to both the patron and the Minister of Education and Skills. The functions of the BOM, which are set out in section 15 of the *Education Act, 1998*, include but are not limited to: appointing the principal, the teachers and other staff; ensuring that child protection and welfare are considered in all of the school's policies, practices and activities; ensuring the school has a code of behaviour and an anti-bullying policy; complying with garda vetting requirements before employing, contracting or placing any person in contact with children or vulnerable persons; and keeping discussions and documents confidential unless otherwise agreed by the board. In addition to these responsibilities, the BOM must assume responsibility for the statutory obligations placed on the school since the enactment of *Children First, 2015* (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2017). Accordingly, the BOM must fulfil particular child protection oversight responsibilities which include: the preparation and publication of the CSS, including the child Risk Assessment; the appointment of the DLP and deputy DLP; putting arrangements in place to ensure that all school personnel (including the DLP) and members of the Board have the necessary familiarity with the CPP to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities; ensuring that the child protection procedures are implemented 'in full'; that children are safe from 'harm' while attending school or participating in school activities; and concerning curricular provision ensuring the full implementation of

the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) Curriculum, including Stay Safe Programme (Department of Education and Skills, 2017a).

The Stay Safe programme was first published in the late 1980s when it was decided by the Department of Education that a positive preventative approach was necessary to deal with the problem of the significant rise in the number of official reports of child abuse (An Roinn Oideachas 1995). The aim of Stay Safe is to reduce vulnerability to child abuse and bullying through the provision of personal safety education for children that addresses issues such as physical, emotional and sexual abuse as well as bullying and stranger danger. Children are also taught that it is not their fault if they are bullied or abused. As well as reducing children's vulnerability to abuse, the Stay Safe programme aims to increase well-being and resilience by giving children knowledge, skills and strategies in an age-appropriate manner, using developmentally structured lessons and resources to empower them (Stay Safe, 2016).

There is a four-year term of office for current primary school BOMs that began in December 2019 and will continue up until November 2023. In Ireland, BOMs consist of voluntary members of school communities and membership of these boards requires "no mandatory experience or skill set" (Gaffey, 2017, p. 4). The composition of the BOM for schools with more than one teacher is: two direct nominees from the patron body; two parents of children enrolled in the school; the principal, a teacher from the school; and two extra members agreed by the representatives of the patron body, teachers and parents. In addition, each Board elects a chairperson, two Secretaries (a main secretary and a recording secretary) and Treasurer from within this group. In most instances the principal is also the main secretary, and, due to the longstanding link between the church and the education system in Ireland, the chairperson is frequently also a direct nominee of the patron body (IPPN, 2011).

In Ireland, the school principal is directly accountable to the BOM (Government of Ireland, 1998) and implied within this legislative arrangement is

the assumption of a functional hierarchical model of accountability and oversight. Nevertheless, as pointed out by Stynes and McNamara (2019), while BOM serves a four-year term of office, a principal is appointed in a permanent capacity and “typically acts as a link from one Board to the next” (p. 27). Thus, BOM members usually look to the principal for guidance in practice. The Department of Education partially acknowledges this, noting that the school principal and the chairperson will “normally be the main source of information for other Board members (Department of Education and Skills, 2017a, p. 10).

CPS Training Available to Chairpersons

As the Chair of the BOM, the chairperson has the ultimate responsibility for overseeing that the BOM is fulfilling its responsibilities with respect to child protection and in accordance with the requirements set out in the Education Act, 1998. Considering the scope of the chairperson’s responsibilities, it is perhaps surprising that training is not made mandatory for chairpersons. Instead, all BOM members are “strongly advised” to avail of training (Department of Education and Skills, 2017, p. 1). For those who choose to avail of training, it is organised through schools’ relevant Management Body . In this research study these bodies include: the Catholic Primary School Management Association, the Church of Ireland Board of Education, Educate Together, and the National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education. While the training organised by each school Management Body may vary in delivery, the modules covered are the same. These include, the board as a corporate entity; procedures governing the appointment of staff; board finances; legal issues; child protection procedures; anti-bullying procedures; and data protection (Department of Education and Skills, 2019a).

Research on Chairpersons

In 2011, IPPN carried out a study of primary school BOMs (IPPN, 2011) and while this study did not remark on child protection specifically, some of its findings are relevant to this research. The study identified chairpersons and principals as the “governance force” (IPPN, p.25) in schools and claimed that while many BOMs are diligent in their compliance to their duties, “some Boards

fall short” and are “unsure of their roles and responsibilities” (IPPN, p.25). The authors of this study excused this finding, in part, arguing it is unfair to expect lay-people, acting in a voluntary capacity, to be *au fait* with, and conduct themselves in accordance with the increasingly legislative landscape that operates across primary school contexts. Similar findings were reported by Stynes (2014) who reported that some principals felt they were “frequently called upon to prepare and maintain the grounds on which boards themselves are built” (p. 166) and believed that board members were not always suitably experienced or qualified for their role. Moreover, this IPPN report highlighted how chairpersons could find their duties onerous and time consuming. In addition, many religious chairpersons expressed that they had been ‘reluctant’ chairpersons for years, that they did not have the time or required skill-set and that their commitment to school governance was a distraction to core pastoral duties (IPPN, p. 26).

While consideration of the above literature is important, it is also crucial to note that BOMs are an under-researched area in Ireland, and thus, there is a sparsity of literature to indicate whether these perspectives are corroborated or contested. Moreover, prior to this study, there was no research conducted with them in the area of child protection and so, despite the degree of responsibility ascribed to chairpersons of BOMs, no national data existed until now. Considering the magnitude of their responsibility, this is very surprising. This study will address this significant gap in the research base by revealing the perspectives of ten chairpersons of BOMs and seeking their views, experiences and concerns.

The Role of the Primary School Principal and DLP

Although it is the school’s BOM that carries the statutory responsibility to provide an appropriate education for its pupils, it is the principal who is accountable for this responsibility to the board and who is required to provide leadership to the teachers, staff and students within the school community (Government of Ireland, 1998). Stynes (2014) remarks that this arrangement “effectively places the principal in the role of manager on-site on a day-to-day basis” (p.27) and remarks on the challenges associated with such a responsibility

when one considers that the Board is comprised entirely of local volunteers, changes every four years and is required to assemble on a minimum of only five times per calendar year. In accordance with the CPP, each BOM must designate a full-time member of staff as the DLP for child protection in the school” (Department of Education and Skills, 2017a, p. 22), and the school principal typically undertakes this role. The role of the DLP is outlined in the CPP as follows:

The role of the DLP is to act as the resource person to any member of school personnel who has a child protection concern. The DLP should be knowledgeable about child protection and should be provided with any training considered necessary to fulfil this role. However, in cases where there are concerns about a child and the DLP is not sure whether to report the matter to Tusla or whether a report should be submitted as a mandated report, the DLP shall seek advice from Tusla (Department of Education and Skills, 2017a, p.22).

Hence, the first function of the DLP is to act as the ‘resource person’ for all school staff in dealing with child protection matters since, in accordance with the CPP, any member of school personnel who receives an allegation or has a suspicion that a child may have been, is being, or is at risk of being abused or neglected, is required to report the matter, without delay, to the DLP. Within this arrangement, the DLP becomes the individual through which all child protection concerns are channelled, giving them a more precise picture than any other individual within the school community of the child protection issues pertaining to the children attending the school. The second function of the DLP is to be the link person for external agencies who may be interacting with the school in matters relating to child protection:

The DLP will be the designated liaison person for the school in dealing with Tusla, An Garda Síochána and other parties, in connection with allegations of and/or concerns about child abuse and neglect. Those other parties shall be advised by the DLP that they shall conduct all matters pertaining to the processing or assessment/investigation of alleged child abuse through the DLP. Where the matter concerns a member of school personnel such matters shall be conducted through the employer (Department of Education and Skills, 2017a, p.22).

As well as being the resource person for school personnel and liaising with external agencies, the DLP is required to carry out other actions detailed clearly in the CPP. These include informing parents/carers that a report concerning his or her child is being made and the reasons for the decision to make the report; keeping written records of any concern brought to their attention; deciding whether concerns brought to their attention are at or above the defined 'threshold of harm' or whether it constitutes 'reasonable grounds for a concern' and act accordingly; retain a record of all consultations with Tusla (Department of Education and Skills, 2017a). In addition to these responsibilities, the CPP require all school principals to prepare a Child Protection Oversight Report (Department of Education and Skills, 2017a) for every meeting of the BOM. This report must contain information under four headings: Allegations of Abuse Made Against Members of School Personnel; Other Child Protection Concerns in Respect of Pupils in the School; Child Protection Concerns Arising from Alleged Bullying Behaviour Amongst Pupils; Summary Data in Respect of Reporting (Department of Education and Skills, 2017a). This report and all necessary documentation must be made available to BOM members at each board meeting so that the BOM, in its oversight capacity, can review whether the relevant reporting requirements were followed. In any situation where the BOM deems this not to be the case, the CPP requires that the chairperson seeks advice and/or make a relevant report to Tusla on behalf of the BOM.

Internationally, the child protection demands on principals are similarly vast. For example, in Australia where mandatory reporting also exists, where mandatory reporting laws for teachers and principals are in existence, the principal is expected to inform all contract staff of their child protection responsibilities; ensure staff complete Child Protection training and confirm that staff repeat this training every three years; make and/or accept mandatory reports from teachers and forward them, as soon as practicable, to the Mandatory Reporting Service (MRS); contact the MRS by phone when there is a concern for the immediate safety of the child prior to making a written or online report;

provide information to the relevant child protection agency and/or the Police as requested; and provide secure storage for documentation. Dissimilar to Ireland however, principals in Australia must seek advice from the MRS prior to communication with parents and should not keep a copy of a mandatory report made by another mandatory reporter or name the mandatory reporter in documentation (Department of Education, 2019).

In comparison, principals' CPS duties in the United Kingdom, where there is no current mandatory reporting legislation in effect, are dissimilar in many ways to principals' duties in Ireland and Australia. For example, CPS procedures in effect in Northern Ireland (Department of Education, 2022) require that the Board of Governors (BoG) and school principal appoint a Designated Teacher (DT) and Deputy Designated Teacher (DDT) who are expected to manage the CPS system in the school. DTs and DDTs are expected to ensure that new staff and volunteers have safeguarding and child protection awareness sessions as part of an induction programme. In addition, DTs should make themselves available to discuss safeguarding or child protection concerns of any member of staff; hold responsibility for record keeping of all child protection concerns; should promote awareness among staff of early intervention supports and other local services available to vulnerable children and families; make referrals to Social Services or the police where appropriate; keep the school Principal informed; lead responsibility for the development of the school's child protection policy; and compile written reports to the Board of Governors (BoG) regarding child protection (Department of Education, 2020). Hence, within this system, the child protection responsibilities are mostly devolved to the DT and DDT, meaning that the school principal is not expected to carry the burden of CPS responsibilities.

Research Available on Primary School Principals and DLPs

There remains a scarcity of national literature on the experiences and perspectives of primary school principals but that which does exist has indicated that this group of school leaders feel increased pressure compared to previous generations (Stynes, 2014) and are at risk of developing mental health issues such

as stress, anxiety and depression (Stevens, 2013). Moreover, research by Stynes and McNamara (2019) reports that while today's principals are faced with the challenge of 'perpetual motion', they face this challenge with a willingness and desire to juggle everything, often putting the school above their own needs.

In Ireland, accounts of the principal's duties and responsibilities are wide-ranging and involve a myriad of tasks. While many of these tasks are objectively quantifiable such as record keeping and accounting, many others are subjectively unquantifiable such as providing support to staff and leading in school development (Stynes, 2014). An earlier study, by the IPPN carried out by Drea and O'Brien (2003, p. 2) analysed the role on the principal in Ireland with the view to developing a statement to reflect the scope of this position. It defined the breadth of the principal's duties succinctly and identified seven distinct categories. These include: creating, communicating and delivering a leadership vision; delivering and developing high quality teaching and learning; resource management; human resource management; policy formation; administration; and managing external relationships. Although this list is wide-ranging, it does not acknowledge the paramount position ascribed to child protection work in Irish schools, nor does it recognise the reality whereby most principals undertake the role of the DLP in tandem with their duties as school principal, as is the case for the thirteen participating principals in this study. Yet, as the CPP provides a list of precise actions required of the DLP in response to specific child protection matters, an objective analysis of this role may assume it to be somewhat straightforward. However, research available indicates otherwise. For instance, a study conducted by INTO (2008) concluded that this role was challenging, time consuming, solitary and isolating. In addition, this study problematised the lack of support services available to the DLP in a role that requires them to make difficult decisions that can significantly impact people's lives. More recently, Nohilly (2018) describes the role of DLP and its associated duties as highly emotional, stressful and challenging. According to this author, the role of DLP involves a myriad of challenging responsibilities that include, but are not limited to, informing parents that the school have reported them to Tusla; carrying the sole

responsibility of liaising with staff, families and outside agencies; supporting vulnerable children; and trying to make the 'right' decision when deciding whether a concern warrants a mandated report to Tusla.

CPS Training Available to Principals/DLPs

Considering the breadth and importance of the DLP's role, training is considered essential (Nohilly, 2019a). However, the adequacy of training provisions made available to DLPs has been repeatedly questioned (INTO, 2008; Nohilly, 2018, 2019a; Treacy & Nohilly, 2020). Currently DLPs and Deputy DLPs can avail of a one day face-to-face training event funded by the Department of Education and delivered through the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST). However, due to the limited amount of time given for this training, its aims are limited to familiarising participants with the content and requirements of the new CPP (Professional Development Service for Teachers [PDST], 2020). Commenting on the current training arrangements (Nohilly, 2019a) points out that while opportunities have been made available for teachers to attend CPD in all areas of the primary school curriculum over the last 20 years, "no full day of CPD has ever been afforded to the area of child protection where all school staff have an opportunity to attend a facilitated training day" (p. 83).

As illustrated, the role of the primary school principal is wide-ranging, time-consuming, and frequently brings with it a degree of stress and anxiety (Stevens, 2013; Stynes, 2014). Considering the reality whereby most principals also assume the position of DLP in their school community, it is fair to surmise that a lot is asked of these professionals. Despite the degree of responsibilities they assume, little is known about this group and no research has been conducted to reveal what these professionals believe to be the factors that enhance and impede schools' CPS aims. This research addresses this gap in the literature by offering valuable insights from thirteen primary school principals/DLPs.

The Role of the Primary School Teacher

Teachers are considered among some of the most significant adults that children will encounter (Laskey, 2008) and their contribution to effective child protection work has been widely acknowledged (e.g. Baginsky, 2008; Buckley and McGarry, 2010, 2011; Nohilly, 2018; Treacy & Nohilly, 2020). Outside of their home, children under 12/13 years of age spend most of their time in primary school (Nohilly, 2019a), and because of their age, these children are considered especially vulnerable (Moody, 1994). Unlike other professionals working with children, teachers are considered to have a distinctive 'vantage point' (Buckley & R. Buckley, 2015), allowing them to monitor and observe a child's emotional, psychological and physical condition (Buckley & McGarry, 2011). Moreover, their professional duty of care and ethical responsibility towards children (Gilligan, 1996) alongside their knowledge of typical child development and age-appropriate norms places them in a unique position for identifying the possible signs of abuse and neglect (Bourke & Maunsell, 2016). Within the lives of children, teachers often hold a position of a 'trusted adult' to whom children may feel comfortable disclosing sensitive information to (Bourke & Maunsell, 2016). This gives teachers the opportunity to piece together a fuller picture of the child's life than usually afforded to other professionals (Buckley & McGarry, 2011). Moreover, Bourke & Maunsell, 2016) claim that the valuable position of teachers in the lives of children is especially important in cases of neglect. According to these authors, some signs of neglect that would be directly observable in an educational setting would include "inadequate clothing poor food and nutrition, tiredness, frequent absence from school, anxiety, disruptive and attention seeking behaviour, poor homework routines, insufficient parent parental support, language and communication delays, poor social skills, delays in cognitive development, or a general failure to thrive" (Bourke & Maunsell, 2016, p. 317). Elsewhere, international research suggests there is a correlation between disadvantaged socio-economic circumstances of parents and their child's likelihood of experiencing child abuse and/or neglect (Bywaters et al., 2016). Moreover, these same authors claim that this association exists across developed countries, types of abuse, and different child protection systems. Hence, while teachers should understand the

importance of their role in supporting children experiencing neglect, the research conducted by Bywaters et al., (2016) indicates a view that poverty should be considered a risk factor for child abuse and neglect. This view is also shared in recent reports conducted in Scotland (Public Health Scotland, 2021) and in Ireland (Children's Rights Alliance, 2022). These reports underlined how children living in deprivation experience various risk factors that can have adverse long and short-term health and social consequences. Similarly, exposure to drug use or drug activity should also be considered to be a risk factor associated with poorer outcomes for children (Tusla, 2015). For example, a U.S. study concluded that children exposed to drug use or those who have parents with drug problems are nearly four times as likely to be physically abused and more than four times as likely to be neglected as children of parents who do not have problems with substances (Tusla, 2007). In Ireland, policy relevant to CPS work in schools identifies a range of risk factors that may place children at greater risk of abuse and notes, among other risk factors, children's exposure to poverty and drugs (Department of Education and Skills, 2017; Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2017).

Since the enactment of Children First, teachers' responsibilities and requirements concerning CPS are more defined than they have ever been. Despite this, Buckley and McGarry (2011) warn against the assumption that a positively causal relationship exists between the existence of law, policy and protocol and responsive child protection practices. Although teachers are largely motivated by a desire to act in the best interests of the child (Bryce, 2018), detecting child abuse and determining the appropriate response is a complex process made more challenging by certain factors identified subsequently.

Barriers Preventing Teachers from Upholding their CPS Responsibilities

Within international literature, there is growing acknowledgement that professionals, including those with a legal duty to report child protection concerns, frequently experience obstacles that prevent or impede them from acting in line with their legal CPS duty. For example, in their international

literature review, Bunting et al. (2010) uncovered a range of such obstacles including a reluctance on the part of professionals when there was a lack of 'evidence' to support their suspicions; a hierarchy of abuse types whereby that are more easily identifiable or are likely to be subject to public concern are more commonly reported; concern about damaging relationships; limited faith in the child protection system to adequately respond; an ambivalence toward physical punishment; and a fear of being wrong. Elsewhere, national research considering the teachers' obstacles to CPS reporting suggested that the barriers preventing teachers from fulfilling their CPS duties could be categorised into either 'explicit' or 'implicit' factors. Explicit factors include tangible barriers such as lack of knowledge of the signs, symptoms, policies and procedures whilst implicit barriers include less tangible factors, such as the individual's belief system about children, children's rights, child protection and child abuse. While deterrents to what would be considered an appropriate response to CPS concerns may be caused by 'explicit' barriers such as the lack of knowledge of the signs, policies and procedures, Bourke & Maunsell (2016) claim it is the 'implicit' barriers which pose a more significant challenge to effective child protection practices. Such barriers may include a teacher's judgement about the harm of reporting outweighing the benefits; a perceived need to maintain relationships with a child's parents; a fear of over-zealous responses by external professionals; a lack of background information about a child's home life; a reluctance to report for fear of retaliation from parents; fear of making an inaccurate report; a view that child protection services will not offer any help to the child; and a fear that reporting CPS concerns could damage the teachers relationship with the child (Kenny, 2001, 2004; Gilbert *et al.*, 2009; Buckley & McGarry, 2011; Bourke & Maunsell, 2016). Moreover, these deterrents appear to influence teachers' CPS decision making even in contexts where mandatory reporting laws have been introduced (Kenny, 2004; Hinkelman & Bruno, 2008; Laskey, 2008; Bourke & Maunsell, 2016). Nonetheless, Gilligan (1998) maintains that "ignorance or uncertainty are no defence for inaction" (p. 38) as failure to act sends a very wrong signal to the child, betrays the professions' duty, and breaches the ethical contract that the school has as a caring community with its children and the broader community. However, research has identified a

positive correlation between the level of CPS training received by teachers and their capacity to respond appropriately to CPS concerns (Goldman, 2007; Baginsky, 2008; Walsh *et al.*, 2011).

CPS Training Available to Teachers

Despite the identified correlation between the level of training received by teachers and their readiness to respond appropriately to CPS concerns (Goldman, 2007; Baginsky, 2008; Walsh *et al.*, 2011), the provision of child protection training in Ireland has been deemed inadequate with regards to its frequency, format, content and quality (Buckley & McGarry, 2010, 2011; Buckley, 2014; Bourke & Maunsell, 2016; Nohilly, 2019a). This argument is evidenced further by the limited provision of CPS training made available to schools and school personnel since child protection was placed on a statutory footing in 2017.

In the 2017/2018 academic year the Department of Education sanctioned school closures⁸ so that schools and teachers could familiarise themselves with the *Children First Act 2015* and their new child protection requirements (Department of Education and Skills, 2017b). This training was to be provided by the DLP and/or Deputy DLP and hence, necessitated a familiarity with new legislation, procedures and requirements. During this school closure, schools were encouraged to access a universal e-learning programme designed by Tusla. This learning programme (Tusla, 2017) takes approximately 90 minutes to complete and is intended to support ‘mandated persons’ from many different professions and enterprises. Hence, it did not refer to the unique role of schools or school personnel in CPS or acknowledge factors relevant to this context. In addition to this training, in 2018, the PDST introduced a 90 minute e-learning presentation (PDST, 2020 to support professional development for CPS. As evidenced by Figure 2.1, this e-learning presentation focuses on five key areas of CPS.

⁸ Schools were permitted to take one full-day or two separate half-day school closures (Department of Education and Skills, 2017b).



Figure 2.1. The modules covered during PDST’s (2018) e-learning webinar.

Although legislation is referenced only as the first focus, it is important to understand that the role of the mandated person and the DLP, and the appropriate procedures for reporting, recording and handling disclosures are all considered within the legal framework of the *Children First Act*. Hence, it could be argued that this presentation is predominantly focused on the legal aspects of CPS. Consequently, the focus is orientated from what mandated persons, DLPs, DDLPs and BOMs are required to do by law, with the importance, for vulnerable children, of additional non-regulatory support/care practices remaining unacknowledged. In addition, it does not acknowledge the complexity of CPS or consider the prevailing factors that limit schools’ capacity to protect and safeguard children. Considering this, it is perhaps unsurprising that Nohilly (2019a) describes CPS training as being restricted in its focus and unbalanced in how it has given maximum consideration to the interventional procedures required and with far less attention to addressing the preventative measures. Moreover, Laskey (2008) claims that when teacher learning is designed as such it tends to concentrate learners’ attention on intervention rather than prevention and “overlooks many possibilities for teachers to contribute to combating child abuse both as educators and as community members” (p.170). Returning to Buckley and R. Buckley’s (2015) claim that child protection systems tend to take either a ‘welfarist’ or a ‘child protection’ approach, it would appear that teacher training for CPS is characterised more by a reactive rather than a preventative approach to CPS. Regardless of the training inadequacies identified here, there exists other macro

influences that shape CPS practices and influence the whole school culture. These are discussed subsequently with specific reference to the pervasiveness of accountability and audit mechanisms and their influence on care practices within the school community.

The Influence of Wider Educational Trends and System Challenges on Care practices in Schools

Philosophers such as Nel Noddings (1984) have argued that because education is central to the cultivation of caring in society, schools must go beyond teaching fundamental skills. Internationally, the importance of care practices within the school community is clearly recognised, with the particular significance of such practice being underscored in the lives of vulnerable children (Gilligan, 1998, 2000; Baginsky, 2008; Fletcher-Campbell, 2008; Nohilly, 2019b; Treacy & Nohilly, 2020; Nohilly & Treacy, 2022). In Ireland, an emphasis on care is enshrined through the *Codes of Professional Practice for Teachers* (The Teaching Council, 2016). These codes set out the ethical foundations of the profession and identify the values of care, respect, integrity and trust. Here ‘care’ is articulated not only as a legal ‘duty of care’ but also as something more substantive, denoting a practice that seeks ‘the best interests’ of the child. Despite this articulation, the adequacy of such codes in ensuring ethical and caring practice is contested (O’Brien, 2012), and concern is expressed that schools’ care practices can be undermined by broader educational trends of accountability and auditing that have become central features of CPS work in schools (Nohilly, 2019b). This is evidenced by the volume of CPS templates and checklists (Appendix N), as well as the degree of specificity required of the Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections (CPSIs) (Appendix O), carried out by the Department of Education since 2020.

These templates, checklists and checks were devised to reflect the goal “making further and better provision for the care and protection of children”, as set out in the *Children First Act 2015* (Government of Ireland, 2015, p. 5). However, perspectives offered by Treacy and Nohilly (2020) brings into question whether

these resources are achieving the goals for which they are intended, and asks what has been the impact of broader educational trends of accountability and auditing on care practices in schools. Taking a similar view, albeit in relation to the broader educational context, O'Neill (2002) warns that schools and educators often adapt behaviour to suit the particularities of that which is being audited. This concern is shared by Biesta (2009), who questions "whether we are indeed measuring what we value, or whether we are just measuring what we can easily measure and thus end up valuing what we measure" (p.35). Concerns expressed by O'Neill (2002) and Biesta (2009) appear to be evidenced in Tracey and Nohilly's recent piece of research (2020), which expressed concern that the current audit mechanisms aimed at enhancing child protection may have negative consequences for pupil welfare by placing "misdirected emphasis on what is important" (p. 23). In addition, more recent research has linked the challenges associated with upholding one's CPS responsibilities with the perceived limited capacity of the State's related systems involved in CPS work. For example, research with DLPs highlighted views that children were being failed not by their schools but by Tusla and the State (Nohilly & Treacy, 2022) as it was believed that these powers could not adequately response to schools concerns about certain children.

Notwithstanding broader educational trends or wider system challenges, schools remain "a place of safety and security, of routine and predictability" for children, especially those most vulnerable (Bryce, 2018, p. 82). For these children, school and its teachers can offer children a significant source of unrelated, caring and helpful role models who may serve a myriad of positive functions in the young person's life including becoming an ally (Gilligan, 1996), a 'listener' and 'valuer' (Seidman *et al.*, 1994). Because of these factors, the school community offers them a special supportive value, a secure base from which to explore the world and a gateway to adult opportunity (Gilligan, 1998). For some children, their teacher may be one of the most consistent adults in their lives and what these children need in their everyday lives is an investment of interest and concern by adults personally committed to them (Gilligan, 1998). The adults that children encounter within the school community and how these adults speak to, listen to,

teach, discipline and support children help them shape their understanding of the world (Daniel, 2008). For this reason, the adults within this community should remember:

[t]hat the detail of what they do with children counts. The rituals, the smiles, the interest in little things, the daily routines, the talents they nurture, the interests they stimulate, the hobbies they encourage, the friendships they support, the sibling ties they preserve make a difference. All of these little things may foster in a child the vital senses of belonging, of mattering, of counting. All of these little details may prove decisive turning points in a young person's developmental pathway (Gilligan, 2000, p. 45)

Examples of caring school practices such as these have been identified in the research findings. However, there is also some evidence that their existence is being challenged in part by the pervasiveness of accountability and audit mechanisms emphasising that which can be measured.

Conclusion

Across literature relevant to children and childhood, children are frequently conceptualised implicitly as either individuals who are 'becoming' adults or as children who are simply 'being' children (James et al. 1998; White, 2002; James & James, 2004; Jenks, 2005; Uprichard, 2008). However, this research highlights necessitates a view of children who are simultaneously 'being' and 'becoming', as individuals who have their own distinct rights, realities and experiences and yet, are vulnerable and in need of protection. This hybrid philosophical view of children is reflected by the UNCRC (1989) which ascribes rights that are particular and specific to children, whilst the reality of child abuse acknowledges, at least implicitly, that children are most often reliant on adults to exercise their rights for them (Hunt Federle, 2000; Peterson-Badali *et al.*, 2004; Cherney and Shing, 2008).

While the UNCRC has undoubtedly influenced how CPS systems worldwide are organised and orientated, international literature reveals there to be

significant variance among nations. In Ireland, it is clear that constitutional and ideological reverence for the family has, for decades, conflicted with child-centred or welfarist orientations espoused within national policy and procedure. Consequently, concern has been expressed that Ireland's approach to CPS is child-centred and family-orientated more in policy than in practice (Whelan, 2018). Moreover, the lasting reverence for the family's right to raise their child(ren) as they see fit, has resulted in the endurance of high thresholds for State intervention into family life (Burns et al. 2017; Burns & McGregor, 2019). As will be discussed in later chapters, this existence of high thresholds is viewed as problematic for many school personnel who are striving to protect vulnerable children in their schools.

Nonetheless, the historical antecedents detailed in this chapter have shown there to be a slow and steady erosion of long-held restrictive CPS ideologies and hence, allowed for the development of national CPS systems, provisions, and supports aimed at helping children in need of protection. The culmination of such discourses and development has led to the enactment of *Children First, 2015* and with it, the clear delineation of legislative CPS responsibilities for schools and school personnel. However, as this research will later reveal, schools and school personnel experience a wide range of challenges upholding their statutory and non-statutory CPS responsibilities. Hence, while schools are viewed as central sites for cultivating a caring society (Noddings, 1984) and their provision of care is judged as being particularly significant for vulnerable children (Gilligan, 1998, 2000; Baginsky, 2008; Fletcher-Campbell, 2008; Nohilly, 2019b; Treacy & Nohilly, 2020), this research illuminates the realities and complexities of protecting children.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

Introduction to Chapter

Recent changes in law, policy and procedure represent a significant change for schools as they considerably expand principals', Designated Liaison Persons' (DLPs), chairpersons' and teachers' Child Protection and Safeguarding (CPS) responsibilities. Despite such significant change, the perspectives of those charged with CPS responsibilities are mainly absent from debates on the topic and there remains a dearth of literature in the area. While one piece of national research has sought the specific views of DLPs concerning the recent legislative change (Treacy & Nohilly, 2020), no research has sought to gain the perspective of principals/DLPs, chairpersons and teachers together. This research project aims to address this gap in the literature base. Per this aim, this chapter seeks to explicate the theoretical lens used when researching these phenomena.

Determining the Suitability of the Theoretical Framework

When used appropriately, theoretical frameworks help researchers to “think more deeply about a topic” and hence, influence the entire research project (Wyse & Cowan, 2017). For this reason, determining the suitability of various theoretical perspectives is a crucial part of the research process. As outlined subsequently, the design and analysis of this research were framed by Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), which is a theory of action. Nevertheless, before arriving at this decision, the researcher carefully considered the applicability of other theoretical perspectives to this research project. For example, the researcher carefully reflected on the applicability of both Wenger's (1991) 'Communities of Practice' (CoP) model and Roy Bhaskar's (2008) perspective on 'Critical Realism' to this research project. A succinct rationale for rejecting these perspectives is offered subsequently.

Wenger (1991) claims that CoPs are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better. In reference to the aims of this research, Wenger's (1991) perspective would allow for a careful

consideration of how principals, chairpersons and teachers share in their concern for and learn about CPS. Moreover, it would enable the researcher to consider how participants' views in relation to CPS were shaped by the distinct CoP in their school context. However, the CoP perspective did not lend itself to a thorough consideration of how contextual factors may affect CPS perspectives and behaviours. Consequently, factors such as the influence of history, legislation, policy, procedure and system-wide issues may have been overlooked in terms of their significance to this research topic.

In relation to Critical Realism, Bhaskar (2008) distinguishes between the 'real' world and the 'observable' world. The 'real' cannot be observed and exists independent from human perceptions, theories, and constructions. The world as we know and understand it is constructed from our perspectives and experiences, through what is 'observable'. Thus, according to Critical Realism, unobservable structures cause observable events and the social world can be understood only if people understand the structures that generate events. The value of this theoretical perspective relates to its capacity to acknowledge that CPS behaviour and action can be influenced by implicit factors that can remain undetected. As is acknowledged elsewhere, the actions of those involved in CPS work are frequently shaped by intangible factors such as individuals' "belief systems about children, children's rights, child protection and child abuse" (Bourke & Maunsell, 2016, p.319). Despite the utility of this theoretical perspective, the researcher determined that some of the core principles of Critical Realism, such as the views relating to the 'real' world, did not align with her own ontological and epistemological beliefs, or with the principles of qualitative research. Hence, the search for an appropriate theoretical framework continued until the researcher came to learn about CHAT.

Cultural-Historical Activity Theory

The design and analysis of this research were framed by Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) which is a theoretical lens for understanding human activity. CHAT or Activity Theory (AT), as it is also known (Batiibwe, 2019) sees

human cognition and behaviour as being embedded in collectively-organised, artefact-mediated activity systems (Leontiev, 1978; Engeström, 2015). Foot (2014) explains the significance of each word in the label 'Cultural-Historical Activity Theory: 'Cultural' underscores the idea that humans are enculturated, and hence, their behaviour is influenced by their cultural values and resources; 'Historical' is used alongside 'cultural' emphasising a view that an analysis of what people do at any point in time must be viewed in light of the historical trajectories in which their actions take place; 'Activity' refers to what people do together and is shaped and evolves in response to cultural and historical influences; conveying the situatedness of human activity; and 'Theory' is used to denote that this is a conceptual framework for understanding and explaining the human activity. Considering this topic of research through the lens of CHAT enabled the researcher to understand human cognition and behaviour for CPS within a collectively-organised and artefact-mediated system (Leontiev, 1978; Engeström, 2015). This system is collectively-organised by the cultural norms, societal rules and responsibilities ascribed to school personnel for CPS. Moreover, when acting for CPS, CHAT assumes that these persons utilise a range of actual and conceptual artefacts related to CPS. Such as guidance provided within key documents (Government of Ireland, 2017; Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2017; Department of Education and Skills, 2017, 2019a).

CHAT views activities as “social practices orientated at objects” and postulates that an entity becomes an object “when it meets a human need” (Engeström, Miettinen and Punamäki-Gitai, 2007, p.380). Object, therefore, can be understood as the potentially shared problem or socially significant aim that humans are working on or toward yet “is never fully reached or conquered” (Engeström et al., 2007, p. 381). Hence, in relation to this study, object can be understood as the societal aim of protecting children from harm. While this aim is worthy of pursuit, it will never be fully reached as protecting all children from all forms of harm is arguably an impossible goal. In CHAT, the subject (i.e., the individual or group) is seen as constructing the object by identifying, implicitly or explicitly, the properties thought to be fundamental for developing a social

practice using mediating artefacts that exist as “forms of expression of cognitive norms, standards, and object-hypotheses existing outside the given individual” (Lektorsky, 1980, p. 137). In this artefact-mediated activity system, the object determines the horizon of possible actions, giving shape and direction to the activity (Engeström et al., 2007). Accordingly, activities should not be perceived as being rigid or fixed but rather, understood as being in a constant state of change and development (Gedera, 2016). Moreover, contradictions, which expose themselves as obstacles, conflicts or tensions that preclude the object, are said to be the driving force propelling this change and development and thus, are viewed as helpful.

The historical origins of CHAT can be traced back to classical German philosophy (from Kant to Hegel), dialectical materialism and the writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, and the Soviet Russian cultural-historical psychology of Lev Vygotsky, Alexei Leontiev and Alexander Luria (Engeström et al., 2007). Currently, the development of CHAT can be understood as a succession of four generations, with each generation developing its own prime unit of analysis (Engeström & Sannino, 2021). While this study does not allow for a thorough review of CHAT’s history and development, it will consider the contributions made to CHAT by Vygotsky, Leontiev, Luria and Engeström, as the concepts developed by these individuals are most pertinent to the research methodology and analysis. Fourth Generation CHAT (4GAT) will be absent from this discussion, as its applicability to this research is of least relevance⁹.

First Generation CHAT

Vygotsky’s ‘classical mediational triangle’ (Figure 3.1) is often referred to as ‘First-Generation Activity Theory’ (1GAT). This generation of CHAT is defined by ‘mediated action’ (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010) which, as a concept, introduced the

⁹ As of yet, there is no unified model, construct or principles for 4GAT so applying it to this research would diminish the robustness of the overall study. Moreover, tentative proposals concerning 4GAT suggest it is suited to activity systems that are characterised by the unstable involvement of various stakeholders working in a poorly bounded arrangement (Spinuzzi & Guile, 2019) which contrasts with the activity systems being examined here.

idea that human behaviour is not always triggered by stimuli but instead is mediated by artefacts of the environment that are created to prompt or modulate action (Bakhurst, 2009, p. 199). Although Activity Theory has developed considerably since the 1920s, mediation has remained a key idea “that runs as the unifying and connecting lifeline” between the various generations of Activity Theory (Engeström et al., 2007, p.29) and is an essential concept for this research.

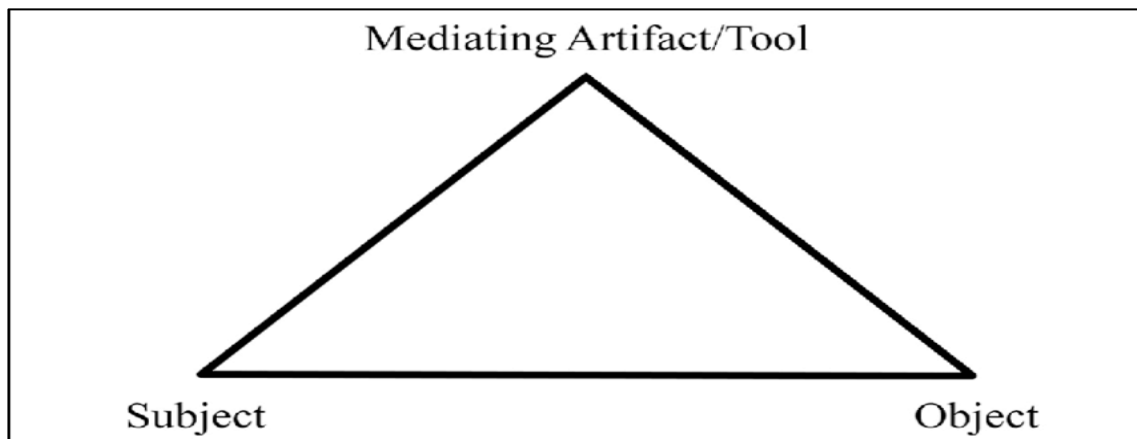


Figure 3.1. Vygotsky's (1978) classical mediational triangle depicting “a complex, mediated act”.

