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National Reporting Frameworks for School Bullying: An International Evidence Review

Caoimhe Dempsey & Selina McCoy

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Executive Summary

Bullying is neither an inevitable feature of school life, nor a normal part of childhood and adolescence (McCoy et al., 2026). Addressing bullying requires attention to the student-, school- and system-level factors that shape its prevalence, as reflected in the Cineáltas Action Plan on Bullying (Government of Ireland, 2022). Recent evidence from Department of Education and Youth Inspectorate (2026) and independent research (McCoy et al. 2026), highlights the importance of robust and systematic data collection to support schools and policymakers.

This report reviews four national approaches to bullying data collection: large-scale student surveys, dedicated bullying surveys, bullying incident monitoring systems, and evaluations of existing programmes. Each approach has strengths and limitations. Across all approaches, greater coordination within the Department of Education and Youth and across government departments is needed to improve coherence, reduce duplication and support sustainable policy action. Data collection should not only provide national evidence but also support schools by sharing findings in a clear, accessible, and non-judgemental way.

Norway's Olweus Bullying Prevention Programme demonstrates the value of linking programme evaluation with national survey data, allowing reliable measurement of policy impact over time. Finland's biennial School Health Promotion study similarly provides long-term trend data while also giving schools access to their own results to inform local policy and practice. Together, these examples highlight the value of validated, repeated measures and the integration of survey and administrative data to strengthen anti-bullying policy and practice. Ensuring rich and robust evidence will require sustained commitment and investment, but the benefits for policy and practice are substantial.

The Irish Context

Introduction

Ireland has made significant progress in the recognition, research, and prevention of bullying in schools in recent years. A significant body of research in Ireland has contributed to developments in national and international understanding of bullying as a complex social phenomenon linked to individual, contextual, and societal factors (Corcoran et al., 2012; O'Higgins Norman et al., 2025). While early conceptualisations of bullying focused on local, isolated interactions and responses, current perspectives adopt a more holistic approach with the definition of bullying as:

"... a damaging social process that is characterized by an imbalance of power driven by social (societal) and institutional norms. It is often repeated and manifests as unwanted interpersonal behaviour among students or school personnel that causes physical, social, and emotional harm to the targeted individuals or groups, and the wider school community" (UNESCO Chair on Bullying and Cyberbullying at Dublin City University, 2024. p. 4).

This holistic definition focuses on the social networks that support or combat bullying, including qualities of the school environment, societal norms, and systemic contexts. Cyberbullying fits within the UNESCO definition and can be succinctly defined as "bullying with the use of digital technologies" (UNESCO Chair on Bullying and Cyberbullying at Dublin University, 2024, p.4). Cyberbullying can transcend physical and temporal boundaries, enabling harmful behaviour to occur at any time and across settings, including in children's homes, and the perceived anonymity of online platforms can facilitate harmful behaviours that would not have occurred in face-to face settings (Barlett, 2015). Cyberbullying operates through similar underlying mechanisms and can produce similar consequences as other forms of bullying. This definition is reflected in current national policy in Ireland, the Cineáltas Action Plan on Bullying (Department of Education, 2024a).

Prevalence

The earliest evidence of bullying prevalence in Ireland indicates that in 1997, 18.6% of primary and 10.8% of post-primary students reported being occasionally targeted by bullying, and smaller proportions experiencing more severe, frequent or weekly harassment (O'Moore et al., 1997). Over the next two decades, these figures appear to have stayed relatively stable: a meta-analysis of the subsequent 20 years showed, on average, 22.4% of primary and 11.8% of post-primary students reporting victimisation (Foody et al., 2017). Forms of cyberbullying and blended bullying, where online harassment is often intertwined with offline victimisation (McCoy et al., 2026), are now captured in prevalence rates of bullying. For example, recent data from the National Advisory Council for Online Safety (Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, 2021) indicated that 17% of 9–17-year-olds, and 22% of 13–14-year-olds, have experienced bullying, both online and offline.

These prevalence rates are significantly higher among marginalised and minority student groups. For example, the Irish School Climate Survey conducted by BeLong To Youth Services indicated that, in a representative sample, 76% of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) students "feel unsafe in school" (BeLonG To Youth Services, 2022). Students from under resourced families, migrant and gender non-conforming students are also more vulnerable to bullying behaviour, and these factors are often connected and contribute to intersectional bullying experiences (Kuldas et al., 2022). Recent findings from a large, representative sample of post-primary students showed that female students and students with special educational needs were more likely to report bullying as a problem in their school (McCoy et al., 2026). Contrary to international evidence, students in disadvantaged schools were less likely to report

bullying as a problem in their school, perhaps showcasing the effectiveness of the Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools (DEIS) programme in fostering positive school climates (McCoy et al., 2026). The strongest protective factors against the prevalence of bullying, as reported by students in the study, included a strong sense of school belonging and the quality of teaching approaches (McCoy et al., 2026).

Policy Response in Ireland

The history of policy response to bullying in Ireland stems back to early Guidelines on Countering Bullying Behaviour in Primary and Post-Primary Schools (Department of Education, 1993). At the time, policy focused on individual acts of verbal and physical aggression and disciplinary responses. The Action Plan on Bullying and associated Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (Department of Education and Skills, 2013) took a more holistic approach, acknowledging the importance of school culture, student wellbeing, community and parental supports and online influences. This policy required schools to develop an anti-bullying framework, record incidents, appoint staff responsibility, and provide support to students.

Furthermore, in 2014, the Department of Education funded the Anti-Bullying Centre to strengthen links between research, policy and practice. The Department further supported the establishment of the first UNESCO Chair on Bullying and Cyberbullying at the Centre in 2018. The research centre provides evidence on bullying in Ireland, such as quality of school practices, current implementation challenges, and compliance with national policy (e.g., Murphy et al., 2017; Corcoran et al., 2012; Kenny et al., 2023). Examples of the research centre's evidence on bullying in Irish schools include studies on the strong role of Irish board of management in controlling operations (Travers, 2023) and patrons in shaping school ethos (O'Flaherty et al., 2018). Irish schools have significant autonomy and a dual focus on inclusion and performance (Kenny et al., 2020). Specifically, the centralised curriculum and emphasis on terminal assessments can conflict with an inclusive school environment that promotes social outcomes, shaping the quality of school-based bullying prevention (Kenny et al., 2023).

The current national policy, Cineáltas: Action Plan on Bullying (Department of Education, 2024a), adopts a rights-based, intersectional framework, informed by current conceptualisations of bullying as a complex, multi-dimensional phenomenon. The action plan is built on several legal and ethical foundations, including the Children First Act (Government of Ireland, 2015), which places statutory duties on organisations and individuals to protect children, and Coco's Law (Government of Ireland, 2021), which addresses online abuse and cyberbullying. The current action plan broadens responsibility to all school staff, wider school communities, and external stakeholders such as government departments and technology companies. The plan places a greater emphasis on the vulnerability of particular student groups, including LGBTQ+ young people, disabled students, and migrants. The plan prioritises student voice and an inclusive, preventative ethos. The plan also incorporates several wider department and government policies, such as the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice (Department of Education, 2019), which provides an overarching framework for supporting the wellbeing of all members of the school community, including preventing and addressing bullying behaviour. The action plan states that the Department of Education will examine how schools can record alleged incidents of bullying behaviour in an anonymised manner, which will include information on the nature of the behaviour, the approach taken to address the behaviour and the outcome. The action plan states that the Department of Education will progress the development of a national database to facilitate data being collated in an anonymised manner to facilitate the development of an annual national report on bullying in schools that examines the prevalence of bullying and measures that successfully address bullying.

Current Data Collected on Bullying

School level data

The Bí Cineálta Procedures to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour for Primary and Post-Primary Schools state that all incidents of bullying behaviour should be reported at the school level. The school record should document the form and type of bullying behaviour, where it took place, and the date of the initial engagement with students and their parents. The record should include the views of the students and their parents regarding actions to address the bullying and whether it has ceased. Dates of each engagement and date on which bullying ceased should be documented, as well as any engagements with external services or supports. The records should be retained in accordance with the school's record keeping policy and in line with data protection regulations (Department of Education, 2024a). School principals must present an update on the number of incidents of bullying behaviour and measures taken to address bullying behaviour at each meeting of the school board of management. This update should inform discussion at the board level on the effectiveness of current school strategies and anti-bullying policies.

National level data

The Department's Inspectorate plays a key role in supporting schools to prevent and address bullying through school self-evaluation advisory visits and programmes of inspection. During 2023, all inspection models were updated to include anti-bullying checks that focus on compliance and the promotion of a positive school culture and environment (Department of Education, 2024a). In instances of non-compliance identified during inspections, the Inspectorate follows up with schools until matters are resolved and full compliance is achieved. A new Promotion of Wellbeing In Schools Evaluation Inspection model was approved in December 2024 and has been implemented from Q1 2025. It reflects the Department of Education and Youth's focus on wellbeing as central to enabling children and young people to achieve their full potential. The model provides a more comprehensive and in-depth evaluation of schools' approaches to promoting wellbeing than previous inspection models, with a particular emphasis on the prevention of, and response to, bullying behaviour. It is firmly underpinned by national policy and guidance, including the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice, Cineáltas, the Bí Cineálta anti-bullying procedures, and Looking at Our School 2022.

Since 2023, as part of Cineáltas the Inspectorate has gathered data on the views of children and young people, parents, principals and teachers on how their school prevents and addresses bullying behaviour. The first Inspectorate report, *Perspectives on Bullying Behaviour* (2023), included survey data collected in 2023 from over 2,300 students, 3,300 parents, 800 teachers and 64 principals across 106 schools (Department of Education, 2024b). The report contained descriptive results and stated that, generally, parents, teachers and students viewed schools as positive places where bullying was not tolerated (Department of Education, 2024b). The report identified challenges, particularly at post-primary level, where almost one-third of students indicated they feel unwelcome and many expressed concerns about the effectiveness of their schools in managing bullying behaviour (Department of Education, 2024b).

The second Inspectorate report, *Perspectives on Bullying Behaviour* (2024), draws on data collected through an online survey conducted during Anti-Bullying Week in 2024 (Department of Education and Youth 2025). Survey participants included 4,818 children and young people, 5,155 parents and 1,336 principals and teachers.

The survey included multiple choice, rating scales and open-ended questions on the following topics: culture and environment e.g., positive and welcoming school environment, respectful school community, confidence in school rules, sense of belonging, feeling safe to be oneself, feeling cared for in school, responding to bullying; curriculum e.g., learning experiences, learning to recognise and respond to bullying, value of learning about bullying; policy and planning e.g., involvement in policy development and review, perceptions of policy effectiveness, transition into post-primary school; relationships and partnerships e.g., relationships within the school community, children and young people's participation, teacher professional learning; and addressing cyberbullying (Department of Education and Youth, 2025). The report contained descriptive results and quotes from the open-ended questions. For example, reports of prevalence of experiencing bullying behaviour were at 25% of primary schools, 17% of post primary schools, and 29% of parents (Department of Education and Youth, 2025). Of those who had experienced bullying, 63% of primary students and 50% of post primary students told an adult. Of those who told an adult at the primary level, 70% of students received support and 45% of students said the bullying stopped. Of those who told an adult at the post primary level, 67% of students received support and 43% of students said the bullying stopped. No statistical comparisons were made with the 2023 data, and the sample was not generalisable to the entire student population.

The third and most recent Inspectorate report, Perspectives on Bullying Behaviour (2025), similarly draws on data from a survey completed by 3,949 students from primary (n=1,981) and post primary (n=1,968) (Department of Education and Youth, 2026). The findings from the report indicate that most students feel safe, supported and happy in school, particularly at primary level, but that bullying remains a persistent issue, affecting around one in six students, with social and verbal bullying most common. Experiences are unevenly distributed, with higher risk reported by senior-cycle students, those identifying as another gender, and students who speak languages other than English or Irish at home. While students generally understand what bullying is, many lack confidence to intervene or report it, often due to fear or uncertainty, and trust in adult responses declines with age. Adult follow-up is shown to be a decisive factor in outcomes. The authors report that the methodology for the survey was improved in 2025, which should facilitate comparison-based analysis over the remaining 2026 and 2027 reports.

International Context

Prevalence

International assessments of bullying prevalence often draw on data from cross-national studies such as Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children, Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, Survey on Social and Emotional Skills, and Programme for International Student Assessment. A recent working paper (OECD, 2026) compiled the estimates from these studies. While not directly comparable, estimates of experiencing bullying behaviour at least a few times a month range from 9% (HBSC2 2022 for 15-years-old) to 46% (TIMSS3 2023 for grade 4 students, aged 9-10; OECD, 2026). The figure below, published in the working paper (OECD, 2026) provides further information on the data sources for these international prevalence rates.

