An Exploration of Student's Wellbeing in a DEIS Post-Primary School within the context of the new Wellbeing Curriculum at Junior Cycle

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An Exploration of Student's Wellbeing in a DEIS Post-Primary School within the context of the new Wellbeing Curriculum at Junior Cycle

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7th October 2019
Declaration:

The author hereby declares that this thesis is his own work.
No element of the work described in this dissertation has been
previously submitted for any degree in the University of
Limerick or in any other institution.

Signature:________________________________
Acknowledgments

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## Glossary of Terms

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASTI</td>
<td>Association of Secondary teachers Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPD</td>
<td>Continuous Professional Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCYA</td>
<td>Department of Children and Youth Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DES</td>
<td>Department of Education and Skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>FG</td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>IGC</td>
<td>Institute of Guidance Counsellors</td>
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<tr>
<td>JC</td>
<td>Junior Cycle</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCCA</td>
<td>National Council for Curriculum and Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCGE</td>
<td>National Centre for Guidance and Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PISA</td>
<td>Programme for International Student Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSI</td>
<td>The Psychological Society of Ireland</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPHE</td>
<td>Social, Personal and Health Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>SWB</td>
<td>Subjective Wellbeing</td>
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<tr>
<td>TY</td>
<td>Transition Year</td>
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<tr>
<td>WSA</td>
<td>Whole School Approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UL</td>
<td>University of Limerick</td>
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Abstract

The current research aims to explore the phenomenon of wellbeing from the student perspective and identify possible impacts, school supports, and areas for improvements within one DEIS post-primary school. Wellbeing has been highlighted as an indicator of societal progress and thus been referred to as a new paradigm of development (O’Brien 2008; Bach and Scott 2018; Thorburn 2018). The wellbeing of the students has been brought into sharper focus due to the increased prevalence of societal issues manifesting within the school setting (Hearne et al. 2018). Consequently, the Department of Education and Skills (2018) aim for wellbeing to be at the core of the ethos of every school and education institute by 2023. The recent Wellbeing Guidelines (NCCA 2017) outline this new curriculum and offer support in planning and developing a coherent Wellbeing programme. The study was anchored within this Wellbeing Curriculum with a specific focus of the study resting on the six indicators of wellbeing as proposed by the NCCA (2017). However, a review of the literature in this study highlights issues such as a lack of a clear definition of the wellbeing term which led to implications for policy drafting. The literature also discusses the role of the guidance counsellor as well as the whole school approach in supporting the wellbeing of the students in school (NCCA 2017; NCGE 2018).

A mixed methods approach was used for the collection of data. This involved online surveys to the Junior Cycle cohort along with focus groups with transition year (TY) students who recently competed the Junior Cycle. It was felt this method would garner the most appropriate response to the research questions. Morse (2003) describes mixed methods research as being able to obtain a more complete picture of human behaviour and experience which leads the researcher to achieve their research goals quicker and more comprehensively.

The research findings conclude that the new Wellbeing Programme is relevant to supporting students SWB. However, according to the findings, clearer communication is required to explicate the relevance of the programme to students in schools so they fully comprehend its rationale for supporting their wellbeing. Furthermore, a whole school approach is fundamental in the support and development of a student’s SWB as opposed to the sole responsibility for its delivery being placed on a school’s guidance service. Finally, a number of recommendations are put forward arising from the study.
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research topic and presents a justification for the study and the positionality of the researcher within it. Additionally, it will introduce the aim and objectives of the study, methodology, and provide an outline of the thesis.

1.1 Context and Justification of the Research Study

This research study explores the subjective wellbeing (SWB) of students in a DEIS post-primary school. Wellbeing and schooling has only recently been aligned, and prior to this schools primarily focused on subject knowledge (Thorburn 2018). It is also only recently that Irish policy makers have determine that SWB should be an integral aspect of a student’s school experience (DES 2018; NCCA 2017).

In 2010, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) carried out a consultation process with regard to change within Junior Cycle education (Ryan 2018). What emerged from this process was a concern for the SWB of students during a critical period in their development. Following on from this process, the NCCA released the Framework for Junior Cycle which identified Wellbeing as a curricular area (NCCA 2017). Included within this curriculum programme are Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE), Physical Education (PE), and Guidance. Additionally, other subject areas and learning experiences were to be included to enhance and support the SWB of the students. Schools were instructed to provide 300 hours of Wellbeing upon its introduction in 2017 building up to 400 hours by 2020 with schools being given the autonomy to best decide and plan the allocation of these hours (NCCA 2017).

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) outlined its vision for the implementation of the new Wellbeing programme in its Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice (2018). It envisions Ireland to be the leader in the area of wellbeing in education and having Wellbeing as the core ethos of every school by 2023. Looking after the wellbeing of young
people in our schools is a positive step in the right direction, with research suggesting that students with higher levels of wellbeing tend to have better cognitive outcomes, leading to greater academic achievement (Smyth 2015). Furthermore, higher levels of SWB lead to greater self-esteem, optimism, resilience, and positive mental health (UCD and Headstrong 2009). As the Wellbeing programme is still relatively new, there is a lack of empirical research to determine its impact on student’s lives. The current research aims to explore the issue of wellbeing from the student perspective and identify possible impacts, school supports, and areas for improvements within one DEIS school. This exploration will be based on the new Wellbeing programme and the six indicators of wellbeing: active, responsible, aware, connected, resilience and respected (NCCA 2017).

The Wellbeing guidelines emphasise the importance of a whole school approach for the promotion of student wellbeing (NCCA 2017). It includes positive relationships between teacher and students, the ethos, the policies, and the curriculum. Current policy identifies guidance counsellors as integral to the promotion of positive mental health (DES 2013), as they deal with a variety of issues that impact the SWB of students on a daily basis in post primary schools. They provide guidance on personal and social, educational, and vocational needs (DES 2005a; IGC 2018). Guidance counsellors also play a key role through whole school guidance planning (Hearne et al. 2016). For this reason, guidance related learning is a crucial aspect of the new Wellbeing programme. However, responsibility does not lie solely with the guidance counsellor, but with the whole school. The whole school is still responsible for promoting and supporting the SWB of all students through their daily interactions and through school policies (NCCA 2017). As such, the implementation of Wellbeing at curriculum level is primarily the responsibility of teachers of CSPE, SPHE, PE, and the guidance counsellor.

1.2 Positionality of the Researcher

As the researcher it is imperative to acknowledge my position in order to inform readers of my stance, both metaphorically and literally (Thomas 2013). The researcher is a trainee guidance counsellor and a woodwork teacher for the past 15 years. The researcher is very close to the research topic and has taken a reflexive stance throughout the research process, which will be addressed in some of the upcoming chapters. Recent opportunities have
enabled me to experience new teaching subjects such as Wellbeing and PE. This experience reinvigorated my passion for helping and caring for students and, hence, my interest in the research topic. It is hoped the findings will enable schools to identify strengths and limitations in relation to enhancing the SWB of students.

1.3 Methodology

A mixed methods approach was chosen for this research study, which combines both quantitative data and qualitative data (Bryman 2012; Mertens 2010). The quantitative data was gathered through the use of an online survey based on an example survey in the Wellbeing Guidelines (NCCA 2017). This survey is designed for students to reflect on their wellbeing, using a self-report Likert type scale. It was disseminated to a cohort of Junior Cycle students currently undertaking the newly introduced Junior Cycle. The qualitative data was gathered through the use of two focus groups, involving students in Transition Year (TY) who had just completed the new Junior Cycle, including the Wellbeing programme. The findings from both data sources were triangulated by cross checking both results and looking for.

1.4 Aims and Objectives of Research

The overall aim of this study is to explore students’ SWB in the context of a DEIS post-primary school, specifically the new Wellbeing programme and its six indicators in terms of supporting the students’ SWB.

The objectives are:

1. Review the relevant literature including policy, research and practice sources to provide a context to underpin the research study.
2. Explore the views of students’ on their SWB in a DEIS post-primary school.
3. Bather data from two different data sources (i.e. students in 1st, 2nd and 3rd year and TY students).
4. Arising from the findings of the study, identify recommendations for future policy, practice and research.
1.5 Outline of Thesis

Chapter 1: This chapter introduced the research topic and provided justification for undertaking such a study. Furthermore, it addressed the researcher’s position in the study, along with the aim and objectives and methodology, before providing an overview of the six chapters.

Chapter 2: The literature review critically analyses the relevant literature relating to the topic. It involves a range of sources and provides a point of reference for the research questions, methodology and primary data findings.

Chapter 3: The methodology chapter describes the theoretical and practical application of the research design. It identifies the research questions and provides a rationale for the selected research paradigm. It examines the methods used for data collection and analysis, as well as the validity, reliability, reflexivity and ethical issues in the study.

Chapter 4: The findings chapter is presented in two sections. The findings from the online survey with Junior Cycle students is addressed first, followed by the findings from the focus group with TY students.

Chapter 5: The discussion chapter provides a critical interpretation of the primary data findings, in relation to the literature reviewed.

Chapter 6: The concluding chapter summarises the main findings of the research study. It provides a number of recommendations in terms of policy, practice, and future research on the topic investigated. It also outlines the reflexivity and personal learning of the researcher.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

Bell and Waters (2018) suggest that researchers can learn a lot from other researchers during a literature review process. With this in mind, this literature review chapter aims to critically evaluate previous research and discourse on the topic of wellbeing in post-primary schools. It will also analyse policy and theory associated with this expansive topic and derive findings and any gaps related to this study. In concurrence with Hart (2018, p.67), the goal of this current research is to “satisfy my curiosity” and provide a better understanding of students’ wellbeing in a post-primary context. It is hoped that through this literature review a greater understanding of wellbeing will emerge (Jesson et al. 2011).

A logical approach was taken to the literature review, which involved analysing journal articles, books, policies and theories associated with wellbeing. This included definitions, international policy, national policy and theorists. The review is divided into four thematic sections. The first section examines literature on subjective wellbeing, including definitions and concepts. The next section addresses both international and national policies, including the recent DES policy (DES 2018) introduced into Irish post-primary schools in 2018. The third section examines adolescent developmental perspectives. Finally, the guidance counsellor’s role in the context of a whole school approach, as well as student wellbeing, is addressed in the fourth section.

2.1 Subjective Wellbeing (SWB)

This section will discuss the origins, definitions, conceptualisation, and benefits of subjective wellbeing (SWB). The purpose of this section is to inform the reader of this elusive term and how it subsequently led to changes in national policy and in the Junior Cycle curriculum, all of which placed a greater emphasis on the wellbeing of the student (NCCA 2017).

2.1.1 Positive Psychology and Wellbeing

It is beyond the scope of this study to comprehensively analyse and discuss the philosophical origins of happiness and wellbeing that predate the time of the Ancient Greeks. Nevertheless,
it would be remiss to ignore the concepts that scholars understand that lead to the ‘good life’. Two prominent paradigms of philosophy with regard to the concept of wellbeing are known as *hedonism* and *eudaimonia*. Hedonism generally reflects the view that wellbeing consists of pleasure or happiness (Garson 2016). In addition to this, Kahneman et al. (1999), in his publication, clearly suggests that, within this paradigm, the terms well-being and hedonism are essentially equivalent. Eudaimonia, however, is regarded as something more than happiness and consists of the actualisations of human potentials (Waterman 1993; Howard 2000; Huta and Waterman 2014). Where these two paradigms diverge is the view of virtue and wellbeing being interdependent. O’Brien (2008) argues that a society, which has a hedonistic view of wellbeing, runs the risk of ignoring social injustices and caring for others. Ultimately, without virtue, there can be no society. However, contemporary psychologists argue that hedonism has evolved, from bodily pleasures, to a broad focus on self-interest (Ryan and Deci 2001). Huta and Waterman (2013) posit that although both concepts are central to the study of wellbeing, their definitions are sometimes vague. This presents challenges such as the looseness with which hedonia and eudemonia are sometimes discussed. This “looseness” can thus affect the research and empirical work of scholars in the area of wellbeing (Huta and Waterman 2013, p.1426).

From the 1960’s onwards, the field of positive psychology has emerged from the study of these two paradigms (O’Brien 2008). According to Seligman and Csikzentmihalyi (2000), the goal of positive psychology is to create a field focused on human wellbeing and the conditions that allow people to thrive. It focuses on the meaning of happiness and what is right with people, as opposed to the ‘what was wrong’ (Seligman 2011). Equally, Gable and Haidt (2005, p.104) state that “positive psychology is the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people”.

According to the literature, the phenomenon of wellbeing is undeniably complex, often resulting in a difficulty in establishing a true definition for it (Amerijckx and Humblet 2014; Mashford-Scott et al. 2012; Bourke and Geldins 2007). In positive psychology, the term wellbeing serves as an umbrella term for happiness, health, optimal functioning, and flourishing, at both the individual and national level, in both positive and negative conditions (Wong 2011). Wellbeing is more often described thus as a set of constructs rather than a single definition (Dodge et al. 2012). For example, flourishing, appears to have become synonymous with wellbeing and is described as the apex in wellbeing (Gaffney 2011;
Seligman 2011; Coffey et al. 2014). Thomas (2009, p.11) argues that wellbeing is “intangible, difficult to define and even harder to measure”. For this reason, the complex term wellbeing can hinder progress in the development of policies and strategies for the improvement of students’ wellbeing (O’Brien and O'Shea 2017).

However, the positive psychology movement is not without its critics and there are many who believe the concept of positive psychology to be naïve at best. Sheldon and King (2001, p.216) define positive psychology as “nothing more than the scientific study of ordinary human strengths and virtues”. It has also received much criticism for its sometimes “incoherent and muddled” considerations regarding the foundations of its activity (Joseph 2015, p.38). Similarly, Gable and Haidt (2005) suggest that the rest of psychology must be assumed negative if we need to call this positive psychology. Furthermore, Miller (2008) argues that positive psychology only works for people who are naturally optimistic with a positive disposition. Norem agrees that forcing optimism on a person with a propensity for pessimism can actually damage them (Norem 1993). However, regardless of the critics of positive psychology, it is still viewed as an important factor due to the media attention it receives and the number of people and policy it influences (APA 2011).

2.1.2 Prominent Theoretical Perspectives

Diener (1984), who is credited with the advancement of positive psychology and the area of subjective wellbeing (SWB), describes it as how one thinks his/her life is desirable regardless of how others see it, commonly known as ‘life satisfaction’. Diener’s concept of SWB falls within the hedonic perspective, which is fundamentally about maximising pleasure and avoiding pain (Albuquerque 2010). Diener states personality, material resources, and social relationships are considered critical determinants of SWB and so the importance of living in cooperative and trust-based societies is stressed (Tov & Diener, 2009). To this end, Diener’s theory of SWB does not go beyond the benefits that a good society has on the individual level (Arcidiacono and Di Martino 2016). According to another leading figure in positive psychology, Park posits the following:

Life satisfaction is the cognitive component of subjective wellbeing and plays an important role in positive development as an indicator, a predictor, a mediator/moderator, and an outcome.

(Park 2004, p.25)
Park and Diener’s views highlight that life satisfaction and positive affect are mitigating factors against the “development of psychological and behavioural problems among youth” (Park 2004, p.25).