1GAT focuses on individual action in its relation to the *subject*, *mediating artefact* and *object* (Khayyat, 2016). Here, the term *subject* is used to refer to the participant within the activity and, the *mediating artefacts/tools* are the symbols, signs, and conceptual understandings that serve as physical or psychological tools, mediating between the *subject* and the *object* (Batiibwe, 2019). However, it should be noted that controversy exists among CHAT scholars in relation to what the term *object* signifies. Because of its origins, many CHAT sources were originally published in Russian, and this has been highlighted as problematic because the word *object* has multiple meanings when translated into English (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). As a result, the term *object* is frequently used interchangeably to refer to the aim of an activity, the motives for participating in an activity, and the material products that participants try to gain through an activity (Anselm, 2017).

Engeström (2015) claims that Vygotsky's insertion of cultural artefacts (i.e. the *tools/artefacts*) into human actions was revolutionary because the "basic unit of analysis now overcame the split between the Cartesian individual and the

untouchable societal structure" (2015, p. 5). Accordingly, this new shift in thinking about human activity meant the "individual could no longer be understood without his or her cultural means; and the society could no longer be understood without the agency of individuals who use and produce artefacts" (Engeström, 1987, p.5). Reflecting on the discussion in Chapter Two brings Engeström's (2015) point to life. Tracing the historical development of the child protection system in Ireland alongside the cultural artefacts (e.g. iterations of child protection guidelines and procedures), it becomes evident that individuals do not simply react to a child protection concern. Instead, their action for CPS needs to be understood in relation to the mediating artefacts designed to direct their actions in particular ways. Moreover, reflecting on the periods of time in Ireland when few or no cultural artefacts existed for CPS, it is also possible to see how those in power could alter society's action as it related to CPS. A prime example of this relates to the *Child Care Act* (Government of Ireland, 1991) which was first introduced at a 'genteel pace' until the *Kilkenny Incest Report* (McGuinness, 1993) accelerated the process considerably (Nohilly, 2011).

While 1GAT offers analytical strength in understanding individuals' action for CPS, its unit of analysis remains focused on individual action (Engeström, 2015) and it is limited in its capacity to account appropriately for the influence of society, culture, and history on activity systems (Roth and Lee, 2007). Hence, in the following sections, the applicability of Second-Generation Activity Theory (2GAT) is considered.

Second Generation CHAT

Alexei Leontiev, a student of Vygotsky, expanded the concept of mediation from individual action to collective activity by incorporating community and division of labour into Vygotsky's earlier model, thus making it more of a systems approach (Batiibwe, 2019). Unlike Vygotsky, Leontiev distinguishes between *action* and *activity*. From his perspective, *action* is conducted by an individual or group to fulfil some goal whereas an *activity* is undertaken by a community (denoting division of labour) and it has an *object* and a *motive* (Bakhurst, 2009).

Regarding this study, *activity* can be thought of as protecting children from harm. This *activity* is collective, necessitating a variety of *actions* by different individuals (i.e., the chairperson, principal, and teacher) who are unified, to some degree, by a shared *object*. Differentiating between *actions* taken by the chairperson, principal, and teacher helps reveal both the complexity of CPS as an *activity* and the importance of the *community*. For example, the chairperson who represents the BOM carries out an oversight function in respect to CPS. Accordingly, one of the chairperson's responsibilities is to ensure that newly appointed teachers know their child protection responsibilities. The chairpersons' *actions*, in this respect, may involve asking teachers interview questions to judge whether they are appropriately knowledgeable and hence, would know what procedures to follow if a child protection issue arose for them. In contrast, the principal is expected to "act as the resource person to any member of school personnel who has a child protection concern" (Department of Education and Skills, 2017a, p.22). Thus, the principal's actions may include discussing a child protection concern with another teacher and advising them on what subsequent action to take to mitigate the harm posed to that child. Class teachers are expected to teach the Stay Safe Programme in full. Accordingly, their action in this respect may involve familiarising themselves with the programme content and teaching it to a class. The goal here would be to ensure that the children in that class know that they can make a disclosure to an adult that they trust (i.e., the teacher) and then that this adult would take the necessary action to mitigate further risk to that child. This example, although brief, illustrates that while a shared *object* unifies *subjects*, the *actions* undertaken by them and the goals they seek are frequently very different.

Another important concept introduced by Leontiev (1978) relates to the *object motive*. From his perspective, *activity* does not exist without a *motive*. Hence, behind the activity, an *object motive* exists that "may be material or ideal, present in perception or exclusively in the imagination but always directing the participation of subjects in an activity system" (Leontiev, 1978, p. 45). This *object motive* can be likened to a 'particular point of view' and 'set of parallel values' directing the subject(s) *action* (Edwards, 2011). Leontiev suggested that because

subjects may have different *object motives*, their *actions* may be ‘driven forward’ with variance even when seeking the same *object*. In this research, Leontiev’s (1978) *object motive* concept became most useful during the data analysis process when considering why participants, all working in the same school context, approached child protection concerns with varied attitudes and urgency. This is discussed in Chapters Five and Six.

Leontiev’s work on AT was seminal, bringing the concept of *activity* a significant step forward by turning the focus toward complex interrelations between the subject(s) and the *community*. However, Leontiev never graphically expanded his concepts into a model of a collective activity system. This feat was achieved by Yrjö Engeström, who drew from Leontiev’s work and from Vygotsky’s AT model to construct a new framework now widely referred to as ‘Second-Generation Cultural- Historical Activity Theory’ (2GAT) (Engeström, 2000).

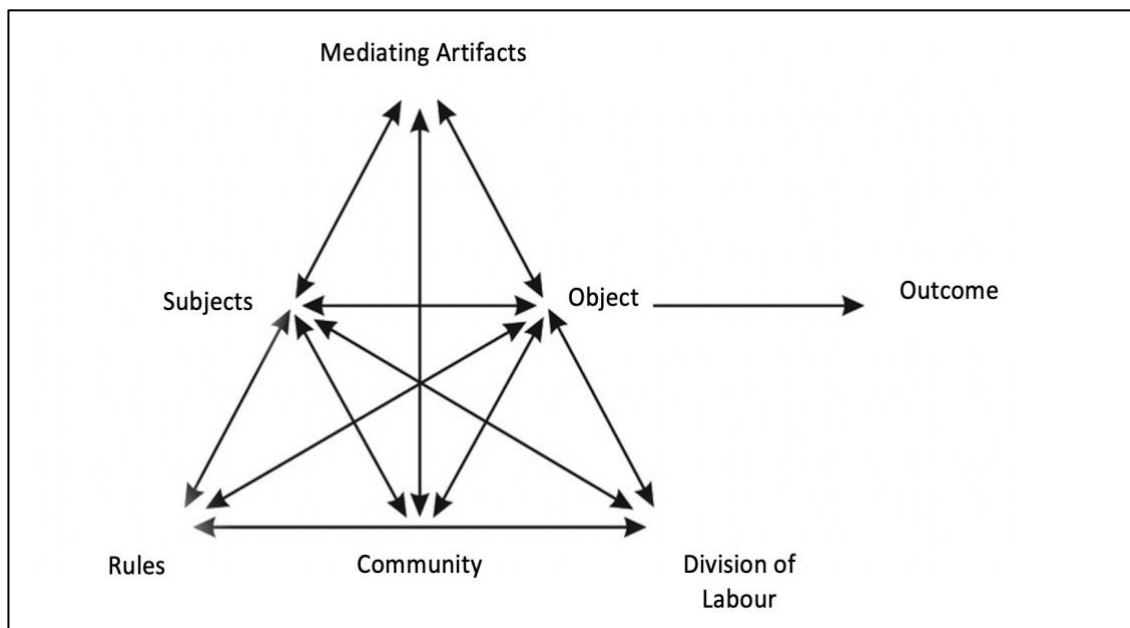


Figure 3.2. The structure of a human activity system (Adapted from Engeström, 1987).

Engeström’s framework for activity system analysis (Figure 3.2) has six core components (referred to here as nodes) and can be used to map the co-evolutionary interaction between individuals or groups of individuals and their environment (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). The first three nodes, conceptualised

earlier by Vygotsky but now reconceptualised across a socio-historical dimension by Engeström, include the *subject(s)*, the *tools*, and the *object*. To extend the concept of mediation to incorporate societal, cultural, and historical dimensions Engeström (1987) inserted a fourth, fifth and sixth node beneath Vygotsky's original model of complex human mediation (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2012). The fourth node, the *Community*, relates to other people who share with the *subject*, an interest in and involvement with the same *object* (Foot, 2014). Interactions between the *subject(s)* and the *community* are mediated by the last two components of CHAT: the *rules* and the *division of labour*. In CHAT, *rules* refer to the formal (e.g., laws, policies, procedures) and informal regulations (e.g., norms) that guide the *subject* regarding the correct procedures and appropriate interactions. Hence, they exist to regulate *action* by mediating how the subject *acts* in relation to the *object*, including the *tools* employed and how they are employed (Foot, 2014). Because of this, *rules* can constrain or liberate *activity* (Engeström, 1993). Finally, the *division of labour* defines how tasks and responsibilities are shared among the system participants engaging in the activity (Cole and Engeström, 1993). Foot (2014) suggests that the *division of labour* construct also serves as a prompt to consider the influence of sociohistorical power structures within the activity system and in its relation to the wider culture/society of which it is part and thus, should not be viewed as static. This point becomes obvious when reflecting on the development of the child protection system in Ireland alongside its changing power dynamics and cultural attitudes towards child abuse prevention, as discussed in Chapter Two.

Second-Generation CHAT: The Adult CPS Activity System in Schools

Engeström's (2000) framework for activity system analysis offers great analytical strength when applied to this piece of research. When employed, the individuals participating in this research become the *subjects* of the school CPS Activity System. For reasons that will be later explained, this activity system is referred to as '*The Adults' CPS Activity System*' (Figure 3.4).

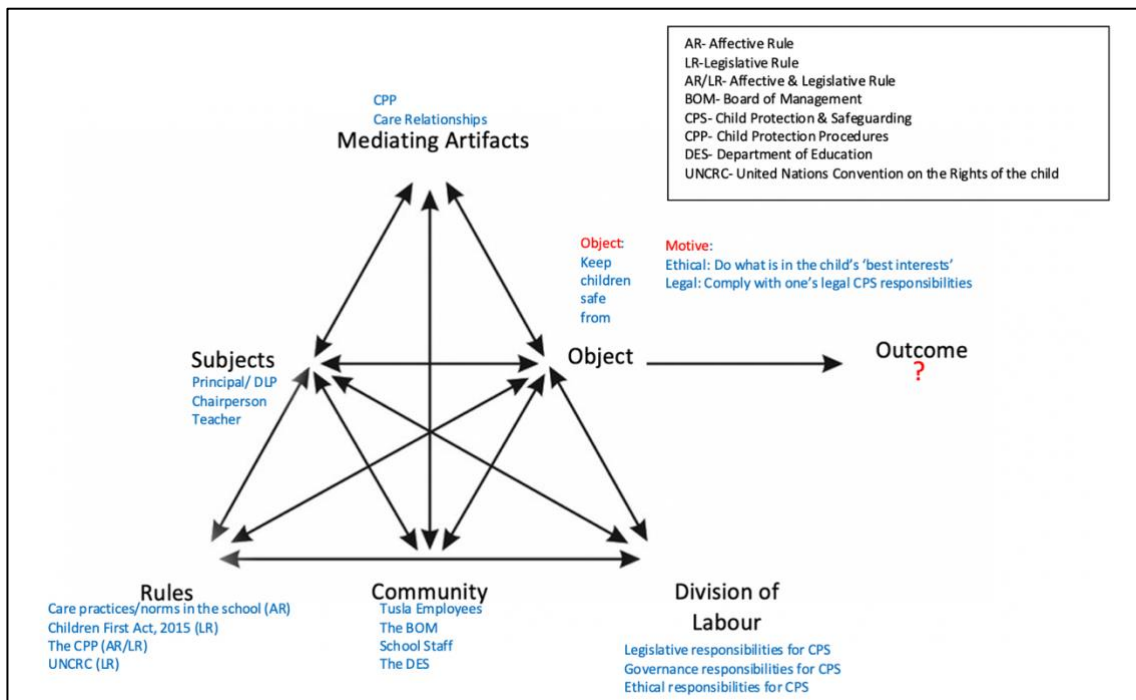


Figure 3.3. The Adults' CPS Activity System (Adapted from Engeström, 1987).

In seeking the CPS *object*, the *subjects* employ different *mediating artefacts*. In this piece of research, two *mediating artefacts* are considered. The first, discussed previously in Chapter Two, includes the 'Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017' (Department of Education and Skills, 2017a) (hereafter CPP). The second tool includes 'Care Relationships' that exist in relation to this *object*. For instance, in seeking the *object*, a teacher may seek advice, support or involvement from others who have a caring relationship with the child or who share with the subjects, an ethical or professional motive to protect this child/ these children. Relatedly, the *community* involved in seeking this *object* include Tusla employees, the BOM, other staff members in the school, and the Department of Education and Skills. From a CHAT perspective, many *rules* relevant to CPS could have been considered. However, the scope of this research project limited the number of *rules* that could be included. Cognisant of this, after reviewing the literature and the emerging data, the researcher decided that four *rules* would be considered. These rules, which are categorised as being 'affective' and/or 'legislative' rules, include the non-regulatory care norms existing within the school; the *Children First Act, 2015*; the CPP and particular Articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the

Child (UNCRC, 2013). In relation to this last *'rule'*, two Articles are of crucial significance. These include Article Three of UNCRC which states that “all actions concerning the child must be based on his or her best interests” (UNCRC, 2013, p.1) and Article Nineteen which states that the “State has an obligation to protect children from all forms of abuse and neglect, to provide support to those who have been abused and to investigate instances of abuse” (UNESCO, 2013, p.2).

Regarding the *division of labour*, it is important to acknowledge that many of the *actions* taken by chairpersons, principals and teachers for CPS are delineated either through national legislation (Government of Ireland, 2015) or through educational guidance (e.g., The Teaching Council, 2016; Department of Education and Skills, 2017a; 2019). From a CHAT perspective, the explication of these responsibilities as they relate to specific participant groups denotes a clearly defined *division of labour*. In Chapter Two, the legal and professional responsibilities placed on the participants for CPS were discussed in detail. Returning to these and taking a CHAT perspective, it becomes essential to acknowledge that regulating particular actions for CPS complicates both the *object* and the analysis of the entire activity system. For example, if a teacher reports a child protection concern to Tusla, does it reflect an ethical *object* whereby the teacher wants to mitigate against the potential danger to a specific child or a professional *object* to uphold one’s professional duties? Perhaps it is both, but if so, another question arises. That is, which *object* is most dominant, and how does this affect the whole activity system and its outcome? These questions, which are central to this research, will be considered in Chapter Six.

The ‘Hypothetical Child’ in Need of Protection

A central aim of this research is to consider, from the participants’ perspective, how the current arrangements for CPS are serving the needs of vulnerable children in Irish primary schools. 2GAT offers great potential in seeking this aim. Using this theoretical framework in tandem with the perspectives offered by the participants (i.e., the *subjects*), it was possible to detect where specific tensions within the system may be precluding the CPS *object*. Despite this, the

viewpoint that would hypothetically have been taken by a vulnerable child remained elusive.

As noted in Chapter Two, there is emerging concern that schools have become overly focused on the regulatory aspects of CPS work and questioning whether schools have lost sight of what CPS is actually about (Treacy & Nohilly, 2020). For this reason, the researcher thought it appropriate to consider these children in need of protection as embodying a separate activity system that interacts with '*The Adults' CPS Activity System*'. The rationale for this decision was also encouraged by Engeström's claim that, when looking at schools, there should be more than one activity system involved because it would not be wise to equate the activity (or perspectives) of staff with the activity (or perspectives) of the pupils (Ploettner & Tresserras, 2016). To do this the researcher conceptualised the 'hypothetical child' in reference to the participants' anecdotes. This construct is imagined as including the primary-aged children who have, who are or who will suffer child abuse and/or neglect, regardless of whether they make a disclosure or understand what they are experiencing is wrong. As will be revealed in chapters five and six, these children who are imagined here as a construct exist and prompt action, debate and reflection among the participants in this research who seek to protect them. In recognition of such children, the 'hypothetical child' and his/her activity system are conceptualised within '*The Child's CPS Activity System*' (Figure 3.4).

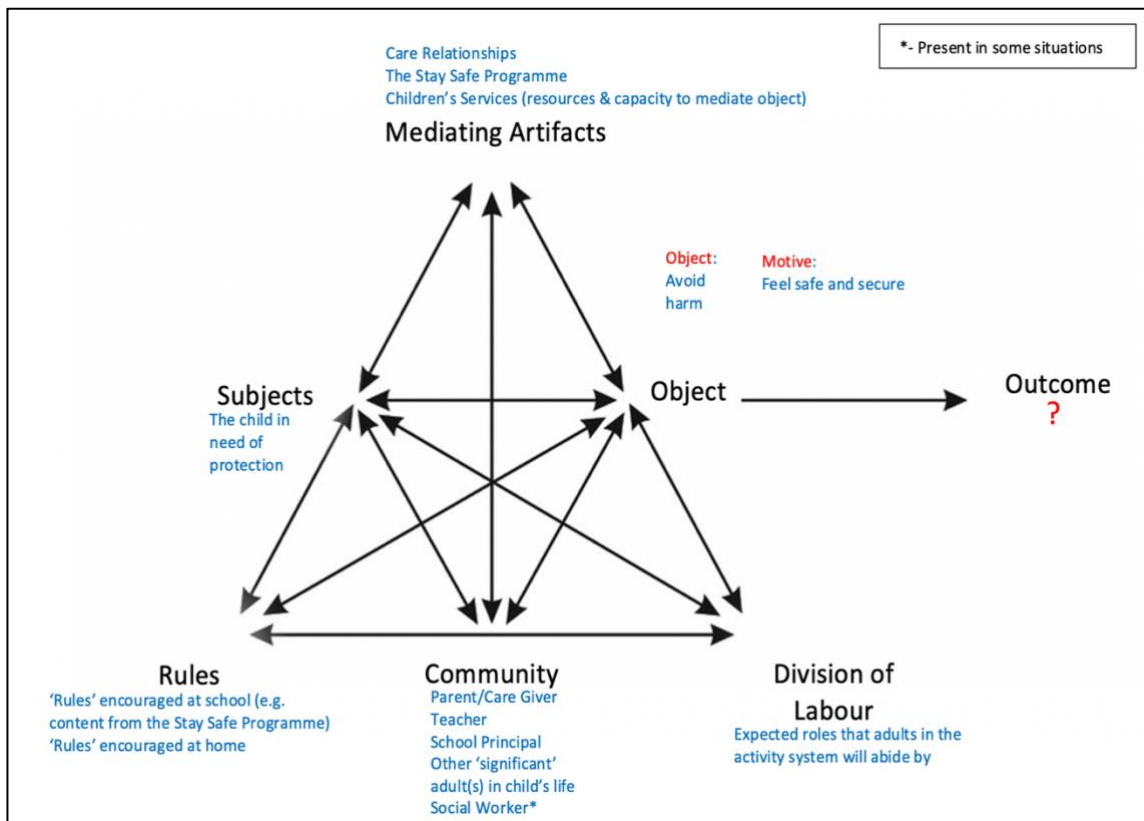


Figure 3.4. The Child's CPS Activity System (Adapted from Engeström, 1987).

When conceptualised from the perspective of the child/children in need of protection, the activity system for CPS is different in many respects from the 'The Adults' CPS Activity System' (Figure 3.3). Here, it is imagined that the *object* would be understood as an aim or desire to avoid harm. In seeking this *object*, it is presumed that the *subject* may employ three *mediating artefacts/tools*. For example, these may include 'Care Relationships' that exist in relation to this *object*. For instance, the child may seek help from a familiar adult, trusting that they can help keep them safe from harm. Alternatively, the child may apply his/her learning from the Stay Safe Programme (CAPP, 2017) and may understand the importance of disclosing any maltreatment they experience to a trusting adult. The third *mediating artefact* here relates to children's services and is premised on a view that vulnerable children depend indirectly on the efficacy of children's services to mediate their CPS *object*. For instance, if a child makes a disclosure that they have been abused, once that disclosure has been shared with Tusla, that child then relies on Tusla's capacity to respond in a timely and appropriate manner to mitigate against the potential for that child to experience further harm. As will be

discussed in Chapters Five and Six, factors may serve as forces obscuring the child in seeking the *object*. For example, some participants felt that children who had made initial disclosures to school staff later changed their disclosing behaviour, becoming reluctant to share their adverse experiences with adults they once trusted with such information. The ‘motive’ and the *rules* constructs are of importance here. For some children, the *motive* of avoiding harm may sometimes conflict with the *motive* of making sure you stay with your family or with what is being asked of you (*rules*) at home. In relation to the *community*, this construct consists of the child’s parent(s)/caregiver(s), the child’s teacher, the school principal, other ‘significant’ adults in the child’s life and, in some situations, a social worker.

While there is great potential to examine the tensions within ‘*The Child’s CPS Activity System*’ or ‘*The Adult’s CPS Activity System*’ using 2GAT, this framework is limited in its capacity to understand each activity system in relation to the other. Hence, while 2GAT helps to identify significant tensions within one activity system, it is limited in its applicability to consider this tension in respect to another related activity system. From an ethical perspective, it is important to consider the tensions that may arise for vulnerable children in seeking their CPS *object*. However, the value of doing this would be diminished if this analysis was not expanded to ‘*The Adult’s CPS Activity System*’ and, considered in relation to the wider national goal of putting ‘Children First’ (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2017). For this reason, this research will apply what is widely referred to as ‘Third-Generation Activity Theory (3GAT)’ to consider the relationship between the two activity systems mentioned above.

Third-Generation Activity Theory

Third-generation Activity Theory (3GAT) is premised on the same principles as 2GAT but takes two interacting activity systems as its minimal unit of analysis (Engeström, 2001). This model of CHAT, depicted in Figure 3.5, endorses the view that “all activity systems are part of a network of activity systems that in its totality constitutes human society” (Roth and Lee, 2007, p. 200). Per this idea, Engeström

et al. (2007) claim that as long as individuals contribute to the activity systems that they are part of, they contribute to the reproduction of these activity systems and also, society as a whole.

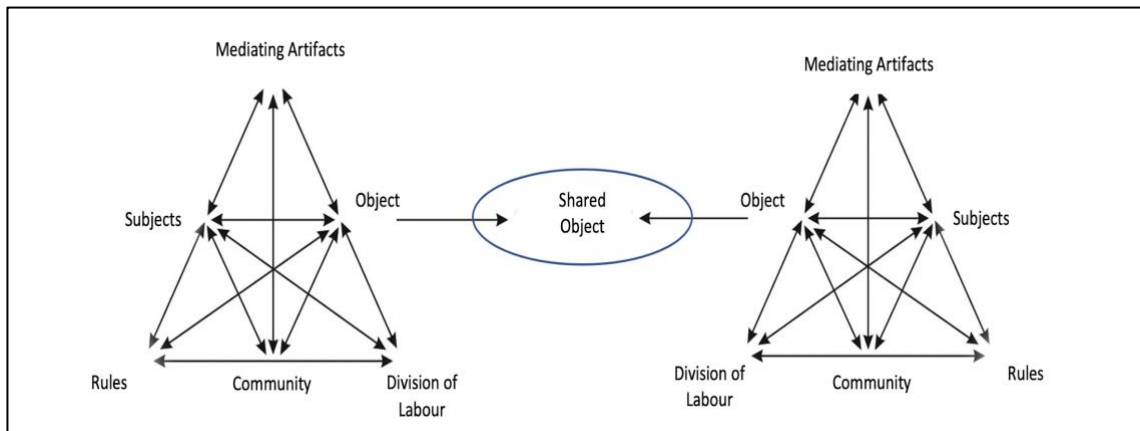


Figure 3.5. Two Interacting Activity Systems (Adapted from Engeström, 2001).

Engeström (2001) explains that this model of CHAT is premised on five principles. First, a collective, artefact-mediated, and object-oriented activity system, as seen in its network relations to other activity systems, is taken as the prime unit of analysis. Second, an activity system is always a community of multiple points of view, traditions, and interests. This should be viewed as a source of trouble and a source of innovation, demanding actions of translation and negotiation. Third, because activity systems take shape and get transformed over lengthy periods of time, their problems and potentials can only be understood against their own history. Fourth, contradictions are viewed as historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems. Moreover, these should be viewed as sources of change and development. Fifth, within activity systems there is always the possibility of expansive transformations. These principles, as described by Engeström (2001) helped to guide the data analysis process of this research.

According to Engeström and Pyörälä (2021), when looking at complex social institutions one should expect to uncover historically accumulating systemic contradictions within and between the nodes of each activity system and among interconnected activity systems. When applied to this research, 3GAT helps to

identify the historically accumulating systemic contradictions within and between 'The Adults' CPS Activity System' and the 'The Child's CPS Activity System', allowing for a discussion of what may be precluding the shared object between these two interrelated systems. The interplay between these two systems is depicted Figure 3.6 and then discussed beneath.

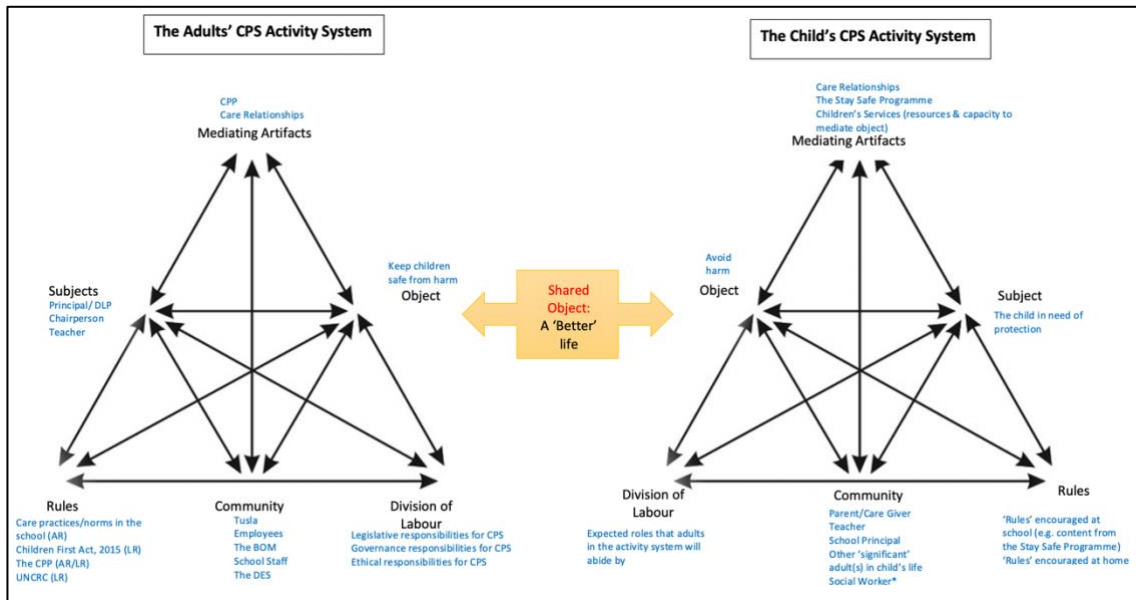


Figure 3.6. The interplay between 'The Child CPS Activity System' and 'The Adult CPS Activity System'.

When the two activity systems here are considered in relation to one another the *shared object* is understood as a 'better' life. In general terms, this 'better life' *object* can be understood as a changed life experience whereby the child lives in a reality where they are not (or at least are less likely) to experience subsequent adverse experiences. From the perspective of the chairperson, principal and teacher (i.e. the adults), this object can be understood in relation to both their regulated professional duties toward this child and an ethical urge to seek a better life for children experiencing adversity. Moreover, while the professional actions expected in seeking this aim are outlined in key documents (e.g. Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2017; Department of Education and Skills, 2017a; 2019) the ethical dimensions of this *object* are less tangible. Accordingly, each individual's *actions* in seeking this *object* and the nodes that facilitate or constrain this action will vary in relation to the individual's own

axiology. Chapters Five and Six elaborate further on this, emphasising how particular individuals were moved to 'act' when faced with a concern while others were not motivated by the same factors.

Exploring this *shared object* from the child's perspective illuminated different yet fundamental tensions that were arguably less visible to the adults in the system due to power differentials and regulatory factors that may preclude the *shared object*. As highlighted in Chapter Two, vulnerable children often experience feelings of isolation, fear and distrust and seek, above all, "an investment of interest and concern by adults personally committed to them" (Gilligan, 2000, p. 45). What these children need, Gilligan (2000) claims, is for adults not to lose sight of the "crucial details of what can sustain the positive development of *this child today*" (p. 45, emphasis in original). 3GAT, when applied here, highlights several tensions relevant to the *shared object* and Gilligan's (2000) argument. For instance, if a child makes a disclosure to an adult (e.g. a teacher/principal) and that adult makes a report to Tusla but it does not reach Tusla's own 'threshold for action', the adult needs to recognise that, despite his/her action for CPS, nothing has changed from the child's perspective and the *shared object* remains out of sight. From the child's perspective, this may be viewed as a failure to respond to their reality and send a wrong signal to the child about the adults' ethical orientation.

Reflections on the Applicability of CHAT to this Research

As a theoretical lens, CHAT is particularly useful to researchers seeking to describe the relationships between participant activities and the social environment (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). Because of this, CHAT is frequently used as a means to analyse activities of the workplace to "uncover how people use both material and conceptual tools and what aspects of work they prioritise" (Edwards, 2011, p.1). Increasingly, CHAT is being used by scholar-practitioners across a diverse array of fields to advance ways of thinking about and shaping professional practices such as developing curricula and teaching at all education levels (Roth & Lee, 2007), providing mental health care (Sundet, 2010), strategising and

managing organizational processes (Blackler, Crump, & McDonald, 2000), designing digital technologies (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006), developing public policy (Canary, 2007, 2010; Canary & McPhee, 2008), and analysing work. Within the field of educational research, the application of CHAT to research studies has increased dramatically since the 1990s (Nussbaumer, 2011) as the framework has increasingly been recognised as a means to study how schools operate as systems shaped by history, culture and society (Edwards, 2011). The application of CHAT to this research allowed for a balanced analysis of CPS as an inherently social activity that is shaped and influenced by durable cultural factors (Blackler, 2009). Hence, rather than critiquing the issues or tensions associated with distinct participants, schools or social factors, CHAT instead encouraged the researcher to consider the relationship between such tensions and the wider CPS system while also reflecting on the associated system outcomes.

CHAT endorses the view that all activity systems are part of a network of activity systems that, in its totality, constitutes human society (Roth & Lee, 2007). By proxy, those who apply CHAT to their research indirectly make positive assumptions concerning the capacity of this framework to analyse the complexity that is human society. However, as highlighted by Spinuzzi (2019), contemporary activity systems are frequently not as stable, well-organised and unified as CHAT assumes. Relatedly, Blackler (2009) problematises the illusory simplicity of the term 'object' CHAT. From this author's perspective, when applied to any given activity system this term needs to be understood as being "simultaneously given, socially constructed, contested, and emergent" (p. 27) while also being the basis for theorising the influence of motivation within any given system. Hence, as a construct, it needs to be understood as being inherently complex and multi-dimensional. Similarly, Bakhurst (2009) warns that, when looking at complex social phenomena, one should be wary of "stable, structural representations where you aspire to understand dynamism, flux, reflexivity, and transformation" (p. 207). Despite this critique, Bakhurst (2009) clarifies that CHAT has two fundamental strands of applicability. First, it can be applied as a fundamental explanatory strategy and likened to a lens for understanding a social phenomenon in its

context. Bakhurst (2009) rationalises that, when used in this way, AT “turns out to be a useful heuristic” (p. 207) put places a caveat on this point, claiming that this heuristic is effective only when applied to activities that have reasonably well-defined objects, a sense of what the desired outcome is, a set of subjects and a good sense of what might count as an instrument or tool. However, as distinct from this applicability, Bakhurst (2009) states that 3GAT is being increasingly applied as a method for modelling activity systems in the aim to facilitate changed practice. Yet, as 3GAT is essentially a model with ‘minimal predictive power’, such applications should be cautiously adopted. While acknowledging these criticisms of 3GAT, it is important to state that, in this research, CHAT is applied as a heuristic tool to understand CPS activity and not as a mechanism seeking to predict or alter participants’ practice.

Conclusion

This chapter sought to explicate the theoretical lens used when researching perspectives on CPS in primary schools. To begin, the researcher outlined key concepts relevant to 1GAT. During this discussion the researcher defined what was meant by ‘mediated action’ (Vygotsky, 1978) and identified this concept as a key idea “that runs as the unifying and connecting lifeline” between the various generations of Activity Theory (Engeström et al., 2007, p.29). Nonetheless, recognising 1GAT’s limited capacity to account appropriately for the influence of society, culture, and history on activity systems (Roth and Lee, 2007), the applicability of Second-Generation Activity Theory (2GAT) was next considered. This section highlighted the appropriateness of 2GAT in considering CPS activity as a collectively shared endeavour while also giving due consideration to the contextual factors that may influence the whole system. During this discussion, the school CPS system was considered from the point of view of the adults within the system (i.e., the chairpersons, principals, and teachers) and then separately from the perspective of the ‘hypothetical child in need of protection’. Following this, the next section underscored the utility of 3GAT in allowing the researcher to consider the adult and the child’s CPS system together while also giving due consideration to the shared object between these two interacting

systems. Finally, criticisms of CHAT were considered in relation to this research study.

Chapter Four: Methodology

Introduction to Chapter

Within the Irish educational context, the Child Protection and Safeguarding (CPS) requirements expected of schools and school personnel are clearly delineated through national legislation in the *Children First Act, 2015* (Government of Ireland, 2017) and through statutory guidance offered in both *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2017) and the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools* (Department of Education and Skills, 2017). In addition to the stipulation of CPS duties offered in these key documents, the *Education Act, 1998* charges Boards of Management (BOMs) with ensuring good governance in schools and extends this responsibility to include an oversight role in CPS (Department of Education and Skills, 2019a). Hence, the importance of schools and school personnel in protecting children from harm is clearly acknowledged across national policy and procedure. Correspondingly, national and international literature relevant to CPS underscores the significant of schools and school personnel in mitigating the harm posed to vulnerable children (e.g., Gilligan, 1998; Baginsky & Macpherson, 2005; Bourke & Maunsell, 2016). Nevertheless, this literature also highlights a consensus that child protection and safeguarding (CPS) work in school communities is complex and nuanced, suggesting there are tensions between the expectations placed on school personnel for CPS and how those expectations are experienced.

In the Republic of Ireland (ROI), the voices of those charged with CPS responsibilities are mainly absent from debates on the topic and hence, there is a dearth of research available to indicate the efficacy of current CPS arrangements operating in schools, or indicate what factors are supporting or preventing schools from seeking their CPS aims. This lack of literature provides the rationale for this research study which seeks to understand the perspectives toward CPS held in thirteen school communities in North Dublin.

This chapter aims to explicate the methodological approach and processes involved in undertaking this research study. The chapter is divided into six broad sections in reference to this aim. Section one explicates the philosophical assumptions underpinning this research. Section two defends the choice to employ a mixed-methods case study design before describing the sampling procedure and profile of participants. Section three describes the data collection process, remarking specifically on the applicability of questionnaires and focus groups. Section four outlines the procedures taken to maximise validity, reliability and generalisability. Section five discusses the ethical considerations that were necessary when completing this research. Section six summarises the data analysis processes involved in examining the quantitative and qualitative data.

Philosophical Assumptions Underpinning this Study

Explicating your philosophical assumptions is an initial task required on every research journey (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010). Researchers are advised to begin by clarifying core ontological assumptions (Tang, 2011) as these give rise to epistemological assumptions that in turn define methodological considerations and eventually determine instrumentation and data collection methods (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). In addition, Creswell and Poth (2018) claim that, as all research is 'value-laden', researchers should acknowledge their axiology and its influence on their study. In the following section, the researcher will discuss the meaning associated with these key philosophical constructs before considering these in relation to her personal research philosophy and the research paradigm.

Ontology

Ontology is concerned with the nature of social entities; what there is or what exists in the social world and hence encapsulates one's philosophical stance on what is assumed to exist in the world and how those things should be viewed and studied (Thomas, 2013). Accordingly, an investigation into one's ontological perspective brings forth questions concerning whether social entities can be considered as objective entities which have a reality external to social actors or contrastingly, should they be considered social constructions built upon or up

from the perspectives and actions of social actors (Bryman, 2016). These contrasting perspectives toward social phenomena can be thought of as existing along a continuum. At one end, 'objectivism' perceives there to be one objective reality that is independent of how people interpret it, and at the other end of the continuum, 'constructionism' perceives there to be multiple realities, rejecting the view that reality is something 'out there, waiting to be discovered'.

Initially, the researcher found herself torn between the ontological arguments for both objectivism and constructivism, seeing value and issues related to both, and postulating that there are 'truths' that can be spoken about accurately from a positivist perspective. For example, the researcher imagined that the realities of vulnerable children could be understood as 'truths' that were real and singular to each individual whether known or not known to others. Yet, thinking more deeply, it seemed as though this stance collapsed each time it was interrogated more closely. For instance, the researcher's initial judgement that the 'truth' of vulnerable children could be thought of from an objective stance broke down when reflecting on the term 'vulnerable', as it became clear that the meaning of this term had not been attained objectively. Reflections like this helped the researcher to realise that her ontological stance aligns with constructivism. Bryman's (2016) perspective also helped to uncover this. According to this author, how researchers formulate their research questions indicates their ontological position. The Primary Research Question (PRQ)¹⁰, especially the inclusion of the plural word 'perspectives' indicated an underlying assumption that the participants would not share the same singular view and hence, it would be impossible for this research to arrive at a definitive and objective conclusion.

