A.S.T.I Submission

To

National Action Plan against Racism

July, 2021

ASTI Submission to National Action Plan against Racism

Summary and Recommendations

Schools perform a **unique role** in the socialisation of young people. They constitute a safe space for learning to live with, respect and interrogate diversity. The current Intercultural Education Strategy ended in 2015: a new strategy needs to be developed in order to provide guidance to schools in the context of new societal understandings of racism and specific actions in the second National Action Plan.

The **international norms and definitions** established in the UN Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) must frame and infuse the National Plan: they should not be compromised by privileging of one form of racism over another.

The dominant **ethos of inclusion** across the school sector, underpinned by legislation, societal norms and schools' mission and vision is a real strength in our society. Schools need more human resources in order to create truly inclusive learning communities. and must be acknowledged and supported by the National Action Plan.

Teacher professionalism is the key to quality education. Teachers are agents of change for young people: when they teach, they motivate, support, assist and socialise young people. Career-long learning or CPD is critical to maintain the highest standards of professionalism. The dominant CPD transmission model is not fit for purpose: teachers need professional time to engage in formal and informal learning during their working year. Actions in the National Action Plan must require that the Department of Education and Skills provide a dedicated training programme.

School leadership is determinative on all aspects of school life, in particular the school's ethos and culture. The personal commitment of school leaders and other members of the school management teams to an ethos of diversity is critical in realising an inclusive school culture. A defining feature of school leadership in recent years is role expansion and intensification in response to rapidly changing societal and educational demands. Schools need more leadership posts and post-holders need time to conduct their post duties.

The **Inter-cultural Education Strategy 2010 -2015** had many strong features, not least its emphasis on the role of school leadership, teacher professional development and the need for ongoing research. Regrettably, this Strategy never received the system-supports such as strengthened school leadership, teacher training, dedicated resources for English as an Additional Language (EAL) or system-wide research. The second national Action Plan should require a new Strategy and allocation of schools and the teaching profession.

Measures to address racism in the school context are comprehend in the **2013 National Anti-Bullying Procedures**. While they provide a clear framework for responding to allegations or incidents of bullying (racism is defined as identity-based bullying), concerns are growing around the capacity of schools to engage in the recommended prevention and intervention approaches. The latter are central to the concept of the inclusive school and the creation of a

positive school environment which foregrounds respect, dignity and safety for all students. School leadership and teacher training are the key requirements.

Anti-Traveller prejudice is insufficiently acknowledged in school communities and, as such, remains un-addressed. School leadership and teacher training are absolutely critical to ensuring that all students, in particular those from ethnic minorities, feel safe, respected and valued in school. The Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy must be implemented in full in order to address the systemic prejudice, discrimination and exclusion which these communities face.

Having **good equality data** is important to address racism and to monitor the differential educational and post-school outcomes for migrant students. The fact that the State Examinations Commission does not provide disaggregated data is problematic as so much education policy is informed by data relating to examination outcomes.

Diversity in society must be reflected by **diversity in the teaching profession.** Barriers to entry to the profession include costs of teacher training, lack of knowledge re third level education/cultural capital, and high standards for entry to the training courses. The Department of Education must continue to support interventions to remove these barriers for school-leavers.

Introduction

The ASTI welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the public consultation process on the second National Action Plan against Racism. This consultation constitutes a vitally important moment for our polity and society. Globally, we are witnessing dangerous trends of exclusionary nationalism, racism, xenophobia, misogyny, reductions in protections for minorities and a disregard for international human rights norms and protections. No country is immune to these trends. We cannot be complacent in Ireland that our historical experience of colonialism renders us less susceptible. Ireland in recent decades has been a leader in progressive social change aimed at realising the values of equality, respect, diversity, dignity for all. Internationally, Ireland is highly respected for our development aid policy which is focused on human dignity and leaving no one behind. Ireland's recent election of the UN Security Council is a testament to this international esteem.