A diverging view of wellbeing by Ryff (1989, 2014) embeds it instead within the concept of eudaimonia. Ryff shifts the focus from a satisfaction with life to living a life with meaning, focusing on an individual’s ethical life values and a more social view. She posits an “environmental mastery”, which pertains to the individual’s capacity to choose and change contexts to suit themselves (Ryff 1989). However, it is argued by Arcidiacono and Di Martino (2016) that this theory relies too heavily on an individual’s capacity to intervene and change contexts with the resources they have.

A further contribution to the understanding and conceptualisation of SWB is Sen and Nussbaum’s Capabilities Approach (Sen, 2009; 1999; Nussbaum, 2003; 2011; Nussbaum & Sen, 1993). This view outlines relevant functional dimensions that range from preventing premature death to more complex dimensions such as integrating into society or being happy. The OECD (2015) suggests that its framework for measuring wellbeing is partly based upon Sen’s capabilities approach to wellbeing. Like Sen, Nassbaum (2011) endorses a Capabilities Approach that is more socially just and an alternative to GDP approaches. She hypothesises a ten-part approach, including bodily health, emotions, senses, play, and affiliation. She believes focus should be placed on creating wellbeing capabilities for all persons, with education at the core of this (Nassbaum 2011). Nassbaum is also aware that her approach may be represented as wanting to impose Western values on other countries but argues that they have close links to the human rights movement and are not specifically Western ideals (Thorburn 2018). It must also be acknowledged that the Capabilities Approach also relies on personal achievement and individual judgement, as well as freedom of choice (Gore 1997).

Finally, Seligman’s (2005, 2011) wellbeing theory (WBT), which is one of the most prominent views in the literature, is quoted in the NCCA’s (2017) Wellbeing Guidelines as the ultimate goal for wellbeing. It purports that wellbeing is related to life satisfaction. He puts forward a five pillar framework (PERMA), consisting of positive emotions (P), engagement (E), relationships (R), meaning (M), and achievement (A). These are a combination of both hedonic and eudaimonia concepts. He hypothesises that when people engage in activities associated with these pillars, they tend to improve their wellbeing and flourish. However, Miller (2008) argues that this simplistic model assumes that people are
capable of setting goals and have enough intrinsic motivation to engage in these activities. Others argue elements that influence wellbeing such as resilience and physical activity are absent from this model (APA 2010).

To conclude, there are some similarities between theories, which led Kozina and Straus (2017) to state that several of the models of wellbeing overlap to some extent. In the next section, a discussion on how wellbeing has been brought into sharper focus in both international and national policy will be provided.

2.2 Policy Perspectives on Wellbeing

With the wellbeing movement gaining currency and momentum based on evidence from psychological studies, policy makers began to move their attention from earlier measures of progress to the area of wellbeing (O’Brien 2008; Thorburn 2018). This section will discuss key policies, both international and national, and their influence on the Irish post-primary school context.

2.2.1 International Policy on Wellbeing Measurement

Internationally, the focus on subjective wellbeing has intensified in recent years and thus wellbeing has ‘emerged as a new paradigm of development’ (Bache and Scott 2018, p.4). Primarily, the impetus for this had been a growing dissatisfaction with Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as the dominant measure of progress. According to Diener (2009, p.2), if “modern countries were to make progress, they needed measures to gauge it and subjective wellbeing was argued to be one such measure”. However, some anthropologists and sociologists questioned how this idea of subjective wellbeing would reflect true human progress (Diener 2009). Regardless, the Social Indicator Movement began to gather momentum following the Second World War (Offer 2000) and politicians and policy-makers sought new policy frames to challenge the dominance of GDP growth as an indicator of societal progress (Bache and Scott 2018). Nonetheless, the development of social surveys that purported to influence policy had limited success, as it was found to be difficult to marshal such diverse statistics (Bache and Scott 2018). In the late 1980’s, there was increased interest and, more importantly, better understanding of wellbeing and a growing acceptance of the value of measuring wellbeing for public policy purposes (Bache and Reardon 2016).
New frameworks were therefore created to measure wellbeing internationally. Important developments have included the UN’s *Convention on the Rights of Children* in 1989, the *EU’s GDP and Beyond Initiative* set up in 2007, and the OECD’s *Better Life* global platform in 2011 (Bache and Scott 2018).

### 2.2.2 International Policy on Wellbeing in School

It is evident that wellbeing policy is driven by various cultural contexts and by different objective and subjective influences (Thorburn 2018). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) agree with this view, with the following definition:

> Students’ well-being refers to the psychological, cognitive, social and physical functioning and capabilities that students need to live a happy and fulfilling life

(OECD 2015, p.37)

This definition is focused on the school context and is taken from the Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA) in 2015, which suggests wellbeing is “first and foremost defined by the quality of life of students” (OECD 2015, p.38). The World Health Organisation define wellbeing as:

> Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community

(WHO 2014)

UNICEF (2007, 2011) has published reports on the quality of life of young people, monitoring the wellbeing of children using six indicators: material wellbeing, health and safety, subjective wellbeing, family and peer relationships, behaviour and risk, and educational wellbeing (UNICEF 2011). In response to this, think-tanks and professional groups have been created to promote and advocate for childhood wellbeing (Matthews et al. 2015; NEF 2009). In this context, schools are considered pivotal in relating education to a child’s wellbeing (Thorburn 2018). Furthermore, O’Shaughnessy and Larson (2014) argue that there has been a paradigm shift in education. Beforehand, education was focused primarily on academic accomplishment, whereas the approach now is on education and wellbeing.
A diverging view, however, from Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) critiques the focus on the emotional wellbeing of students and the wide ranging interventions taking place in schools. They argue that schools are therapizing students. They argue that there can be a tendency for learners to become dependent upon educators for their wellbeing and instead promote a strengths based approach where public services are designed to support individuals’ needs. This approach allows teachers to focus on the health and wellbeing advantages one has, as opposed to dwelling on their concerns. Although, it has been implemented into the Australian education policy (ACARA 2015), there is a lack of empirical evidence to determine the success of its implementation (Thorburn 2018). In England, policy provides flexible curriculum arrangements where teachers are considered best placed to understand the needs of the learners (Department for Education 2013). Whilst some view this approach as enlightening, others view wellbeing-related teaching as more of an obstruction than a benefit (Formby and Wolstenholme 2012). This model has parallels to the Irish Junior Cycle model which places autonomy on the teachers to design appropriate courses and curriculums (NCCA 2017).

### 2.2.3 National Policy on Wellbeing in Post Primary Education

In this section, national policy on the development of Wellbeing within the post primary sector will be discussed. Numerous policy documents and reports linked to wellbeing have been produced in recent years that purport to support the wellbeing of students in schools. Appendix A outlines the chronological order of documents, strategies, and policies introduced from government and cross-departmental collaboration to promote wellbeing in a national perspective (DES 2018).

Since the early part of this century, studies suggest that students who have increased positive wellbeing are more likely to achieve more in school academically (Verkuyten and Thijs 2002; Gilman and Hueber 2003; Kozina and Straus 2017). For example, in a comparative study carried out by the OECD (2009), which included Ireland and 29 other nations, they tested the relationship between wellbeing and literacy in maths and reading. It found there was a significant correlation as high as r=0.63 in reading literacy, stating that “It reminds us that wellbeing matters not simply because it leads to better educational outcomes but can influence young people’s outcomes as adults” (NCCA 2017, p.10).
Weare (2000) explains that there is overwhelming evidence that students learn more effectively if they are happy in their work, have self-belief and feel connected to the school. The support of the school is a significant indicator in student wellbeing, with Smyth (2015) acknowledging that positive relationships between students and teachers can lead to better engagement in school work, a feeling of a sense of belonging to the school, and fewer disciplinary problems among the school population. Studies indicate that a student’s wellbeing can be increased through the relationship of “one good adult”. The ‘My World Survey’ carried out by University College Dublin and Headstrong between 2008-2012 emphasised the importance of this concept. Diener agrees with this sentiment, emphasising that ‘the most important determinants of positive wellbeing is having social relationships’ (2009, p.158).

The current Irish wellbeing policy in post primary education is informed by international developments, as outlined in the previous section. However, the DES is explicit in its view that wellbeing must be considered within the national context (DES 2018).

This policy promotes the use of evidence-informed practice, which brings together local experience and expertise with the best available evidence from research. It acknowledges that what works in one context may not be appropriate or feasible in another.

(DES 2018, p.9)

With the introduction of the Irish Education Act (1998), an emphasis was placed on the school’s responsibility to promote the personal development of students. One of the first steps in addressing this was the introduction of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) in 2000. One of the aims of SPHE is to promote physical, mental, and emotional health and wellbeing (DES 2000). Similar to the English equivalent of Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE), concerns were raised on the delivery of this new course. Findings from O’Higgins et al. (2007) suggested an issue with teacher engagement with the subject. Further research demonstrates the complexity of implementing policy and initiatives that address the affective domain but which are not directly exam focused (Hearne et al. 2016). In contrast, it could be argued that such flexibility within wellbeing is quite an enlightened approach to take and differs from the one size fits all policies (Thorburn 2018).

Following on from this, a cross-departmental collaboration developed the ‘Wellbeing in Post-Primary Schools: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention’ (DES,
DCYA, DOH, HSE 2013). The focus of this report was to provide practical guidance on how post-primary schools can help promote the wellbeing and mental health of students, including supporting students at risk of suicide, and identifying the concerns of those returning to school. This report also acknowledged that post-primary schools “may be viewed as the solution to all mental health problems among young people” (DES 2013, p.4).

The establishment of the NCCA Wellbeing Guidelines in 2017 followed an extensive consultation process undertaken by the Irish government over the preceding years which included the first ever National Children’s Strategy in 2000 (DES and DOH 2000). Subsequently, Hanafin et al. (2005) developed a national set of child wellbeing indicators as a key objective of the strategy. Their study was an important development in the national context, as no national studies had existed beforehand. The indicators proposed included basic health services, family relationships, public expenditure, childcare services, and attendance at school (Hanafin et al. 2005). Andrews et al. (2002) describe indicators as necessary to “enable societies to inform policy….” (p.7).

The NCCA (2017) guidelines suggest that schools can make a significant difference to a student’s wellbeing, as it is an opportunity to gain knowledge, skills, and competencies to deal with challenges that impact on their wellbeing (DES 2018). The NCCA defines wellbeing as follows:

> Student wellbeing is present when students realise their abilities, take care of their physical wellbeing, can cope with the normal stresses of life, and have a sense of belonging to a wider community.

(NCCA 2017, p.9)

This definition has parallels to the WHO’s (2014) definition of wellbeing regarding coping with the normal stresses of life and also contributing to their community.

The Wellbeing curriculum was first introduced into Junior Cycle in 2017, with a minimum of 300 hours timetabled from 2017, increasing to 400 hours as the new Junior Cycle becomes fully implemented by 2020 (NCCA 2017). The four main pillars are Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE), Physical Education (PE), SPHE and Guidance. While the language of measurement is ever present in education discourse, six indicators of wellbeing central to a student’s wellbeing have been devised (NCCA 2017). They are active, responsible, connected, resilient, respected, and aware. The indicators were adapted from the
Scottish education system, where wellbeing is well established in the system as clarified in an email to Betty McLaughlin (April 2019).

The most recent policy document in relation to the implementation of wellbeing in post-primary is the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* (DES 2018), which purports to have wellbeing as the core ethos of every school and Centre for Education by 2023. Furthermore, it envisions Ireland to be recognised as a leader in this area (DES 2018). The next section will discuss why wellbeing is being brought into the spotlight by the DES and other government agencies, along with its benefits for students.

### 2.3 Adolescence Development

Following on from the previous section on wellbeing in post-primary education, it is imperative to discuss the literature on adolescent development. This section will thus provide a critical analysis on the theories of this stage of development.

#### 2.3.1 The Self

The self consists of all the characteristics of a person (Santrock 2014). Aspects of the self the researcher will focus on in the context of wellbeing include self-understanding and self-esteem.

#### 2.3.1.1 Self-understanding in Adolescence

The development of self-understanding in adolescents is complex and involves a number of aspects of the self (Harter 2013). Piaget’s (1952) theory of cognitive development identifies this as the fourth stage known as the formal operational stage. He hypothesizes this emerges at 11 to 15 years of age, which is typical of Junior Cycle students in the Irish post-primary school context. During this stage, adolescents think more abstractly and idealistically (Santrock 2014). This new mode of thinking can lead adolescents to describe themselves in idealistic terms and create a divide from their real selves and ideal selves (Harter 2013). Furthermore, Rogers (1950) argues that too strong a discrepancy between the ideal and real self can produce a sense of failure and self-criticism, leading to mental health issues. However, Oyserman and James (2011) argue adolescents can think about a possible self which can lead to decisions and actions on who they hope to be become and who they fear they will become.
Similar to Piaget, Erikson (1968) developed a stage model of human development proposes that adolescents enter the fifth stage (12-18 years) of identity vs identity confusion, requiring them to explore who they are, what they are about, and where they are going in life (Santrock 2014). This stage involves experimentation and choices as the adolescent tries to find their place in the world (Boyd and Bee 2015). Social pressure, educational choices, sexual orientation, and too many occupational options can exacerbate this crisis and affect their wellbeing (Miller 2011). Adolescents place more emphasis on popularity and peer acceptance than they do on any other dimension of peer relationships. As they get older, from 16+, the quality of peer relationships becomes more important than popularity (Boyd and Bee 2014). Furthermore, Marcia (1994, 2002) characterizes identity crisis as a period of identity development. During this development, the adolescent will face issues such as low self-esteem, anxiety, and concerns about vocational identity (Gordon 1998). It is during these stages that the adolescent is choosing meaningful alternatives (Santrock 2014).

However, some critics of these theoretical perspectives conclude that this development is a more lengthy process than Erikson and Marcia posit (Kroger 2012; Syed 2013). Stage theories have been criticised for their simplistic views and lack of cultural cross-over. Erikson also fails to explain how individuals move from one stage to the next or how to resolve a crisis within a stage (Miller 2011). Moreover, some argue that the sense of self or self-understanding does not begin in adolescence but in infancy instead (Duriez 2012).

2.3.1.2 Self-esteem

SWB has been found to be a correlate of self-esteem across a number of studies (Kong et al 2013; Krieger et al 2015). “Self-esteem is nothing but the satisfaction or dissatisfaction with oneself” (Graff 2015, p.1). How adolescents view themselves is therefore a key component in their SWB. Similar to wellbeing, self-esteem is multi-faceted and difficult to define (Lawrence 1996). Adolescents can possess worthiness or high self-esteem in specific situations and feel inadequate or have low self-esteem in others. The adolescents’ ‘global self-esteem’ refers to their overall self-esteem. In a school context, their self-esteem can be impacted negatively, as students “cannot escape school subjects which is why failure in school so easily generalises to the global self-esteem” (Lawrence 1996). If self-esteem is low and there is a lack of self-identity, peer groups can thus bring the individual into adulthood with the potential for both negative and positive influences on wellbeing and development (Eccles and Roeser 2011). This emphasises the importance of relationships in the adolescents
lives. Moreover, Smyth (2015) states this as one of the fundamental impacts of a student’s SWB is his/her relationships.

