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Results of the Department of Education and Skills ‘Lifeskills’ Survey, 2012

January 2014

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1. Introduction

The Department of Education and Skills conducted its second ‘Lifeskills’ survey of primary and post primary schools in 2012. The first Lifeskills Survey was carried out in 2009. The survey provides data on a number of ‘lifeskills’ related issues, including physical activity and healthy eating within schools. The survey also provides information on other important areas such as the implementation of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), anti-bullying, substance use, and road safety.

This report concentrates on the main findings to emerge from the survey data. These findings are outlined below, divided into primary and post primary levels. The findings provide evidence of the good work being undertaken by respondent schools in helping their pupils to develop key skills necessary to cope with the many demands and pressures they face both within and outside of school. They also highlight areas where there is scope for some schools to strengthen implementation of required policies in the future. The end of the report contains some analysis of the key findings, along with an outline of the main challenges and opportunities for the Department of Education and Skills (DES), schools and for other stakeholders.

The limitations to the data on which this report is based must be acknowledged at the outset. In the first instance, not all schools responded to the survey. The 2012 Lifeskills survey received an overall response rate of 68% at primary level (n= 2,135) and 52% at post primary level (n= 325). Not all schools that responded answered each of the questions posed.¹ Secondly, the data provided in the Lifeskills survey are quantitative rather than qualitative. They do not provide an in-depth analysis of the quality of provision within schools or the type of learning outcomes for students.

Finally, the data are reported directly to the DES by schools and the Department does not cross check the validity of the responses provided. However despite these important caveats, the survey constitutes an important source of information to the DES. The data provided through the Lifeskills survey, complemented by data from other sources such as the subject and other evaluations undertaken by the DES inspectorate, will assist in informing policy development into the future.

The findings of a recent evaluation of SPHE in post primary schools (September 2013) is referenced in this report where relevant.² Where possible, comparative results from the 2009 Lifeskills survey are also included in the findings that are presented below.

¹ The total number of responses was 2,135 at primary and 325 at post primary. Not all schools answered each question but partly complete responses were included in the analysis. The overall number of responses (n) received for each question is identified in this report. It will be noted that (n) is higher for those questions that received a higher response rate.

² ‘Looking at Social, Personal and Health Education. Teaching and Learning in post primary schools’, DES inspectorate (2013) available at <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/Evaluation-Reports-Guidelines/Looking-at-Social-Personal-and-Health-Education-Teaching-and-Learning-in-Post-Primary-Schools.pdf>

2. Main findings: primary school responses

2.1. Healthy Eating

Schools who responded to the survey are performing strongly in promoting healthy eating among their pupils. This is reflected in the fact that 97% of respondent primary schools (n= 2075) promote healthy lunches while 93% of respondents (n = 2094) have a healthy eating policy in place or are in the process of developing one.

The active role played by primary schools in relation to healthy eating is also reflected in the fact that 99.7% of respondent schools (n=2100) reported that they do not facilitate the sale of fizzy drinks, sweets and crisps in school, either through vending machines or a school shop. However, schools are less involved in promoting the sale of healthy alternatives, with less than 3% of respondents (n=2004) indicating that fruit was available for sale on their premises.

Almost 100% of respondent schools provide information to pupils on the importance of a balanced diet (n=2041) and the food pyramid (n=2036).

The responses received in relation to all of the issues highlighted above are very similar to those received in response to the 2009 Lifeskills survey.

Among respondent schools in 2012 (n=2,086), approximately 40% reported that they are currently in the Health Promoting School initiative, which is supported by the Department of Health/HSE, or are in the process of joining. There was a slightly higher proportion of schools (42%) who reported themselves as being participants in this initiative, or in the process of joining, in 2009.

