An Exploratory study of the ways in which the Guidance Counsellor can support second year female students to enhance their social development in a single-sex Post-Primary school in Ireland.

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8th October 2019
Declaration

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

Signature: __________________________________________

Claire Stanley

Date: __________________________________________
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<tr>
<td>CBA</td>
<td>Classroom Based Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSPE</td>
<td>Civil Social and Political Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>DES</td>
<td>Department of Education and Skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESRI</td>
<td>Economic and Social Research Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>IGC</td>
<td>Institute of Guidance Counsellors</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 in Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>PE</td>
<td>Physical Education</td>
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<td>SOL</td>
<td>Statements of Learning</td>
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<td>SPHE</td>
<td>Social Personal Health Education</td>
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<td>WHO</td>
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Abstract

This research explores how the guidance counsellor can support second year female students in enhancing their social development in a post-primary school. Adolescence is viewed as a period of opportunities and vulnerabilities that can have lifelong consequences for young peoples’ wellbeing (Barker 2007). It is during this time of heightened self-focus that early adolescents enter post-primary school, which makes the school environment a pivotal place to promote and support their wellbeing (Fraiser 1993; DES 2018).

Using a qualitative approach, the research gathered an in-depth understanding of the participants own lived experiences. One focus group with seven second year students and one-to-one semi-structured interviews with one member of management and six staff members were conducted. Key findings identified that the school community’s negative perception of second years can impact their self-esteem and their feeling of school connectedness. Class tutors were also found to be best placed to support the social needs of students, if they have the appropriate training in how to manage the potential social issues that may arise. The research concludes by making recommendations to guidance counsellors about the importance of generating an awareness with staff, students and parents about social influences which can impact second years social development.
Chapter 1: Introduction
This chapter will introduce the research study in relation to relevant literature and policies. It will provide the context and justification for the research study and outline the positionality of the researcher. The aims and objectives of the study and the research methodology will be discussed. It will also outline the plan of this thesis.

1.0 Context and Justification for this Research Study:
This research study aims to explore how the guidance counsellor can support second year female students in enhancing their social development in a post-primary setting. In a study for the World Health Organisation, Barker (2007) viewed adolescence as a period of opportunities and vulnerabilities that can have lifelong consequences for young peoples’ wellbeing. The study also emphasised that adolescents need caring and meaningful relationships during this time in order to have strong connections with others which can result in positive developmental outcomes (Barker 2007). Yet, despite education being considered the most valuable way for adolescents to develop personally, socially and intellectually, there is very little evidence that schools place an emphasis on supporting students’ social development (Smyth and McCoy 2011). This research study will examine current supports that are in place to support second years’ social development and generate recommendations based on management and staff members suggestions for effective supports.

The Economic and Social Research Institute (ERSI) study ‘Pathways through Junior Cycle’ discovered that second year was when students started to drift from their learning (Smyth et al 2006). Second year is also a key period in their education when they will either become highly involved in their schoolwork, or they may do the opposite and disengage from school which can lead to disruptions during class and school refusal (Smyth 2009). Based on this research, the Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines (NCCA 2017) identify guidance as an important element in second years’ education as it can be utilised to teach students’ coping and self-management skills in order to build their confidence and resilience. The Wellbeing Guidelines (NCCA 2017) also give schools the freedom to implement guidance into the curriculum in a way that best supports the needs of their junior cycle students.

Traditionally, guidance counsellors primary focus has always been aimed towards Senior Cycle students, especially sixth year students, who need support and advice on which courses and careers to pursue. Whereas little consideration or time has been allocated for Junior Cycle students who are also making key decisions (McCoy et al. 2006). The Wellbeing Guidelines (NCCA 2017) now allow for change, acknowledging that time needs to be allocated towards
the wellbeing programme at junior cycle. Guidance counsellors are now in a better position to provide support towards their social development. The Department of Education (DES) (2018) has further supported this change by announcing in circular 0079/2018 that 400 hours be allocated to the Junior Cycle Wellbeing programme by 2020. This provides an opportunity for guidance counsellors to advocate for the social needs of second year students and insist on time being allocated on their timetable to implement such approaches (NCCA 2017). For this reason, this research study will identify which supports would be the most valuable to implement based on the findings from the management and staff members and insights from the second year students.

Before these new developments on student wellbeing, the Social Personal Health Education (SPHE) curriculum (DES 2000) was the first educational program to place an emphasis on providing young people with skills to manage their personal and social development. This research study gains an insight into SPHE teachers’ experience of delivering the curriculum specifically relating to social development. The DES (2000) also specified that communication and co-operation between the SPHE teachers and guidance counsellors was critical for the effectiveness of the subject. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) (2016) have also designed a short course for SPHE which focuses on the six key indicators: active, responsible, connected, resilient, respected and aware. Yet not all schools will be implementing this short course. For this reason, this research study will be important to explore ways that guidance counsellors can implement specific strategies for second years to teach them the skills which may not have been covered in SPHE.

1.1 Researcher’s Position in the Study
In interpretivist research, it is important to state the positionality of the researcher and explain their intentions for carrying out the research, especially within guidance practitioner-research (Thomas 2009; Hearne 2013). The researcher is a trainee guidance counsellor and a post-primary Art teacher with four years’ experience. I have been working for a year within the school where the research was conducted. I have previously worked in two mixed-gender community schools in the Midlands of Ireland where I became aware of the social difficulties that can impact second years’ school experience. Smyth and Holian (2008) believe that research conducted within the school that you work in can be worthwhile as it can help solve practical problems as well as forcing you to witness everyday issues as those involved experience them.
Daily reflections will be kept in my research journal throughout the data collection and analysis stage to critically reflect and develop my research skills. Having experienced social difficulties of my own when I was in second year, and therefore having a keen interest in second year students’ development, I need to be mindful not to let my bias and subjectivity affect the findings (Punch 2009). It is also important that my personal characteristics as a teacher does not affect the data collection process as students may feel that they must give the correct answer to the teacher (Berger 2015; Dixon 2015). To avoid this, I familiarised myself with all participants in a friendly manner prior to the focus group and avoided sounding strict or controlling during the focus group (Dixon 2015).

1.2 Aims and Objectives
The overall aim of this study is to explore how the guidance counsellor can support second year female students in enhancing their social development in a Post Primary setting. The research objectives are:

- To examine relevant literature relating to adolescent development, emotional wellbeing, guidance counselling research and educational policies.
- To gain an understanding of the whole school perspective towards second year students and the impact that can have on students’ wellbeing and behaviour.
- To examine the current supports and initiatives that are in place to support second year students manage their social development.
- To gain an understanding of students own lived experience through a focus group.
- To generate new insights into the social development of second year students and provide staff and management with the findings.

1.3 Research Methodology
This study used an interpretivist paradigm due to its flexible and unstructured design (Hammersley 2013). The qualitative approach was the most effective way to gain an understanding of the students and staff members own individual experiences (Thomas 2009). In this study, one focus group was carried out with seven second year students. Seven semi-structured one-to-one interviews were also carried out with one member of management and six staff members who consisted of two SPHE teachers, two guidance counsellors, one class tutor and one learning support teacher.
The researcher gained ethical approval (2019_03_20 EHS) (Appendix A) from the University of Limerick Research Ethics committee to carry out the research study and adhered to the ethical principles outlined by the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC) (2012) and the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) (2008). The validity and reliability, which questions the credibility and trustworthiness, of the study were also important factors that were considered through this research (Robson 2007).

1.4 Outline of the Thesis
The outline of the thesis is as follows:

Chapter 1: This chapter introduces the research study by providing a context and justification and outlining the researcher’s positionality in the research. The aim and objectives are presented, and the chosen research methodology is explained. It also provides an outline of the following six chapters.

Chapter 2: This chapter critically reviews the literature relevant to the research topic to provide a background to the study. The context of education in Ireland is presented, and theoretical perspectives of adolescent development is critically explored. Educational and guidance policies are analysed and factors relating to students’ social development are examined.

Chapter 3: This chapter outlines the methodology and research paradigm used in the study. The research aim and research questions are presented, and the interpretivist paradigm is critically justified. The case study design is explained, and the access and sampling are explored and described. The data collection and analysis are outlined and the validity, positionality, reflexivity and ethical considerations are addressed.

Chapter 4: This chapter outlines the data analysis strategy employed and presents the primary findings from the data collection. These findings are outlined through the three overarching themes that emerged from the data collection.

Chapter 5: This chapter presents a critical interpretation of the primary data findings in the context of the existing literature which is directed by the research questions. Key themes that emerged in the study are identified.

Chapter 6: This chapter concludes the research study and provides a summary of the key findings. The strengths and limitations of the research are outlined, and several
recommendations are put forward. Finally, it discusses the researcher’s personal learning from the research process.

1.5 Conclusion
This chapter introduced the research study and provided a context and justification for the research topic. The researcher’s position in the study was identified and the aims and objectives were presented. The research methodology was explained, and an outline of the thesis was presented.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction
The aim of this chapter is to critically review literature related to early adolescents’ social development. It will examine literature from primary texts, educational policies and circulars and research journals related to the education system in Ireland. Literature relating to guidance counselling, adolescent development and other factors that influence adolescents’ social development such as peer influence, parental influence and social media are also explored. In doing so, this literature review will provide the reader with an image of what research has already been carried out in this area and outline any gaps of knowledge within this topic (Bell 2005).

The literature review is guided by the research aim which explores ‘how the Guidance Counsellor can support second year female students in enhancing their social development in a Post Primary setting’ and the four research questions underpinning this study:

1. What are second years’ attitudes and beliefs regarding their social development?
2. How is the social development of second year students currently being supported in a Post Primary setting?
3. What are the perceptions of second year students according to management, staff and second year students?
4. According to management and staff, what factors influence second years’ social development?

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section explores the Irish Education System and outlines the structure of post primary schools in Ireland. It discusses recent policy changes that are placing a strong emphasis on promoting the wellbeing of adolescences. The value of the guidance counsellors’ role within the school and how they can encourage a whole school approach to supporting the social development of second year students is also explored. The second section examines literature related to adolescents’ physical, behavioural, personal and social development. The final section identifies the influential factors that can have an effect on early adolescents’ social development.
2.1 Education System in Ireland
Education in Ireland is compulsory for every child from the ages of 6 to 16 years old (DES 2004). The second level education sector consists of voluntary schools, vocational schools, community and comprehensive schools which vary from being privately owned, operated under religious trusteeships and managed by the local Education and Training boards (ETB) (Citizens Information 2018). They each provide a three-year Junior Cycle and a two or three-year Senior Cycle depending if the students decide to participate in the transition year programme after they complete their Junior Cycle (DES 2004). The Junior Cycle is in the process of replacing the Junior Certificate which focused mostly on state exams in June of third year, while the Junior Cycle is more flexible with projects and presentations throughout second and third year, guided by the 24 Statements Of Learning (SOL) (NCCA 2017).

2.1.1 Junior Cycle Education
The Junior Cycle consists of three years with first years generally starting at 12 years old while third year students are usually 15 years old when they sit their first state exams. The ESRI study ‘Pathways through Junior Cycle’ discovered that second year, was when some students were starting to become disengaged from their learning (Smyth et al 2006). Similarly, second year is viewed as a key period when students will either become highly involved in their schoolwork and strive to do their best in class, or they will start to actively disengage from school which can lead to disruptions during class and early school-leaving (Smyth 2009). Some teachers believe that without the pressure of upcoming exams and having already settled into the new school environment for first year, their attention drifts which can have a negative impact on their behaviour (Smyth 2009).

2.1.2 Current policies on wellbeing in the Irish Education system
The Department of Education and Skills (2013) identified SPHE as having an important role in addressing students’ needs at Junior Cycle, in addition to a whole school approach to support students’ personal and social development. The Principles of the Quality Framework (DES 2016) also justified students’ wellbeing to be pivotal for lifelong learning and feeling that they are part of the school environment. The Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines (2017) were then issued and identify guidance as one of four pillars to teach students coping and self-management skills. The DES (2018) issued Circular 0043/ 2018 stating that all schools must implement a Wellbeing Promotion Process through their School Self-Evaluation process.
by 2023. They place the responsibility with a whole school approach because it is the duty of both managements and staffs to support students and to promote their wellbeing overall (DES 2018). The DES (2018) also stated in Circular 0079/ 2018 that 400 hours must be allocated to the Junior Cycle wellbeing programme by 2020 and that schools can decide how best to implement guidance which provides Guidance Counsellors with an ideal situation to advocate for the needs of second year students.

2.1.3 Guidance Counselling in the Irish Education System
Guidance counselling aims to support post primary students with their personal, social, education and vocational needs and is underpinned by nine competency areas: counselling, information, advice, assessment, classroom guidance activities, vocational preparation, referral, networking and advocacy, and management (IGC 2017). The nine activities provide a framework for the role of the guidance counsellor and explain their professional competency. The IGC define professional competency as residing ‘in the personal qualities, values and attitudes of the guidance counsellor’ (IGC 2017, p.10). It is also important for the guidance counsellor to reflect on their actions, so they can continuously learn and adapt in order to develop their professional competencies throughout their careers (Schon 1983; IGC 2017).

Up until now, the primary focus for guidance counsellors has been assisting Senior Cycle students with subject choices and college course choices, with little consideration for the younger students at Junior Cycle who are also making key decisions (McCoy et al. 2006; Smyth et al 2006). Yet, with the Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines (2017) now demanding that time is allocated towards second years, Guidance Counsellors can advocate to provide supports towards their social development. The NCCA (2017) also suggest a continuum model of support for Junior Cycle students through a whole-class approach, small group work and one-to-one meetings with certain students. Through this, guidance counsellors can employ preventative measures and teach students strategies to help reduce bullying behaviours, reducing victimisation and addressing concerns students may have (Schulz 2011). It is also believed that guidance-related learning can provide second years with an opportunity for reflection as well as developing coping skills and self-management skills to improve their personal effectiveness (NCCA 2017; Everi et al 2018). Not only are these skills vital, but it is also important for students to appreciate how different subjects can relate to the everyday world and their future careers (NCCA 2017). However, Durlak et al (2011) are pragmatic pointing out that guidance counsellors have limited resources, and other competing
demands which means they should prioritize evidence-based modules which show multiple benefits.

2.1.4 Whole School Approach to supporting second years’ social development
A whole school approach provides a framework of good practice for management, teachers and guidance counsellors to work collaboratively in supporting students’ social development (DES 2009). As students encounter up to nine different teachers every day for a short period of time, it can be difficult to build trust with an individual teacher (Smyth and McCoy 2011). Yet, the DES (p.2, 2018) stated in circular 0043/2018 that:

*The qualified classroom teacher is the best placed professional to work sensitively and consistently with students and she/ he can have a powerful impact on influencing students’ attitudes, values, and behaviour in all aspects of wellbeing education.*

Therefore, the guidance counsellor must utilise classroom teachers to implement positive supports to promote their social development within a safe place (Fraiser 1993; Caskey and Anfara 2007). The ‘My World Survey’ also found that every student needs to have one good adult in their life to improve their self-esteem and manage difficult times (Dooley and Fitzgerald 2012). For students who do not have one good adult as a support outside of school, the classroom teacher or the guidance counsellor can fill that role to support their social development. In doing so, teachers need to be mindful of their students’ needs and share a mutual understanding that they have their best interests at heart (Barker 2007). By actively listening to students, and helping them to initiate conversations with their peers, it can build their confidence (American Psychological Association 2002; NCCA 2017). These approaches can improve school engagement which in turn can have a lasting effect on the academic performance and promote positive behaviour (Simons-Morton and Chen 2009).