Figure 1. Estimates of global bullying prevalence.

Bullying refers to experiencing any type of bullying behaviour monthly or more often. It also includes cyberbullying, except for HBSC

Survey	Bullying prevalence	Age or grade	Population	Measure
TIMSS	46%	Grade 4 students	64 countries	11 behavioural questions
	40%	Grade 8 students		14 behavioural questions
PIRLS[5] 2021	37%	Grade 4 students	57 countries	10 behavioural questions
SSES 2023	35%	10-years-old	5 countries and 10 subnational entities	6 behavioural questions
	25%	15-years-old	1 country and 5 subnational entities	
PISA6 2022	20%	15-years-old	36 OECD countries	
HBSC 2022*	13%	11-years-old	44 countries	1 question: "How often have you been bullied at school in the past couple months?"
	12%	13-years-old		
	9%	15-years-old		

Source: OECD (2026).

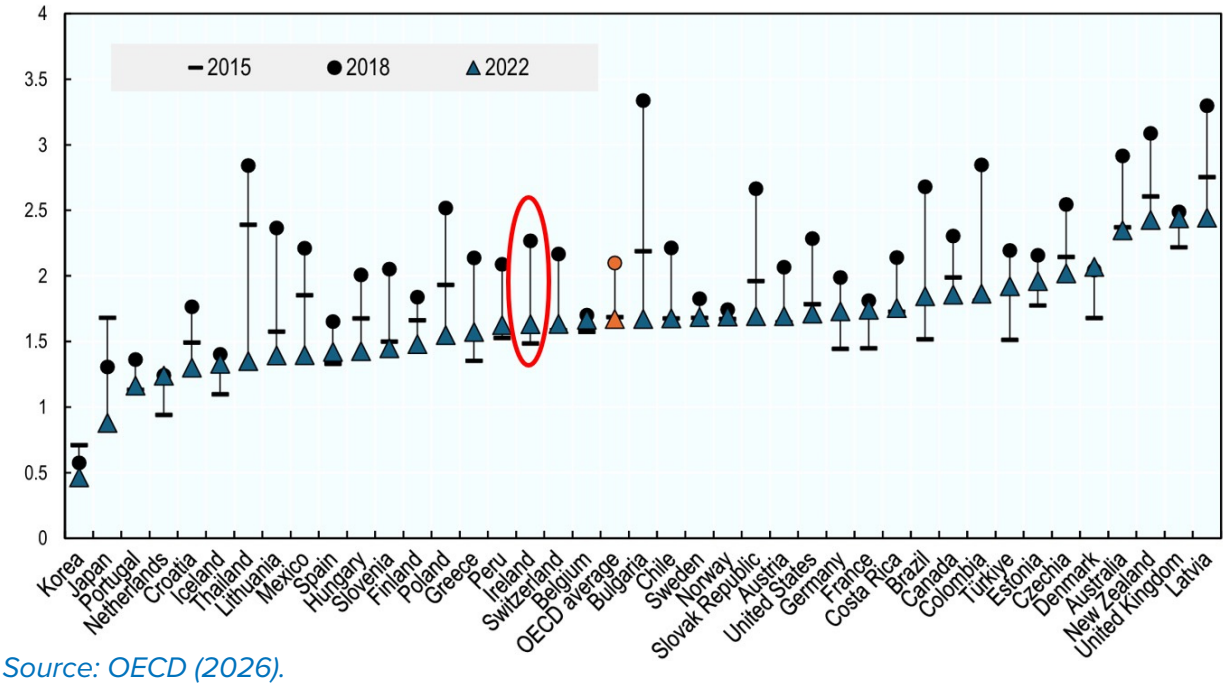
Note: * For HBSC 2022, only students who experienced at least two to three bullying behaviours a month were considered bullied. Sources: HBSC (2023[6]), Data browser (findings from the 2021/22 international HBSC survey), https://data-browser.hbsc.org (accessed on 27 August 2025); OECD (2023[7]), PISA 2022 Results (Volume II); OECD (2024[8]), Nurturing Social and Emotional Learning Across the Globe: Findings from the OECD SSES 2023; Reynolds et al. (2024[9]), Aspects of Student Well-Being and Reading Achievement in PIRLS 2021; and von Davier et al (2024[10]), TIMSS 2023 International Results in Mathematics and Science.

Many international studies measure bullying as a dichotomous variable (being bullied or not), which fails to capture how the impact of bullying may depend on its frequency, duration and type. To address this, recent analysis by the OECD created a frequency-based intensity index of bullying using the six PISA items of gradations of bullying experience measured in 2015, 2018 and 2022 (OECD, 2026). The six items reported on the frequency of the following behaviours, both in-person and online:

- Being deliberately left out by other students
- Being made fun of
- Being threatened
- Having belongings taken or destroyed
- Being hit or pushed
- Having nasty rumours spread about them

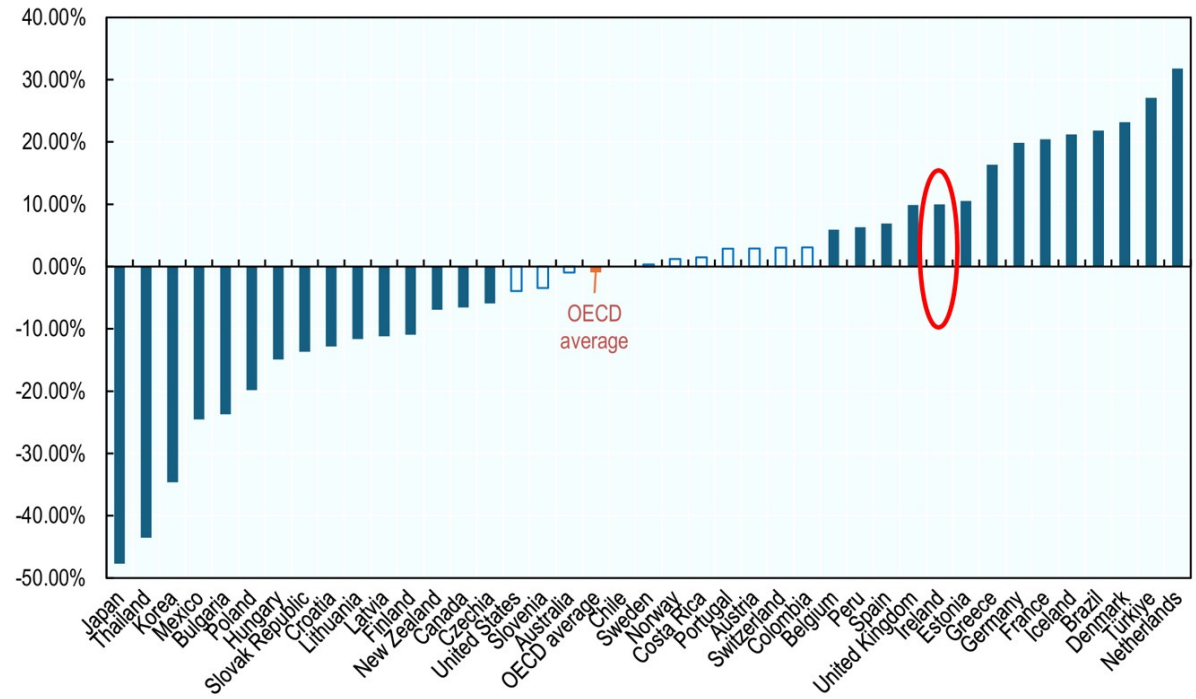
Responses were coded on a four-point scale from “never” to “once a week or more” and items summed to create an overall bullying intensity index (OECD, 2026). The findings showed that overall, across most countries, the average bullying intensity increased from 2015 to 2018 and decreased from 2018 to 2022. The two figures below, published in the OECD (2026) report, show changes in each country, including Ireland.

Figure 2. Bullying intensity index across OECD and accession countries



Source: OECD (2026).

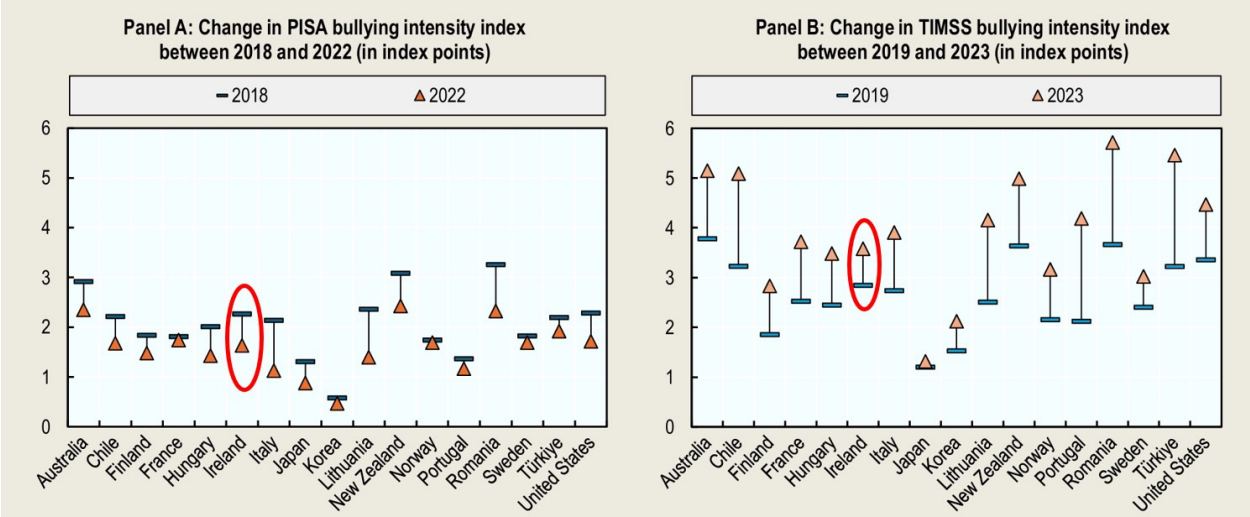
Figure 3. Change in bullying intensity index between 2015 and 2022.



Source: OECD (2026).

However, it is important to note that the decrease from 2018 to 2022 is likely linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. To address this, the OECD (2026) paper also analysed comparable data with same-age students collected in TIMSS in 2019 and 2023. A bullying intensity index was created using the items in TIMSS which most closely aligned with the PISA items. As expected, the analysis revealed differing patterns to that shown in the PISA data, potentially indicating results reflected pandemic-related disruptions. The evidence from TIMSS (including Ireland), shown in the figure below, indicated an increase in bullying from 2019 to 2023, and in some instances, prevalence reaching above pre-pandemic levels (OECD, 2026).

Figure 4. Change in bullying intensity index between 2018 and 2022 (PISA) and 2019 and 2023 (TIMSS).

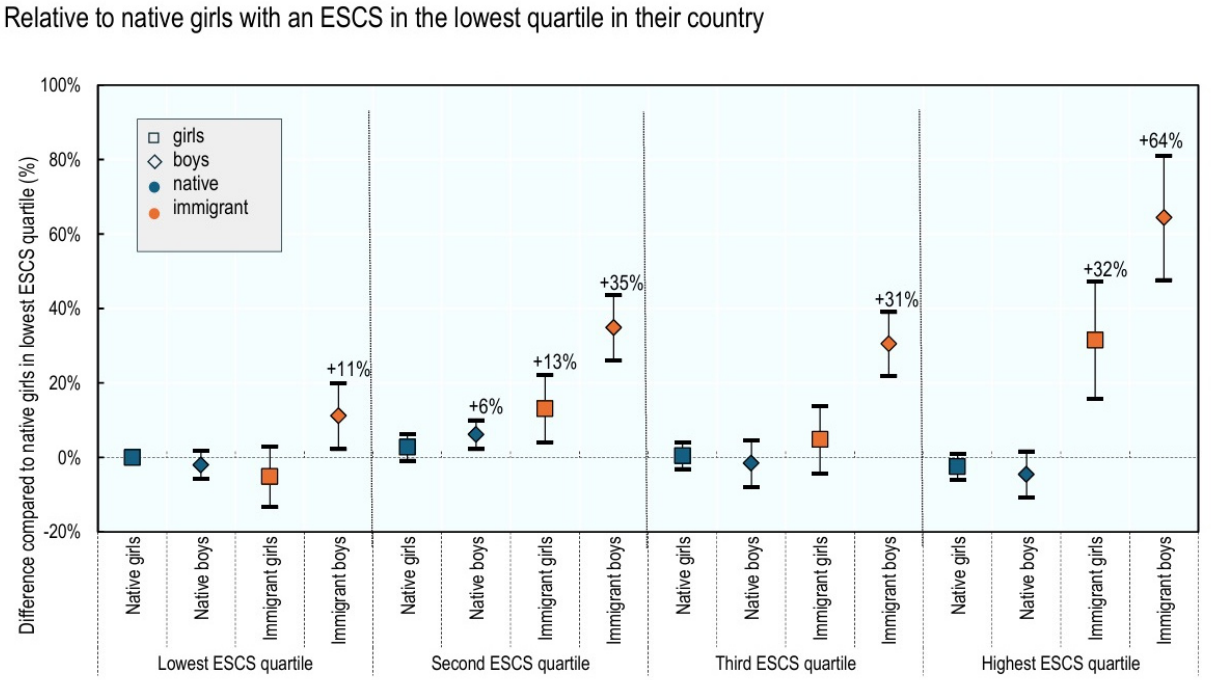


Source: OECD (2026).