2.4.2 Bioecological Theory of Adolescent Development

Schaffer (1996) posits that self-esteem is easily influenced by experience right through adolescence. These experiences can be affected by the environment in which he/she is exposed, as Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) bioecological theory suggests. Bronfenbrenner hypothesises that those closest to the individual can shape them, with family being the most prominent. Other examples of influence include school and even technology (Boyd and Bee 2015). This system highlights the complexity of the environment and how it influences the development of the child. Systems change and the environment moves which leads to shifts in contexts and can be turning points in development (Berk 2010). However, Nichols and Schwarz (2001) disagree and conclude that individuals are born with innate qualities of ego strength that were not obtained from their environment. It is also implied that family influence, peers, and society also affect the person and how they interact with their environment (Bronfenbrenner 1979).

2.5 Supports Available in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)

The Education Act (1998, section 32 (9)) defines educational disadvantage as “the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools”. The DEIS scheme was launched in 2005 and aims to support children who are at greatest risk of educational disadvantage (DES 2017). Under DEIS, schools are entitled to avail of additional supports such as the Home School Community and Liaison (HSCL) scheme, school meals programme, School Completion Programme (SCP), Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP), and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). The HSCL offers the opportunity for a current member of staff to develop relationships and partnerships between the parents and teachers of students at risk of early school leaving and educational disadvantage (DES 2019). This role aims to increase the connectedness and sense of belonging to a school, which has been highlighted as crucial to a student’s SWB (O’Brien 2009; Rowe et al. 2007). Furthermore, within the DEIS scheme, guidance allocation is increased compared to non-DEIS schools (DES 2019). However, the IGC’s (2016) audit argued that DEIS schools were
impacted the most with budget 2012 (DES 2012). DEIS schools have a greater percentage of guidance counsellors employed but not practicing at 18.7% compared to non-DEIS schools at 12.7%. Furthermore the average number of qualified guidance counsellors employed by DEIS schools is 1.4, while in non-DEIS schools the figure is 1.57. At the same time, the average number employed and practicing in DEIS schools is 1.14 and in non-DEIS schools 1.37. Additionally, (Smyth et al. 2015) had highlighted that its abolition was likely to lead to even greater difficulties in combining the educational guidance and personal counselling elements of the guidance counsellor role in the context of reduced resources.

2.6 Guidance Counselling and Wellbeing

This section discusses the provision of guidance counselling in the post-primary sector, including the role of the guidance counsellor in the context of student wellbeing, the whole school approach, and the integrated model of guidance counselling.

2.6.1 Overview of Guidance Counselling in Post-primary Education

Guidance counselling, which is a multi-faceted and complex role, was formally brought into legislation through the Irish Education Act (1998, Section 9c). The Act states that secondary school students are entitled to access “appropriate guidance” to support their educational and career decision-making. The NCGE describes guidance counselling as offering students learning experiences to assist them in the development of self-management skills, which may lead to productive choices and outcomes in their lives (NCGE 2013, 2017).

Guidance counselling is a specialist area that has evolved since its inception in 1966 to provide a holistic approach, which incorporates personal and social, educational, and career guidance (Hearne and Gavin 2014; NCGE 2004; DES 2005a; IGC 1998). This integrated model is “somewhat unique” when compared to other European countries (Hearne et al. 2018, p.317). Much debate surrounds the integrated approach which seems to be based on a value system along with availability of resources (Hearne et al. 2018). These resources are impacted by the national economic situation, however. During the national downturn in the economy, a re-allocation of guidance to an in-quota status was announced as part of Budget 2012 (DES 2012). This had a significant impact on the role of the guidance counsellor and the guidance service. Quantitative studies on the effects of the removal of the allocation indicated reductions between 21.4% and 23.7% in post-primary guidance services (ASTI
2013; IGC 2013, 2014; JMB 2012; NCGE 2013) and increases in the numbers of unqualified staff performing guidance duties (IGC 2014). Importantly, however, due to an improving economy in the last few years, efforts have been made to restore some of the 600 posts that were lost. Thus far, 500 of these removed posts have been reintroduced, albeit on an in-quota basis (DES 2017).

Watt and Kidd (2000) posit personal counselling as a critical aspect of the guidance service and is one aspect of the integrated model of guidance counselling. Personal counselling is integral to supporting students in exploring their thoughts and feelings and developing coping strategies to deal with potential personal difficulties in order to support their wellbeing (DES 2005; NCGE 2004). The wellbeing of the students has been brought into sharper focus due to the increased prevalence of societal issues manifesting within the school setting (Hearne et al. 2018).

2.6.2 Whole School Approach to Guidance Provision and Wellbeing Delivery

A whole school approach to guidance counselling has been implemented by Irish policy makers as a model of good practice in the delivery of guidance counselling in the post-primary sector (Hearne et al. 2016; NCGE 2017). Whole school guidance provision places direct responsibility on the “whole” school team and external stakeholders to deliver the school guidance programme across the curriculum under the leadership of a professionally qualified guidance counsellor (DES 2005, 2012; NCGE 2004; Hearne et al. 2018). This has been steered by international research and is viewed as the most effective way to deliver guidance counselling in a whole school community approach (Farrington and Tofofi 2009). This paradigm shift towards a whole school responsibility has come to the fore since the reallocation of guidance hours in Budget 2012. A new emphasis on the whole school approach allows schools to maximise resources. However, the school culture and norms need consideration in the delivery of this model and the awareness of school management can influence the delivery of a successful guidance service (Hearne et al. 2018). Furthermore, there are conflicting understandings of roles and responsibilities among staff. The literature has shown that duties such as pastoral care, a term linked to the welfare and wellbeing of the student (Hui 2002), may be beyond the remit of ‘regular’ teachers (Hearne et al. 2016). This is unsurprising, as one study reported 80% of teacher participants identified the level of pastoral care training throughout their teacher training as inadequate (Hearne and Galvin 2014).
The whole school guidance school plan overlaps with many of the sentiments associated with wellbeing. Circular 0009/2012 states a school guidance plan should support the needs of its students (DES 2012). The DES (2018) also emphasise the importance of coherent policy and planning at a whole school level for the successful delivery of a wellbeing programme. The NCCA (2017) outlines four areas of wellbeing in schools: the curriculum, policy and planning, relationships and culture. A whole school community is necessary to contribute to the building of the culture that supports the wellbeing of the students (NCCA 2017).

Although the guidance counsellor has an integral part to play in the planning and implementation, it must be acknowledged that it is a whole school activity. Thus, not only should the guidance counsellor be involved in the planning, but also other members of staff (NCGE 2017).

Concerning the curriculum, guidance related learning is identified in the Wellbeing Guidelines as one of the main pillars of a school’s wellbeing programme (NCCA 2017). The Framework for Junior Cycle (2015) first stated that “guidance provision may be included in the 400 hours available for wellbeing” (NCCA 2017, p.48, NCGE 2017, p.11). However, the most recent circular (DES 2018, p.6) specifies that the “Junior Cycle programme must include guidance education”. This departure from guidance being optional to compulsory is a significant alteration in the Framework for Junior Cycle and may address the imbalance in Junior Cycle guidance provision compared to senior cycle (Hearne et al. 2016). The rationale for including guidance is based on the significant contribution that guidance can make to the promotion of student wellbeing (DES 2015). Issues arise, however, when audits show that less time is being dedicated to the Junior Cycle guidance curriculum due to ex-quota guidance hours (NCGE 2013). Furthermore, school management are given significant autonomy by considering how best to align resource allocation. This falls back on the importance that a school leader places on the guidance service. However, this is a worrying proposition, as it is harrowing to discover that more than a third of school principals described their knowledge of guidance and counselling issues as inadequate (Hearne et al. 2016).

The policy framework (DES 2018) makes several recommendations on behalf of supporting guidance counsellors with implementing this new curriculum. They include focusing on improving guidance counselling provision, along with collecting and reviewing data on the use of Guidance Counselling resources in post primary schools, to identify any potential
recommendations for improvement (DES 2018). It is hoped that these recommendations are sincere and aid in the delivery of the wellbeing curriculum.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter addressed the origins of wellbeing, prominent theorists, an analysis of both international and national policy, adolescent development with a focus on self-esteem and self-understanding and finally the role of the guidance counsellor in supporting the SWB of students. The key issues that emerged are the elusiveness of the wellbeing term, the origins of wellbeing in public policy and the difficulty in measuring its success and finally the role of the guidance counsellor and the WSA to the wellbeing of the students.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodology and methods used in this research study. It will begin by identifying the research questions, followed by a discussion of the research methodology of the study. It will then examine the instruments used for data collection and analysis followed by validity and reliability issues. Finally, reflexive issues and ethical considerations will be addressed.

3.1 Identification of Research Questions

In order to explore the topic of wellbeing in this study a number of key research questions were identified (Merriam 2001). The formulation of these questions was a challenging aspect of the research design, but it was critical to the selection of an appropriate methodology (Bryman 2012; Hogan et al. 2007).

3.1.1 Research Questions

The research questions underpinning this study were derived from a combination of issues that emerged from the literature review and my own professional practice as a teacher and trainee guidance counsellor. Wellbeing has become a dominant driver in both global and national policy, as influenced by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN 1989). It has gained increased attention across many educational systems, including the national Wellbeing Policy which purports that Ireland will be leader in this area by 2023 (NCCA 2017; DES 2018). The emphasis on student wellbeing in Ireland has come to the fore through the recent Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines and programme (NCCA 2017), and although the advantages of it are well publicised, little evidence of its impact as emerged to date. This led the researcher to the following research questions which aim to provide insights on the area being studied (Flick 2015), namely:

1. What are students’ perspectives on wellbeing in a DEIS post-primary school?
2. What are the factors that affect students’ wellbeing in a DEIS post-primary school?
3. What relevance does the new Wellbeing component of the Junior Cycle curriculum have for students’ wellbeing during this period of adolescence?

4. How can a WSA support the wellbeing of students in a DEIS post-primary school?

### 3.2 Research Methodology: Mixed Methods

Methodology refers to the range of approaches used within educational research to gather data which are to be used as a basis for inference and interpretation, and for explanation and prediction (Cohen et al. 2010). Thomas (2017) suggests that the research methodology is more than just the selection of a particular research method, but more about the examination of how it will support the researcher’s work. For this reason, the researcher took into account the complexity of wellbeing as a phenomenon and decided upon a mixed methods research paradigm to provide the most accurate information and data associated with the chosen topic in an educational context (Mertens 2010). Morse (2003) describes mixed methods research as being able to obtain a more complete picture of human behaviour and experience which leads the researcher to achieve their research goals quicker and more comprehensively.

However, Sale et al. (2002) argue that mixed methods research is incompatible, as they are two distinct paradigms which do not study the same phenomena. According to Mertens (2010) the researcher must be an expert in both approaches of research to have the desired effect of a mixed methods design. Green and Caracellis (2003) propose that many researchers do not have this expertise and, therefore, should reconsider calling their work mixed methods research. Finally, Regardless of the many scholarly debates on this type of research design, the researcher believed that the use of this particular approach would help converge the data from both paradigms to obtain more comprehensive findings.

Mixed methods in this study incorporated both the positivist and interpretivist paradigms. This allowed the gathering of “both quantitative and qualitative data and integrate this and draw interpretations based on the combined strengths of both sets of data” (Creswell 2015, p.2). Flick (2015, p.22) suggests that progress happens “when new views prevail in the sense of scientific revolutions”. Meuser (2003) defines a paradigm as a “framework of the accepted research method”. Thus, both the quantitative and qualitative components together yielded a richer understanding of student wellbeing (Merriam and Tisdell 2016).
3.2.1 Positivism (Quantitative)

Positivist research is described as studying the social world objectively (Thomas 2016). Furthermore, as the world around us can be measured scientifically, the sciences should concentrate on studying observable facts (Flick 2015). Bryman (2012, p.28) summarises positivism by specifying that research must be “conducted in a way that is value free and thus objective”. In addition to this, he states that only phenomena confirmed by the senses can be seen as knowledge. In the context of this research study, the positivist approach was used for addressing researcher objectivity and allowed data to be collected on an external reality separate from the researcher’s descriptions of it (Flick 2015). Concurring with Creswell (2015), the positivist approach was appropriate for gathering data from a large sample of Junior Cycle students in one school location.

3.2.2 Interpretivism (Qualitative)

However, criticisms of positivism include its reliance on instruments and procedures that may hinder the connection between research and everyday life (Bryman 2012). Cohen et al. (2010) argue that the paradigm does not take into account the complexity of human nature. With this in mind, the qualitative approach was employed in this study to gather data from a different group of students, i.e. (Transition Year (TY) students. As wellbeing is much more nuanced, the interpretivist (qualitative) approach emphasised “words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data” (Bryman 2012, p.380). It differed from the positivist approach, as it is:

not assumed that rules and meanings are clear for all participants in the same way and that researchers understanding of an issue can be assumed to be that of the participants. (Flick 2012, p.24).

Qualitative research is generally based on the assumption that reality is constructed by individuals in light of their experiences, meaning there are therefore many realities (Merriam and Tisdell 2016). Thus, the researcher hoped to broaden the exploration of the students’ experience of wellbeing in their reality. It was hoped that the students’ narratives and discussions would provide more in-depth data for analysis. To provide validity to the findings of the interpretivist research method, a systematic approach to the writing up of findings was imperative with clear explanations of how the research was carried out and analysed.
provided. This has been a criticism by quantitative researchers who declare qualitative research to be too impressionistic and subjective (Bryman 2012).

To conclude, the mixed method approach involved collecting both quantitative and qualitative data almost simultaneously and analysing and comparing them (Merriam and Tisdell 2016).

3.3 Data Collection Procedures

This section will discuss the sampling of participants and data collection and analysis methods used in the study. An online survey and two focus groups were used for two different sets of data sources. The six indicators of Wellbeing underpinning the student’s school experience (NCCA 2017), were integrated into both methods of data collection through the instruments used: online survey and focus groups with two different sets of data sources.

3.3.1 Access and Sampling of Participants

Ethical approval was received from the University of Limerick in April 2019. The researcher then received approval from the gatekeeper (school principal) of the proposed study site to collect data from the student population (Appendix B). Before any data could be collected, information letters and consent forms were disseminated to the student population as shown in appendix C. Furthermore, as all students in the study were under 18, consent from parents, guardians, or carers was also sought (Appendix D).

According to Teddlie and Yu (2007), there are two main sampling procedures in the social sciences, probability and purposive sampling. In this study, 145 Junior Cycle (JC) students, which is the entire JC cohort will form the purposive sample. I chose this method of sampling as I hope to receive a variety of views (Bryman 2012). They will be both male and female, aged between 12-17. It is hoped to administer the online survey to this cohort.