Racism in Ireland

The ASTI highly commends the clarity with which the Consultation Paper defines racism, its systemic nature and intersectionality with other inequalities and oppressive practices. The international norms established in the UN Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) must frame and infuse the National Plan: they should not be compromised by any privileging of one form of racism over another. The Guiding Principles in the Interim Report to the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth are premised on these international norms and are indicative of the commitment of the Irish government to confront racism in our diverse and democratic state.

The transformative role of education

As a teacher trade union, ASTI is deeply aware of the transformative role of education in shaping the values and social practices in our society. It strongly believes that education and young people must be central to the National Action Plan. The positive experience of Irish schools in integrating migrant students, in particular since the 2004 EU enlargement, has been well documented.[1] The dominant ethos of inclusion across the school sector, underpinned by legislation, societal norms and schools' mission and vision is a real strength in our society and must be acknowledged and supported by the National Action Plan. At the same time, there are strong and legitimate critiques around this process which must be addressed. Societal understanding of racism is constantly evolving. In particular, young people from diasporic migrant families are articulating their experience of school and growing up in Ireland. This voice is hugely important in informing policy and the political actors. In this submission, the ASTI will focus on those areas which it considers are most central to ensuring that our schools are enable to become the inclusive communities they aspire to be.

Teacher professionalism

Education is, at its core, based on relationships. Learning is primarily a social practice as has been dramatically demonstrated by the shift to remote teaching over the last twelve months. Teachers are agents of change for young people: when they teach, they motivate, support, assist and socialise young people. Teacher professionalism in Ireland is internationally acknowledged and is the driving force for the quality education that is our hallmark. At the same time, the state does not provide sufficient supports to the profession to support their continuously evolving role. Teachers have heavy workloads and work in institutions which are acknowledged as experiencing 'innovation overload'.[2] Supports such as access to CPD, professional time for non-teaching work, career progression and mobility are significantly under-developed in comparison to other EU and OECD systems.

Career-long learning or CPD is particularly significant in the context of the National Action Plan against Racism. Teaching culturally diverse classrooms requires deep understanding of cultural diversity. Understanding relates to teachers' beliefs and values which form the foundation of their relationships with students. As part of any teacher professional development, teachers need time to engage in explicit reflection on their beliefs and values in dialogue with their peers. This is, moreover, an iterative process as teachers gains experience and pedagogical skills. Unfortunately, the dominant model of teacher professional development in Ireland is the 'transmission model' wherein information is provided to teachers on new curriculum. Increasingly, the Department of Education is providing this model outside of teachers' working time. This model is no longer fit for purpose: teachers need time in their working year to engage in formal and informal learning to address the complex and inter-related issues shaping their students' lives and development – wellbeing, online lives, existential angst in relation to climate change, relationships and sexuality, diverse learning needs including disabilities and special educational needs, ethnic status, community environments and educational disadvantage, misogyny *and* racism. While this is not an issue which the National Action can directly address, it is

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[1] The role of principals in creating inclusive school environments: insights from community national schools in Ireland: School Leadership & Management: Vol 38, No 4 (tandfonline.com) (this 2018 paper provides a comprehensive résumé of Irish research to that date)

[2] http://www.asti.ie/document-library/teachers-work-work-demands-and-work-intensity-march-2018/

important that the ASTI identifies in this submission the barriers to teacher professionalism and transformative practices in the classroom.

School leadership

School leadership is determinative on all aspects of school life, in particular the school's ethos and culture. The personal commitment of school leaders and other members of the school management teams to an ethos of diversity is critical in realising an inclusive school culture. A defining feature of school leadership in recent years is role expansion and intensification in response to rapidly changing societal and educational demands. At the same time, school leadership is significantly under-resourced in second-level schools. The ASTI has reiterated its concern that not only is there insufficient numbers of middle leadership posts (Assistant Principals), in voluntary secondary schools the latter do not have reduced teaching timetables to enable them to engage in their post duties. This is an untenable situation and is undermining the capacity of schools to meet needs and achieve goals.