Epistemology

While ontology brings forth questions about *what* you are looking at and the events that exist in the social world, epistemology prompts inquiry into *how*

¹⁰ *What are the perspectives of principals, Chairpersons and teachers toward child protection and safeguarding?*

you look at and find out about these social entities. Bryman (2016) explains that epistemological issues concern the question of “what is (or should be) regarded as acceptable knowledge in a discipline” (p.27). Similar to ontological positions, epistemological positions can also be located along a continuum with ‘positivism’ and ‘interpretivism’ located at opposite ends. On one end, positivism has a realist orientation and is based on “the idea of God’s view or an independently existing reality that can be described as it really is” (Slevitch, 2011, p.76). This perspective supports the view that objective reality exists independent of human perception (Sale, Lohfeld & Brazil, 2002) and postulates that ultimate truth exists and can be discovered. Premised on the success of positivist science in the natural world, positivist research attempts to replicate its utility in social science and to explain phenomena using quantitative methods (Yilmaz, 2013) and highly formal rhetoric that focuses on precision, generalisability, reliability and replicability (Grix, 2004). Moreover, because positivism assumes that phenomena have objective reality, quantitative epistemology maintains that the researcher and that being researched are independent entities, and therefore, it is thought possible that researchers can study a phenomenon without influencing it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). At the other end of the epistemological spectrum exists ‘interpretivism’ that is rooted in a constructivist ontology. This perspective does not see objective knowledge as possible because reality is seen as dependant on one’s mental structure and activity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017).

This researcher’s epistemological stance aligns clearly with interpretivism. According to Creswell and Poth (2018) interpretive research seeks a complexity of views and aims to rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation. Because of this, the research questions are usually open and general, allowing the participants to make sense of the social phenomena in focus. The researcher’s role is then to ‘interpret’ these perspectives while acknowledging the influence of context (Creswell & Poth, 2018.). As will be revealed, this research employed open-ended questioning as the primary data collection method. The researcher interpreted this data using the theoretical frame designed to account for contextual factors that may influence perspectives and practice.

Axiology

Axiology, which can be understood as the values and beliefs that one holds about something, which is of particular significance to qualitative researchers (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018) who should “admit the value-laden nature of the study and actively report their values” (Creswell and Poth, 2018, p. 20). With respect to this point, it is important to acknowledge the relationship between my personal history, my axiology, and this piece of research.

I grew up in a family where both parents were teachers in a large Special School in North Dublin. This school catered for the needs of children with learning and behavioural difficulties, with a significant proportion of pupils coming from what would be referred to now as ‘disadvantaged’ backgrounds. Although I refer to my parents here as ‘teachers’, I grew up with an understanding that teaching was about so much more than the academics. It is difficult to articulate my parents’ profound influence on my axiology and research interest. However, it is very clear to me that their *praxis* was very much orientated toward an effort to balance the inequalities that their pupils faced. Practices, that would seem unusual today, were an inherent part of my parents’ role. To offer one example of many, they brought a group of children away on a week-long trip to the Aran Islands off West Ireland with a few other teachers each July. For me and my siblings, this was a typical summer holiday and those pupils were our friends. It was not until years later that I realised how this group of teachers were trying to give something to these children to mitigate against the adversity that they faced. This effort encapsulates the essential purpose of my research project which endeavours to advocate for the needs of vulnerable children in Irish primary schools through the perspectives offered by participants. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge how my professional identity as a primary school teacher has also shaped my axiology and hence, influenced my decision to pursue this topic. At the time of writing I am in my ninth year of teaching. For the first four years of my career, I taught in a school where there appeared to be a higher than normal proportion of vulnerable children. Being a teacher to some of these

children challenged me to consider the boundaries of my role as a teacher and underscored the importance of care, support and relationship building with these children and their families. Perhaps for this reason, I have entered into this research wondering whether others too are challenged when trying to figure out the boundaries between education and care, or even if there was one. While recent legislation, policy and procedure underscore the role of adults in protecting and safeguarding children, my own experience as a teacher has illuminated the importance of care, support and time spent building relationships with vulnerable children and their families. However, this affective dimension of practice is not tangible or quantifiable. Moreover, I do not believe it can be compelled through legislation, policy or procedure. Hence, when I entered this research journey in 2018, the year after the enactment of *Children First, 2015*, I was curious to find out how the dimensions of legislation, policy and procedure intersected with the affective domain of caring practice in schools, how these dimensions influenced one another and ultimately, what this meant for vulnerable children. Finally, in line with the discussion above and my epistemological view, I believe that the researcher's own experiences and values shape their research project in ways that are both obvious and obscure. Thus, I view my role as researcher as co-constructing new knowledge with the participants through a collective process of negotiated meaning while acknowledging that my own axiology and that of the participants' will shape this new knowledge.

The Research Paradigm

In social science research, the term paradigm can be understood loosely as a collection of logically related assumptions, concepts, or prepositions that orientate thinking and research (Luttrell, 2010). As such, the term 'paradigm' can be generally perceived and understood through their core ontological and epistemological assumptions emanating from distinct views about the world (Tang, 2011). In line with my philosophical assumptions, I acknowledge that this research is located within a 'constructivist' paradigm. Ontologically, my philosophical perspectives align with the view that the social world does not have tangible, material qualities that allow it to be measured, touched and observed in

some literal way (Denscombe, 2002). Instead, I agree that the social world and its phenomena are *socially* created, constructed through the minds of people and reinforced through their interactions (Denscombe, 2002). From an epistemological perspective, this research endeavours to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the phenomena being researched while acknowledging that these perspectives, like my own, are subjective and must be understood in reference to their socio-historical context. In order to understand these perspectives, this research employed a mixed-method, primarily qualitative case study design as its methodological approach. In the section that follows, the strengths and limitations of case study research are considered with reference to the overall aim of this research.

Case Study Research

A case study is an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clear (Yin, 2018). In other words, it is a suitable method of research when the researcher wants to understand a contemporary issue and appreciates the significance, and perhaps, the influence of context. In the social science and educational research, case study research has evolved as an approach to research that can capture rich data, giving an in-depth picture of a bounded unit or an aspect of that unit (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013). Furthermore, the particularistic, descriptive and heuristic qualities of case studies can provide a holistic and detailed explanation and analysis of a unit of study while also uncovering new meaning or confirming what is known (Merriam, 1998). Within the field of educational research, the efficacy of case study methodology is widely acknowledged as an approach to research which can capture rich data, giving an in-depth picture of a bounded unit or an aspect of that unit (Stake, 1995; Denscombe, 2002; Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2012, Cohen et al., 2018). Yin (2018), a world-renowned expert on case study methodology, describes case study as an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in-depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may

not be clear (Yin, 2018) .In other words, it is a suitable method of research when the researcher wants to understand a contemporary issue but also appreciates the significance, and perhaps, influence of context. Furthermore, the particularistic, descriptive and heuristic qualities of case studies can provide a holistic and detailed explanation and analysis of a unit of study while also uncovering new meaning or confirming what is known (Merriam, 1998). Cohen et al. (2013) affirm that one of the real strengths of case study research is that it allows the researcher to examine the case in its real environment while simultaneously acknowledging that the environment has an impact on the case.

According to Yin (2018), case study is an appropriate methodological choice when the researcher is examining a contemporary phenomenon over which, he or she has little control, when researchers are seeking to explain a social phenomenon in relation to various contextual factors, and the answers to the planned research questions require an in-depth description of context. Hence, researchers often choose case study when they “want to understand a real-world case and assume that such an understanding is likely to involve important contextual conditions pertinent to the case (Yin & Davis, 2007). Thus, case study differs significantly from other prominent research methods, such as experimental research which deliberately separates the phenomena from its context; historical research which acknowledges the significance of context but does not deal with contemporary issues; or survey research which can deal with the phenomena in its context but is significantly limited in its capacity to investigate contextual factors (Yin, 2018).

In seeking the aims of this research, a case study approach was deemed appropriate. This is because the researcher sought to understand and describe a contemporary issue (perspectives toward CPS), and this goal necessitated a thorough consideration of contextual factors such as the influence of historical events, new legislation, policy and procedure as well as the roles of distinct participant groups and perhaps, significance of school context and wider systems involved in CPS work.

Defining the ‘case’ is an important aspect of case study research. Yin (2018) clarifies that while classic case studies usually focus on an individual person as the case, more contemporary applications of case study frequently define the case as being a social entity or phenomena. However, when examining broader social phenomena, ‘bounding the case’ (Yin, 2018) becomes important. As evidenced by the discussion later in this chapter, this advice significantly influenced the methodological decisions taken by the researcher when determining the appropriate sampling procedure.

Yin (2018) describes four approaches to case study research which he categorises into single or multiple case study designs, with holistic or embedded units of analysis. This research employs a single-case design with multiple embedded units of analysis, as illustrated in Figure 4.1. Here the ‘case’ is understood as the perspectives concerning CPS and is understood in relation to its context. This case contains six subunits of analysis across two levels. This embedded case study design not only helps the researcher to understand the case from different angles but also “serves as an important device for maintaining the case study’s focus” while also helping to bound the case (Yin, 2018, p. 53)

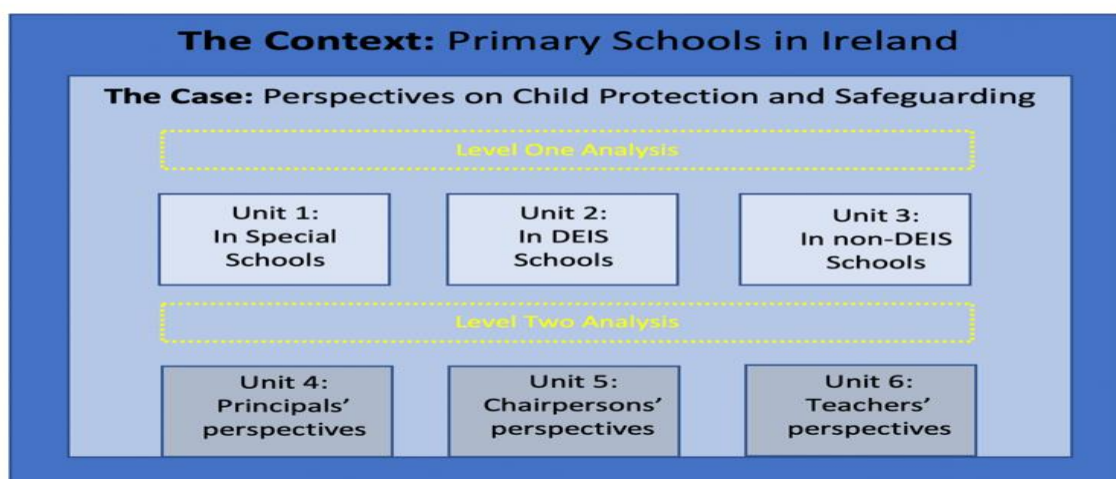


Figure 4.1. Single-case design with multiple embedded units of analysis (Adapted from Yin 2009, p.46).

Mixed Methods Case Study

Guetterman and Fetters (2018) claim case study research integrates well with mixed methods research which, from their perspective, seeks a complete understanding of a phenomenon through the integration of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. Yin (2018) suggests that this combination enables the researcher to address broader or more complicated research questions. In this research, quantitative questionnaires enabled the researcher to gather a wide range of data specific to school contexts and participant groupings. Hence, before beginning the main qualitative component the researcher had already attained an extensive description of the 'case' and gathered pertinent information relating to each of the six units of analysis. Moreover, analysing this data through Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) helped identify tensions between school contexts and participant groupings to be explored during the qualitative phase.

Limitations of Case Study Research

Like all research methods, the case study is not without its criticism. One of the main criticisms associated with the case study approach lies in its limitations regarding generalisability (Jensen & Rodgers, 2001). However, other researchers (e.g. Yin, 2018) refute this view, arguing that its purpose is not to produce generalisable findings but instead to learn as much as possible about the 'case' to generate deeper insights. So, while findings from this case study cannot be considered representative, there is still much to gain by exploring the perspectives concerning CPS in these school communities. These conversations will not only help the researcher to identify factors influencing practice, but also allow her to consider how such factors influence the lives of the most vulnerable children in these schools. So, while the researcher may not be able to draw solid comparisons and apply what she has learned through the process on a macro scale, similar contexts and professional groups can learn from the findings of this research. Remarking on this point, Cohen et al. (2018) suggest that any case study, regardless of its size, may become a 'step to action' when findings are utilised and considered in similar contexts or to inform future action or policy-making.

The Sampling Procedure

Social researchers are frequently faced with the fact that they cannot collect data from everyone who is in the category being researched and thus, rely on getting evidence from a portion of the population in the hope that what is found in that portion applies equally to others (Denscombe, 2002). Because of this, many researchers have to make sampling decisions early in their research journey. However, as the quality of a piece of research “stands or falls not only on the appropriateness of methodology and instrumentation but also by the suitability of the sampling strategy” (Cohen et al., 2018, p.143) these decisions must be thought through carefully.

Sampling strategies can be generally divided into probability or non-probability sampling categories (Cohen et al., 2018). In probability sampling, every member of the population has an equal chance of being included. In contrast, in non-probability sampling, the researcher deliberately selects a particular section of the population to include/exclude meaning each member of the broader population does not have an equal chance of being included (Guetterman & Fetters, 2018). Being aware of her axiology and interest in child protection, the researcher judged non-probability sampling to be unsuitable. Premised on this view, while also aware that inviting the whole population to participate would be unfeasible, the researcher decided to employ ‘cluster sampling’. This sampling method is used when the population is diverse or widely dispersed, and hence gathering a simple random sample from the whole population poses administrative problems (Cohen et al., 2018). Cluster sampling allows the researcher to identify a sample of schools geographically and invite all potential participants (or schools) within this region. The decision regarding which geographical region to choose was made in reference to Tusla’s ‘Area Management Structures’ (Figure 4.2), and the researcher’s location of study and work based in North Dublin.



Figure 4.2. Tusla’s Area Management Structures.

Inviting all schools in Dublin North was deemed problematic as it was assumed that the sample of those who would participate would be too large. Moreover, considering that child protection and safeguarding is a responsibility borne by all school contexts (Buckley & McGarry, 2011), the researcher felt that judging which schools to exclude would be difficult. Because of this, the researcher clustered potential schools using Tusla’s ‘Area Management Structures’ map and invited all of the schools in the ‘Dublin North City’ area. This region, which generally correlates with schools located within the Dublin One, Three, Five, Seven, Nine and Eleven postcode areas, included ninety-eight schools. An email containing a short video was sent to the principal of these schools. This video

briefly outlined the aims and methodology of this research. If interested in volunteering, the principal was encouraged to share this video with the chairperson and relevant teacher(s) in the school and then, to contact the researcher if all three parties sought to participate. Five schools within this region chose to participate in this research. As this sample size was deemed too small, the researcher extended the initial cluster region northerly, inviting the schools within the Dublin thirteen, fifteen and seventeen postcode areas. These postcode areas are located within the 'North Dublin' area on Tusla's 'Area Management Structures Map' and border the initial 'Dublin North City' region chosen. The fifty-six mainstream schools within this region were invited, and eight chose to participate. Overall, one hundred and fifty-four schools were invited to participate and thirteen decided to participate. These schools were located either in Dublin North City or North Dublin (See Figure 4.2), enabling the researcher to 'bound the case' by geographical area, as suggested by Yin (2018).

Key Descriptors of the Participating Schools, Principals, Chairpersons and Teachers

In total, thirteen schools chose to participate in this research. There were 2,618 children enrolled in the participating schools during the year this research was conducted (Department of Education and Skills, 2021a). The principal, chairperson and one teacher from each school expressed their desire to participate in this research, creating an overall participant number of thirty-nine. However, this number was later reduced to thirty-six after three individuals changed their minds and decided not to participate. Key descriptors of the participating schools are outlined below in Table 4.1.

School No.	Location in Reference to Tusla's Area Management Structures	School Type		Patronage
		<i>Special School</i>	<i>DEIS</i>	
1	Dublin North City	Yes	n/a	Catholic
2	Dublin North	No	No	Multi Denominational
3	Dublin North City	No	No	Catholic
4	Dublin North	No	Yes	Multi Denominational
5	Dublin North	No	Yes	Multi Denominational
6	Dublin North	No	No	Catholic
7	Dublin North City	No	Yes	Catholic
8	Dublin North	Yes	n/a	Church Of Ireland
9	Dublin North	No	No	Catholic
10	Dublin North City	No	No	Catholic
11	Dublin North	Yes	n/a	Catholic
12	Dublin North City	No	No	Catholic
13	Dublin North	No	Yes	Catholic

Table 4.1. Key descriptors of the participating schools.

Altogether, thirty-six individuals participated in this study. This included thirteen principals, ten chairpersons¹¹ and thirteen teachers. The following tables outline the profile of those who participated in this research. It should be noted that participants are numbered according to the number ascribed to their school context and thus, Principal 1, Chairperson 1 and Teacher 1 (etc.) all work in the same school community.

¹¹ Three chairpersons who initially agreed to participate later changed their mind.

Principal Number	School Type	Years' experience as principal	Participated in Survey Phase	Participated in Focus Group Phase
Principal 1	Special Sch.	Unknown	Y	Y
Principal 2	Non-DEIS	15	Y	Y
Principal 3	Non-DEIS	10	Y	Y
Principal 4	DEIS	<1	Y	Y
Principal 5	DEIS	12	Y	Y
Principal 6	Non-DEIS	5	Y	N
Principal 7	DEIS	9	Y	Y
Principal 8	Special Sch.	<1	Y	Y
Principal 9	Non-DEIS	10	Y	N
Principal 10	Non-DEIS	16	Y	N
Principal 11	Special Sch.	6	Y	N
Principal 12	Non-DEIS	11	Y	Y
Principal 13	DEIS	14	Y	Y
Total			13 principals	9 principals

Table 4.2. Key descriptors of the participating principals.

Chairperson Number	School Type	Years' experience as chairperson	Participated in Survey Phase	Participated in Focus Group Phase
Chairperson 1	Special Sch.	Unknown	N	N
Chairperson 2	Non-DEIS	22	Y	Y
Chairperson 3	Non-DEIS	Unknown	N	N
Chairperson 4	DEIS	6	Y	Y
Chairperson 5	DEIS	15	Y	Y
Chairperson 6	Non-DEIS	4	Y	Y
Chairperson 7	DEIS	1.5	Y	N
Chairperson 8	Special Sch.	5	Y	N
Chairperson 9	Non-DEIS	2	Y	N
Chairperson 10	Non-DEIS	3	Y	N
Chairperson 11	Special Sch.	31	N	Y
Chairperson 12	Non-DEIS	1.5	Y	Y
Chairperson 13	DEIS	4	Y	Y
Total			10 chairpersons	7 chairpersons

Table 4.3. Key descriptors of the participating chairpersons.

Teacher Number	School Type	Years' experience as teacher	Participated in Survey Phase	Participated in Focus Group Phase
Teacher 1	Special Sch.	15	Y	Y
Teacher 2	Non-DEIS	10	Y	Y
Teacher 3	Non-DEIS	8	Y	N
Teacher 4	DEIS	7	Y	Y
Teacher 5	DEIS	16	Y	Y
Teacher 6	Non-DEIS	17	Y	Y
Teacher 7	DEIS	15	Y	Y
Teacher 8	Special Sch.	15	Y	N
Teacher 9	Non-DEIS	9	Y	Y
Teacher 10	Non-DEIS	11	Y	Y
Teacher 11	Special Sch.	25	Y	N
Teacher 12	Non-DEIS	31	Y	Y
Teacher 13	DEIS	15	Y	Y
Total			13 teachers	10 teachers

Table 4.4. Key descriptors of the participating teachers.

The Data Collection Process

This section outlines the data collection process regarding the aims of this research project and the relevant literature. These data collection tools, outlined briefly in Table 4.5, are subsequently described in detail.

The Quantitative Component	Data Collection Tool One: Questionnaires Completed in February and March 2021		
	The Principal's Questionnaire	The Chairperson's Questionnaire	The Teacher's Questionnaire
The Qualitative Component	Data Collection Tool Two: Role Specific Focus Groups Completed in April 2021		
	Focus Groups with principals	Focus Groups with chairpersons	Focus Groups with teachers
	Data Collection Tool Three: School Cluster Focus Groups Completed in May and June 2021		
	Special School Focus Group	Non-DEIS Focus Group	DEIS Focus Group No.1 DEIS Focus Group No.2

Table 4.5. The Data Collection Process.

Data Collection Tool One: Questionnaires

According to Queirós, Faria and Almeida (2017), questionnaires are one of the most used quantitative research techniques and can offer distinct advantages to researchers. They allow for a wider geographical spread than other data collection techniques (Palaiologou, Needham and Male, 2016) and they can be administered and evaluated quickly (Choy, 2014). When complete, surveys provide the researcher with an immediate quantitative or numeric description of the phenomena, including but not limited to participants' attitudes, beliefs and confidence levels for a particular phenomenon. Also, this data can be analysed quickly and accurately using computer software (Cohen et al., 2018). Once inputted, researchers can begin the process of numerical analysis, enabling them to make accurate comparisons between organisations (e.g. schools) or groups (e.g. principals) (Yauch & Steudel, 2003). The decision to utilise questionnaires during phase one was made in reference to these strengths. This quantitative tool allowed the researcher to ask a wide range of questions informed by relevant

literature while also including open-ended questions to allow participants freedom should they wish to identify other pertinent factors that the researcher had not been included. This data provided the researcher with a focused starting point that could be elaborated upon during the qualitative phase of this research.

To capture role-specific information, three separate but similar questionnaires were created by the researcher (Appendix D, E and F). Each questionnaire had four sections. The first section of the questionnaire gathered descriptive data about the participant. Here, participants were asked questions about years' experience in their role, whether they had received training for their role and whether they believed this had adequately prepared them for their role as principal, chairperson or teacher. This data was analysed and used to create Tables 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4 which provide key descriptors of the participating principals, chairpersons and teachers.

The second section of the questionnaire contained a Likert Scale that was relevant to all participants. This scale contained eight statements with which participants were asked to report their level of agreement with. As there is no existing CPS scale relevant to this research topic, the researcher formulated these statements in reference to existing legislation and documents that were relevant to the three participant groupings as well as key literature in the area. For example, statements one and two were worded in reference to the responsibilities expected of participants, as delineated chiefly through the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools* (Department of Education and Skills, 2017). The remaining six items were formulated in response to key literature in the area that problematised inadequate supports available to schools when practising for CPS, underscores the complexity of CPS work in schools, and that identify CPS as an emotional endeavour for school personnel (e.g., Horwath, 2007; Baginsky, 2018; Nohilly, 2008; 2019b; Richards, 2018; Baginsky et al., 2019). Data from this second section of the questionnaire was analysed and responses to the first four items are reported in Chapter Five, as these responses were most pertinent to the research questions.

The third section of the questionnaire contained a Likert Scales that were role-specific. Accordingly, the statements included in the scales differed between participant groups. The Likert Scale statements devised for principals sought their views in relation to issues identified in the literature relevant to principals elsewhere (e.g., Bunting et al., 2009; Buckley & McGarry, 2011; Richards, 2019; Nohilly, 2018; Treacy & Nohilly, 2020; Nohilly & Treacy, 2022) and also, sought their perspectives concerning recent legislative changes that expanded their role in CPS (Department of Education and Skills, 2017; 2019b). The Likert scale statements devised for chairpersons sought their views in relation to issues identified as being problematic in the literature conducted elsewhere (e.g., Irish Primary Principals' Network, 2011; Nohilly & Treacy, 2022), in response to the BOM's expanded role for CPS (Department of Education and Skills, 2017; 2019b) and also in relation to the BOM as the school's governance body (Department of Education and Skills, 2019a). The Likert scale statements devised for teachers sought their views in relation to issues pertinent matters identified in the literature base related specifically to teachers, such as their importance in children's welfare (e.g., Gilligan, 1998; Fletcher-Campbell, 2008) and the challenges they face when practising for CPS (e.g., Crenshaw et al., 1995; Kenny, 2001, 2004; Levi, 2008; Bourke & Maunsell, 2016). In addition, the statements sought to ascertain teachers' views in relation to their mandated responsibility to determine whether a concern has reached the 'Threshold of Harm' necessitated reporting to Tusla, as outlined in the CPP (Department of Education and Skills, 2017). Unsurprisingly, responses to section three of the questionnaire yielded a significant volume of data. Hence, one of the researcher's tasks during data analysis was determining which data best answered the study's PRQ, SRQ1 and SRQ2. Accordingly, not items contained in section three of the questionnaire are reported in Chapter Five. Nevertheless, those that are most pertinent to the aims of the research are.

Finally, the fourth section of the questionnaire contained five open-ended questions. The inclusion of these questions enabled the researcher to gather data related to SRQ1 and SRQ2 prior to commencing the focus groups. This allowed the

researcher to identify prevalent factors that could be explored further during focus-group discussions. When combined, the data collected from the questionnaires gave the researcher a focused starting point prior to embarking on the main qualitative phase of data collection. For example, issues identified by distinct participant groups during the quantitative phase were noted by the researcher in her research journal so that the researcher could explore these further during the focus group phase if the opportunity arose. Moreover, examining the qualitative data helped the researcher to understand, to a certain degree, how the phenomena were being perceived both in general (e.g. across schools/participant groups) and in specific terms (e.g. particular school contexts/participant groups).

Data Collection Tool Two and Three: Focus Groups

As this study was rooted in the qualitative approach, interviews and focus groups were other appropriate data collection tools that were considered. Although these data collection tools have many similar attributes, qualitative interviewing involves the “meeting of two persons to jointly construct meaning about a particular topic” (Janesick, 2010, p.45) while focus groups are a form of group interview that “actively leverages the interaction between members of that group as they describe or frame experiential data and reflect on that experience” (Jones, 2015, p. 566). The aim of focus groups is to get “high-quality data in a social context where people can consider their own views in the context of the views of others” (Quinn Patton, 2002, p. 385). While focus groups may appear to be unstructured and resemble a form of a natural conversation to participants (Yin, 2018), the researcher must have a clear focus and agenda while also effectively prompting participants and promoting reflection (Newby, 2014).

Considering the aims of this research study, which was to gather shared perspectives on CPS, focus groups were deemed to be a more appropriate data collection tool when compared to interviews. Rather than co-constructing meaning with each participant through interviews, focus group methodology enabled the researcher to gather perspectives from multiple groups. Moreover,

they provided a platform where participants could collectively discuss their perspectives on CPS while also responding to the tensions/contradictions identified by others. This allowed the researcher to gain more in-depth information and illuminated the “lived realities of complex educational situations” (Simons, 2009, p. 104). To this end, the researcher thought it appropriate to consider the role-specific lived realities of CPS. In order to do this, the researcher first facilitated three focus groups: one with chairpersons, one with principals and one with teachers. Participants were encouraged to share their role specific perspectives during these focus groups. Following this, the researcher commenced the ‘School Cluster Focus Groups’ where school contexts were grouped to discuss perspectives on CPS.

In total, the researcher carried out seven focus groups (see Table 4.6). The aim of the first three was to gather role-specific data and hence, the researcher carried out one focus group with principals, one with chairpersons and one with teachers. The aim of the remaining focus groups was to facilitate a collaborative discussion about CPS with mixed participant groupings in order so that the researcher could gather deeper insight into participants’ perspectives and explore the contextual factors relevant to this topic. While the participant levels (Table 4.6) and the discussion varied between focus groups, the structure was framed by the Focus Group Schedule created by the researcher (Appendix K). The creation of these schedules ensured that the discussion centred upon the research questions that the researcher wanted to answer. Moreover, they provided a roadmap for the discussion. As outlined in Appendix K, at the beginning of each focus group the researcher welcomed participants, thanked them for their participation, and gave a brief overview of the research aims. Following this, the procedures employed to ensure confidentiality and anonymity were outlined, the risk management procedures were highlighted (Appendix H) and the researcher emphasised the importance of each person sharing their view. Once this introductory phase was completed, the researcher encouraged discussion along three convergent lines relevant to the research questions.

Limitations of Focus Groups

Despite their inherent strengths, focus group interviews are not without limitations. For example, (Cohen et al., 2018) warn that the group dynamics may lead to a low level of participation by some members and dominance by others. Elsewhere Bryman (2016) identifies how the possibility of ‘groupthink’, that is, the tendency for participants to uncritically embrace an emerging group view, may affect the accuracy of data collected. To address these limitations, each participant was invited to participate in two different focus groups, meaning the dynamic and participant groups of any focus group were never the same. For those who only chose to participate in the ‘School Cluster Focus Group’, the researcher made sure to elicit perspectives from all participants, including those who did not offer their perspectives as quickly as other, more dominant members. Both Bryman (2016) and Cohen et al. (2018) claim that group size is another factor warranting consideration. From the perspective of these authors, larger groups can become unwieldy and difficult to manage while the intra-group dynamics of smaller groups can produce a disproportionate influence on the data. In this study the planned focus group size for the ‘School Cluster Groups’ was six (e.g., the teacher, principal, and chairperson from two schools would participate) and the planned focus group size for the ‘Role Specific Focus Groups’ was five. However, due to various reasons, including the Covid-19 Pandemic, some participants who originally intended to participate in two focus groups only participated in one. Table 4.6 summarises the number of participants involved at the various stages of the data collection process.

The Quant. Component	Data Collection Tool One: Questionnaires			
	The Principal's Questionnaire	The Chairperson's Questionnaire	The Teacher's Questionnaire	
	Answered by 13 principals	Answered by 10 chairpersons	Answered by 13 teachers	
The Qual. Component	Data Collection Tool Two: Role Specific Focus Groups			
	Focus Groups with principals	Focus Groups with chairpersons	Focus Groups with teachers	
	5 participated	4 participated	5 participated	
	Data Collection Tool Three: School Cluster Focus Groups			
	Special School Focus Group	Non-DEIS Focus Group	DEIS Focus Group No.1	DEIS Focus Group No.2
3 individuals participated*	3 individuals participated*	4 individuals participated	5 individuals participated	
	*During these focus groups the second school community that was meant to join had to pull out due to unforeseen circumstances.			

Table 4.6. Participant involvement at the various stages of the data collection process.

Procedures to Maximise Validity, Reliability and Generalisability

Throughout the design phase, researchers must also ensure that other aspects of the study are well constructed to achieve validity, reliability and generalisability (Wilson, 2017). The procedures in seeking this aim are discussed below, with reference to the relevant literature informing such actions.

In general terms, validity can be understood as a concept used to judge whether the research accurately describes the phenomenon which it intends to describe and hence, is concerned with “the integrity of the conclusions that are generated in a piece of research” (Bryman, 2016, p.30). Maintaining the construct validity can be especially challenging in case study research but can be achieved if researchers develop a sufficiently operational set of measures and avoid making subjective judgements (Ruddin, 2006). Elaborating on this, Yin (2018) suggests that researchers follow three tactics. The first tactic is the use of *multiple sources of evidence*. This encourages convergent lines of inquiry and allows researchers explore the research question from various perspectives and

through various channels. In order to do this, three data collection processes were employed (see Table 4.5).

Yin's (2018) second tactic involves establishing a 'chain of evidence' such as shown in Figure 4.3. Using this, it is possible to move from one part of the case study process to another, with clear cross-referencing of methodological procedures and to the resulting evidence. This increases the overall construct validity of the case, and allows the reader to follow the derivation of any evidence from initial research questions to ultimate case study findings (Yin, 2018).

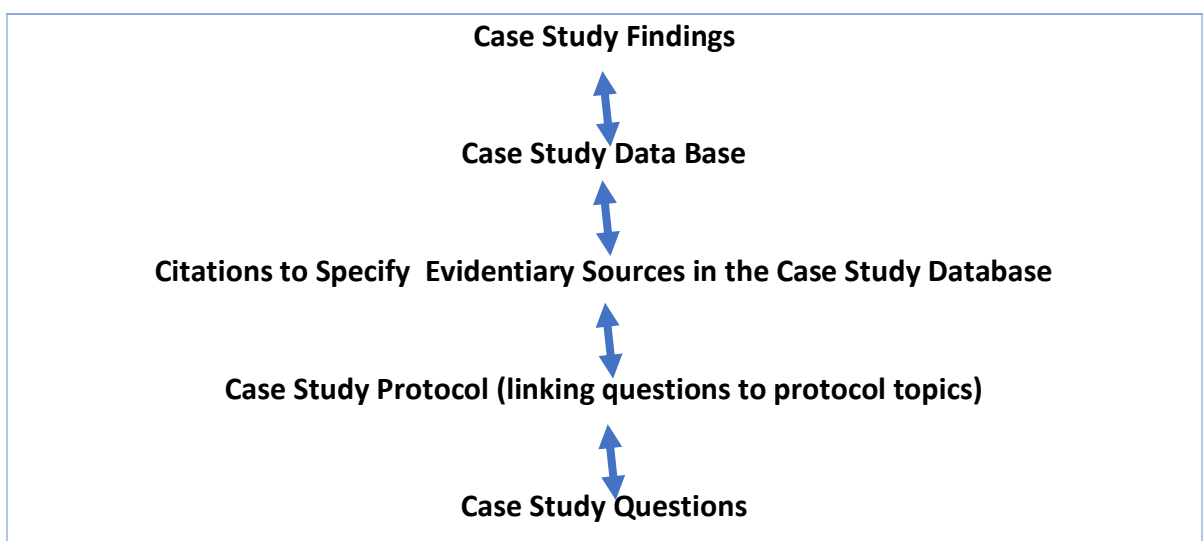


Figure 4.3. Maintaining a 'Chain of Evidence' (Adapted from Yin, 2018).

The Piloting Process

The third tactic used to increase the construct validity of this study involved conducting a pilot study. This was undertaken to further maximise the validity and reliability of the data collection instruments. This is a crucial phase of case study research as it helps the researcher redefine data collection plans with respect to both the content of the data and procedures to be followed (Yin, 2018). In this case, it involved piloting the questionnaires with each participant grouping and piloting the focus groups. The piloting of these three instruments was carried out with individuals who did not participate in the study. These individuals are known to the researcher through various contexts including, previous teaching experience, peers on the Ed. D programme, and acquaintances known through other professional channels.

The piloting process was carried out in three phases. First, the questionnaire was piloted with seven individuals: three who are the chairperson of a BOM, two who are principals and two who are teachers. The questionnaire was sent to each of these individuals through email. They had the opportunity to answer and consider the questionnaire for one week before we discussed it. Following this, the researcher phoned each individual and took note of their suggestions. Next, the researcher carried out mock focus groups. The first mock focus group was conducted with two chairpersons, the second mock focus group was conducted with two principals, and the third mock focus group was conducted with two teachers. Following this, the researcher piloted one school cluster focus group with the chairperson, principal and a teacher from one school context. These three individuals had also been involved in the piloting of phase one and two.

Valuable lessons were learned and essential tweaks were made during the process of piloting this research. For example, feedback from the participant groups helped the researcher to realise that the questionnaire's content needed to vary slightly for each participant group. This way it would be possible to gather role specific information from participants and hence, identify tensions arising within particular participant groupings that then could be teased out during the qualitative phase. In addition to the steps taken to ensure that the construct validity is maintained, researchers must also consider how their study's internal and external validity is protected (Merriam, 1998). The steps taken to do this are discussed subsequently.

Procedures to Maximise Internal and External Validity

External validity can be defined as the extent to which a research design allows one to “generalize beyond the subjects under investigation to a wider population” (Nunan, 1992, p. 17). However, given that case study research is essentially context-bound and ethnographic, Yin (2018) critiques the applicability of external validity in qualitative research. Nevertheless, others such as Lincoln and Guba (1985) encourage qualitative researchers to provide ‘thick description’

so that others can decide for themselves if connections can be drawn between qualitative studies. So, while the external validity of this qualitative case study may not be generalisable to all school contexts, those studying specific aspects of CPS in primary schools may be able to draw some parallels between this case and other studies. In contrast, internal validity relates to the extent to which a study investigates what it purports to investigate (Nunan, 1992) and, thus, the overall credibility of its findings (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2020). Moreover, while some authors highlight the challenge, in case study research, of maintaining the internal validity of the research, suggesting researchers can show bias due to their invested role (Shaughnessy, Zechmeister & Zechmeister, 2012) others suggest that using multiple sources of data and triangulation to verify the emerging findings mitigates possibilities such as this (Robson, 2011).

Ethical Considerations

Specific ethical considerations arise for all research involving human 'subjects' (Yin, 2018), and educational research is no different (Wilson, 2013). Moreover, due to the nature of the topic under investigation, the researcher believed she should exercise caution when judging the risk posed to participants. For instance, while the risk relating to participation may be low for participants who have not been affected by issues relating to child protection, the researcher was aware that a participant might have had an adverse experience relating to the topic but still opt to participate. In recognition of this, particular procedures were implemented according to the ethical advice and standards outlined by Dublin City University. For example, in advance of commencing this research the Plain Language Statements (Appendix A, B and C) were shared with all participants. With this information, participants were able to decide whether they would like to volunteer in the study, with full knowledge of what it would involve and reassurance that they could opt out of this procedure at any time (Cohen et al., 2018). In addition, those who chose to participate in this research were provided with a form listing the 'Risk Management Protocols' (Appendix H), which listed the procedures in place and the supports available should any participant become distressed while engaging in this research. Ethical issues around anonymity and

confidentiality also had to be carefully considered by the researcher. For example, while participants were assured that personal details that might reveal their identity would not be used (Robson, 2011), they were informed that the protection of their identity could only be guaranteed within the limitations of the law and that, in the unlikely event that a participant disclosed a child protection matter that was not dealt with or responded to, the researcher may have to inform the Child and Family Agency (Tusla).

Data Analysis

Data analysis can be understood as consisting of three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display and conclusions drawn or verified (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2020). The reduction of the data mass can be achieved through descriptive and summary statistics for quantitative data and the creation of summaries, codes, and written memos for qualitative data. Usually, quantitative data is displayed using graphs and tables, from which some conclusions are drawn. In contrast, qualitative data is frequently presented using commentary and conclusions are often drawn by noting patterns and regularities, and positing possible explanations (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2020, Robson, 2011). Together with the activity of collecting the data itself, these three flows of activity form a continuous iterative process (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2020). In this study, different approaches were used to analyse the data in each of the two strands in keeping with the mixed method approach used. The aim of this data analysis was to collate, consider and then display the data that specifically answered the three research questions outlined:

PRQ: What are the perspectives of principals, chairpersons and teachers toward child protection and safeguarding?