Regarding the qualitative method, purposive sampling was also used. More specifically, convenience sampling, was used for the focus groups with Transition Year group students (Cohen et al. 2010; Bryman 2012; Creswell and Clark 2008). I intend to hold the two focus
groups with the 18 TY students (2 groups of 9) who completed the JC Wellbeing component. According to Krueger and Casey (2009), this size group is recommended. This includes both male and female participants aging between 16-17. Maxwell (1997) argues purposive sampling techniques are primarily used in qualitative studies and based on particular settings, persons or events, deliberately selected for the important information they can provide.

### 3.3.2 Data Collection Instruments: Online Survey and Focus Groups

The field work consisted of two stages and took place between the 8th April and 17th May 2019. A timeline of fieldwork is outlined in Table 3.1.

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<tr>
<th>Stage 1</th>
<th>Entering the field</th>
<th>1st April 2019</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Received permission from gatekeeper and disseminated information sheets and consent forms to all parties involved.</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Stage 2</th>
<th>In the field</th>
<th>8th April 2019</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Closing date for return of consent forms for both JC and TY students</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12th April 2019</td>
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<td>Reopen deadline for return of consent forms for JC students, closing date moved to 10th May</td>
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<td>10th May 2019</td>
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<td>Closing date for return of consent forms and dissemination of survey link</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13th May 2019</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Two focus groups conducted with TY students</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Stage 3</th>
<th>Close of fieldwork</th>
<th>15th May 2019 onwards</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Data analysis and interpretation of findings</td>
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Table 3.1 Timeline for primary data collection fieldwork (adapted from Patton 2002).
3.3.3 Online Survey with Junior Cycle Students

The purpose of this study was to explore how students view their subjective wellbeing (SWB). An online survey was designed to gather the data under various indicators. There has been considerable growth in the use of online surveys in research. The advantages are that they can be low cost, have a faster response rate and data entry is automated which limits errors (Bryman 2012). In this study, the researcher used a survey consisting of questions used by the NCCA (2017) related to its six indicators of wellbeing. When embedding these questions into the online survey, the researcher ensured that the statements were spread out along the survey and not grouped together for variation of answers (Bryman 2012). The survey was frontloaded with information regarding the survey and questions seeking gender and year group as shown in appendix E. The survey was administered by emailing the online link to the sample population, which then directed the respondents to a questionnaire embedded in the Microsoft Forms application. Each participant had access to this Microsoft digital platform from their school’s account. The survey was self-reporting and used a Likert type scale format. The middle option of the Likert scale was removed to prevent the tendency to overchoose middle option (Thomas 2017). The limitations of self-reported surveys include the mood the participant is in at the time of responding and also the influence of memory on their wellbeing (Diener 2009). These factors were considered when analysing the data gathered.

Bryman (2012) posits that operating systems or software may present problems when reading or answering surveys. Fink (2017) emphasises that surveys must be piloted to reveal whether people understand directions, phrasing of questions, and ease of use of survey. Other issues that are identified are people having more than one email address, participants with no access to a device, and confidentiality and anonymity issues (Bryman 2012; Cohen et al. 2010). These issues were overcome in the research study by using their school email address, offering access to device to participants with no access during school time if needed, and emphasising anonymity by selecting the option to keep all responses confidential to researcher. The current study was also piloted with family members for feedback on ease of use and response times (Thomas 2017). It also ensured that it opened on multiple devices such as mobile, tablet, and desktop devices (Bryman 2012). Feedback was positive and no issues arose. The average time to complete this particular survey was two minutes 56
seconds. Following initial piloting, the survey was sent to the total population \((n=145)\) JC students with a response rate of 66.21% \((n=96)\) after two administration phases.

### 3.3.4 Focus Groups With Transition Year Students

The second method of data collection was two focus groups with TY students. Focus groups are defined as “a carefully planned discussion, designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment” (Krueger and Casey 2009, p.6). Focus groups can be undoubtedly valuable when in-depth information is needed, but they can be unproductive and time consuming if there is an unclear purpose and inappropriate processes (Bell and Waters 2018; Krueger and Casey 2009). The purpose of the focus groups in the current study was to gain insights into the experience of TY students in relation to the new Junior Cycle Wellbeing curriculum.

The optimum number of participants in a focus group is five to ten, hence the need for two groups in this study (Krueger and Casey 2009). In this study the two focus groups comprised of two groups of nine TY students. The two groups consisted of two female and seven male students. The focus groups were conducted separately on the same day, lasted 40 minutes and were audio recorded for data gathering.

When organising the focus groups, consideration was given to the makeup of the groups. From the researchers experience, it was clear that some participants were intimidated by others and would speak less as a result. Krueger and Casey (2009) suggests mixing up the participants and separating groups of friends for optimum participation. This I felt worked well in both instances. Another consideration was the timing of the focus group and the number of questions. Adolescents will focus for 45-60 minutes and anything after that will lead to boredom. An interview framework was devised with 11 questions that were age appropriate and open ended as shown in appendix F. Bryman (2012) encourages relevant questions that elicit reflective discussions. Similar to method one, the questions were based on the six Wellbeing indicators (NCCA, 2017) however the framework was expanded to elicit a fuller discussion.

According to Cohen et al. (2010), focus groups are contrived settings, which is both their strength and their weakness. Therefore, they suggest time be invested in small talk to calm and create a more comfortable environment. The students were reassured that their
anonymity was protected and their names were not included in the write up of this study. Additionally, they signed a focus group confidentiality consent form as shown in appendix G. They were encouraged to be as honest and open as possible and supports were explicated for any students who found particular disclosures that gave rise to feelings of stress or distress (Goodman and Evans 2006). The researcher’s role in the group was to focus the conversation and be flexible to unanticipated issues that arose (Krueger and Casey 2009).

3.3.5 Data Analysis Strategy

Mixed methods data analysis can be a challenging task (Connor et al 1984) so consideration was given to analysis that was practical, systematic and verifiable (Kruger and Casey 2009). Both methods were based on the six indicators of wellbeing so the researcher established these as the main themes at the outset. The online survey presented an overview of how the students perceive their wellbeing under each of these indicators while the focus groups helped to expound on these themes or provide “thick descriptions” to enhance the findings of this research study (Braun and Clark 2012, p40).

The researcher used two methods to analyse the data. The quantitative data in the online survey was analysed using an Excel spreadsheet. This allowed a graphical representation of findings through the use of charts. An initial eyeballing of data forced the researcher to think intelligently about what the numbers were saying (Thomas 2017). When analysing the qualitative data received from the focus groups, the intention from the researcher was to triangulate the data from both methods to seek convergence, corroboration and correspondence of the results (Clark and Creswell 2008). To this end, common themes were identified and analysed. The method of thematic analysis the researcher used is based on Braun and Clark’s (2012) six stage process. More specifically, the variety of thematic analysis is experiential thematic analysis and aims to focus on participants standpoint to best answer the research question (Braun and Clark 2012). As this study was concerned with exploring a student’s experience, the phenomenological aspect, it allowed the students to be self-reflective and share their experiences and make sense of them. The researcher proposed to interpret these experiences and tried to make sense of the students trying to make sense of their world (Braun and Clark 2012). To do this, a critical lens was used while the transcripts were read and the audio recording was listened to numerous times. Attention was paid to the six indicators and how each of these impact the students wellbeing during their daily life.
during school. Outlined below are the stages of analysis as per Braun and Clark’s (2012) framework.

**Stage 1:** Reading and familiarisation

**Stage 2:** Coding

**Stage 3:** Searching for themes

**Stage 4:** Reviewing themes

**Stage 5:** Defining and naming themes

**Stage 6:** Producing report.

After the initial stage of transcription, the researcher ‘immersed’ himself in the data collected. The aim was to become intimately familiar with the data content and begin noticing things that might be relevant (Thomas 2013; Braun and Clark 2012, p.634). Notes were scribed on printed transcripts and relevant points were highlighted. See appendix H for a sample of this process. Coding was then generated to establish themes and make connections with the various indicators of wellbeing as described in the NCCA guidelines (2017) document. This allowed interpretation easier and helped to begin the process of identifying overarching themes. This subsequently led to a more systematic method of analysis and the development of a thematic mind map. The generation of this mind map as shown in appendix I, helped to refine and define sub-themes from the data which enabled presentation of findings and reinforce triangulation. A further mind-map was then established to refine the themes and sub-themes as shown in appendix J.

### 3.4 Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity and reliability in a mixed methods research study, a justification of both methods is needed in the first instance (Mertens 2010). Instruments must then be designed to match the purposes of the study. To this end, the online survey allows the students to self-reflect on their SWB and gain their perspectives. Moreover, the framework for the focus group aims to expand on these findings and garner thicker descriptions of these views of SWB. It is then imperative that the researcher explains any conflicting findings that resulted
from the different method collection (Mertens 2010). This will be acknowledged in discussion chapter.

This section will discuss the validity and reliability issues related to this research study. Validity refers to “whether an indicator that is devised to gauge a concept really measures that concept” (Bryman 2012, p.171). Furthermore, Robson and McCartan (2016) state validity is concerned with whether the findings are really about what they appear to be about. The particular threats to validity in this study were participant bias, researcher bias, and participant error. Participant bias refers to the students, who may have sought to help or please the researcher or the opposite effect for disaffected students. Likewise, Bryman (2012, p.394) also refers to a phenomenon known as “methodological self-conscious”, which takes into account one’s relationship with those whom one studies. This is also referred to as “good bunny syndrome” whereby the participant is motivated to give the researcher the desired answers (Hearne et al. 2016, p.19). In this study, the researcher eliminated this phenomenon as the sample of TY students in focus group were not taught by the researcher. Researcher bias describes the researcher’s personal views on the research topic and any assumptions they may have regarding data analysis. This will be addressed in the reflexivity section. Finally, participant error could potentially influence the data as external circumstances such as mood or life events could alter the survey responses. In terms of the focus groups, it is essential that the researcher trusts the results. To this end, the researcher probed and clarified any responses to seek verification from the students (Krueger and Casey 2009).

Reliability refers to the “stability or consistency with which we measure something” (Robson and McCartan 2016, p.105). Furthermore, it relates to the ability of a research method to consistently provide similar results in different contexts such as another post-primary school in the context of this study (Cohen et al. 2010). For the quantitative method, an adapted instrument, based on the six indicators of wellbeing, was used. The findings from this instrument can be replicated in other post-primary schools, as these indicators form the framework to enhance and assess their student’s wellbeing (NCCA, 2017).
3.5 Reflexivity

Reflexivity has been increasingly recognised as a crucial strategy in the process of generating knowledge by means of qualitative research (Blaxter et al. 2010). In this researcher-practitioner based study, professional reflexivity was used to portray an “awareness of the influence the researcher has on what is being studied and, simultaneously, of how the research process affects the researcher” (Probst and Berenson 2014, p.814). As this study used a mixed methods approach, critical self-reflexivity was very important to the researcher and, therefore, a number of approaches were taken into consideration to reduce issues that could arise. Being aware of my own biases, beliefs and values in relation to this study were some of the approaches I took (Krueger and Casey 2009; Etherington 2004). With this awareness, my own assumptions and biases were questioned and discussed. These assumptions included the supposed positive link between physical activity and SWB, teacher attitudes to pastoral care in schools and the impact of a WSA on teachers workload. To deal with these I journaled to capture thoughts and questioned myself constantly on biases appearing in findings and also in discussions with supervisor.

3.6 Ethical Issues

When conducting social research such as in the case of this study, the respect and safety of participants’ was an important consideration (Thomas 2017). How one conducts their work and addresses morals, beliefs, and values within society determines the ethical principles of the researcher (Bryman 2012). It was, therefore, imperative for the researcher to follow a set of principles and codes of practice that served to inform decisions and courses of actions across situations arising in the research context (Hearne et al. 2016; Thomas 2017).

As a practitioner-researcher, the primary ethical issue related to this study with students was the duty of care to them and the school involved. Wellbeing is a personal and subjective concept and discussion of such could have triggered emotions or reactions within the student. Firstly, ethical approval was first provided by the University of Limerick’s Faculty of Education and Health Science Ethics Committee on the 1st of April 2019. To protect the integrity and dignity of all participants, the researcher adhered to the ethical principles in the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE 2008) Research Code of Ethics, the
Institute of Guidance Counsellor’s (IGC 2012b) *Code of Ethics* and the Psychological Society of Ireland’s (PSI 2011) *Code of Ethics* The researcher’s ethical behaviour included respecting the autonomy, dignity and privacy of all participants (Etherington 2007). Consideration was given to confidentiality of information and protection of identities by not naming participants in the research study.

All participants in the study were fully informed of the aim, methods and outcomes of the research through research information sheets. Emphasis was also placed on the voluntary nature of their participation. As the students were under 18, consent was sought from them and their parents, guardians or carers. This is in line with the *Children First Guidelines* (Department of Children and Youth Affairs 2011). The online survey included a tick box to indicate implied consent to take part as shown in appendix E. A duty of care towards participants was imperative and, before and after the focus groups, the researcher checked in with the group members and supports were indicated in case any concerns arose.

### 3.7 Conclusion

This chapter addressed the methods and methodologies used in the gathering of data. Chapter 4 will present the data findings from the online surveys and also the focus groups.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the primary findings from both the online survey and the two focus groups. The online survey data will be presented first, followed by findings from the focus groups. Participants in the focus groups are not named, to preserve anonymity. In addition, key themes will be identified from the data gathered from this mixed methods study.

4.1 Findings from Online Survey with Junior Cycle Students

The total completed response rate to the online survey was 96 respondents, which was a 66% return rate for this study. The findings are presented under seven subsections: firstly the demographic data, which is then followed by the six indicators of wellbeing, as noted by the NCCA (2017). Four of the indicators - Responsible, Resilient, Respected, and Aware - have three statements to explore a student’s wellbeing and the other two indicators - Active and Connected - have two statements each. The results of these are presented in graphical format first, followed by an analysis pertinent to these statements.

4.1.1 Section 1: Demographic Information

This section presents the demographic data generated from the questions that frontloaded the online survey, primarily regarding gender and year group. The rationale for this data was to elicit comparisons between gender and stages of adolescent development throughout the three years of Junior Cycle (Figure 4.1).

![Gender Demographic](image)

Fig 4.1.
The specific year groups are identified in Chart 4.2. There was 40% \((n=37)\) completion by the first year group, 36% \((n=35)\) by the 2nd year group, as opposed to only 24% \((n=23)\) from the third year group. The reasons for this are unclear, but one suggestion could be that the completion of the survey may have been viewed as an additional task on an already loaded schedule for third years, who were busy at this time on projects and classroom based assessments (CBA’s).

![Year Group Demographic](image)

**Fig 4.2.**

With regard to gender breakdown across the various year groups, 63% \((n=24)\) of respondents in 1st year were male, with 37% \((n=14)\) female. In 2nd year, 51% \((n=18)\) were male and 49% \((n=17)\) were female. Finally, in 3rd year, 26% \((n=6)\) were male, with 74% \((n=17)\) female. The findings identify that 3rd year students had the most significant gender imbalance, with only 26% \((n=6)\) of male students completing the survey.