Curriculum matters

The curriculum defines what and how students learn. It is by its nature multi-layered and depends on high levels of teacher professionalism to meet all its learning goals. Curriculum change has been a constant feature of second-level education for over a decade. The implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle in 2015 was a fraught process for many reasons. The key lesson from this experience is that curriculum change must simultaneously be accompanied by comprehensive implementation supports and strategy. The need for curriculum to be responsive to cultural diversity has been underlined by the introduction of the Traveller History and Culture in Education Bill, 2018. The Inter-cultural Education Strategy 2010 -2015 had many strong features, not least its emphasis on the role of school leadership, teacher professional development and the need for ongoing research. Regrettably, this Strategy is rarely referenced in the school context: not because its actions and recommendations are not relevant but, rather, it never received the system-supports such as strengthened school leadership, teacher training, dedicated resources for English as an Additional Language (EAL) or system-wide research. The second national Action Plan should contain actions to ensure that schools receive the necessary supports to implement a revised Inter-cultural Education Strategy.

Anti-racism policy in schools

The Equal Status Acts 2000 – 2018 provide protections for individuals from certain kinds of discrimination, harassment and sexual harassment that can happen in education situations in Ireland. The 2018 Admissions to Schools Act proscribes discrimination in terms of admission to a school. The 2013 National Anti-Bullying Procedures are explicit in terms of racist bullying. Bullying is defined as unwanted negative behaviour, verbal, psychological or physical, conducted by an individual or group against another person (or persons) and which is repeated over time. These procedures make clear that this definition includes cyber-bullying and identity-based bullying such as homophobic bullying and racist bullying. Research by the DCU Anti-Bullying Centre confirms that while the 2013 Procedures provide a clear framework for responding to allegations or incidents of bullying, concerns exist around the capacity of schools to engage in the prevention and intervention approaches recommended in the

Procedures. The latter are central to the concept of the inclusive school and the creation of a positive school environment which foregrounds respect, dignity and safety for all students. The ASTI can absolutely confirm this research finding. Austerity measures in the last decade has resulted in second-level schools losing middle-management posts. The latter are key to ensuring that whole-school policies such as that specified in the 2013 Procedures are delivered, monitored and regularly reviewed.[3]

In its submission to the Departmental consultation on the 2013 Anti-Bullying Action Plan, the ASTI underlined the need to support the Procedures with a national programme of inservice for teachers. This did not happen. The need for such a programme has not diminished with time. If anything, the changed societal landscape - in particular the growing emphasis on mental health and wellbeing, living safely and ethically in the online space, the need to have specific measures to protect the dignity of minorities and of LBGT+ students - is infinitely more complex and challenging than that which prevailed as recently as 2013. Huge advances have also taken place in relation to research on anti-bullying intervention measures, while at system level, schools must implement a Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice. The latter identifies bullying, aggression and violence as key risk factors for students' wellbeing. The Framework is a complex and multi-faceted approach to student wellbeing. It is predicated on complex organisational practices such as 'collaborative problem-solving approaches', 'school-based screening and intervention tools to assess social, emotional and behavioural difficulties', 'policies and plans setting out how inclusive practice will be implemented in a way that fosters school connectedness, acceptance and celebration of diversity'. This Framework was not accompanied by a national training programme either. No additional resources in the form of additional middle-management posts or Guidance Counselling posts were provided to ensure the effective implementation of this Framework in each school. Schools cannot meet these holistic policy goals in the absence of significant investment in human resources in our schools.

Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy

The National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017- 2021 is an ambitious strategy which recognises the severe marginalisation, disadvantage and discrimination faced by both ethnic minorities. The educational statistics are stark: 13% of Traveller children complete second-level education compared to 92% in the settled community. Of those Travellers who drop out of second level education, 55% have left by the age of 15. The number of Traveller children who progress to third level education represents just 1% of the Traveller community. Moreover, it noted a reluctance to continue in mainstream education as Travellers feel that it is not associated with any positive outcomes because of the high level of discrimination faced by Travellers when seeking employment.

