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Exploring the introduction of the Framework for Junior Cycle: A longitudinal study Interim Report 4 School case studies (Round 2)

Item Type	Report
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Publisher	University of Limerick
Download date	2026-03-14 14:24:16
Item License	https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/
Link to Item	https://doi.org/10.34961/researchrepository-ul.27443502



**UNIVERSITY OF
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OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Exploring the introduction of the Framework for Junior Cycle: A longitudinal study

Interim Report 4

School case studies (Round 2)



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To cite this report: McGarr, O., McCormack, O., O'Reilly, J., Hennessy, J., O'Meara, N., Calderón, A., Leahy, K., MacPhail, A., Lenihan, R., Neary, A., Lynch, R., Power, J., Ó Gallchóir, C., McMahon, J & Goos, M. (2024) *Exploring the introduction of the Framework for Junior Cycle – A Longitudinal Study: Interim Report no. 4 (School Case Studies – Round 2)*, University of Limerick.

[Project website link](#)

Acknowledgements

The research team would like to acknowledge and thank the school principals, teachers, students and parents for their participation in the research project and all other school staff who supported this research. The team would like to acknowledge and show their appreciation for the contribution of Jade Gill, Anna McHale, Samuel Brzyskiewicz, Eabha Hughes and Anthony O'Leary. The team also wish to acknowledge and thank the NCCA staff, the Council of the NCCA and the Board for Junior Cycle for their feedback and advice throughout the project.

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Executive Summary

This interim report is the fourth of a series of reports from a longitudinal study exploring the implementation, enactment and impact of the Framework for Junior Cycle in post-primary schools in Ireland. This fourth report presents findings from the second round of case study visits (conducted September-January 2023-2024). Case study data collected during visits to the 12 schools included student focus groups (31 focus groups; n=219), student surveys (n=1782), teacher interviews (n=63), school principal interviews (n=12), parent interviews (n=30) and observations of learning and teaching (n=13). The current round of case study visits was framed around the principles underpinning Junior Cycle as a way of capturing schools'/participants' experiences. The Principles of Junior Cycle were selected as they reflect the broader intentions of the changes as reflected in the Framework. For this reason, the research findings for this round of case studies are presented through these principles.

Students' Perspectives

Students mainly viewed the Junior Cycle as preparation for the Leaving Certificate, providing them with exposure to and experience of a state examination. Student focus group discussions explored students' experiences of the Principles of the Framework for Junior Cycle. Students were largely positive about *Quality* and *Inclusive Education*, largely negative about *Wellbeing* and expressed mixed views (both positive and negative comments) relating to the other Principles of Junior Cycle.

Choice and Flexibility: Choice of subjects and choice within subjects was central to students' commentaries, with mixed views expressed. Positive comments showed contentment with subject options, as well as with the level of choice within subjects. CBAs were considered one way to experience *Choice and Flexibility*. Those that felt they did not experience *Choice and Flexibility* spoke about the limited subject choices available and the limited choice within subjects. The majority of students stressed that there is a lack of consistency in the amount of choice offered within subjects. In the survey, many students asserted that they had the opportunity to voice their opinions, but more than one-third of students claimed that their opinions are never acted upon. The majority of students indicated that they did not have a choice on the Short Courses they studied.

Creativity and Innovation: CBAs, project and interactive approaches to teaching and learning were deemed to support the enactment of *Creativity and Innovation*. Others, however, believed that they had limited scope to be creative, particularly due to examinations. The survey data also indicates a strong desire amongst students for more opportunities to be creative, with creativity emerging as the Key Skill least developed at Junior Cycle.

Continuity and Development: Some students felt that their learning was incremental and effectively scaffolded. These students also spoke positively about continuity from primary school. Some saw a link between what they learned in school and their life and world around them. Those that raised concerns relating to this principle focused on the transition from primary to post-primary, with these students either not seeing a link between their learning in each setting and/or viewing the move as a ‘big jump’.

