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Belong To Primary

New Foundations for LGBTQ+ Inclusivity in Primary Schools



The Challenge

All children grow up in worlds with LGBTQ+ people. Many children have LGBTQ+ family members, and many are processing their own LGBTQ+ identities. Yet, despite this diversity, many children are not seeing their personhood, families, or worlds reflected holistically in primary schools. These subtle dynamics suggest to all children that there is something taboo about LGBTQ+ lives, creating the early conditions for hierarchy and discrimination with hugely negative impacts into adolescence.

The goal of 'Quality Education' (SDG4) is not being achieved when LGBTQ+ lives are not being reflected in inclusive or meaningful ways in the formal or informal facets of primary school life.

Furthermore, 'Gender Equality' (SDG5) is not being realized when families with trans and gender diverse members are rendered invisible or negatively impacted by rigidly gender segregated schooling or restrictively gendered practices.

Waiting to address this challenge in post-primary schooling is too late. Furthermore, the need to address this problem early has never been more urgent, as we see the rise of anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric globally with LGBTQ+ lives being misrepresented as somehow threatening to children.

Belong To Primary provides new foundational evidence with epistemological and societal impacts that have huge potential for the reduction of inequalities (SDG10) in primary schools.

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The Research

Funded by an Irish Research Council 'New Foundations: Engaging Civic Society' grant, this study was conducted in partnership with Belong To LGBTQ+ Youth Ireland. The project was also supported by a national primary education advisory group[1].

Belong To Primary 2024

Aim:

To yield new, ground-breaking evidence on LGBTQ+ inclusivity in primary schools by providing:

(a) large scale insight into primary school staff perspectives and needs regarding LGBTQ+ inclusivity and

(b) in-depth insight into how families with LGBTQ+ parents/guardians or LGBTQ+ identifying children aged between 10 and 12 are navigating primary school life.

Methodology:

A survey exploring staff experiences, perspectives and professional needs regarding LGBTQ+ inclusivity was distributed to all 3,231 primary schools in Ireland and was open from March to May 2023. A total of 1031 primary school staff took the survey which consisted of Likert scale and open item questions. Qualitative research explored how families with LGBTQ+ members are navigating everyday primary school life. A total of 23 semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of 21 families (24 people). For a detailed breakdown of the sample for both cohorts and the research methods, please see the Belong To Primary Full Report (Neary & Power, 2024, p. 18-26 and p. 82-83).

The Impact (Outputs & Outcomes)

Belong To Primary produced a large, national quantitative dataset from primary school staff and a qualitative dataset from families with LGBTQ+ members.

The following is a summary of the outputs and outcomes arising:

Reports & Articles

1. Belong To Primary 2024: Key Survey Findings



2. Belong To Primary 2024: Full Report



3. Neary, A. & Power, J. (2025: Forthcoming in Q1 journal *Gender and Education*)
4. Neary, A. (2025: In review as 20th anniversary of LGBT INTO Teachers' group feature article in *Irish Teachers' Journal*)

Irish National Teachers' Organisation
Cumann Múinteoirí Éireann

The two reports were disseminated widely via education stakeholder networks and continue to inform policy and practice developments.

All international peer-reviewed articles will be published open access in quartile one journals and it is anticipated that they will be highly cited.

The open access practitioner journal reaches all primary school staff in Ireland via the Irish National Teachers' Organization (INTO). The article is an evidence-based roadmap for teachers on holistic LGBTQ+ inclusivity in primary schools.

Press Release/Videos:

1. Belong To Primary 2024 research press release

2. Professionally produced video communicating quantitative survey findings.



3. Professionally produced video communicating qualitative findings



These communication outputs targeted key education stakeholders and policymakers. The two videos will be housed on the Belong To Primary research page in the coming weeks and key education stakeholder groups will raise awareness of these resources for primary school staff.

Conferences/Talks

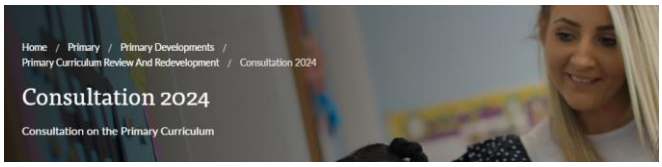
1. Neary, A. (2024) Belong To Education Sector Advisory Group April 2024.
2. Neary, A. (2025) *Gender and Education*, Manchester MET 28-30 May 2025.
3. Neary, A. and Power, J. (2025) *Education Studies Association of Ireland*, 10-12 April 2025.

Belong To Primary findings were first communicated through the Belong To education sector advisory group[1], maximizing impact for primary schools.

The conference presentations target education scholars and practitioners in Ireland with the potential for policy and practice changes and an international network of scholars, further building the knowledge exchange capacity.

Curriculum Development

1. Neary, A. et al. (2024) Written Submission to National Council for Curriculum & Assessment (NCCA) Primary School Wellbeing Curriculum Consultation Process.
2. Belong To (2024) Written Submission to NCCA Primary School Wellbeing Curriculum Consultation Process.



Both of these submissions were based on the evidence produced in *Belong To Primary* and are currently having impact on the primary curriculum development process at national level.

Broader Impact Now and Over Time

Global and Local Impact:

Belong To Primary makes a direct contribution to and impact on three SDGs: Quality Education, Gender Equality and Reduced Inequalities.



In UCC, current and future outputs from *Belong To Primary* will have impact for 'UCC Futures: Children' specifically in the thematic area of 'Inclusion and Children'.



Knowledge Production Impact:

Belong To Primary will have a lasting impact on the field of research on gender, sexuality and education internationally. *Belong To Primary* is ground-breaking research on an urgent societal challenge and under-researched topic and will thus provide a platform for future research and theory building. An example of this is in my own ERC Consolidator proposal (Submitted January 2025, waiting result) which springboards from the evidence of *Belong To Primary.*

[1] All major education stakeholders were invited to be part of an advisory group for Belong To Primary. The group included representatives from those organizations who expressed willingness to take part: Educate Together, the Education and Training Board, the Irish National Teachers' Organization, and the National Parents' Council.

Policy & Professional Impact:

Belong To Primary provides the basis for teacher professional development work into the future. Already, Belong To have developed a pilot programme and guide for primary schools as well as an e-learning programme, nearing completion.



There will be future national resources and initiatives too through organizations such as Oide and the NCCA, building on my previously commissioned resource development work.

Societal and Cultural Impact:

Ultimately, *Belong To Primary* has and will continue to make a significant impact towards ensuring that primary schools are reflective of all family forms and that all children feel like they belong at school.



For More Information

For more information, please visit the *Belong To Primary* project website here.



To make contact with the PI and follow forthcoming publications, please visit the PI's UCC research profile here or contact the PI at aneary@ucc.ie

"Belong To Primary has responded to the urgent need for insight into how staff and families are navigating LGBTQ+ inclusivity in primary schools. This work will continue to have significant impact in terms of knowledge, advocacy and capacity on this important issue, building towards the ultimate impact of ensuring that all children feel like they belong at school."

— Dr Aoife Neary, PI Belong To Primary/ School of Education UCC



"Primary school staff across Ireland are doing inspiring work to create safe and supportive environments in their schools. We must listen to them on what is required to achieve this and provide the resources and training they are calling for to ensure that all primary-aged pupils, including pupils who identify as LGBTQ+, feel safe, supported and represented in their school environment."

— Moninne Griffith, CEO, Belong To

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