The Strategy states that a key reason for such low levels of educational progression are the negative experiences of Traveller children in school. Anti-Traveller prejudice is insufficiently acknowledged in school communities and, as such, remains un-addressed. School leadership and teacher training are absolutely critical to ensuring that all students, in particular those from ethnic minorities, feel safe, respected and valued in school. The recent Ombudsman for Children's report on the living conditions

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[3] https://www.asti.ie/document-library/school-bullying-and-the-impact-on-mental-health/

for children in a local authority halting site graphically underlines how the former impact on Traveller children's education. [4]

Good quality data

Having good equality data is important to address racism and to monitor the differential educational and post-school outcomes for migrant students. It is of note that the Interim Report is adamant that ethnic equality monitoring is a key tool in uncovering the prevalence of racial discrimination and its impact on lives. It is ironic that information on the achievement of 15-year-olds from ethnic minorities is provided by the OECD PISA biennial studies rather than from the State Examinations Commission. The latter does not provide disaggregated data and, in the opinion of the ASTI, this is problematic as so much education policy is informed by data relating to examination outcomes.[5] The Department of Education's Statement of Strategy 2021 – 2023 underlines the need for policy to be underpinned by evidence, research and evaluation. [6]

Diversity in the teaching profession

There is unanimity in the research on the need for the teaching profession to reflect the cultural diversity of society.[7] This is a particularly important area of education policy and it is a matter of concern that the 2020 Teacher Supply Action Plan does not reference this need. In Ireland, 99% student teachers identify as 'white Irish', as compared to 85% of the population. In 2014, only one person from the 2,437 students who applied for primary teacher training identified as being from the Traveller community.[8] Entry to the teaching profession is largely predicated by social class. Apart from the high costs of initial teacher education for individuals (the 2-year PME ranges from €11,000 to €16,000), barriers which migrant school-leavers face include lack of familial experience of third-level education, knowledge of the Irish education system – both forms of cultural capital - and the high academic standards required to access initial teacher education.

The research is unequivocal on the benefits of having a diverse teaching profession. In particular, it highlights that teacher from diverse backgrounds set high expectations for students from marginalised groups, and act as mentors and advocates for them, often with transformative results. Moreover, it has also been shown that the advantages of a more diverse teaching profession extend beyond the experience of students from minority groups, bringing crucial benefits to the entire student cohort. This is because internalised and unconscious beliefs about inferiority and difference are overcome when children see people from disadvantaged groups as professionals and authority figures. In 2017 the Department of Education in partnership with the Higher Education Authority, funded six centres of teaching excellence across Ireland, under the Programme for Access to High Education (Path) scheme, to widen access to initial teacher education for underrepresented groups. The Department must continue with interventions of this nature to ensure diversity in the profession.

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[4] https://www.oco.ie/news/ombudsman-for-childrens-office-launches-no-end-in-site-an-investigation-into-the-living-conditions-of-children-on-a-local-authority-halting-site/

[5] https://www.oecd.org/pisa/

[6] https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/56137-department-of-education-statement-of-strategy-2021-2023/

[7] http://publications.europa.eu/resource/cellar/ee14cd84-ffa7-11e5-b713-01aa75ed71a1.0003.01/DOC_1

[8] https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/lessons-in-diversity-the-changing-face-of-teaching-in-ireland-1.4120546

Conclusion

Addressing and preventing bullying, including identity-based bullying or racism, is a priority for school leaders and teachers. At the same time, policy makers must acknowledge the barriers to schools' capacities to achieve the complex mission of inclusion and wellbeing. In this submission, ASTI has highlighted these barriers. It is simply not sustainable to attribute more and more responsibilities to schools and *not* provide the necessary resources to sustain their capacity to discharge same. 'Innovation overload' is an acknowledged problem in our education system. Lack of investment is leading to heavy workload, high levels of occupational stress and is damaging morale. This entrenched negative cycle must be halted. Schools will no doubt feature prominently in the second National Action Plan against Racism. They perform a unique role in the socialisation of young people and constitute a safe space for learning to live with, respect and value diversity. It is time to support them in this vital work.