Prevalence among vulnerable student groups

A consistent finding across international evidence indicates several student groups are more vulnerable to experiencing bullying. Moreover, significant intersectional patterns of vulnerability also emerge based on student gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status. For example, in the OECD (2026) paper which draws on quartiles of the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS), students with an immigrant background were more at risk of bullying than their native peers, particularly among socio-economically advantaged students and among boys. Showcasing the non-linear effect of background characteristics, results also showed that among disadvantaged students, boys with an immigrant background score 11% above native girls, however, among advantaged students, boys with an immigrant background score 64% above native girls, as shown in the below figure.

Figure 5. Predicted differences in bullying intensity index by gender, immigrant background and socio-economic status.



Reading guide: For instance, the last displayed value's interpretation (64%) is that boys with an immigrant background and an ESCS in the highest quartile of their country score 64% higher on the bullying intensity index than native girls with an ESCS in the lowest quartile of their country.

Source: OECD (2026).

International approaches to address bullying

A range of strategies have been adopted to prevent and respond to bullying internationally, with several countries revising and updating anti-bullying strategies in recent years. Strategies adopted by various countries include national anti-bullying policies, school-based initiatives, establishing legal sanctions, assigning responsibilities for response to bullying. For example, in 2022, the Finnish parliament amended the 1998 Basic Education Act to include the requirement that teachers and school leaders report "any harassment, bullying or violence" to students' parents and prepare and implement "educational measures, disciplinary measures and security measures" to combat bullying (Parliament of Finland, 2022). An important distinction across international legal amendments is the classification of bullying as an offence. The Finnish Parliament did not classify serious bullying as an offence under the Criminal Code. By contrast, in France, a 2022 law classified school bullying as a distinct criminal offence (French Parliament, 2022), alongside wider anti-bullying policies including a community-oriented national programme and helplines dedicated to bullying (French Government, 2023).

As well as national policy and legal developments, several international approaches to bullying prevention include school curriculum reform and capacity building. Ireland is a strong example of this, through the review and update of Social Personal and Health Education and Relationships and Sexuality Education to strengthen learning on topics, such as safe, responsible Internet and social-media use, and on recognising and responding to bullying (Department of Education, 2022). However, too often these governance measures lack robust impact evaluations, thus limiting evidence on their effectiveness. Central to the effectiveness of these measures is school capacity development. Numerous studies indicate that school staff report lacking confidence in how to respond to bullying (Dawes et al., 2022). Teachers who receive specific training and feel confident in their ability to respond are significantly more likely to intervene in instances of bullying (Fischer et al., 2020; Waasdorp et al., 2021; Finet et al., 2023). Capacity building also

extends beyond school staff; severe cases of bullying can require specialised professionals and support from external agencies. Ensuring schools have access to these expertise and professional supports strengthens system-level ability to address complex bullying situations (Publications Office of the European Union, 2023; UNESCO, 2019). Family and community engagement is also an important part of capacity building, such as in Ireland, the anti-bullying training sessions provided for parents by the National Parents Council and funded by the Department of Education (2024a).

International approaches to measuring and monitoring bullying

Evidence indicates several international challenges to accurate measuring of bullying prevalence. Directly questioning students can lead to underreporting for several reasons. Students may fear retaliation, experience shame or social desirability bias, or have differing understandings of what constitutes bullying (OECD, 2026). Single-item approaches to reporting bullying, often used in surveys, typically result in lower rates of responding (Smyth & Darmody, 2025). Furthermore, single items often fail to capture online behaviours. Asking students questions on specific behaviours, such as being left out, which students may not themselves classify as bullying can capture more accurate incident reports (Smyth & Darmody, 2025). However, long lists of bullying behaviours can be burdensome for students and still fail to capture all instances, particularly online behaviours or adult-to-student bullying.

Rigorous monitoring and evaluation systems at the school and system level are needed to effectively act on bullying at a national level. Recent recommendations from the OECD on responding to bullying in schools identified improving monitoring systems and evaluations of policy as a key gap in international approaches (OECD, 2026). Recommendations included collecting bullying prevalence statistics that could be disaggregated by gender, socio-economic status, immigrant background, disability and other characteristics to improve equity. Regular, high-quality data collection on the prevalence, forms and contexts of bullying would provide education systems with an accurate picture of emerging trends, monitor disparities, and target resources appropriately (OECD, 2026). Furthermore, while many countries have introduced anti-bullying measures, few are rigorously evaluated, and impact evaluations are needed to refine programmes, scale up effective practices, and ensure accountability (OECD, 2026).

With these recommendations in mind, several approaches to monitoring and evaluation of bullying prevalence in schools will now be reviewed in detail. A review of international approaches indicates that most countries draw snapshots of bullying prevalence through surveys. Some countries incorporate bullying assessments into existing, wider surveys or data collection processes. Some countries oversee systems of structured reporting mechanisms. Finally, limited examples of specific evaluations of anti-bullying action implementations also exist. The following chapters describe, through a case study approach, four approaches to monitoring and evaluating bullying prevalence and policies at a national level, showcased through a country example. Each of the four approaches are prefixed with a national context, before describing the method taken, form of data collection, level of data analysis and sharing, evidence of impact or results and a discussion of the benefits and considerations of the approach. The four approaches to monitoring bullying at a national level are:

1. Comprehensive student survey on school health: Finland
2. Brief survey conducted during anti-bullying awareness campaign: France
3. Recording and monitoring incidents of bullying in schools: Scotland
4. Systematic evaluation of specific anti-bullying actions including implementation fidelity and impact: Norwegian Olweus Bullying Prevention Program

Comprehensive student survey on school health: Finland

National context

The Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL) monitors and supports the health and welfare of the population. Within the Institute, the School Health Promotion study implements this task among children and young people. The School Health Promotion study describes the perceived health and wellbeing of children and young people and their lifestyles, schoolwork and studying (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, 2026a). Data have been collected from 8th and 9th graders in comprehensive schools since 1996, in upper secondary schools since 1999, and in vocational institutions under the age of 21 since 2008 (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, 2026a). Data collection was expanded to children in 4th and 5th grades and their guardians in 2017.

Data quality

The School Health Promotion study is carried out nationally with the aim of surveying all children and young people in the relevant age range and producing data at the level of wellbeing services counties and municipalities. Since 2013, the School Health Promotion study has been implemented across the entire country every two years. Data for the period 2006–2011 combines the research years 2006–2007, 2008–2009 and 2010–2011 to ensure that the results are as comparable as possible with the research years 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019, 2021, 2023 and 2025.

The responses collected are combined into children's data (4th–5th-graders) and young people's data (8th–9th graders, general upper secondary students and vocational students). The data are enriched with the details of the educational institution and municipality-based regional data. Students' responses are used to calculate national or regional (e.g. municipality-specific) percentages for the indicators used in the statistics. The percentages are calculated in proportion to the number of students who responded to the question or questions used for the indicator concerned.

The questionnaires and implementation procedures of the School Health Promotion study are developed together with representatives of municipalities and educational institutions (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, 2026b). The feedback received from students and teachers on previous questionnaires is used to revise the survey. In selecting questions, the monitoring data intended for the use of educational institutions, municipalities and wellbeing services counties and the comprehensibility of the questions to children and young people play a key role. The SHP study data collection was assessed by the institutional review board of The Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare in 2012, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2020, 2022 and 2024.

To ensure validity of the data, implausible responses are examined in the data based on answer techniques. Implausible answers are mapped out by examining response behaviour in matrix questions. Matrix questions with at least five rows in the questionnaires of the survey year are used in the examinations. In 2025, respondents who had answered at least 75 per cent of the questions addressed to all respondents in less than 5 minutes (n=206) were removed from the data across all school levels (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, 2026b).

Data collection

The data are collected as a census study of educational institutions every second year in an anonymous,

independently completed online questionnaire (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, 2026b). Students complete the questionnaire by class or group during the school day. The teacher hands out the answer IDs to the students and supervises them as they fill out the questionnaire. One lesson is reserved for completion of the survey. Completion of the questionnaire is voluntary. The study includes separate questionnaires for four different school levels, and the questionnaires can be completed in Finnish, Swedish, English, Russian or Northern Sámi.

To ensure informed consent, the sensitive themes within the questionnaire are explained (mental health, violence, substance use, perceived gender, sexuality) so that the student can refuse to respond to the questionnaire, or specific questions, if they so wished. None of the questions in the questionnaire were made mandatory.

The educational institutions inform the guardians of the survey in advance, and they are given the opportunity to opt out if the child is under the age of 15, in line with guidelines from the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (2019).

As an example, the number of respondents (n) and national coverage (%) of the survey by school level (2025) are as follows:

- Grades 4 and 5 of basic education (9-11 years old), n=103 408 (85%)
- Grades 8 and 9 of basic education (14-16 years old), n=94 743 (73%)
- 1st and 2nd year students in upper secondary school (17-19 years old), n=47 248 (70%)
- 1st and 2nd year students in vocational institutions n=24 998 (38%)

The questionnaire

The topics included in the questionnaire are living conditions, schoolwork, health, health related behaviour and school health services. The questionnaire is continuously being developed in response to student feedback, however, some of the questions have remained the same for 30 years, to maintain comparability. The questionnaire includes 76 items in total. These items are divided into topics as follows.

Table 1. School Health Promotion study topics.

1	Background info (4 item)	14	Physical activity (2 items)
2	School experiences (11 items)	15	Life satisfaction (2 items)
3	Bullying (5 items; see appendices for exact items)	16	School help and services (3 items)
4	Discrimination (1 item)	17	Mental wellbeing (5 items)
5	Support at school (1 item)	18	Dating and sexual health (3 items)
6	Family and housing (6 items)	19	Smoking and intoxication (6 items)
7	Friends (2 items)	20	Gambling (1 item)
8	Health (3 items)	21	Internet use (1 item)
9	Injuries (1 item)	22	Violence (1 item)
10	Brushing teeth (1 item)	23	Sexual harassment (2 items)
11	Eating (2 items)	24	Family violence (2 items)
12	Energy drinks (1 item)	25	Free time (8 items)
13	Sleep (2 items)	26	Feedback on survey (1 item)

Levels of data sharing and analysing

The Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare produce compiled national data from the study. The Institute's datasets are secured at all stages of processing, and data and information systems can only be accessed by persons granted access for clearly defined purposes. The study does not contain direct personal data. Indirect identification using data (school and its location, grade, gender, age, sexual orientation, country of birth of one's own and parents, area of residence, housing arrangements, family characteristics) may be possible. This personal data included in the research material is only processed by those researchers whose work tasks require it. Researchers processing personal data have a legal or contractual obligation of confidentiality. Research data are stored in the Finnish Social Science Data Archive (FSD). Personal data are not regularly disclosed or transferred outside the research group. Data may be transferred to those requesting it in accordance with the Act on the Openness of Government Activities (621/1999), the Act on the Secondary Use of Social and Health Data (552/2019) or other mandatory legislation or international agreements.

The statistics are published by the Institute typically four months after data collection is complete through publicly available statistical publications and reports. The regional and municipality-specific data from the study are published as indicators in the Result Service of the School Health Promotion study (Tableau) and in the statistical cubes (TIKU) and some indicators are also published in the Institute's Statistics and Indicator Bank (https://sotkanet.fi/sotkanet/en/index). Educational institutions also receive a PDF summary of their data on the key indicators, which can be discussed with personnel, students and guardians. The data from the School Health Promotion study are confidential; however, similar to access to data under the Central Statistics Office in Ireland, researchers can apply for access to the data for specific purposes through The Finnish Social and Health Data Permit Authority Findata (2019).