![Gender per Year Group](image)

**Gender per Year Group Fig 4.3.**
### Breakdown of figures in year groups Fig 4.4

#### 4.2 Indicator 1: Active

Questions 3 and 12 relate to the Active Indicator. With regard to Q3, fig 4.5, students’ perceptions of how active they are on a regular basis was consistent across the three year groups. An average of 29% ($n=28$) stated that they were physically active on a regular basis. However, 3% ($n=3$) of respondents indicated that they *almost never* take part in physical activity on a regular basis. Findings suggest that this is not gender exclusive, as 2% ($n=2$) were female and 1% ($n=1$) were male. It was encouraging that 97% ($n=93$) of the respondents took part in regular physical activity at least *sometimes*. 

![Chart 4.5](Q. 3 I am physically active on a regular basis)

![Chart 4.6](Q. 12 I am a confident and skilled participant in physical activity)
Question 12 correlated with Question 3 and identified students’ perceptions of how confident and skilled they are in participating in physical activity. When asked how confident and skilled they perceived themselves to be, an average of 36% \((n=35)\) identified as *very much like me* across the three year groups. There was, however, a higher percentage of 1st years who stated that they were only a little confident in physical activity, at 41% \((n=15)\). However, no 1st years responded as *not at all like me*. When this 41% of 1st years, who had little skill and confidence in physical activity, was analysed further regarding gender, the findings revealed that 19% \((n=7)\) were female and 22% \((n=8)\) were male. Another interesting finding in this first category was that 26% \((n=6)\) of students in 3rd year perceived they had no confidence or skill in physical activity. Further analysis identified that 22% \((n=5)\) of this cohort were female. No males identified as having no confidence or skill in physical activity.

4.1.3 Indicator 2: Responsible

Questions 10, 14, and 15 relate to the Responsible indicator. The wellbeing guidelines suggest that a student is responsible for their own wellbeing, such as making responsible eating choices, knowing when their safety is at risk, and taking action to protect and promote their wellbeing (NCCA 2017).

![Graph showing Q10 I can make healthy eating choices](image)

Fig 4.7.

Question 10 revealed that students found making healthy eating choices difficult. Across the three year groups, 17% \((n=16)\) of students reported they can make a healthy eating choice
almost always, a vast majority of 48% (n=46) can make a healthy eating choice only sometimes, and 9% (n=9) never make a healthy choice. Of this 9% (n=9), further analysis revealed females found it most difficult, to a ratio of six females to three males, giving a ratio of 2:1. Interestingly, 17% (n=4) of 3rd years were in the almost never category, the highest of any year group. Further analysis revealed these to be all female.

In question 14, the 1st year group was identified as being the most responsible when it came to protecting and promoting their wellbeing and that of others, with 81% (n=30) suggesting it was somewhat or very much like them. The findings also revealed that 17% (n=6) of 2nd years took no action or did little to promote and protect their or others’ wellbeing. 26% (n=6) of 3rd years also emerged on the lower side of the scale of a little like me. There was little difference related to gender in the findings to this question.
In contrast to the data in question 14, the findings in question 15 indicate that the students were more responsible when it came to their own safety. Of those who responded, 39% \((n=37)\) of the entire cohort reported being very aware when their safety was at risk and would make the right choice to protect it. There was no significant variance in gender when it came to protecting their safety, with 20% \((n=18)\) females and 21% \((n=19)\) males identified in the upper part of the scale. A further 41% \((n=39)\) were aware and would take appropriate action. However, 3% \((n=3)\) could not identify when their safety was at risk and would not be able to make the right choices. Of this 3% \((n=3)\), all were male. The findings suggest that males may take greater risks in relation to their safety or lack the awareness on making right choices to protect themselves.

4.1.4 Indicator 3: Connected
The findings to question 4 are shown in fig 4.10. They reveal the lack of connection felt by 2nd and 3rd years but 1st years feel the most connected to the school, their friends, community and wider world. Interestingly, this suggest that, as the student progresses through the years, they seem to feel less connected. Overall, a significant number, 98% (n=94), felt connected at some point, either *sometimes* to *almost always*. However, only 9% (n=2) of 3rd year students reported they *almost always* feel connected compared to 37% (n=13) of 2nd years and 32% (n=12) of 1st years. Only 2% (n=2) of students do not feel connected to the school, friends, community, or the wider world. Again, this is not gender specific, as it was one male and one female student.

![Graph showing the distribution of responses to question 18.](image)

**Q. 18 I understand how my actions and interactions impact on my own wellbeing and that of others, in local and global contexts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1st Year</th>
<th>2nd Year</th>
<th>3rd Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all like me (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little like me (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat like me (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very much like me (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 4.11.

Question 18 sought the students’ perceptions on how their actions affect their own personal wellbeing and that of others. There was limited variance across all year groups and the vast majority had an understanding of the impact of their actions, with 76% (n=73) stating between *somewhat like me* and *very much like me*. However, 26% (n=6) of 3rd years identified as *a little like me*. A ratio of 3:1, male to female, could not understand how their actions and interactions impact on their SWB and that of others.

**4.1.5 Indicator 4: Resilient**

The 4th indicator of Resilience includes three statements for students to reflect on. Questions 7, 11, and 13 relate to this indicator.
Question 7 relates to the students’ self-belief or self-efficacy. Regarding 1st years 43% \((n=16)\) of them believe that, with effort, they can achieve. Of this 43%, 30% \((n=11)\) are male and 13% \((n=5)\) are female. Findings suggest in this study that the male population in 1st year have more belief that effort leads to achievement than female students, at a ratio of 2:1. These findings diverge, however, throughout the older groups, as 2nd year students 31% \((n=11)\) believe very much that with effort they can achieve. Of this 31% \((n=11)\), 6 females and 5 males believe with effort they can achieve. Furthermore, in 3rd year, 39% \((n=9)\) believe very much that, with effort, they can achieve. Further analysis indicates a ratio of 2:1, female to male believing this statement. Hence, the findings indicate that a high percentage of 71% \((n=68)\) of students identifying as somewhat to very much like me in relation to self-belief and achievement.
Question 11 seeks data on knowing where to go for help as presented in figure 4.13. The data revealed that only a small minority, 7% \((n=7)\) of students were unaware as to where to get help if needed. Although a small number, it is worrying nonetheless. Of this figure, 6% \((n=6)\) were female and 1% \((n=1)\) was male. Of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} year cohort, 46% \((n=16)\) know where to get help; the highest of all the year groups. There was also a relatively even split among the gender demographic of this year group. It is apparent that 1\textsuperscript{st} year male students are far more aware as to where to go for help. Additionally, they also had the highest percentage of not knowing where to go to seek help at 8% \((n=3)\). Both 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} years each had 6% \((n=2)\) students who lacked the knowledge of where to go for help.

![Fig 4.14.](image)

Finally, through Q13, the respondents in the online survey indicated that 69% \((n=66)\) identify as having somewhat to high self-confidence and coping skills to deal with challenges. This means that the remaining 31% \((n=30)\) of students believe they are lacking the necessary skills to deal with life’s challenges. This is concerning, as 14% \((n=13)\) of students reported they feel they lack confidence and skills. Furthermore, when the data is analysed by year group, a significant 20% \((n=7)\) of 2\textsuperscript{nd} years feel they have no coping skills for life’s challenges. Further analysis reveals that the 20% \((n=7)\) who responded as having limited coping skills were female.

4.1.6 Indicator 5: Respected

Questions 5, 9, and 16 relate to the Respected indicator. Feeling listened to, having positive relationships, and showing respect are the statements analysed in this section.
Regarding Q5, the vast majority 87% (n=83) stated they were listened to and valued, either very often or sometimes. However, only a minority of the students across all year groups felt that they were listened to or valued almost always as represented by a mere 8% (n=8). Conversely, 5% (n=5) felt they were never listened to. It appears that students feel less listened to as they progress through the Junior Cycle. Results show that 63% (n=23) of 1st years feel listened to always and often, as opposed to 39% (n=9) of 3rd years.

In Q9, students were surveyed about their positive relationships with friends, peers and teachers. The respondents revealed that 43% (n=41) have positive relationships with peers,
teachers, and friends, as shown in Fig. 4.16. Of the 20% \((n=19)\) of respondents who indicated they do not have many positive relationships, 13% \((n=12)\) were female and 7% \((n=7)\) were male overall. Further analysis revealed the majority of these respondents, 9% \((n=9)\) were in 2\(^{nd}\) year.

![Fig. 4.17.](image)

Finally, in Q.16, the vast majority of respondents reported they show care and respect to others on a regular basis, with 64% \((n=61)\) indicating that it is very much like me. At the lower end of the scale, were the 2\(^{nd}\) years, identified as the year group who show care and respect for others the least, with 1 in 5 students revealing this is not at all like me or a little like me.

4.1.7 Indicator 6: Aware

The final indicator of wellbeing, Aware, encompasses an awareness of their thoughts and behaviours and making sense of them, an awareness of decisions and values, and an awareness of how they learn best and knowledge of self-improvement. This indicator was represented in questions 6, 8, and 17.
In question 6, figure 4.18, the respondents’ awareness to their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours differed throughout the year groups. Their awareness seemed to dip as they progressed through the Junior Cycle: 35% of 1st years reported being almost always being aware of their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, compared to 29% and 22% in 2nd year and 3rd year, respectively, and 34% of 2nd years reported only sometimes. This was on the lower end of the scale and the highest percentage of any year group. Further analysis revealed that the 4% \((n=4)\) of students who responded that they are almost never aware of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours were female.
In question 8, figure 4.19, the vast majority of students across all years claim to be aware of how they learn best, with 62% (n=60) indicating this through somewhat like me and very much like me. However, over half of all 2nd year students, 51% (n=18) claim that question 8 is not at all like me or a little like me. Further analysis reveals that the 11% (n=4) of 2nd years who identify as not at all like me regarding their awareness of how to learn best, 8% (n=3) were male. A minority of students, 11% (n=11), stated this was not at all like me. Associations across gender showed little difference across the gender demographic, as of this 11% (n=11) 6% (n=6) were female and 5% (n=5) were male.

Finally, Q17 sought data on awareness of personal values and thinking through decisions. It is evident from the findings that 1st years are less aware of their personal values and have more difficulty thinking through their decisions than any other year group with 32% of 1st year students situated in the lower end of the scale self-identifying as a little like me or not at all like me. However, they report higher in the very much like me section at 38% (n=14). When this data is compared to the 83% (n=) of 3rd years who identified at the upper half of the scale, it appears that the older the student, the more awareness about their values and thought processes occur. Regarding gender differences, there was no significant variances.

This completes the primary findings from the online survey with the Junior Cycle students. The following section will present the findings from the two focus groups with TY students.
4.2 TY Focus Group Findings

Four overarching themes emerged from the analysis of the focus group data. The first two include a number of subthemes.

1. Students awareness of wellbeing
   a. Psychological and physical wellbeing
   b. Having wellbeing and ‘being well’
   c. Self-esteem and self-worth
2. Key indicators that emerged
   a. Active
   b. Connected
   c. Resilient
3. Factors that impact a student’s wellbeing
4. Improvements required to develop student wellbeing in school.

4.2.1 Students awareness of Wellbeing

The first theme that emerged in the focus groups was the students’ awareness of the term wellbeing. They all agreed it was a familiar term and often heard in media and advertising. Some were familiar with the term from “radio adverts” and “health promotion posters”. However, when questioned about wellbeing in a school context and specifically the Junior Cycle curriculum, the students were unaware of the recent emphasis of wellbeing. A key issue for the majority of the students was the lack of explication of the wellbeing indicators to them. None of the students had any awareness of these indicators. When asked to define the term wellbeing, students provided varying interpretations, as addressed in the following subthemes.

4.2.1.1 Psychological and physical wellbeing

Although the students used words and phrases such as “testing limits...happy...your self-image”, a single definition was not forthcoming. Some of these reflected physiological aspects such as “you are exercising and generally taking care of yourself...being physically healthy”. However, the vast majority of terms that emerged were psychological or ‘neck up’,
including “how you feel…positive mindset…positive emotions…confidence”. With further analysis, the students who described wellbeing in physical attributes were all male. No female students alluded to wellbeing in this regard. The majority of students seem to think that the two are separate entities with more emphasis on mind than body.

4.2.1.2 Having wellbeing and ‘being well’

When asked ‘what do you have when you have wellbeing’?, the responses were quite varied, including having “support of family, friends and teachers…satisfaction with life…freedom…manners…a good mindset”. One male student claimed “freedom” and “having more of a chance to do things and explore things that you have never done before”. One student considered exploration as an adventure and, for him, gave him enormous wellbeing, as he “felt better about himself”. It was again another example of the subjective nature of wellbeing and how one student’s view of wellbeing and what gave him “satisfaction with life”.

4.2.1.3 Self-esteem and self-worth

The final sub-theme refers to subjective feelings of self-esteem and self-worth. There was unanimous consensus from the students that wellbeing leads to how they feel about themselves. One male student described it as “being happy with yourself”. Furthermore, another revealed, “I think it’s how you see yourself and how you are to other people”. A female student described it as “Image, not like body, but the image of yourself”. Another female student stated “the way you take care of yourself, the way you see everything around you”. The female students interpreted wellbeing as visual. The way you see yourself, the way you see everything around you. The male students used mostly single words or simple phrases such as ‘happy” or “feeling good”. Through their own descriptions of wellbeing, it became obvious that, although they found it difficult to define, they understood wellbeing and its subjective nature.

4.2.2 Key indicators that emerged

Although the students were familiar with the term wellbeing, they were less familiar with the emphasis on wellbeing in the Junior Cycle. When it was explained however, the students could identify where these indicators were used in various subjects. Of the six indicators,
three repeatedly emerged in the focus groups when the students discussed their experience of wellbeing in school, as described in the following sub-themes.

4.2.2.1 Active

Initially, the students’ definitions of wellbeing focused more on psychological explanations, however students in both focus groups identified the link between being active and their wellbeing. They viewed PE as an important subject. One male participant stated “if you are stressed, activity might relieve the stress”. Many participants recognised the value of other activities that took place during their Junior Cycle experience such as the Active Week which included a 5km sponsored walk. One participant linked his engagement with the Homework Club to being active, as it gave him the opportunity to “get your homework done, then when you go home you can do whatever you want like play sports”.

Another interesting point made by a male participant was that they were “stuck in the classroom way too much” and not enough PE comprising 80 minutes per week. Lunchtime activities including sport and clubs were inadequate, according to the majority of participants. However, this appeared to be pertinent for the males in the groups. A female participant suggested that she was “afraid of what people will think” if she was to partake in some of the activities. This was further elaborated on by another, who declared that “half the girls are afraid to even kick the ball”. Another suggested that the “lads all want to play soccer and none of the girls want to do anything”.

4.2.2.2 Connected

The second indicator (sub-theme) that emerged was students’ sense of being connected to the school and their community. Several of the projects that the students undertook through their three years in the Junior Cycle related to this indicator. One such project that emerged in the TY focus group was the CSPE diversity project which taught “equality, diversity and that we are all the same in some way”. Other projects emphasised the use of teamwork, and one participant said it “brought them closer as a class group”. Another suggested that one initiative gave him new perspectives on life and what his peers could be going through.