Engagement and Participation: *Engagement and Participation* received mixed responses in the focus group. Those that spoke positively about this principle spoke about the student-centred learning and project work they engaged in, as well as extra-curricular activities. The three main concerns students expressed related to a lack of active learning, the perceived lack of relevance of curriculum to their lives and the negative impact workload had on students’ capacity to engage and participate. Student survey results indicated that working on their own in the classroom is the type of schoolwork they engaged with most frequently with TY/5th year students more likely to report this compared to 3rd and 2nd years.

Inclusive Education: The small number of students that selected *Inclusive Education* as the principle they experienced most at Junior Cycle did so on the basis of pedagogical and teacher approaches that supported inclusion, with students feeling included within the classroom environment. Group work/projects and CBAs, along with teacher questioning and additional supports and exemptions for students that require them, were deemed to support inclusion. The small number of students that viewed inclusive education as the least evident dimension felt that shyness and peer pressure may impact on inclusion, and that pedagogical approaches did not always support inclusion.

Learning to Learn: Mixed views were identified regarding students’ experiences of *Learning to Learn*. Those that felt they experienced this principle, believed that their teachers

encouraged, supported, and enabled them to learn effectively. Students also felt that they could take responsibility for their own learning – largely through engagement in the CBA. Some were content with the level of study skills they received at Junior Cycle and with the relevance of what they learned in school with their life, further education, and work. In comparison, others suggested that they had not experienced or received enough understanding of how to learn and study during Junior Cycle and/or these students struggled to see the relevance of what they learned in school to their life now and in the future. ‘Managing information and thinking’ was seen as the Key Skill developed the most and the majority of students indicated in their survey responses that they could take responsibility for their learning all or some of the time. While students agreed that feedback helped their learning, test scores were the dominant mode of feedback with written and oral comments from peers received least. While the majority agreed that they and their parents received reports on their learning, they were less likely to strongly agree/agree that these reports improved their learning. CBAs were seen as more effective ways of evidencing their learning and helping their learning. Just over half of student survey responses strongly agreed or agreed that in-class/end of year exams were suitable ways of assessing their learning.

Quality: Students tended to equate *Quality* at Junior Cycle with teacher effort, commitment, support, and encouragement of students’ learning and success, as well as supporting quality learning through feedback. Those that were unsure about whether they experienced *Quality* at Junior Cycle argued that this depended on the teacher, their efforts, pedagogical practices and professionalism.

Wellbeing: While students tended to recognise their school’s attempt to care for their wellbeing, it was the principle that received the most negative comments from students, with students feeling overwhelmed by the workload and the stress to perform in the examination. Wellbeing programmes weren’t always considered effective in addressing this stress. These views are reflected in one of the changes students called for at Junior Cycle, namely a reduction and spreading out in the workload attached to the programme to reduce stress. TY/5th year students were more likely to strongly agree/agree that they can cope with the workload in Junior Cycle, in comparison to 2nd and 3rd years.

Teachers' Perspectives

Teachers expressed mixed views (positive and negative) regarding the enactment of the majority of the Principles of Junior Cycle. Teachers were more likely to express positive views regarding *Creativity and Innovation* and *Engagement and Participation* and more negative views regarding *Quality* and *Continuity and Development*. The remaining principles received mixed responses from teachers.

Choice and Flexibility: There was a balance of both positive and negative views regarding experiences of *Choice and Flexibility* amongst teachers. Positive views referred to the CBAs and how they supported and provided choice for student learning. Some teachers felt there was now more choice within Junior cycle. These teachers felt, for example, that there was now more choice within their subject and that they had a greater choice in the range of resources. Some also felt that students had greater choice in terms of how they wished to present their work, and in terms of the subjects they could choose. Three concerns were identified in terms of teachers' experiences of *Choice and Flexibility*. Firstly, teachers felt that choice was limited, and they did not experience greater choice as a result of the changes. Secondly, some were concerned about the lack of choice within the exam. Thirdly, some struggled with dimensions of choice, as, from their perspective, it left them unsure whether students were adequately prepared for the exam. Short Courses did not emerge as a key discussion point within this principle.