Use of the data

For the Institute's analyses, the survey responses are linked to the educational institution's details and regional information obtained from registers maintained by Statistics Finland and the Finnish National Agency for Education using the respondent's ID. The Institute uses the data, for example, in the development of school and student healthcare and in the monitoring of the mental wellbeing and substance use of children and young people. The government uses the results of the School Health Promotion study for purposes such as monitoring and assessing the implementation of policy programmes and different laws. Municipalities and wellbeing services counties use the findings in monitoring the health and wellbeing of children and young people and in welfare management, for example, when drawing up plans for the wellbeing of children and young people. Educational institutions use the information provided by the School Health Promotion study to develop and improve school policies and practices in areas such as school culture, student welfare and teaching and learning.

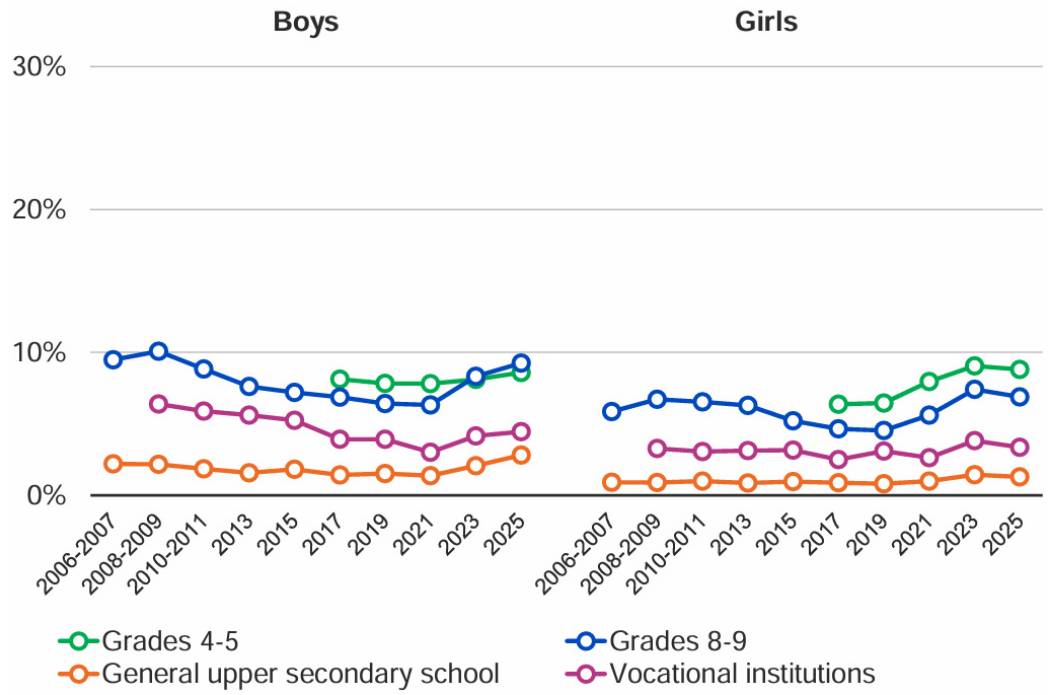
Results and evidence of impact

Reports from the survey are published by the Institute in annual statistical reports. Data from the survey are available and presented on the Sotkanet.fi website at different levels, regional and national, to provide statistical information on welfare and health (https://sotkanet.fi/sotkanet/en/index). The survey data have been used by researchers in many published academic articles.

For example, in the 2025 report on the wellbeing of children and young people, respondents were asked how often they had experienced bullying by other students during the spring term (Helenius et al., 2025). The indicator is based on questions on bullying at school from the WHO's survey Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC). In line with HBSC, bullying refers to a student or a group of students saying

or doing something unpleasant to another student; teasing a student repeatedly in ways he or she does not like is also bullying; an argument between two students who are equally strong is not bullying. In 2025, experiences of bullying were more common among students in basic education than among students in upper secondary education. Bullying at school on a weekly basis during the term had been experienced by almost one in ten students in grades 4 and 5 (boys and girls 9%) and in grades 8 and 9 (boys 9%, girls 7%) of basic education. Among students at general upper secondary schools (boys 3%, girls 1%) and students of vocational institutions (boys 5%, girls 3%), experiences of bullying on a weekly basis were not as common. The proportions remained almost unchanged compared to 2023, but the proportion among boys in grades 8 and 9 of basic education has been increasing slightly since 2021 (Figure 6; Helenius et al., 2025).

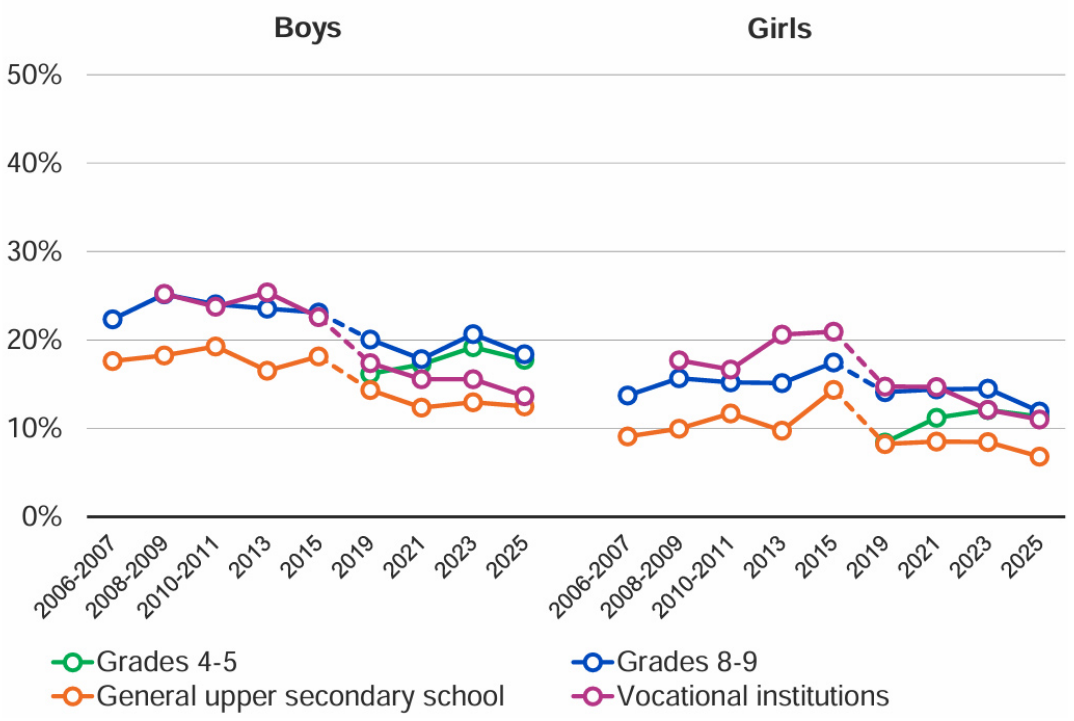
Figure 6. The proportion of children and young people who have been bullied at least once a week by gender and school level in 2006-2025, %.



Source: Helenius et al. (2025).

Students were also asked about their experiences of having been hit, kicked or threatened with violence. Results in 2025 indicated that boys had experienced the physical threat described above more often than girls at all school levels (Helenius et al., 2025). Over the past 12 months, 18 per cent of boys in grades 4 and 5 and grades 8 and 9 of basic education, 12 per cent of boys in general upper secondary schools and 14 per cent of boys in vocational institutions had experienced a physical threat. Approximately one out of ten girls (11%, 12%, 7% and 11%) had experienced the same. Compared to 2023, the proportions were slightly smaller in grades 8 and 9 of basic education, while the proportions among the others remained almost unchanged (Figure 7; Helenius et al., 2025).

Figure 7. The proportion of children and young people who have experienced a physical threat during the year by gender and school level in 2006-2025, %.



Source: Helenius et al. (2025).

Benefits and considerations of this approach

Measuring and monitoring rates of bullying as part of a wider student survey has several benefits, as exhibited by the system in Finland. Establishing a national student survey would facilitate longitudinal comparisons and monitoring of trends in bullying, as well as the student, school, and community level factors associated with bullying. This is exemplified in the figures showing trends over time in bullying prevalence from the Finnish survey. A significant benefit of conducting such a survey is the ability to examine and report on links between bullying and other measures, such as student characteristics, school characteristics, school experiences, and differences in these links over time. For example, such a student survey could examine how other elements of school culture, teaching and learning, school support and resources contribute to differences in bullying. If items on family and community factors are collected, as done in Finland, these could also be examined in relation to bullying. This would facilitate in depth analysis of trends and associations between school experiences and students' lives. The data could support multiple policy objectives and developments. As such, a student survey could be developed in collaboration with other departments (children, health etc.). As shown in Finland, data could be shared and used at several levels, including school, regional and national access with restrictions as necessary. This would support schools to improve their practices and monitor and assess municipal and national trends.

Committing to a multi-faceted survey would require expertise and rigour in the design, data collection, and analysis of such a survey. Quality survey design includes selecting age-appropriate, psychometrically robust measures, rigorous ethical considerations, including sufficient care in asking about sensitive topics, consideration of the length of survey and burden on respondents, decision to collect any responses beyond students (e.g., parents, teachers, school leaders), ensuring confidentiality, and sampling procedures. To maximise the potential of the student survey data, data linking with other sources of administrative data

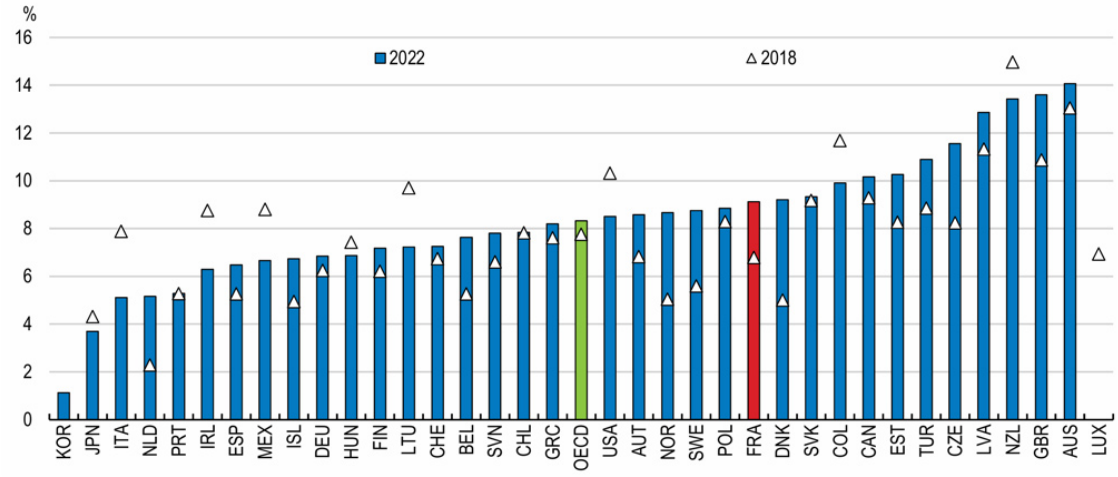
would be a significant strength. For example, the data could be linked with school-level data (e.g., DEIS status, school size, gender composition), and student-level data (e.g., academic achievement, attendance). In the case of Finland, this expertise is well established in the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, which is an independent, state-owned research institute, and operates under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. This institute is responsible for managing, storing, and linking the data, managing the publicly available statistical dashboard, producing annual reports, granting access to the data for researchers and monitoring publications. Potential sites with the appropriate expertise to conduct and manage a student survey in Ireland could include the Central Statistics Office, the Economic and Social Research Institute, universities, or a collaboration between these.

Annual survey conducted during anti-bullying awareness campaign: France

National context

Data from the 2022 PISA survey showed a higher increase from the 2018 survey in the percentage of 15-year-old students regularly being bullied in France, compared to the OECD average (see Figure 8). Over the past decade, significant policy measures have been implemented in France to address this trend, including the Ministry of National Education and Youth allocating an annual budget of 100 million euros to tackling youth bullying and the remuneration of 150 full-time positions in schools (OECD, 2024).

Figure 8. Frequent bullying in France is close to the OECD average, %.



Source: OECD (2024).

The programme for the prevention and fight against bullying (pHARe), first rolled out in 2019, has been the cornerstone of the anti-bullying policy in France in recent years (Ministry of National Education, 2025). The programme aims to provide all schools and educational establishments with a structured and efficient prevention plan; ensure the safety and wellbeing of students by acting directly on the school climate; provide security to teaching teams by guaranteeing the traceability and predictability of public action; train students and staff in the prevention and detection of harassment situations; and ensure that 100 per cent of reported cases are addressed (European Union, 2024). The anti-bullying policy also mobilises harassment referents through a national helpline, 3018, with the department responsible for dealing with cases reported by schools or families (Ministry of National Education, 2025). The anti-bullying policy also mobilises harassment referents through a national public helpline, 3018, with the ministry responsible for dealing with cases reported by schools or families (Ministry of National Education, 2025). In 2023, the ministry introduced additional measures to tackle bullying in schools, including increasing the subsidies to the association operating the helpline, implementing systematic disciplinary procedures for both bullying and cyberbullying, including permanent expulsion from a school, and appointing at least one harassment referent in each educational institution (Ministry of National Education, 2025).