An important issue that emerged was that year groups were segregated during lunchtime which impacts upon their SWB. The students in the two focus groups emphasised the fact
that year groups could not “play together” at lunch time. They felt this was segregation and it affected people who had friends in the other years. One female participant noted the importance of “getting to know the community you are in more because we are small (in a small school)”. They felt they did everything together and although this was positive in one way, they did not get a chance to meet other people.

Finally, teamwork was mentioned on three separate occasions and contributed to the connectedness they felt as both a year group and as part of the school community. One female student described it as “just being able to mix with everyone with different backgrounds”. The connectedness to the school was dominated by relationships with their peers and the majority agreed that friends were the most positive aspect of school life.

4.2.2.3 Resilient

One of the prominent questions the researcher wanted the focus groups to discuss was to find out where the students would go to seek help or guidance in school.

In relation to seeking help, students reported a number of individuals they would approach. Out of the seventeen students who took part, only five students reported that they would seek help from the guidance counsellor in the school. Conversely, a female student reported she would seek such support from the guidance counsellor, finding them “very personable and they could trust them 100%”. However, the majority of the students would talk to friends first and then family. This depended on the issue however. If it concerned bullying to some degree, the principal is who they would go to. Furthermore, a female student quoted that she would prefer if ‘the teachers were more aware of what’s happening with each student and not just going, “They’ll be ok”’. This is an issue that needs to be considered as it received agreement from a lot of the focus group.

4.3 Factors that impact a student’s wellbeing

The next overarching theme concerns the factors that affect a student’s wellbeing. A range of conflicting views emerged in the focus groups. The first factor is the culture of the school, including school rules and codes of discipline, reprimands for breaches of codes, and the outdoor facilities.
With regard to the school rules, there were diverging opinions. One male student stated that the rules need to be ‘more relaxed’. In response, a female student argued they “should be more strict to be honest”. When probed as to why, she declared that it would “keep people more in line and less from destroying stuff in general”. Furthermore, the male students in the group appeared to be energised by this topic and opinions were presented such as “people will fight back against rules even more if they are more stricter” and “I don’t think report cards or any of them stop people from misbehaving”. Whilst the general consensus amongst the male students was the rules are too strict, all students in the group agreed the reprimands for breach of code of discipline were pointless and even humiliating, especially the report cards. They are given to students who receive four notes in their diary for breaches of the code of behaviour. They must hand the report card up to the teacher at the start of class and the teacher comments on their behaviour, effort, and homework, before giving them back for the next class. The students agreed that they make little difference to behaviour and affected their self-esteem, as they had to ‘publicly’ present the card to “the top of the classroom and stand up”. They argued that notes are given out for “small things” and “it’s too easy to build up over time”. The female student who defended the rules earlier contradicted her previous statement somewhat and declared that ‘everyone messes up’ in defence of abolishing report cards.

The school facilities also emerged as an issue, with students finding the lack of seating both inside and outside problematic and stressed there was “no room in the hall for everyone”. The positioning of lockers, crowded corridors, and canteen lines were all issues which impacted on their wellbeing. They also argued that the teachers on supervision encouraged all of the students to go outside during lunch but had little to do once out there. A male student also identified the lack of activities as they progressed through the years, stating that “it’s only 1st and 2nd years that do everything”.

The researcher was interested in seeking opinions about improvements necessary in the school to support students’ wellbeing. Four key themes emerged which included a revamp of the code of discipline, improvements to school facilities, greater access to extra-curricular and finally a greater connection between year groups. A renovation of the code of discipline was discussed at length with an abolition of report cards and relaxing of the rules. Improvements to the school facilities such as added outdoor seating and access to more activities including female soccer teams, additional clubs and table tennis were also
discussed. One female student suggested offering various activities to “see what other people are in to”.

Another factor identified was the need for connection between year groups to be improved. One particular view was that “because year groups get to do everything together, they don’t get to go with any other year”. A female student expressed that “it’s nice to see what other people are doing and not seeing the same people and things you do daily”. Another male student agreed and added “involve the whole school more together, not just our years and classes, put them altogether”. The majority also felt agreed that “1st and 2nd years are doing most things”.

This concludes the primary findings from the focus groups with the TY students. The next section will provide a summary of these findings.

4.5 Summary of Findings

The participants who engaged in the online survey revealed important data on how they currently view their wellbeing through the lens of the six indicators being used in the Junior Cycle Wellbeing framework. Overall the wellbeing of the students from the online survey seems positive. However, findings from the focus groups highlighted important issues and appeared less positive regarding their SWB. Issues such as the physical health of the students, especially due to the lack of exercise during school hours and also their eating choices at break time and lunch time are impacting their wellbeing. Mertens (2010) states the importance of explaining any conflicting findings that resulted from the different method collection. The researcher hypothesises that the participants in the focus group could articulate their opinions and engage in greater discussion regarding these issues compared to the survey. This highlights a limitation of the survey as a lack of data can be obtained for additional explication.

However, the sense of belonging and connectedness to the school appears to diminish as students progressed through the three years of Junior Cycle. A sense of connection is a key indicator in the overall wellbeing of the students, with the findings from the online survey
suggesting that students’ wellbeing decreases the longer they are in school. There was convergence in the focus groups also, with many participants declaring that 1st years get all of the attention and students in the older years are somewhat neglected.

Furthermore, in terms of resilience, a stark finding in the quantitative findings is that 31% of students feel they do not have the necessary skills to cope with life’s challenges. This was particularly true of 2nd years. This is an important year regarding choices and personal and social development. Students who lack these skills will invariably have their wellbeing affected. Nonetheless, the findings highlight a positive aspect regarding the students knowing where to go for help with 61% (n=58) revealing they do. But the focus group data also shows that some students rarely seek help from the guidance counsellor, teacher, or principal and receive it predominantly from friends and family.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the findings from the online survey and the two focus groups. These findings will be critically discussed in Chapter 5 with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.
Chapter 5: Discussion

5.0 Introduction

This chapter will present a critical analysis of the primary research findings within the context of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The research questions:

1. What are students’ perspectives on wellbeing in a DEIS post-primary school?
2. What are the factors that affect students’ wellbeing in a DEIS post-primary school?
3. What relevance does the new Wellbeing component of the Junior Cycle curriculum have for students’ wellbeing during this period of adolescence?
4. How can a WSA support the wellbeing of students in a DEIS post-primary school?

The overall findings are discussed through the following three thematic sections.

5.1 Student Wellbeing in the Context of a DEIS Post Primary School

This section will address the first two research questions and discuss the overall findings on students’ perspectives of wellbeing and the factors that affect their wellbeing in a DEIS post primary school. With regards to the first question, the literature acknowledges the complexity of defining subjective wellbeing (SWB) (Amerijckx and Humblet 2014; Mashford-Scott et al. 2012; Bourke and Geldins 2007). The NCCA’s (2017) definition alludes to students recognising their potential, acknowledging their physical capabilities and coping abilities, and having a sense of purpose and belonging. Associated with this definition, are the six indicators of wellbeing: being active, responsible, connected, resilient, respected and aware (NCCA 2017). The current study gathered data across the three Junior Cycle year groups and also a Transition Year (TY) group that had recently completed the new Junior Cycle and Wellbeing Programme. Data was analysed for variances across the groups and across the gender demographic. Any substantial impacts to the SWB of the various year groups or gender will be discussed.

According to O’Brien and O’Shea (2017), the complexity of the term wellbeing can hinder progress in the development of policies and strategies to enhance a student’s SWB. In the current study, this was particularly obvious in the TY focus groups when students were asked for their interpretations of wellbeing. It was evident that the recent emphasis on students’
wellbeing in the school policy and practices had gone unnoticed amongst this population of students. Although they recognised the term, they did not appear to understand the association between SWB and the school environment and curriculum. Neither were they aware of the new Wellbeing Programme or the six indicators of Wellbeing. As mentioned in the Wellbeing guidelines (NCCA 2017), these indicators set out a new vision and direction to address wellbeing through SPHE, CSPE, PE and Guidance. However, the students in this study all had their own descriptions of the concept of wellbeing, which varied considerably. Some associated it with being physically healthy, whereas the majority viewed it in psychological terms. The majority of students mentioned something more than simple pleasure or happiness. Words such as ‘freedom’, ‘respectful’, and ‘kindness’ emerged from the TY group, which indicates an understanding of wellbeing as more than just about pleasure. These virtues are anchored in the eudemonic philosophy of SWB (Huta and Waterman 2014). However, their confusion of the concept resulted in incongruity between their SWB and their school experience. It was only when the NCCA indicators were highlighted to them in the focus group, were they able to identify specific situations when their SWB was being supported in school. Therefore it is to build and communicate a common understanding of wellbeing in the context of school structure systems, and with staff and students, if schools are to fully support student wellbeing (NCCA 2017).

The quantitative data gathered from the online survey with the Junior Cycle students was related to the NCCA’s (2017) six indicators, and allowed the students to self-assess and reflect on their SWB. This provided the researcher with insights on how students perceive their own wellbeing. The findings suggest that there are significant variances in students’ views on their SWB based on their gender and year group. Interestingly, the findings imply that 1st years are more aware and responsible when it comes to protecting and promoting their wellbeing. It emerged that 2nd year students appear to be the least equipped to deal with life’s challenges, show the least care and respect for others, and the least aware of their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. Research suggests that 2nd year is perceived as being a very challenging year, "a fork in the road, where one group of students is becoming more engaged in learning and school life and another group is disengaging and becoming more disruptive” (NCCA 2006, p.14). Therefore, it is vitally important that students in this year are supported with their wellbeing and coping skills and are also made aware of where to go for guidance and support if needed. It could be argued that the incorporation of programmes and initiatives into the wellbeing hours could help combat this disengagement in 2nd year students.
Concerning SWB, it is argued that adolescents will often overlook potential consequences of risky behaviour because of social pressure (Berk 2010; Boyd and Bee 2015; Miller 2010). In addition, males have a tendency to take more risks overall, with females tending to engage in more risky behaviour in early adolescence only (Berk 2010). The findings from the online surveys with the Junior Cycle students in the current study concur with this view, especially regarding one of the six indicators which is about making the correct choices to protect one’s safety. The findings suggest that young males are much more likely to take risks than young females in Junior Cycle. Furthermore, the males in question were from the younger years of 1st and 2nd year. The findings also identified that although females were less confident in their cognitive ability in the earlier years of schooling, they appear to develop more confidence as they progress through their education. This converges with the literature in relation to cognitive abilities, such as verbal reasoning, where female achievement increases in adolescence (OECD 2018). Females have the advantage of earlier development of the left hemisphere of the cerebral cortex, where language is usually localised (Berk 2014). These findings suggest that, although females have the cognitive advantage in earlier stages of adolescence, males do catch up as they develop.

Furthermore, the findings from the TY focus groups indicated diverging opinions amongst the males and females about their SWB. For example, the male students’ focus on physical activity, as an important aspect of school life, which enhanced their SWB. They argued for more PE classes compared to the female students in the group. The females expressed a lack of interest in PE as they felt self-conscience, and they highlighted a male dominance in the class regarding decisions on the types of activities to be played. Lawrence (1996) states self-esteem can fluctuate within certain contexts and it appears here that the female students’ self-esteem is impacted within the PE class. This could then lead to a disengagement from PE classes, which in turn could be a lost opportunity for physical activity, an indicator of SWB (NCCA 2017). However, balancing the interests of both male and females in a PE class may be a difficult proposition.

This view of SWB that is promoted by the NCCA (2017), constitutes a realisation of abilities, a sense of belonging, and care of their physical wellbeing constitutes their core vision. The students’ perspectives varied in this study, the majority of them identified SWB as being psychological and linked to their mental health, with responses such as “satisfaction with life”. This view converged with the views of theorists such as Diener (1984), Park (2004),
and Seligman (2011). In addition, virtues such as compassion and respect arose in the primary findings of the TY focus group. It became clear through the findings that the students understanding of SWB was based on the eudemonic tradition.

The second research question examined the factors that affect students’ wellbeing in a DEIS post-primary school. Although many factors that influence wellbeing are located in the home, the school can also be a “powerful context for healthy development” (DES 2018, p.12). The factors that emerged in this study were relationships, connection, the culture of the school, school policies and resilience. One of the key factors is the influence of positive relationships between teachers and students on students’ SWB (Smyth 2015). The positive relationships established between teachers and students was evident in the study. Some of the students in the TY focus group cited specific teachers who they have built a rapport with. However, This particular piece struck the researcher, as often times a teacher can act as ‘one good adult’ in the student’s lives as indicated by the ‘My World Study’ carried out by UCD and Headstrong (2009). It could be argued that the deficit of pastoral care training in initial teacher training courses could affect a teacher’s attitude when confronted with a wellbeing issue (Hearne and Gavin 2014). The establishment of interventions such as the ‘Check and Connect’ programme initiated by the National Behavioural Support Service (NBSS) and the Alert Programme (NBSS 2009) are vital for upskilling staff members in building positive relationships with students, encouraging academic progression, and monitoring any issues they may have. These additional programmes link whole school support to wellbeing by addressing ‘support for some’, as outlined in the NCGE (2017) and wellbeing policy document (DES 2018).

Another major factor that impacts students’ SWB is the feeling of being connected to the school. The sense of belonging and feeling that it matters that you are there is increasingly seen as vital for both health and academic outcomes (Blum 2005). In this study, findings from the Junior Cycle cohort suggest that students feel less connected to the school as they progress through the curriculum years. The focus group data indicated this is due to numerous factors such as the student voice not being powerful enough in school, as identified by Fleming (2016), in addition to the segregation of year groups during break and lunch times. Although this was introduced to eliminate bullying issues, students feel that it prevents the development of relationships among their peers in different years. It appears that, if schools genuinely want to improve students’ sense of belonging and connectedness, more has
to be done to involve students in the planning of policies and having a voice around the school. However, this requires students to have a particular set of cognitive skills and maturation that some might not have developed thus far (Boyd and Bee 2014).

The third factor that emerged through the findings was the culture of the school. The emphasis on Seligman’s (2011) theory of focusing on what is right with the person as opposed to what is wrong were acknowledged in the discussion of these events in the focus groups. Activities that enhanced their SWB were the Wellbeing Week and Active School Days. There was a perception that involving the whole school was a positive aspect according to comments from a male student in the TY focus group. The wellbeing guidelines (NCCA 2017) outline the whole school approach to wellbeing in four areas with school culture being one of these. The culture of the school in the study was deemed a significant factor for the TY students’ SWB. In particular, the physical and social environment with crowded corridors, positioning of lockers and the rush to the bus for pick-ups causing problems.

The final factor was the students’ resilience, which emerged in both the TY focus groups and the online survey with the Junior Cycle students. Resilience is fundamental to a person’s flourishing and wellbeing (Huppert and So 2013; Seligman 2011; Gaffney 2011). Knowing where to go for help is a key aspect of being resilient according to the wellbeing guidelines (NCCA 2017). The TY students’ in the focus groups indicated who they would go to for help. Interestingly, just over a third would seek help from the guidance counsellor. The majority would consult friends or family first, which emphasises the importance of positive relationships for students. Furthermore, the Junior Cycle online survey findings revealed 7% (n=7) of the entire cohort did not know where to go for help. Of this 7% (n=7), the majority were 1st years. These findings from both data sources are concerning. It seems imperative to promote and explicate the role of the school guidance service to 1st years, especially when transitioning into post-primary.