2.2. Physical Activity

Schools were asked to identify how much time is currently timetabled for P.E. provision at each class level. The responses are outlined below.

| Class | n (2012) | < 1 hour | | 1 hour | | >1 hour | |
|---|----------|----------|------|--------|------|---------|------|
| | | 2009 | 2012 | 2009 | 2012 | 2009 | 2012 |
| Infants | 1914 | 14% | 12% | 72% | 76% | 14% | 12% |
| 1 st . and 2 nd class | 1967 | 7% | 5% | 74% | 77% | 19% | 18% |
| 3 rd and 4 th class | 1963 | 5% | 3% | 65% | 68% | 30% | 29% |
| 5 th and 6 th class | 1953 | 4% | 3% | 63% | 65% | 33% | 32% |

The data indicate that the vast majority of those primary schools who responded to the survey reported themselves to be implementing at least the 1 hour minimum P.E. provision that is recommended by the DES. A considerable cohort of respondent schools indicated that they are implementing more than 1 hour per week. However, there are a small number of schools who identified themselves as not meeting the existing requirement for provision in this area. This is particularly the case in relation to infant classes. The amount of time provided for P.E. in primary schools appears to increase as pupils progress from infants through to sixth class. Implementation is

strongest in 5th and 6th class: approximately 32% of respondent schools reported that they offer more than the required 1 hour P.E. provision for 5th and 6th classes.

The position is broadly comparable to that reported in the 2009 Lifeskills survey but the latest data reveal small improvements in the proportion of schools who are delivering the minimum P.E. provision at each class level.

A total of 81% of respondent schools (n=1827) reported in 2012 that they are involved in sporting activities outside of school time, which is in line with the 82% of schools in this category in 2009. While some schools found it difficult to estimate the time involved in such activities, the estimates that were provided ranged from one hour to more than ten hours a week. Schools highlighted the many different sporting and team activities they supported, including Gaelic, soccer, athletics, swimming, tag rugby and horse riding.

Some 74% of respondent schools (n=2039) participate in 'Sport for all Day'. This is a decrease of eight percentage points since the 2009 survey. In the latest survey, 98% of respondent schools (n=2061) reported encouraging physical activity in pupils during break-times. This is the same response rate as in 2009.

Schools are also active in providing information to pupils, through the curriculum, on the importance of regular exercise. Less than 1% of respondent schools (n=2,032) indicated that they did not provide such information. This is broadly comparable to the position in 2009.

One factor that impacts on the promotion of physical activity is whether schools have a policy that prevents running in the schoolyard. Only 6% of respondents (n=2061) indicated that such a policy was in place. The position was similar in 2009.

2.3. Substance use

Schools are very active in relation to promoting awareness of drug and alcohol abuse. 88% of respondents (n=2089) have a Substance Use policy in place, which represents a one percentage point increase on the position in 2009. Approximately 94% of respondent schools (n=2035) reported using the Walk Tall programme. This is an increase of two percentage points since 2009.

A similarly high proportion of respondent schools provide information to their pupils, through the curriculum, on the health risks associated with smoking (94%, n=2041), promoting awareness of and combating alcohol abuse (90%, n=2030), and promoting awareness of and how to combat drug abuse (90%, n=2019). Almost all respondent schools reported that they provide information to their pupils to enable them to make sound decisions in relation to these substances (99%, n=2043), and also to resist inappropriate peer pressure (99%, n=2042). These results are in line with those from 2009.

It is not possible to express as a percentage the number of schools who engaged external agencies to support them in communicating to students on the topic of substance abuse. However, of the 771 schools who specified which agency they

engaged for this purpose, the most frequently used, by 54% of respondents, was An Garda Síochána.

2.4. Relationships and sexuality education

97% of respondent schools (n=2066) indicated that they have a documented Relationships and Sexuality (RSE) policy in place, as required by the Department of Education and Skills, or are in the process of developing one. This proportion has not changed since the results of the 2009 survey.