SRQ1: According to the participants, what factors enhance schools' capacity to protect and safeguard children?

SRQ2: According to the participants, what factors impede schools' capacity to protect and safeguard children?

To answer these questions, the researcher gathered, organised and analysed the data collected through quantitative and qualitative methodologies. While SRQ1 and SRQ2 were focused, meaning it was easy to gather, collate and analyse data related to these questions, the PRQ was broader. Considering the primarily qualitative, case study design of this research, it was important to the researcher that participants could raise issues or points related to the research topic without being constructed by the PRQ. Hence, the researcher included open-ended questions in both the questionnaire and during the focus group discussions. Open-ended questions such as 'In relation to child protection and safeguarding, what is it like being a principal and DLP/ a chairperson/ a teacher?; How are you experiencing your CPS role?; What has changed since child protection was placed on a statutory footing?; et cetera enabled the researcher to gather a wide range of data that was then analysed and organised to answer the PRQ. As discussed subsequently, the quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics in SPSS and the qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006) and carried out using Nvivo¹².

Organisation and Analysis of Quantitative Data

As previously outlined, questionnaires (Appendix D, E and F) were answered by thirty-six participants, including thirteen principals, ten chairpersons and thirteen teachers working in schools located in North Dublin. These questionnaires contained four sections. The first section gathered descriptive data about the participant. This data was used to present an overview of the participant profiles as outlined in Tables 4.2, 4.3 and 4.5. The second section contained a Likert Scale that was relevant to all participants. This scale contained eight statements with which participants were asked to express their agreement/disagreement. Data gathered in this section was analysed using descriptive statistics in SPSS. This analysis highlighted findings that were shared amongst participants, as presented in section one of Chapter Five.

¹² NVivo is a software package designed for qualitative analysis.

The third section of the questionnaire contained a Likert Scale that was role-specific. The data gathered in this section was also analysed using descriptive statistics in SPSS. This analysis highlighted findings specific to participant groupings, as presented in section one of Chapter Five. Finally, the fourth section of the questionnaire contained several open-ended questions. This section allowed participants to express their perspectives towards CPS in an unstructured manner, giving them the freedom to mention whatever they thought was most prevalent to the research topic. Reviewing this data allowed the researcher to consider any pertinent issues or points that she had not considered previously, affording her to explore these further during the qualitative phase of data collection.

Organisation and Analysis of Qualitative Data

According to Robson (2011), unlike quantitative data analysis, there is no clear, accepted single set of conventions for analysing qualitative data. Nonetheless, Thematic Analysis is acknowledged as being the most commonly used method of analysis in qualitative research analysis (Thomas & Harden, 2008; Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012) and is used for identifying, analysing, and reporting (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021). Following consultation with previously published literature, her research supervisors and after attending an NVivo training workshop that explored the potentials of Thematic Analysis, the researcher determined that this method of analysis was well suited to the aims of this research project. The processes involved in this analysis are summarised in Table 4.7 and described subsequently.

Phase	Activity	Examples of Associated Processes Employed Within NVivo	Example of Process	Iterative Process Throughout Analysis
Phase 1 Data Familiarisation & Writing Familiarisation Notes	Data Immersion. Active Reading. Verbatim Transcripts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transcribing data, reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas. • Creating Annotations, Concept Maps, Mind Maps, and/or Memos. 	n/a	Assigning data to refined concepts to portray meaning
Phase 2 Systematic Data Coding	Creating Initial Codes. Developing a coding strategy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code. • Creating Annotations, Concept Maps, Mind Maps, and/or Memos. • Generating Codebook for Phase 2. 	Appendix M	Refining and distilling more abstract concepts
Phase 3 Generating Initial Themes from Coded and Collated Data	Sorting codes for themes. Developing themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme. • Creating Annotations, Concept Maps, Mind Maps, and/or Memos. • Generating Codebook for Phase 3. 	Appendix M	Assigning data to themes/concepts to portray meaning
Phase 4 Developing and Reviewing Themes	Reading all references for each theme. Questioning whether there is a coherent/consistent pattern forming. Considering the validity of individual themes in relation to the data set.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set. • Using Research Question to help reduce data/identify data most relevant to research aims. Using Coding Stripes and Coding On. • Creating Concept Maps, Mind Maps, Thematic Map and/or Memos. • Generating Codebook for Phase 4. 		Assigning meaning

Phase 5 Refining, Defining and Naming Themes	For each theme, writing a detailed analysis with supporting details in relation to the research questions. Developing a Thematic Framework. Deciding on Theme Names.	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme. Creating Concept Maps, Mind Maps and/or Memos. Refining/Generating Codebook for Phase 5.	Appendix M	Generating themes and concepts
Phase 6 Writing the Report	Analysis & Write Up. Making & Using Visuals. Reviewing Audit Trail.	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.	See Chapter Five	

Table 4.7. The Phases of TA Utilised Within NVivo (Adapted from Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021; Meehan, 2021).

Conducting Reflexive Thematic Analysis Using NVivo

During Phase One of the Thematic Analysis process, data gathered during the focus group interviews were transcribed into Microsoft Word 2021 and imported into NVivo 10. The transcribed data was read and reviewed multiple times and initial ideas or observations were made using the Memo Tool in NVivo. In Phase Two of the TA process the researcher began to code, reviewing it line by line to identify initial codes. Examples of such codes included: ‘Stress and CPS’, ‘Deciding when to report’, ‘Neglect’, and ‘Children’s Services are poor in Ireland’. Altogether, 138 codes were identified during Phase Two. However, many of these codes were later collated into larger themes During Phase Three. For instance, codes such as ‘Principal acting as a resource person for CPS in the school’, ‘Time pressures on the principal’ and ‘Magnitude of Principal’s duties’ were collated into

the broader theme labelled 'Principals' Perspectives'. During Phase Four, the research began reviewing codes and themes in relation to the aims of this research study, the theoretical framework employed, and relevant literature identified. During Phase Five, theme names were further refined to constructs associated with CHAT. Finally, in Phase Six, the researcher logically organised themes and this structure shaped how the findings of this study are presented in Chapters Five and Six.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to explicate the researcher's philosophical positioning and outline the methodological approach undertaken for this research. In line with her philosophical assumptions, the researcher explained that this research is located within a 'constructivist' paradigm. Consequently, the researcher believes that the social world and its phenomena are *socially* created (Denscombe, 2002), necessitating a methodology that could rely, as much as possible, on the participants' views of the phenomena being studied. In accordance with this assumption, the researcher outlined why she believed a mixed-methods case study design was an appropriate method. Following this, the chapter described the sampling procedures undertaken. Aware of her own axiology and interest in child protection, as well as the reality that CPS is a responsibility borne by all school contexts (Buckley & McGarry, 2011), the researcher defended the decision to employ probability sampling (Cohen et al., 2018) before outlining the procedures put in place to gather an appropriate sample of participants and schools in 'Dublin North' and 'Dublin North City' using Tusla's 'Area Management Structures Map' in Figure 4.2. Following this, the data collection processes were described in reference to the aims of this research, and the inherent strengths and limitations of these data collection tools. It was acknowledged that a key strength of employing questionnaires was their utility in collecting data quickly (Choy, 2014) and also, how this data can be analysed swiftly and accurately using computer software (Yauch & Steudel, 2003; Cohen et al., 2018). Thus, employing this data collection tool allowed the researcher to ask a wide range of questions informed by relevant literature and then, to analyse this

data in a time-effective manner which provided the researcher with a focused starting point when beginning the qualitative phase of data collection. Next, considering the aims of this research and the philosophical positioning of the researcher, focus groups were defended as an appropriate data collection tool during the qualitative phase of data collection. The researcher explained that this tool enabled her to gather more in-depth information and illuminated the “lived realities of complex educational situations” (Simons, 2009, p. 104) before describing the processes involved in carrying out the focus groups. After this, the chapter outlined the discrete tactics used to maximise the validity, reliability and generalisability of this research. Following advice from Yin (2018), the researcher outlined how she utilised multiple sources of evidence, a ‘chain of evidence’ and a piloting phase to increase the study’s overall methodological rigour. Following this, the researcher explicated the specific ethical considerations warranting consideration when carrying out this research. In line with the advice from Robson (2011), Wilson (2013), Yin (2018), and Cohen et al. (2018), the researcher described the risk management procedures followed to protect the participants from experiencing any adverse effects, such as the creation of ‘Risk Management Protocols’ (Appendix H) that were specific to the topic of this research. Finally, the data analysis procedures employed in order so that the researcher could collate, consider and display the data that specifically answered research questions PRQ, SRQ1 and SRQ2 were explicated.

Chapter Five: Findings

Introduction to Chapter

This research explores perspectives on Child Protection and Safeguarding (CPS) in Irish Primary Schools. To this end, the researcher carried out a mixed-methods case study in thirteen schools located in North Dublin in order to answer the primary research question (PRQ) and secondary research questions (SRQs):

PRQ: What are the perspectives of principals, chairpersons and teachers toward child protection and safeguarding?

SRQ1: According to the participants, what factors enhance schools' capacity to protect and safeguard children?

SRQ2: According to the participants, what factors impede schools' capacity to protect and safeguard children?

This chapter reports the findings of this study and is organised into four main sections. The first section reports on the quantitative findings generated from the questionnaire, setting the context for the findings presented in subsequent sections. After this, sections two, three and four report on the findings relating specifically to the research questions outlined.

Section One: Overview of the Quantitative Findings

The third section of all questionnaires contained a Likert Scale that was relevant to all participant groups (Appendix D, E and F). This scale contained eight general statements about CPS and respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with these statements, on a scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Data gathered from this section was analysed using SPSS and this analysis highlighted the findings reported subsequently. As evidenced by Figure 5.1, all participants agreed or strongly agreed that their CPS responsibilities are an integral part of their role, with principals reporting most agreement with this statement. In addition, all participants except one chairperson agreed that

they understood, in full, what their legal obligations for CPS involved (Figure 5.2). Again, principals were the group that agreed most strongly with this statement. Finally, all participants except one agreed that the tasks they undertake for CPS make a positive difference in the lives of children (Figure 5.3).

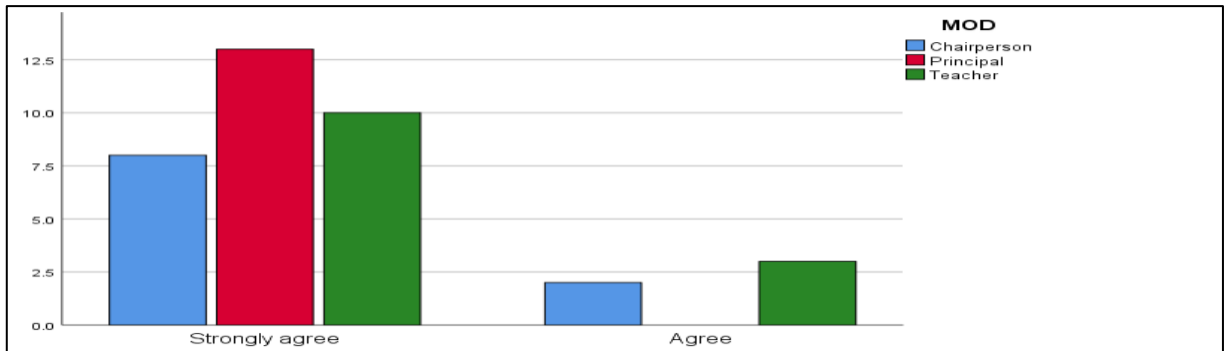


Figure 5.1. Participants' response to 'My child protection and safeguarding responsibilities are an integral part of my role'.

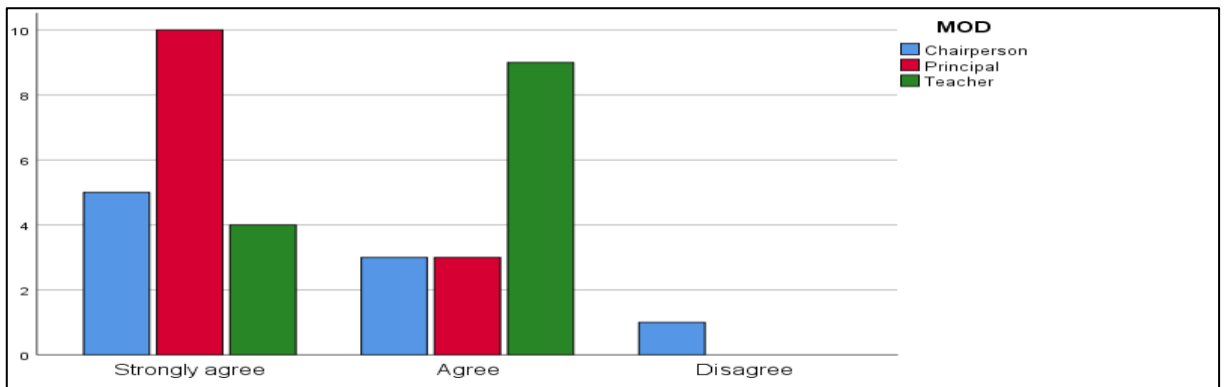


Figure 5.2. Participants' response to 'I understand, in full, my legal obligations for child protection and safeguarding'.

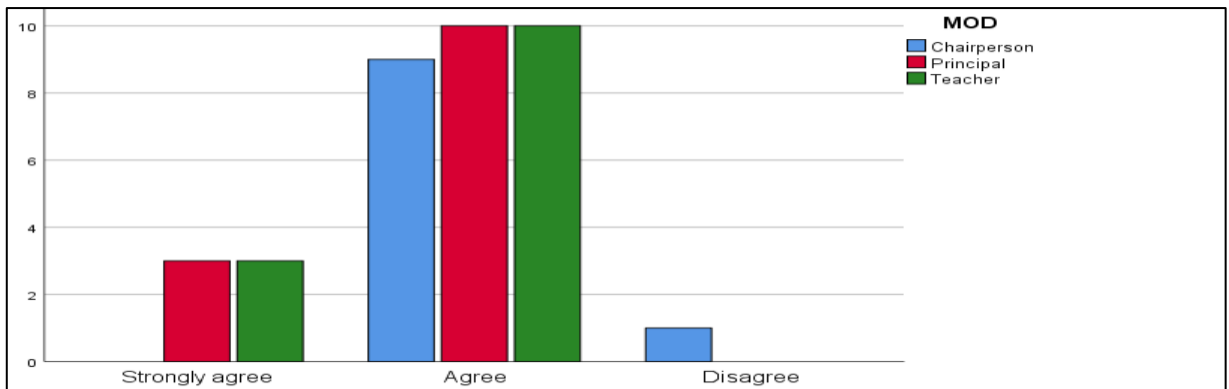


Figure 5.3. Participants' response to 'The tasks I undertake in respect to child protection and safeguarding make a positive difference to the lives of children'.

One of the most significant findings from this research is that all the principals, most of the teachers and half of the chairpersons believe that there are children in their school who remain inadequately protected from harm (Figure 5.4). Hence, despite very significant legislative, policy and procedural changes aimed at enhancing the safety and protection of children (Government of Ireland, 2015; Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2017; Department of Education, 2017a), most participants believe that these measures have not mitigated against the harm posed to some children. From their perspective, these children remain at risk due to many factors discussed in section four of this chapter.

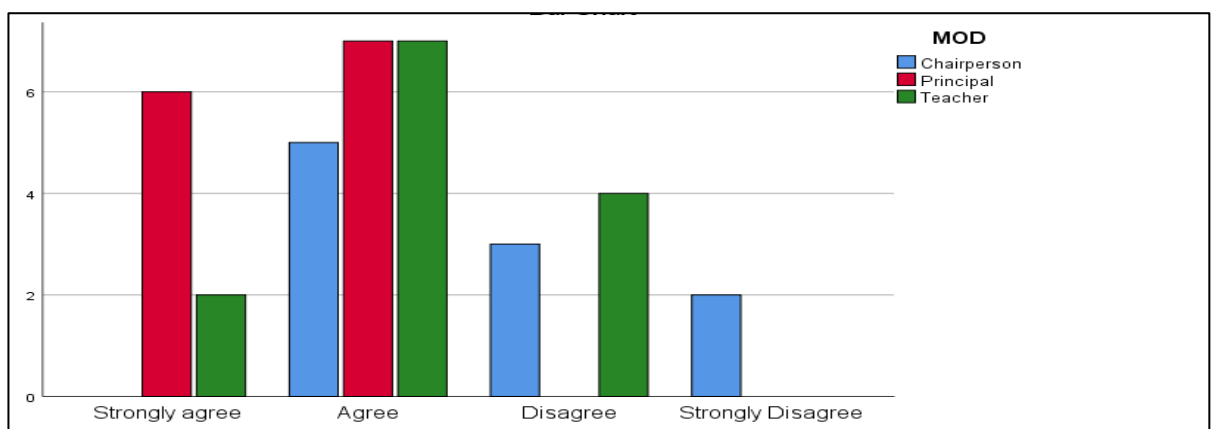


Figure 5.4. Participants' response to 'Even with the current child protection procedures, I believe that some children in this school are still not adequately protected from harm'.

Summary of Section One

This section reported on the quantitative findings generated from the Likert Scale contained in section three of the questionnaires. These findings highlighted: a consensus among participants that their CPS responsibilities are an integral part of their role; a belief shared by most that they understand their legal CPS obligations; and a view that the tasks they undertake for CPS make a positive difference in the lives of children. In addition, this section revealed one of the most significant findings from this research. That is, the view held by most that there are children in their school who remain inadequately protected from harm.

Section Two: Perspectives on CPS: The Principal, The Chairperson and The Teacher

The PRQ of this study sought to find out what are the perspectives of principals, chairpersons and teachers toward CPS. This section uses both quantitative and qualitative data to report on these perspectives, beginning with the principals. This section reports on two subthemes that emerged from the data analysis. That is, the 'Varied Experiences of Being a Principal and DLP' and the challenges associated with 'Acting as Resource Person for CPS'.

Principals' Perspectives Toward CPS

When analysed, the quantitative data from the principals' surveys revealed that most principals (85%) believe that their work for CPS has increased significantly since child protection was placed on a statutory footing in 2017. Still, nearly two-thirds of principals (62%) believe that the current arrangements are not serving the needs of children in the school and over half (54%) did not believe that Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections would enhance the safety of children. When asked about the legislative requirement to carry out a Risk Assessment for CPS, most principals (85%) believed it raised the level of awareness about the potential risk of harm posed to pupils in their school, and over three-quarters (77%) believed that teachers in their school had received adequate training to support them in carrying out their CPS responsibilities. Regarding Tusla and their role in CPS, over half of principals (54%) reported that they were satisfied with Tusla's advice when they sought it. However, when asked about their satisfaction with Tusla's feedback following a concern being reported, only one principal stated that it was satisfactory. In addition to the findings above, an analysis of the qualitative data revealed findings that were specifically relevant to the principal cohort. These are discussed subsequently.

Varied Experiences of Being Principal and DLP

As illustrated in Figure 5.5, principals reported varied views in response to the statement 'It is easy for me to fulfil my legal and professional child protection and safeguarding responsibilities'. Considering that these duties are the same for

all thirteen participating principals prompted the researcher to examine this finding more closely to explore why some principals find it easy to fulfil their CPS functions and others do not. This analysis revealed that principals working in larger schools (i.e., with more than three hundred pupils) or those who were new to the role of principal tended to believe that the role of DLP was challenging.

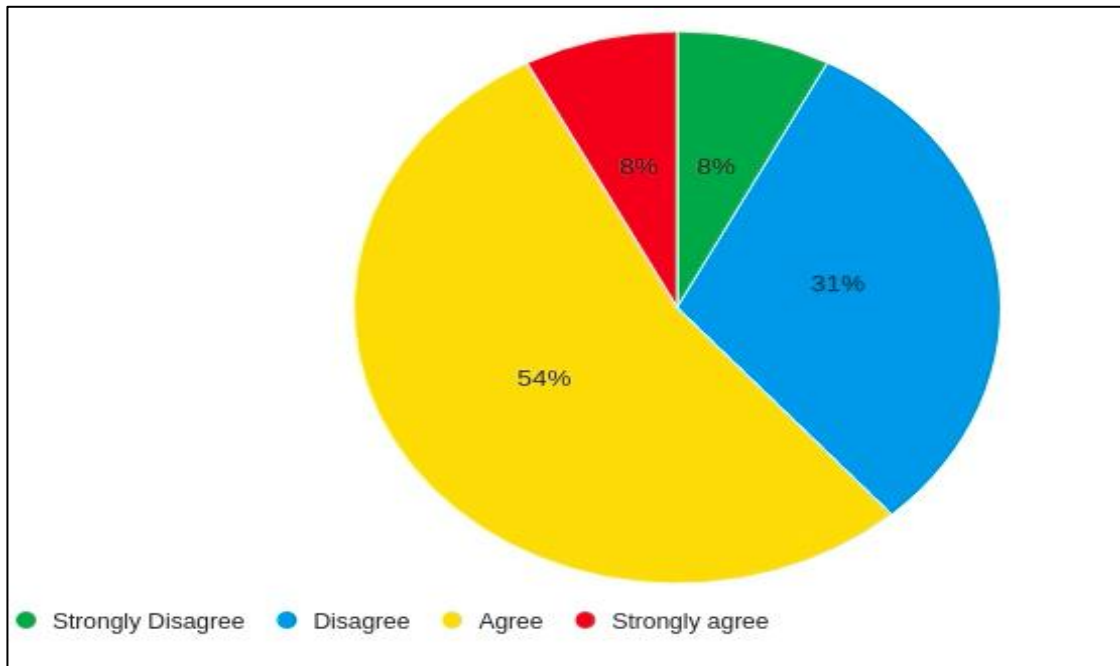


Figure 5.5. Principals' response to 'It is easy for me to fulfil my legal and professional child protection and safeguarding responsibilities'.

Among those participating in the principals' focus group, a consensus was shared that upholding CPS responsibilities when new to the role of principal/DLP is both overwhelming and challenging:

Initially, I did carry it like a burden. I felt completely unprepared moving from a classroom teacher where if I had a concern, I go to the principal to the role of the principal but as time goes on, you obviously gain experience, you gain confidence, you get a rapport with social workers and people involved and it became something that I'm very comfortable with now it's something that I'm glad to do (Principal 3).

I was appointed as principal just three months ago and I have to admit, I feel nervous about the weight of responsibility placed on me as DLP (Principal 4).

Similarly, Principal 8, who was recently appointed, shared with the group how she felt very nervous taking on her new role as principal/DLP and sought advice from the other more experienced participants on numerous occasions. However, those who had more years' experience did not appear overwhelmed by their duties:

I don't carry the responsibility like a weight around my neck anymore because I just have too many other things weighing on my mind most of the time (Principal 2).

I've been in the role I for a good few years my own I'm comfortableness with it has definitely improved... so that does all come in time (Principal 7).

Evidently, the focus group discussion held amongst the principal cohort revealed varied experiences of being principal and DLP. In addition to this subtheme, the analysis of the principals' focus group data highlighted the challenges associated with acting as the 'resource person' for CPS. This is reported subsequently.

Acting as 'Resource Person' for CPS

As previously noted, all principals participating in this study were also the DLP in their school community, as is recommended by the Department of Education (Department of Education and Skills, 2017a). As DLPs, these participants are expected to "act as the resource person to any member of school personnel who has a child protection concern" (Department of Education and Skills, 2017a, p.22) and hence, are expected to give CPS advice to other members of staff. Some participants highlighted this as a particularly stressful aspect of their role due to the other duties that principals must simultaneously manage. For example, Principal 1 said that while she is confident in her capacity to respond to CPS concerns in the school when they do arise, they tend to "consume the day" and leave her with little or no time to complete her other duties as principal. Similarly, Principal 3, described the role of DLP as being "massively time consuming" due to the scope of responsibilities and prioritisation of CPS issues when they arise during

the school day. Moreover, while DLPs can themselves seek advice from Tusla, some principals reported that they frequently could not get through to the agency as their phone line closes for lunch between 13.00 and 14.15 and then again for the day at 5pm. Considering that a significant proportion of mandated reports sent to Tusla come from schools (Tusla, 2019a), these hours and especially the closure during lunch were deemed problematic by many principals, as it made acting as a resource person for CPS more challenging. Remarking on this, Principals 2 and 7 shared how they frequently had to rely solely on their intuition and/or knowledge when advising staff members or making a mandated referral because they could not get through to Tusla. This issue was further highlighted by Principal 11, who shared how she has been in situations where, after 5pm on a Friday, she had become aware of a CPS concern that needed to be reported to Tusla without delay, and yet, their telephone lines are closed until 9am the following Monday. Faced with this predicament, this principal said she must independently try to determine whether the concern, of which she has only limited knowledge of, is urgent enough to report to the Gardaí¹³ or can wait until Monday. Moreover, considering that research elsewhere (Richards, 2018) underscores the efficacy of phone line services providing CPS advice and identifies their utility in mitigating against some of the barriers to reporting, it is unfortunate that some principals could not access this type of service.

Chairpersons' Perspectives Toward CPS

When analysed, the data from the chairpersons' survey revealed that half of the group (50%) had received CPS training and a half had not (50%). A significant proportion of those who had received CPS training reported it did not adequately prepare them for their role in CPS. When asked whether they thought their other Board of Management (BOM) members had the necessary knowledge and skills needed to carry out the CPS duties, half (50%) felt they did and half (50%) felt they did not. In line with the *Children First Act 2015* (Government of Ireland, 2015), a crucial duty of the BOM is to act in an oversight capacity and, in particular

¹³ Gardaí is the state police force in the Republic of Ireland.

situations, overrule the principal's decision relating to CPS. To do this, the BOM is provided with a Child Protection Oversight Report (CPOR) and supporting documentation at every BOM meeting. In Section four of the questionnaire, chairpersons were asked whether these items provided the BOM with sufficient evidence to determine whether the DLP had complied with appropriate reporting procedures, and the majority (90%) believed they did. Moreover, when asked whether it would be difficult for the BOM to overrule the DLPs decision not to report a CPS concern, the majority (80%) felt it would not. In addition to these findings, an analysis of the qualitative data highlighted some specific themes relevant to the chairperson cohort. The section that follows reports on three subthemes that emerged from this data. These include the view 'The CPS System has been Strengthened', 'The Merits of Additional CPS Training', and 'Chairpersons' Contribution to the Data'.

The CPS System has been Strengthened

The chairpersons who were elected to their role prior to the enactment of the *Children First Act 2015* commented on the vast changes they had witnessed to CPS procedures and protocols:

There's been a massive shift in the way we think about and act since child protection was legislated in 2017. Everyone is now acting together rather than assuming it's the responsibility of the principal... its really gotten a whole lot better (Chairperson 11).

There is now huge awareness that children are vulnerable and that adults have a responsibility to protect them. Legislative change has led to shared responsibility for protecting children... its everyone's business now (Chairperson 5)

Sharing a similar view, Chairperson 8 added that there are now very "clear and transparent procedures for reporting concerns" making one's role and function more straightforward. Hence, from the perspective of chairpersons in the role prior to 2017, there is consensus that the system has been strengthened.

However, additional paperwork, procedural and oversight responsibilities have been placed on chairpersons and the BOM in line with these changes. Some chairpersons felt that there were unintended negative consequences associated with these changes. For instance, Chairperson 5 thinks that due to the increase in “rules and bureaucratic stuff...the organic element of education and care is gone”.

The Merits of Additional CPS Training

As outlined in Chapter Two, the enactment of the *Children First Act 2015* brought significant changes to the role and function of chairpersons and the BOM. Hence, chairpersons, who carry a significant weight of responsibility and work in a voluntary capacity, are expected to operate within an increasingly legislative landscape. Perhaps for this reason, many chairpersons think additional CPS training would be helpful:

I think schools would benefit greatly from specific school-based training for child protection. Especially Boards of Management. You have to remember that the Board is made up of volunteers and yet, these individuals are expected to make very big decisions. It's amazing really that Board members can hold such power and responsibility without making it mandatory that they first receive training. (Chairperson 2).

In addition to this point, several chairpersons expressed the importance of getting the ‘right’ members on the BOM. From Chairperson 4's perspective, he seeks out BOM members who do not come from a disadvantaged context themselves, as he wants to ensure that these individuals are not desensitised to concerns relating to disadvantage, or perceive disadvantage to be normal and/or typical. Interestingly, Chairperson 11 shared how, when his school's BOM was reformed, two specific parents (a solicitor and a medical consultant) were approached to see would they join the BOM as these parents were deemed as having skills that would be useful:

She was able to give us fantastic advice that we'd never get, we would have had to pay a fortune for it. And the legal guy was really good as well,

because over the years it seems we are increasingly having to get legal advice on different issues (Chairperson 11).

While school 11 is fortunate to have such a wide variety of perspectives on its BOM, the comment highlighted by Chairperson 11 is perhaps indicative of the influence of increased bureaucracy and legislative requirements, as it seems BOMs are increasingly apprehensive about getting the 'right' people to ensure that they make the 'right' decisions.

Chairpersons' Contribution to the Data

As will be later discussed, themes that emerged for teachers and principals were often not identified in the chairpersons' data. Logically, this makes sense, as chairpersons are largely removed from the intricacies of daily school life and the complexity of CPS practices during school hours. As Chairperson 12 explained, "I don't know the children, haven't met the children, so I can only answer from a step removed from it". While this may be true, on multiple occasions, the researcher made her own observations about several chairpersons and that, unlike the principals or teachers, they appeared to be anxious about engaging with this research project. The researcher brought up this observation about the chairpersons during the principal's focus group hoping that they could provide some insight. In response, Principal 7 rationalised this perceived apprehensiveness. In her opinion, the enactment of the *Children First Act 2015* triggered a "huge shift in their roles", and with it, "they became really responsible with these new guidelines, which was terrifying for them" as they were now being "held personally accountable which was not where they wanted to be". This seemed to be the case for Chairperson 5, who expressed how he felt "overwhelmed" by his CPS requirements and shared how he relied "heavily on the principal's guidance". In his opinion, the area of child protection "has become so heavily legislated that it is challenging to keep up with the terminology and procedures". Moreover, prior to engaging with this research project, Chairperson 5 expressed his nervousness to the researcher, telling her he was afraid he "would not know the answers". While chairpersons were continuously reassured and

encouraged, the researcher noted how chairpersons appeared to be more tentative when sharing their views.

Teachers' Perspectives Toward CPS

When analysed, the data from the teacher's survey revealed that all teachers (100%) had received training for CPS and that the majority of these teachers (77%) thought that this training had adequately prepared them for their CPS role. In addition, nearly all of the teachers (92%) felt that they had an adequate understanding of the CPP and the majority (85%) reported that their DLP always dealt appropriately with their child protection concerns. In addition, most teachers (85%) believed that determining what constitutes a 'cause for concern' can be difficult and the majority (69%) reported that they were unsure about how they should best support a child after a referral is made to Tusla. Nonetheless, the qualitative data revealed one subtheme that was distinct to the teacher cohort. This is, the challenges associated with 'Caring for and About Vulnerable Children'.

Caring for and About Vulnerable Children

During the qualitative phase of this study many teachers shared anecdotes and recounted experiences of caring for and caring about vulnerable children. This data highlighted the necessity of viewing care as a challenging aspect of teachers' CPS role, as many participants experienced perpetual worry about certain children:

You're trying to do the best for these children but it's hard. I can't afford to buy particular children food each day... I am not the one who should be washing their dirty clothes or lunchboxes...taking school books from the resource room and giving them to these children without asking the principal...because the school can't afford to do that for all vulnerable children.. and yet, sometimes I get in my car and get annoyed that I didn't do those sorts of things. At least they would no longer be playing on my mind (Teacher 9).

When you have vulnerable children in the class you're constantly trying to provide them with additional care without their classmates noticing. It's a

hard thing to achieve. You don't want to draw attention to their vulnerability (Teacher 7).

The biggest challenge for me is it is trying to place a boundary between school and private life. I go home and I take my worries about particular children with me. I have gone home and stayed awake all night worrying about certain children. (Teacher 6).

Interestingly, during the teacher's focus group, those who participated were asked how their role differed from that of the principal. Teacher 11 suggested that teachers' concern for vulnerable children "is a different type of intense " due to their close relationship with that child, whom they care "deeply about". Similarly, Teacher 2 shared how she had worried about a particular child all summer and looked forward to seeing him in September so she would know he was okay. Principals and chairpersons noted this particular aspect of the teachers' role. For instance, Principal 1 shared how teachers can find it very hard to 'detach' from the care and concern they have for specific children. She said that she frequently has to tell teachers 'you have to go home and just rationally detach from it. You've done everything you could do for that child today. Tomorrow's a new day'. Also referring to the orientation of teachers' CPS praxis, Chairperson 11 relayed how he was "put in my place once or twice by teachers". In one instance, the BOM was trying to expel a child for gross misbehaviour:

I said, "look, our responsibility is to protect and look after the welfare of the other children, and look after their rights. And to the staff... they have to feel safe doing their job because we can't be leaving them vulnerable... And this teacher turned around to me and says, "Well, [Chairperson 11], who's going to look after this child?" who's going to look after his interests?" It showed me that there's humanity there, that we can't just be looking at it in black and white. So while the BOMs role is to think of the bigger picture, the teachers', theirs is to always think of the child first. They were always coming down on the side of the pupil.

This quote highlights the difference between participants' CPS roles and perspectives. While the functions of the principal, chairpersons and teacher overlap, each is characterised by particular distinctions. In this instance, while the

chairperson can consider the CPS issues in relation to the wider school CPS goals and community, the teacher cannot. Instead, her perspective is oriented toward the immediate needs of the particular child they are working to protect.

Summary of Section Two

This section highlighted themes that were particular to distinct participant groupings. From principals' perspective, it appears that being the 'resource person' for CPS in the school community is time consuming and challenging, especially in scenarios where principals have to rely on their own advice. From chairperson's perspective, this section highlighted a view among experienced chairpersons that the CPS system has been strengthened since child protection was placed on a statutory footing. Nevertheless, some chairpersons identified training as a factor that could further enhance CPS practice for CPS. From the teachers' perspective, this section highlighted the emotional aspects of the teacher's role in CPS and noted the degree of care and consideration teachers give to vulnerable children in their care.

Section Three: The Factors Enhancing Schools' Capacity to Protect and Safeguard Children

In response to SRQ2, this section reports on what participants believe are the factors enhancing their school's capacity to safeguard and protect children. Two themes emerged in response to this including the CPP's efficacy and the introduction of mandated reporting.

The Efficacy of the Child Protection Procedures

The CPP was highlighted as a strength of the current CPS systems operating across school communities during multiple focus groups. From the participants' perspective, these provided clear guidance on the procedures that needed to be adhered to in various situations. For example, Chairperson 12 believed that having the CPP helps to make the process of protecting and safeguarding 'black and white' even in scenarios that are sensitive and perhaps

distressing. In his view, you just have to “make sure that what should happen, does happen”. This view was shared by others, including Teacher 9:

We have now nailed down the correct procedures for protecting children in school. We know, by and large, what we have to do and we are doing it, even if it is causing us distress and takes a lot of time. So the procedures are rock solid. And that is a big thing. We should acknowledge that. Decades ago, it was clear that many children were not safe in school, they were not protected, there was no oversight... schools were a law unto themselves. This is not the case now. Children in school are protected across so many levels by so many people. There is so much being done- yes it seems bureaucratic and extreme, but I think the teaching profession can stand back and confidently say, schools are absolutely safe places (Teacher 9).

The Introduction of a Mandated Persons

One of the fundamental tenets of the CPP is that, in line with Children First, teachers are now legally considered to be ‘mandated persons’¹⁴. Participants view this legislative change as a significant strength to the school’s overall capacity to protect children from harm. While chairpersons’ addition to the debate around school-level CPS processes was noted previously as limited, their contribution to this finding was significant. For instance, Chairperson 4 feels that “the fact that all people are mandated is a huge change and it has had a very positive impact...there is huge awareness now that children are vulnerable and that adults have a responsibility to protect them. It is everyone’s business now”. Similarly, Chairperson 2 believes that sharing CPS responsibilities is a key strength of the current arrangement as “you don’t have one person making all the decisions”. Correspondingly, Chairperson 11, with over three decades experience thinks:

Things have changed massively....there has been a massive shift in the way we think about and act now. I have to tell you, it's gotten really a lot better, and the teachers are all clued in, because they have to be because they're

¹⁴ Mandated persons have two main legal obligations under the *Children First Act 2015*. First, to report harm of children, above a defined threshold, to Tusla. Second, to assist Tusla, if requested, in assessing a concern which has been the subject of a mandated report.

mandated. Concerns are brought to the board from the beginning, and they're tuned in. They watch out for these things and they know how to report them (Chairperson 11).

Principals also identified the introduction of mandatory reporting as a strength of the current system. One principal noted that prior to the introduction of mandatory reporting some members of staff would have had arguments with her about making a report as they “felt it was breaking down relationships with parents” and “damaging trusts with families”. However, mandatory reporting has removed that tension for principals and teachers:

you could be thinking, "God, don't really know. I'm not sure." You might not be doing anything about it. Then it might be March, and you think, "Well, we'll leave it and see." Then suddenly it's June, and you're like, "It's the summer now." Then one or other of you has gone to another school the following year, and they're with a new teacher. It could be a whole other year or six months before it's picked up by another teacher. I think that's where that obligation to report has changed this sort of thing (Principal 12).

In addition to the strengths noted above, Principal 7 suggested that mandatory reporting is helpful because it grants teachers “increased ownership of the process”, meaning they can lodge CPS reports even in scenarios where the DLP disagrees with them that a concern has reached a threshold.

Summary of Section Three

This section aimed to identify what factors enhance schools’ capacity to safeguard and protect children. The qualitative data revealed two factors that were particularly helpful to school communities. These were the CPP and the introduction of mandated reporting. Regarding the CPP, participants noted how these procedures offered clear guidance on how to act in particular situations, even those that were distressing and/or challenging. In respect to the introduction of mandated reporting, there was a sense that this legislative change helped school communities share the responsibilities for CPS and hence, ensured better oversight protocols which helps keep children safe from harm.