Method

As part of the PHARE programme, the ministry conducted a student survey on bullying in the 2023 school year (Ministry of National Education, 2025). The survey was administered in November 2023, on the national anti-bullying day. All students from CE2 (age 8) to Terminale were invited to participate in the survey, including students in primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary schools and educational institutions. The survey is intended to be repeated periodically.

Data collection

All students were invited to complete the questionnaire. The surveys were administered in class with teacher supervision. While classroom administration ensures standardisation of data collection, it may have introduced social desirability bias in responses. Surveys were anonymous and voluntary, with parents given the opportunity to opt out. The survey included self-report measures of experiences of bullying and its impact on their wellbeing. Bullying incidents were categorised into 14 response types, such as insults, physical aggression, rumours, cyberbullying, and students responded to whether they experienced these on a scale from never to very often. Questions on cyberbullying included receiving threatening messages, image sharing without consent, and online harassment. The survey also asked students questions on how bullying impacted students' sleep problems, anxiety, sadness, loneliness, academic performance, and absenteeism. The survey data was used to create composite measures of victimisation, based on the number of repeated incidents, and school wellbeing index, based on negative responses. These composite measures were used to classify students into risk groups.

Level of data sharing and analysing

Data were managed at two levels, school and national (Ministry of National Education, 2024). At the school level, the completed questionnaires were examined and used to improve understanding of bullying situations within the school, in order to adopt appropriate measures. A separate process occurred at the national level for schools selected as part of the representative sample for national prevalence reporting and monitoring. This representative sample included 100 primary schools, 197 collèges and 382 lycées. This was through random sampling by the Ministry's statistics department (DEPP). In primary schools, all pupils were included. In secondary schools, one class was randomly selected per school. This provided a sample of 21,700 students, with 17,400 usable responses (80% response rate). These schools sent their responses to the Ministry of Education to produce national indicators and monitor bullying trends over time. The data were transferred by secure administrative systems managed by the Ministry of Education's statistical department. Response rates across sectors were relatively even: 86% from primary level, 80% from collège level, and 76% from lycée level. The results were statistically weighted to correct for non-response (Ministry of National Education, 2024).

Use of the data

The data were used for short term identification of at-risk student groups and to inform school level interventions and anti-bullying actions (Ministry of National Education, 2024). The data were used for long term production of national prevalence indicators and to support policy design and to monitor trends over time.

Other forms of data collection

Separate to the survey, schools report bullying cases into a national incident-reporting database (SIVIS). Through the database, school principals and inspectors report serious violence issues, harassment-related incidents, threats, discriminatory abuse, disciplinary outcomes. Reports are collected monthly by the Ministry's statistics department (DEPP). In addition to formal reporting, schools collect qualitative data through interviews with students and families, capturing contextual and experiential dimensions of bullying. Data is also collected from the 3018 helpline, which is operated by a non-governmental organisation, and collects and manages data on reported cases.

Results and evidence of impact

The survey provides evidence of the impact of bullying on student wellbeing (Ministry of National Education, 2024). Results reported by the department in February 2024 show that victims of bullying are more likely to skip school, struggle with homework, and experience falling grades. However, the survey does not provide evidence of impact of policy, as the 2023 survey was the first of its kind, thus the results established a baseline for future monitoring. The anonymous nature of the survey means there can be no individual follow-up or longitudinal tracking of student responses. Benefits of the approach include enhanced awareness and clear reporting mechanisms, better identification of at-risk students, coordination across institutions. Limitations include no causal evidence or longitudinal evaluations. The survey is intended to be repeated periodically, though the exact frequency is not yet clear or fully implemented.

Benefits and considerations of this approach

Conducting a brief survey of students focusing solely on bullying, for example, during anti-bullying week, has several benefits, though limited in scope. A brief survey significantly reduces the burden on respondents, is easy to implement, and the process is likely feasible to oversee and manage within the department. Similar to a wider student survey, this approach, if participation is voluntary and the survey is anonymous, maintains student confidentiality. If the survey is well designed, with consistent measures, and repeated over time, this approach would facilitate monitoring national prevalence rates and types of bullying. If a small number of additional items are collected (e.g., absenteeism), some trends with bullying prevalence could be analysed. If schools are provided with their own data, this could support schools to monitor prevalence and types of bullying. This approach would likely be conducted by the department, thus dependant on the scope and expertise consistently available to oversee the design, data collection, management, storage, and analysis and use of the data. A brief survey would likely be one part of a wider national policy on bullying and other forms of data would continue to be collected at school level (reporting incidents) and department level (to support wider department aims for student experiences). This siloed approach has greater risk of putting schools under additional burden e.g., providing data for department policy actions related to bullying, absenteeism, wellbeing, achievement etc. This approach may also be more likely to change over time, with potential for lower commitment to consistent, well-established measures which may limit longitudinal analyses and international comparisons.

Recording and monitoring incidents of bullying in schools: Scotland

National context

Scotland's national guidance on anti-bullying, Respect for All (Scottish Government, 2024), outlines that accurate recording of bullying incidents serves a number of important purposes: including demonstrating that bullying is taken seriously, that children are listened to and is the first step in protecting children from bullying; enabling monitoring of specific incidents to ensure that an appropriate response has taken place and that the correct support is in place for children and young people; enabling monitoring of recurring patterns or trends, thereby encouraging early intervention and making improvements in policy or practice at a local level; and enabling schools and organisations to assess the effectiveness of their policy and practice, which should be reviewed and updated on a regular basis.

Schools are advised to record the following information:

- The children and young people involved, as well as staff/volunteers or any other adults who witnessed the incident or were involved in the initial response
- Where and when bullying has taken place
- The type of bullying experienced, e.g. name-calling, rumours, threats
- Any prejudice-based attitudes or behaviour presenting
- Details of any protected characteristic(s)
- Consideration of personal or additional support needs and wellbeing concerns
- The outcome, including if the issue was resolved, not resolved or unfounded
- The impact of the incident, including consideration of personal or additional support needs and wellbeing concerns
- Actions taken including resolution at an individual or organisational level

In line with the UNCRC (including Article 12, children and young people have the right to an opinion and for it to be listened to and taken seriously, and Article 16, children and young people have the right to a private life), where possible, the content of this record should be agreed with the child or young person. In cases where the recording system does not allow for this level of detail and monitoring, schools/organisations may want to review their systems.

Method

Following the publication of Scotland's national guidance on anti-bullying, Respect for All (Scottish Government, 2024), Scottish Ministers tasked a short life working group to develop a more consistent national approach to recording and monitoring incidents of bullying in schools. The group identified the Bullying and Equalities Module (BEM) within the SEEMiS system as the most appropriate tool for schools and local authorities to use to record and support them to monitor bullying incidents (His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland, 2019). SEEMiS is the Scottish local government's Education Management Information System (MIS) provider. As the standard MIS within Scottish Education, all local student data is processed and managed by SEEMiS software. Since August 2019, all schools and local authorities have been expected to use the BEM within the SEEMiS system to record and monitor bullying incidents. Independent schools, grant-aided schools and children and young people's organisations should have

robust recording and monitoring systems in place (His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland, 2019).

Local education authorities are responsible for supporting the development and implementation of organisational anti-bullying policies in line with the Respect for All national policy. Regarding monitoring and data collection, the education authorities hold responsibility for ensuring the recording and monitoring of bullying incidents across all settings and use the information gathered to shape and inform future responses. Education authorities provide local guidance on recording and monitoring to support public schools, including further information on training and support for educators.

Data collection

Monitoring data on bullying incidents can provide valuable information on the scope and scale of the issue; the data can help identify numeric trends, specific issues around equality and diversity and other relevant data/patterns which may help organisations, schools and education authorities to prevent and respond to bullying incidents efficiently. This information should be used to identify whether there are trends that indicate specific interventions would be beneficial or where improvements to policy or practice could be made. It can also be used to help identify how effective interventions are, whether there are matters which would benefit from training opportunities and where good practice can be shared locally.

Schools, organisations and education authorities are instructed to give particular attention to the following areas when monitoring bullying:

- Number, type, location, year group and timing of bullying incidents
- Incidents of prejudice-based bullying
- Whether there is a change over time

Levels of data sharing and analysing

All education authorities have access to the SEEMiS Business Intelligence (BI) Reporting Tool which allows them to view and filter data recorded in the Bullying and Equalities module e.g. how many incidents of specific incident type have occurred across the authority and where incidents are occurring in their schools, for example. These reports can also be made available to individual schools for their own school data, should the education authority choose to make the reports accessible to them. As approaches vary across Scotland as to how or if education authorities use the Bullying and Equalities module, it would be for individual schools to contact their authority for further information on access to these Business Intelligence reports, if they cannot currently do so.

The most granular level of monitoring data is best carried out at individual school/ organisation level, where it can be best understood and used to support the improvement of targeted support and interventions that can be applied in a focused, responsive way (Scottish Government, 2024). Schools and organisations are also best placed to recognise the unique nuances of geography and demographics. Recorded incidents of bullying should be monitored by the Senior Leadership Team of a school/children and young people's organisation on a regular basis. In a school setting this should be more than once a term. Education authorities should monitor incidents to identify whether individual schools may require any bespoke support to address particular behaviours. They should also monitor trends across the whole education authority. It is recommended that education authorities monitor school-based incidents at the end of each term. Data should not be analysed in isolation. The local context and other relevant information should be considered alongside the statistical evidence.

Schools should refer to their own Data Protection Team within the education authority regarding local procedures for obtaining permission to record personal data. Other organisations supporting children and young people should refer to their own data protection policies.

Results and evidence of impact

Example of data analysis and reporting at the local authority level

There are 32 education authorities in Scotland. They are responsible for:

- Meeting statutory requirements
- Taking forward nationally agreed policies and guidelines
- Spending and accountability for educational funding
- Continuous improvement of services to meet the needs of local communities

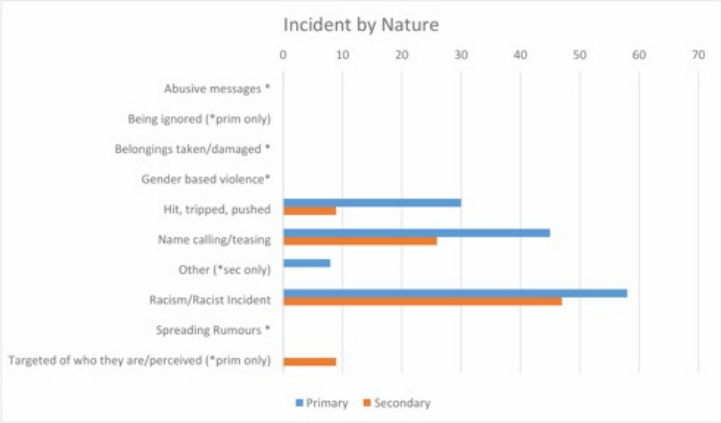
HM inspectors, working across all areas of learning, support and challenge the work in the 32 authorities, through the process and impact of rigorous inspection. An example of how local authorities can use data to monitor instances of bullying comes from a statistical analysis report published by East Dunbartonshire Council (2025). The council analysed data from their schools and provided an overview of the number of incidents by school level, gender, the nature of the incident, the perceived reason for the incident, the location of the incident and the conclusion of the incident. Figures and tables for these, taken from the local authority report, are provided below. Incidents with asterisks (*) are left blank as under Section 38(1)(b) of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act (2002), exact figures when between 1 and 4 are not provided to protect against the identification of individuals (East Dunbartonshire Council, 2025).

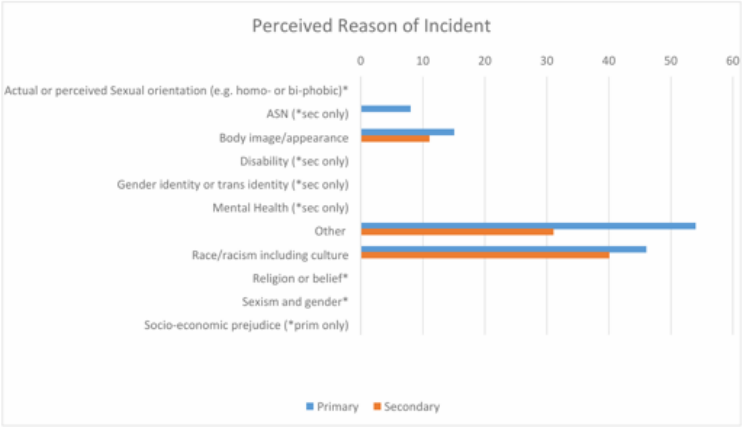
The local authority report concluded that their next steps were to continue to monitor Scottish Government guidance; offer professional learning opportunities in the BEM module; track and monitor schools use of BEM; ensure incidents are processed and responded to in line with national policy (East Dunbartonshire Council, 2025).