Continuity and Development: While teachers expressed mixed views regarding their experiences of *Continuity and Development*, their views tended to be more negative than positive. Teachers felt that students now developed important skills, often through the CBA that supported continuity. However, several teachers raised concerns about *Continuity and Development* from the perspective of progression to Senior Cycle. A small number of teachers raised concerns about the transition from primary to second level, often depending on the subject and the primary school attended. The Special School faced difficulties in terms of *Continuity and Development*, specifically in identifying and supporting the progression of learners after Junior Cycle.

Creativity and Innovation: Teachers were more likely to express positive views regarding their experiences of *Creativity and Innovation* within the Framework for Junior Cycle. Three main themes reflecting positive views on this were identified. Teachers believed that *Creativity and Innovation* were supported by the CBAs, technology offered opportunities for creativity and the choice afforded to students to present work in differing ways facilitated creativity. Teachers with concerns about the enactment of *Creativity and Innovation* were unsure whether all students were capable and interested in being creative and some teachers struggled to be creative within subjects they perceived to be content heavy with the focus remaining (or returning) to preparation for the examination at the end of 3rd year.

Engagement and Participation: Teachers were more likely to express positive views regarding their experiences of *Engagement and Participation*. Teachers felt that they were now using more group work, active learning, and student-centred approaches, which supported student engagement and participation. Three themes reflecting a more negative view of *Engagement and Participation* were identified. Those that were unsure whether this principle had been enacted at Junior Cycle felt that 1) not all students were open to or capable of working independently and with others effectively, 2) poor attendance impacted negatively on engagement and participation, 3) subject specification did not provide sufficient space and time for teachers (and students) to fully enact this principle.

Inclusive Education: Mixed views were expressed in relation to whether greater *Inclusive Education* was achieved. Four main themes reflecting positive views on this were identified within the data. Firstly, some felt that Junior Cycle is now more inclusive of different types of learners, including students with Special Education Needs. The introduction of Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes were considered helpful in this regard. Secondly, these teachers felt that they were differentiating learning more. Thirdly, some felt that they were now adopting differing teaching approaches and selecting curriculum to respond to the needs of their students. Finally, Common Level specifications, active learning approaches, project work and CBAs were deemed to support the enactment of this principle. Concerns relating to *Inclusive Education* tended to focus on Common Level specifications. These teachers suggested that some students could struggle with a Common Level examination paper due to the language used in the examination paper, the nature of the questions and its length.

Secondly, others felt that higher achieving students weren't challenged sufficiently by a Common Level specification examination paper.

Learning to Learn: Teachers expressed mixed views regarding their experiences of *Learning to Learn*. Positive views referred to teachers placing more emphasis on supporting students to develop skills relating to learning to learn, including reflection, critical thinking, and questioning skills. CBAs were considered helpful in supporting students to enhance their capacity to learn. Three main themes reflecting a more negative view of *Learning to Learn* were identified. Some felt that there was limited space and time within Junior Cycle to focus on dimensions of *Learning to Learn*. Secondly, some felt that certain students at Junior Cycle lacked capacity to engage in reflection and consideration on their learning. Thirdly, the fact that students would still ultimately be sitting an examination at the end of the three years posed a potential tension.

Quality: *Quality* was primarily viewed through the lens of subject content and teachers mainly expressed negative views regarding their experiences of *Quality* within the Framework. These teachers believed that the quality at Junior Cycle had 'dropped' or 'decreased' since the introduction of the Framework for Junior Cycle. This was largely perceived to be due to the removal of certain content areas within a subject and the nature of the examination questions.

Wellbeing: Teachers expressed mixed views regarding their experiences of *Wellbeing* within the Framework. When teachers spoke positively about the enactment of *Wellbeing* they tended to focus on the value and priority the school places on wellbeing. Others felt that Wellbeing classes weren't valued and/or weren't effective. Some teachers believed that student wellbeing was not catered for within the new Junior Cycle, with the related workload causing significant stress. Thirdly, others were concerned that Wellbeing classes took time away from other classes, resulting in additional stress.

Teachers identified a number of changes they would like to see occur at Junior Cycle, the majority of which related to dimensions of assessment. They called for percentage to be allowed to the CBA; for the grading bands to be altered; for Higher and Ordinary level to be

reinstated; for students to complete only 1 CBA per subject; for a clear marking scheme to be provided and for changes to occur in how *Wellbeing* is enacted.