Section Four: Factors Impeding Schools' Capacity To Protect And Safeguard Children

Even with the introduction of legal and professional requirements aimed at enhancing CPS, most participants believed that there were children in their school that remained inadequately protected from harm. As evident from Figures 5.6, 5.7 and 5.8, principals agreed most strongly that children were still not adequately protected from harm, followed by the teacher cohort and then the chairpersons. In response to SRQ2, this section now reports on what participants believe are the factors impeding their school's capacity to safeguard and protect children. It is organised into three parts: micro level factors, meso level factors, and macro level factors.

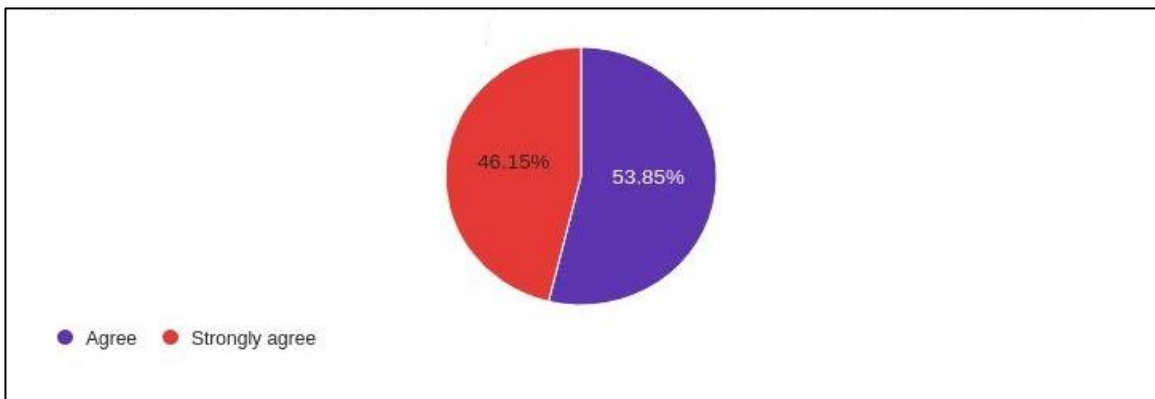


Figure 5.6. Principals' response to 'Even with the current child protection measures, I believe that some children in this school are still not adequately protected from harm'.

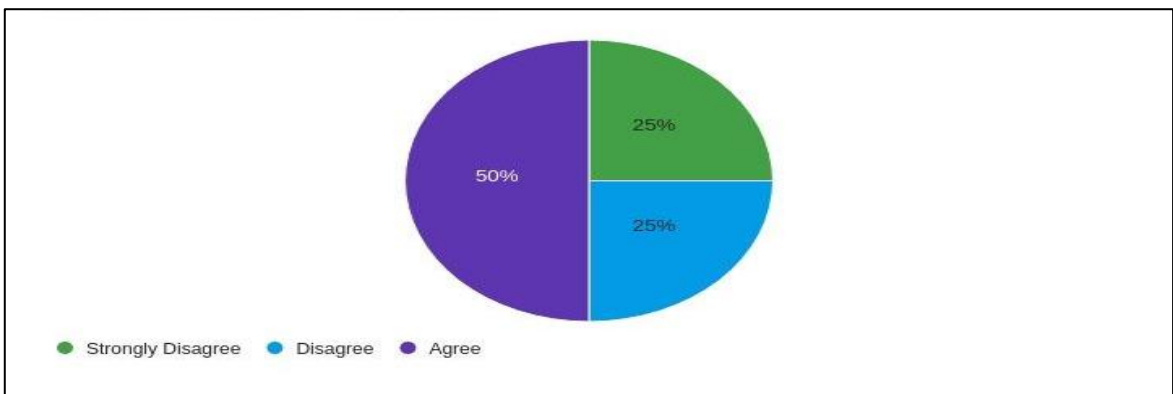


Figure 5.7. Chairpersons' response to 'Even with the current child protection measures, I believe that some children in this school are still not adequately protected from harm'.

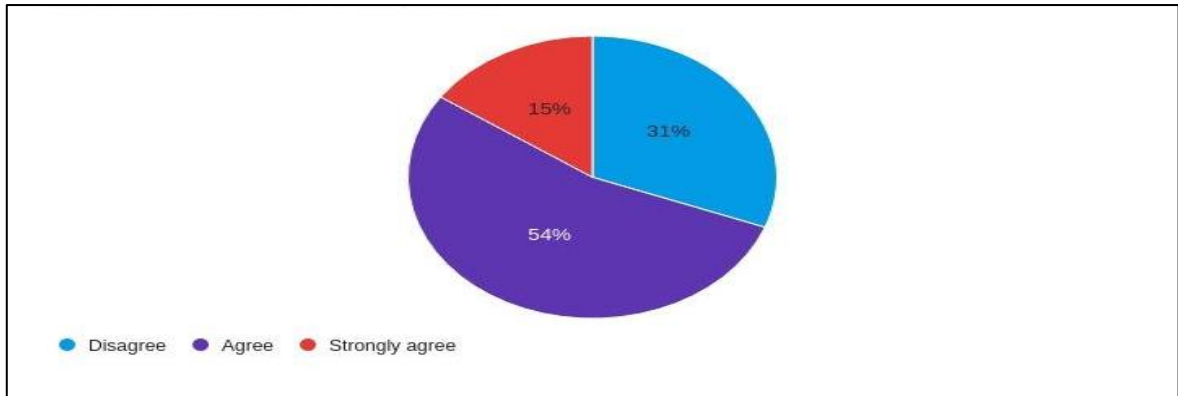


Figure 5.8. Teachers’ response to ‘Even with the current child protection measures, I believe that some children in this school are still not adequately protected from harm’.

As evidenced from the above figures, most participants believe that there are children in their school who remain inadequately protected from harm. This is one of the most significant findings from this research as it indicates a view that recent legislative, policy and procedural changes aimed at enhancing the safety and protection of children (i.e., Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2017; Department of Education and Skills, 2017a; Government of Ireland, 2015) have not mitigated against the harm posed to some children. The section that follows reveals why participants believe this to be true. This discussion is framed within a micro, meso and macro perspective.

Micro-Level Barriers:

This section identifies the micro-level barriers that impede schools’ capacity to safeguard. These factors can be understood as school-level factors influencing how schools can protect and safeguard children.

Threshold Issues

In line with the *Children First Act*, all mandated persons are legally obliged to report harm of children, above a defined threshold, to Tusla. While Tusla provides guidance on determining when this threshold has been reached (i.e., Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2017; Department of Education and Skills, 2017a), in practice, it seems that accurately determining when the ‘threshold’ has been reached can be challenging:

A big difficulty is identifying what constitutes a risk. Especially when it comes to neglect or emotional abuse. It's not clear cut (Teacher 2).

The threshold is different for everybody. What you consider above the threshold of harm isn't the same as what Person Y or Person X considers it (Teacher 5).

Determining when the threshold has been reached is 'easy' only when a child has made a disclosure, when there is physical evidence of harm or when the concern relates to sexual abuse (Teacher 2).

Particularly in cases of neglect, there was a sense across the data that the 'threshold' was something intangible, subjective, understood differently by different people and organisations because "what is a reasonable cause for concern in one school does not even come anywhere near a threshold in another" (Principal 13). Correspondingly, Chairperson 4 described the threshold principle as a "constant comparative" between contexts and situations, where the time of school personnel was taken up with responding to the most severe incidents and situations. However, this view was not shared by Principal 13, who when relaying her experience of a Case Conference¹⁵, questioned the level of neglect a child must experience before Tusla intervenes in a meaningful way:

¹⁵ Child Protection Case Conference is a meeting organised by Tusla and held to determine the risk posed to a child. This meeting is attended by Tusla representatives and other significant people involved in the child's life.

Their house was practically derelict. They destroyed the house.... We all got asked to rate the family, and the family rated themselves maybe an eight. Maybe social workers gave five. I was like, how is this acceptable that these children are living in these circumstances. How could it be a five? I think I gave it a two and the home-school teacher gave it a two. The guard gave it a one. Nobody was prepared to say this is not okay. .., it was really, really scary to see. When it came down to it, the social work department were not prepared to say, this is not an acceptable way for a child or anybody for that matter to live. It was really frightening, and it was very, very sad. I thought the threshold of what it had to be...and we know removing a child is not the answer. We all know that. It's incredibly complex. I accept that. But nobody was even prepared to say, this isn't okay.... You wouldn't let an animal stay with these people. It was horrific! (Principal 13).

Criticisms of Tusla's threshold for action was a common occurrence across the data. This was evidenced by Principal 1 who questioned the effect of reporting on children's lives:

I don't know if the reporting ever really leads to anything. Unless it is significant and ongoing and consistent, a child is not allocated a social worker or they're not placed on the child protection register. You might be very vulnerable and suffer a lot and neglect, but you still don't meet the threshold. It doesn't matter how many concerns go in... nothing really happens. Unless you're incredibly vulnerable, they don't really get support I don't think (Principal 1).

Similar to this view, Teacher 1 believed that it had to be "really, really severe child abuse before the system will intervene and supports are put in place". Across the data there was widely held consensus that Tusla's threshold was not intentionally high but was an unintended consequence of organisational overload. For example, Principal 2 expressed a view that "Tusla are overwhelmed by the volume of referrals that they're getting" and hence, are forced to "sift through referrals to find the most critical ones" (Principal 2). Adding to this frustration, several participants believed that Tusla's threshold for action was different in DEIS schools¹⁶. For instance, Principals 13 and Principal 4 were certain that Tusla

¹⁶ The DEIS programme is a strategy introduced to primary and post-primary schools in Ireland in 2006 and is aimed at providing supports to schools with high concentrations of students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds who are at risk of educational failure.

applied a higher threshold for intervention in their school communities. Similarly, Teacher 6 shared the following:

I teach in a DEIS school and over the years there have been a few occasions when I have reported what I think is a very serious concern about neglect to Tusla and nothing was done (Teacher 6).

Perhaps related, in a focus group with two DEIS schools, there was a consensus that neglect was not a child protection concern that necessitated automatic reporting. For instance, one teacher stated that if they reported all instances of neglect, “we’d be on the phone to TUSLA every single day” (Teacher 5). In response to this, the researcher asked the group whether it was possible that schools can become desensitised to neglect, and this discussion followed:

Teacher 5: Yeah. Definitely.

Principal 5: I think you can, yeah. I think you definitely can. You're not surprised, where somebody new into the place would be very surprised at how is that allowed to happen.

Chairperson 4: I think the Board of Management might have a slightly different perspective, and it's very important that we do... the BOM can't become desensitised to it....But by God, I was there for 18 years [was previous teacher and principal in this school] I was desensitised completely because if you didn't, every event would be a major event, and you'd never actually get over it. You wouldn't survive it yourself. So I think it's a very interesting goal for a board not to be desensitised.

From the findings above, it is clear that schools experience difficulty determining when the ‘threshold’ for reporting a concern to Tusla has been met. Moreover, some school personnel are questioning the point of reporting cases of neglect when, in their opinion, Tusla does not take action in response.

Principals and Teachers Fearing for Their Safety

Fear was also identified as a micro factor that may impede schools’ capacity to safeguard. This factor was first identified in the teachers’ quantitative data (Figure 5.9) but was also highlighted in the qualitative data.

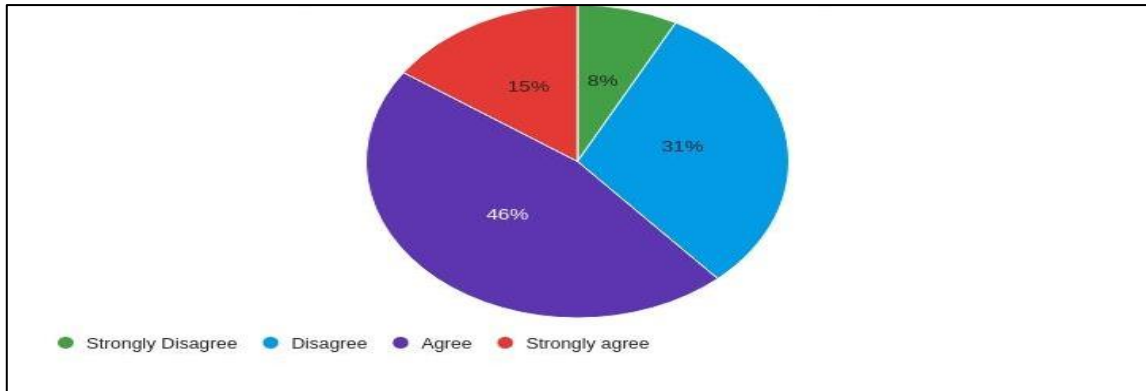


Figure 5.9. Teachers’ response to ‘I worry about the consequences for myself when I make a mandated report’.

Within the qualitative data, several participants reported experiencing fear when upholding their CPS duties. In one focus group a principal stated that “families are always trying to find out who reported them” (Principal 5) and that this can cause additional fear. The teacher from the same school stated that when she makes a report, she questions “How safe am I? How protected am I?”. In her opinion, there is a strong likelihood that the family will find out it was her who made the report and “that's putting yourself, your family, everything at risk” (Teacher 5). She described this possibility as a “really, really big concern” for those working in her school. Similarly, Teacher 10 asserted that the fear of repercussions for your safety could deter teachers from reporting. Elaborating on this further, she said:

There is a huge drug scene in North Dublin, like it or not. and those people, those criminals I guess you’d call them, they have kids and those kids go to school...we have some families here that we would be wary about. And, what I am saying is, if I had to make a report about one of those families, and it was later found out that it was me who made the report, I would be really scared (Teacher 10).

Elsewhere, Principal 3 described occasions when she felt nervous going to her car after making a CPS referral to Tusla. She shared how her chairperson has asked whether she feels “safe enough” after making a report. While she empathised with the families “in crisis” she also shared how reporting these families can be “intimidating”. While no participant said that fear for their own

safety has ever prevented them from upholding their legal and professional CPS duties, fear was widely recognised as a factor that could potentially prevent school personnel from acting in the child’s best interests, especially when they feel their own safety would be compromised.

Fearing for the Safety of Children

Fear for the child’s safety and well-being were also identified as impeding CPS factors, as some participants believed that making a report could have negative consequences for the child. This was identified as a very significant factor in the teachers’ quantitative data (Figure 5.10).

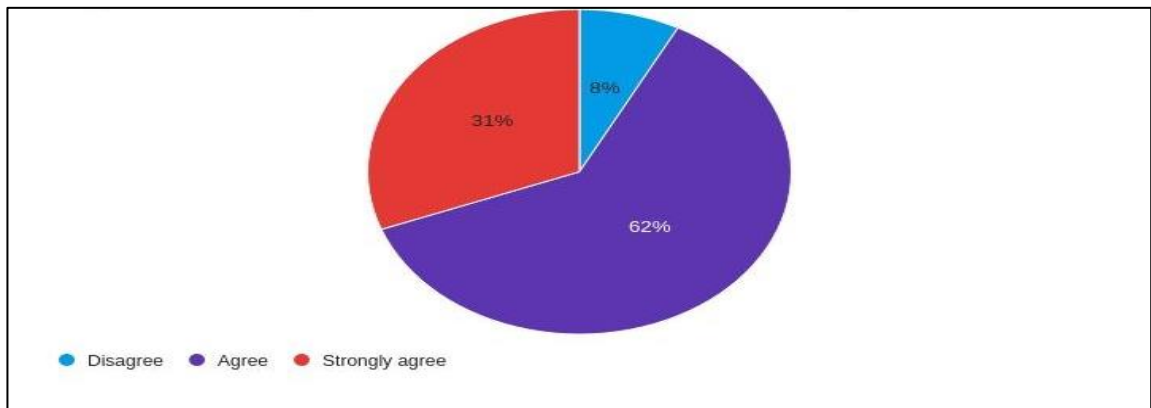


Figure 5.10. Teachers’ response to ‘I worry about the consequences for the pupil when I make a mandated report’.

During the teachers’ focus group, participants debated the unintended consequences of mandatory reporting. For example, Teacher 11 questioned whether reporting could potentially put a child “in more danger because Tusla won’t intervene because it’s serious, but not serious enough”. Consequently, this teacher wondered if mandated persons could be indirectly putting children in harm’s way “for the sake of our duty”. Sharing her view on this debate, Teacher 6 stated:

And then, they might not tell you anything in future. And you might lose their trust all for the sake of putting in a concern to Tusla that really, just made the child’s situation worse, not better (Teacher 6).

Interestingly, several teachers assumed that most non-teaching principals would not experience this emotional dilemma. According to Teacher 5, teachers “because of the very nature of [their] job....usually have a closer relationship with that particular vulnerable child than the principal will”. Similarly Teacher 10 stated that principals “are not looking at that child who has or is living through an adverse experience everyday...like for children living with neglect... they don’t see the embarrassment on their face when another child asks why they have no lunch... no coat.. or why they’re dirty.... Principals are often a little removed from this”. Teacher 10 felt that due her principal’s limited familiarity with the realities of particular children, he could be:

a bit slow to report a neglect concern that I bring up and I think this is why... it’s not in his face every day, it’s in mine...so when I raise a concern, I can be a little emotional about it when he plays it down. I’m sure he’s thinking about the other issues that making this concern will cause... because, let’s be real, reporting can cause other issues like damaging the home school link with the family and causing an already stressed out family more stress (Teacher 10).

Similarly, Teacher 9 remarked on his DLP’s inclination to report concerns relating to neglect, sharing how it was difficult to get him to “agree to lodge a concern relating to neglect”. Consequently, this teacher shared how there have been occasions where he has felt “issues haven’t been followed up by my DLP, even though I strongly believe Tusla should have been contacted”. In response to this, the researcher asked Teacher 9: hypothetically, would you feel confident lodging such a concern yourself, making it anyway because you do not need to have agreement from the DLP? The response to this was, “I’m not sure. It might make me wonder was I seeing an issue where there was none”.

While teachers, as mandated persons, do not need their DLPs approval or agreement to make a referral to Tusla they still seek it. For instance, Teacher 10 said that disagreeing with her DLP on a CPS matter would cause her “discomfort”. She elaborated on this further, problematising the issues it could cause:

imagine if you were a NQT¹⁷ or not a permanent member of staff. You probably would not like to say to the DLP 'yeah you don't think, you as principal and DLP don't think this is concerning, but I do'. In fact, I think that DLPs, they should back all concerns brought to them. They should back their teachers' perspective really... because like... I just imagine, if I was DLP and principal and a teacher came to me with a concern, I'd imagine I'd think to myself, well if they bothered to come and talk to me about a concern they had about a child, that that would warrants a report (Teacher 10).

The above findings highlight how fear for oneself or for the pupil you are trying to protect can impede schools in upholding the CPS responsibilities. Moreover, this fear appears to add to the complexity of CPS work, making it an emotional endeavour, particularly perhaps, for teachers and principals. In addition, some participants suggested that children's own fear can make upholding one's CPS duties more challenging. These teachers spoke about how vulnerable children who had previously disclosed to staff "get better at keeping it to themselves or explaining it away by other reasons" (Teacher 12). From the perspective of these children, it seems their experiences of being vulnerable over time compels them to exercise more caution with what they divulge, fearing the consequences of disclosing for themselves and their family. For example, Teacher 1 shared how, in her experience, vulnerable children frequently change their disclosing behaviour:

Where before they would open up to us but now are reluctant to share information or will say "I can't tell you because it will get my mam in trouble' or "If I tell you my family will be broken up and I won't see my mam and brother anymore" (Teacher 1).

Principal 2 also remarked on how children can change their disclosing behaviour. However, this participant questioned whether there was a correlation between this changed behaviour and the child's perception that nothing has changed for them after making a disclosure:

¹⁷ NQT is an acronym for Newly Qualified Teacher.

If a child discloses something to you, they're doing it because they think that you can help them...they're trusting you...they see you as a person who is in a position to help them. It's very disappointing and very upsetting to think that a child has unburdened themselves with something...and you pass it on to Tusla but unless you're incredibly vulnerable, don't get support...that's very difficult for them.

The same participant was sceptical about whether children would be willing to share subsequent disclosures with this 'trusting adult', particularly if their initial attempts to get help had 'backfired' and/or they were punished by their parent(s) for disclosing information to school personnel. In the child's eyes, this scenario may have "made a bad situation a whole lot worse" (Principal 2).

This section identified the micro-level barriers existing within schools' CPS systems. This discussion highlighted how determining when the 'Threshold of Harm' was reached can be significantly challenging for schools and how teachers can be reluctant to report concerns if their DLP is not in agreement with them. In addition, the data revealed how Tusla's threshold for intervention was judged as problematic by many participants, particularly those working in DEIS contexts. In addition to these findings, this section revealed how fear could exist as a factor that can dissuade CPS action and cause children to become reluctant to share details of their lives with adults they trust. Following on from this discussion, the next part of this chapter identifies the meso-level barriers that affect CPS practices in schools.

Meso-Level Barriers

This section identifies the meso-level barriers that impede schools' capacity to safeguard. These factors can be understood as community-level risk factors that, while beyond the control of the school and school personnel, influence the degree to which schools can protect and safeguard children.

Across the data, participants spoke empathetically about the level of adversity some children in their school face. While it was clear that participants worked to address these, it also seemed as though many felt it was a losing battle,

as the impact of what the principal, chairperson or teacher could do to remedy the situation was limited. Two themes that emerged within the meso category include 'Children and Drugs', and 'Poverty and Neglect'. Findings from these themes are outlined individually; however, the data suggests that there is a relationship between these themes.

Children and Drugs

The participants from two school communities located close to each other, continuously emphasised the catastrophic impact of drugs and a local culture of drug use on their school's capacity to safeguard children. Principal 5 said that the "drug scene in the area now has become absolutely huge". During the focus group held with these two schools participants expressed concern that they could not possibly mitigate against the risk that this culture posed to children. Participants from these schools spoke about how children in 5th and 6th class regularly become involved in selling drugs, and, as this behaviour was happening covertly, outside of school hours, these schools felt limited in their capacity to address this significant CPS concern:

the demographic of the whole area is a factor that is hard to mitigate against. A lot of vulnerable children and families here. Drugs have become a big issue. Why would any child go on to secondary school if they can make a lot of money bringing drugs from one place to another? (Chairperson 5).

they're able to earn money for passing on parcels to one another. That whole thing. If you're getting €80 for drops here and there, what's going to keep you going to school?... we see boys here up in 5th and 6th class...and after school, they're out working with the men doing the men's lingo, hanging out with adults all the time. So ... I don't think there's any kind of stopping it (Principal 5).

As with a culture of drugs, the influence of poverty and its relationship to neglect was another factor that schools quickly identified as a significant risk posed to children in their school. Again, however, schools debated how they could mitigate against this factor.

Poverty and Neglect

Across the data, and most noticeably among the DEIS schools, it was clear that neglect is an ongoing CPS issue for many schools. According to one principal the “sheer volume” and “commonality” of neglect in DEIS contexts could potentially enable it to become “part of the background” and be overlooked as being a significant risk factor for children (Principal 7). Similarly, Teacher 9 felt that the incidences of child neglect are “nearly expected in some school contexts” as if it “is the norm”. Nevertheless, many participants described the lengths schools go to alleviate the neglect children experience due to poverty. For instance, Teacher 7 shared how disadvantaged children in her school were given “catered for a lot” by providing food, clothing and educational resources. Consequently, this teacher believed that those factors indicating a child is experiencing neglect due to poverty were “looked after” by her school, enabling children to come to school on “an even base”. However, one principal, who said that her school also offered similar support, raised a concern that schools could be “creating a culture of helplessness” through such support:

You do everything for them. You provide lunch. You provide the tracksuit. You provide whatever they need. You find an after school club that will cater for them until six o'clock in the evening...They literally don't do anything for themselves. They don't learn how to manage any of their child's schooling or school related activities. That is a concern (Principal 13).

While others in the focus group could see her point, there was also a sense that ethically, schools had to respond to the needs of these children because, by providing such support, schools are “increasing the time, the length of time each day, that, that child is feeling safe” and is “allowing them to come in without feeling shame, or feeling like they're totally conspicuous in their poverty” (Principal 7). However, other participants were not confident that schools or school personnel could ever mitigate against the challenge of poverty and neglect in children’s lives. Principal 12 pointed out that there is “only so much you can do. You can't go home and fix things at home”. However, for Principal 4, the effects of poverty were seen as cumulative and not easily solvable. While parents living in

poverty “want the absolute best” for their children, their experience of living through economic disadvantage can limit their “capabilities to put in place the long-term structures to help their children achieve”. Although several principals and chairpersons believed that schools were limited in their capacity to lessen the effects of poverty in children’s lives, the data gathered from teachers revealed how this participant group frequently attempted to mitigate these effects in their day-to-day practice. Teacher 6’s experience evidences this:

He came in nearly every day with no lunch, no drink, no coat. Each day we’d give him lunch, the school just bought extra but no one would ever clean out his bag at home. So the food we were giving him was just going mouldy at the bottom of his bag.

The school gave him a uniform in September because we knew the family didn’t have much money.... I remember noticing he spilt a yoghurt all down his top in September and that stain being there for months. I actually ended up taking it home and washing it but worrying that I was overstepping the line...You want to care for these children, your heart goes out to them but I have felt unease sometimes... like when I got a coat from the schools lost and found and offered it to his mam. She took the coat but I know she felt embarrassed and I really didn’t want to make her feel that. I just couldn’t watch that child come to school on another wet day and absolutely soaked to the skin before 9am. And it’s difficult because these families, they love their children, they are just in crisis. This child was living in a three-bedroom apartment with his parents and eight siblings...

At Christmas there was no Santa in his house. He thought he was bold and that’s why he didn’t get anything. Honestly, that child’s five year old face will be engrained in my memory for all of my career....the second year I had him, when Christmas was coming up I bought him a Spiderman toy, hid it in his school bag with a note to say it was from Santa (Teacher 6).

From the data, it is clear that schools and school personnel make conscious and deliberate attempts to mitigate the adversity children are experiencing. However, in some situations, it appears that broader socioeconomic factors make it difficult, or perhaps impossible, for schools to ensure the safety and protection of all pupils. What is clear from the findings above is that while schools have a

sense of how to mitigate against poverty, knowing how to mitigate against a local drug culture is more challenging. In the section that follows, the difficulties experienced by schools and school personnel when acting to protect and safeguard children is continued, as additional State-level factors impeding schools' capacity to protect children are identified.

Macro-Level Barriers

This section identifies the macro-level barriers that impede schools' capacity to safeguard. Here, the discussion turns to state-level factors and outlines how, from the participants' perspective, their efficacy and provision are affecting schools' capacity to protect and safeguard children.

The Bureaucratisation of CPS work

Many participants felt that changes in CPS legislation, policy and procedure had generated significant change for schools in managing CPS concerns but not necessarily changed much for vulnerable children. For example, Teacher 6 said that "while there's a lot of activity happening around child protection concerns, such as calls being made and conversations being had, nothing significant has changed for the child". Many others expressed this pessimism, including Principal 5 who felt that nothing significant "besides our paperwork" had changed. Others suggested that increased paperwork requirements were overly bureaucratic and problematic in some instances. For instance, Chairperson 5 stated that the "problem really is it is now all about paperwork rather than about doing something to help vulnerable children". In his view, "paperwork is being prioritised at the expense of practical and effective supports...Unless you can write it down on a piece of paper it's nearly like it's pointless. We have, sadly, lost sight altogether of what counts". Similarly, Principal 7, said that the bureaucratisation of CPS in schools was leading her to become "more cynical about what has changed at all for vulnerable children". In her opinion, the prioritisation of paperwork and record-keeping is "missing the point" of real and effective CPS. This view was shared by Chairperson 11, who questioned the unintended consequences of bureaucratisation of CPS in schools as it can "send the wrong signal" to school

personnel who may think that their responsibilities have ended once the concern was recorded.

The State and Children's Services

Many participants identified the State and the efficacy of its agencies involved in CPS as being a factor that directly affects schools' capacity to protect and safeguard children:

What no one ever says, what we fail to acknowledge is that Tusla are doing the best with what they have. If they cannot get to all reports quickly, if they are slow to intervene... that is actually not Tusla's cross to bear, it is that States. The State has continuously underfunded and under-resourced children's services and then allows agencies like Tusla to take the blame. But those agencies, they are created, regulated and resourced by the State so really, any criticism of Tusla is really a criticism of the Irish Government (Teacher 9).

We need to ask what kind of nation are we? What do we stand for really if vulnerable children are left waiting years for services that they need today? It's all political spin. Like all these policies we have... like not just related to child protection, like I am thinking about disability too, other children's services. These policies made by the Irish Government that highlight things like 'the formative years', 'early intervention', 'child-centredness', you know, 'the importance of the child's voice'.... Maybe I am just cynical but I think it is all spin because what could it be but spin if the Government is not willing to put their money where their mouth is and invest properly in children's services (Teacher 2).

Relatedly, in various focus groups, participants questioned the efficacy of mandated reporting when there seemed to be a lack of available services to help vulnerable children and their families. For example, Principal 8 questioned the point of teachers being mandated when there are no available supports to help families struggling or because they are currently "spread so thin that they can't possibly do any good for anybody". Similarly, Principal 1 believed that children in her school were falling "between the cracks" due to poor service provision in Ireland. In another focus group, Principal 13 and Principal 1 described their recent

experience of referring children to the Education Welfare Services¹⁸, which are part of the Tusla Education Support Service (TESS).

A load of overly onerous paperwork to no end. To no fruition. You don't mind doing these things, if it's going to lead to a good outcome and if it's going to improve their lot. But if it just goes into this vacuum of nothing, no response, no writing back to me to say, we're not looking at them even (Principal 1).

I spent ages doing forms. Sent them all off, got letters back for all of them, saying we're not in a position to take on these cases. They told me to monitor them and if you feel the need re-referring, please do so. I was so close to writing a letter or bringing someone in, saying, for God's sake, I did feel the need to be looked at. I did refer them. Now you're telling me to just keep my eye on it, do it all again in a year's time? It's just shocking. They're under TUSLA. That's educational welfare services- another quango! (Principal 13).

Tusla

Given the nature of this research topic, it was perhaps not surprising that Tusla arose as a point of discussion during every focus group. However, what was surprising was the participants' general perception of Tusla's efficacy at responding to concerns raised by schools. During every focus group held, the discussion at some stage, and without prompting from the researcher, identified Tusla's capacity to respond to CPS concerns as a factor that directly impedes the school's capacity to protect and safeguard children. There was a consensus among participants that Tusla was overburdened and overwhelmed. Participants shared how they believed Tusla employees are working "in crisis mode" due to a lack of staff, funding and services (Teacher 7) and, as a result, "are overwhelmed by the volume of referrals that they're getting in" (Principal 2). Consequently, numerous participants believed that "many children are left without what they need" (Teacher 4).

¹⁸ Educational Welfare Services which are part of the Tusla Education Support Service (TESS) deal with children and families who have difficulties in relation to school attendance, participation, retention.

In addition to the above findings, it was evident that participants, especially principals, were exasperated by the lack of feedback from Tusla once a CPS referral had been made. From their perspective, it is as if some referrals “get lost in the ether” because principals “rarely receive any follow up” (Principal 12) after a referral has been made. Consequently, some felt that “you'd be doing well if they got a phone call” (Principal 13) back from Tusla with any updates relating to the concern. In such situations, the principal/DLP, who is legally expected to act as the resource person for CPS in the school community, is “left in the dark” to decide whether any subsequent actions are needed to protect the child in question (Principal 1). When this happens, the principal is usually unaware of whether Tusla initiated an investigation into the concern, what the outcome of this was and ultimately, whether Tusla believes there is a continued need to monitor this child’s situation to protect them from harm.

Summary of Section Four

This section aimed to identify what, according to participants, are the factors that limit schools’ capacity to safeguard and protect children. During the focus groups, participants identified various factors, which were grouped by the researcher into micro, meso and macro categories. In the ‘Micro-Level Barriers’ section, issues related to Tusla’s ‘Threshold’ for making a CPS referral were identified. Here participants problematised the subjectivity of this concept, particularly in concerns relating to neglect. In addition, issues with how Tusla apply this concept were outlined by participants. Following this, the role of fear as an influential factor was considered. The ‘Meso-Level Barriers’ section highlighted how particular socioeconomic factors could make it difficult, or perhaps impossible, for schools to ensure the safety and protection of all pupils. Within this discussion, the influence of drugs and poverty were highlighted as being particularly challenging factors to mitigate. Finally, the ‘Macro-Level Barriers’ section reported on State-level factors that, while out of the control of schools and school personnel, act as indirect barriers to schools when protecting and safeguarding children from harm. Noted as being particularly problematic here

was the provision of children's services in Ireland, including how Tusla operates and is resourced and staffed.

Conclusion

The aim was to present the findings of this research study. In accordance with this aim, this chapter was organised into four main sections. The first section reported on the quantitative findings generated from the questionnaire, setting the context for the findings presented subsequently. Section two reported first on the findings that were general to all participant groups, highlighting a consensus among participants that some children remain inadequately protected from harm. Next, the themes that were particular to distinct participant groupings were reported. The findings relevant to the principal cohort suggested that being the 'resource person' for CPS is time consuming and challenging for principals, especially when principals are new to their role and/or work in a large school. The findings relevant to the chairperson cohort revealed how these individuals were usually 'a step removed' from the daily intricacies of CPS work in schools, tended to construct the aims of CPS more objectively than principals or teachers, and identified a desire for additional CPS training. The findings relevant to the teacher cohort highlighted how these individuals constructed the aims of CPS in relation to their care role and relate this to the needs of specific children. Moreover, the findings revealed the tension experienced by teachers when seeking to do what is in the child's 'best interests' while simultaneously upholding their legal CPS responsibilities. Section three of this chapter reported on what factors enhance CPS in school. This section highlighted the benefits of mandatory reporting to schools' CPS system and its function in portraying CPS as a shared endeavour and responsibility, as distinct to a duty undertaken by one figurehead. In addition, participants commended the clarity of the CPP. Particularly from the chairpersons' and principals' perspective, the CPP was commended for effectively explicating the appropriate procedures necessitated within a variety of diverse situations. Finally, section four reported on the micro, meso and macro-level factors that, according to participants, limit schools' capacity to safeguard and protect children. Issues reported here included the subjectivity of the 'Threshold of Harm' principle,

the existence of fear as a prevailing factor influencing CPS decision making, the connection between particular socio-economic factors and children's exposure to heightened risk factors, and the impact of State-level factors on schools' CPS system.

Chapter Six: Discussion

Introduction to Chapter

The child protection and safeguarding (CPS) expectations placed on schools and school personnel expanded very significantly in 2017 with the enactment of the *Children First Act 2015* (Government of Ireland, 2015). This Act places statutory CPS obligations on certain professionals (including teachers and principals) and upon particular institutions (including schools). In addition to this legislative change, schools are also expected to take account of various non-statutory, requirements relating to CPS (e.g., The Teaching Council, 2016; Department of Education and Skills, 2017a). Despite this positioning of schools and school personnel in CPS work, prior to this research study, there was no national research to reveal the perspectives of school communities towards their CPS responsibilities or to reveal what, in their view, are the factors that are enhancing and impeding their schools' capacity to protect and safeguard children. This research study addresses this gap in the literature base by answering the following three research questions:

Primary Research Question (PRQ): What are the perspectives of principals, chairpersons and teachers toward child protection and safeguarding?

Secondary Research Question One (SRQ1): According to the participants, what factors enhance schools' capacity to protect and safeguard children?

Secondary Research Question Two (SRQ2): According to the participants, what factors impede schools' capacity to protect and safeguard children?

A significant findings emerging from this study was view held by numerous participants that nothing significant has changed for many vulnerable children since 2017. Hence, pupils in schools remain at risk despite the introduction of a new legislative framework and auxiliary directives. From the point of view of the participants, this chapter considers the difficulties in protecting children and relates this challenge to internal tendencies within school communities and the broader social factors that limit schools capacity to protect children from harm. As

noted in Chapter Three, the design and analysis of this research were framed by Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), which is a theoretical lens for thinking about human activity. CHAT sees human cognition and behaviour as being embedded in collectively-organised, artefact-mediated activity systems (Leontiev, 1978; Engeström, 2015). Accordingly, constructs from this theory feature in the layout and discussion of this chapter.

The Object(s) of Child Protection and Safeguarding

When applied to a field of research, CHAT's application of the term 'object' can be used to refer to the potentially shared problem or socially significant aim that humans are working on or toward (Engeström et al., 2007). In line with this understanding, when the term 'object' is used in this study, the researcher is referring to the goals or the objective of CPS, whether thought of from an individual, group or societal perspective. This study highlighted the multiplicity of objects within the school CPS system. For instance, there is clear evidence that a broader social object to protect children and keep them safe permeates school communities. As noted in Chapter Two, it is helpful to consider this broad social aim in relation to its history and the culmination of discourses that highlighted child protection as a national issue (e.g. McGuinness, 1993; Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs [OMCYA], 2009; Gibbons *et al.*, 2010; European Court of Human Rights, 2014) and necessitating legislative and policy change. Consequently, documents that serve to direct and regulate individual and organisational action for CPS (i.e., The *Children First Act*, 2015 and *Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017*, emphasis added) need to be considered in reference to their national context. In these documents, children are referred to in a general and plural sense. However, objects that relate to the safety and protection of specific children are also apparent in the data, and relevant to the *Child Protection Procedures* (Department of Education and Skills, 2017a, emphasis added), which mostly refers to the singular 'child'. Hence for schools, the goal of protecting a specific child run parallel to the broader goal of protecting children in general. As will be discussed, these

simultaneous objects can sometimes be antagonistic and cause tensions within schools' CPS system.