Schools were also asked to identify whether they were implementing each of the strand units of the RSE curriculum. The responses are reproduced in the table below.

| | 2009 | 2012 | n (2012) |
|-----------------------------------|------|------|-------------|
| Strand Unit of RSE | % | % | |
| Personal hygiene | 100 | 100 | 2040 |
| Naming parts of the body | 97 | 99 | 2035 |
| Growing and changing | 98 | 99 | 2033 |
| Changes at puberty | 93 | 95 | 2021 |
| Conception and birth | 91 | 93 | 2006 |
| Empathising with others | 99 | 99 | 2030 |
| Taking responsibility for oneself | 99 | 100 | 2039 |
| Sharing feelings | 99 | 100 | 2034 |
| Different forms of friendship | 97 | 97 | 2018 |
| Respecting others | 100 | 100 | 2027 |
| Accepting difference | 100 | 100 | 2008 |

Respondent schools report almost universal implementation of RSE at primary level. There is a 100% implementation rate in relation to five of the eleven strand units. The two strand units with the lowest implementation rate are ‘Conception and Birth’ and ‘Changes at Puberty’. Even here, however, the implementation rates are 93% and 95% of respondent schools respectively.

There is very little change in the position since 2009. However, there are small improvements in the implementation rates in four of the eleven strand units.

It is not possible to express as a percentage the number of schools who engaged external agencies to assist in the delivery of RSE. However, of the 1,246 schools who identified a particular individual or agency that they engaged for this purpose, the most frequently used, by 39% of respondent schools, was the HSE or a trained health professional such as the local public health nurse, school nurse, or local GP. The second most common agency identified was Accord, the Catholic Marriage Service. This service is being engaged by 24% of those schools who indicated that they engaged external agencies.

2.5. Child Protection

Almost 99% of respondent schools (n=2057) reported having a ‘Stay Safe’ programme in place. This is an increase in four percentage points since 2009.

Schools were also asked if they enabled pupils, through curricular provision, to develop the skills of identifying and responding to unsafe situations. All respondent schools indicated that they helped children to identify such situations (n=2060), to know when and how to seek help (n=2054), and to say no to keeping secrets (n=2048). A similar response was achieved in 2009.

2.6. Anti – bullying

99% of respondent schools (n=2101) reported having a documented anti-bullying policy in place. The same proportion of schools (n=2098) indicated that their pupils know what to do in the event of being bullied. In addition, all respondent schools (n=2025) reported that they provide information to pupils on understanding bullying, and on how to seek help if bullying is encountered. The same level of response was reported in 2009.

2.7. Student Councils

The proportion of primary school respondents (n=2119) that have established student councils is reported as 14%. While this remains low, it has almost doubled since the 2009 survey when 8% of schools were in this category.

2.8. Road Safety

98% of respondent schools (n=2051) reported teaching ‘road safety’ to their pupils. Of these schools, 43% use the RSA/MACE ‘Safe to School’ programme as a teaching resource. Only 23% of schools used this resource in 2009. More than 80% of respondent primary schools (n=2035) promote the ‘Seat Belt Sheriff’ scheme, which represents an increase of three percentage points since 2009.

3. Main findings: post primary school responses

3.1. Healthy Eating

Approximately 55% of respondent schools (n=310) had a formal Healthy Eating policy in place, or being developed, in 2012, compared to 50% in 2009. Some 66% of schools (n=287) reported themselves as active in promoting healthy lunches. This is an improvement of two percentage points since 2009.