Teachers’ expectations and attitude can also have a huge influence as if they are encouraging and supportive towards their students, it allows students to feel comfortable enough to take risks and be open to new ideas (Smyth and McCoy 2011). However, if teachers’ expectations are unrealistic or they are discouraging towards students it can have a profoundly negative impact on students’ motivation to do well (Smyth and McCoy 2011). The class teacher or year head are also more likely to meet students’ parents during parent teacher meetings or at school matches throughout the year, so co-operation between the school staff and parents is important (Rohde *et al* 2015). This could be an opportunity to reassure and advise parents that increasing peer influence is part of their social development during early adolescence.
and, in some cases, positive peer relationships can have a significant impact on their development (American Psychological Association 2002). However, Schulz (2011) points out that while it is commonly believed that it is the teachers’ role to solve every issue regarding students’ social development by developing new initiatives. But change can be so slow to progress and, in most cases, the students grow up and leave school before new initiatives can have an impact on them (Schulz 2011).

2.1.5 Summary of Education System in Ireland
Following Pathways through Junior Cycle (Smyth et al 2006), new wellbeing policies and guidelines were issued by the DES to implement change in schools (DES 2016; DES 2018; NCCA 2017). The role of the guidance counsellor has previously lacked focus on supporting Junior Cycle students due to Senior Cycle pressures, but the NCCA (2017) are suggesting a continuum model of support to specifically focus on supporting second years’ wellbeing. Through a whole school approach, with classroom teachers at the core, each student would have someone in the school community to turn to for support.

2.2 Adolescent Development
Adolescence has always been considered a difficult and turbulent time due to hormonal, and behavioural changes occurring (King 2004; Burnett and Blakemore 2009). In a study carried out by the World Health Organisation, it found that around the world, adolescence is viewed as a period of opportunities and vulnerabilities marked by identity and role formations that can have lifelong consequences on their wellbeing (Barker 2007). Early adolescents also need caring and meaningful relationships during this time in order to have pro-social connections as typically, they prefer to learn in collaboration with teachers, peers and their families which in turn, can promote positive developmental outcomes (Barker 2007; Durlak et al 2011). However, it is also a time of transition where their peers influence increases and their parents influence decreases (Simons-Morton & Haynie 2002). As a result, they are beginning to face new social challenges daily which they must learn how to navigate (Crone and Dahl 2012).

2.2.1 Physical Development
One of the most visible changes young adolescents undergo is their physical development. Adolescents undergo more developmental changes during these years than at any other time in their life, except from when they are born to two years old (Caskey and Anfara 2007). Burnett and Blakemore (2009) explain how it is not yet known if adolescents’ approach social situations using different cognitive strategies or whether it is a side effect of anatomical brain development in the absence of cognitive change. However, they believe that hormones,
genes and the psychosocial impact of the physical changes of puberty must surely alter the shape of social awareness and behaviour (Burnett and Blakemore 2009).

2.2.2 Identity Formation
Forming an identity is another key stage in adolescents’ social development. Profound changes in their personality traits and major changes cognitively and socially occur during this time (Klimstra 2013; Bryant 2018). Psychological, intellectual and moral development also play a part in identity formation due to their newfound quest for independence, increased ability to understand and reason, as well as being able to make choices on how to treat one another (Caskey and Anfara 2007). It is also important for adolescents to be able to answer questions for themselves about who they are and what they will become (King 2004).

Erikson (1950) identified in his theory of psychosocial development, that anyone between the ages of 12 to 18 years old experience identity versus role confusion while trying to find their place in society and identify their personal values and goals (McLeod 2018). Erikson also believed that an essential characteristic of adolescence was to experience an identity crisis, which leads to role confusion, in order to test out different lifestyles and determine what morals and identity they wish to adopt (King 2004; McLeod 2018).

Peers have the greatest influential role in developing adolescents’ identity yet, in the event that they adopt someone else’s identity, they can become dissatisfied compared to developing their own which in some cases, can lead to them becoming withdrawn and no longer caring about themselves (American Psychological Association 2002; King 2004). Social media is also having an impact on adolescents’ social development as they are now using it to objectify others and view other peoples’ opinions rather than considering their own individual opinions (Bryant 2018). Despite this, another social ability is to decide to ignore what others think you should do which can lead to more meaningful development (Burnett and Blakemore 2009).

2.2.3 Social Development
Transitioning between childhood and adulthood results in complex changes to adolescents’ self-awareness and social behaviour which impacts their social development (King 2004; Burnett and Blakemore 2009). Their peers, family and community can alter their changing personal goals and motivations on their journey to becoming a responsible adult (Crone and Dahl 2012). These relationships formed during adolescence are extremely important, but if something negatively affects that relationship such as bullying, peer pressure, humiliation or
cyber bullying, it can have a lifelong effect on their wellbeing and social development (American Psychology Association 2002; Barker 2007). Hence, providing adolescents with appropriate social supports through schools can have a positive impact on their day-to-day functioning, equip them with personal coping skills and help them to resolve and manage stressful or upsetting situations (Barker 2007).

An approach that education has considered in recent years is Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) where schools not only prepare students for academic success but ‘also enhance health, prevent problem behaviours, and prepare young people better for the world of work and engagement as world citizens’ (Lantieri 2009, p.4). It does so by teaching children and adolescents fundamental personal and interpersonal skills to manage themselves and their relationships with peers and family through five competencies: ‘self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making’ (Lantieri 2009, p.5). This allows adolescents to contribute to their peers, school community and family with a sense of belonging and satisfaction (Hawkins, Smith & Catalano 2004). However, this approach is not employed in every school in Ireland which is why it is important for each school to value the skills of supporting early adolescents’ social development.

2.2.4 Summary of Adolescent Development
Adolescents experience significant developmental changes during early adolescence. During this time, their physical development and identity formation can impact their social behaviour. Peer relationships start to become more important than relationships with their families which in turn can have an impact on forming their identity.
2.3 Influential Factors on early adolescents’ social development
Based on research relating to social development, the key factors which were found to influence second year students’ social development were: peer influences, group formation, family and social media.

2.3.1 Peer Influence
One of the biggest influences for adolescents’ social development is the interaction with their peers. Brown and Larson (2009) explain that for decades, scholars have identified peer relationships as one of the most important features of adolescence. Their prior dependence on their family shifts towards a peer group to establish more independence (American Psychology Association 2002). However, while peers can influence each other’s immediate decisions, it is believed that families and other responsible adults in their lives can still have an impact on their long-range plans (Snowman and Biehler 1986).

2.3.2 Group Formation and Fitting in with Peers
Peers have also been held responsible for problematic aspects of early adolescents’ behaviour (Brown and Larson 2009). Erikson (1950) believed that adolescents rely on social feedback from their peers in order to determine who they are as a person (King 2004; Brown and Larson 2009). They also begin to search for social structure and a reputation within their broader peer groups as sources of status, acceptance and prestige (Caskey and Anfara 2007; Brown and Larson 2009; American Psychology Association 2002). These pressures to conform and gain social approval by their peers can become all-consuming during their adolescent years which can cause them to behave differently, alter their opinions and dress similarly to fit in (American Psychology Association 2002; Snowman and Biehler 1986).

Brown and Larson (2009) studied the effects of popularity within social groups and discovered two forms which relate to status and being well liked. However, they found that it was the middle-status groups of students’ who were the best liked and considered moderately popular. This implies that adolescents who pay greater attention to be the ‘most popular’ do not necessarily benefit from it in the long run. On the other hand, adolescents who may not fit into the social structure can feel isolated, alienated and lack a sense of belonging which can lead to negative social emotions such as embarrassment, judged and foolish which can greatly impact their social development (Schulz 2011: Burnett and Blakemore 2009). Despite this, adolescents dependence on their peer group changes as they progress through adolescence (American Psychology Association 2002).
2.3.3 Peer Pressure
Another reason adolescents are influenced by their peers may be due to their social-emotional development, which relates to their ability for mature interactions lagging behind their physical and intellectual development (Caskey and Anfara 2007). When some adolescents turn to their peers for support instead of their parents or other adults, they can be led towards anti-social behaviour and falling victim to peer pressure (Barker 2007). Steinberg and Monahan (2007) believe susceptibility to peer pressure increases during early adolescence and peak around the age of 14 and declines thereafter. The average age of second year students are 13 to 14 years old which explains why they can be so susceptible to peer pressure. Early adolescents can also become peer pressured due to an intensification in peers’ demands to conform and being unable to resist their social influence (Steinberg and Monahan 2007). It is not until middle adolescence that the capacity to resist peer pressure develops and they can stand up for their own values and beliefs (Steinberg and Monahan 2007). Yet, if students do not communicate with someone that they trust about being pressured by their peers, it can lead to increased stress, anxiety and depression, but if they do talk about their problems, it can have positive effects on their mental health (Dooley and Fitzgerald 2012).

2.3.4 Risk taking with Peers
If adolescents are unable to resist peer pressure, it can result in risk taking behaviours. Karaman and Cok (2007) categorize three development characteristics that encourage early adolescents to take part in risky behaviours which are egocentrism, sensation seeking and identity exploration. Peer contagion can also undermine adolescents’ social development or cause them harm if they adopt the behaviours and emotions of their peers (Dishion and Tipsord 2011). As a result, adolescents with aggressive friends can over time become more aggressive themselves and, in some cases, the group leader uses aggressive tactics to preserve and maintain their integrity of the social group (Dishion and Tipsord 2011; Brown and Larson 2009). Likewise, once a young person becomes involved in risk taking, it is usually not a once off occurrence and instead can lead to multiple occurrences (Severson et al 1993). Severson et al (1993) also noted that when adolescents take part in risky behaviour, they are aware how dangerous the activity is, but they believe they are in control and in some cases, feel that they cannot avoid participating.

On the other hand, Cauffman and Steinberg (2011) discovered that risk taking can also be a by-product of an interaction between adolescents’ cognitive and psychosocial factors. It is also important to consider that taking risks might not be due to pressure from their peers but
getting a thrill from crossing parental or legal boundaries (Karaman and Cok 2007). Similarly, adolescents often respond more strongly to the reward of breaking rules than they do to receiving punishment (Albert and Steinberg 2011). However, their cognitive-control system gradually matures throughout their teenage years and they learn to exercise self-regulation (Albert et al 2013). Despite all of this, in many risk-taking situations, adolescents tend not to consider risky behaviours as being risky (Karaman and Cok 2007).

2.3.5 Family Conflict
Parent-child relationships tend to decline in quality and influence over the course of the adolescent years as teenagers prefer to spend more time with their friends instead of their parents (Lerner and Steinberg 2004; Burnett and Blakemore 2009). However, in many cases, adolescents become emotionally autonomous from their parents before they are ready for that degree of independence (Steinberg and Monahan 2007). This may result in conflict within the family where emotionally charged situations may cause young adolescents to react in a childish and naive manner (Lerner and Steinberg 2004; Caskey and Anfara 2007). Steinberg (2001) identifies two kind of conflict, spontaneous conflict over daily issues which can occur more frequently and cause greater upset, and conflict about important issues which occur less often. In particular, the greatest source of conflict can occur between adolescent girls and their mothers (Steinberg and Morris 2001). As a result of this new conflict, they may become awkward and distant towards each other, as mothers may interpret these conflicting interactions as being rejected or perceived as being failures as parents, while their daughters consider them as being a way to express frustration and not significant (American Psychological Association 2002). However, if parents can accept that this stage during adolescence is not rejection and instead stay involved and be an emotional and instrumental support for their adolescents as they learn how to become independent whilst maintaining their connection and psychological bond (Lerner and Steinberg 2004; Steinberg and Morris 2001).

2.3.6 Family Support
As a way for families to support and stay actively involved in their adolescents’ lives, it is important to remember how influential their peers are and try to support them to withstand peer pressure and help encourage the development of more positive friendships (American Psychology Association 2002; Simons-Morton and Chen 2009). In doing so, parents need to be non-judgmental, calm and have an appropriate level of empathy when communicating or advising their adolescents and actively listen to their concerns (Bryant 2018). The American
Psychological Association (2002) describe the most effective parental relationship as having firm limits and guidelines, yet encouraging appropriate developmental expectations by using reasoning, explaining limits and having open discussions. If parents are too strict with high academic expectations, extreme monitoring of behaviour or over empathizing, they can heighten their adolescents’ emotions causing them to rebel against their over involvement (Simons-Morton and Chen 2009; Bryant 2018). Therefore, parents need to be mindful not to be a cause of stress in their adolescents’ lives where possible as they can find parents’ expectations as well school demands very challenging (Rohde et al 2015). However, it is important to note that any effective parental relationships that encourage healthy social development can depend on their adolescents’ peer and community environments (American Psychological Association 2002).

2.3.7 Social Media
Social media is another factor that has a huge influence over second years’ social development as they are one of the first generations to grow up in a world saturated by it (Crone and Konijn 2018). Media incorporates television, computers, music and the internet to name a few, and all of these sources of media can take up the majority of adolescents’ time as they feel they are part of a community (American Psychological Association 2002). These days, adolescents have become addicted to their smart phones and can rarely leave them out of their sights for more than a few minutes as they feel they must always remain connected (Bryant 2018).

Not only is it a means to stay in touch with their peers and makes plans, but it is also how they choose to present themselves to the world (Bryant 2018). This means they are constantly at risk of experiencing rejection or victimization from peers and strangers which can have a profoundly lasting negative impact on their social development (Bryant 2018; Crone and Konijn 2018). It can also have a negative effect for adolescents on how they perceive their body image as certain social media sites such as Instagram can make adolescents feel that they must look like a particular shape or must wear clothes that are on trend (Bryant 2018). Similarly, it is a platform to not only share information, but to also share opinions, share images and videos publicly and discuss all media content with their peers (Crone and Konijn 2018). Therefore, it is the role of any professional that works with adolescents such as teachers, management and guidance counsellors to understand how adolescents process this
amount of virtual information and how it can affect their self-esteem and social development (Crone and Konijn 2018). Then it is their duty to support them in a non-judgmental way to appreciate the potential risks involved and discuss strategies to handle any negative situations that might occur (American Psychological Association 2002).

2.3.8 Summary of Influential Factors on Social Development
The literature identifies several factors influencing adolescents’ social development which include peers, group formation, popularity, peer pressure, risk taking, family supports and social media. The review does not consider other relevant factors such as the impact of drugs and alcohol because these are not relevant issues for Junior Cycle students within the case study school. Peer relationships, and more recently, their interaction and the way they present themselves through social media is the most researched area on adolescent social development. This is followed by research on family dynamics and conflict, in particular, the relationship between mothers and daughters which is identified as being emotionally charged and volatile (Lerner and Steinberg 2004).