Engeström et al. (2007) maintain that the way an individual, group or society constructs an object, and the motive behind it, determines the horizon of possible actions taken and thus gives shape and direction to the activity within the system being investigated. This perspective is useful as it provided a lens through which the researcher could better understand the variance with which individual participants constructed the object(s) of CPS and how their role shaped this construction. For instance, it appears that teachers construct the object(s) of CPS in relation to their care role as it relates to specific children whereas this is not the case for chairpersons who tended to construct the object(s) more objectively, relating it to the need to 'oversee' and 'check' for the sake of children in a plural sense. For principals, it seems that they must bear the burden of both perspectives, thinking of the object(s) simultaneously in both general and specific terms. As detailed fully in Chapter Two, key national publications (Government of Ireland, 2015; The Teaching Council, 2016; Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2017; Department of Education and Skills, 2017a; 2019) outline the breadth and variety of CPS functions carried out by the school principal/DLP, the chairperson and the teacher. Concurrently, this research highlighted how principals/DLPs, chairpersons and teachers understand and experience their CPS responsibilities differently. Hence, while sharing in the general object of CPS, it is clear that participant groupings have distinctly different CPS roles and that this is an essential feature of schools' CPS systems. For example, the care role is almost always ascribed to teachers. This role, it seems, is not motivated by one's legal CPS duty but rather an instinctive, ethical urge to care for and protect children. While this role appears to be innate, it is not simple. Across the data, teachers identified the many complex challenges they experience when seeking to care for and protect vulnerable children. Most poignant in this respect was the perpetual worry teachers had about particularly vulnerable children and, in some cases, the frustration teachers felt that their principal could, due to their role, be distanced from experiencing the same degree of worry.

Principals also experience frustrations unique to their role. For instance, literature relevant to CPS highlights how fear of damaging teacher-child relationships exists as a factor deterring reporting (Abrahams, Casey and Daro, 1992; Kenny, 2004). This research highlighted how some principals were frustrated when teachers expressed reluctance to report a concern due to the fear of damaging teacher-child relationships and trust. For example, Principal 1 felt the need to remind teachers that their relationship with a child is “of secondary importance to a potential risk to the child”. While the participating principals in this research were very clearly committed to the safety and well-being of children in their school community, they could understand their roles and responsibilities more objectively than teachers could. For instance, principals appeared to make CPS decisions more swiftly, utilising the Child Protection Procedures (CPP) to direct their decision making. For example, Principal 2 stated that she had ‘too many other things weighing on [her] mind’ to allow herself to be overwhelmed by her CPS responsibilities. Generally, this contrasted with teachers who were more likely to contemplate the hypothetical consequences of their actions for the child they were trying to protect and hence, who it seemed experienced more emotional turmoil. These findings correspond, to a degree, with literature conducted elsewhere (Bunting, Lazenbatt & Wallace, 2009; Buckley & R. Buckley, 2015) which claims that, when faced with an ambiguous CPS concern, such as neglect, professionals are often more tentative in their decision making and attempt to consider the multiplicity of anticipated negative and positive outcomes. Contrasting with this literature however, principals in this study did not express the same degree of tentativeness or trepidation when making CPS decisions. However, it is possible that the magnitude of tasks principals undertake (Stynes, 2014) compels them to make quicker decisions when compared to teachers.

Like principals, chairpersons’ proximity to vulnerable children enables them to objectively understand their CPS roles and functions. As chairperson 12 put it, in CPS work, chairpersons are ‘always a step removed’ as they do not personally know the vulnerable children they are working to protect. There was a

sense among several chairpersons that being unacquainted with the children made it easier for them to carry out their oversight function and enable their decision making to be directed by their legislative responsibilities.

A Hierarchy of Objects

Although the object of CPS can be constructed differently between individuals and groups, some objects trumped others in their perceived importance, denoting a clear hierarchy of objects. Hence, some forms of child abuse¹⁹ are judged as being 'lesser' than others, and this judgement influences how concerns are responded to. This was most apparent when the researcher compared attitudes and reactions described in response to concerns relating to sexual abuse with those relating to emotional abuse, physical abuse and especially, neglect. While there were very few accounts shared that related to the sexual abuse of children, those that were reported were characterised by a sense of shock, urgency and importance. This contrasted greatly with the accounts related to other forms of abuse, particularly neglect. This finding corresponds with research conducted elsewhere (Bunting, Lazenbatt & Wallace, 2009; Buckley & R.Buckley, 2015; Whelan, 2018), suggesting that this differential response to abuse types is not unique to this piece of research. However, this research highlighted several contextual factors that warrant consideration. For instance, Teacher 5 said that her school would be 'on the phone to TUSLA every single day' if they reported every incident of child neglect, while Principal 5 expressed concern that schools like his with high incidences of neglect could become desensitised to it. These perspectives indicate that some schools feel incapable of responding to all concerns relating to neglect due to the sheer volume of neglected children in their schools. Another factor warranting consideration is the view expressed by many participants that Tusla would not respond in a meaningful way to neglect concerns. In research conducted elsewhere, the view that state authorities will not respond appropriately is identified as a significant barrier to

¹⁹ In the Irish context, child abuse is categorised into four different types: neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse.

CPS reporting (Kenny, 2001; Horwath, 2007). This finding, coupled with findings related to differential responses to abuse types identified in this research and elsewhere, may indicate that children experiencing neglect, especially those attending schools in areas associated with higher incidences of socio-economic disadvantage, may face a multitude of obstacles to accessing support and/or intervention from agencies such as Tusla. As revealed by the findings, attitudes toward neglect must also be considered alongside the subjectivity of the 'Threshold of Harm' principle (hereafter the threshold), as determining when this threshold was reached proved to be significantly challenging. This connection is considered subsequently.

The 'Threshold of Harm': A Problematic Principle

In CHAT, the rules construct refer to any formal or informal regulations that exist in relation to the object(s) of the system. Whether formal or informal, rules serve to constrain or liberate an activity by delineating guidance to the subject(s) on the appropriate procedures necessary within a given circumstance (Engestrom, 1993; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). Within the schools' CPS system, the 'Threshold of Harm' principle exists as a formal, legislative rule. However, as is revealed in the subsequent discussion, its utility and efficacy are challenged by additional interrelated factors within the school CPS system.

When a mandated person has a CPS concern that relates to neglect, emotional abuse or physical abuse they are required, by law, to determine whether they think that concern is at or above a defined 'threshold of harm'. This threshold is reached when a mandated person "knows, believes or has reasonable grounds to suspect" that the child has been, is being or is at risk of being maltreated "to the point where the child's health, development or welfare have been or are being seriously affected, or are likely to be seriously affected" (Department of Education and Skills, 2017, p.27). As noted in Chapter Two, this definition highlights the subjectivity of the threshold principle, as it is for the individual with the concern to determine whether the threshold has been reached. Thus, it could be argued that this is a strength of the principle itself, enabling those

with concern to respond, even in scenarios where others do not share the same degree of concern. Nevertheless, the inherent issues of the threshold principle have been highlighted by others. For example, Levi (2008) points out that the problem with 'believing' that a child is at risk involves holding an idea to be true, whereas, in the context of reporting CPS concerns "one is seldom *sure* that abuse has occurred but instead concerned that it *might* have occurred" (Levi, 2008, p. 135, emphasis in original). In addition, the utility of thresholds is based on the idea that they can be determined logically, which is most frequently not the case (Buckley, 2014; Kirk & Duschinsky, 2017). In addition, as discussed in Chapter Two, Irish law necessitates high thresholds for State intervention into family life (Burns et al. 2017; Burns & McGregor, 2019).

Considering these points, it is perhaps unsurprising that this study revealed the threshold principle to be one of the most problematic features of CPS work in schools, as participants were frequently uncertain whether the threshold had been reached. This was evidenced by Teacher 2 who stated that determining whether the threshold has been reached is 'easy' only when a child has made a disclosure, when there is physical evidence of harm or when the concern relates to sexual abuse. This finding correlates with earlier research (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Kenny, 2001; Walsh *et al.*, 2006; Bunting et al., 2009) which reveals how professionals frequently construct in their minds a sort of hierarchy of abuse types, whereby those that are more easily identifiable or are likely to be subject to public concern and are more commonly and more quickly reported. In contrast, concerns considered more complex or related to neglect or emotional abuse are frequently characterised by slower professional responses, as individuals spend more time considering the multiplicity of anticipated positive and negative outcomes, including adverse consequences (Buckley & R.Buckley, 2015). The following section further discusses the key tensions experienced by participants regarding the threshold principle. These tensions are depicted in Figure 6.1. which was created by the researcher to indicate areas of tension within schools' CPS system.

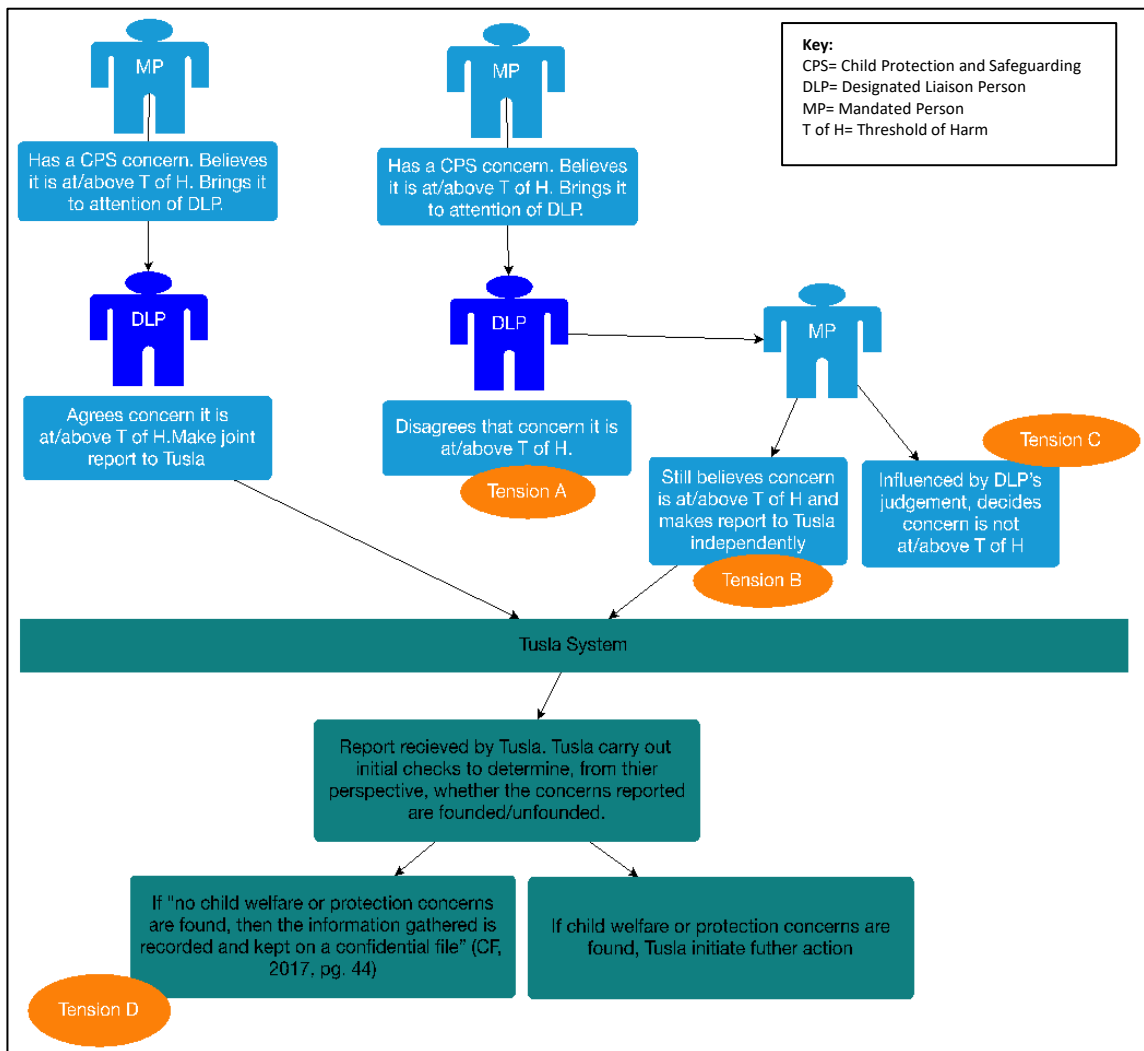


Figure 6.1. Tensions that arise in relation to the 'Threshold of Harm' principle.

Tension A: School Personnel Disagree Over Severity of CPS Concern

Under the Children First and the CPP, mandated persons (usually teachers) are expected to bring CPS concerns to the DLP (usually the school principal). The DLP and teacher are then expected to jointly decide whether this concern is at or above the threshold. Perhaps surprisingly, this research revealed that it was not uncommon for the DLP and teacher to disagree on this matter. This best highlights the subjectivity of the threshold principle (Tension A) as two individuals who are both considering the same CPS concern can arrive at opposing judgements.

Tension B: Teacher Lodges a CPS Referral Independently of DLP

If the teacher believes that the concern has reached the threshold, but the DLP disagrees, the teacher can lodge a CPS report independently of the DLP. However, the data revealed that this particular scenario causes teachers discomfort (Tension B) as they seek to have their concerns validated by their DLP. Moreover, it was presumed by the teacher group that this would be a particularly problematic situation for NQTs²⁰ or non-permanent members of staff who may feel more insecure about disagreeing with their principal/DLP.

Due to the scope of this research, it was not possible to determine how an experience of opposing judgements on a CPS matter might affect a teacher's subsequent CPS action/reporting behaviour. However, it could be presumed that teachers who seek agreement from their DLP that the concern has reached the threshold may be less likely to bring similar concerns to the attention of their DLP. As argued by Buckley and McGarry (2011), teachers' response to CPS concerns can be influenced by both the attitude of the school principal and by his/her previous experiences of reporting similar concerns. Hence, occasions where teachers seek the agreement of their school principal are concerning, as they suggest that the function of this legislative change (whereby teachers can make independent CPS reports) may be limited in its effect.

Tension C: The Influence of the DLP on Teachers' Initial Judgement Concerning Severity of a CPS Concern

Also worrying, in other situations, it appears that the DLP's judgement that a concern does not reach the threshold alters the teacher's initial judgement of a CPS concern (Tension C). For instance, Teacher 10 said that while she brings concerns she considers to have reached the threshold to the attention of her DLP, she 'leaves it up to' the DLP to determine whether the threshold has been reached. This action is referred to elsewhere as 'second-hand reporting' (Buckley, 2014), whereby concerns are passed onto other professionals rather than statutory

²⁰ NQT is an acronym for Newly Qualified Teacher.

authorities and is more common when CPS concerns relate to neglect. Moreover, research elsewhere has found that many of these concerns passed onto other school personnel never get reported to the relevant state authorities and hence, place children at risk for continued abuse (Abrahams, Casey & Daro, 1992; Kenny, 2001). This finding concurs with Walsh et al. (2006) who suggests that the attitude of the principal can influence the CPS decision-making and action.

In this study, second-hand reporting indicates that Teacher 10 is either i) not fully aware of her legal CPS duties²¹ or ii) is aware but only partially upholding them. The same teacher reported that neglect is 'hard to insentify[sic]' in her school, suggesting perhaps that the DLP will not judge concerns relating to neglect as reaching the threshold and thus, they remain unreported. These findings are concerning as it seems that both Teacher 10 and DLP 10 are only partially upholding their legal CPS duties, which is clearly problematic for any child that has, that is or that will experience neglect in this school context.

As noted in Chapter Two, in 2019, a new model of school inspection, called Child Protection Safeguarding Inspections (CPSIs), was introduced to evaluate school's compliance with key aspects of child protection "in an in-depth way" (Department of Education and Skills, 2019, p.2). These inspections comprise of 65 items to be evaluated by a team of inspectors from the Department of Education. Following a CPSI, schools will be issued with two reports stating that they are either *fully compliant*, *substantially compliant*, *partially compliant* or *not compliant* and this will be made publicly available online (Department of Education and Skills, 2019). This information is significant as School 10 was subject to one of these inspections and despite the concerning findings identified above, this school was judged as being *fully compliant*. This raises an important question regarding the appropriateness of the CPSI as a CPS audit tool. Despite its in-depth design, it failed to i) detect the existence of limiting attitudes toward CPS or ii) appropriately judge whether mandated persons understand their legal and

²¹ In Ireland, all mandated persons are considered to be individually legally responsible and hence, cannot devolve their responsibility to others.

professional CPS duties. Previously, Whelan's research (2018) questioned the utility of accountability and measurement tools in the area of child protection, suggesting that it sends the wrong message about child protection work by implying that: it can be quantifiable; that good outcomes for children can be measured; that child abuse is easy to identify and address, and that failure to do so is the fault of the worker(s). Similarly, Buckley (2008) cautioned against a rise in New Public Management (NPM) tools streamlining child protection, rationalising that these often bring about unintended consequences.

This caution appears to be founded on recent national research (Treacy & Nohilly, 2020) which suggests that NPM tools may be unintendedly discouraging care practices in schools by placing an overemphasis on the bureaucratic aspects of CPS that can be accounted for and measured. Considering the arguments made by others above (i.e., Buckley, 2008; Whelan, 2018; Treacy & Nohilly, 2020) alongside the findings relevant to School 10, suggests that the limitations of CPSIs need to be acknowledged. Judgements reporting schools to be *fully compliant*, *substantially compliant*, *partially compliant* or *not compliant* fail to acknowledge the 'unwieldy' (Buckley & R.Buckley, 2015) and 'uncertain' nature (Gilbert et al., 2011) of child protection practices and systems, or to appropriately account for or qualify non-statutory care practices deemed essential elsewhere for vulnerable children (e.g. Gilligan, 1996, 1998, 2000; Nohilly, 2019b). In this study, while care practices were highlighted as crucial, many participants expressed concerns similarly noted by Treacy and Nohilly (2020) that the focus of CPS has become overly bureaucratic. As frustratingly expressed by Chairperson 6, "[p]aperwork is being prioritised at the expense of vulnerable children".

Tension D: Dissonance Between Schools' and Tusla's Judgement Concerning Severity of CPS Concern

However, even when schools do decide to lodge a CPS report, it is not guaranteed that Tusla will agree with the reporter's judgement that the concern has reached the threshold needed to intervene (Tension D). Similar to other research (Richards, 2018), this study highlighted the frustration schools frequently

experience when this happens. Compounding this frustration is the reality whereby schools are left unaware why their concerns were unfounded and unsure how they are subsequently expected to support the child/ren, or even if they need to. While the reasons why schools' concerns were unfounded remains unknown, research elsewhere (King & Scott, 2014) concludes that child protection reports made by schools are much more likely to be unsubstantiated compared to other professional groups such as doctors or the police. Consequently, school personnel can feel that their concerns are not treated seriously, and this view can become a deterrent limiting motivation to report future CPS concerns (Crenshaw, Crenshaw & Lichtenberg, 1995; Baginsky, 2008).

Significantly, the experience of coming to realise that a CPS concern has been unsubstantiated effectively interrupts the processes involved in protecting and safeguarding children, as schools now have to independently determine whether they need to monitor or disregard the concern(s) reported without being privy to information Tusla used when making their judgements about the concern. Added to this tension is the certain view expressed by several participants that Tusla's threshold for intervention is higher for schools designated as DEIS. While the limitations of this study did not allow this to be explored, research in the UK reveals a correlation between high deprivation communities and lower intervention rates by the relevant authorities (Bywaters et al., 2015). However, as social workers' workload effectively mediates their threshold for intervention, increasing demand frequently leads to an increase in the threshold for intervention (Mansell, 2006). Nevertheless, what may be most problematic regarding this research is the opinion that Tusla's threshold for intervention is higher for schools designated as DEIS. Whether accurate or not, this view is potentially problematic as it may serve as a factor that discourages CPS reporting within DEIS school communities where there are usually higher proportions of vulnerable children.

The key tension here appears to be how information is shared between organisations that share the object of protecting vulnerable children. While this

tension has been a longstanding issue in Ireland (e.g. Mansell, 2006; Gibbons *et al.*, 2010; *O’Keeffe v. Ireland*, 2014), it could be argued that the efficacy of interagency communication has been considered more frequently from the perspective of state agencies rather than from the perspective of schools. As noted in Chapter Two, historical reports, inquiries, and court cases have proved legitimacy for the introduction of the current legal framework that legally obligates mandated persons to report the ‘harm’ of children when it is judged to have reached the threshold and to assist Tusla, if requested, in assessing a concern which has been the subject of a mandated report (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2017). These two requirements effectively serve as a legal mandate placed on schools to share CPS information with Tusla in order so that the agency can better protect vulnerable children. While these requirements are critical, this research strongly indicated that schools require more information from Tusla to adequately determine what support and care vulnerable children require. Hence, in the context of this study, it seems that the unilateral flow of information may be limiting schools’ capacity to protect and safeguard vulnerable children, or worse, mistakenly imply that certain children no longer require special care and support when they do. While inadequate information sharing by Tusla was explicitly reported by participants as a significant external issue, internally, it appears that school personnel are frequently seeking contradictory CPS objects. This tension also limits schools' capacity to protect children from harm, as reported subsequently.

Contradictory Objects and Motives

In CHAT, it is assumed that an object motive exists behind every activity and that this motive directs the actions of individuals and groups within any given activity system (Leontiev, 1978). This object motive can be likened to a 'particular point of view' and 'set of parallel values' directing the action of individuals and groups (Edwards, 2011). Yet, as individuals and groups can have different object motives, their actions may be 'driven forward' with variance. Moreover, Leontiev (1978) claims that the motive experienced by the subject(s) and the object of the activity system can conflict, causing tension for the subject. These perspectives are

significant as they help to explain the tension experienced by some participants when seeking to uphold their legal CPS responsibilities alongside the desire to care for and act in the child's 'best interests'.

This research identified instances where participants' motive to protect a child from harm and act in the child's 'best interests' conflicted with the object to uphold one's legal CPS responsibilities. This was most apparent in scenarios where teachers worried that making a mandated report to Tusla was not in the child's best interests. This was rationalised for various reasons but the most frequently cited was a fear that a child may be punished by his/her parents once they find out a report has been logged. In such scenarios teachers questioned whether they could be putting children 'in harm's way'. In other scenarios, teachers expressed reluctance to report some concerns to Tusla, believing that they would not reach Tusla's threshold for intervention yet, from a school perspective, would damage trusting relationships between teacher and child and damage home-school links fostered with the child's parent(s)/carer(s). Hence, when weighing up the probable outcomes, a view that reporting would not be in the child's best interests frequently prevailed. In such scenarios, mandatory reporters experience conflicting obligations: the obligation to follow the law versus the obligation to protect children from harm. While Levi (2008) acknowledges the difficulty of decision making here, he also points out that child protection agencies, however imperfect, provide the only systematic approach for investigating CPS concerns. Hence, mandated persons must be careful not to exercise overconfidence in determining, for themselves, what is in the child's best interests (Levi, 2008).

These scenarios illustrate how participants' legal object of upholding their legal CPS responsibilities can conflict with their ethical object as it relates to the desire to care for and act in the child's 'best interests'. While it was not possible to determine which object/motive was more dominant within the CPS system or even to speculate the degree of influence one has on the other, it is still important to acknowledge that contrasting object/motives exist within school CPS systems and that these can have significant implications for vulnerable children. For

instance, mandated persons who are predominantly focused on the ‘best interests’ of the child may mistakenly make judgements that are not in the child’s best interests. Also problematic is that those who are predominantly focused on their legal CPS duties risk overlooking the everyday and immediate care needs of vulnerable children, as reporting CPS concerns and assisting Tusla, it appears, frequently does not alter children’s reality.

While fear for the child was a commonplace concern across the data, some participants also expressed fear for themselves and their safety. This was particularly evident in school 5. The principal of this school shared how families are ‘always trying to find out who reported them’, and the participating teacher in the school shared how this is a ‘really, really big concern’ for those working in the school. From her perspective, reporting particular families can put her and her family at risk and consequently, she questions how protected she is in scenarios where she is required to make a CPS report. Similarly, Teacher 10 said she would feel ‘really scared’ about the repercussions of reporting particular families associated with crime in her school. Concurrently, Principal 3 described having conversations with her chairperson about her safety when going to her car after making a CPS report. These expressions of fear are not unique to this study, as research conducted elsewhere suggests that the fear of retaliation exists as a factor dissuading reporting (Kenny, 2001; Baginsky, 2008; Laskey, 2008; Buckley & McGarry, 2011; Bourke & Maunsell, 2016), especially in cases where families have a reputation for violence (Lazenbatt & Freeman, 2006). Interestingly, the findings from this study indicated that this fear of parent retaliation was not evident in the data collected from special schools. Unlike mainstream schools, pupils in special schools in Ireland get transport to and from school. This factor, it could be assumed, mitigates the fear of parent retaliation, as face-to-face interactions with the child’s parent(s) are limited in these contexts.

This research identifies fear as a factor that influences the cognitive and behavioural aspects of CPS work in schools. This is particularly significant within an Irish educational context, as it reveals how the affective domain of CPS work

continues to exist as an influential factor even with the introduction of mandatory reporting laws. Moreover, while some perspectives indicate that the legislative requirements compel CPS action despite fear (e.g. the perspective offered by Principal 3), others indicate that the fear of one's safety dominates CPS decision-making. This discussion is considered further in the subsequent section, which identifies the effect of CPS training on teachers' fear and beliefs.

Teacher's Fears and Beliefs: CPS Training as the Missing Link?

The influence of teachers' fear and beliefs on their response to CPS concerns and reporting behaviour has been widely researched. Of note, much of this research encourages caution when assuming a positive correlation between clear CPS procedures and appropriate identification and responses to CPS concerns (e.g. Kenny 2001; Walsh et al., 2006; Buckley & McGarry, 2011; Buckley & R.Buckley, 2015). Similar to the findings from this study, research elsewhere highlights how effective school CPS practice is constricted by factors that appear to withstand legislative frameworks such as mandatory reporting laws (Crenshaw, Crenshaw & Lichtenberg, 1995; Kenny, 2004; Hinkelman & Bruno, 2008). Such factors may include a teacher's judgement about the harm of reporting outweighing the benefits; a perceived need to maintain relationships with a child's parents; a reluctance to report for fear of retaliation from parents; fear of making an inaccurate report; and a view that child protection services will not offer any help to the child (Kenny, 2001; Buckley & McGarry, 2011; Bourke & Maunsell, 2016).

Positively, however, research in Ireland and overseas suggests a correlation between the level of training received by teachers and their capacity to respond appropriately to CPS concerns (Baginsky, 2008; Buckley & McGarry, 2011; Mathews & Bross, 2015; Bourke & Maunsell, 2016). In this research, all principals, teachers and half of the chairpersons received CPS training. In addition, most believed that their training had adequately prepared them for their CPS role and nearly all stated that they understood, in full, what their CPS duties were. Nevertheless, there is a contradiction between the assertions of most participants

that they have received adequate training and findings that identify limiting attitudes and beliefs toward CPS or gaps in their knowledge. This contradiction is not unique to this piece of research. Previous international research has noted that, despite educators' claims to be appropriately knowledgeable and skilled for their CPS role, they frequently hold erroneous beliefs that negatively impact the efficacy of their child protection practices (Laskey, 2008; Bunting et al., 2009). While CPS training is generally suggested as a mechanism to address such beliefs (Kenny, 2001; Baginsky & Macpherson, 2005; Bunting et al., 2009), closer examination of the relevant literature suggests that the format and focus of this training matters, as simply raising general awareness about CPS and its associated legislative requirements is perhaps not enough (McGarry & Buckley, 2013).

To be effective, training needs to take account of the specific barriers individuals experience when working to protect children (Bourke & Maunsell, 2016) and the use of experimental exercises and hypothetical situations has been identified as beneficial (Kenny, 2001). One-off training events and isolated workshops should be avoided, and it is recommended that training is jointly provided by professionals from an educational and social work background (Baginsky & Macpherson, 2005). Bunting et al. (2009) add that training should emphasise the seriousness of emotional abuse and neglect while also clarifying physical evidence or sharing a disclosure should not be considered prerequisites for action.

As outlined in Chapter Two, such provisions for training have not been made available in Ireland. While DLPs can avail of a one-day face-to-face seminar, CPS for teachers has been limited to the provision of two 90 minute e-Learning presentations that focus predominantly on the legal CPS responsibilities of mandated persons. These modules do not acknowledge the complexity of CPS or consider the prevailing factors that limit schools' capacity to protect and safeguard children. Focus instead is orientated toward what mandated persons, DLPs, DDLPs and BOMs are required to do in line with legislation and CPP, with the importance, for vulnerable children, of additional non-regulatory support and care practices

remaining unacknowledged. Considering the findings from this research study alongside the arrangements to date for CPS training, strongly indicates that the format, focus, length and delivery of training for CPS needs to be reconsidered in Ireland.

Protecting the Most Vulnerable Children: An Unattainable Object

One of the most significant findings from this research is that all of the principals, teachers and half of the chairpersons believe that there are children in their school who remain inadequately protected from harm. Hence, despite very significant legislative, policy and procedural changes aimed at enhancing the safety and protection of children (i.e., Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2017; Department of Education and Skills, 2017a; Government of Ireland, 2015), most participants believe that these measures have not mitigated the harm posed to some children. From their perspective, these children remain at risk due to a myriad of community and state-level factors.

Another distressing finding of this research highlights the view that it is impossible to protect particular children and that any efforts made by schools are judged as being negligible compared to the influence of broader socio-economic factors. This was most apparent when participants spoke in dismay about the effect of drugs and poverty on the lives of children in their schools. These factors appear to preclude the schools' CPS object of protecting these children and keeping them safe from harm. Moreover, the sense of resignation and despair among the participants who personally know these children was evident, as was their despondence about the school's capacity to protect these children from the effect of these factors. For example, participants from schools 4 and 5, whose schools are both categorised as DEIS and are close in proximity, shared how young boys not yet old enough to be criminally convicted²² were being encouraged by adults in the area to sell drugs. In despair, these participants asked the researcher how their school could possibly mitigate the local culture of drug use or the allure

²² In Ireland, children under the age of 12 years cannot be charged with an offence.

of selling drugs. As principal 5 said, "if you're getting €80 for drops here and there, what's going to keep you going to school". Concerningly, these participants believed there was 'no stopping it'. Moreover, it appears that participants were unsure of their CPS responsibilities in such situations, as unverified reports of children's involvement with drugs often filtered to them indirectly and occurred beyond the parameters of the school community. Accordingly, determining whose responsibility it is to report these claims or deciding which category of abuse exploitation should be categorised within remained unclear.

This research also highlights how poverty can obscure the objective of protecting children from harm. Children living in deprivation experience various risk factors that can have adverse health and social consequences during childhood and into adulthood (e.g., Public Health Scotland, 2021). This research highlighted how schools make significant and conscientious efforts to mitigate these perceived adverse effects of poverty. This is done through the provision of meals, clothing, toys and educational resources. In addition, all of the participating DEIS schools had supports in place so that children in need could attend afterschool and homework clubs where they could receive a hot dinner. Consequently, some participants expressed significant concern about the welfare of children who were absent from school for long periods or over the holidays, as these supports were effectively removed. A few, however, questioned whether such provisions, in the long run, further exacerbate the disadvantage children face by effectively discharging the responsibility of their caregiver(s) to provide for them. Some participants felt the breadth of these provisions might create a 'culture of helplessness' whereby caregivers are not afforded typical opportunities to learn how to provide for their children. This, they felt, could have long-lasting or even intergenerational consequences. Moreover, despite the range of provisions made available to children living in poverty, participants appeared sceptical about the degree to which these supports could alleviate the adversity children currently faced, or the long term effects poverty could have on their lives. For instance, Principal 7 felt that the mitigating effects of these supports were

limited to reducing the shame children felt by partially concealing the degree of poverty they experienced.

While many of the participants perceived poverty as a potential risk factor, Morris et al. (2018) raised concern about this perception. These authors claim that such views, which they argue are premised on unfounded biases, lead to many poorer families becoming inaccurately subject to child protection reports and result in poorer children being disproportionately represented within child protection system databases. However, this research contradicts reported in Morris et al. (2018), as it appears that the participating schools were more likely to respond to disadvantage through the provision of support and resources rather than through reporting channels.

From the above, it is clear that the effect of broader socio-economic factors, particularly the influence of local drug culture and the effect of living in poverty, makes the school's goal of protecting all of its pupils difficult or perhaps even impossible. It seems that schools and school personnel are unsure of the parameters of their CPS role when considering these factors, which, while existing as issues beyond the school community, clearly affect the lives of children in the school. Building on this view, many participants identified a link between the provision of state-level supports and the school's ability to support vulnerable children. This link is discussed subsequently.

The Capacity of the Wider Community and its Related Systems

In CHAT, the community construct relates to other people or systems that share with the subject(s) an interest in and involvement with the same *object* (Foot, 2014). Within this study, the State and its agencies, such as Tusla, are understood as embodying this community construct.

Many participants in this research study identified the State and the efficacy of its agencies involved in CPS as being a factor that directly affects schools' capacity to protect and safeguard children. When considering this finding

the researcher found it helpful to draw from CHAT's understanding of *community* and its relation to the CPS object(s). In CHAT, *community* refers to the other individuals or systems that share with the *subjects*, an interest in and involvement with the same *object* (Foot, 2014).

Considering the extent of Tusla's role in CPS, it was unsurprising that this agency was identified as the most crucial system sharing the object of CPS with schools. However, it was surprising and concerning that every focus group raised concern regarding Tusla's capacity to respond to CPS concerns. The findings from this research identify an overwhelming view of participants that Tusla is understaffed, underfunded, and under-resourced, and that these factors indirectly constrain the school's capacity to protect and safeguard children. For instance, many participants believed that inadequate staffing in Tusla has caused the agency to become completely overwhelmed and resulted in the agency applying higher thresholds for intervention and support than should be acceptable. Consequently, many participants felt that children in their school were not receiving support from Tusla when they ought to be. Moreover, there appeared to be an evident connection between perspectives about Tusla's capacity to respond to 'lesser' abuse types (i.e., neglect) and participants' motivation to report such concerns. As Principal 1 lamented, "I don't know if the reporting ever really leads to anything. Nothing really happens... unless a child is judged as being incredibly vulnerable".

While the perspectives presented in this research study cannot be generalised to the wider school population it is noteworthy that similar findings have been noted elsewhere. In August 2021 the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA)²³ published a report on Tusla's 'Dublin North' service area²⁴. The findings from this report are significant to this research as CPS concerns from most of the participating schools (all those in the Dublin North Area on Table 4.1) are channelled through Tusla's 'Dublin North' service area. During a four day

²³ HIQA is responsible for developing and inspecting national standards for health and social care services.

²⁴ Tusla has 17 service areas across the Republic of Ireland.

inspection, Dublin North was assessed by HIQA against six national standards for child protection and welfare and was judged to be *moderately non-compliant* in respect to all six. Of relevance to this research, the report noted that due to a shortfall between the demand for Tusla's services in the area and the resources needed to meet this demand had resulted in the Dublin North service area "operating under considerable strain for a significant period of time (HIQA, 2021, p. 9). Moreover, while "children at the highest level of risk were prioritised", those deemed to be at medium or low risk faced "long delays" and "unacceptable" wait periods for Tusla services. The report concluded that these "delays meant that children waited in situations where risks existed for unacceptable periods of time before social workers took this initial action to fully understand the severity, nature and impact of these risks" (HIQA, 2021, p. 17).

The findings from HIQA's report problematise inadequate resourcing within Tusla's North Dublin service area. While this finding is concerning in and of itself, when considered in relation to the findings of this research it may indicate that some of the CPS issues identified by the participating schools (e.g. perspectives that: Tusla has a high threshold for intervention in DEIS schools; that feedback from Tusla is unsatisfactory; that there are very limited services available for vulnerable children) may need to be considered in relation to the broader systematic problem of resourcing, staffing and funding in Tusla. Moreover, while the findings from this research cannot be generalised, other schools in Dublin North probably experience similar difficulties. Hence, it may be unwise to assume that the negative effect of Tusla's staffing and resourcing issues, as reported in this study, are confined specifically to these thirteen participating schools. As noted in Chapter Two, concerns regarding the resourcing of children's services in Ireland are longstanding and lengthy. Moreover, before the enactment of Children First, the child protection system in Ireland was judged as being fragile and warnings were issued that the system would not be able to withstand the added pressures of mandatory reporting (Buckley & R. Buckley, 2015). Hence, it is doubtful that the State is unaware of resourcing shortfalls within the system or naïve to the effect these shortfalls have on vulnerable children. Nevertheless, without commitment

from the Government to addressing the weaknesses identified, it seems inevitable that children will remain in situations where they are exposed to avoidable risk and harm.

Conclusion

This mixed-methods case study aimed to explore the perspectives toward CPS in thirteen primary schools in North Dublin and to find out what factors, according to participants, are facilitating and impeding schools' capacity to protect and safeguard children. The findings from this research paint a picture of schools engaged and committed to enhancing the safety of pupils attending their schools. Despite this, the data revealed that protecting children, particularly those deemed most vulnerable, is complex and challenging.

When applied as a theoretical lens, CHAT uncovered the multiplicity of objects existing within the school CPS system. While the existence of numerous CPS objects is not problematic in and of itself, the data revealed how these objects frequently conflict. Of note, it appears that the aim of protecting children in a plural sense and one's legal duties in this regard can contradict with the desire to protect specific children and/or to protect oneself from an anticipated negative outcome. Consequently, this research reveals how fear influences human CPS behaviour and cognition despite legal mandates directing CPS action along well-defined pathways (i.e., Government of Ireland, 2015; Department of Education and Skills, 2017a). CHAT also exposed how the objects of CPS are not perceived as being equal, with some trumping others in their perceived importance and denoting a clear hierarchy of objects. Crucially, these research findings highlight how neglect is judged as being of 'lesser' importance compared to the other three types of child abuse. Consequently, this research highlights cause for concern that children experiencing neglect are not always supported appropriately by those in positions of trust. Related to this concern, the 'Threshold of Harm' principle, while theoretically simple, is often problematic in practice. The subjectivity of the principle itself frequently leads to situations where individuals (e.g., the teacher and the principal) and/or organisations (e.g., the school and Tusla) disagree over

whether concerns have reached this threshold. As highlighted in the discussion, this dissonance creates tension within schools' CPS systems and presumably, affects how CPS concerns are responded to and hence, the likelihood that children experiencing abuse will be responded to appropriately. While training was highlighted as a crucial component needed to address many of the prevailing factors that make responding to CPS concerns complex and challenging, this discussion emphasised how the format, focus, length and delivery matters.