Some 30% of schools (n=310) reported having a vending machine or school shop which sells ‘junk food’. This represents an improvement on the position in 2009 when 35% of schools in this category. Some 64% of those schools who responded to the latest survey (n=287) reported having a facility for the sale of fresh fruit, which is identical to the position reported in 2009. Some 37% of post primary schools who responded to the survey (n=307) reported being participants in the ‘Health Promoting Schools’ initiative or in the process of becoming involved. This is slightly higher than the position in 2009, when 36% of schools were participants in the initiative. A recent evaluation report by the DES inspectorate (2013) on SPHE/RSE in post primary

schools noted the benefits of the Health Promoting Schools initiative for participating schools.³

3.2. Physical Activity

Schools were asked to identify how much time is currently timetabled for P.E. in each year of post primary school. The responses are outlined below.

| Year | n (2012) | < 2 hour | | 2 hours | | >2 hours | |
|-----------------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| | | 2009 % | 2012 % | 2009 % | 2012 % | 2009 % | 2012 % |
| Junior Cycle – Year 1 | 307 | 83 | 90 | 11 | 7 | 6 | 3 |
| Junior Cycle – Year 2 | 304 | 84 | 90 | 10 | 8 | 6 | 2 |
| Junior Cycle – Year 3 | 304 | 86 | 91 | 9 | 7 | 5 | 2 |
| Transition Year | 267 | 54 | 57 | 27 | 31 | 19 | 12 |
| Leaving Cert – Year 1 | 296 | 90 | 93 | 6 | 6 | 4 | 1 |
| Leaving Cert – Year 2 | 290 | 91 | 94 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 1 |

The data indicate that the vast majority of post primary schools are currently not implementing the recommended two hours of P.E. provision. More than 90% of schools are in this category in relation to both junior and senior cycle. The only exception is during transition year, when nearly half of schools are meeting or exceeding the recommended time allocation in this area. A minority of schools are providing more than the minimum recommended time.

Overall, the position has deteriorated since 2009, when implementation of the two hour recommendation was slightly higher. The proportion of respondent schools that are implementing more than the recommended two hours has also reduced since 2009. This is particularly noticeable in Transition Year where the proportion of respondent schools has reduced from 19% in 2009 to 12% in 2012.

In relation to sporting activities outside of school time, 96% of respondent schools (n=287) reported in 2012 that they engaged in such activities. This position has not changed since 2009. While some schools found it difficult to quantify precisely how much time was spent on such activities, it is clear from the responses that almost all schools are very active in supporting activities outside of school time.

The proportion of schools who encourage physical activity during breaks is 86%. This compares to 89% in 2009.

3.3. Substance Use

In relation to the area of substance use, 93% of respondent schools (n=313) reported having a substance use policy in place. This is slightly lower than the 96% of schools that reported having such a policy in place in 2009. The recent DES inspectorate report on SPHE/RSE in post primary schools provided evidence of a stronger

³ 'Looking at Social, Personal and Health Education. Teaching and Learning in post primary schools', DES inspectorate (2013), p.11

implementation rate in this area. Of the schools that were the subject of that evaluation report, 98% had a substance use policy in place.⁴

Some 83% of Lifeskills respondents (n=271) use the *On My Own Two Feet* resource. This is an increase of eleven percentage points since 2009.

All respondent schools, with one exception, reported providing information to pupils on harmful substances (n=292), on the dangers of smoking (n=292), on alcohol abuse (n=292), and on how to combat substance abuse (n=293). The position was almost identical in 2009.

Schools are also active in facilitating pupils to develop the skills necessary to make informed choices in relation to these substances. In this context, 99% of respondent schools reported enabling their pupils to identify influences on their decision-making (n=291), and to enable their pupils to withstand inappropriate peer pressure (n=291). These results are in line with those from the 2009 survey. The junior cycle students surveyed as part of the recent SPHE/RSE evaluation indicated that they value the information that schools provide to them in this area.⁵

3.4. Relationships and sexuality education

Some 98% of respondent post primary schools (n=300) have a documented policy in place on Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) or are in the process of developing one. This is an improvement of three percentage points on the 2009 survey results. However, this conflicts with data from the DES inspectorate evaluation of SPHE/RSE in post primary schools. The inspectorate report indicated that only 56% of post primary schools evaluated had an RSE policy in place.⁶

Schools were also asked, through the Lifeskills survey, to identify whether they were implementing each of the topics of the RSE module. The responses are reproduced in the table below.