2.4 Conclusion
The literature review outlines the context of the Irish education system and examines the developmental and influential factors that impact second years’ social development. Following Pathways through Junior Cycle (Smyth et al 2006), new wellbeing policies and guidelines were issued by the DES to implement change in schools (DES 2016; DES 2018; NCCA 2017). The role of the guidance counsellor has previously lacked focus on supporting Junior Cycle students due to Senior Cycle pressures, but the NCCA (2017) suggest a continuum model of support to specifically focus on supporting the wellbeing of second years. A whole school approach would enable classroom teachers to better understand and support the social development of this vulnerable year group. However, there is little research or policy direction specifying the role that class tutors and year heads have in supporting students’ social development.

The transition between childhood and adulthood results in many physical and emotional developmental changes. Identity formation is an important development throughout this time and their peers can have a significant role in this. Peer relationships also start to become more important than family relationships which can have both positive and negative impacts on their social development.
Several factors that influence adolescents’ social development include peers, group formation, popularity, peer pressure, risk taking, social media and family conflict. Peer interactions and the impact of social media are identified as being particularly influential on their social development. Family dynamics and conflict also emerge during this time. This research study analyses the factors that influence second years’ social development and current supports that are in place already, in order to identify and implement effective, relevant supports for second year students.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.0 Introduction
This chapter begins by identifying the research aim and research questions that underpin the study. This chapter will define and discuss the methodology and research paradigms used and explore the data collection and data analysis methods that were employed. Finally, the validity, reflexivity and positionality of the researcher and ethical considerations will also be addressed.

3.1 Research Aim and Questions
The research aim underpinning this study was:

To explore how the Guidance Counsellor can support second year female students in enhancing their social development in a Post Primary setting.

To explore the research aim further, the following four research questions were identified:

1. What are the attitudes and beliefs of second year students regarding their social development?
2. How is the social development of second year students currently being supported in a Post Primary, all-female setting?
3. What are the perceptions of second year students according to management, staff and second year students?
4. According to management and staff, what factors influence second years social development?

3.2 Research Methodology
Thomas (2013) defines research methodologies as approaches or methods that researchers adopt for the underlying foundation of their research. There are two main approaches for collecting data for research, 1) qualitative (interpretivism) and 2) quantitative (positivism).

Qualitative research focuses on collecting insights and understanding into various topics. There are through semi-structured or unstructured methods such as interviews and focus
groups and generally with a small number of participants (Denscombe 2010; DeFranzo 2011). This type of research allows participants the freedom to express their individual experiences and opinions in their own words (Punch 2009; Thomas 2013). Whereas, quantitative research collects numerical data. Examples include through online or paper surveys and questionnaires, which can access a larger sample population and the findings can be arranged into usable statistics (DeFranzo 2011). For this research, a qualitative framework was chosen to achieve rich and detailed data through interviews and focus groups rather than being restricted by closed-ended questions (Punch 2009; Bryman 2016; Bogdan and Biklen 1992).

3.2.1 Research Paradigm
Research paradigms represent the beliefs, thinking habits and worldview of the researcher (Thomas 2013). As part of the research paradigm, ontology and epistemology identified what events exist in the social world and how these events are uncovered (Thomas 2013). Hearne (2013) identifies the importance of choosing a suitable paradigm when carrying out guidance practitioner-research as it can be a complex role. The epistemological orientation relates more to this study because when research is carried out in an interpretivist framework, it can highlight multiple realities which is a way of gathering more natural and in-depth data (Bryman 2012). This was evident when interviewing management and staff members and carrying out focus groups with second years as each participant portrayed varying accounts of their own personal experiences. Bryman (2012, p.41) also describes this paradigm as being ‘concerned with the generation rather than the testing of theories’.

3.2.2 Qualitative Research
Interpretivism is a successful means of social enquiry through a flexible and unstructured design due to its verbal form of analysis instead of statistical analysis (Hammersley 2013). It strives to appreciate the world of human experience from the participant (Cohen et al 2011). Another key strength is its interest in people and the way that they interrelate through lived and felt experiences in societal settings (Thomas, 2009; Robson and McCartan 2016). This approach is more beneficial to this research because it gains an understanding of second years social development from the viewpoints and individual experiences of second years themselves, staff and management, in ways which may not have occurred if a quantitative method was employed.
Qualitative research can have numerous limitations also. For example, the emphasis of open-ended questions can frequently produce surprises, changes of directions and new insights which might make the research process more challenging (Bryman, 2016). This could impact this research due to selecting a random cohort of second year students from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, and a variety of management and staff members with different roles within the school context. If these challenges occur, it could be due to the researcher expecting to collect specific data relating to their own personal experiences or preconceived attitudes, therefore, it is their role to monitor the impact of their own biases and not become immobilised by them (Bogdan and Biklen 1992; Berger 2015).

3.3 Research Design
Research methods are linked with various types of research design (Bryman 2016). Bryman (2016, p.46) defines research design as providing ‘a framework for the collection and analysis of data’. Once the research design is selected, which in this study is a case study design, research methods need to be chosen to collect data (Bryman 2016). Case study research can employ various methods to collect and analyse data (Cohen et al 2007).

3.3.1 Case Study
A case study is a beneficial research design frame to adhere to as it illustrates real-life situations with real people by intensively studying one setting (Cohen et al 2007; Bryman 2016). The chosen case study site for this research was a large, all-girls post primary school located in the South East of Ireland. A school is a good location to carry out a case study as it provides a straightforward understanding of second years social development in one specific school from several different perspectives. Due to multiple realities operating in a specific case, it is common to employ more than one method of data collection (Bryman 2016; Cohen et al 2007). Focus groups were chosen as the most suitable method for second year students as they are still in early adolescence so they could feel more comfortable sharing within a group setting with their peers rather than a one-to-one interview with a researcher that they do not know. Interviews were deemed the most suitable method to collect data from management and staff due to timetabling constraints and staff members may feel uncomfortable sharing information in front of their colleagues.
3.4 Data Collection and Data Analysis:
This section outlines the data collection and methods employed and explains how the school and participants were chosen, accessed and sampled. It describes the strengths and limitations associated with selecting interviews and focus groups as data collection methods. Finally, it will justify the method of data analysis selected and explain the steps that will be taken to extract and generate themes from the data collected.

3.4.1 Access and Sampling
The target population for this study were second year female students and post-primary management and staff that have experience working with second year students. Only female students had the opportunity to participate as the case study site was an all-girls post primary setting. The staff and management participants included the deputy principal, two guidance counsellors, one learning support teacher, one second year class tutor and two second year SPHE teachers. Selecting management and staff members who worked with second year students in different capacities (some had over 20 years’ experience) allowed a range of data to be gathered from varying perspectives.

Ethical approval from the University of Limerick was received on 1st of April 2019 (2019_03_20 EHS). Once approval was given from the gatekeeper (Appendix C), which was the school Principal, the research could commence in the case study site. Next, the target population had to be addressed and sampled.

A purposeful sample was employed as it enabled selection of staff and management with direct experience working with second year students (Patton 2002). It was also used to select second year students as purposeful sampling is effective in identifying participants that are ‘related to the phenomenon of interest’ (Palinkas et al 2015, p.1) which in this study, was the second year students themselves. However, a limitation was that the researcher had previously taught a large cohort of second year students which may impact the information they shared (Berger 2015). This limited the sample of students that could take part in the focus group.

The researcher addressed the second year assembly to invite them to participate in the focus group. The research study and what it would entail was explained in detail together with the benefits of participating. It was important to emphasise that only students who the researcher did not teach were invited to volunteer to take part. The first 12 students to volunteer were given an information sheet (Appendix D) and parental consent forms (Appendix E) for their
parents or guardians to read and sign. An information sheet (Appendix F) and consent form (Appendix G) was also distributed to these students to read and sign before being allowed to participate in the focus group. The focus group date was assigned for 23rd of May 2019, and it was held in the school meeting room around a large, circular table. As only one focus group was held, it was imperative that two audio-recording devices were used to ensure that the recording would be successful (Bell 2005).

When inviting staff members to participate in the study, an information sheet (Appendix I) about the research study was put into the locker/ cubby hole of all staff members who had experience working with second year students from a broad area of roles within the school such as their class tutors, year head, deputy principals, guidance counsellors, learning support teachers and second year SPHE teachers. Staff members that were interested in participating informed the researcher and a selection of each role was chosen. An interview time was scheduled and held in the school meeting room which ensured confidentiality.

A limitation of selecting a target population in a school that the researcher was already a staff member meant that trust had to be developed with the principal, management, staff and students prior to collecting data and clear guidelines over what was required to take part in the research had to be established (Thomas 2013). It was also important not to presume that an ‘insider’ position would immediately result in access being granted and that the chosen sample would agree to participate (Thomas, 2013).

3.4.2 Focus Groups
Focus groups are different from other methods of qualitative research in their purpose, composition and procedure but they can provide an excellent opportunity to give the students a voice, as well as gaining access to what adolescents consider public knowledge (Hennink and Diamond, 1999; Michell, 1999). For this research, one focus group with seven second year students was held in the meeting room in the case study school on the 23rd of May 2019 for a duration of 45 minutes. At the beginning, it was important to gain their trust by building a rapport with them and ensuring that they were aware of the benefits of participating in the research (Dixon 2015; Boyle 2007). It was also important to be mindful of their developmental stage and use appropriate questions and techniques to encourage them to feel comfortable to share honest and considered responses within the group (Dixon 2015; Boyle 2007). This was achieved by projecting encouraging signals while they shared their experiences, allowing enough time for them to consider the answer to each question and not appearing tense or nervous throughout the focus group (Dixon 2015). Even though the
researcher had control of most aspects of the process, the second year students must feel that there is an equal power balance and that they are being treated with respect (Dixon 2015; Boyle 2007). The researcher’s experience of working with adolescent females for several years may also make the participants more willing to share honest information as they feel relaxed (Dixon 2015).

Carrying out focus groups with early adolescents can also have its limitations as they may become overly enthusiastic in expressing their opinions and complete each other’s sentences (Michell 1999). This could be restrictive when transcribing the data from the focus group as it would be unclear who was speaking. There is also the potential for strong personalities to answer all the questions meaning the quieter participants being overlooked, so it is the role of the researcher to ensure every voice is heard and valued (Bell 2005; Michell 1999). The researcher ensured this by asking participants to answer each question one at a time and in order (Bell 2005). Adolescent participants may also struggle to share confidential and personal issues with the researcher while in front of their peers which is why signing the confidentiality contract (APPENDIX H) prior to starting the focus group is important as it reminds the participants how important it is to respect one another (Boyle 2007). The researcher also asked the participants to write down things that caused them social distress at the beginning of the focus group on post it notes which encouraged the participants to share from the beginning.

3.4.3 Semi-Structured Interviews:
Interviewing is considered the most common method of collecting data for qualitative analysis and offers more advantages than other methods of data collection (Payne 1999; Dixon 2015). Seven interviews were carried out with management and staff members over a four-week period. A semi-structured interview style was used with open-ended questions which allowed the participants to speak freely about their own individual experiences (Thomas 2013). This method was more suitable than a quantitative survey as it allowed the researcher to ask probing questions based on their responses and notice their body language and facial reactions during the interview (Bell 2005; Dixon 2015). It was also important to establish a relationship with the staff members and provide reassurance that any information they shared was considered valuable. The topics for the interview questions were based on the research aim and questions and literature previously sourced. After each interview, it was beneficial to reflect on how the process went and suitably adjust any aspects before the next interview took place (Dixon 2015).
Semi-structured interviews can be limiting as the researcher must be adaptable and flexible to collect suitable data as vast amounts can be generated (Payne 1999; Bell 2005; Thomas 2013). It was also important not to become distracted by the topic that is being discussed and remember the key research questions that need to be answered (Bell 2005). Another limitation of semi-structured interviews is the time required to analyse the data from the interviews meaning only a small number of participants can contribute to the study (Bell 2005). Using teachers as participants for this research can also have a negative impact on the findings as teachers may tend to want to give the ‘correct’ answer instead of giving their own interpretations of their experiences working with second year students (Dixon 2015). This was evident with most of the participants confessing that they felt nervous and apprehensive when presented with a list of questions. This was addressed by reassuring the participants, gaining their trust before starting the interview and outlining how they were benefiting the research (Dixon 2015).

3.4.4 Data Analysis
Data analysis allows the research to gather the experiences and explanations of each participant and make sense of their data (Braun and Clarke 2012). The method of thematic analysis will be used for ‘systematically identifying, organising and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set’ (Braun and Clarke 2012, p. 2). This approach is the most suitable for this qualitative research because identifying themes is an effective way to capture reoccurring data that can answer the research questions (Braun and Clarke 2006).

Braun and Clarke’s (2006) ‘Six-phase approach to thematic analysis’ framework begins with becoming familiar with the gathered data. This first phase began after the first interview as initial insights and thoughts occurred while the participants were sharing their experiences (Braun and Clarke 2006; Nowell et al. 2017). It also occurred while transcribing the data as similar themes and experiences were becoming evident. Next, initial codes were generated which needed a consistent approach to be adhered to throughout the entire process (Nowell et al. 2017). Once these were generated and collated, themes needed to be identified throughout the codes (Braun and Clarke 2006; Nowell et al. 2017). The next two phases required reviewing the initial themes that had potential and generating a thematic map and then naming and defining those themes (Braun and Clarke 2006). It was important at the fifth stage to write a detailed description of each individual theme and ensure that the theme
names were clear, concise and informative (Braun and Clarke 2006). The sixth and final phase required the findings to be written up in the report which ‘should provide a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting account of the data’ (Braun and Clarke 2006, p.93). By following this framework, the researcher can develop an understanding of the shared meanings of the participants’ experiences (Braun and Clarke 2012).

The data was transcribed by listening to the audio-recordings and typing the data that was shared. Various coloured highlighters were used to visually identify the common themes gathered in the different interviews and focus groups. It was important to use exact quotes from the participants to reiterate common themes and to ensure that every participant’s data contributed to the findings (Bryman 2016; Frandland and Bloor 1999). By using participants’ exact quotes, it makes the researcher closer to the findings despite the time-consuming transcribing (Bryman 2016).