5.2 Relevance of Wellbeing Programme at Junior Cycle

In terms of the third research question, adolescence is seen as a period of transition, experimentation, and development and a time when cognitive, physical, and emotional changes are taking place (Miller 2011; Berk 2010; Boyd and Bee 2011). The Junior Cycle Wellbeing curriculum is designed to support the SWB of adolescents during this period of
transition (DES 2018). Studies show a high correlation between wellbeing and literacy (OECD 2009), and benefits include fewer disciplinary issues and better engagement (Smyth 2015). In the current study, the findings from the TY focus groups highlight the benefits of infusing wellbeing into the curricular classes through SPHE, CSPE, PE, and guidance. However, this realisation only emerged when the focus group students were probed on the issue suggesting a disconnect between how the curriculum is supporting their SWB. The students had little recollection of these particular subjects being taught to them. Furthermore, the emphasis on supporting their SWB had not been articulated to them in the school. This may be due to poor teacher engagement in the Wellbeing curriculum as outlined by O’Higgins et al. (2007). Ultimately, the school ethos should be underpinned by a strong desire to support wellbeing across all years as envisioned by the Wellbeing Policy Statement (DES 2018).

One of the overarching themes that emerged in the TY focus group data was students’ self-esteem and its impact upon their SWB. Self-esteem fluctuates across the life span (Trzesniewski et al. 2013) but often decreases when students transition from primary to post-primary (Nolan 2012). The SPHE programme, as part of Wellbeing, aims to promote self-esteem and self-confidence. In this study, students from the TY focus groups commented on ‘image’ and ‘how you see yourself and others’ in terms of their perception of their wellbeing. Interestingly, the findings from the Junior Cycle online surveys showed that, across the three year groups, the 1st years had a more positive view of their SWB. This diverges with the literature, which suggests that there can be a drop in self-esteem and SWB upon new transitions (Lawrence 1996). This could be due to the efforts of the school to make the transition for the 1st years as seamless and less stressful as possible. Its DEIS status enables additional supports, such as access to the HSCL officer, which creates links with the students’ home for a more harmonious transition. As parental involvement can be limited in post-primary compared to primary, creating these links is important to help facilitate academic achievement (Byrne and Smyth 2010). It is, therefore, imperative to have frequent communication with parents/guardians on matters such as policy drafting and attendance issues. Additional input from parents/guardians into these activities would be more beneficial, as opposed to solely parent-teacher meetings and parents’ council fundraising initiatives. Self-esteem also emerged in the online survey findings with the Junior Cycle students. In questions that determined their opinions on how connected they felt, which could impact a person’s self-esteem, the 3rd years scored the lowest. Interestingly, the 1st years
scored the highest overall. The researcher’s preconceptions were that first years, new to a school, new friends, and relationships would score the lowest, while those in more senior years with established relationships would score the highest. This was not the case in this study, which also converges with the findings of Byrne and Smyth’s study (2010), which recognises the importance of transitional approaches such as mentor systems and transition days for feeder schools. This opinion was reinforced within the focus groups. As third years feel less connected to the school, stronger emphasis on their involvement in other areas of learning is warranted, which would be a difficult proposition nonetheless with a year filled with projects, classroom based assessments (CBAs), and exams. Interestingly, the introduction of CBA’s or exam stress never materialised in any discussions on impacts to SWB.

In summary, once explicated, the majority of students could identify when their SWB was being supported and developed. However, some issues did arise in the findings. For example, a lack of PE and acknowledgement of Guidance at Junior Cycle emerged in the findings.

5.3 Whole School Approach to Wellbeing (WSA)

The final research question concerned the WSA to supporting the student wellbeing in a DEIS post-primary school. The WSA model is viewed as good practice, as it allows schools to maximise resources and may be an effective way to deliver guidance counselling (DES 2018; Hearne et al. 2016; NCGE 2017). This section will address the findings related to the four pillars of wellbeing promotion (DES, 2018): the culture of the school, the curriculum, relationships, and policy and planning.

5.3.1 School Culture

According to Kutsyuruba et al. (2015), the culture of the school, including the physical environment, matters to the students’ experience of wellbeing. The link between school culture and student wellbeing emerged in the current findings under varying guises: physical aspects such as the school building and grounds, physical space within the school and access to lockers in crowded corridors, and a need for more exterior seating. Although these factors can be easily rectified within the design of a new school building, retrofitting an older
building poses several issues, including fitting lockers into already narrow corridors and also the financial implications.

The issue of physical amenities in the school has implications for the delivery of PE. Evidence suggests that being physically active supports and develops a person’s wellbeing (Biddle and Asare 2011; Usset al. 2007; Penedo and Dahn 2005). For this reason, the NCCA guidelines place a strong emphasis on the role of PE in schools, with the most common allocation being two class periods a week (NCCA 2017). The findings from the online survey in the current study suggest that the vast majority of the Junior Cycle students believe they are active on a ‘regular basis’, with a high percentage 36% (n=35) revealing they were active on a regular basis only ‘sometimes’. However, the findings from the TY focus groups show that the time allocated for PE in the school is insufficient. At present, there is a minimum threshold of time allocated for PE, which is 135 hours spread across first, second, and third year. There is, however, an optional allocation of PE classes if schools decide to offer it. These classes can be incorporated into a school’s Junior Cycle curriculum through a short course which consists of one hundred hours. Short courses provide opportunities to enhance the current provision and are left to the autonomy of school management (NCCA 2014). Fundamentally, the implications are that more space and better physical activity amenities within the school would improve students’ activity levels and affect their SWB positively.

5.3.2 Curriculum (Teaching and Learning)

Teachers have long been acknowledged as playing a pivotal role in creating learning environments that raise levels of social and emotional skills that in turn have a strong effect on SWB (OECD 2015). The findings from the TY focus groups indicate that the four areas of the Wellbeing programme of SPHE, CSPE, PE and Guidance provide positive support. SPHE was acknowledged as key to learning about responsibility, respect, and connection, as instilling. Projects completed by students within CSPE provided them with new appreciations and perspectives on life including an appreciation of diversity. Other subjects were also mentioned. For example, two students within the focus group could make parallels with practical subjects such as science, woodwork and metalwork and being responsible for their pieces and safety within the room. Guidance however, was never mentioned within the focus groups as supporting their wellbeing at Junior Cycle. The literature suggests the inclusion of guidance is based on the significant contribution that guidance can make to the promotion of
student wellbeing (DES 2015). The most recent circular (DES 2018) states guidance must be part of the 400 wellbeing hours at Junior Cycle but the findings suggest the anticipated impact has not materialised at present in this study.

5.3.3 Relationships

Prominent positive psychology theorists such as Diener (2009) and Seligman (2011) articulate the importance of positive relationships to support peoples SWB. In the school context, Smyth (2015) reinforces this and purports that positive relationships between teachers and students can lead to better engagement in school. These propositions resonate with the findings of this study. Peer relationships were perceived as the biggest influence on students’ SWB in the TY focus groups in this study. To this end, the importance of small, everyday acts of kindness, interest, consideration and positivity cannot be underestimated as highlighted by the NCCA (2017). These dimensions of relationships and interactions communicate to students that they are recognised, cared for, valued and listened to and thereby contribute significantly to students’ feeling of wellbeing (NCCA 2017).

The DES (2018) Wellbeing Policy Statement explicitly states that systems should be in place in schools to allow the voice of students to be heard. Fleming (2016, p.43) argues that what can emerge from giving students a voice “is a chorus of trust, inclusion, engagement, participation and positive relationships within a person-centred and democratic school culture”. Nonetheless, the findings from both data sources in this study indicate that this is not necessarily the case in the school and their opinions appear to be neglected. The majority of students in the TY focus groups believed that they were not being heard, and this was also reflected in the online survey findings. A mere 8% (n=8) of students in the survey felt they were listened to ‘almost always’. The implications for this is a perceived disconnect of students to the school. Moreover, associated with this is the necessity for appropriate education and training of school staff in order to understand and fully embrace the concept of appreciating the importance and benefits of the student voice. This is an area that needs to be addressed by offering students more active roles in developing the school environment to support their SWB.
5.3.4 Policy and Planning

Specific school policies including the teaching and learning policy, code of discipline, and the whole school guidance policy all support the wellbeing of students. Regarding the teaching and learning policy the WSA to guidance counselling has many parallels with the WSA to wellbeing. The NCGE’s (2017) framework is designed to complement five of the six indicators of Wellbeing, as set out by the NCCA (2017). Within this, the NCGE’s area of learning known as developing my learning is closely associated with the Junior Cycle’s key skill managing myself. These two areas of learning, or key skills, seek to develop the students’ personal learning and development. In the current study, findings from the online survey showed that 62% (n=60) of all students were aware of how they learn best and can improve. However, 51% (n=17) of 2nd year students were at the lower end of this scale. It could be argued then that 2nd years may not fully appreciate the necessity of appropriate study, as state exams are still a year away. Furthermore, male students appeared to be less aware of how they learn best. Conversely, 1st years were the most satisfied with their learning awareness which could indicate an increased self-concept or lack of exam emphasis at that level. Another possibility was the availability of Homework Club for 1st years. This resource is funded through the DEIS scheme and aims to provide an environment within school for the completion of homework. The availability of Homework Club was mentioned as a positive support which allowed one TY focus group respondent to engage in physical exercise because all homework and study was completed when he arrived home. Furthermore, 3rd years were undergoing study skills and the majority were satisfied with their learning awareness. This poses the question as to when the best time to introduce study skills is. Would 1st year be more suitable to instil good study habits at an early stage or 3rd year to prepare for upcoming exams?

The school’s Code of Behaviour created an energetic discussion amongst the participants in the two TY focus groups. The majority of participants agreed the school was ‘too strict’, with a smaller number saying it was not strict enough. However, they all agreed the penalties for misbehaviour were inappropriate, with two male participants calling them ‘humiliating’ and ‘ridiculous’. Students felt the specific punishments prescribed to students can have a negative impact on their self-esteem. A possibility for negotiating appropriate sanctions for misbehaviour would be to include the student voice at a greater level when designing school
policies. With a collaborative effort, the possibility of a more balanced and fairer system might then materialise.

As part of DEIS status, schools have access to a schools meal programme. This aims to provide regular, nutritious food to children who are unable, by reason of lack of good quality food, to take full advantage of the education provided for them (DOEASP 2018). The findings from the online survey suggest that only 17% \( (n=16) \) of students can make a healthy eating choice ‘almost always’. The vast majority of respondents were at the lower end of the scale, revealing their inability to make a healthy choice. The findings also reveal that females are more likely to choose an unhealthy option, when compared to males. However, these findings diverge with the results of the Healthy Ireland (DOH 2017) study, which found males to be less responsible when choosing healthy meals. Regardless of the free of charge meat and salad roll, the findings show that the students will still opt to pay for the alternative fried chicken roll or pastries at break time. Therefore, the only option is the introduction of a healthy eating policy, where the canteen food is assessed and only healthy options are available with no alternatives. This lack of regard for healthy nutrition affects a student’s wellbeing through mood, energy levels, and motivation; among other implications (DOH 2017).

Although Guidance is a main pillar of the Wellbeing programme (NCCA 2017), the findings suggest that more needs to be done in the promotion of the guidance service. This is especially pertinent for the 1st year cohort. Of all year groups, 43% \( (n=16) \) of 1st were least aware of where to go for support. In the current study, timetabling Guidance as part of Wellbeing in first year could be very beneficial as it would provide an opportunity for students to get to know the guidance counsellor and to form a relationship that can be important in the context of students needing one-to-one support at a later stage (NCCA 2017). Guidance at the Junior Cycle will aid in transitioning into post-primary, support emotional wellbeing, and develop the students’ independence to take responsibility for themselves and make informed choices about their lives (NCGE 2017; Hearne et al 2016). The NCGE (2017) framework also supports the view that the guidance counsellor has an important role in the planning and delivering of the learning outcomes associated with the Wellbeing indicators. This, however, is not always possible due to timetabling issues and reductions in allocation since Budget 2012 (DES 2012). DEIS schools experienced a significant impact to their guidance service at this time as discussed in the literature (IGC
2016). However, the DES (2018) posits a continued support for guidance provision with the phased reinstatement of lost hours during the economic downturn.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the overall findings of the research study. The next chapter, Chapter 6, will provide a conclusion to the study.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.0 Introduction

This conclusion chapter will provide an appraisal of the research study in the context of the aim and objectives of the study. It will provide an overview of the findings, as well as the strengths and limitations of the study. A reflexive examination of the personal learning involved in the process is also discussed.

6.1 Overview of Findings

The establishment of SPHE in the Irish curriculum laid the foundations for supporting a student’s wellbeing in secondary schools. The Junior Cycle Wellbeing curriculum, which was introduced in 2016, further purports to develop and support the SWB of students. Hence, the establishment of policies and guidelines for schools (DES 2018; NCCA 2017). The overall aim of the current study was to gather the perceptions of students’ on their SWB in a DEIS post-primary school. In addition, the findings showed the importance of the whole school approach in supporting the students’ SWB in school. A mixed methods strategy was used that allowed the triangulation of both methods to corroborate mutual findings or conversely, show divergence (Bryman 2012).

Overall, the findings highlight the complexity involved in defining wellbeing as a term. Although the students in this study had their own interpretations of the term, their responses appear to correspond with the NCCA’s (2017) definition of wellbeing that explicates the many strands involved:

Student wellbeing is present when students realise their abilities, take care of their physical wellbeing, can cope with the normal stresses of life, and have a sense of purpose and belonging to a wider community.

(NCCA 2017, p.9)

Although there is no right or wrong answer when defining the term, the NCCA (2017) emphasise the importance of communicating a shared message of what wellbeing means in
specific contexts. This is especially true when it comes to assessing the success of the Wellbeing curriculum in the school. As Diener (2009) argues we must have a good theory about a phenomenon before we are able to measure it.

The findings also highlight divergences in the perceptions of students across the different year groups in the study. In particular, 2\textsuperscript{nd} year students appear to have a more negative perception of their SWB in relation to two of the NCCA (2017) key indicators i.e.. resilience and being responsible. This converges with the literature which states this can be a challenging year for this cohort of students (Smyth 2015). Perceptions of SWB also differed amongst the two genders in this study. The findings suggest males take more risks regarding their safety compared to females, whereas females find it more difficult to be responsible for choosing healthy eating choices.

It emerged from both data sources that positive relationships were the number one factor for supporting their SWB. The focus group data revealed peer relationships enhanced their SWB and any segregation in school impacted upon this. Teacher-student relationships also appeared in the online survey findings. Research suggests these relationships are influential for a sense of belonging to the school which is central for a students’ SWB (Smyth 2015). Teachers can be seen as the ‘one good adult’ in the students’ lives which is identified as increasing a person’s self-esteem and resilience (UCD and Headstrong 2009). The implications of this for schools is that teacher-students relationships need to be strengthened and brought to the forefront through mentoring or alternative initiatives.