| | 2009 | 2012 | n (2012) |
|---------------------------------|------|------|-------------|
| Strand of RSE | % | % | |
| Communications and respect | 100 | 100 | 293 |
| Sharing feelings | 98 | 99 | 292 |
| Negotiating relationships | 98 | 99 | 291 |
| Changes at puberty | 98 | 99 | 290 |
| Human reproduction | 99 | 99 | 292 |
| Teenage pregnancy | 97 | 98 | 285 |
| Contraception | 94 | 97 | 284 |
| Sexually transmitted infections | 95 | 97 | 284 |
| Sexual orientation | 93 | 97 | 285 |
| Taking responsibility | 99 | 99 | 288 |

⁴ *ibid.*, p.12

⁵ *ibid.*, p.26

⁶ *ibid.* pp.11-12

Of the ten constituent elements of the RSE programme, which include negotiating relationships, reproduction, contraception and teenage pregnancies, almost all schools who responded to the survey reported that they are implementing each strand. There is a very small cohort of schools that are not implementing some strands. The strands with the lowest level of implementation are ‘contraception’, ‘sexually transmitted infections’, and ‘sexual orientation’. Even here, however, the implementation rate is 97%. The extent of RSE delivery has improved since 2009, particularly in relation to the strands on ‘sexual orientation’ and sexually transmitted infections’. Data from other sources also indicate that the RSE modules most closely associated with exploring sexuality were the ones most likely to be omitted from RSE delivery.⁷

Schools were also asked to identify if RSE was being delivered in each year of post primary education. The results are outlined below.

| Year | Yes 2009 | Yes 2012 | n (2012) |
|-----------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| | % | % | |
| Junior Cycle 1 | 94 | 96 | 275 |
| Junior Cycle 2 | 95 | 97 | 272 |
| Junior Cycle 3 | 96 | 98 | 275 |
| Transition Year | 77 | 88 | 231 |
| Leaving Certificate 1 | 72 | 85 | 268 |
| Leaving Certificate 2 | 68 | 81 | 259 |

The data indicate that there is currently almost universal provision of RSE at Junior Cycle, among respondent schools where the implementation rate ranges from 96% in first year to 98% in third year. There is a lower level of implementation at Senior Cycle, where RSE is also mandatory for schools. The decline starts in Transition Year where there is an 88% implementation rate. This is followed by 85% in the first year of senior cycle. The lowest implementation rate occurs in the final year of senior cycle where there is an 81% implementation rate. The DES inspectorate recently reported that 96% of a sample of post primary schools had made provision for RSE in senior cycle.⁸

In overall terms the data in relation to RSE in post primary schools from the 2012 Lifeskills survey represent a significant improvement over the position reported in 2009. Implementation rates have increased at each class level since 2009. At senior cycle in particular, the delivery rate has improved by eleven percentage points in transition year, and thirteen percentage points in fifth and sixth year.

The Lifeskills data do not provide any insight into the *quality* of RSE provision within schools. Separately, the DES inspectorate has highlighted deficiencies in relation to the quality of RSE provision at senior cycle in 30% of post primary schools.⁹ The focus in the Lifeskills survey is on quantitative rather than qualitative data due to the nature in which the data are collected.

⁷ *Ibid.* p.16

⁸ *ibid.* p.12

⁹ *ibid.* 7-8

It is not possible to express as a percentage the number of schools who engaged external agencies to assist in the delivery of RSE. However, of the 131 schools who identified a particular individual or agency that they engaged for this purpose, the most frequently used, by 19% of respondent schools, was the HSE. The DES inspectorate has reported separately that 45% of a sample of post primary schools used external facilitators to deliver aspects of RSE. The inspectorate also pointed to the benefits of drawing upon external expertise in this manner, as long as that expertise is effectively integrated into the overall programme of RSE delivery within the school.¹⁰

Schools were also asked in the Lifeskills survey if they used the RSE Trust Pack and DVD for senior cycle RSE. Some 49% of respondent schools (n=288) indicated that they currently use this resource (compared to 34% in 2009), 50% will consider using it, while 1% of respondent schools said they do not use it.