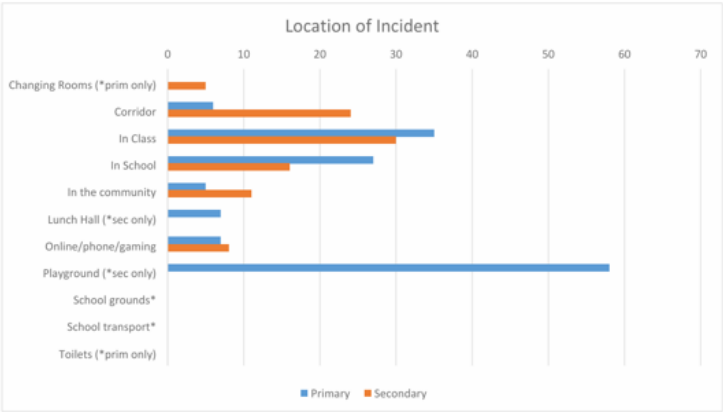
Figure 9. Breakdown of bullying incidents in a local authority in Scotland.

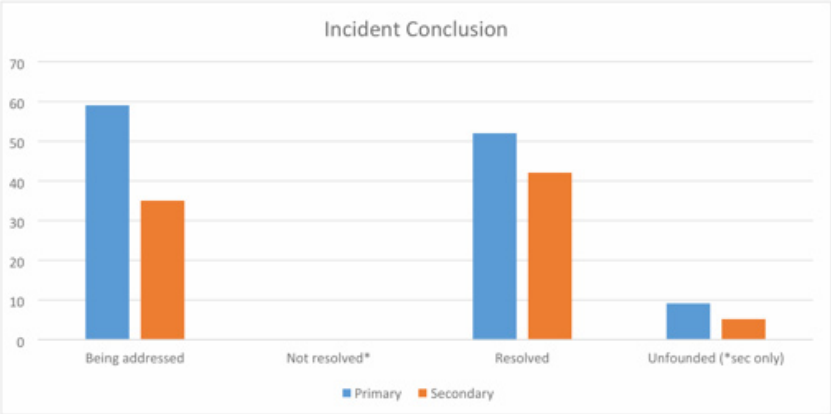
Number of Incidents	**121 Recorded incidents in Primary Schools** **84 Recorded incidents in Secondary Schools**	
Number of Incidents by Gender Experiencing	**41 Primary Female** **84 Primary Male**	**37 Secondary Female** **51 Secondary Male**
Number of Incidents by Gender Displaying	**30 Primary Female** **109 Primary Male**	**16 Secondary Female** **71 Secondary Male**

Source: East Dunbartonshire Council (2025).


Incident by Nature
0
10
20
30
40
50
60
70
Abusive messages *
Being ignored (*prim only)
Belongings taken/damaged *
Gender based violence*
Hit, tripped, pushed
Name calling/teasing
Other (*sec only)
Racism/Racist Incident
Spreading Rumours *
Targeted of who they are/perceived (*prim only)
Primary
Secondary


Perceived Reason of Incident
0
10
20
30
40
50
60
Actual or perceived Sexual orientation (e.g. homo- or bi-phobic)*
ASN (*sec only)
Body image/appearance
Disability (*sec only)
Gender identity or trans identity (*sec only)
Mental Health (*sec only)
Other
Race/racism including culture
Religion or belief*
Sexism and gender*
Socio-economic prejudice (*prim only)
Primary
Secondary


Location of Incident
0
10
20
30
40
50
60
70
Changing Rooms (*prim only)
Corridor
In Class
In School
In the community
Lunch Hall (*sec only)
Online/phone/gaming
Playground (*sec only)
School grounds*
School transport*
Toilets (*prim only)
Primary
Secondary


Incident Conclusion
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
Being addressed
Not resolved*
Resolved
Unfounded (*sec only)
Primary
Secondary

Findings from the national review of recording and monitoring instances of bullying

During September and October 2022, a national thematic review was conducted to assess current practices in monitoring instances of bullying (Education Scotland, 2023). HM Inspectors visited 35 schools (19 primary schools; 11 secondary schools; three special schools; and two all-through schools, which typically combine primary and secondary education) across all 32 local authorities. HM Inspectors spoke with a range of key stakeholders including headteachers, other senior leaders, teachers and support staff and conducted focus groups with children and young people. The findings from this national review were published by Education Scotland in February 2023.

The report indicated that around two-thirds of schools are recording incidents of bullying on BEM in line with national guidance (Education Scotland, 2023). However senior leaders and school staff find BEM challenging to use. Most senior leaders do not consider BEM to be the most effective recording system for incidents of bullying. They identify challenges when using BEM, including difficulties in navigating the system and the length time required to complete the recording and updating of incidents. Senior leaders have found that BEM is not flexible enough to detail fully each incident and the actions taken to support the children and young people involved.

As such, nearly half of schools have created their own parallel system, in addition to using BEM to record incidents of bullying (Education Scotland, 2023). These systems include commercial software packages, local authority monitoring and tracking systems and in-house tools such as spreadsheets. By using their own systems alongside BEM, schools can record important details about the impact of bullying incidents on children and young people and what actions staff take to support them. This allows them to identify more readily the scope and scale of bullying issues in their schools. They use their analysis of data on bullying to support improvements in school policy and practice. For those schools not using BEM to record incidents of bullying, almost all are using their own preferred systems.

The report also showed that senior leaders are concerned about the potential negative impact on individual children and young people of recording incidents of bullying that can identify them on BEM (Education Scotland, 2023). Almost all headteachers are concerned about the impact of recording incidents of bullying on a child or young person's individual record. They feel that the recording of incidents of bullying on BEM may result in children and young people being seen as 'victims' or 'bullies'. A few headteachers welcome the generic and inclusive language used on BEM that avoids labels such as 'victims', 'perpetrators' or 'bullies'.

Overall, senior leaders express disappointment regarding the limitations of BEM to assist them in monitoring incidents of bullying (Education Scotland, 2023). They find the system time-consuming and report it does not allow them to extract information in a format that is helpful to them when identifying patterns and trends. When using BEM to draw conclusions on patterns or trends in bullying behaviour, senior leaders need to carry out intensive manual processing of the data. This includes identifying any protected characteristic that may feature in each recorded incident of bullying. A single incident of bullying involving a group of learners or an incident involving more than one protected characteristic leads to multiple entries on BEM. As a result, staff attempting to identify patterns or trends of prejudice-based bullying need to manually filter and analyse each individual incident. To address these challenges, around a quarter of schools have developed their own systems to help identify patterns and trends.

Schools which have systematic approaches to monitoring report a reduction in incidents of bullying (Education Scotland, 2023). Around two-thirds of these schools analyse data, including about protected characteristics and prejudiced-based bullying, to identify the scope and scale of bullying in their school and to drive improvement. Examples of improved policy and practice as a result of effective data analysis include adaptations to the school environment, amendments to the health and wellbeing curriculum, targeted support for individuals and professional learning for staff. There is significant scope for schools to

strengthen their arrangements for using data to identify patterns and trends of incidents of bullying to help guide improvements in practice.

The frequency of monitoring of bullying incidents varies significantly across schools, ranging from daily to termly depending on the school's preferred approach and the number of incidents recorded (Education Scotland, 2023). A few senior leaders shared that their local authority, as part of its approaches to quality assurance, includes discussion of incidents of bullying including patterns or trends. Senior leaders value these discussions.

Recommendations from the national review included the Scottish Government is to work with partners to review the functionality of the BEM within the SEEMiS system to make it more practical for schools to record and monitor incidents of bullying and that schools must regularly record bullying incidents accurately and monitor this information systematically, to more readily identify the scope and scale of bullying incidents and make improvements in school policy and practice (Education Scotland, 2023).

Benefits and considerations of this approach

Hosting a national online system for recording and monitoring incidents of bullying has several distinct benefits to the previous two survey approaches. A national monitoring system would collect data on every reported incident of bullying occurring in schools, hence providing comprehensive, accurate, and real-time updates on the prevalence of bullying in every school. Requiring schools to input bullying incidents on a standardised system ensures consistency in the quality of information collected across all educational institutions, e.g., type, severity, cause, and conclusion of the incident. Using a standardised system would facilitate comparisons across contexts, e.g., school types, size, location, and across years, if the format of the system stayed consistent over time. A clear structure of responsibility would support this approach, for example, local education authorities in Scotland providing support and overseeing the implementation, training, and monitoring of the system in their jurisdictions. Though not utilised by all local authorities in Scotland, reports produced at this level can support the monitoring of prevalence, identify areas for improvement, and guide school practice within jurisdictions.

The potential drawbacks of such a national monitoring system, as highlighted by the approach in Scotland, include the limited nature of the reporting system, challenges using the system, and social desirability biases contributing to the accuracy of reporting within schools.While a standardised system facilitates comparison, it's narrow definition and reporting structure limits the scope for reporting on the nuances of particular incidents of bullying. This is especially limiting given bullying is a process that occurs in several ways and may not easily be reported as an interaction between two students. A one size fits all approach to closed answer (drop-down list) questions within the reporting system appears insufficiently flexible for schools in Scotland, as reported in the national review of current practices (Education Scotland, 2023). A more open-ended, descriptive approach to recording incidents may be preferable, though would be more laborious for conducting comparisons and monitoring trends over time. Furthermore, an ill-fitting national reporting system may create more burden for school staff, as seen in Scotland, where most schools also maintain their own, more effective recording system for bullying incidents. This duplication creates unnecessary workload and frustration for educators required to use the national system. The national review of current practice in Scotland also indicated a degree of resistance to report incidents in the national system for reputational reasons, both from students and staff, implicating the quality, accuracy and comprehensiveness of data collected (Education Scotland, 2023).

Systematic evaluation of specific anti-bullying actions including implementation fidelity and impact: Norwegian Olweus Bullying Prevention Program

National context

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Programme (OBPP, Olweus 1991, 1993, Olweus and Limber 2010a, b), is the oldest and most researched school-based bullying prevention programme (National Academies 2016). Initially designed for students in elementary, middle, and junior high school grades, the goals of the OBPP are to reduce bullying among children and youth, prevent new bullying problems, and more generally, achieve better relations among peers at school (Olweus 1993; Olweus & Limber, 2010b). Systematic implementation of the OBPP in Norway with some government funding started in the autumn of 2001 (Olweus et al., 2019).

The programme involves school personnel restructuring the school environment to reduce opportunities and rewards for bullying and on building a sense of community. The OBPP is built upon four key principles, which were derived from theory and research on aggression in youth (Olweus 1993). Adults within a school environment should (a) show warmth and positive interest in students, (b) set limits to unacceptable behaviour, (c) use consistent positive consequences to reinforce positive behaviour, and consistent, non-hostile consequences when rules are broken, and (d) act as positive role models for appropriate behaviour (Olweus 1993; Olweus et al., 2007). These principles are translated into school-level interventions, classroom-level interventions, individual interventions, and community-level interventions.

1. School-level: coordinating team responsible for ensuring that all components of the OBPP are implemented with fidelity and sustained over the long-term; yearly administration of the Olweus Bullying Questionnaire (OBQ, Olweus 2007a); training and ongoing consultation for members of the coordinating team and all school staff; the adoption of clear rules and policies related to bullying; and the review and refinement of the school's system of student supervision.
2. Classroom-level: class meetings to build understanding of bullying and related issues through discussion and role play and build class cohesion; supporting school-wide rules against bullying; and periodic class-level meetings with parents. Teachers also are encouraged to integrate bullying prevention themes throughout the curriculum.
3. Individual level: careful supervision of students, particularly in known hotspots for bullying; training for all staff to intervene on-the-spot when bullying happens or is suspected; and follow-up interventions with children and youth involved in bullying (and their parents, when appropriate).
4. Community-level: involvement of one or more community members on the school's coordinating team; other activities to help ensure community support of the school's bullying prevention work; and efforts to spread bullying prevention messages and strategies into other community settings where children and youth gather (Olweus and Limber 2010b).