3.5 Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability can be defined as ‘technical issues about the quality of data in empirical research, and the ideas behind them apply to both qualitative and quantitative approaches’ (Punch 1998, p.322). Robson (2007) simply considers validity as the ‘trustworthiness’ and ‘credibility’ of the outcomes of the research. Whereas, Bell (2005) describes validity in more complex terms as whether the research method describes what it is hoping to measure or achieve. Empathetic validity will form part of this approach as participants, including second year students, are speaking about their own experiences which can create positive emotions such as compassion and respect between the researcher and the participants (Dadds 2008). Qualitative research can also integrate validity ‘through the use of check coding, and by following the audit trail through the analysis’ (Punch 1998, p.322). Yet, a way of distorting validity can be if selection bias is evident by the researcher (Thomas 2013). Bell (2005, p.117) also defines reliability as the ‘extent to which a test or procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions’. As this is a qualitative study with open-ended questions being used with participants, this encouraged different responses due to speaking about their own experiences and opinions on the research topic (Bell 2005).
3.6 Positionality
Within any research study, it is important to state the positionality of the researcher and explain their intentions for carrying out the research, especially within guidance practitioner-research (Thomas 2009; Hearne 2013). The researcher has been working for a year within the school where the research was conducted and taught two class groups of second years which limits the sample that can be accessed for the focus groups. However, an advantage of carrying out this research within this setting, is having knowledge about the setting and convenience of accessing participants (Punch 2009). Smyth and Holian (2008) believe that research conducted within a school that you work in can be worthwhile as it can help solved practical problems as well as forcing you to witness everyday issues as those involved experience them. Despite having a keen interest in second year student’s development already, the researcher needs to be mindful not to let their bias and subjectivity affect them due to having an invested interest in the findings (Punch 2009). It is also important that the researcher’s personal characteristics as a teacher does not affect the data collection process, for example, students may feel that they must give the correct answer to the teacher (Berger 2015; Dixon 2015). To avoid this happening, the researcher familiarised themselves with all participants in a friendly manner prior to the focus group and avoided appearing controlling or strict during the focus group or interviews (Dixon 2015).

3.7 Reflexivity
Reflexivity is defined as ‘the self-appraisal in research’ (Berger 2015, p.2). It encourages the researcher to constantly reflect on the data collection process, acknowledge what was learned and adjust the setting and the participants taking part (Dixon 2015). During the interview process, it was vital for the researcher to critically reflect in their research journal after each participant shared their experiences as adjustments to the phrasing of the questions might have to be made to ensure that they were as clear as possible (Berger 2015). It was also important for the researcher to be aware of their own reactions and emotions during the interviews and identify what triggered them (Berger 2015). The researcher also had to reflect on how their biases were impacting the data collection and be cautious not to let their personal experiences affect the outcomes (Berger 2015). Without doing so, the researcher was not able to develop their research skills and enhance the quality of their research (Dixon 2015; Lietz et al 2006). Drake (2010, p.3) also emphasises that reflexivity for ‘qualitative researchers, particularly practitioner researchers, tend to recognize and address them as an inherent part of the research’.
3.8 Research Ethics

Thomas (2013, p.38) explains that:

‘ethical principles encompass same decisions and dilemmas that not just put right against wrong, but balance one right action against another right action, taking into account the possibly conflicting interests of the parties involved’.

The researcher adhered to the professional standards and ethical codes and principles outlined in the National Centre for Guidance in Education (2008) Research Code of Ethics and the Institute of Guidance Counsellor’s (2012) Code of Ethics. The core ethical principles in guidance research, which are ‘beneficence, non-maleficence, autonomy, fidelity and justice’ (McLeod 2010), also guided this research. This research adhered to the ethical guidelines and legislative requirements of the UL Faculty of Education and Health Science Research Ethics committee and ethical approval was granted on the 1st of April 2019 (2019_03_20 EHS).

There are many factors to consider when outlining ethical and reflexivity issues within the research. The researcher must ensure that issues such as bias, subjectivity, anonymity and coercion are addressed (Smyth and Holian 2008). The NCGE (2012, p.5) also place on emphasis on respecting all participants to ‘privacy, confidentiality, self-determination and autonomy’. Carrying out a case study in a specific school can also have its own ethical dilemmas because there is a higher risk of a participant or school being exposed so, it is important to ensure that all evidence that identifies the school is erased (Hearne 2013).

As the focus groups only involves early adolescent students, parental consent to take part is critical (Thomas 2009). He also stresses the importance of choosing students who have made an active choice to be involved in the study and make it clear that they may withdraw at any time. However, the researcher has a duty of care to take steps to avoid or minimise harming any student if it is unavoidable (McLeod 2003; Murphy and Davidshofer 2005). As alluded to above, there is the potential for students to share parts of the discussion with their wider peer network (Michell 1999). Therefore, it is the researcher’s duty to ensure they have all signed and understand the confidentiality consent form (Appendix H) prior to the focus group (Thomas 2009; Dixon 2015). By taking these critical steps, the second year students may feel more comfortable to share their experiences in the focus group (Boyle 2007). Similarly, the researcher has protected their legal and moral duty and all the participants by addressing the limits of confidentiality (Thomas 2013; Dixon 2015).
3.9 Conclusion
In conclusion, the interpretivist research paradigm is the most suitable approach to achieve the research aim which wants to gain an understanding of second years own experiences to find ways to best support their social development. This chapter began by outlining both the research aim, and the primary and secondary research questions that underpin this study. It defined the methodology and research paradigms and discussed the strengths and limitations for choosing a qualitative/interpretivist approach. It then explored the data collection and data analysis methods that were employed with an emphasis on interviews and focus groups. It also detailed how the researcher gained access to a sample for this study. Finally, the validity, reflexivity and positionality of the researcher and ethical considerations were addressed.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings.

4.0 Introduction
This chapter will discuss the primary findings that were gathered from the focus group with second year students and semi-structured interviews with management and staff. First, it will discuss the data analysis strategy that was employed and describe the research demographics of the participants. A range of themes emerged from the data analysis which provided a deeper understanding into how second years can navigate their social development.

4.1 Data Analysis Strategy
Braun and Clarke’s (2006) ‘Six phase approach to thematic analysis’ was employed as a framework to extract themes from the collected data. First, the focus group and interview audio recordings were transcribed. Secondly, codes were extracted from the transcripts by taking important points of data from each question and grouping them together (Braun and Clarke 2006) (Appendix P and Q) Thirdly, reoccurring themes were identified. A thematic map was generated for the fourth phase (Appendix R) and the constant comparative method (Thomas 2013) was then employed to identify emerging themes from the thematic maps. This allowed the researcher to review the initial themes by grouping similar themes together and removing ones that were not as common (Braun and Clarke 2006). Phase five named and defined three over-arching themes:

(i) Peer Relationships  
(ii) School Perspective and Supports  
(iii) Family Dynamics

Finally, the sixth phase outlines the findings in a dissertation (Braun and Clarke 2006).

4.2 Research Demographics
All participants that took part in the research were selected from the case study site which was a single sex female post-primary school in the South East of Ireland. Purposeful sampling was employed as it enabled staff and management with an in-depth experience of working with second year students to participate (2002). Purposeful sampling was also used to select second year students as they are the focus of this study (Patton 2002).

4.2.1 Student Participant Demographic
One focus group with seven students was held in the school meeting room on the 23rd of May 2019 for a duration of 45 minutes. Twelve students originally volunteered to participate but due to absenteeism and failure to provide parental consent forms, ethically, only seven
students were eligible. To comply with ethical procedures and ensure anonymity, pseudonyms (Fig. 4.1) were used for the seven participants.

![Figure 4.1 Pseudonyms used for identifying focus group participants.](image)

### 4.2.2 School Staff Participant Demographic

Seven interviews were carried out over a four-week period. An information sheet (Appendix I) of the research study was placed into post boxes of all staff members who had experience working with second year students from a broad area of school roles. Seven people volunteered, comprising six teaching staff and one member of the management team. Once again, each participant was given a pseudonym (Table 4.1) to protect their identity and ensure anonymity. Notably, just one was male.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff Pseudonyms:</th>
<th>DP</th>
<th>GC 1</th>
<th>GC 2</th>
<th>LS</th>
<th>CT</th>
<th>SPHE 1</th>
<th>SPHE 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role/Job Description:</td>
<td>Deputy Principal</td>
<td>Guidance Counsellor 1</td>
<td>Guidance Counsellor 2</td>
<td>Learning Support Teacher</td>
<td>Class Tutor</td>
<td>SPHE Teacher</td>
<td>SPHE Teacher</td>
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<td>Female</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experience:</td>
<td>30 + years</td>
<td>23 years</td>
<td>20 + years</td>
<td>20 years</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>8 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1 Research demographics of staff and management participants.

### 4.3 Experience of second years social needs

A baseline of key social needs was first identified with both the students and the management and staff. This provided an understanding of what social influences currently exist and impact on student social development.

#### 4.3.1 Second Year Students

Two activities were utilized to put the students at ease when opening up about their own personal experiences. Firstly, each participant wrote five reasons that cause them social
distress daily (Fig 4.2) (Appendix O). Secondly, the participants were asked to write their own initials in the middle of the page, then write the initials of people they could confide in, and finally, write the initials of people who they consider friends or acquaintances but do not feel that they could confide in them about personal issues. This acted as a visual way to identify who they could trust. These pages were later shredded as some participants wrote names which would have jeopardised anonymity.

Figure 4.2 Activity No. 1: Reasons that cause students social distress.

### 4.3.2 Management and Staff
To facilitate the baseline with management and staff, each were asked to consider what they felt were the key social needs for second year students. Key words and phrases were extracted from their responses (Fig 4.3).

- Anna
  - Injuries, friends fighting, races, when some of my friends don't like some of my other friends, (local) disco.

- Belle
  - Instagram, speaking in public at times, (cultural) community.

- Ciara
  - Big matches, too many jobs, no spare time, disco clothes.

- Dani
  - Friends, peer pressure, to be yourself, groups, homework and tests.

- Emma
  - Video games or online stuff, relationships, catching up on shows that my friends are into, keeping in touch with my friend.

- Faye
  - Relationships with boys, my appearance (body, face, etc), fighting with friends and family, social media, need to fit in.

- Gail
  - Relationships with lads, my appearance (body, face, etc), the need to fit in, do what everyone else is doing, fighting, arguing and losing friends, fighting with family members.
Figure 4.3 Management and staff members perspective of what the key social needs for second year students are.

4.4 Emergent themes
The three overarching themes that emerged from the data collected in the focus group and semi-structured interviews are:

- Peer Relationships
- Family Dynamics
- School Perspective and Supports

GC 2:
- The need to belong to their own group of friends
- how peers perceive them
- they're more grown up
- the social thing of boys
- a sexual identity

DP:
- friendship
- if they're accepted
- they belong to their peer group
- if they're well integrated into a class group
- to being appreciated
- being valued.

CT:
- to kind of fit in, within school and within their social circles
- issues around eating and mental health
- they're becoming older than they are
- they're putting more importance on stuff like staying on trend
- becoming more aware of boys outside of school

SPHE 1:
- peer pressure
- If their friends aren't getting involved, they then won't

SPHE 2:
- body positivity
- inclusion
- relationships
- study skills

GC 1:
- a sense of fitting in
- being part of a group
- not being on the outside
- connection

LS:
- find your place in school, in your home, in life, in the world, universe
- sense of identity
- lack of a sense of identity can cause problems

DP:
- friendship
- if they're accepted
- they belong to their peer group
- if they're well integrated into a class group
- to being appreciated
- being valued.

4.4.1 Theme 1: Peer Relationships

In the context of this research, peer relationships refer to one-to-one interaction with peers, transition from first to second year, group dynamics within the school community, social media and relationships with boys outside the school environment.

Over half of the students identified their peers as more influential than their families. Building from the second ice breaker activity, the students were more comfortable speaking to their peers about personal issues because ‘we trust them more and we know they won’t be going around saying it to other people’ (Gail) and ‘they know you better so they can relate to your side more’ (Anna). The negative impact of confiding in their peers was also evident ‘if we talked to a friend, depends on who you’re talking to, everyone would know about it’ (Gail).

Students were asked about the transition from first year into second year. There was a consensus among the group, that friendship groups changed and developed during this time:

In first year, I was kind of like, friends with everyone, like I didn’t have a friend that I would just go to, I’d just talk to everyone. For second year I think I just have like a close friend. And that’s like the person I sit with in class and lunch.

(Belle)

There was one person in my friend group that I got on with a lot better and we both kind of just went away from that group and we have a bunch of new friends that she knows.

(Emma)

Staff and management identified predominantly negative associations with that transition. Group dynamics can come to the fore as ‘it’s all about the group, in terms of are they being included, excluded, bullying and isolation’ (GC 2). Most acknowledged the impact that group formation and changes within friendship groups can have on their wellbeing:

They’re kind of an in between year between first and third year … and because they’re not new in the school anymore, they’re kind of finding what group of people or what peers that they belong into. And they’ve probably tried out maybe a couple now at this stage. And that can be an issue because there’s more kind of maybe arguments or things developing in second year as opposed to first year. And they haven’t reached third year yet so they haven’t got their kind of cemented group of peers that they hang around with. So it can be a tricky change.

(CT)

Changes in behaviour were also identified by management and staff during this transition as ‘a lot of changes can happen around their friendships areas…they’ve gotten used to the
school in first year, and then they’re beginning to act out’ (DP). Confidence levels were also acknowledged:

They kind of gather a support network around them in second year, they know who to hang out with and who’s going to keep them company if they’re in trouble … but definitely there is a confidence beginning in second year. And certainly more likely to challenge the boundaries.

(LS)

Peer pressure was also evident from management and staff on how it can affect students from taking part in class because ‘if their friends aren’t getting involved, they won’t and if they do, they will’ (SPHE 1). This can also be due to the changes in friendship which make them a challenging year group:

I suppose there’s a lot of changed in friendships, there’s a lot of peer pressure … all of those issues really come to the fore. I suppose they really are the tricky year.

(DP)

Students strongly linked social media with impacting how they communicate with their peers and as a way to meet new people. Faye said she uses it ‘literally all the time, I’m always on my phone’ and Ciara justified it by explaining that she has to ‘charge it twice a day cause I’d be on it so much’. Gail expressed the most reliance for her phone using it to stay in contact with friends at all times during the day and night:

I spend most of my time on my phone, like I wake up at seven in the morning. First thing I do is check my phone, then put on music. Everywhere I go, I have my phone. I facetime people, I call people, I text people, I do everything on my phone and then I keep my phone in bed till like 12 or till whenever I go to sleep.

The few students who identified that they do not rely heavily on social media, shared how they can be perceived by their peers as ‘an outlaw or something’ because ‘now everyone communicates through [social media] so you kind of have to be on it’ (Anna).

Management and staff recognize social media has having a negative effect on students’ social development as ‘they’re putting more importance on stuff like making sure that they’re on trend with the latest bloggers or whoever they’re looking at for makeup tutorials’ (CP). They are also concerned over student’s ability to cope with social media:

I think it’s also very important to know how they can cope with [social media], some of them seem to be able to cope quiet well and don’t get sucked into it too much. Others are obsessed with social media and their life is a virtual life, not a real one.

(GC 1)
Students’ identified boys as an influential factor that causes them social distress during the first ice breaker activity (Fig 4.1). Boys also caused some of the students to become stressed during the day ‘because you’re waiting for someone to snap [chat] you or even though it might never happen, you still expect to have a notification from someone’ (Gail). Not having access to their phones during the school day can also add to increased stress:

There’s always that one person you want to snap you or text you, and then you’re in school all day, and you can’t see it and it’s just really frustrating and stresses me out.