3.5. Child Protection

Schools were asked if current curricular provision encompassed issues important to child protection. In this context, 99% of schools reported giving guidelines to pupils on personal safety (n=293), helping children to identify risks and unsafe situations (n=291), and supporting them in knowing when and how to seek help (n=292). This is in line with the results of the 2009 survey. This finding is complemented by data from the DES inspectorate which indicate that more than two thirds of junior cycle students surveyed valued the information provided by their schools in the area of personal safety.¹¹

3.6. Anti-Bullying

Some 99% of respondent schools (n=313) have an anti-bullying policy in place. This corresponds closely to findings reported by the DES inspectorate which indicated that 98% of post primary schools have such a policy in place.¹² All schools who responded to this element of the Lifeskills survey also reported that their students know what to do in the event of an incidence of bullying occurring (n=314), and also indicated that they provide information through the curriculum on how to deal with bullying (n=289). This replicates the position reported in the 2009 Lifeskills survey. This is also reflected in data collated by the DES inspectorate which indicate that more than two-thirds of post-primary students are of the view that the information provided by schools in the area of anti-bullying is of assistance to them in identifying bullying and developing the skills to address it.¹³

3.7. Student Councils

Approximately 97% of respondent schools (n=322) have a student council in place. This is in line with the results from the 2009 survey.

¹⁰ *ibid.* 9, 15

¹¹ *ibid.*, p.26

¹² *ibid.* 12

¹³ *ibid.* 26

3.8. Road Safety

Some 84% of respondent schools (n=280) reported that road safety was taught to students, compared to 82% in 2009. 27% of respondent schools (n=267) indicated that the RSA 'Streetwise' programme was used at Junior Cycle level compared to 26% of respondent schools in 2009.

44% of respondent schools (n=266) reported that they used the Road Safety Transition Year programme. This represents a decrease of eight percentage points compared to the position reported by schools in 2009.

4. Conclusions

The findings from the Lifeskills survey 2012 identify the good work that is being done by many schools in equipping students with the essential lifeskills that will enable them to cope with the many demands and pressures they face both within and outside of the education system.

The data produced by the Lifeskills survey provide indicative information to the DES that will assist in informing future policy making. However, the limitations of the data are acknowledged. In the first instance, the data provided are mainly quantitative in nature. They do not give a qualitative view of the position on the ground. This means that it is not possible, to comment on the depth of the learning experience for students or on whether a particular initiative or programme resulted in meaningful educational outcomes. The data also represent a snapshot in time rather than facilitating a longitudinal measurement, although the results from the 2009 survey provide a benchmark in many instances. The data also represent the perspective of the school community, and the views expressed must be balanced with information provided through other sources such as school and subject inspection reports by the DES inspectorate, as well as the views of students themselves. Finally, in drawing conclusions from the data provided through the survey, it has to be remembered that not all schools responded to the survey.

4.1 Positive findings

There are a number of positive findings to emerge from the data. In the first instance, schools who responded to the survey are contributing in a significant way to healthy eating initiatives. The primary sector is particularly active in this respect. This effort is vital in the effort to tackle the growing obesity issue at national level. The work undertaken by schools, through informing pupils about the importance of healthy eating, and promoting healthy eating choices during the school day, complements the work undertaken by the Department of Health and other stakeholders in promoting the overall 'Healthy Ireland' agenda.

Schools at both primary and post primary levels continue to be extremely active in supporting pupils in physical activity outside of school hours. This is a manifestation of the dedication of teachers in encouraging their pupils in sporting competitions and activities even where this is not a mandatory requirement. Evidence from the Lifeskills survey is complemented in this regard by the participation rates in initiatives such as the Active Schools Flag.

