

Thursday, July 22, 2010

ARTHUR
BEESLEY

Opinion, page 18



To get to this point however
Ireland have already receive

Schools lack help to stop bullying – expert

PAUL CULLEN

SCHOOLS ARE losing morale in the fight against bullying because of a lack of official support, according to a leading expert.

Anti-bullying programmes in Ireland experienced resistance compared to other countries, according to Prof Mona O'Moore of the school of education in Trinity College, and the results of the last national programme were disappointing.

This was despite the proven effectiveness of anti-bullying programmes in reducing the incidence of bullying in schools, she told the annual conference of the International School Psychology Association in Dublin yesterday.

A pilot programme in Co Donegal succeeded in reducing the incidence of victimisation by 20 per cent, and bullying of others by more than 17 per cent, she pointed out. The rates of frequent victimisation and frequent bullying fell by 50 per cent and more than 69 per cent respectively.

A later national programme also saw reductions in the rate of bullying, but the number of participating schools suffered a disappointing rate of attrition as the

amount of time on the curriculum devoted to anti-bullying measures was squeezed.

Ms O'Moore called on the Government to prioritise the implementation of a State-wide approach to bullying in schools, paying particular attention to newer forms of bullying such as cyberbullying. She also suggested it should be mandatory for schools to implement anti-bullying programmes, as it is in Finland. "Why don't we get in there at the start. We know the children who are at risk. We have enough information," she said.

Ms O'Moore said the "myths" around bullying needed to be challenged, such as the view that it was normal or character-building. If this was the case, then why were victims found in psychiatric units or dying by suicide, she asked.

About 27 per cent of boys and 20 per cent of girls in Ireland say they have been bullied, according to one survey, slightly lower than the international average.

She said Ireland was not dealing very well with bullying and the problem was not always taken very seriously. The financial benefits of anti-bullying programmes, in terms of reduced delinquency

and depression rates outweighed the costs of tackling the programme.

She was supported by an international expert on bullying, Prof David Farrington of Cambridge University, who told the conference that anti-bullying programmes worked. A review of scientific studies of the topic by Prof Farrington showed a fall in bullying and victimisation of about 20 per cent after programmes were implemented in schools.

Prof Keith Sullivan of NUI Galway's school of education described cyberbullying as a growing problem that was difficult to manage in the school system. It was characterised by the perpetrators ability to maintain anonymity and to harass victims 24 hours a day, and it was carried out in a language with which adults were not familiar. However, he said cyberbullying was normally accompanied by in-school bullying.

Mr Sullivan admitted he was "illiterate" in the culture and language of cyberbullying, unlike his children. "Instead of speeding through cyberspace at light speed, I was stranded in a cyberjungle, entangled in tentacles of information overload."