Training and continued consultation are provided by certified OBPP Trainer-Consultants, who help to address challenges and maintain fidelity to the programme. Print, online, and video resources are provided for administrators, members of the coordinating team, teachers, and parents.

Data collection and use

The Olweus Bullying Questionnaire (OBQ) includes 39 questions and sub-questions which assess students' experiences with being bullied and bullying other students, their reactions as bystanders and their attitudes to bullying (Olweus, 1996, 2007, 2013; Solberg & Olweus, 2003). It serves both as a research instrument and as an active component in the practical work with the programme. Individual schools receive a comprehensive report of their survey results with tables and graphs (broken down by age and gender) which help the school leadership and staff, parents and, to some extent, students, to get a detailed and reasonably realistic picture of the "bully/victim situation" at their school. Most important, the follow-up measurement after one year can inform the school about possible positive or negative changes over time. The aim of this data sharing is to raise awareness and engagement and help give direction to the school's anti-bullying efforts.

History of evaluation evidence

The OBPP has been evaluated in a number of studies in Norway. Seven large-scale studies of the OBPP in Norway (involving more than 30,000 students from more than 300 schools) have produced consistently positive effects for students in grades 4–7 (with reductions in bullying in the range of 35–50% after 8 months) and positive, although somewhat less consistent and immediate results, for students in grades 8–10 (Olweus & Limber 2010b). In an evaluation of long-term effectiveness of the OBPP, Olweus followed students from 14 schools (with 3000 students at each assessment) over 5 years and observed reductions in self-reported victimisation of 40% and self-reported bullying of 51%.

Example of evaluation evidence

In the school year of 2005/2006, an online version of the OBQ questionnaire was provided and schools that had implemented the programme before that time were allowed and generally encouraged to conduct the survey at any time and without costs (Olweus et al., 2020). However, it was up to the schools themselves to decide if they wanted to use the online survey, and as a result, some schools continued to conduct the survey more regularly than others. Regular use of the OBQ in the follow-up period could be seen as an indicator or marker variable signalling that such schools had continued to follow the programme's principles and routines, at least to a certain extent (Olweus et al., 2020). In contrast, schools that had not used the OBQ in that period were assumed to have followed the programme less or maybe not at all. This provided the opportunity to compare the level of bullying problems in schools who frequently engaged with the survey and those who did not, at a long-term follow-up period. To conduct this comparison, school-aggregated data on the percentage of students being bullied was linked from the annual National Pupil Survey (Elevundersøkelsen) which comprises a very large percentage of all Norwegian students in grades 5–7 (and 8–13) (Olweus et al., 2020). This allowed comparison of the long-term outcomes of particular groups as well as a comparison with the national average.

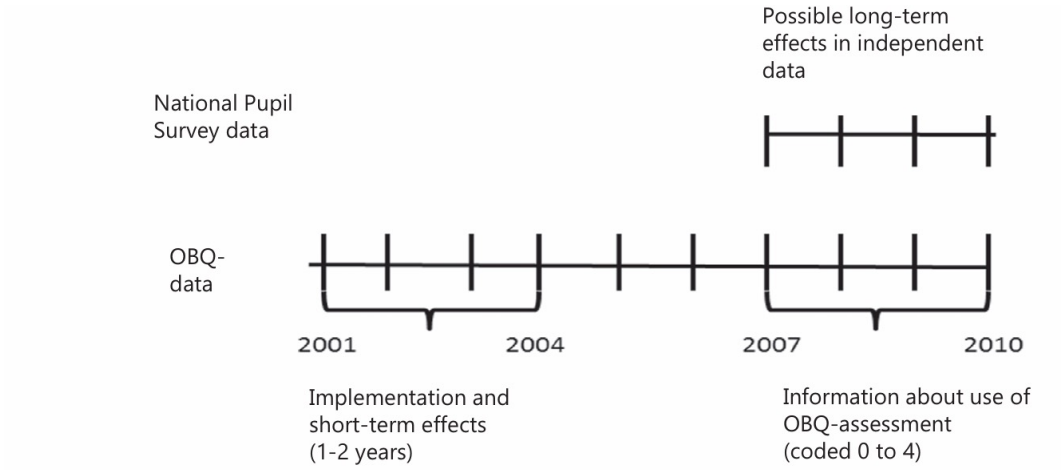
Methods

Data was drawn from elementary schools (pupils aged 6-13 years), the schools in Norway where the programme has been implemented most frequently. The study included 234 elementary schools. Schools were included which had completed implementation of the programme (having conducted the OBQ prior to the programme and at 1-year follow up) in the period 2001–2005. These two initial surveys provided measures of the level of bullying in the introductory implementation period and of the degree of relative and absolute change after eight months of work with the programme. See Figure 10 for the design of the longitudinal evaluation.

The key long-term outcome variable in the National Pupil Survey is the global question from the Olweus Bullying Questionnaire (OBQ), presented after a brief definition of the term bullying: "How often have you been bullied at school in the past couple of months" (e.g., Olweus, 1996, 2013; Solberg & Olweus, 2003; Wendelborg, 2012). The five response alternatives are: I have not been bullied at school in the past couple of months (code 0), once or twice (1), 2 or 3 times a month (2), about once a week (3), and several times a week (4). Based on various psychometric analyses, there are good grounds for classifying students who answer "2 or 3 times a month" or more often (codes 2–4) as being bullied and those who choose "not been bullied" or "once or twice" as not bullied (codes 0–1; e.g., Olweus, 2013; Solberg & Olweus, 2003).

A summary measure of a school's average bullying level was obtained by calculation of the "percentage bullied students", that is, by summing the total number of students who reported having been bullied at school "2 or 3 times a month or more" divided by the number of students who had answered the question. The reliability of the school-aggregated measure is typically quite high (e.g., Limber et al., 2018).

Figure 10. Overview of the study design evaluating the Olweus Bullying Prevention Programme.

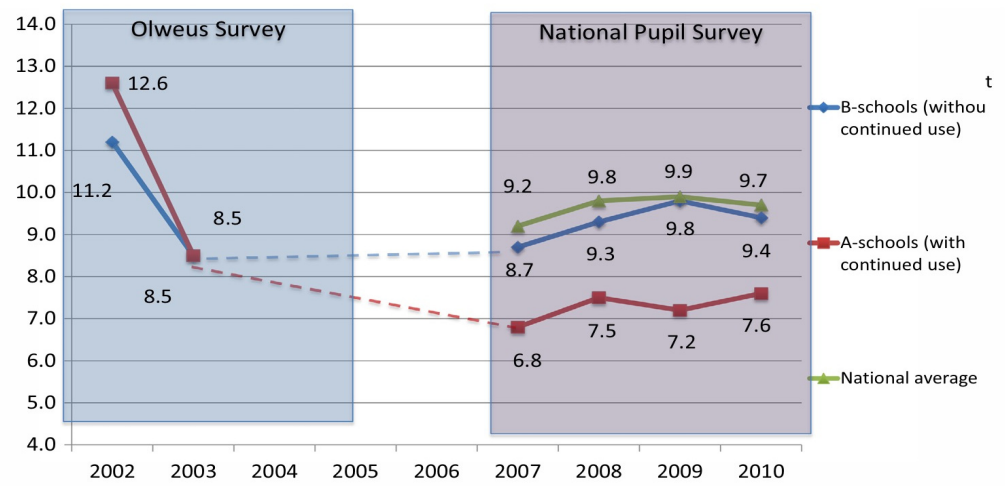


Source: Olweus et al. (2020).

Results and evidence of impact

The study showed that the 70 elementary schools (A schools) with continued and repeated use of the Olweus Bullying Questionnaire (OBQ) in the four-year follow-up period of 2007-2010 (two to eight years after original implementation of the OBPP), had more favourable long-term development in terms of bullying prevalence than 102 comparable schools (B schools) that had not conducted any OBQ-surveys in the same period. The odds of being bullied for students in A-schools with continued use were approximately 25% lower than for students in B-schools. The prevalence values (percentage bullied students) in A-schools were also clearly lower than the national average in the Pupil Survey, 7.1% versus 9.6% ($p = 0.001$). The odds of being bullied for students in an average elementary school ('non-Olweus school') were 40% higher than for students in an A-school (or 28% the other way around).

Figure 11. Being bullied (red and blue lines): Long-term development of schools that started with the OBPP in 2001/2005 and either conducted the OBQ survey 3-4 times in the follow-up period (2007-2010) or did not conduct any OBQ surveys in the same period compared with the national average measured with the national Pupil Survey.



Source: Olweus et al. (2020).

This study provided a rigorous, long-term test of the effectiveness of the OBPP programme. Central to the possibility of such a strong evidence base, the key measure from the OBQ was collected as part of a national, independent data source, the National Pupil Survey. This ensured data was collected using a reliable, valid measure and permitted comparison of the results of the programme with population-based national averages. That the same measures are used in research and practical implementation work for such a long period in Norway (included in the National Pupil Survey since 2003/4) greatly strengthens the ability to conduct high quality monitoring and evaluation of bullying in Norwegian schools.

The study suggests that repeated use of the OBQ survey in the follow up period could be seen as an indication that such schools had also continued to use other components and followed the routines and principles of the programme at least to some extent, and clearly to a greater extent than schools that had not conducted any OBQ surveys at all. The results of the study emphasise the general importance of schools sticking to a programme that can document positive effects and letting it become a part of and pervade the schools' everyday routines. The authors used the evidence to conclude that systematically and substantially reducing bullying is possible, not only in one-year evaluations, but also in the long term, up to eight years after original implementation, when schools continue to implement the programme with fidelity (Olweus et al., 2020).

Benefits and considerations of this approach

Systematic evaluations of specific practices are the only approach to provide evidence on whether anti-bullying policy and practices are resulting in change in their targeted outcomes. While the three other approaches described above provide data on prevalence and could facilitate analyses of factors associated with bullying, including at student, school, or community levels, there are no direct assessments of policy impact. Systematic evaluations such as the approach taken to evaluate the Olweus Bullying Prevention Programme in Norway provides clear, measurable impact of specific policies, practices or programmes.This type of data is highly valuable for informing future policy and practice regarding anti bullying in schools, though the single item measure of bullying is a limitation. To conduct this approach,

clear outcomes should be identified in advance, e.g., reducing rates or severity of certain forms of bullying, and these should be measured in a rigorous and consistent manner before and after implementation of a programme or policy. As seen in the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, this is built into the intervention, through the repeated data collected using the Olweus Bullying Questionnaire. This approach is exemplary evidence-informed policy and practice with clear findings on the effectiveness of the intervention.

Programme evaluation is typically conducted once-off, with evaluation built into the implementation procedure. However, the approach taken in Norway showcases how embedding evaluation into national data collection and linking with administrative data can expand this to provide robust, long-term evidence of policy impact. Integrating evaluation measures from the Olweus Bullying Questionnaire into a national pupil survey provided a unique opportunity to examine whether sustained programme implementation supported bullying prevention using data collected up to a decade later. Norway's ability to conduct highly robust, long-term evaluations of policy and programme impact is a result of a long history of monitoring bullying in schools, sustaining effective partnerships between academic researchers and policymakers, and establishing systems for data sharing and linking.

Strengths and weaknesses of possible approaches considering the Irish context

Each of the four approaches outlined above have their own strengths and weaknesses. This chapter consolidates these differences and discusses the potential for adopting each approach considering the current systems and context in Ireland. The discussion of data collection approaches is organised into the following topics: quality of a national report, usefulness for other departments and evidence for policy, capacity for policy evaluation, flexibility, bias and fidelity, burden on students, burden on schools, real-time versus periodic reporting, and management of the data and reporting. Table 2 on page 36 summarises the discussion and strengths of each approach across these topics.

Quality of a national report on bullying

A critical point to consider is the quality of a national report on bullying that could be garnered from each potential approach. The Perspectives on Bullying Behaviour reports (Department of Education, 2024b, Department of Education and Youth, 2025) published using data from the Inspectorate, is quite comparable to the approach taken in France, which collected data from students during anti-bullying week and produced a descriptive report of prevalence rates and frequency scores on a small number of related constructs (anxiety, loneliness, absenteeism etc.). Similar to the Perspectives on Bullying Behaviour reports up to 2024, the data was limited by comparably low-quality survey design, including questionnaire items, data collection procedures and sampling strategy. Similar to the Perspectives on Bullying Behaviour reports up to 2024, the data was limited by comparably low-quality survey design, including questionnaire items, data collection procedures and sampling strategy (not representative of the sampling population). Such a report provides a snapshot into the current perspectives of some students, but does not facilitate tracking trends over time, comparing differences across school and student characteristics (including intersectionality across these characteristics), or conducting inferential analyses of important contributing factors to bullying experiences. It should be noted, the methodology for the Irish survey was improved in 2025, which should facilitate comparison-based analysis over the remaining 2026 and 2027 reports.