(Faye)

Staff members strongly link boys as influencing students’ social development as ‘the development of the relationship, with a sexual relationship, and a sexual identity is probably beginning to form as well’ (GC 2). Other staff members believe that boys ‘can have an influence on them and how they kind of behave, in school as well as at home’ (CT).

Staff members are also keenly aware of the negative and volatile aspect of social media such as sending inappropriate photos or messages to people and how they’re presenting themselves online by what they are posting on public sites:

I think it is also social media and how they’re presenting on social media, and the kind of image that they’re giving across, we’ve had issues of sexting and things like that.

(GC 2)

I don’t think they’re aware of whatever they put out online, can come back to haunt them… I think there needs to be a timetabled class for second years, on how to use social media in a proper and safe manner, because it’s not being done. And even though they’re tech savvy, it’s kind of running away with us at the moment.

(CT)

It is evident from the students, that their social interaction with peers and boys can affect their mental health when they go home from school and they are on their own:

But when you go home … you can just start thinking things that you worry about, then you just start breaking down or crying or whatever out of nowhere.

(Gail)

So like when you do go home and like, other things can get to you and you can be thinking about the whole day … so then when you do go home you can break down and stuff.

(Faye)

Staff members identify students as being ‘more self-conscious’ (SPHE 2), ‘not sure of who they are’ (CT), or experiencing ‘issues like an eating disorder or self-harm due to low self-
“Esteem” (GC 2) while they are in second year. Some believe it to be due to students having a lack of identity at this stage in adolescence:

I think for anybody is to find your place… and that’s just cropping up over and over again, to find your place in school, in your home, in life, in the world, universe, everything it’s just, if they have that sense of identity and lack of that sense of identity can cause a lot of problems. And this is a big place, and sometimes they can get lost in it.

(Shorty)

4.4.2 Theme Two: School Perspective and Supports
For the purpose of this research, school perspective and supports relates to the school community’s negative perspective of second year students, the supports which are currently in place and suggestions for improvement and the impact of the guidance counsellor in supporting students’ social development.

A predominantly negative perspective of second years emerged from both student and staff participants. Students were asked what they felt the perceptions of their year group were and they all laughed in unison. Each students response was negative and they said teachers think ‘they’re great because they’re not in first year anymore…trying to be cool’ (Anna), ‘the least favourite year…teachers don’t care as much’ (Ciara), ‘think that second years are a bit rowdy and they think that they’re all just trying to be popular’ (Emma) and that ‘teachers have problems with our tan’ (Gail). They feel that they are not perceived fairly by their teachers because mostly, they are just trying to be part of a group:

They all think that like, second years think they’re deadly and they’re all trying to be popular, but most of them are just trying to fit in and go with everyone else and do what they’re all doing.

(Faye)

Students are also aware of teachers treating them differently compared to when they were in first year and said that ‘they’re much nicer in first year but now they’re sick of us’ (Anna), ‘all the tests are corrected last cause we’re the least important’ (Ciara), ‘teachers are definitely nicer in first year and in second year they usually bring up the junior cert’ (Dani) and ‘they put a lot more pressure on you’ (Faye).

Staff and management shared similar negative associations of the year group and consider them to be ‘always a troubled group’ (LS), ‘at the very tricky stage’ (DP), ‘hormones are
kicking in’ (DP) and ‘can be one of the most difficult years for students’ (KP). This negative perspective is believed to be common throughout the teachers:

Teachers, I think, can be very negative towards second year, including myself, it’s like oh god, get them to third year and they become human again.

(DP)

When students considered supports in schools, most felt comfortable speaking to their class tutor about a social issue (Fig 4.4). The rest said that they would speak to their year head, subject teacher or their SPHE teacher.

![Figure 4.4 Which staff members second years feel the most comfortably speaking to about a personal issue.](image)

However, most of the second years were fearful of confiding in teachers in case they would tell others and ‘it’ll get bigger and then it’ll get back to my parents’ (Ciara). Some were also concerned that teachers do not know them well enough:

Teachers realistically, unless you’ve had them for ages, actually don’t know you that well. You can’t really tell them anything unless you’re really close with them. And then your parents mightn’t approve of it or whatever. And you might have to confess something you don’t want to.

(Anna)

Management and staff members listed several supports of students’ social development (Fig 4.5). Most of the staff members identified the pastoral care team referral system as the guideline to follow, while all participants listed the following:
Class tutors were considered the most beneficial role to offer support to students as ‘they have regular contact with the second year group, they probably understand the dynamics of that group’ (KP), ‘the tutor has a very nurturing role’ (LS) and ‘they’re more likely to notice a change in behaviour or withdrawal or unhappiness or not keeping on top of work and spot somebody who’s socially not engaging’ (MR). Management consider them to be the best placed person to notice changes in their students:

They’re the key people on the ground, they’re the people that actually see the little dynamics, why is this child not sitting there that used to sit there yesterday … they’re the person best placed to touch the support through social development’.

(DP)

A key issue identified by guidance counsellors was that class tutors are not a voluntary role. Therefore, class tutors may not necessarily the most engaged in promoting students development:

I wish in a way that they class tutor had more time or was more official, the voluntary capacity of it perhaps, maybe doesn’t allow itself to have the key role that they have because I think they are the core people who are working with them.

(GC 2)
Staff members also listed school subjects that benefit students social development which are SPHE, civil social and political education (CSPE), religion, physical education (PE), wellbeing in the new Junior Cycle, choir, subjects that incorporate the classroom based assessment (CBA) projects and practical subjects such as art and music. The bars in figure 4.6 represent the number of times a subject was mentioned by staff members:

![Bar chart](chart.png)

Figure 4.6 Subjects that staff members identify as supporting second years social development.

Staff listed SPHE as the most important subject to support social development. The two SPHE teachers outline the modules which specifically focus on social development such as ‘belonging and integrating, self-management, communication skills, physical health, friendship, relationships and sexuality, emotional health, influences and decisions, substance use and personal safety’ (SPHE 2). But there is greater emphasis placed on those modules in first year rather than second year:

The overall module of minding myself and others, which involves friendship, and relationships with each other and how they interact. But there would be more of a focus on that area in first year, discussing how relationships changes from primary to secondary school. And then you wouldn’t put as much time into that with second year though maybe they still need us because their relationships are changing and developing.

(SPHE 1)

Both SPHE teachers explained that despite the SPHE curriculum providing enough information and being a benefit to second year students, ‘finding the time to cover the
curriculum is a challenge’ (SPHE 2) and ‘because of having one class period a week, there is only so much you can do’ (SPHE 1).

Staff participants identified similar challenges which may be why teachers do not consider the social development of their students as ‘the ground is hit running at the beginning of second year to try and get a course done’ (LS):

They’re just trying to get through the curriculum. So in most cases, they’re not really going in too concerned about social changes. They probably realized they’re a bit more moody and irritable and more likely to fly off the handle but I don’t know if they go in really with that in mind, they’re going in to teach a class.

(GC 1)

Several suggestions were provided as suitable supports that could be implemented to support students’ social development. Most of the staff members suggested targeted activities or trips throughout the year. The others suggested timetabled classes such as wellbeing, SPHE focusing on topics such as social media. Some staff members shared the limitations of implementing such supports as ‘that takes time and it takes resources and takes a timetable, if it’s not on the timetable it doesn’t happen’ (LS). A buddy system or a check in system was also suggested:

To just check in with them, especially in the first term when they’re going through the changes of no longer the first year, and there’s a lot of supports for first years, it might be a shock to the system then that they’re left up to their own devices. And that’s where maybe some of the behaviour problems can come through. So even maybe a mentoring thing with more senior students and to check in with the tutor.

(SPHE 1)

In relation to guidance counsellors, students were able to name both of them in the school and most were aware that they were someone to speak to ‘if you need to rant to them you can rant to them so they just hear you out’ (Emma) and ‘they do try and help you and it’s easier to be able to rant to them if they don’t know you as well because they can’t really judge you for it’ (Faye). Yet some also think that you can only speak to them ‘if someone was really in trouble and they can’t talk to anyone else’ (Anna). A few students thought that you only went to the guidance counsellor if it related to ‘career stuff, picking subjects and what job you would like to have’ (Anna) and no one goes to them ‘other than sixth years’ (Belle).

Management and staff identified the benefits of the guidance counsellor introducing themselves the new first year classes, ‘they actually introduce themselves and that’s very important’ (DP), and ‘so I would hope they would have an understanding that it’s threefold,
we’re there to give educational, vocational and personal counselling’ (GC 1). The other guidance counsellor discussed the possibility of second years’ negative association with accessing the guidance service within the school:

It’s probably something they see as an individual appointment. And probably more the counselling, they might see it as a negative way in terms of if you have a problem, you identify yourself as being outside the group, which perhaps is sometimes, and may prevent them from actually accessing the service because they don’t want to be identified as somebody who has a problem.

(GC 2)

The other staff members all felt that students associated the guidance service with ‘solely being there for fifth and sixth year students’ (CT), ‘mainly careers related’ (SPHE 1) and to help with ‘subject choices’ (LS).

4.4.3 Theme Three: Family Dynamics
The final theme that emerged from the data was family dynamics. Both students and management and staff members acknowledged that family dynamics play a role in supporting students’ social development. It will discuss the finding in relation to family expectations and parents lack of understanding.

Students outlined that their parents have higher expectations of them now that they are in second year and that ‘they’re not as easy on you’ (Faye), ‘they expect you to be more mature and be more responsible’ (Belle) and ‘they give you more stuff to do’ (Dani). Anna also said that ‘they kinda freak out a bit, they’re like you have to study and you have to do this’. Yet, some of the students felt that they are treated the same as when they were in primary school because ‘I have two older brothers so they already know what’s going on’ (Ciara) and ‘they can relate to you a little bit more’ (Emma). Belle also discussed her culture as having an effect over what is expected of her:

I have my own opinions but because I’m from India, I kind of get influenced by that cause I don’t think I’d be able to do like, some of the things that people here will be able to do so like my mam would kind of influence me. So I might want to do it, but my mam will be like no, that’s not appropriate.

Management discussed the effect that socio-economic background can have on some students’ social development:
I think family history is a big part of it. So if there are problems in the family space, that the parents are split up or there has been maybe unemployment, or there’s a social issue like maybe drugs or so on, it can have a massive effect on them.

(DP)

Students were mostly concerned about confiding in their families if the issue was deemed ‘appropriate’ or not. Many expressed this concern saying it ‘depends on what it is’ (Dani), ‘if it’s appropriate enough I’d tell my mam’ (Gail) and ‘if I’m fighting over something my parents wouldn’t like to hear about then I probably wouldn’t tell them’ (Faye). Another student explained the distress it caused when her mother wouldn’t allow her to download certain apps to stay in touch with her friends:

My mam wouldn’t let me get Snapchat, so I had to secretly get it because I thought it was time to get it ... my mam wanted to check my phone and I got notifications from Snapchat and I got in so much trouble. But during that time, I would have to secretly go on my phone, and then I got my phone taken off me for the longest time.

(Belle)

Most of the students said that they get into arguments with their parents over their friends because ‘there’s some of my friends that my parents wouldn’t agree with me hanging around with’ (Faye), ‘I wanted to go into town with my friends, but my mam said no, I should stay home and study instead’ (Belle) and ‘my mam found out and she was just disappointed in the friend and how much I trusted her’ (Gail).

Students also expressed that their parents do not understand why social media is so important to them, for example, ‘the apps I use she doesn’t really get’ (Gail) and ‘she sees me on my phone and she’d be like get off it you’re on it too much’ (Ciara). Parents also fail to understand the need for them to constantly be in contact with their peers:

I could have a pain in my stomach and my mam will be like oh that’s cause you’re on your phone too much. Like that has nothing to do with my phone. She’s like oh you see half of those people all the time in school. But there’s other people I talk to that I don’t see all the time.

(Faye)

My mom doesn’t really get the thing that you have to keep in contact with so many people and snap them and all this. She’s like why bother. And she thinks it’s wasting our generation.

(Anna)

4.5 Conclusion
This chapter presented the findings from the focus group with seven second year students, and the seven semi-structured interviews with management and staff in the post primary case
study site. It discussed the data analysis strategy, identified the research demographics and outlined the three predominant themes that emerged which were peer relationships, school perspective and supports and family dynamics. The following chapter will discuss these findings in relation to relevant literature and policies.
Chapter 5 Discussion

5.0 Introduction
The purpose of this chapter is to provide a synthesis and critical interpretation of the primary findings in the context of the research questions and the literature review. The overarching themes will be discussed in relation to how second year students’ social development can be supported by the guidance counsellor in an all-female post primary school.

5.1 Overview of Research Findings in the Context of the Research Questions
The overall aim of this research was ‘to explore how the Guidance Counsellor can support 2nd year female students in enhancing their social development in a Post Primary setting’. Initially, the research aspired to identify the extent to which peers and peer group dynamics impacted second years’ social development in order to find ways to best implement strategies and supports that could help them to navigate those social challenges.

This study employed an interpretivist paradigm to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants own lived experiences (Cohen et al. 2011). The second year students shared a number of issues that influence and impact their day to day lives, the most common being their peers and friendship groups. The findings revealed that their peers can have both a positive and negative impact on their social development. An unexpected finding was that their friendship groups changed dramatically from first to second year. All but one student transitioned from being friends with everyone in first year, to selecting one or two close friends in second year.

Social media emerged as having a predominantly negative effect on students’ social development as many reported that they remained in constant communications with their peers outside of school and often became distressed waiting for boys to message them during the day. This correlates with Bryant’s (2018) research that adolescents are now addicted to their mobile phones and prefer to communicate through them instead of speaking face to face which can have lasting effects on their social development. The guidance counsellor would be the person well placed to share with parents how influential social media is to second year students and the reliance they place on their peers.
By not talking to others about the problems or stresses they are experiencing on a day to day basis, the My World Survey (Dooley and Fitzgerald 2012) found that it can lead to increased levels of distress and anxiety which second years may find difficult to manage. Some students shared that they can suffer from mental health issues such as feeling down and overwhelmed as a result of interactions with their peers throughout the day, with results in them “breaking down” when they are at home and on their own in the evening instead of speaking to an adult that they trust. Dooley and Fitzgerald (2012) found that students who do not communicate about their problems with someone they trust do not have adequate social supports or one good adult to turn to for help. Despite this, most of the students explained that they did have a family member to talk to about social issues but only if they considered the issue to be appropriate.

The management and staff members outlined supports currently in place within the school that they feel help second years manage their social development and suggested other activities, trips and extra-curricular clubs that could support them during this time. Yet, despite suggesting several suitable supports that would have a positive influence on second year students, most of the staff participants shared the limitations of implementing these supports and admitted to unrealistic time constraints which would hinder some of their suggestions working in the future. Recent policies (DES 2018) and wellbeing guidelines (NCCA 2017) have made positive changes by allocating 400 hours dedicated to wellbeing by 2020 and identifying guidance related learning as one of four pillars to support students’ wellbeing. The guidance counsellor is therefore able to advocate for the need of specific supports for second year students.