Observation of Learning and Teaching

Observations showed strong evidence of student-centred learning, through the use of a range of activities and differing forms of group work, although approaches to teaching and learning varied across the observations and remained largely teacher-controlled. Many teachers drew on creative approaches to support learning, through the use of technology, games and creative activities/resources. Strong evidence of a relaxed atmosphere emerged, with positive teacher-student relationships being evident within the observed lessons.

Principals' Perspectives

Principals expressed mixed views around *Choice and Flexibility*. Some principals felt that they could offer a good choice of subjects within Junior Cycle. Principals were more likely to be negative about *Continuity and Development* than any other principle, due to the perceived gap between Junior and Senior Cycle. Principals were largely positive about *Creativity and Innovation*. Some felt that students could display their creativity more due to changes introduced at Junior Cycle. Principals were largely positive about *Engagement and Participation*, with many feeling that students were more engaged and active in classrooms. Some felt that they could adapt and tailor the Framework to suit the needs of their students to support *Inclusive Education*. Principals were largely positive about the enactment of *Learning to Learn*, believing that students now showed greater understanding, awareness and reflection on their learning. Feedback was an area some felt they needed to give more time and consideration to. Some felt that despite the changes, the priority remained on the examination at the end of third year, impacting on the enactment of certain principles. While principals were largely positive about the quality of the education they provided, no common theme was identified. Principals were largely positive about the enactment of *Wellbeing* with their school, believing it is embedded in all subjects and is viewed as every teacher's responsibility.

Parents' perspectives

Parents expressed mixed views regarding *Choice & Flexibility*, *Inclusive Education* and *Learning to Learn*. Parents were more likely to be positive about the enactment of *Engagement and Participation* and more negative regarding *Continuity and Development*, *Quality* and *Wellbeing*, as outlined below.

Parents had differing and mixed views in relation to *Choice and Flexibility*. Those that spoke positively tended to be happy with the range of subjects their child could pick from. Others were concerned about this range of subjects and/or that they were 'forced' to take certain subjects. The choice students had in selecting the focus of the CBA was noted positively. With the exception of a parent with a child in a Special School, Short Courses were not specifically mentioned by parents.

While a small number of parents raised concerns about their child's transition from primary to post-primary, parents' main concern regarding *Continuity and Development* related to the transition to Senior Cycle. These parents felt there was a gap between Junior and Senior Cycle and that students were not prepared for the nature and amount of learning required for the Leaving Certificate.

Parents did not frequently discuss dimensions relating to *Creativity and Innovation*. Those that did, felt that CBAs were supportive in this regard, while the continued focus on a final examination was deemed to impact negatively on Creativity.

Parents were more likely to speak positively about dimensions relating to *Engagement and Participation*. These parents spoke about approaches to teaching and learning and the amount of active learning and group work their child engaged in at Junior Cycle. Some observed that their child seemed engaged (or more engaged) with and during the CBAs.

While CBAs were deemed to support *Inclusive Education*, some felt that this could actually exasperate existing inequalities, especially if CBAs were completed at home.

Parents had mixed views in relation to dimensions of the Junior Cycle that related to *Learning to Learn*. Those that spoke positively focused on the nature of the learning students engaged

in and their capacity to apply their learning and skills to future life and learning. The parents who raised concerns focused on their child's understanding of the learning process and the schools' perceived lack of support in this regard.

While parents were less likely to discuss issues relating to *Quality*, a small number of parents raised on what they perceived as a simplified Junior Cycle. Some also believed that grading bands impacted student motivation, while others felt that the value and importance of the Junior Cycle had been reduced.

Those that spoke about *Wellbeing* raised a number of concerns. Some felt that CBAs, while frequently considered a positive dimension in many ways, added stress and workload to their child's Junior Cycle experience, without taking pressure away from the final exam. These parents felt that the focus still remained on the final exam, which itself brought a certain level of stress. Others felt that there was either too much focus on Wellbeing classes within the Junior Cycle and/or the approach taken wasn't always effective.