As a theoretical lens, CHAT encourages researchers to reflect upon the whole system being investigated while giving due consideration to the influence of its components and the effects of existing tensions on the 'outcome' of the system. In this research, the dominant view held by participants is that nothing significant has changed for many vulnerable children since 2017, and hence, pupils in schools remain at risk despite the introduction of a new legislative framework and auxiliary directives. While this view cannot be generalised to the broader educational context, it remains a strikingly depressing judgement shared by participants of the system's outcome. When examining the precursors to this outcome, schools generally identified two factors. First, a view that certain socio-economic factors can make protecting children difficult, if not impossible and second, a belief that schools' CPS systems are indirectly reliant on the capacity of larger related systems, such as Tusla, to fulfil their CPS functions.

Finally, although the primary function of the school is to educate, schools readily expand beyond the parameters of this role, putting in place provisions for children who are not cared for and protected appropriately. Crucially, however, without addressing the limited opportunities made available thus far to schools for CPS training and without increasing the capacity of related CPS systems, it seems inevitable that some pupils will remain in situations where they are exposed to avoidable risk and harm.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter draws the study to a close. First, the focus of this case study is outlined. The limitations of this study are then acknowledged and a short summary of the research approach is presented. Following this, the researcher outlines her view on this study's contribution to the literature base relevant to Child Protection and Safeguarding (CPS). Suggestions for future research and key considerations for stakeholders involved in CPS are then proffered before this thesis is concluded.

The Case Study

The CPS expectations placed on schools and school personnel expanded very significantly in 2017 with the enactment of the *Children First Act 2015* (Government of Ireland, 2015). The *Children First Act 2015* places statutory CPS obligations on certain professionals (including teachers and principals) and upon particular institutions (including schools). In addition to this legislative change, schools are also expected to take account of various non-statutory, requirements relating to CPS (e.g., The Teaching Council, 2016; Department of Education & Skills, 2017a; 2017b). Despite this positioning of schools and school personnel in CPS work, prior to this research study, there was no national research to reveal the perspectives of school communities toward their CPS responsibilities. This research project aimed to address this gap in the literature base. Using a mixed-methods case study, this research sought to explore perspectives toward CPS in thirteen primary schools in North Dublin to find out:

1. **Primary Research Question (PRQ):** What are the perspectives of principals, chairpersons and teachers toward child protection and safeguarding?
2. **Secondary Research Question One (SRQ1):** According to the participants, what factors enhance schools' capacity to protect and safeguard children?
3. **Secondary Research Question Two (SRQ2):** According to the participants, what factors impede schools' capacity to protect and safeguard children?

Limitations

As noted in Chapter Four, the researcher contacted one hundred and fifty-four schools and thirteen of these schools chose to participate. This equates to a response rate of approximately eight and a half per cent. Consequently, the researcher identifies this response rate as a limitation of the study and acknowledges that the perspectives shared by those who decided to participate may not be generalisable to the wider population. In addition, the four of the schools were not associated with a catholic patronage. Hence, interpretations of the findings need to be considered in relation to these contextual factors.

Though this study revealed a valuable insight into the complexity of CPS as perceived by school personnel, the voice of the child and their first-hand perspective does not feature. Accordingly, this research acknowledges the paternalistic perspective taken here as a limitation of this study. In addition, it is important to acknowledge that the sample of potential participants was restricted by geographical location. As the geographical location chosen is associated with higher propensities of schools designated as DEIS (Department of Education and Skills, 2021b), it is possible that there could be a correlation between this contextual factor and the findings presented. Consequently, the researcher acknowledges that, if this research were to be replicated in a different geographical location, it is possible that alternative findings may emerge.

From the data it is clear that some participants had more to say about CPS than others. It is possible that those who spoke at greater lengths about CPS were

more interested in the topic being investigated and hence, their views may not accurately represent the opinions of the wider population. Therefore, this research acknowledges the varied participation levels among participants as another limitation of this research.

This research project was carried out during a period when society was significantly restricted due to the effects of Covid-19. It is likely that this contextual factor affected participation levels, particularly during the focus group stage of data collection. As noted previously, while thirty-nine individuals initially agreed to participate in this research, thirty-three completed the survey and twenty-six of these individuals went on to participate in the focus group stages. Several of the participants who initially agreed to take part in this research were later unable to partake in focus groups due to Covid related issues. Moreover, focus groups were arranged through Zoom²⁵ to ensure social distancing guidelines were followed. It is possible that some participants felt less comfortable sharing their views through this online medium and hence, were more reserved than they may have been if a face-to-face arrangement was in place.

Finally, as evidenced throughout this thesis, the design and analysis of this research were guided by CHAT. The researcher believes that this framework helped to illuminate the complexity of CPS and identify the interrelated factors warranting consideration. Therefore, the researcher underscores the utility of CHAT when applied to the field of educational research, particularly when such research warrants consideration of the interplay between the educational sphere and other fields of work, such as social work. Nevertheless, the researcher acknowledges that other researchers may have identified other interrelated factors, such as alternative subjects, objects, community members, rules and mediating artefacts. Thus, while the researcher considers CHAT to be a suitable theoretical framework for this topic, she recognises that it may be applied differently by others and hence, recognises the flexibility of CHAT as a limitation

²⁵ Zoom is a video conferencing platform that allows individuals to connect online.

of this study's replicability. In addition, the researcher, after reflecting on the research design would alter the data collection process. While data collection phases one and three would remain the same, the researcher would alter data collection phase two and carry out semi-structured interviews with chairpersons. It is the researcher's opinion that this data collection method would have better suited the needs of the chairpersons, enabled the researcher to provide additional encouragement to those who may have been anxious about participating and thus, may have aided better data collection from this participant group.

Summary of the Research Approach

Before beginning the data collection process, a review of the relevant literature was conducted, as discussed in Chapter Two. This chapter considered the influence of historical reports, inquiries and cases investigating child abuse on the current legal framework for CPS and outlined the existing CPS requirements placed on schools and school personnel. In addition, the training that has been made available to principals/DLPs, chairpersons and teachers for their CPS role was considered before identifying what is known about them from the relevant literature base. Finally, the importance of caring practices in schools was underscored before acknowledging the influence of wider educational trends on the affective domain of care.

This research then employed a mixed-method, primarily qualitative case study design as its methodological approach. In total, thirteen schools and thirty-six individuals chose to participate in this research. Collectively, there were 2,618 children enrolled in the participating schools during the year this research was conducted (Department of Education and Skills, 2021a). The design, data collection process and analysis of findings was guided by CHAT, the theoretical framework underpinning this research. This framework sees human cognition and behaviour as being embedded in collectively organised, artefact-mediated activity systems (Leontiev, 1978; Engeström, 2015) and views activities as social practices orientated at objects seeking to meet a human need (Engeström et al., 2007).

Three phases of data collection were employed in order to gather sufficient data to answer the research questions. In the first phase of data collection, quantitative data was collected using an online questionnaire answered by thirty-six participants. In the second phase of data collection, qualitative data was collected from fourteen participants during three role-specific focus groups, one with four chairpersons, one with five principals and one with five teachers. Finally in the third phase of data collection, further qualitative data was collected during four school-cluster focus groups carried out with fifteen participants. The quantitative data gathered was analysed using SPSS. Tests run during this process revealed that there was no statistical difference between perspectives when compared to school types but that there was a statistical difference between perspectives when compared between participant grouping. Following completion of the quantitative analysis, the researcher began analysing the qualitative data collected. This analysis method encompassed a six-step approach to thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006) carried out using Nvivo²⁶. A summary of the findings are presented beneath.

Contribution to the Literature Base

This research provides a valuable insight into the intricacies and complexity of CPS work in primary schools in Ireland. The perspectives shared by the thirty-six participants paint a picture of principals, chairpersons and teachers who care deeply about the welfare of the pupils in their school community and who are personally committed to the goals of CPS. By proxy, this study highlights these thirteen primary schools as a significant sources of provision, care and support for vulnerable children. Nevertheless, the findings from this research should be considered in light of the research's limitations noted previously in this chapter.

Within this study, children are conceptualised simultaneously as subjects who are 'being' and 'becoming'. This perspective acknowledges the vulnerability of children and their need for protection while also recognising that each child has

²⁶ NVivo 10 is a software package designed for qualitative analysis.

his/her own unique experiences and reality. When researching the area of CPS, this dual lens is deemed to be both appropriate and necessary. Irrespective of age, ability or skill set, the 'being' perspective necessitates a recognition of children and of their realities and rights in the immediate, present tense (James et al., 1998; White, 2002). In contrast, conceptions of the 'becoming' child, when applied to the area of CPS, identify the vulnerabilities of children and acknowledge the lasting negative effects of child abuse (Frost, 2020). Hence, this perspective indirectly underscores the necessity of adults' agency in the lives of children (Richards, 2018). By proxy, this conception recognises adults as subjects who possess the power to emancipate children from situations where they are being, or are at risk of being, harmed. From this perspective, the significant adults in children's lives are understood as being a *mediating artefact* (Engeström, 1987) that offer vulnerable children the prospect of a 'better' life.

As the review of historical events in Chapter Two illustrates, the child protection system in Ireland has been influenced heavily by the notion that, when thinking about CPS, one needs to place focus on the roles and responsibilities of adults. This adult-orientated praxis is shaped and directed by a focus on what I, as the adult, must do and hence, is focused from a personal, adult-centric perspective. This study highlighted numerous accounts characterised by this perspective such as the chairpersons' perceived need to 'oversee' and 'check' procedures; the principals' preoccupation, when speaking about CPS, with workload, tasks and time pressures; and the tension experienced by teachers' when they believe that the aims of CPS and their legal CPS duties are incongruent. Hence, while all participants believe that CPS is an integral part of their role, their understanding of this role is often constructed from an adult-centred orientation. Nevertheless, this study recognises that the teacher cohort showed most awareness of the immediate needs and realities of children. Another evident example of this adult-centric CPS perspective was revealed through the findings reporting that participants believe they have received adequate CPS training and understand their CPS role fully. One would assume that if CPS training was sufficient it would have i) emphasised the necessity of supporting vulnerable

children in the days, weeks and months after a report has been made to Tusla and ii) provided school personnel with the knowledge and skill sets necessary to do this. However, quantitative data revealed that most teachers were unsure how they should support a child after a referral was made and qualitative data suggested school personnel are frequently uncertain about what appropriate actions are needed to support vulnerable children. Consequently, this study problematises the uncertainty participants portrayed when the aims of CPS are orientated from the needs of the specific, singular child.

One of the most significant findings from this study was a view that, despite very significant legislative, policy and procedural changes aimed at enhancing the safety and protection of children (i.e., Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2017; Department of Education and Skills, 2017a; Government of Ireland, 2015), some children remain inadequately protected from harm. Put another way, this finding suggests that the current provisions for children as set out in Irish law and policy are not sufficiently mitigating the harm posed to some children. Considering the current positioning of schools in CPS work and the distinctive 'vantage point' these individuals have (Buckley & R. Buckley, 2015), the perspectives identifying the factors impeding the aims of CPS are acknowledged as being invaluable. In essence, these perspectives revealed that while schools and school personnel are committed to CPS, protecting vulnerable children is a difficult task made more challenging by the existence of micro, meso and macro-level impediments previously discussed in Chapters Five and Six. The researcher, after reflecting on these obstacles and considering them in relation to their context, history and the relevant literature, problematises another issue. That is, the pervasiveness of the aforementioned adult-centric orientation of CPS practice.

This adult-orientated, risk-aversion praxis is oriented toward society's CPS responsibilities and conceptualises children in a general sense. Emanating from the discourses identifying historical CPS failings and seeking to redress past-wounds, this orientation of praxis fails to adequately acknowledge the primacy of the child's immediate needs and realities. Borne from this orientation emanates

the unintentional consequence whereby the needs of the individual 'being' child become a peripheral and secondary goal within the school's CPS system. This is evidenced by the widely held view held by participants that they are adequately prepared for their CPS role and the contradiction revealing that they are largely unsure as to how they should support vulnerable children in their school. While compliance with one's CPS roles is of utmost importance, its efficacy in supporting vulnerable children is weakened when not thought of in tandem to the necessity of non-regulated care practices.

Accordingly, this study necessitates a refocusing of CPS objects in order to prioritise the specific, singular child and consider this human being in reference to his/her immediate needs, realities and context. Hence, rather than asking what 'I' must do in reference to this child, focus instead is oriented toward how this child's immediate needs are being met and by whom or what structures. Without this refocused orientation of praxis, it seems inevitable that CPS systems, including that relating to the primary school context, will continue to revolve rather than evolve, with systemic issues resurfacing time and time again. As poignantly put by one of the participants, when thinking and acting for CPS, it seems "we have, sadly, lost sight altogether of what counts".

Suggestions for Future Research

The findings from this study make a valuable contribution to the research available on CPS and it is the researcher's intention to disseminate these findings through national and international channels (Appendix Q). Nonetheless, as there remains limited research in the area, ample opportunities remain to add to the research base. As acknowledged previously, one of the limitations of this research concerns the absence of the voice of the child. Hence, future studies that include the voice of the child and which are centred upon their experiences and perceptions within the school system would be hugely beneficial. Through such research, it would be possible to reveal what children believe to be the important supports and factors that facilitate them in seeking a 'better life'.

This research revealed how the attitudes of school personnel toward abuse types varied considerably and that neglect was frequently judged as being of 'lesser' significance. Moreover, some perspectives indicated a possibility that schools located in disadvantaged communities are overwhelmed by and/or desensitised to concerns relating to neglect. These findings offer considerable impetus for further research in this area to i) examine whether there is a relationship between such attitudes and context of the school, and ii) judge whether schools' capacity to respond appropriately to neglect is restricted within communities experiencing higher levels of disadvantage.

While nearly all of the participants stated that they had received CPS training and most judged it to be adequate, qualitative data revealed identified incidences of limiting attitudes and beliefs toward CPS, and fundamental gaps in some participants' CPS knowledge. Moreover, the findings from this research identified particular internal tendencies that appear to reduce schools' capacity to protect and safeguard children. There is a dearth of literature to reveal what influence CPS training has at mitigating such factors, or to reveal whether the efficacy of training is conditional to particular factors, such as: its duration, frequency, focus, format and delivery. Hence, research in this area would be highly valuable.

Emerging Possible Outcomes: Key Considerations for Stakeholders Involved in CPS

The Irish Government

- While the State has illustrated a desire to show commitment to addressing child abuse as an issue pervading all aspects of society, the mechanisms in place to aid identification and reporting are severely limited in their effect without the provision of adequate parallel resources. Hence, it is vital that supports and services relating to CPS are appropriately resourced. Without this commitment, it is inevitable that particular children will continue to be unnecessarily exposed to risk even when mandated persons have reported concerns to Tusla.

Tusla and the Department of Education

- It is clear that school-based training for CPS in Ireland is limited in its scope, depth and focus, and that this provision of training indirectly limits schools' capacity to protect and safeguard children effectively. Future school-based CPS training should be orientated from the needs of vulnerable children, emphasise the cruciality of caring practices and facilitate schools in developing such practices. In addition, it should allow for a thorough consideration of the specific challenges school communities may encounter when seeking to protect children from harm and should be delivered by those who are appropriately knowledgeable about CPS, rather than through e-learning programmes or by placing an expectation on school leaders to lead learning themselves.
- This research and that conducted elsewhere by others strongly indicates that neglect, as a form of child abuse, is frequently not well assessed, fully understood or adequately responded to in schools. Hence, future supports made available to schools should acknowledge that schools may need additional support, guidance and advice when responding to concerns relating to neglect. Moreover, while this research highlights the CPP as a key strength of the current CPS arrangements, it identifies challenges associated with the

utility of the 'Threshold of Harm' principle, especially when it is applied to concerns relating to neglect. Hence, future support addressing the application of the threshold in practice would be beneficial.

- While schools are mandated to provide relevant information to Tusla regarding CPS concerns, this requirement remains unilateral and makes CPS more challenging for schools. To better support vulnerable children, Tusla could introduce clear protocols for sharing information and feedback with schools in order so that they can make necessary provisions for vulnerable children while in school. In addition, while schools understand that their CPS responsibilities do not end after a CPS report is made, teachers are frequently unsure about how best to support vulnerable children in the days, weeks and months after a report has been made. Hence, schools would greatly benefit from additional care guidance from Tusla who have the necessary expertise in this area.

School Communities

- Research available underscores the special supportive value of schools and their community members in the lives of vulnerable children. While schools and school personnel should be oriented toward their legal CPS duties, it is also crucial that they make the necessary provisions to ensure such children are minded, cared for and supported while at school and remember that reporting CPS concerns does not equate to this crucial provision.
- Research tells us that it takes a community effort to protect children and hence, different roles and functions are ascribed to various individuals in the school community. While the chairperson, principal/DLP and teacher share the general aim of protecting and safeguarding children, their CPS roles and experiences vary greatly. School leaders (i.e., chairpersons, principals and DLPs) should be aware of the challenges associated with distinct CPS roles in order to better support the whole school community when working toward the goals of CPS.

- The attitudes of school leaders toward CPS can impact reporting patterns across the school. Therefore, those in leadership roles need to demonstrate commitment to responding appropriately to all types of CPS concerns and communicate clearly to staff that no form of abuse is ‘lesser’ than another.
- Schools should be aware of the specific contextual factors that may make protecting children more challenging within their school context before clarifying, as a school community, their ethical and legal CPS responsibilities in relation to these influences.

Reflecting on the Research Journey

I began this research journey in 2018, coming straight from the completion of the M.Ed. in Teaching and Learning at Dublin City University. Initially, I had intended to continue researching the area of focus from my M. Ed which was centred upon teachers’ continuing professional development and underscored the importance of ongoing, school-based, and meaningful learning. However, during the taught phase of the Ed. D programme I became increasingly drawn into the arena of child protection and safeguarding and began to ask myself how the function of schools and the role of those working there aligns with the aims of child protection. Moreover, considering the requirement that schools recognise the primacy of child protection issues, I was surprised by the limited research available on child protection within the field of educational research. Reflecting on the entire research process, I am relieved that I followed my instinct to change the direction of my research focus.

Through the process of completing this research, I have acquired new knowledge and skills that will stand to me as I continue my research journey. For example, the ability to undertake mixed-methods research; utilising key literature, legislation and policy to design a CPS questionnaire for principals, chairpersons and teachers; analysing quantitative data using SPSS; carrying out focus groups with participants from different schools and different professional backgrounds; and analysing qualitative data using Thematic Analysis in NVivo.

Whilst I entered this research journey with the assumption that this focus of research would be a challenging arena to study, I did not fully appreciate the complex interplay between history, legislation, policy and practice within the arena of child protection and safeguarding nor the paradoxical nature of CPS systems. When considered from a macro perspective, CPS systems can appear as being stable and preserving. Yet, when the system is considered more closely one can better appreciate how changes made in particular areas of the system, such as changes made to legislation, policy, resourcing, or funding can bring about change to the overall system, and hence, its trajectory, orientation and evolution over time. This learning has bolstered my enthusiasm for continuing research in this area as I have come to appreciate the impact of seemingly small changes. Hence, rather than trying to ‘fix’ a whole system, I now appreciate the value of identifying and focusing on distinct aspects of educational support and provision that have the potential to enhance the lives of vulnerable children in Ireland. Following careful reflection, I have identified distinct areas warranting attention from key stakeholders involved in CPS work, as outlined in the section titled ‘Emerging Possible Outcomes: Key Considerations for Stakeholders Involved in CPS’. Finally, while my professional identity entering this research process could be easily categorised as ‘teacher’, as I complete this journey I am compelled to appreciate that this identity has broadened to ‘teacher’ and ‘researcher’. This dual professional identity will have implications for my future professional practice and intended research endeavours as I bring to bear a new, deeper appreciation of schools’ role in CPS and the necessity of continued research in this area in order so that the voice of the child needing support can feature more prominently within national research on CPS.

Concluding Comment

Within current Irish policy there runs a core welfare paradigm that “the safety and welfare of children is everyone’s responsibility” (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2017b, p.2) and that children are dependent on adults for safeguarding their welfare. Moreover, both national and international research positions schools as being at the fulcrum of child protection work. This

study offers a unique glimpse into the realities of CPS work in schools and consequently, identifies the many difficulties and challenges associated with caring for and protecting children, especially those judged as being vulnerable. Most poignantly however, this study highlights the continuous efforts school communities make in seeking to keep children safe from harm.

Across the data, the many anecdotes shared by participants illustrated the efforts principals, teachers and chairpersons make in seeking the aims of CPS. As subjects within the school CPS system, these participants could share a unique and valuable insight into the aspects of the system that helped and hindered them in seeking the aims of CPS. Moreover, they offered insightful appraisals into the effect of these factors on the system's outcome. Disconcertingly, most participants believe that nothing significant has changed for many vulnerable children in their schools since child protection was placed on a statutory footing in 2017. Consequently, this research, like Buckley (2009), problematises the corollary put forward by many that legislative change can automatically bring better protection for children. Nonetheless, the findings presented in this research present the myriad of connected factors that, according to participants, have produced this outcome. In addition to these perspectives, the researcher, in reference to the perspectives shared and literature reviewed, puts forward the argument that CPS praxis in schools is largely oriented from an adult-centric perspective that has the potential to distract from the immediate needs of children. Accordingly, this research identifies the numerous interrelated factors that, if addressed, could make a very significant difference to lives of vulnerable children in Ireland.

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Appendix A: Plain Language Statement for Principal

Introduction to the Research Study:

'Perspectives on Child Protection and Safeguarding: A Case Study of Ten Schools.

DCU Institute of Education.

Doctoral Researcher: Kate Shanahan

Contact details: kate.shanahan2@mail.dcu.ie; 0873607981

Principal Investigator: Dr Bernadette Ní Áingléis, School of Policy and Practice, DCU

Contact details: Bernadette.niaingleis@dcu.ie; 017009236

Secondary Investigator: Dr Audrey Doyle

Contact details: Audrey.doyle@dcu.ie; 017009234

Details of What Involvement Will Require:

This research project aims to reveal perspectives on child protection and safeguarding among ten primary schools communities. Here, 'communities' is used as a collective term and refers to the Chairperson of the Board of Management (BOM), the school principal, and a teacher in the school.

School communities play a crucial role in child protection and this role has expanded significantly in recent years with the introduction of new law, policy and procedures aimed at safeguarding children. There is currently no national research available to indicate what are the perspectives of school communities with respect to their child protection and safeguarding role. This research project will provide this valuable information through the perspectives offered by Chairpersons, principals and teachers working across a range of school contexts. Participation in this research will involve two activities- with a potential for a third activity should you wish to volunteer.

Activity One: An Online Questionnaire

The online questionnaire that will take approximately 10 minutes. Through completion of this questionnaire the researcher hopes to gather your perspective in matters relating to:

- how you are experiencing your role and responsibilities as Principal/DLP;
- what, from your perspective, constrains/facilitate the schools' capacity to protect and safeguard pupils.

Activity Two: Focus Group with two school contexts

The second activity you will be asked to participate in is a 'School Focus Group' discussion with the researcher, the Chairperson and a teacher from your school context and a Chairperson, principal and a teacher from one other school context. There will be approximately seven individuals present for this focus group, it will take approximately one hour and will be held over Zoom. During this focus group, the researcher will ask questions to facilitate an informal discussion.

Activity Three: Principal Focus Group

As well as these two activities, the researcher is seeking the involvement of five Principals for another focus group. The only individuals present at this focus group will be the researcher and other primary school principals. The purpose of this group is to gather the distinct perspective of principals.

The focus group discussions for Activity Two and Activity Three will be conducted over Zoom and the audio of this discussion will be recorded. During these focus groups, the researcher will ask questions to facilitate an informal discussion. Examples of such questions would be 'What is it like being a principal/DLP?' or 'What do you believe would enhance the schools' capacity to safeguard pupils?'. Each focus group will take less than an hour.

Confidentiality and Use of Data:

Confidentiality is of utmost importance in this study. Your name or school location will not be used at any stage throughout this research. Personal data (your name and the name of the school where you are principal) will be collected at the beginning of this research. Once the researcher has this information she will assign a false name to you and to the school that you are associated with. She will share these false names with you so that you can identify yourself in the research. These names will be used continuously and consistently when discussing, writing and presenting on this research.

At the beginning of this research the researcher create a document file containing the identifiers that link your personal data to false names that were assigned to you and your school. This information will be treated as highly sensitive data. It will be kept separately and securely to all other data collected throughout this research project. It will be stored securely in a password-protected folder accessible only to the researcher. This data will be destroyed on 1st March 2024. The researcher will record the audio from the focus group using a password-protected device. The researcher is the only individual who will know this code. This recording will be destroyed on

1st March 2024.

It must be noted that the protection of this data is subject to legal limitations. It is possible for data to be subject to subpoena, freedom of information claim or mandated reporting by some professions.

Benefits (Direct or Indirect) to Participants

Through participation, you can offer your unique perspective on current child protection and safeguarding as well as offering your opinion on what is needed to further enhance schools' capacity to safeguard children. This valuable information will contribute to the literature base for academics and organisations involved in the complex task of safeguarding children.

Potential Risks to Participants

Child protection is a sensitive research area and it is possible that you could become distressed by the topic being discussed. It is important that you understand that participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are under no obligation to take part and can stop participating in this research at any stage without explaining why. If you do decide to participate in this research, the researcher has put in place a number of protocols to mitigate against the potential risks posed to you. These are outlined in the form titled 'Risk Management Protocol' which is attached at the back of this form. If you have any further questions or queries in relation to this issue please do not hesitate to contact the researcher or a member of her supervision team.

Voluntary Involvement:

Involvement in this research project is entirely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the study at any stage without prejudice or reason. There will be no penalty enforced on any participants wishing to withdraw before the study being completed.

Other Relevant Information:

Approximately thirty participants will take part in this study. Ten of which will be Chairpersons of a primary school BOM, ten will be primary school principals and ten will be primary school teachers. Participants will be sought from all over the Republic of Ireland and from a variety of school contexts. Should you wish to find out what were the findings of this study, the researcher will invite you to a Zoom meeting in September 2022. During this, she will share the findings of the study before they have been published.

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

Appendix B: Plain Language Statement for Chairperson

Introduction to the Research Study:

'Perspectives on Child Protection and Safeguarding: A Case Study of Ten Schools.

DCU Institute of Education.

Doctoral Researcher: Kate Shanahan

Contact details: kate.shanahan2@mail.dcu.ie; 0873607981

Principal Investigator: Dr Bernadette Ní Áingléis, School of Policy and Practice, DCU

Contact details: Bernadette.niaingleis@dcu.ie; 017009236

Secondary Investigator: Dr Audrey Doyle

Contact details: Audrey.doyle@dcu.ie; 017009234

Details of What Involvement Will Require:

This research project aims to reveal perspectives on child protection and safeguarding among ten primary schools communities. Here, 'communities' is used as a collective term and refers to the Chairperson of the Board of Management (BOM), the school principal, and a teacher in the school.

School communities play a crucial role in child protection and this role has expanded significantly in recent years with the introduction of new law, policy and procedures aimed at safeguarding children. There is currently no national research available to indicate what are the perspectives of school communities with respect to their child protection and safeguarding role. This research project will provide this valuable information through the perspectives offered by Chairpersons, principals and teachers working across a range of school contexts. Participation in this research will involve two activities (with a potential for a third activity should you wish to volunteer).

Activity One: An Online Questionnaire

The online questionnaire that will take approximately 10 minutes. Through completion of this questionnaire the researcher hopes to gather your perspective in matters relating to:

- how you are experiencing your role and responsibilities as a Chairperson;
- what, from your perspective, constrains/facilitate the schools' capacity to protect and safeguard pupils.

Activity Two: Focus Group with two school contexts

The second activity you will be asked to participate in is a 'School Focus Group' discussion with the researcher, the principal and a teacher from your school context and a Chairperson, principal and a teacher from one other school context. There will be approximately seven individuals present for this focus group, it will take approximately one hour and will be held over Zoom. During this focus group, the researcher will ask questions to facilitate an informal discussion.

Activity Three: Chairperson Focus Group

As well as these two activities, the researcher is seeking the involvement of five chairpersons for another focus group. The only individuals present at this focus group will be the researcher and other chairpersons school principals. The purpose of this group is to gather the distinct perspective of principals.

The focus group discussions for Activity Two and Activity Three will be conducted over Zoom and the audio of this discussion will be recorded. During these focus groups, the researcher will ask questions to facilitate an informal discussion. Examples of such questions would be 'What is it like being a chairperson?' or 'What do you believe would enhance schools' capacity to safeguard pupils?'. Each focus group will take less than an hour.

Confidentiality and Use of Data:

Confidentiality is of utmost importance in this study. Your name or school location will not be used at any stage throughout this research. Personal data (your name and the name of the school where you are Chairperson) will be collected at the beginning of this research. Once the researcher has this information she will assign a false name to you and to the school that you are associated with. She will share these false names with you so that you can identify yourself in the research. These names will be used continuously and consistently when discussing, writing and presenting on this research.

At the beginning of this research the researcher create a document file containing the identifiers that link your personal data to false names that were assigned to you and your school. This information will be treated as highly sensitive data. It will be kept separately and securely to all other data collected throughout this research project. It will be stored securely in a password-protected folder accessible only to the researcher. This data will be destroyed on 1st March 2024. The researcher will record the audio from the focus group using a password-protected device. The researcher is the only individual who will know this code. This recording will be destroyed on

1st March 2024.

It must be noted that the protection of this data is subject to legal limitations. It is possible for data to be subject to subpoena, freedom of information claim or mandated reporting by some professions.

Benefits (Direct or Indirect) to Participants

Through participation, you can offer your unique perspective on current child protection and safeguarding as well as offering your opinion on what is needed to further enhance schools' capacity to safeguard children. This valuable information will contribute to the literature base for academics and organisations involved in the complex task of safeguarding children.

Potential Risks to Participants

Child protection is a sensitive research area and it is possible that you could become distressed by the topic being discussed. It is important that you understand that participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are under no obligation to take part and can stop participating in this research at any stage without explaining why.

If you do decide to participate in this research, the researcher has put in place a number of protocols to mitigate against the potential risks posed to you. These are outlined in the form titled 'Risk Management Protocol' which is attached at the back of this form. If you have any further questions or queries in relation to this issue please do not hesitate to contact the researcher or a member of her supervision team.

Voluntary Involvement:

Involvement in this research project is entirely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the study at any stage without prejudice or reason. There will be no penalty enforced on any participants wishing to withdraw before the study being completed.

Other Relevant Information:

Thirty participants will take part in this study. Ten of which will be Chairpersons of a primary school BOM, ten will be primary school principals and ten will be primary school teachers. Participants will be sought from all over the Republic of Ireland and from a variety of school contexts. Should you wish to find out what were the findings of this study, the researcher will

invite you to a Zoom meeting in September 2022. During this, she will share the findings of the study before they have been published.

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

Appendix C: Plain Language Statement for Teacher

Introduction to the Research Study:

'Perspectives on Child Protection and Safeguarding: A Case Study of Ten Schools.

DCU Institute of Education.

Doctoral Researcher: Kate Shanahan

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Secondary Investigator: Dr Audrey Doyle

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Details of What Involvement Will Require:

This research project aims to reveal perspectives on child protection and safeguarding among ten primary schools communities. Here, 'communities' is used as a collective term and refers to the Chairperson of the Board of Management (BOM), the school principal, and a teacher in the school.

School communities play a crucial role in child protection and this role has expanded significantly in recent years with the introduction of new law, policy and procedures aimed at safeguarding children. There is currently no national research available to indicate what are the perspectives of school communities with respect to their child protection and safeguarding role. This research project will provide this valuable information through the perspectives offered by Chairpersons, principals and teachers working across a range of school contexts. Participation in this research will involve two activities (with a potential for a third activity should you wish to volunteer).

Activity One: An Online Questionnaire

The online questionnaire that will take approximately 10 minutes. Through completion of this questionnaire the researcher hopes to gather your perspective in matters relating to:

- how you are experiencing your role and responsibilities for child protection and safeguarding;
- what, from your perspective, constrains/facilitate the schools' capacity to protect and safeguard pupils.

Activity Two: Focus Group with two school contexts

The second activity you will be asked to participate in is a 'School Focus Group' discussion with the researcher, the principal and the chairperson from your school context and a chairperson, principal and a teacher from one other school context. There will be approximately seven individuals present for this focus group, it will take approximately one hour and will be held over Zoom. During this focus group, the researcher will ask questions to facilitate an informal discussion.

Activity Three: Chairperson Focus Group

As well as these two activities, the researcher is seeking the involvement of five teachers for another focus group. The only individuals present at this focus group will be the researcher and other teachers. The purpose of this group is to gather the distinct perspective of teachers.

The focus group discussions for Activity Two and Activity Three will be conducted over Zoom and the audio of this discussion will be recorded. During these focus groups, the researcher will ask questions to facilitate an informal discussion. Examples of such questions would be 'How are you experiencing your child protection and safeguarding responsibilities?' or 'What do you believe would enhance schools' capacity to safeguard pupils?'. Each focus group will take less than an hour.

Confidentiality and Use of Data:

Confidentiality is of utmost importance in this study. Your name or school location will not be used at any stage throughout this research. Personal data (your name and the name of the school where you are Chairperson) will be collected at the beginning of this research. Once the researcher has this information she will assign a false name to you and to the school that you are associated with. She will share these false names with you so that you can identify yourself in the research. These names will be used continuously and consistently when discussing, writing and presenting on this research.

At the beginning of this research the researcher create a document file containing the identifiers that link your personal data to false names that were assigned to you and your school. This information will be treated as highly sensitive data. It will be kept separately and securely to all other data collected throughout this research project. It will be stored securely in a password-protected folder accessible only to the researcher. This data will be destroyed on 1st March 2024. The researcher will record the audio from the focus group using a password-protected device. The researcher is the

only individual who will know this code. This recording will be destroyed on 1st March 2024.

It must be noted that the protection of this data is subject to legal limitations. It is possible for data to be subject to subpoena, freedom of information claim or mandated reporting by some professions.

Benefits (Direct or Indirect) to Participants

Through participation, you can offer your unique perspective on current child protection and safeguarding as well as offering your opinion on what is needed to further enhance schools' capacity to safeguard children. This valuable information will contribute to the literature base for academics and organisations involved in the complex task of safeguarding children.

Potential Risks to Participants

Child protection is a sensitive research area and it is possible that you could become distressed by the topic being discussed. It is important that you understand that participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are under no obligation to take part and can stop participating in this research at any stage without explaining why.

If you do decide to participate in this research, the researcher has put in place a number of protocols to mitigate against the potential risks posed to you. These are outlined in the form titled 'Risk Management Protocol' which is attached at the back of this form. If you have any further questions or queries in relation to this issue please do not hesitate to contact the researcher or a member of her supervision team.

Voluntary Involvement:

Involvement in this research project is entirely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the study at any stage without prejudice or reason. There will be no penalty enforced on any participants wishing to withdraw before the study being completed.

Other Relevant Information:

Thirty participants will take part in this study. Ten of which will be Chairpersons of a primary school BOM, ten will be primary school principals and ten will be primary school teachers. Participants will be sought from all over the Republic of Ireland and from a variety of school contexts. Should

you wish to find out what were the findings of this study, the researcher will invite you to a Zoom meeting in September 2022. During this, she will share the findings of the study before they have been published.

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

Appendix D: Principals' Questionnaire

Principal Questionnaire: Perspectives on Child Protection and Safeguarding

(Q1.1-1.7 Sought participants' consent to participate in this study)

Q2.1 What is the number that has been assigned to your school context for the purpose of this research?

<input type="radio"/> School 1	<input type="radio"/> School 8
<input type="radio"/> School 2	<input type="radio"/> School 9
<input type="radio"/> School 3	<input type="radio"/> School 10
<input type="radio"/> School 4	<input type="radio"/> School 11
<input type="radio"/> School 5	<input type="radio"/> School 12
<input type="radio"/> School 6	<input type="radio"/> School 13
<input type="radio"/> School 7	

Q2.2 How many years have you been the principal in your school context? _____

Q2.3 Are you the Designated Liaison Person in your school?

- Yes
- No

Q2.4 Do you think that you have received adequate training for child protection and safeguarding?

- Yes
- No

Q2.5 Pre-Covid, approximately how many child protection referrals would you make to Tusla during a school year? _____

Q2.6 Can you rank order the types of abuse most frequently reported to Tusla in your school context

- _____ Emotional Abuse
- _____ Sexual Abuse
- _____ Physical Abuse
- _____ Neglect

Q2.7 Overall, do you feel that the current arrangements for child protection and safeguarding are serving the needs of the vulnerable children in your school? Please comment.

Q3.1 Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My child protection and safeguarding responsibilities are an integral part of my role.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I understand, in full, what my legal obligations are for child protection and safeguarding.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I do not have access to adequate supports to assist me in my role for child protection.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My responsibilities for child protection and safeguarding are necessary and proportional to the needs of children.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Even with the current child protection procedures, I believe that some children in this school are still not adequately protected from harm.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The tasks that I undertake in respect to child protection and safeguarding make a positive difference to the lives of children.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Upholding my responsibilities in respect to child protection is a duty fraught with stress and anxiety.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is easy for me to fulfil my legal and professional child protection and safeguarding responsibilities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q4.1 Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The current child protection and safeguarding arrangements are not serving the needs of vulnerable children in this school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Carrying out a risk assessment has raised the level of awareness about the potential risk of harm posed to pupils in this school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Child Inspection and Safeguarding Inspections will enhance the safety of children.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My work for child protection and safeguarding has increased significantly since child protection was placed on a statutory footing in 2017.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Following the correct reporting procedures takes up a disproportional amount of my time.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Stay Safe Programme is taught, in full, to all pupils in this school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers in this school have received adequate training to support them in carrying out their child protection and safeguarding responsibilities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q5.1 Please indicate your level of satisfaction with the following

	Satisfactory	Neutral	Unsatisfactory
Your experience of seeking advice from Tusla when you have a child protection concern.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your experience of receiving feedback from Tusla regarding referrals made.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The support offered to you from Tusla when carrying out your child protection and welfare responsibilities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tusla's response to concerns relating to the neglect of children.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q6.1 What are the challenges associated with child protection and safeguarding?