The data also provide evidence of strong implementation of Relationship and Sexuality Education at both primary and post primary levels. The implementation rate as reported by schools actually increased since the 2009 survey to the point where schools reported in 2012 an almost universal implementation rate for each strand of the RSE curriculum. The delivery of such education is of particular importance in the context of the national Sexual Health Strategy that is currently being developed by the Department of Health. One limitation of the Lifeskills survey is that it does not provide information on the *quality* of RSE provision. However, the findings of the Lifeskills survey can be complemented by the more qualitative findings from other sources such as the recent evaluation of SPHE/RSE by the DES Inspectorate.

Schools display a high compliance in relation to child protection requirements. Formal procedures in this area are complemented by schools' efforts to ensure that children are equipped with the key knowledge and skills to assist them in the event that they encounter a child protection issue. The data also indicate that schools are very active in equipping their pupils with the key skills they require to make informed choices about substance use. Schools are also confident that their pupils are developing the capabilities to respond appropriately in the event of an incidence of bullying.

4.2 Challenges identified

While the data affirm the very positive contribution that schools continue to make to the many policy areas outlined above, the evidence also suggests that there is significant room for improvement in some areas.

One issue to emerge in relation to healthy eating is the need to promote a wider variety of healthier alternatives to 'junk' food in schools. This is an issue relevant to post primary schools in particular. The prominence of vending machines and school shops that sell 'junk' food in a significant cohort of post primary schools is a particular problem. Schools should proactively address this important area, particularly in light of the growing obesity phenomenon. The DES will communicate with schools in relation to the use of vending machines.

Linked to the above, and common to both primary and post primary schools, is the need to encourage more schools to participate in the Department of Health/HSE's 'Health Promoting Schools' initiative. In 2012 only 40% of primary and post primary schools who responded to the survey reported that they were participating in this initiative. The DES will work with the Department of Health to encourage more schools to become 'Health Promoting Schools'.

Schools are very active in promoting physical activity outside of school hours. However, the data indicate that 90% of respondent post primary schools are not meeting the mandatory recommendation (2 hours per week) for formal P.E. delivery within the curriculum at junior and senior cycle. The evidence indicates that, despite the mandatory status of P.E., respondent schools are currently not meeting the recommendations in relation to the P.E. curriculum at post primary level. The position has actually deteriorated since the last Lifeskills survey in 2009. It should be noted that a new junior cycle short course in P.E. is being developed by the National

Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). This new short course will be available to schools from September 2014. The NCCA is also currently developing a specification for P.E. at senior cycle. It is intended that this will comprise two elements: Leaving Certificate Physical Education is being developed as a full Leaving Certificate subject, while Senior Cycle Physical Education is designed to provide schools with a framework within which they can design a physical education programme for those students who do not choose to take physical education as part of their Leaving Certificate.

4.3 Opportunities identified

Schools are making significant improvements in delivering road safety education to their pupils but it is clear that more advantage could be taken by schools of the excellent resources that are available to assist delivery in this area, particularly those that have been developed by the Road Safety Authority.

Schools could also take more advantage of the RSE Trust pack that has been specifically developed to assist in the delivery of the RSE programme at senior cycle.

The DES is very aware of the many pressures that schools are facing, administrative and otherwise. It is therefore very appreciative of the schools that took the time to complete the Lifeskills survey. It is hoped that such cooperation will continue into the future. In order to assist in this regard, the Department is committing to ensure that the next Lifeskills survey will be more streamlined. It is also hoped to incorporate some opportunities for student feedback into the next survey which is scheduled for 2015. At post primary level, the data indicate that approximately 97% of respondent schools have a student council in place. The student councils would appear to be a potential medium for representing the student voice at post primary level in the next Lifeskills survey. Consideration will be given to how the student voice can be most effectively incorporated at primary level.

Department of Education and Skills
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