When both staff and student participants were asked what their perceptions of second year students were, the findings revealed an overwhelmingly negative response. The management and staff admitted that second years are considered a difficult and hormonal year group, while the second years themselves, unanimously agreed that teachers dislike them this year. The second years noticed a significant change in how teachers treated them in first year and now in second year and agreed that their teachers consider them to be the least important year and correct their homework and tests last. These findings can a profoundly negative impact on their self-esteem during this difficult time. They also
contradict with the DES (2016) belief that feeling part of the school community is vital for students’ wellbeing. Findings from the students also revealed that they do not feel that they can trust teachers about personal issues fearing that it might get back to their parents or management might get involved. Guidance counsellors need to be mindful of how second years perceive these negative associations with their year group and can advocate on their behalf with teachers to explain what they are going through.

The students were asked what they thought the guidance counsellor’s role was in the school. Unexpectedly, half of the students were aware that their guidance counsellor was someone they could speak to about personal issues. While the other half felt they were only there to speak to sixth year students about their future careers and applications to third level. The staff participants felt that second years only considered the guidance counsellor to be someone who helped them with subject choices or applying to college and not who they could make an appointment with for a personal or social issue.

Family dynamics were the final theme that emerged from these findings. The key findings indicated that second year students do not feel comfortable confiding in their parents unless they deem the issue appropriate. Similarly, they identified that their parents misunderstood the importance of social media to stay in contact with their peers outside of school. It was also found that most of the girls experience conflict with their mothers, in particular relating to issues with their peers.

The following are the three predominant themes that emerged from the study:

1) Peer Relationships
2) School Perspective and Supports
3) Family Dynamics

5.2 Theme 1: Peer Relationships
This section will address the impact of peers and relationships have on second year social development. The three sub themes encompassing this theme are peer formation and development, social media and relationships and effects on mental health.
5.2.1 Peer Formation and Development

The most frequent theme that reoccurred throughout this study related to the relationship second year students have with their peers and the importance they place on fitting into a peer group. This relates to Brown and Larson’s (2009) research that for decades, peer relationships have been identified as one of the most important features of adolescence. The students identified that their relationships with their peers were more important to them than their relationships with their families or teachers because they feel that they can trust them and have things in common with them. Barker (2007) believed this to be a positive influence on their social development as adolescents need to have meaningful and caring relationships.

Nearly all the student participants said that their friendship groups changed from first to second year which Crone and Dahl (2012) recognize as an important time to navigate new social challenges daily. Most explained that they went from being friends with everyone in first year to now having one or two close friends. The staff participants were also aware of this development and explained that peer groups can become more stable in second year allowing them to support one another. Yet, staff also observed that their friendship groups become the most important aspect their lives.

The staff participants were also wary of the negative effects that peer relationships can have on second years’ social development. Some identified peer pressure as a cause for some students to not participate in class as they do not want to seem different from their peers. This finding relates to Barker’s (2007) research that peer pressure or negative peer relationships can have lasting effects on their wellbeing and social development and in some cases can lead to increased anxiety and depression. The American Psychology Association (2002) also observed that it can become all-consuming for second years to try and conform and gain social approval by their peers. One of the guidance counsellors observed some second years being excluded, bullied or isolated from their peer groups. Schulz’s (2011) research found that students can lose a sense of belonging and connectedness if they do not fit into the social structure within their peers. This is one of the most important factors to consider when support second years as their friendship groups can continuously change which may cause some students great distress.
5.2.2 Social Media and Relationships
Social media was a recurring theme that emerged from both staff and student participants. Crone and Konijn’s (2018) recent research found that these early adolescents are one of the first generations to grow up in a world saturated by social media. This was prevalent when every student participant admitted to constantly using their mobile phones to stay in contact with peers and to get to know others outside of school. This correlates with Bryant’s (2018) research that adolescents are now addicted to their mobile phones. The students also said that social media can cause them distress during the school day as some students wonder if boys are texting them.

The staff members considered the more negative aspect of social media and discussed how second years use it to present themselves to the world and potentially send inappropriate messages or images. This may have damaging effects on second years’ social development as they can be at risk of rejection or victimization from their peers and strangers (Bryant 2018). Bryant’s (2018) research also found that apps such as Instagram can make adolescents feel that they must be a certain body shape or be on trend with other social influencers. This correlates with some of the student findings where they all just want to fit in and do what everyone else is doing. One of the guidance counsellors expressed the need to identify how second years cope with social media and be alert to the signs that students are nurturing a virtual life instead of a real one. Crone and Konijn (2018) stress the importance of understanding how the amount of virtual information can impact their self-esteem and social development. The American Psychological Association (2002) suggests discussing different strategies with second years to help them deal with any negative situation that might occur. This concerning aspect of social media highlights how important it is for the guidance counsellor to implement targeted programmes on how students can handle this new virtual world.

5.2.3 Effects on Mental Health
Some of the student participants expressed that their relationships with peers and boys can cause them to break down and start crying when they get home from school in the evenings. Simons-Morton and Chen (2009) explains that when adolescents experience emotional and cognitive distress like this, it can have an impact on their motivation, school engagement and their self-efficacy. The World Health Organisation (2001) also estimated
that one-in-four people will suffer from a mental health condition at some point throughout their lives. One of the SPHE teachers noted that second years can become more self-conscious during this time, while one of the guidance counsellors explained more serious issues such as eating disorders and self-harm can develop to cope with emotional distress. Schulz (2011) places the responsibility on guidance counsellors to employ preventative measures and strategies to address any upsetting concerns that second years may have.

5.3 Theme 2: School Perspective and Supports
This section examines the impact of the school’s perspective on second year students and the supports that are currently in place or the ones that would be beneficial to help second years manage their social development. Three sub themes encompass this theme. These are negative school perspective, school supports and the impact of the guidance counsellor.

5.3.1 Negative School Perspective
When questioning both staff and students about how the school perceives second year students, the findings were overwhelmingly negative. The students felt that teachers do not care about them as much as other year groups and the students think that second years think they are “great” and want to be popular. The students also note that they themselves have issues with their appearance. The students also expressed that they are mostly concerned with being part of a group and trying to fit in. While the Principles of the Quality Framework (2016) highlighted that students’ wellbeing and inclusion in the school environment is pivotal for learning nowadays, these negative associations of second year students can have the opposite effect on their overall social development and emotional wellbeing.

The staff participants shared a similar negative association with second year students. A study carried out by the ERSI (Smyth et al 2006) found that second year was the year that students started to become disengaged with their learning. Smyth (2009) believed this was due to not having the pressure of upcoming exams which results in their attention drifting. The Deputy Principal shared a similar experience where she explained that teachers in general just want students to get to third year so that they can return to being normal and better behaved. In a similar vein, the other staff participants identified second years to be the most difficult year for students citing possible reasons such as changes in hormones.
which manifests with more behavioural issues. However, Smyth and McCoy (2011) found in their research that teachers need to have encouraging expectations and a supportive attitude to influence students to do their best.

Yet these findings identified that the second year students are keenly aware that teachers consider them to be the least important year group and correct their homework or tests last but still put a lot more pressure on them. Barker (2007) found that teachers need to show their students that they have their best interests at heart and be mindful of the ever-changing needs of their students. In doing so, students will respond to the positive and encouraging attitude which would improve school engagements and promote positive behaviour (Simons-Morton and Chen 2009).

5.3.2 School Supports
The DES (2018) considers the school environment as pivotal in supporting the students’ social and emotional needs as it is where adolescents spend most of their time. They also encourage a Whole School Approach to nurture and support students’ wellbeing as much as possible (DES 2018). However, a key finding that emerged from many of the students was that they were apprehensive about sharing personal issues with their teachers in case the issue would be brought back to their parents or in case it spiralled into a bigger issue than they perceived it to be. Smyth and McCoy (2011) noted that another reason students’ may struggle to form a trusting relationship with teachers can be due to encountering up to nine different teachers every day, all which could have different expectations and attitudes towards second year students.

However, when students were specifically asked which staff member they would feel the most comfortable talking to, if they had to, half of the students said their class tutor. This finding correlates with the DES (2018) that the classroom teacher is best placed to work sensitively and consistently with students, as well as influencing their attitudes and behaviours. However, the class tutor is even more beneficial as they have a more holistic role than just being a classroom teacher and, in many cases, have the same tutor group for the three years of junior cycle. One of the guidance counsellors (GC 2) also explained that class tutors are the core people working with students, yet worryingly, in most cases teachers do not volunteer for the role so they may not be willing to invest their time to
support their students as others teachers may. The other staff participants also identified class tutors as being the most effective staff member to support second years’ social development as they said that they are the most likely to notice changes in behaviour, the dynamics of their peer group and if students are not socially engaging with their peers. However, some of the student participants felt that they could not share personal concerns with teachers because they do not know them that well. Smyth and McCoy (2011) explain that teachers need to be encouraging and supportive towards second year students so it allows them to feel comfortable to open up and take risks. Similarly, Barker (2007) discovered in his research that teachers need to be mindful of the needs of their students and share with them that they have their best interests at heart.

The staff participants shared mixed feelings relating to how successful the supports for second years are within the school in general. Many suggested extra-curricular activities such as going on day trips, school fun days or a weekly games club. Yet most were sceptical of new initiatives being successful if they were not supported by management and the whole school community. Schulz (2011) cautions that change can be slow to progress in schools and says that in many cases, students have left the school before the new initiatives can have an impact on their social development. While all the staff members identified the care team referral system as a guideline to use when referring a student for extra support, many stated the limitations such as time constraints, competing demands and lack of priority when it came to giving second years additional support which Durek et al (2011) also found. These findings contradict the NCCA’s (2017) suggestion that Junior Cycle students need a continuum model of support such as whole-class approach, smaller groups and one to one meetings. Ignoring the limitations, one of the SPHE teachers agrees with this approach and suggests a check-in system between the class tutor and second year students or a mentoring system with older students to help them transition from first into second year.

Staff participants identified SPHE as the most effective curriculum subject for teaching students about their social development. While it is beneficial, the two SPHE teachers that participated explained that there is a greater emphasis placed on social development and peer relationships in first year compared to second year. These are important findings as it
suggests that it would be beneficial to recap on topics relating to their peers in second year when they may be experiencing more changes within their peer group than in first year. The SPHE teachers also noted that second years can be more reluctant to answer questions or participate in class discussion and can be more irritable and moodier. The SPHE teachers also found that students can fear being humiliated or isolated from their peers if they actively participate in class. These findings relate to Smyth’s (2009) research that second year is a key period where students either do their best in class, or they will become disengaged which can cause a rise in disruptions and behavioural problems in class. However, if teachers are able to address students sudden disengagement as a result of peer pressure, teachers could work alongside the social demands of the class and initiate new ways for second years to participate in class.

5.3.3 Impact of the Guidance Counsellor
The IGC (2017) defined guidance counselling as supporting post primary students personal, social, educational and vocational needs. Unexpectedly, half of the students were aware that the guidance counsellor was there for them to talk to without judgement or if they were in trouble and had no one else to talk to. The other students thought that only sixth years accessed the guidance service when they needed help applying to college. Yet, the Wellbeing Guidelines (NCCA 2017) now identify guidance as an important role in supporting second years with their coping and self-management skills which can build their resilience and confidence.

There were mixed findings from the staff participants with some justifying the benefits of the guidance counsellors introducing themselves to all students in first year and explaining that they are available for their personal, social, educational and vocational needs. While the other guidance counsellor (GC 2) considered students’ negative association with accessing the service for personal or social reasons in second year as they felt they could be ashamed to be perceived as different from their peers. The other staff participants felt that second years only thought that the guidance counsellor was there to help with subject choices or career related guidance. It was also noted that very few second year self-refer themselves to the guidance service if they are experiencing social issues or distress, instead the guidance counsellors explained they only meet second years for personal counselling if they have been referred through the pastoral care team referral system. Meanwhile, the
NCCA (2017) suggest applying a continuum model of support for Junior Cycle students. If this model of support was employed, the guidance counsellor could use it to incorporate preventative measures and strategies to reduce victimizations, reduce bullying behaviours and address any concerns adolescents may have (Schulz 2011). But it is also the guidance counsellor’s role to identify ways to eliminate the negative association of accessing personal counselling because it is a beneficial support to students in the long run.

5.4 Theme 3: Family Dynamics
This section will examine the research findings that relate to how families influence their daughters in second year and how their higher expectations impact their social development. Two sub themes encompass this theme: family background and expectations, and trustworthiness and lack of understanding.

5.4.1 Family Background and Expectations
Adolescence can be a difficult and conflicting time for families. Steinberg and Monahan (2007) found that adolescents strive to be more independent during this time and look for guidance from their peers instead of their families. These findings conflict with their research as half of the students said that their parents still have a greater influence on them than their peers. However, many of the students also identified times that they had arguments with their parents for hanging around with friends that their parents disapproved of or for not being allowed to socialise with their friends outside of school. Lerner and Steinberg (2004) also found that this is a common occurrence during adolescence, as their newfound independence can cause emotionally charged situations.

Another key finding from this research was that most of the students shared that they felt their parents have higher expectations of them now than they did when they were in first year and have more responsibility, increased pressure to study and are less sympathetic if they do something wrong. This could be why parent and child relationships can decline in influence according to Lerner and Steinberg’s (2004) research. One of the student participants also shared the cultural differences that she experiences and how it can cause conflict between her and her mother. The findings found that her mother was more restrictive on her socialising with her friends outside of school which appeared to affect her social development. This relates to Steinberg’s (2001) finding that the most common sources of conflict occur between adolescent girls and their mothers. If conflict goes
unresolved or is reoccurring, it can cause their relationship to suffer and mothers may feel they are failing, while their daughter may just see it as releasing frustration (American Psychological Association 2002).

5.4.2 Trustworthiness and Lack of Understanding
The American Psychological Association (2002) state in their research that the best way for families to support their adolescents’ social development is to stay actively involved in their lives. However, findings from the students revealed that they only spoke about peer related problems if they considered the issue to be appropriate. Bryant (2018) suggests in his recent research that parents need to be cautious when communicating with their daughters’ around sensitive issues and not appear judgemental but instead actively listen to them, so they feel comfortable going to them for advice.

5.5 Conclusion
Considering the findings in the context of the literature, insights revealed the need for class tutors to be a voluntary role, the guidance counsellors role is to implement targeted supports relating to peer dynamics and the use of social media, and making second year parents more aware of the different factors that influence their daughters during early adolescence, to name a few. While, management and staff were invested in supporting second year students, they admitted to having a negative perspective of the year group and were very aware of the limitations within the school that can hinder any quality supports being implemented. Chapter 6 will conclude this research study by further summarising the key research findings, outline several recommendations, discuss the strengths and limitations of the study and consider the personal learning gained by the researcher.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.0 Introduction
The purpose of this chapter is to provide a conclusion relating to the aims and objectives of this research study. It will discuss the strengths and limitations of this study and outline several recommendations that are informed by the primary research findings and the literature. Finally, the researcher will present a reflective summary of their experience as a practitioner-researcher and outline the personal learning that was gained throughout the process.