The whole school approach is pertinent in the delivery of the Wellbeing programme and the students acknowledge the benefits in this study (NCCA 2017; DES 2018; NCGE 2018). When attention was drawn to specific indicators (NCCA 2017) and explicated, they invariably acknowledged the range of supports that were available to them through the curriculum, policies and activities arranged in support of their SWB. It is therefore imperative to inform and educate students about their wellbeing and, more importantly, communicate how the school is supporting them in developing it. The supports and resources in place in the DEIS school in the study were referenced in the findings. The Breakfast Club, Homework Club and the meal allowance emerged in the TY focus groups as supporting and enhancing their SWB. The absence of these supports could have a detrimental impact on their SWB from a socioeconomic viewpoint.
A key issue identified in the study is how the Wellbeing programme is explicated to students who are experiencing it. Although there was no recognition of any changes to the students’ Junior Cycle experience regarding their wellbeing education, the students could acknowledge it when indicators were highlighted. This is twofold, as it shows that it is not always necessary to radically dismantle the entire schooling system to introduce a new programme. Conversely, however, more could be done to highlight the importance of wellbeing and develop its integration into education for maximum benefit to the students.

6.2 Strengths and Limitations of the Study

In terms of strengths, this research study explored students’ views on their SWB in one DEIS post-primary school. This data was gathered through mixed methods and provided insights into their world and how they view it (Thomas 2017). Although the combination of two different data sources revealed a deeper synthesis of the findings, Bryman (2012) reminds the reader of the lack of conventions of writing up mixed methods findings. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003) suggest a list of characteristics that truly distinguish a mixed methods study such as incorporating multiple approaches in all stages of the study which include problem identification, data collection and data analysis. Both data sources were used and the researcher sought to integrate, connect and link the results in the best possible way (Creswell and Tashakkori 2007).

A limitation of the research study was the design of the Junior Cycle online survey. This was based on the NCCA (2017) self-reporting instrument. Although it provided the researcher with valuable data, some questions could have been rephrased to provide more specificity. An example would be a question regarding positive relationships with friends, peers and teachers. A revised survey could omit ‘teachers’ from question 9, as the researcher feels having friends and teachers in the same relationship category would skew the findings slightly. By making adjustments to some questions, a greater specificity would garner more accurate findings. However, this would have tampered with the NCCA (2017) survey which is what the researcher chose to use. Another limitation is that this study was conducted in only one specific type of school so generalizability is difficult to claim.
6.3 Recommendations of Study

Based on the research findings, a number of recommendations regarding policy, practice, and research can be made. The exploration of students’ experiences and perspectives of SWB in a DEIS post-primary school highlight areas of additional development and support that the students need relating to their SWB.

1. The DES aims to place student wellbeing as the core ethos of every educational establishment by 2023. If this is to come to fruition, educational institutions need to communicate this message effectively to all stakeholders including students. This will ensure that staff and students can identify the various approaches within the education system to support students’ SWB. Additionally, students may become more responsible with regards to protecting their SWB if they truly understood the vision of the school and its curriculum.

2. Another key recommendation is to have a rigorous method for evaluating the Wellbeing programme to determine its efficacy in the short-term and long-term. At present it is left up to the autonomy of the school.

3. A more focused Wellbeing curriculum is needed for 2nd year students who may need additional support in the development of their skills to cope with societal changes during this stage of their development.

4. The relationships students develop in school are key to their SWB. Although peer relationships surpassed all others in this study, teacher-student relationships are also very important. Encouraging positive relationships through team sports, lunchtime activities, team building events, and peer mentoring, as well as teacher mentoring programmes, are therefore essential to support student SWB.

5. The inclusion of the student voice in school policy development is a crucial aspect of promoting inclusion and connectedness, factors central to SWB. Additional opportunities need to be made available to students to have an input into school policy formation on Wellbeing.

6. The whole school approach to Wellbeing requires a collective effort from all school staff, and not just be the responsibility of the pastoral care team and guidance service. However, it is fundamental that all teachers have the required skills to support a student’s SWB. Additional CPD needs to be provided to upskill teachers who feel they do not possess the skillset to support the students’ SWB.
7. DEIS schools provide additional resources such as meal schemes and book rental schemes, as well as access to a HSCL officer. These resources are invaluable in looking after the SWB of disadvantaged students. These resources should also be considered in non-DEIS schools as the study reveals their positive effect on students’ SWB.

6.5 Reflexivity and Personal Learning

The impetus for this study was based on the researcher’s curiosity about the SWB of students in school. This new landscape of Wellbeing has resulted in the immersion of this researcher in an aspect of school life that, up until then, was unfamiliar. The development of the research questions was formulated from this particular line of enquiry (Finlay and Gough 2003).

Throughout the study, the researcher was cognisant of the focus of the study and reflected on any subjective thoughts and feelings associated with this. This was accomplished through reflective writing in a journal and also self-questioning (Etherington 2004). The researcher had personal biases and presumptions which had to be addressed. An example being that the researcher assumed that students would seek out the guidance counsellor or Year Head to resolve their wellbeing issues, but the findings suggest otherwise. This research study has provided an insight into student’s perceptions of their wellbeing and for that I am grateful for their honesty and collaboration. The researcher has gained an understanding which will benefit the him personally and in practice. Going forward, the researcher will be more cognisant of issues that may impact the students’ SWB and also aware of supports that can be put in place to enhance it.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter concludes the study. Within this chapter, the main findings were summarised. It also identified strengths and limitations of the study, and finally identified recommendations for promoting and supporting the SWB of students. Finally, a discussion of the researcher’s reflexivity and personal learning was considered.
References


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National Centre for Guidance in Education (2017) *A whole school guidance framework*, Dublin, NCGE, available:


Appendix A

Wellbeing Policy Documents


Well-Being in Post-Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion (DES, DCYA, DOH, HSE, 2013)

Healthy Ireland-A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2013-2025

Framework for Developing a Health Promoting School Primary and Post-Primary (2013)
Aistear Síolta Practice Guide (NCCA 2015)

Well-Being in Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion (DES, DCYA, DOH, HSE, 2015)

Blueprint for the Development of Children and Young People’s Services Committees 2015)
National Youth Mental Health Taskforce Report (DOH 2017)


Youth Mental Health Pathfinder Project

Healthy Lifestyle Guidance for Schools

Active School Flag

Lifeskills Survey 2015

National Physical Activity Plan 2016

School Principal Consent Form

EHS REC no. 2019_03_22_EHS

Research Title: An exploration of student’s wellbeing in a DEIS post-primary school within the context of the new Wellbeing curriculum at Junior Cycle.

I have read the project Information Sheet and understand in detail the particulars of the research project. I understand that the identity of the participants and the school will not be revealed in the reporting of this research study. The conditions involved in the research which are designed to protect the privacy of participants and respect their contribution are:

Participation is entirely voluntary. Students can choose not to take part in the online survey or focus group.

Volunteers taking part in the focus groups can opt out of study prior to data analysis.

The data from the surveys and focus groups will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to the researcher and the supervisor. Excerpts from the two methods may be part of the final research dissertation but under no circumstances will names or any identifying characteristics be included in the report.

I hereby give my consent for Ciaran Hegarty to carry out this research in the school.

Signature of Principal:_____________________________________

Printed name:__________________________________

Signature of Researcher:_________________________

Date:________________________________________
Appendix C

Volunteer Consent Form (Focus Group)

Date:

EHS REC no. 2019_03_22_EHS

Research title: An exploration of student’s wellbeing in a DEIS post-primary school within the context of the new Wellbeing curriculum at Junior Cycle.

- I understand what this research project is about, and what the results will be used for.
- I am fully aware of the procedures and of the risks and the benefits of the study.
- I am fully aware that the recording of the focus group and the data generated from it will be kept confidential.
- I am aware that only volunteers who agree to be audio recorded will participate in the study.
- I am aware that my identity will remain anonymous.
- I know that my participation in the research study is voluntary and I can withdraw my involvement at any time prior to the data analysis stage.

I hereby agree to take part in this study through a focus group:

Signature:_____________________________________

Printed name:__________________________________

Signature of Researcher:_________________________

Date:_________________________________________
Appendix D

UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Parent/Carer/Guardian Consent Form (Focus Group)

EHS Rec. No: 2019_03_22_EHS

Research Title: An exploration of student’s wellbeing in a DEIS post-primary school within the context of the new Wellbeing curriculum at Junior Cycle.

I have read the Subject Information Letter and understand in detail the particulars of the research study. I understand that the following conditions are designed to protect the privacy of all participants and to respect their contributions.

Participation is entirely voluntary. Even if I consent to my child taking part, he/she still has the right to refuse to take part.

All participants are free to withdraw at any time in the process prior to the data analysis of the focus group interview.

The focus group data will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to the researcher and supervisor. Contributions during the focus group, however, will be heard by all other participants in the group.

While excerpts from the focus group data may be made part of the final research report, under no circumstances will any names of students or the school, nor any identifying characteristics be included in this report.

The collected data will be stored in the supervisor’s office in the University of Limerick for seven years.
I hereby consent to my son/daughter taking part in this research study in the form of a Focus Group.

Parent/Guardian Name: .................................................................
Students Name and School Year:..................................................
Parent/Guardian Signature:...........................................................
Researcher’s Signature.................................................................Date:.........
Appendix E

Student Online Survey

EHS RecNo: 2019_03_22_EHS

Research Project Title: An exploration of student’s wellbeing in a DEIS post-primary school within the context of the new Wellbeing curriculum at Junior Cycle.

I appreciate you taking the time to complete this survey. Please answer all of the questions in all of the sections.

Tick this box to give your consent to take part in this survey □

What is your Gender?
Male
Female
Other

What Year Group are you in?
1st Year
2nd year
3rd Year

Please read each statement and choose one option that relates to you.
3. I am physically active on a regular basis.

Almost never Sometimes Very often Almost always

Answer
Almost never Sometimes Very often Almost always

4. I feel connected to my school, my friends, community and the wider world.

Almost never Sometimes Very often Almost always

Answer

5. I feel listened to and valued.

Almost never Sometimes Very often Almost always

Answer

6. I am aware of my thoughts, feelings and behaviours and I can make sense of them.

Almost never Sometimes Very often Almost always

Answer

7. I believe that with effort I can achieve.

Not at all   A little   Somewhat like Very much
like me     like me     like me

Answer
8. I am aware of how I learn best and know how I can improve.

Answer

9. I have positive relationships with my friends, my peers and my teachers.

Answer

10. I can make healthy eating choices.

Answer
11. I know where I can go for help.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Almost never</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Very often</th>
<th>Almost always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

12. I am a confident and skilled participant in physical activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Somewhat like</th>
<th>Very much</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>like me</td>
<td>like me</td>
<td>me</td>
<td>like me</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13. I feel confident in myself and have the coping skills to deal with life's challenges.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Somewhat like</th>
<th>Very much</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>like me</td>
<td>like me</td>
<td>me</td>
<td>like me</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14. I take action to protect and promote my wellbeing and that of others.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Somewhat like</th>
<th>Very much</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>like me</td>
<td>like me</td>
<td>me</td>
<td>like me</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

15. I know when my safety is at risk and I make the right choices to protect myself.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Somewhat like</th>
<th>Very much</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>like me</td>
<td>like me</td>
<td>me</td>
<td>like me</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
16. I show care and respect for others.

Answer

17. I am aware of my personal values and can think through my decisions.

Answer

18. I understand how my actions and interactions impact on my own wellbeing and that of others, in local and global contexts.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Somewhat like</th>
<th>Very much</th>
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<tr>
<td>like me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>me</td>
<td>like me</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Answer

*Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. If any concerns arose for you from answering this survey, you are advised to talk to a member of staff (e.g. school guidance counsellor).*
Appendix F

UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
O L L S C O I L L U I M N I G H

2019_03_22_EHS.

Research Title: An exploration of student’s wellbeing in a DEIS post-primary school within the context of the new Wellbeing curriculum at Junior Cycle.

Focus Group Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Focus group questions are based on the six pillars of student wellbeing proposed by the NCCA (2017). The questions included below are linked to each of the pillars to gather descriptive data and to provide information on their perceptions and experiences of being through the Junior Cycle Wellbeing Curriculum.

Establish ground rules.
What does the word ‘wellbeing’ mean to you?
What do you have when you have wellbeing?
The new Junior Cycle describes a student’s wellbeing as based on 6 indicators. Are you familiar with these? Show indicators and describe each one clearly.
Were these indicators a part of your junior cycle experience? Tell me more…
In Junior Cycle, did you take part in any of the wellbeing activities organised in the school? Tell me about your experience…..
Outside of the classroom and into the whole school community, what impacts your wellbeing? Example, breakfast club, homework club, extra-curricular activities etc.
What supports do you feel are in place in the school to help you look after your wellbeing?
If you have a concern or problem who would you go to for help in the school?
Have you any suggestions of what would improve your school experience and boost your wellbeing?
What is the most important aspect of school life that makes you feel good about yourself?
Confidentiality Agreement for Focus Group Participants

EHS Rec No: 2019_03_22_EHS

Research Project Title: An exploration of student’s wellbeing in a DEIS post-primary school within the context of the new Wellbeing curriculum at Junior Cycle.

I agree to keep everything that is said in this group confidential.

That means that I can talk about anything that I say or the interviewer says outside of the group BUT I will not talk about anything that was said by any other students in my group.

I agree to keep other people’s opinions and contributions to the group private. If I feel that this is something I cannot agree to, then I should reconsider my participation in the group and notify the researcher [insert name] that I will be no longer taking part.

I understand that I do not have to answer any questions that I don’t feel comfortable answering and that I can decide at any stage that I don’t want to take part anymore.

I agree   I don’t agree

Participant Name: ………………………… Participant Signature:…………………………

Researcher’s Signature…………………………………………………………………

Date:……………………………………………………………………………………..
Appendix H

Coding of transcripts

So I have gone through all the ground rules with you. Ok, you have signed a confidentiality. First question what does the word well being mean to you, anyone want to go with that one?

- Healthy
- Very good, being healthy
- Being positive about things
- Being positive about things good one.
- Being kind to people
- Perfect being kind to people
- Being happy with yourself
- Being respectful

Being happy with yourself, regardless of what anyone else thinks of you, once you are happy with yourself, would that be the kind of consensus? Yes, anything else? we have got a range of them there, being healthy.

- Going beyond what you can do
- Good man well done
- Testing out things you never tried before
- Testing out things you never tried before, part of well being perfect
- Not giving up

Quite a broad term, isn’t it. I can’t say to you what’s well being and you give me one word, you have all given me different answers there and they all actually make up your well being. So it’s quite a massive topic, it’s very hard to decline. What do you have when you have well being?

- Happiness
- A good mindset
- Manners
- Freedom
- Confidence
- A feeling of contentment
- Personal goals (achievable?)
Appendix I

Mind-map Draft 1
Appendix J

Mind-map Draft 2