—

Q6.2 What are the benefits of the current child protection procedures?

—

Q6.3 What (if anything) concerns you most about current arrangements for child protection?

—

Q6.4 What resources or supports, if made available, would enhance child protection and safeguarding in your school context?

—

Q6.5 What factors (if any) are impeding this school's capacity to protect and safeguard children?

—

Q6.6 Any other comment you would like to make

Appendix E: Chairpersons' Questionnaire

Chairperson Questionnaire: Perspectives on Child Protection and Safeguarding

(Q1.1-1.7 Sought participants' consent to participant in this study)

Q2.1 What is the number that has been assigned to your school context for the purpose of this research?

<input type="radio"/> School 1	<input type="radio"/> School 8
<input type="radio"/> School 2	<input type="radio"/> School 9
<input type="radio"/> School 3	<input type="radio"/> School 10
<input type="radio"/> School 4	<input type="radio"/> School 11
<input type="radio"/> School 5	<input type="radio"/> School 12
<input type="radio"/> School 6	<input type="radio"/> School 13
<input type="radio"/> School 7	

Q2.2 For how many years have you served as a chairperson, including in other schools? _____

Q2.3 Have you received training for child protection and safeguarding that is specific to your role as a Chairperson ?

- Yes
- No

Q2.4 Do you think this training has adequately prepared you to undertake your responsibilities for Child Protection and Safeguarding?

- Yes
- No

Q2.5 Overall, do you feel that the current arrangements for child protection and safeguarding are adequately serving the needs of the vulnerable children in your school? Please comment.

—

Q3.1 Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My child protection and safeguarding responsibilities are an integral part of my role.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I understand, in full, what my legal obligations are for child protection and safeguarding.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I do not have access to adequate supports to assist me in my role for child protection.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My responsibilities for child protection and safeguarding are necessary and proportional to the needs of children.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Even with the current child protection procedures, I believe that some children in this school are still not adequately protected from harm.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The tasks that I undertake in respect to child protection and safeguarding make a positive difference to the lives of children.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Upholding my responsibilities in respect to child protection is a duty fraught with stress and anxiety.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is easy for me to fulfil my legal and professional child protection and safeguarding responsibilities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q4.1 Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
It is the BOM's responsibility to ensure all school personnel have the necessary familiarity with the Child Protection Procedures.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
All BOM members have the necessary knowledge and skills needed to carry out their child protection and safeguarding duties.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Child Protection Oversight Report and supporting documentation provides the BOM with sufficient evidence to determine whether the DLP has complied with the appropriate reporting procedures.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It would be difficult for the BOM to overrule the principal/DLP's decision not to report a child protection concern	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q5.1 What are the challenges associated with child protection and safeguarding?

Q5.2 What are the benefits of the current child protection procedures?

Q5.3 What (if anything) concerns you most about current arrangements for child protection?

Q5.4 What resources or supports, if made available, would enhance child protection and safeguarding in your school context?

Q5.5 What factors (if any) are impeding this school's capacity to protect and safeguard children?

Q5.6 Any other comment you would like to make

Appendix F: Teachers' Questionnaire

Teacher Questionnaire: Perspectives on Child Protection and Safeguarding

(Q1.1-1.7 Sought participants' consent to participate in this study)

Q2.1 What is the number that has been assigned to your school context for the purpose of this research?

<input type="radio"/> School 1	<input type="radio"/> School 8
<input type="radio"/> School 2	<input type="radio"/> School 9
<input type="radio"/> School 3	<input type="radio"/> School 10
<input type="radio"/> School 4	<input type="radio"/> School 11
<input type="radio"/> School 5	<input type="radio"/> School 12
<input type="radio"/> School 6	<input type="radio"/> School 13
<input type="radio"/> School 7	

Q2.2 For how many years have you been a registered teacher?

Q2.3 Have you received training for child protection and safeguarding that is specific to your role as a Mandated Person?

- Yes
- No

Q2.4 Do you think this training has adequately prepared you for your role in Child Protection and Safeguarding?

- Yes
- No

Q2.5 If you graduated in the last ten years, do you feel that the training you received for child protection while at college was sufficient?

- Yes
- No
- Not Applicable

Q2.6 Do you feel that you have adequate understanding of the Child Protection Procedures?

Yes

No

Q3.1 Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My child protection and safeguarding responsibilities are an integral part of my role.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I understand, in full, what my legal obligations are for child protection and safeguarding.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I do not have access to adequate supports to assist me in my role for child protection.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My responsibilities for child protection and safeguarding are necessary and proportional to the needs of children.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Even with the current child protection procedures, I believe that some children in this school are still not adequately protected from harm.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The tasks that I undertake in respect to child protection and safeguarding make a positive difference to the lives of children.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Upholding my responsibilities in respect to child protection is a duty fraught with stress and anxiety.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is easy for me to fulfil my legal and professional child protection and safeguarding responsibilities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q4. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Determining what constitutes as 'a cause for concern' can be difficult.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I worry about the consequences for the pupil when I make a mandated report.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I worry about the consequences for myself when I make a mandated report.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching some parts of the Stay Safe Programme is uncomfortable for me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Any child protection concerns I have are always dealt with appropriately by the DLP.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am unsure how to best support the child after a referral has been made to Tusla	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q5.1 What are the challenges associated with child protection and safeguarding?

—

Q5.2 What are the benefits of the current child protection procedures?

—

Q5.3 What (if anything) concerns you most about current arrangements for child protection?

—

Q5.4 What resources or supports, if made available, would enhance child protection and safeguarding in your school context?

—

Q5.5 What factors (if any) are impeding this school's capacity to protect and safeguard children?

Q5.6 Any other comment

Appendix G: Consent Form Used for all Participants

Q1.1 I have read the Plain Language Statement

- Yes
- No

Q1.2 I understand the information provided

- Yes
- No

Q1.3 I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions

- Yes
- No

Q1.4 I understand I may withdraw from the research study at any point

- Yes
- No

Q1.5 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

- Yes
- No

Q1.6 I have read and understand confirmations relating to other relevant information as indication on the Plain Language Statement

- Yes
- No

Q1.7 I consent to participate in this research study

- Yes
- No

Appendix H: Risk Management Protocols

Doctoral Researcher: Kate Shanahan

Contact details: kate.shanahan2@mail.dcu.ie; 0873607981

Principal Supervisor: Dr Bernadette Ní Áingléis, School of Policy and Practice,
DCU

Contact details: Bernadette.niaingleis@dcu.ie; 017009236

Auxiliary Supervisor: Dr Audrey Doyle

Contact details: Audrey.doyle@dcu.ie; 017009234

If you are distressed by the content or questions in the questionnaire:

If you are distressed by the content of the questionnaire should stop answering it immediately. Please contact Kate Shanahan or a member from her supervision to let them know that you were/are distressed and we will arrange support for you. You can contact Kate and her supervision team using the telephone numbers or emails detailed at the top of this document. You can also avail of any of the free supports listed in the table below.

If you are distressed by the content being discussed during the focus group:

If you are distressed by the content being discussed during the focus group you can leave the Zoom meeting immediately without informing the researcher or any other participant. You can do this by choosing the red 'Leave Meeting' button at the bottom right-hand side of your window. If you leave this meeting Kate Shanahan will immediately stop audio recording it and end the meeting for all participants.

If you leave a Focus group meeting, Kate Shanahan will contact you immediately after she has ended the meeting. She will speak with you and with her supervision team in order to decide what subsequent actions need to be taken in order to support you. Should you wish, a member of the supervision team will ring you and advise you on the supports that you can avail of. You can also avail of any of the free supports listed in the table below.

If you are distressed by the content of this research in general:

If you are distressed by the content of this research project please inform Kate Shanahan or a member of the supervision team so that we can assist you in receiving support. You can also avail of any of the free supports listed in the table below.

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person you can do so using the contact details listed below:

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

Free Supports Available		
Name of support	Type of support Offered	Contact Details
DCU's Research Ethics Committee (REC)	If you have any concern about this research project or wish to contact an independent person to discuss any aspect of this study you can contact the REC of DCU	REC can be contacted through email at rec@dcu.ie and by phone Tel 01-7008000.
Employee Assistance Service (EAS)	EAS a free, short-term, counselling service made available to you	To avail of this support freephone 1800411057 or text 'Hi' to 0873690010
Connect	Connect is a telephone counselling and support service for adults who have experienced abuse, trauma or neglect in childhood.	To speak to a counsellor freephone 1800 477 477:
Samaritans	Samaritans is a registered charity aimed at providing emotional support to anyone in emotional distress, struggling to cope, or at risk of suicide.	To speak to a volunteer freephone 116123
Tusla	Tusla is the Child and Family Agency. There is a vast array of resources available on the Tusla website including a link to contact a social worker should participants wish to get advice on a concern they have.	https://www.tusla.ie/children-first/contact-a-social-worker3/

Appendix I: Ethical Approval

Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City University



Ms. Kate Shanahan
School of Policy & Practice

Dr Bernadette Ní Áingléis
School of Policy & Practice

Dr Audrey Doyle
School of Policy & Practice

18th January 2021

REC Reference: DCUREC/2020/252

Proposal Title: Perspectives on Child Protection and Safeguarding in Irish Primary Schools: A Case Study of Ten School Communities.

Applicant(s): Ms. Kate Shanahan, Dr Bernadette Ní Áingléis, and Dr Audrey Doyle

Dear Colleagues,

Further to full committee review, the DCU Research Ethics Committee approves this research proposal.

Materials used to recruit participants should note that ethical approval for this project has been obtained from the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee.

Should substantial modifications to the research protocol be required at a later stage, a further amendment submission should be made to the REC.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Geraldine Scanlon'.

Dr Geraldine Scanlon
Chairperson
DCU Research Ethics Committee







Taighde & Nuálaíocht Tacaíocht
Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath,
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Appendix J: Timeline of Data Collection Processes

February/March 2021		April 2021		May/ June 2021
Questionnaires: Completed by 36 participants		Role Specific Focus Groups: 1x principals 1x chairpersons 1x teachers		School Cluster Focus Groups 1x Special Schools 1x Non-DEIS School 2x DEIS School

Appendix K: Example of Focus Group Schedule (Principals' Focus Group)

The researcher began by welcoming the participants and thanking them for coming. She introduced herself and gave a brief overview of the study and its goals.

The conventions of focus group participation were then outlined:

- Confidentiality and anonymity; Recording of session with participant's permission; Risk Management Procedures; Importance of every person's experience and view.

Introduction:

Participants were encouraged to briefly introduce themselves and their school.

Introductory question:

What comes to mind when you think about child protection and safeguarding?
What issues would you like us to discuss here today?

Key questions:

1. Perspectives

What is it like to be the principal/DLP in your school?

Possible follow up questions:

How is your CPS role different to the chairperson's/teachers'?

What are the stressful aspects of your role?

2. Strengths of the current system

In your opinion, what are the strengths of the current child protection system?

Possible follow up questions:

Why do you think 'x' is important?

Does anyone else want to share their view on 'x'?

Do you share the same view as Participant 'x'?

3. Weaknesses of the current system

In your opinion, what are the weaknesses of the current child protection system? Or

Possible follow up questions:

Why do you think 'x' as a key weakness?

In your opinion, what impact does 'x' have on your role/the system/vulnerable children?

Does anyone else want to share their view on 'x'?

Do you share the same view as Participant 'x'?

Possible Transition questions:

- In your opinion, what has changed since legislation was introduced for child protection in 2017?
- Is the current child protection system working effectively do you think?

- How could schools' capacity to safeguard children be enhanced?
- What are the challenges associated with child protection and safeguarding?

Closing Question: Is there anything you think we should have discussed that we didn't.

Appendix L: Example of Quantitative Analysis Conducted Using SPSS

Participant Type					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Chairperson	10	27.8	27.8	27.8
	Principal	13	36.1	36.1	63.9
	Teacher	13	36.1	36.1	100.0
	Total	36	100.0	100.0	

School Type					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Special Schools	7	19.4	19.4	19.4
	DEIS schools	12	33.3	33.3	52.8
	Non -DEIS schools	17	47.2	47.2	100.0
	Total	36	100.0	100.0	

Likert Scale from Section Three of Questionnaires

		MOD			Total
		Chairperson	Principal	Teacher	
3.1 My child protection and safeguarding responsibilities are an integral part of my role	Strongly agree	8	13	10	31
	Agree	2	0	3	5
Total		10	13	13	36

		MOD			Total
		Chairperson	Principal	Teacher	
3.2 I understand, in full, what my legal obligations are for child protection and safeguarding	Strongly agree	5	10	4	19
	Agree	3	3	9	15
	Disagree	1	0	0	1
Total		9	13	13	35

		MOD			Total
		Chairperson	Principal	Teacher	
3.3 I do not have access to adequate supports to assist me in my role for child protection	Strongly agree	2	1	1	4
	Agree	3	5	0	8
	Disagree	3	6	10	19
	Strongly Disagree	2	1	2	5
Total		10	13	13	36

		MOD			Total
		Chairperson	Principal	Teacher	
3.4 My responsibilities for child protection and safeguarding are necessary and proportional to the needs of children	Strongly agree	3	7	7	17
	Agree	5	6	6	17
	Disagree	1	0	0	1
	Strongly Disagree	1	0	0	1
Total		10	13	13	36

		MOD			Total
		Chairperson	Principal	Teacher	
3.5 Even with the current child protection procedures, I believe that some children in this school are still not adequately protected from harm	Strongly agree	0	6	2	8
	Agree	5	7	7	19
	Disagree	3	0	4	7
	Strongly Disagree	2	0	0	2
Total		10	13	13	36

		MOD			Total
		Chairperson	Principal	Teacher	
3.6 The tasks that I undertake in respect to child protection and safeguarding make a positive difference to the lives of children	Strongly agree	0	3	3	6
	Agree	9	10	10	29
	Disagree	1	0	0	1
Total		10	13	13	36

		MOD			Total
		Chairperson	Principal	Teacher	
3.7 Upholding my responsibilities in respect to child protection is a duty fraught with stress and anxiety	Strongly agree	0	3	2	5
	Agree	3	8	5	16
	Disagree	6	2	6	14
	Strongly Disagree	1	0	0	1
Total		10	13	13	36

		MOD			Total
		Chairperson	Principal	Teacher	
3.8 It is easy for me to fulfil my legal and professional child	Strongly agree	0	1	1	2
	Agree	8	7	5	20
	Disagree	2	4	7	13

protection and safeguarding responsibilities	Strongly Disagree	0	1	0	1
Total		10	13	13	36

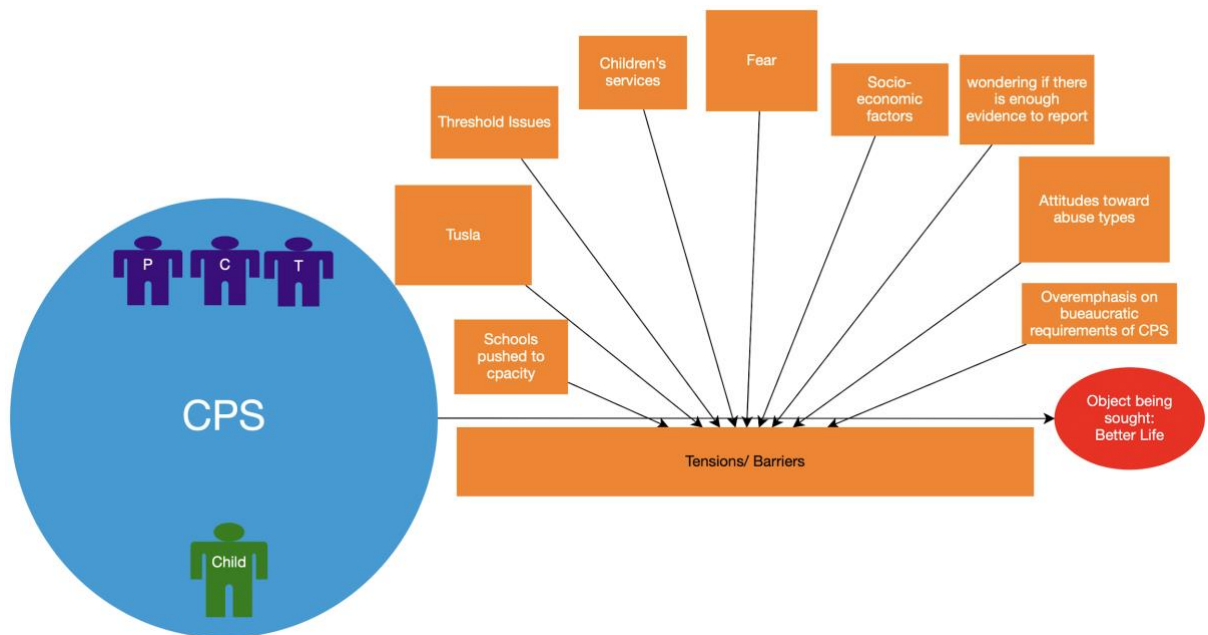
Appendix M: Examples of Qualitative Analysis Carried out using NVivo

Phase 2- Extract* from Full Codebook

Name	Description	Files	References
1. Abuse Types	Use when participants refer to a particular abuse type	5	25
2. Affective Practices or care	Used to identify affective practices or care norms in schools	3	8
3. Children's Realities	Use when participants talk about children and their experiences/needs/perspectives	7	113
4. Children's Services	Use when participants refer to children's services in Ireland	6	40
5. General Perspectives	Use when participants shared perspective/opinion about CPS that was not role specific	7	61
6. Reporting or deciding when to report CPS concerns	Use when participants spoke about reporting or deciding to report CPS concerns	7	80
7. Socio-economic Factors	Used when participant referred to impact of socio-economic factors	7	38
8. Strengths of the current system	Use to identify strengths of the current CPS system or when participants referenced factors that are enhancing schools' capacity to protect and safeguard children	7	27
9. Worry and fear	Use when participants shared anecdote about worrying or being scared	6	60
10. The Chairpersons' perspectives	Use when chairpersons shared their distinct perspective	7	52
11. The Principals' Perspectives	Use when principals shared their distinct perspective	7	90
12. The Teachers' Perspectives	Use when teachers shared their distinct perspective	7	66
13. Tusla	Use when participants referenced Tusla	7	52
14. Weaknesses of the current system	Code is used to identify weaknesses of the current CPS system or when participants referenced factors that are impeding schools' capacity to protect and safeguard children	7	14

*136 codes were identified during Phase 2 of Thematic Analysis. As this entire codebook is too lengthy to attach, an extract from the codebook is provided.

Phase 3: Concept Map Identifying Tensions/Barriers in system



Phase 5- Full Codebook

Name	Description	Files	References
General Perspectives	Use when participants shared perspective/opinion about CPS that was not role specific	7	61
Perspectives	Top-Level Code- Participant Perspectives	7	208
Chairpersons' perspectives	Chairpersons' perspectives toward CPS	7	52
Principals' Perspectives	Principals' perspectives toward CPS	7	90
Teachers' Perspectives	Teachers' perspectives toward CPS	7	66
Strengths of the current CPS system	Top-Level Code- Strengths of the current CPS system	7	27
The CPP	Use when participants referred to the Child Protection Procedures as a strength of the current CPS system	5	16
Introduction of MR	Use when participants referred Mandated Reporting as a strength of the current CPS system	4	11
Factors Impeding Schools' Capacity to Protect and Safeguard	Top-Level Code- Factors Impeding Schools' Capacity to Protect and Safeguard		
MICRO	Micro Barriers	7	60
Utility/Clarity of the	Use when participants criticized the	5	18

Name	Description	Files	References
TH Principle	utility/clarity of the Threshold of Harm Principle		
Fearing for own Safety	Use when participants shared anecdotes of fearing for their own safety while engaged in CPS work	4	16
Fearing for Child's Safety	Use when participants shared anecdotes of fearing for child's own safety while engaged in CPS work	3	9
Attitudes toward Neglect	Use when participants identified problematic culture/attitude toward neglect in the school	4	13
Children Changing their Disclosure Behaviour	Use when participants shared anecdotes relating to children changing their disclosure behaviour	3	4
MESO	Meso Barriers	5	27
Children and Drugs	Used when participants referred to negative influence of drugs/drug culture on children and related this to schools' capacity to protect and safeguard children	3	10
Children and Poverty	Used when participants referred to negative effect of poverty on children and related this to schools' capacity to protect and safeguard children	4	17
MACRO	Macro Barriers		115
Bureaucratisation of CPS Work	Use when participants problematized bureaucratic aspects of CPS work (e.g., paperwork, checklists, record keeping)	5	23
The State and Children's Services	Use when participants problematized children's services in Ireland and related these this provision to schools' capacity to protect and safeguard children	6	40
Tusla	Use when participants identified weaknesses within/associated with Tusla and related these weaknesses to schools' capacity to protect and safeguard children	7	52

Appendix N: Department of Education and Skills Templates and Checklists for CPS

The Department of Education and Skills mandatory templates for CPS
Name of Template
Mandatory Template 1: The Child Safeguarding Statement and Risk Assessment
Mandatory Template 2: Checklist for Review of the Child Safeguarding Statement (this checklist has 40 items requiring review)
Mandatory Template 3: Notification regarding the Board of Management’s review of the Child Safeguarding Statement
The Department of Education and Skills ‘optional’ templates for CPS
Optional Template A: Record of how the allegation and/or concern came to be known to the DLP and record of DLP’s phone call seeking advice of Tusla (Sections 5.1.1 and 5.3.3)
Optional Template B: Template statement from DLP to a member of school personnel as to the reasons why a report has not been made to Tusla (Section 5.3.8 of the Procedures)
Optional Template C: Record of DLP informing or not informing a parent/carer that a report concerning his or her child is being made (Section 5.3.6 of the Procedures)
Optional Template D: Template written notification from DLP to a parent where a child protection concern about a member of school personnel has been raised by a parent (Section 5.6.2 of the Procedures)
Optional Template E: Template Check List for preparing the Principal’s Child Protection Oversight Report (CPOR)* *This template has twenty items requiring review
Optional Template F: Template for Reporting Documents Provided to the board of Management as Part of the Child Protection Oversight Report (CPOR)
Department of Education and Skills checklists for CPS
Child Protection Case File Checklist* *This checklist has seventeen items requiring review
The Board of Management Communications Checklist* *This checklist has eleven items requiring review
The Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspection Framework* *This checklist has sixty-five items requiring review by the Department of Education and Skills Inspectorate during a CPSI

Appendix O: The Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspection Framework

The Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspection Framework	
Check Area	Checks and Sub Checks
1	The name of the DLP is prominently displayed near the main door of the school / in the reception area
	The child safeguarding statement is displayed in a prominent position near the main entrance
	The risk assessment is on display with the Child Safeguarding statement
	A copy of the child safeguarding statement was provided to all school personnel
	The school has arrangements in place to make a copy of the child safeguarding statement available to parents on request
	A copy of the child safeguarding statement was provided to the patron
	A copy of the child safeguarding statement was provided to the parents' association
	The child safeguarding statement is published on the school's website
	School personnel are informed when a review of the school's Child Safeguarding Statement has taken place
2	The DLP and Deputy DLP are named in the school's Child Safeguarding Statement
	The DLP and Deputy DLP are current senior members of the full-time teaching staff
	If the DLP is not the principal the school authority has put arrangements in place to ensure that the DLP will keep the principal appropriately informed of child protection matters
3	The board of management has arrangements in place to ensure that the DLP has the necessary familiarity with the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools 2017 to enable him/her to fulfil his/her responsibilities
	The board of management has put arrangements in place to enable the deputy DLP to effectively assume his or her responsibilities in the absence of the DLP and to ensure that the deputy DLP can access relevant records when required
	The board of management have arrangements in place to ensure that all school personnel have the necessary familiarity with the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools 2017 to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities

	All registered teachers who were interviewed as part of the interview with school personnel during the inspection were aware of the responsibilities of a mandated person
	All members of school personnel who were interviewed as part of the interview with school personnel during the inspection were aware of the actions to take if they receive an allegation or have a suspicion that a child may have been abused or neglected, is being abused or neglected, or is at risk of abuse or neglect
	The board of management has arrangements in place to ensure that all members of the board of management have the necessary familiarity with the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools 2017 to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities
4	The chairperson of the board of management and the principal orally report that the board is aware of its responsibilities in relation to vetting of all school personnel and that they discharge these responsibilities.
	The chairperson of the board of management and the principal sign the declaration that the board is aware of its responsibilities in relation to vetting of all school personnel and that they discharge these responsibilities.
	The chairperson of the board of management and the principal confirm that all employees of the board of management are vetted.
5	The child safeguarding statement is in the format of the template published by the Department
	The child safeguarding statement is reviewed annually
	A record of the review and its outcome has been retained by the board
	If areas of improvement are identified in the review of the child safeguarding statement the school has put an action plan in place to deal with the issues
	A risk assessment, having regard to the particular school's context, has been completed based on the template provided with the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017
	The school has specified, in its written risk assessment, the policies and procedures in place to minimise the risk of harm by responding to potential risks
6	The minutes of each board of management meeting that were checked contain a child protection oversight report

	The child protection oversight report is fully completed on the template provided by the Department or contains all of information required under each of the headings on the template
	Where there are cases under section 9.5 of the procedures (involving school personnel) the board was provided with all of the documents specified in section 9.5.2 of the procedures in respect of each such case
	Where there were cases under section 9.6 of the procedures (not involving school personnel) the board was provided with all of the documents specified in sections 9.6.2 of the procedures in respect of each such case.
	Where there were cases under section 9.7 of the procedures (arising from alleged bullying behaviour) the board was provided with all of the documents specified in section 9.7.2 of the procedures in respect of each such case
	The minutes of the board meeting use unique identifiers to refer to the individuals, including children, involved and do not record the names of the individuals involved
7	A hardcopy file is available for all child protection concerns which contains original, unredacted records of the concern and all correspondence relevant to the concern.
	All parties ⁹ referenced in all files are assigned a unique identifier number
	All files relevant to child protection are maintained in a secure location
	The DDLP is aware of the location of the child protection files and can access them if required
8	A written record from the DLP of how the concern came to his/her attention is retained on the relevant file for all concerns in respect of learners in the school
	A copy of the report submitted to TUSLA is available for all concerns that were reported to TUSLA
	A record of further action taken by the DLP and of any further communication with TUSLA, An Garda Síochana or other parties in relation to that report is available for all concerns that were reported to TUSLA
	A record of the information communicated by the DLP to the parent/carer of the child about whom the report is being made to TUSLA or a record of the decision made by the DLP not to inform the parent/carer and the reasons for not doing so is available for all concerns that were reported to TUSLA

	A record of any consultation with TUSLA, which includes the date, the name of the TUSLA official and the advice given is available for all concerns where the advice of TUSLA was sought and evidence that a report was submitted to Tusla where Tusla advised to do so
	A record that the registered teacher was informed that advice was being sought is available for all concerns where the advice of TUSLA was sought
	A record that the registered teacher was provided with the advice received is available for all concerns where the advice of TUSLA was sought
	A record of a clear statement in writing provided to the relevant staff member as to the reasons why his or her concern is not being reported and that the staff member was advised that he/she may still report that concern to TUSLA is available for all concerns that were not reported to TUSLA
9	written record from the DLP of how the concern came to his/her attention is available in all cases of allegations made against a member of school personnel
	A record that the school employer was informed is available in all cases of allegations made against a member of school personnel
	A record that the DLP sought advice from or made a report to TUSLA is available in all cases of allegations made against a member of school personnel
	A record that the DLP reported to Tusla where Tusla advised to do so
	A record of the DLP's notification under section 5.6 of the procedures to the parent informing him/her of whether or not the concern has been reported to TUSLA, and if not the reasons for not referring it is available if the allegation is made against school personnel by a parent
	A record that the chair of the board of management /Chief Executive Officer of the ETB has assumed the role of the DLP for reporting the matter is available if the allegation is made against the DLP
	A record that the school employer sought advice from or made a report to TUSLA is available if the allegation is made against the DLP
	A record that TUSLA has been informed that the school's protocol authorising immediate action has been operated and/or that the employee has been formally placed on administrative leave is available
	A record that the DLP sought advice from or made a report to TUSLA is available if the allegation is made against a member of the board
	A record that the DLP reported the allegation against a member of the school board to Tusla where Tusla advised the DLP to do so

10	There is a Social Personal and Health Education Programme for all children in the school (Primary)
	The Stay Safe Programme is implemented within the school (Primary)
	Whole-school planning documents indicate that the school has planned appropriately for the implementation of the SPHE curriculum and the Stay Safe programme (Primary)
	The individual teacher planning documents reviewed indicate that the teachers are implementing the SPHE curriculum and <i>Stay Safe</i> programme appropriately (Primary)
	The interactions with pupils indicate that pupils have a satisfactory or better understanding of a number of the key topics of SPHE and Stay Safe (Primary) and of SPHE
	There is a Social Personal and Health Education Programme for all children in the school (Primary)

Appendix P: Categories of Child Abuse and How They Might be Recognised (Tusla, 2017)

Neglect

Child neglect is the most frequently reported category of abuse, both in Ireland and internationally. Ongoing chronic neglect is recognised as being extremely harmful to the development and well-being of the child and may have serious long-term negative consequences.

Neglect occurs when a child does not receive adequate care or supervision to the extent that the child is harmed physically or developmentally. It is generally defined in terms of an omission of care, where a child's health, development or welfare is impaired by being deprived of food, clothing, warmth, hygiene, medical care, intellectual stimulation or supervision and safety. Emotional neglect may also lead to the child having attachment difficulties. The extent of the damage to the child's health, development or welfare is influenced by a range of factors. These factors include the extent, if any, of positive influence in the child's life as well as the age of the child and the frequency and consistency of neglect.

Neglect is associated with poverty but not necessarily caused by it. It is strongly linked to parental substance misuse, domestic violence, and parental mental illness and disability.

A reasonable concern for the child's welfare would exist when neglect becomes typical of the relationship between the child and the parent or carer. This may become apparent where you see the child over a period of time, or the effects of neglect may be obvious based on having seen the child once.

The following are features of child neglect:

- Children being left alone without adequate care and supervision
- Malnourishment, lacking food, unsuitable food or erratic feeding
- Non-organic failure to thrive, i.e. a child not gaining weight due not only to malnutrition but also emotional deprivation
- Failure to provide adequate care for the child's medical and developmental needs, including intellectual stimulation
- Inadequate living conditions – unhygienic conditions, environmental issues, including lack of adequate heating and furniture
- Lack of adequate clothing
- Inattention to basic hygiene
- Lack of protection and exposure to danger, including moral danger, or lack of supervision appropriate to the child's age
- Persistent failure to attend school
- Abandonment or desertion

Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse is the systematic emotional or psychological ill-treatment of a child as part of the overall relationship between a caregiver and a child. Once-off and occasional difficulties between a parent/carer and child are not considered emotional abuse. Abuse occurs when a child's basic need for attention, affection, approval, consistency and security are not met, due to incapacity or indifference from their parent or caregiver. Emotional abuse can also occur when adults responsible for taking care of children are unaware of and unable (for a range of reasons) to meet their children's emotional and developmental needs. Emotional abuse is not easy to recognise because the effects are not easily seen.

A reasonable concern for the child's welfare would exist when the behaviour becomes typical of the relationship between the child and the parent or carer.

Emotional abuse may be seen in some of the following ways:

- Rejection
- Lack of comfort and love
- Lack of attachment
- Lack of proper stimulation (e.g. fun and play)
- Lack of continuity of care (e.g. frequent moves, particularly unplanned)
- Continuous lack of praise and encouragement
- Persistent criticism, sarcasm, hostility or blaming of the child
- Bullying
- Conditional parenting in which care or affection of a child depends on his or her behaviours or actions
- Extreme overprotectiveness
- Inappropriate non-physical punishment (e.g. locking child in bedroom)
- Ongoing family conflicts and family violence
- Seriously inappropriate expectations of a child relative to his/her age and stage of development

There may be no physical signs of emotional abuse unless it occurs with another type of abuse. A child may show signs of emotional abuse through their actions or emotions in several ways. These include insecure attachment, unhappiness, low self-esteem, educational and developmental underachievement, risk taking and aggressive behaviour.

It should be noted that no one indicator is conclusive evidence of emotional abuse. Emotional abuse is more likely to impact negatively on a child where it is persistent over time and where there is a lack of other protective factors.

Physical abuse

Physical abuse is when someone deliberately hurts a child physically or puts them at risk of being physically hurt. It may occur as a single incident or as a pattern of incidents. A reasonable concern exists where the child's health and/ or development is, may be, or has been damaged as a result of suspected physical abuse.

Physical abuse can include the following:

- Physical punishment
- Beating, slapping, hitting or kicking
- Pushing, shaking or throwing
- Pinching, biting, choking or hair-pulling
- Use of excessive force in handling
- Deliberate poisoning
- Suffocation
- Fabricated/induced illness
- Female genital mutilation

The Children First Act 2015 includes a provision that abolishes the common law defence of reasonable chastisement in court proceedings. This defence could previously be invoked by a parent or other person in authority who physically disciplined a child. The change in the legislation now means that in prosecutions relating to assault or physical cruelty, a person who administers such punishment to a child cannot rely on the defence of reasonable chastisement in the legal proceedings. The result of this is that the protections in law relating to assault now apply to a child in the same way as they do to an adult.

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse occurs when a child is used by another person for his or her gratification or arousal, or for that of others. It includes the child being involved in sexual acts (masturbation, fondling, oral or penetrative sex) or exposing the child to sexual activity directly or through pornography.

Child sexual abuse may cover a wide spectrum of abusive activities. It rarely involves just a single incident and in some instances occurs over a number of years. Child sexual abuse most commonly happens within the family, including older siblings and extended family members.

Cases of sexual abuse mainly come to light through disclosure by the child or his or her siblings/friends, from the suspicions of an adult, and/or by physical symptoms.

It should be remembered that sexual activity involving a young person may be sexual abuse, even if the young person concerned does not themselves recognise it as abusive.

Examples of child sexual abuse include the following:

- Any sexual act intentionally performed in the presence of a child
- An invitation to sexual touching or intentional touching or molesting of a child's body whether by a person or object for the purpose of sexual arousal or gratification
- Masturbation in the presence of a child or the involvement of a child in an act of masturbation
- Sexual intercourse with a child, whether oral, vaginal or anal
- Sexual exploitation of a child, which includes:
 - Inviting, inducing or coercing a child to engage in prostitution or the production of child pornography [for example, exhibition, modelling or posing for the purpose of sexual arousal, gratification or sexual act, including its recording (on film, videotape or other media) or the manipulation, for those purposes, of an image by computer or other means]
 - Inviting, coercing or inducing a child to participate in, or to observe, any sexual, indecent or obscene act
 - Showing sexually explicit material to children, which is often a feature of the 'grooming' process by perpetrators of abuse
- Exposing a child to inappropriate or abusive material through information and communication technology
- Consensual sexual activity involving an adult and an underage person

Appendix Q: Dissemination Plan: 2022-2023

Thesis Publication			
<p>Once the researcher has completed all changes suggested by her examiners she will publish this thesis in full through DCU's Online Research Access Service (DORAS). This platform serves as DCU's institutional repository by offering a freely accessible collection of scholarly publications from DCU's academic community.</p> <p>Intended Date of Publication: 1st September 2022.</p>			
Conferences			
Name of conference:	Conference Information:	Presentation Proposal:	Date and Location of Conference
<p>9th National Child Protection and Welfare Social Work Conference</p>	<p>The National Child Protection and Welfare Social Work Conference committee was established in 2005. This inter-agency, not-for-profit initiative is comprised of social work staff from the child protection and welfare social work teams of Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, the Irish Association of Social Workers and School of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork. The aim of the conference is to create a space for practitioners in the area of</p>	<p><i>'Protecting Vulnerable Children- The School's Perspective on Mandatory Reporting'</i></p>	<p>Online 27th October 2023</p>

	child protection and welfare to hear about and debate new developments in the areas of research, policy and practice and to network with colleagues		
Standing Conference on Teacher Education, North and South (SCoTENS).	SCoTENS is a network of 34 colleges of education, university education departments, teaching councils, curriculum councils, education trade unions and education centres on the island of Ireland with a responsibility for and interest in teacher education. SCOTENS was established in 2003 to create a safe space for teacher educators – North and South– to come together and discuss issues of common interest, and explore ways of co-operating closely together.	<i>‘Caring for and About Vulnerable Children- The Roles, Responsibilities and Realities of Primary School Teachers’</i>	Crowne Plaza Hotel Dundalk 20 th and 21 st October 2022.
Journals That The Researcher Intends to Submit to and Proposed Articles			
Journal Name	Journal Information	Proposed Article Title	Intended Submission Date:

Irish Journal of Education	The <i>Irish Journal of Education</i> (IJE) is an open-access peer-reviewed journal published by the Educational Research Centre (ERC).	Putting What First: Considering the Immediate Care Needs of Children.	November 2022
Irish Educational Studies	<i>Irish Educational Studies</i> is an international, refereed journal publishing manuscripts on a range of topics relevant to education by drawing on the full spectrum of disciplines that feed into educational theory and practice; this includes anthropology, sociology, psychology, history, economics, philosophy, politics and curriculum studies.	<i>Education and Social Work- Using Cultural Historical Activity Theory as a lens to Better Understand Interagency Collaboration for Child Protection.</i>	January 2023
Child Abuse Review	<i>Child Abuse Review</i> provides a forum for all professionals working in the field of child protection, giving them access to the latest research findings, practice developments, training initiatives and policy issues. The Journal maintains a practice orientated focus and authors of research	<i>The Challenge of Protecting Children- Perspectives from Primary Schools in Ireland</i>	March 2023

	<p>papers are encouraged to examine and discuss implications for practitioners. By always emphasising research/practice links, it is the Editors' aim to promote practice relevant research and to facilitate the use of research findings, to enhance good practice and influence policy.</p>		
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