Parents identified a number of changes they would like to see occur at Junior Cycle. Parents identified a number of additional areas/topics they would like to see included at Junior Cycle. Parents also called for percentages to be allocated specifically to CBAs. They also called for changes to take place to aspects of the grading bands and for languages to have an oral dimension at Junior Cycle.

Key Issues and ongoing themes

While students had mixed views regarding *Engagement and Participation*, this principle appears to be the one most evident within Junior Cycle. Teachers indicated that their teaching had changed, and was now more interactive, supporting students' engagement. Parents' and principals' views aligned with this. It does appear as if teachers are, to at least some extent and at certain stages, engaging in more student-centred activities and group work – largely during and within the CBA.

The enactment and experience of certain principles was a consistent concern across the case study schools. The approach to *Wellbeing*, and the capacity of the Framework to support students' wellbeing, warrants consideration. Similar to the previous phase of the study,

workload and stress were dominant themes. The approach to Wellbeing classes was also a concern for many as they weren't always considered effective.

A key concern regarding the changes to the Framework for Junior Cycle was continuity with Senior Cycle and students' preparedness for the Leaving Certificate. *Quality* at Junior Cycle was also critiqued in this regard and was frequently aligned with amount and depth of content knowledge. Students, and frequently parents, saw the Junior Cycle as an opportunity to gain experience of a state examination, to assist them in sitting the Leaving Certificate examination. The findings suggest that assessment, specifically the terminal examination and the Leaving Certificate, remains a central concern and priority within the Junior Cycle experience.

Lack of space and time within specifications, as well as continued beliefs and perceptions regarding students' capacity to engage in such forms of learning, were key limiting factors to enacting a range of principles. CBAs appear to be a vehicle through which students can experience a number of the principles. Participants, for example, suggested that CBAs provide students (and teachers) with *Choice and Flexibility*, support them to be creative (something they desire more of), enable them to develop skills (e.g. independent and research skills) that they can use in the future learning and work life, to take responsibility for their learning and to be inclusive of all learners. While the lack of weighting for CBAs in the final grade was a concern for many, it is unclear what impact allocating such percentages specifically to CBAs would have.

What doesn't get talked about during data collection, the indicative silences, tells us something around how the curriculum changes are understood. It is interesting to note that Common Level specifications and grading bands were not commonly discussed by students across focus groups. Short Courses did not emerge as a dominant area for discussion or consideration across most of the data sets. While inclusion and inclusive education were mentioned by some, often if it was specifically relevant to their context, it wasn't a dominant discussion point. Another aspect not frequently mentioned was the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA). This may indicate that the attempts to broaden the picture of reporting of students' achievements, beyond a concern around grading, has not been achieved.

While perhaps understandable, it is interesting to note that the ways in which participants spoke about a principle and the examples they drew on highlight how interconnected the principles are within students' and teachers' experiences. If the principles as currently outlined remain, consideration may need to be given to how changes and/or concerns relating to one principle impacts on the enactment and experiences of others. This perhaps suggests the need to consider the changes and related principles from a systematic and holistic perspective, focusing on the 'big' picture of the changes and their interconnectivity.

Looking forward - The final report

This fourth interim report concludes the data collection phase of the study. The next and final report will present the key findings of the four years of the study. These key findings will be set against the intentions of the Framework, the wider curriculum change research literature and the change context surrounding its implementation. It will also explore the overarching insights of the research study.

Section 1: Introduction

This interim report is the fourth of a series of reports from a longitudinal study exploring the implementation, enactment and impact of the Framework for Junior Cycle in post-primary schools in Ireland. The preceding three reports ([Introductory Report](#), [Second Interim Report](#) and [Third interim report](#)) presented research insights from the school principal interviews, teacher surveys, interviews with stakeholder groups and the first phase of data from the twelve case study schools. This fourth report presents findings from the second round of case study visits, undertaken between September-January 2023-2024.