6.1 Summary of Findings
Despite a large amount of research carried out on adolescents’ development in general, there was little research focusing solely on early adolescents’ social development. The ESRI’s study ‘Pathways through the Junior Cycle’ was the first research carried out in Ireland that identified second year students as the most vulnerable in the Post Primary environment (Smyth et al. 2006). The ‘My World Survey’ was also invaluable research identifying the positive influence of “one good adult” on adolescent’s overall wellbeing (Dooley and Fitzgerald 2012). Yet in recent years, the DES (2018) and NCCA (2017) have placed an even greater emphasis on supporting adolescents’ emotional wellbeing by making it compulsory for schools to implement a wellbeing promotion process and programme at Junior Cycle. These recent developments within policies and DES circulars are all hugely beneficial, but it is the role of the guidance counsellor and staff members who are best placed to make a positive influence in supporting second years’ social development, values and attitudes (DES 2018).

A number of key findings emerged during the data analysis which gave a greater insight into second years’ social development. An unexpected finding from the students found that most of their friendship groups changed considerably between first and second year which had both a positive and negative impact on their social development. Most students said they were friends with everyone in first year, but now have fewer, but closer friends in second year who they trust more and can talk to about personal issues. This transition in friendship groups can be an uncertain time which may impact their levels of anxiety or
stress as the students identified that their primary focus is to just fit in. From the staff perspective, they have observed in their classrooms that changes in friendships groups can be extremely challenging as they fear being isolated or left out. They felt that this can cause negative behaviour in class and a reluctance to participate in class discussions as they fear being perceived as different from their friends. The ‘Pathways Through the Junior Cycle’ study similarly identified second year as a time when students can lose focus on their schoolwork which can lead to school refusal or absenteeism (Smyth et al. 2006). Two students disclosed that the pressure of their peers and school can sometimes cause them to cry and “break down” when they get home from school and when they are on their own. The World Health Organisation (2001) estimated that one-in-four people suffer from mental health conditions throughout their lives which justifies the importance of implementing targeted classes to help second years understand their changing emotions and hormones. By learning how to navigate these new social challenges early in their adolescence, they may be better able to manage their wellbeing throughout their life (Crone and Dahl 2012).

Another key finding identified social media as an influence over how they present themselves to the outside world and to remain connected with their peers at all times (Bryant 2018). Half of the student participants admitted to being addicted to their mobile phones and becoming stressed throughout the school day wondering if boys had messaged them. The other half did not have the same reliance on their mobile phones but explained that their close friends regularly question why they do not use their phones as much as they should. Social media was also found to be a source of conflict with their parents who blamed it for everything that goes wrong. From the staffs’ perspective, they were concerned about the dependence on keeping up with every influencer or celebrity that encourage young girls to wear certain make up or dress in the latest style. Findings from the staff also highlighted the importance of upskilling and informing other staff members about the latest social media trends so they are up to date with students’ terminology.

While findings from the staff members outlined the number of supports currently in place and suggested other ideas for second years to manage their social development, many outlined the limitations such as time constraints and timetabling demands which can impact the effectiveness of such supports. Yet, the most concerning finding in the study was the overwhelmingly negative response of the school community’s perception of second year
students. The students were acutely aware that other year groups and teachers think they all just want to be popular and think that they are “great” but the students agreed that their main priority is to fit in with their peers. The students also noticed a considerable change in attitude from their teachers between first and second year, with a greater increase in academic pressure and less positive support. The staff participants considered second years to be a difficult year group with increased behavioural and emotional issues. The DES (2016) shared the importance of students feeling part of the school community. Without a positive perspective from the school community, it can have an impact on their self-esteem and willingness to learn and participate in class.

Despite this, the class tutor was the teacher that students felt most comfortable speaking to about personal issues. While many students were aware that the guidance counsellor was there if they needed to talk to someone, findings revealed that second years only met the guidance counsellor if they were referred through the pastoral care team referral system. The findings relating to their family dynamics, showed that half of the student participants still turn to their families for support and guidance while the other half turn to their peers. Most of the students felt comfortable sharing with their parents about peer-related issues but only if it was deemed appropriate for their parents. It was also revealed that most of the students admitted to having arguments with their mothers about their peers for various reasons such as not being allowed to spend time with their friends outside of school and being friends with people their mothers disapproved of.

6.2 Strengths and Limitations of the Research Study

6.2.1 Strengths
A key strength of this research study was the interpretivist paradigm that was employed, as it allowed rich and detailed data to be gathered by the student and staff participants (Bryman 2016). It also allowed the second year students to have a voice and give their own opinions based on their own experiences that they are currently going through. This in turn provided the students with an opportunity to appreciate that they do not go unnoticed by everyone within the school community. Another key strength of this study was the cohort of management and staff participants that participated in the semi-structured interviews. Their
range of roles and experience within the school community contributed to a rich variety of data that was gathered.

6.2.2 Limitations
The interpretivist paradigm also had its limitations as the open-ended approach to the questions can make the research process more challenging by producing surprises and changes of direction (Bryman 2016). This was considered during the researcher’s reflections as if anything unexpected or unplanned occurred during the interviews, it was reflected on and altered for the next interview so they would run as smooth as possible.

This study would have also benefited from a wider cohort of student participants. At the initial stages of the research study, fifth year students were going to participate in the study to provide a deeper understanding of the second year experience. This may have been beneficial to the overall findings as the fifth years could have reflected on their own experiences from when they were in second year and they may have shared more information as they are now removed from the experience.

Carrying out the research study as a case study in an all-female Post Primary school with a Catholic ethos also had its limitations as it was difficult to generalise the findings as every Post Primary school has different ethos and may be denominational or non-denominational. Similarly, as this is a small case study research, it was difficult to provide a wide variety of data as only seven students and seven management and staff members were able to contribute to the research study. There was also an absence of the male perspective in this research as all participants were female, apart from one male learning support teacher. The researcher was also female. There is the potential for further research in this area if it was carried out in a mixed gender or all male secondary school, it would give the study a deeper understanding from all perspectives.

6.3 Recommendations
Following the research findings, recommendations can be made in relation to policy, research and practice:

1. Policy should specify that second year class tutors be a voluntary role undertaken by teachers and the guidance counsellor should train them at the start of the school
year, about second years’ developmental stage and the factors influencing their social development.

2. Further research could be carried out in an all-male or mixed gender case study school in order to gain greater understanding about what factors can affect male and female social development in these contexts.

3. A senior peer mentoring programme should be implemented where transition year or fifth year students would be assigned second year students to check in with throughout the year which could alter second years’ negative school perspective.

4. Information should be regularly shared with the whole staff about second years’ transition through adolescence to remind them of the difficulties they are experiencing.

5. Guidance counsellors should carry out a survey with second years about the impact of social media and present the findings to staff members and second year parents to keep them aware of the ever-changing online trends.

6. Targeted and engaging guidance classes should be implemented to all second year students to help them manage social media, peer pressure and changing peer group dynamics.

6.4 Reflexivity and Personal Learning
A reflective approach was employed throughout the research process. Daily reflections were kept in the research journal for the duration of the data collection and analysis, which allowed me to critically reflect and improve my research skills. This was an effective way to also develop my professional competencies as a guidance counsellor (IGC 2017). This research study has made me aware of how dedicated I am in supporting and advocating for the most underappreciated year group in the school community as I begin my career as a guidance counsellor.

My research skills improved throughout the data collection and my personal qualities were able to make the students feel comfortable, appreciated and understood during the focus group which was a very rewarding experience. This research study has also developed my empathy and consideration for all students who are experiencing social distress in school. It also made me aware of my ambition to make the school community a safe and happy place for all students going through difficult and vulnerable stages of adolescence. This study
made me aware of the incredible work management and staff are doing to support the social needs of second year students already, but also how limited staff members feel regarding time constraints and timetable allocation which hinders some of the effective supports that could be utilised or implemented. Researching within a school that I currently work in was worthwhile for these reasons as I saw what problems could be solved and I witnessed how second years currently handle everyday issues (Smyth and Holian 2008).

6.5 Conclusion
This chapter concludes the research study on ways in which the guidance counsellors can support second year students manage their social development. It presented an overview of the key findings and the aims and objectives of the research study. The strengths and limitations were discussed, and several recommendations were put forward. Finally, the reflexivity and personal learning of the researcher were outlined.
References


Bryant, A., 2018. The effect of social media on the physical, social emotional, and cognitive development of adolescents. Available:
https://scholarworks.merrimack.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1036&context=honors_capstones [Accessed: 10th January 2019]


Department of Education and Skills (2018) – Circular 0043/2018 Circular to Management Authorities of all Post Primary Schools: Secondary, Community and Comprehensive and the Chief Executive Officers of the Education and Training Boards


Dear Lucy

Thank you for your amended Research Ethics application which was recently reviewed by the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

The recommendation of the Committee is outlined below:

Project Title: 2019_03_20_EHS  An exploratory study of the ways in which the Guidance Counsellor can support 2nd year female students to enhance their social development.

Principal Investigator:  Lucy Hearne

Other Investigators:  Sancha Power, Claire Stanley.

Recommendation:  Approved until October 2019.

Please note that as Principal Investigator of this project you are required to submit a Research Completion Report Form (attached) on completion of this research study.

Yours Sincerely

Anne O’Brien
Anne O’Brien
Senior Administrator, Education & Health Sciences
Research Ethics Committee
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Appendix B: Subject Information Sheet for the Gate keeper

Principal Subject Information Sheet

Date:

EHS REC no. 2019_03_20_EHS

Research title: An exploratory study of the ways in which the Guidance Counsellor can support 2nd year female students to enhance their social development.

Dear Principal,

I am currently a student of the MA in Guidance Counselling and Lifespan Development course in the School of Education, University of Limerick, under the supervision of Dr. Sancha Power and Dr. Lucy Hearne. As part of my studies it is a requirement to complete a research project on a topic related to guidance counselling.

In my research, I aim to explore how the guidance counsellor can support 2nd year students in enhancing their social development in an all-girls Post Primary setting. In order to gather this information, I would appreciate if you would give me consent to carry out the study in XXX.

This would involve me interviewing 10 staff members including the 2nd Year Head, Deputy Principals, staff members of the Pastoral Care team and staff members who are currently teaching SPHE to 2nd years. The interviews will be audio digital recorded and will take approximately one hour to complete. They will be held in a private location in the school building at the convenience of the participant.

I would also like to carry out two focus groups with 12 students from 2nd year, and 12 students from 5th year. The focus groups will also be audio digital recorded and take
approximately 40 minutes during a class period in the school library. It should be noted that as focus groups are conducted within a group setting, each participant’s contributions will be heard by the other participants within the group. However, each student will be asked to sign an agreement to keep all opinions expressed during the focus group private.

All information gathered will be held in the strictest of confidence and pseudonyms will be used to ensure anonymity. The data will be destroyed after analysis according to UL guidelines. Participation in the study is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the research at any time prior to the data analysis stage. The results from this study will be reported in my thesis and may be disseminated through other professional publications and conferences.

The collected data will be stored in a secure location approved by the University of Limerick. It is important to note that the school’s name and the name of the individual participants will not be used in the research and the school will not be identifiable to anyone other than those directly involved.

If you have any queries or require any further information on the research study, please do not hesitate myself or my supervisor:

**Researcher:** Claire Stanley.
Email: 17123194@studentmail.ul.ie

**Supervisor:** Dr. Sancha Power.
Email: Sancha.Power@ul.ie No: (061) 234297

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Lucy Hearne.
Email: Lucy.Hearne@ul.ie

Thank you for considering this request.

This research has received Ethical approval from the Education and Health Sciences Researcher Ethics Committee (2019_03_20_EHS). If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:

**Chairman Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee EHS Faculty Office**

University of
Limerick Tel (061) 234101
ehsresearchethics@ul.ie
Appendix C: Principal Consent Form

Principal Consent Form

Date:

EHS REC no. 2019_03_20_EHS

Research title: An exploratory study of the ways in which Guidance Counsellors’ can support 2nd year female students to enhance their social development.

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:

1. Participation is entirely voluntary.
2. Participants are free to withdraw at any time prior to the data analysis stage and any contribution made will be subsequently destroyed.
3. The interviews and focus group data will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to the researcher and the supervisor. Excerpts from the interviews and focus groups 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 Claire Stanley to carry out this research in the school.

Signature: ________________________________

Printed name: ____________________________

Signature of Researcher: ____________________
Appendix D: Information Sheet for Parent/ Carer/ Guardian for the Focus Group

Parent/ Carer/ Guardian Information Sheet (Focus Group)

Date:

EHS REC no. 2019_03_20_EHS

Research title: An exploratory study of the ways in which the Guidance Counsellor can support 2nd year female students to enhance their social development.

Dear Parent/ Carer/ Guardian,

I am currently a student of the MA in Guidance Counselling and Lifespan Development course with the School of Education, University of Limerick, under the supervision of Dr. Sancha Power. As part of my studies, I have to complete a research dissertation on a topic related to guidance counselling.

In my research I aim to explore how the guidance counsellor can support 2nd year students in enhancing their social development in an all-girls Post Primary setting. I am writing to you to enquire whether you would be willing to consent to your daughter taking part in a research study in XXX through a student focus group with me.

The focus group will take approximately 40 minutes and will be audio-tape recorded. It should be noted that as focus groups are conducted within a group setting, each participant’s contributions will be heard by the other participants within the group. However, each student will be asked to sign an agreement to keep all opinions expressed during the focus group private. The recordings will have any names or identifiers removed, will be stored in a secure location or on a password protected computer in UL, and the information will be stored for seven years. It will then be safely destroyed.

Participation in the study is voluntary and students can withdraw from the research at
any time prior to the data analysis phase. Should a student withdraw after the focus group has begun their contribution will be removed.

If you have any queries or require any further information on the research study, please contact me or my supervisor:

**Supervisor:**
Dr. Sancha Power.
Email: Sancha.Power@ul.ie
No: (061) 234297

**Principal Investigator:**
Dr. Lucy Hearne.
Email: Lucy.Hearne@ul.ie

If you are agreeable to your daughter participating in this research study please confirm your consent by completing the attached **Consent Form** and returning it to me. A signed copy of this form must be received in advance of the day of the focus group in order for your daughter to participate.

This research has received Ethical approval from the Education and Health Sciences Researcher Ethics Committee (**2019_03_20_EHS**). If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:

**Chairman Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee EHS Faculty Office**

University of Limerick
Tel (061) 234101

ehsresearchethics@ul.ie
Appendix E: Consent form for Parent/ Carer/ Guardian

Parent/ Carer/ Guardian Consent Form (Focus Group)

Date:

EHS REC no. 2019_03_20_EHS

Research title: An exploratory study of the ways in which the Guidance Counsellor can support 2nd year female students to enhance their social development.

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.

(i) Participation is entirely voluntary. Even if I consent to my daughter taking part, she still has the right to refuse to take part.
(ii) All participants are free to withdraw at any time in the process prior to data analysis of the focus group.
(iii) The focus group data will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to the research team. Contributions during the focus group, however, will be heard by all other participants in that focus group.
(iv) 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.
(v) The collected data will be stored in the PI’s office in the University of Limerick for seven years.