By comparison, the significantly higher quality of a large-scale, independently conducted student survey, such as that conducted in Finland, is a much more powerful tool and yields very useful data and a valuable, impactful national report on bullying. While the investment required for a large-scale student survey is higher, the benefits are clear from the case study example. Finland's School Health Promotion study is conducted every two-years, drawing on validated, repeated measures and links data with other sources of administrative data such as achievement and school characteristics. The data is utilised at two levels: schools receive their own data, and anonymised national data are analysed and accessible, to differing levels, by researchers and the public via secure systems. This provides Finland with robust measures of how bullying trends have changed over time, dating back to the first survey in 1993. This also provides schools with valuable information on their own trends and current outcomes which guide school-level policies and strategies. The national report on bullying is comprehensive, facilitating inferential analyses drawing on the wide range of topics collected, such as health, family, academics, relationships, to understand the causes and correlates of individual differences in bullying. The publicly available system provides transparency, facilitating researcher access has resulted in a large body of evidence and academic publications regarding systems in Finland.

Overseeing a national monitoring system of bullying incidents, such as in place in Scotland, would provide data that could be used to publish a brief, descriptive report on prevalence of bullying incidents, including some detail on type, location, resolution status. This approach would provide solely monitoring data, and

likely would not facilitate insights into why patterns may be changing over time, the nature the relationship between school and student factors and bullying experiences or provide an evaluation of the effectiveness of current anti-bullying policies. It is worth noting, too, the challenges faced by educators in Scotland using a national monitoring system, who report its lack of flexibility results in inaccurate data, incomplete reporting of incidents, and duplicating school records at a local level (Education Scotland, 2023).

Finally, empirical evaluations of specific anti-bullying interventions and programmes are critical for reaching evidence-informed policy. However, if interventions and programmes are not rolled out at a national level, as is the case in Ireland where schools have high levels of autonomy and create their own anti-bullying policies, the findings from programme evaluations are solely relevant to the schools adopting the programmes in question. As such, a national report on bullying focusing on evaluating specific procedures would not represent the practices and experiences of all students in Irish schools.

Overall, the approach taken in Finland, implementing a large-scale, independently conducted student survey including bullying prevalence, would likely provide the most robust, useful national report on bullying in Ireland.

Usefulness for other departments and evidence for policy

It is worth considering the usefulness of any approach taken to measure and monitor bullying behaviour for other policy and department objectives. Cross-departmental collaboration supports alignment in policy aims and objectives as well as reducing burden placed on schools and students when required to provide data or take action to comply with national policies. On this topic, a wide-ranging student survey could hold more utility and potential to inform policy than the other approaches to data collection and monitoring. In the example in Finland, the breadth of the survey ensures the data is used by several government departments. Developing a large-scale student survey that spans several government departments could hold significant value and improve evidence-informed policy across a range of policies in Ireland. Solely within the Department of Education and Youth, this would align closely with the current developments underway on the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice (Department of Education, 2019). However, the data could be used to inform policy in the Department of Health, Department of Children, Disability and Equality, and beyond, and indeed, combined with other datasets and administrative data. Providing researchers and practitioners access to the data would also strengthen links between research, policy and practice in Ireland. The other three approaches focus solely on collecting data on bullying in schools, and as such, likely hold little utility beyond the objective of providing a national report on bullying.

Capacity for policy evaluation

Robust evaluations of the effectiveness of policies targeting bullying are a key gap internationally (OECD, 2026). Ireland is no different in this regard: while student surveys such as the Perspectives on Bullying Behaviour (Department of Education and Youth, 2025) and other large-scale surveys conducted by Irish researchers provide insights into the experiences of students in Ireland, they do not provide evidence of policy impact. This evidence is only garnered from direct research assessing the specific goals and outcomes of policies, such as the example provided evaluating the Olweus Bullying Prevention Programme (Olweus et al., 2022). Other forms of data collection, such as a large-scale student survey which captures student outcomes that directly link to the intended outcomes of policies (e.g., student sense of belonging) could provide indirect information on the impact of national policies.

Flexibility

Flexibility was a key challenges facing school staff using the national bullying incident monitoring system in

Scotland (Education Scotland, 2022). Teachers reported on how the closed-response and multiple-choice structure of the system, while ensuring consistency and facilitating comparisons across locations and time, failed to capture important details on the nature of bullying incidents. Conducting an evaluation of policy impact may also be low in flexibility, as the outcomes of the study should be identified in advance, in line with the planned objectives of the policy. Student surveys hold more potential for flexibility, as while some questions and constructs should be included in every survey to aid longitudinal comparisons, new measures could be added as appropriate, as in the case in Finland where items on cyberbullying and blended bullying were included. The flexibility of surveys to adapt to these changing needs would depend on their scope, with brief surveys being more limited. Studies in Ireland, in line with international findings, highlight the dynamic nature and contexts of bullying, including the need to consider bullying as a social, systemic process (McCoy et al., 2026). As such, more flexible approaches may be more appropriate.

Bias and fidelity

Reporter bias and fidelity in data collection and reporting procedures is a consistent challenge across international approaches to monitoring bullying. Bias is inherent to self-report data, across both student self-report surveys and staff reporting of bullying incidents on a national system. Bias can be further amplified by data collection procedures, for example, collecting student reports in class under teacher supervision, or during anti-bullying week. Conducting a student survey that focuses on multiple, wide-ranging topics can reduce the potential for bias. Furthermore, using validated, standardised measures of key constructs, as shown in the School Health Promotion Survey in Finland and the Olweus Bullying Prevention Programme in Norway improves the robustness of the data used in a national report.

Student and school burden

School staff in Ireland already report significant burden on time and resources (Dempsey & McCoy, 2026), and requests to provide data to the Department of Education and Youth in a piecemeal, repetitive manner to measure various policy outcomes adds to this burden. Any approach requesting data from students places a burden on students to provide this information. The scale of the survey will contribute to this, with a larger-scale survey increasing the student burden. However, it is worth considering whether one, large-scale survey, is less of a burden on students than multiple, small-scale data collection procedures across various government departments. Requiring schools to report bullying incidents within a national monitoring system increases the burden on school staff, particularly in instances when a national system is not flexible enough to capture all relevant information on bullying incidents, resulting in schools creating duplicate records at the local level (Education Scotland, 2022).

Real time or periodic reporting

A national reporting system, such as in Scotland, is the only approach that provides real-time rather than periodic data on bullying incidents. Real-time data on bullying incidents is recorded and responded to in Irish schools at the school-level, with any serious incidents potentially also involving and being recorded by external services and supports. The value of real-time data for a national report on bullying would primarily allow for examining bullying prevalence trends across the academic year, for example, identifying whether bullying is more prevalent at the beginning of term, during exam periods etc.

Management of data and national report

The responsible party for managing the collection and storage of data and producing a national report on

bullying differs across each approach and is dependent on the scale and goals of the approach. If the approach taken prioritises a small-scale, lower burden method that aims to collect data solely on bullying prevalence, such as a brief student survey or a national database for monitoring incidents, the management of this data would likely occur within the department, such as the Statistics Section. Conducting an empirically robust evaluation of policy impact would likely require the expertise and objectivity of expert researchers. Conducting a large-scale student survey to provide evidence for multiple policies and strengthen the research, practice and policy links in Ireland would necessitate the expertise, capacity and objectivity of researchers based in academic or research institute settings. However, the data sharing procedures for such a student survey would likely require collaboration with national agencies, such as the Central Statistics Office.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are fundamental to any system for measuring bullying. Collecting data from children and young people requires the highest standards of ethical practice, including meaningful engagement with children and young people in the design and development of survey instruments. Approaches should be sensitive to the diverse needs and experiences of students, with inclusivity embedded throughout all stages of data collection, analysis and reporting. Strong data protection safeguards are also essential, including robust protocols relating to data storage, access, confidentiality and anonymity, in line with legal and ethical obligations.

It is also important to consider the focus of data collection. Research that centres exclusively on sensitive issues such as bullying behaviour may generate discomfort or unease among respondents. Embedding questions on bullying within a broader survey of school experiences can help mitigate these concerns while also facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of students' engagement with multiple dimensions of school life. Recent examples of this broader approach include research on student experiences in voluntary secondary schools (Carroll et al., 2024) and a student examining the school and post-school experiences of disabled young people (McCoy et al., 2025).

	Student experiences survey (Finland)	Bullying survey (France)	National reporting system (Scotland)	Intervention evaluation (Norway)
Quality of national report on bullying	High	Medium	Low	High
Usefulness for other departments and policies	High	Low	Low	Low
Capacity for policy evaluation	Medium	Low	Low	High
Flexibility	High	Medium	Low	Low
Bias and fidelity	Medium	High	High	Low
Student burden	High	Medium	Low	Low
School burden	Medium	Medium	High	Low
Real time or periodic reporting	Periodic	Periodic	Real-time	Periodic
Management of data and national report	Research institute / university	Department	Department	Research institute/ University

Table 2. Summary comparison of the four approaches to monitoring bullying.

Summary and Conclusion

Bullying is a significant barrier, both in Ireland and internationally, to equitable, high-quality education and inclusive societies. A key gap in both Irish and international systems is a lack of robust, longitudinal, national evidence on bullying and impact evaluations of system-level policies (OECD, 2026). Many countries have introduced national anti-bullying strategies and policies, however, without stronger statistical evidence of the prevalence and associated factors of bullying, it remains difficult to draw clear conclusions about the most promising approaches to reducing bullying and its consequences. As such, key recommendations of a recent OECD (2026) review include the investment into longitudinal studies with repeated follow-ups, evaluations of anti-bullying policies, and systematic monitoring and evaluation of bullying at a national level. In line with these recommendations, Ireland is undertaking developments to improve the measurement and monitoring of bullying in schools and produce a national report on bullying. Potential approaches that Ireland may use to conduct data collection, analysis and reporting have been described above. These four approaches have been chosen as examples of the breadth of international systems, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of each, and how lessons learned may be applied in the Irish context. Potential approaches could include conducting a large-scale student survey; a survey focused on bullying, such as during the anti-bullying week; a bullying incident monitoring system; or evaluations of current programmes.

Beyond the strengths, weaknesses and considerations relevant for each of these potential approaches, this review also highlights several general criteria and considerations for planning effective, accurate and useful data collection to contribute to a national report on bullying. These considerations are as follows.

General criteria for effective and useful data collection

- Consistency over time to facilitate longitudinal trend analysis. Using repeated measures in each annual or periodic form of data collection will facilitate analyses of trends over time and temporal patterns across student and school subgroups.
- Valid measurement tools. Basing the data collection on valid, standardised, widely used measures will ensure the data collected is accurate, reduces informant bias and confusion, and could permit international comparisons.
- Age-appropriate questionnaires. Any questionnaires or data collection tools used should be age appropriate for the student population and piloted with students before data is collected.
- Collecting the perspectives of multiple informants. Gathering data from students, parents and school staff can provide a richer insight into topics and reduce informant bias.
- Minimise school and student burden. Utilising current systems in place for school data collection where possible will reduce school and student burden, an ongoing and well-established phenomenon existing in the Irish context.
- Coordinating with wider department and government policy priorities. Prior to implementing processes to support a national report on bullying, efforts should be made to coordinate efforts within the Department of Education and Youth and across wider departments to improve coherence, minimise the potential for duplicate data collection, and improve sustainable policy actions.
- Design systems that support schools to improve their anti-bullying policies and procedures with the use of their data. Beyond the goal of producing a national report on bullying, any data collected should be designed to support schools to improve their own anti-bullying policies and practices through sharing of data in a clear, accessible, and non-judgemental manner.

- Clarify the goals of the national report before implementing any approach. Each of the approaches described in this report have differing goals; this could be to monitor prevalence, understand patterns with wider student, school and system characteristics, or evaluate effectiveness of national policies. Clarifying the goals of the national report, and the priority of these, during the design and development stage, will ensure the approach taken is well suited for the context.

Conclusion

A national bullying report, and a data collection and monitoring system to support the report, holds the potential to greatly improve system-level prevention and targeted supports for bullying in Irish schools. Bullying is neither an inevitable feature of school life, nor a normal part of childhood and adolescence (McCoy et al., 2026). Bullying can be changed, with careful consideration for the student, school, and system level factors that contribute to its prevalence. A national bullying report should reflect the holistic conceptualisation of bullying as a social process driven by multi-level factors, as outlined in the Cineáltas Action Plan on Bullying (Government of Ireland, 2022).

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