As per previous reports, the study is informed by the international curriculum research literature. It acknowledges that curriculum change is a complex process and achieving ‘deep’ change, impacting at the level of practice and beliefs and values, takes significant time and effort to achieve (Levin, 2007; Fullan, 2016). Changing peoples’ perspectives is a highly personal and emotional process, resulting in curriculum changes being ‘enacted’ rather than ‘implemented’ in schools (Goodson, 2001; Mac Donald, 2003; Braun et al., 2010; Ball et al., 2012; Maguire et al., 2011). A school’s culture and wider socio-political, cultural, and philosophical contexts impact and inform how curriculum change is received and enacted. Revised curricula are filtered and refracted through these existing cultural perspectives, thus informing how changes are perceived and received. It is possible that teachers may believe in the merits of a proposed curriculum change, as it aligns with the values they espouse, but may not be able to enact these changes due to the context they find themselves in (Scanlon et al, 2023; Gleeson, 2010; Cornbleth, 1990). Voice, particularly teacher and student voice, is increasingly recognised as key at times of curriculum development and change (Priestley & Biesta 2013; Priestley & Philippou 2018; Priestley et al. 2021). It is important to remember however, that no single teacher, student, or parent voice exists (Cook-Sather, 2006) and multiple perspectives and experiences can exist and be equally valid. Therefore, the focus has been placed on capturing the views, voice and experiences of key stakeholders as they enact this curriculum change.

This report is structured in four sections. Following this brief introduction, section 2 outlines the data collected during the second round of case study visits. Section 3 presents the

findings, drawing on the views of teachers, students, principals, parents and observations of learning and teaching. Section 4 provides a brief discussion of the findings, highlighting the key issues/concerns emerging from this round of data collection.

Section 2: Data collection

The first round of case study visits (reported in the [second interim report](#)) provided a comprehensive understanding of teachers', students', schools' and parents' experiences and views of the Framework for Junior Cycle. The second round of case study visits, informed by earlier dimensions of the study, explores participants' experiences of enacting the Framework. The intent is to develop a greater understanding of the current position of case study schools in this regard i.e. the dimensions they are enacting and experiencing as intended; the dimensions they are not enacting and experiencing as intended. This insight serves to provide better understanding of the changes that have happened and the areas that warrant consideration.

Therefore, the current round of case study visits was framed around the principles underpinning Junior Cycle as a way of capturing schools'/participants' experiences. The Principles of Junior Cycle were selected as they reflect the broader intentions of the changes as reflected in the Framework.

During the case studies, students participated in focus groups and surveys. Teachers, principals and parents participated in interviews. Observation of learning and teaching also took place in some case study sites, depending on availability and willingness.

Student focus groups and surveys

Having received ethical approval (2020_11_26_EHS (ER)) and following ethical principles of informed consent and anonymity, parental consent was sought in advance of conducting the student focus groups and students were assured that the data would be anonymised, guaranteeing that their contributions would not be identifiable.

Students in second, third and Transition Year (TY)/5th year¹ in each case study school were invited to take part in a focus group discussion. Thirty-one focus groups (n=219 students) were conducted across the 12 case study sites. Numbers in focus groups varied, depending

¹ As the second round of case studies were conducted in Autumn 2023, it was decided to focus on TY/5th year students rather than first year students. First year students would only have just started in the school and may not be in the best position to provide perspectives on the Junior Cycle. In comparison, TY/5th year students had completed the entire programme.

on parental consent and student availability/attendance. Focus groups tended to have between 5-8 students each, with a mix of male and female students within co-educational settings.

Focus groups were framed around the eight principles underpinning Junior Cycle. Eight posters were displayed on the walls with the name of each principle and an age-appropriate description of each principle provided underneath (please see Appendix 1)².

Students took part in the following activities as part of the focus group:

1. Students were asked to read each principle. The facilitator then answered any questions students had on the description of each principle.
2. Students were then provided with a post-it note that had a green tick on it and were asked to place the post-it note on the principle they felt they experienced the MOST at Junior Cycle. The facilitator started recording the session.
3. Students were invited to discuss and explain their selection, which led to a group discussion. This discussion continued until all selected principles were explored.
4. Students were then provided with a second post-it note that had a red X on it and were asked to place it on the principle they felt they experienced the LEAST at Junior Cycle.
5. Students were again invited to discuss and explain their selections which again led to a group discussion.
6. Finally, students were asked to explain what they saw as the main purpose of the Junior Cycle and what changes, if any, they would like to see implemented to Junior Cycle.