I hereby consent to my 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 F: Information Sheet for Student Participants

Volunteer Information Sheet (Focus Group)

Date:

EHS REC no. 2019_03_20_EHS

Research title: An exploratory study of the ways in which the Guidance Counsellor can support 2nd year female students to enhance their social development.

Dear Student,

I am a student of the MA in Guidance Counselling and Lifespan Development programme in the School of Education, University of Limerick, under the supervision of Dr. Sancha Power. I am undertaking a research dissertation on a topic related to guidance counselling as part of my studies.

In my research I aim to explore how the guidance counsellor can support 2nd year students to enhance their social development. In order to gather information on this topic, I would appreciate if you would agree to participate in a focus group with a small group of your class peers.

The focus group will take approximately 40 minutes of your time and needs to be completed in the coming weeks. The focus group will be audio recorded. Only volunteers who agree to be audio recorded will participate in the focus group. It should be noted that as focus groups are conducted within a group setting, each participant’s contributions will be heard by the other participants within the group. However, each student will be asked to sign an agreement to keep all opinions expressed during the focus group private. All data recorded will be destroyed after the analysis process. Participation in the study is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the research at any time prior to the data analysis phase.

All information gathered will be held in the strictest of confidence and pseudonyms will be used to ensure anonymity. The results from this research study will be reported in my
thesis and may be disseminated through other professional publications and conferences.

The collected data will be stored in the PI’s office in the University of Limerick for seven years. It is important to note that your name will not be used in the reporting of the research and the school will not be identifiable to anyone other than those directly involved.

If you have any queries or require any further information on the research study, please contact me or my supervisor:

**Researcher:** Claire Stanley.
Email: [17123194@studentmail.ul.ie](mailto:17123194@studentmail.ul.ie)

**Supervisor:** Dr. Sancha Power.
Email: [Sancha.Power@ul.ie](mailto:Sancha.Power@ul.ie) No: (061) 234297

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Lucy Hearne.
Email: [Lucy.Hearne@ul.ie](mailto:Lucy.Hearne@ul.ie)

This research has received Ethical approval from the Education and Health Sciences Researcher Ethics Committee (2019_03_20_EHS). If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:

**Chairman Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee EHS Faculty Office**

University of
Limerick Tel (061)
234101

[ehsresearchethics@ul.ie](mailto:ehsresearchethics@ul.ie)
Appendix G: Consent Form for Student Participants

Volunteer Consent Form (Focus Group)

EHS REC no. 2019_03_20_EHS

Research title: An exploratory study of the ways in which the Guidance Counsellor can support 2nd year female students to enhance their social development.

- 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 they data generated from it will be kept confidential.
- I am fully aware that my identity will be kept 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 understand that students invited to participate in the focus group will be audio recorded.
- I understand that only volunteers who agree to be audio recorded will participate in the focus group.
- I understand I must keep other participants’ contribution confidential and not tell anyone else outside of the focus group, and will need to sign a confidentiality agreement form.

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

Signature: _____________________________________________

Printed Name: __________________________________________

Signature of Researcher: _______________________________ Date: ____________
Confidentiality Agreement for Focus Group Participants

EHS Rec No: 2019_03_20_EHS

**Research Project Title:** An exploratory study of the ways in which the Guidance Counsellor can support 2nd year female students to enhance their social development.

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 I: Information Sheet for Staff Participants

Volunteer Information Sheet (Interview)

Date:

EHS REC no. 2019_03_20_EHS

Research title: An exploratory study of the ways in which the Guidance Counsellor can support 2nd year female students to enhance their social development.

Dear Colleague,

I am a student of the MA in Guidance Counselling and Lifespan Development programme in the School of Education, University of Limerick, under the supervision of Dr. Sancha Power. I am undertaking a research dissertation on a topic related to guidance counselling as part of my studies.

In my research, I aim to explore how the guidance counsellor can support 2nd year students to enhance their social development. In order to gather information on this topic, I would appreciate if you would agree to participate in a face-to-face audio-taped interview with me. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes and be held in a confidential location agreeable to you.

All information gathered will be held in the strictest of confidence and pseudonyms will be used to ensure anonymity. Interviews will be audio tape recorded and all data recorded will be destroyed after the analysis process. Participation in the study is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the research at any time prior to the data analysis phase. The results from this research study will be reported in my thesis and may be disseminated through other professional publications and conferences.

The collected data will be stored in the PI’s office in the University of Limerick for seven years. It is important to note that your name will not be used in the reporting of the research and the school will not be identifiable to anyone other than those directly involved.
If you have any queries or require any further information on the research study, please contact me or my supervisor:

**Researcher:** Claire Stanley.  
Email: 17123194@studentmail.ul.ie

**Supervisor:** Dr. Sancha Power.  
Email: Sancha.Power@ul.ie  
No: (061) 234297

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Lucy Hearne.  
Email: Lucy.Hearne@ul.ie

This research has received Ethical approval from the Education and Health Sciences Researcher Ethics Committee (**2019_03_20_EHS**). If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:

**Chairman Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee**  
**EHS Faculty Office**

*University of Limerick*  
*Tel (061) 234101*

ehsresearchethics@ul.ie
Appendix J: Consent Form for Staff Participants

Volunteer Consent Form (Interviews)

EHS REC no. 2019_03_20_EHS

Research title: An exploratory study of the ways in which the Guidance Counsellor can support 2nd year female students to enhance their social development.

• 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 they data generated from it will be kept confidential.
• I am fully aware that my identity will be kept 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 an interview in this research study:

Signature: ______________________________________

Printed Name: ______________________________________

Signature of Researcher: ______________________________

Date: ______________________________

Thank you for considering this request.
Appendix K: Topic Guide for Focus Group

Focus Group Topic Guide - 2nd Years

EHS RecNo: 2019_03_20_EHS

Themes: Friends, school, parents, supports, social media, etc.

- Establish ground rules.
- Outline ethical considerations.

Peers:

Task 1: Ask students to write their name on a sheet of paper and draw a circle around it. Next as them to write down the names of friends or family that they felt they could talk to if they felt upset or stressed. Draw a circle around those names. Next, write down the names of people you would talk to about minor problems.

Task 2: Give each student 5 cards and ask them to write 5 things that cause them stress or upset that relates to their social life (eg. Friends, family, social media, etc).

Discussion Questions:

- Out of the 5 things you wrote down, which one causes you the most stress or upset and why? (Allow all students to explain)
- Who, in your 2nd circle, do you feel comfortable talking too when you are feeling upset.
- Why do you feel comfortable talking to them more so than the people you wrote down in the 3rd circle?
- What do you feel is the most important quality to look for in a friend?
- Has your friendship group changed between 1st and 2nd year? If so, how?
- What has the biggest influence on what you do; Family, friends or social media? (Discuss answer with group)

School:

- What do you think are teachers and other students perception of 2nd year students?
• Do you feel that teachers treat you differently than they did in 1st year? If so, how?
• For what reasons would you not feel comfortable talking to your friends/parents/teachers?
• Are you aware of what the role of the guidance counsellor is?
• If you had to speak to a teacher or tutor in the school about something that was personal to you, who would you speak too? Why would you choose that person?

Parents:

• Do you feel comfortable talking to your parents or guardians about problems you might experience with your friends?
• Do your parents or guardians treat you any differently than they did when you were in primary school? If so, how?
• Do you ever get into arguments with your parents about your friends? If so, why?

Social Media:

• How long would you speak to friends on social media every day?
• Have you met every friend you have on social media in person?
• Does social media cause you any stress during the day? What reasons would cause you to become stressed when using social media?
• Is social media important to you? Why?
• Do you parents understand the importance of social media?
Appendix L: Interview Schedule for Deputy Principals, Guidance Counsellors, Class Tutor and Learning Support.

Interview Schedule – Deputy Principals, Guidance Counsellors, Class Tutor and Learning Support.

*Length of Interview* – 60 minutes to complete.

**Date:**

**EHS Rec No: 2019_03_20_EHS**

**Introduction Questions:**

- How many years have you been working with 2nd year students?
- What are your perceptions of 2nd years as a year group?
- Why do you think that about 2nd years?

**Questions about Social Development:**

- Do you notice a change in attitude between 1st and 2nd year students?
- If so, what?
- What subjects in the curriculum can help students manage their social development?
- What topics in SPHE primarily focus on 2nd years about how to manage their social development?
- What do you think are the key social needs for 2nd year girls?
- In your experience, what social factors can have an effect on 2nd years overall wellbeing?
- Have 2nd year parents ever contacted you with concerns regarding their daughters social development rather than academic concerns?
- If so, what was the primary reason for their concern?
Conclusion Questions:

- If 2nd years needed additional support due to social factors, where can they access that support in the school?
- In your opinion, what do you think is the students’ understanding of the role of the guidance counsellor in the school?
- Have you ever had to refer students to the guidance counsellor due to social factors? (eg. peers, family, teachers, etc)
- If so, why did you feel you had to do so?
- Would you ever approach a student if you noticed a change in their behaviour/mood? (proactive approach)
- In your opinion, what role does class tutors and year heads have in supporting 2nd years with their social development?
- What supports would you like to see implemented to improve 2nd years social development?
- From your experience, are 2nd year teachers aware of how social factors can have an impact on 2nd year girls?
Appendix M: Interview Schedule for SPHE teachers.

Interview Schedule – SPHE teachers.

Length of Interview – 60 minutes to complete.

Date:

EHS Rec No: 2019_03_20_EHS

Introduction Questions:

- How many years have you been teaching 2nd years?
- What are your perceptions of 2nd years as a year group?
- Why do you think that about 2nd years?

Questions about SPHE/ Social Development:

- How did you begin teaching SPHE?
- Did you get any CPD or training before starting to teach SPHE?
- Did you feel prepared to start teaching SPHE?
- What year groups do you teach SPHE to?
- Do you notice a change in attitudes and behaviour between 1st and 2nd year SPHE classes?
- If so, what?
- What do you think are the key social needs for 2nd years girls?
- In your experience, what social factors can have an effect on 2nd years overall wellbeing?
- What topics in SPHE primarily focus on teaching 2nd years about how to manage their social development?
- Does the SPHE curriculum provide enough information about their
social development?
- Do you feel it is a benefit to students?

Conclusion Questions:
- What supports would you like to see implemented to improve 2nd years social development?
- If 2nd years needed additional support due to social factors, where can they access that support in the school?
- In your opinion, what do you think is the students’ understanding of the role of the guidance counsellor in the school?
- Have you ever had to refer students to the guidance counsellor due to social factors? (eg. peers, family, teachers, etc)
- If so, why did you feel you had to do so?
- Would you ever approach a student if you noticed a change in their behaviour/mood? (proactive approach)
- In your opinion, what role does class tutors and year heads have in supporting 2nd years with their social development?
- From your experience, are 2nd year teachers aware of how social factors can have an impact on 2nd year girls?
Appendix N: University of Limerick acceptance of Child Protection Guidelines.

UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Acceptance of the University of Limerick Child Protection Guidelines

I have read the University of Limerick Child Protection Guidelines and agree to abide by its contents. There is no reason why I would be considered unsuitable to work with children or young people.

Signature: Claire Stanley Date: 21/2/19
Print Name: CLAIRE STANLEY
Department: School of Education

This form must be retained by the signatory's University Department.
Appendix O: Activity No. 1 – Second Year responses to what causes them social distress.
Video games or just online stuff

Relationships

Catching up on shows that my friends are into

Keeping in touch w/my friends

Instagram

Speaking in public at times

my community
Appendix P: Data Analysis of Semi-Structured Interviews
34) Do you support your family in other ways? If yes, how?

35) Do you support your family in other ways? If yes, how?

36) Do you support your family in other ways? If yes, how?

37) Do you support your family in other ways? If yes, how?

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97) Do you support your family in other ways? If yes, how?

98) Do you support your family in other ways? If yes, how?

99) Do you support your family in other ways? If yes, how?

100) Do you support your family in other ways? If yes, how?
Appendix Q: Data Analysis of Focus Group
(3) Do hurricanes mean you will die?

A. Sometimes, but not always. Hurricanes are powerful storms.
B. Yes, sometimes hurricanes can cause significant damage and loss of life.
C. No, hurricanes do not directly cause deaths. However, the effects of strong winds, floods, and storms can lead to injuries and fatalities.
D. It depends on the intensity and duration of the hurricane.
E. There is no definitive answer. The impact of hurricanes can vary widely.

(4) Do hurricanes mean you will lose your home?

A. Yes, hurricanes can destroy homes and property severely.
B. No, hurricanes do not automatically destroy homes.
C. Sometimes, but not always. The extent of damage depends on the strength of the hurricane and the condition of the house.
D. It depends on the location and the construction of the house.
E. There is no definitive answer. The impact of hurricanes can vary widely.

(5) Do hurricanes mean you will lose your job?

A. No, hurricanes do not directly cause unemployment.
B. Yes, hurricanes can disrupt economic activities and lead to job losses in affected areas.
C. Sometimes, but not always. The extent of economic impact depends on the severity of the hurricane and the local economy.
D. It depends on the location and the extent of damage.
E. There is no definitive answer. The impact of hurricanes can vary widely.

(6) Do hurricanes mean you will lose your family?

A. No, hurricanes do not directly cause deaths of family members.
B. Yes, hurricanes can cause fatalities, including family members.
C. Sometimes, but not always. The extent of loss depends on the severity of the hurricane and the health of the family members.
D. It depends on the location and the health conditions of the family members.
E. There is no definitive answer. The impact of hurricanes can vary widely.

(7) Do hurricanes mean you will lose your pets?

A. No, hurricanes do not directly cause deaths of pets.
B. Yes, hurricanes can cause fatalities of pets, especially in extreme cases.
C. Sometimes, but not always. The extent of loss depends on the severity of the hurricane and the health of the pets.
D. It depends on the location and the health conditions of the pets.
E. There is no definitive answer. The impact of hurricanes can vary widely.

(8) Do hurricanes mean you will leave your home?

A. Yes, hurricanes can force people to evacuate their homes.
B. No, hurricanes do not automatically require leaving homes.
C. Sometimes, but not always. The decision to evacuate depends on the severity of the hurricane and the location.
D. It depends on the location and the potential for damage.
E. There is no definitive answer. The impact of hurricanes can vary widely.
18) Why is SM most important to you?

1. Because they’re a tool for communication
2. Because they’re tools for learning
3. Because they’re a tool for entertainment
4. Because they’re tools for connecting with others
5. Because they’re tools for expressing yourself

19) Do your parents understand the importance of social media?

A) No
B) Yes

20) Do you think harassment occurs over social media?

A) Yes
B) No
C) Sometimes

21) What are some ways to avoid harassment on social media?

A) Ignore comments
B) Block harassers
C) Report harassment
D) Use privacy settings

22) Is there a way to prevent harassment on social media?

A) Yes
B) No
C) Maybe
D) It depends on the situation