Below are two examples of completed posters:

² The case study lead engaged with a literacy expert who has extensive experience of the Framework for Junior Cycle to ensure the description and language of each principle was appropriate.

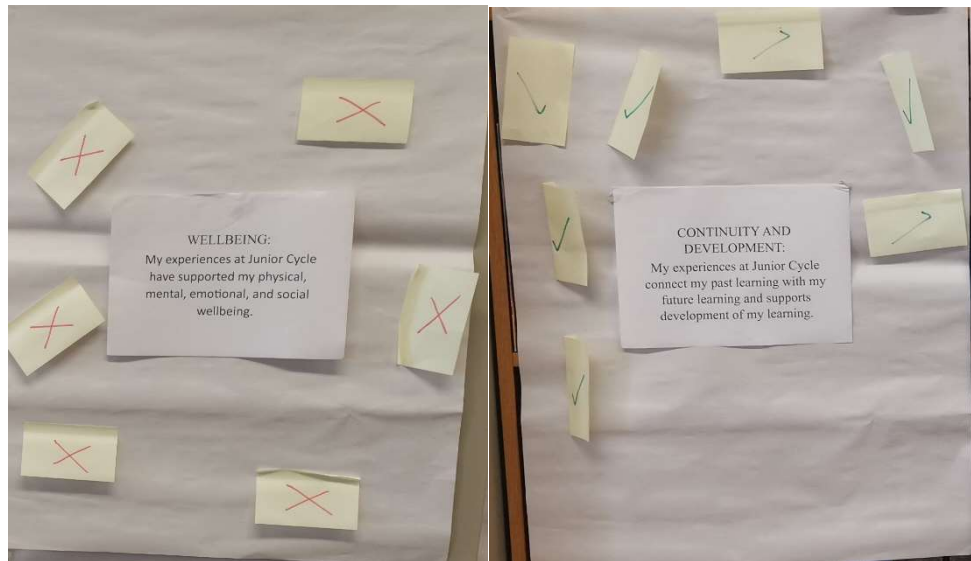


Figure 1: Examples of completed student focus group posters

Following engagement and discussion with the principal in the Special School, students in the Special School (2nd, 3rd and 5th year) completed a creative poster during their focus group, as per the first round of case study visits. Students were invited to visually display ‘their experiences at Junior Cycle’ on a poster and the researcher invited them to talk through what they had developed. The focus group schedule was developed in collaboration with the school principal. Two examples of these posters are presented below:



Figure 2: Examples of completed student focus group posters in the Special School

Student Survey

Students in second, third and TY/5th years were also invited to complete a survey. This survey largely mirrored the survey completed by students during the first case study visit. The survey explored, amongst other things, students' experiences of teaching, learning and assessment; student voice; experiences of Short Courses; and Wellbeing at Junior Cycle. The student survey comprised of 56 items focusing on the following seven areas:

Section A: About You

Section B: Your Needs and Interests

Section C: Your Learning Experiences

Section D: Assessment

Section E: Your wellbeing

Section F: Your Voice

Section G: Other/Concluding Comments

1782 students, across 10 school sites³, completed the student survey. This consisted of 604 second years, 650 third years and 528 TY/5th year students⁴. 59% of students identified as female, 37% as male, 2% as non-binary, with the remaining 2% not wishing to complete the question.

Teacher and principal interviews

75 teachers and principals were interviewed across the 12 case study sites. Interviewees were provided with a copy and explanation of each principle (please see Appendix 2) and asked to consider which principles they believed were embedded/enacted the most and least in their practice/school and why. Interviewees differed in how they responded to this question. Some spoke to each Principle, while others focused on the specific principles they believed were enacted the most and least. The interview also explored any changes they would like to see

³ The researcher got access to students in the Youth Reach for focus group purposes but not for completion of the survey. The survey was not deemed suitable for students in the Special School – rather the focus here was on students' experiences of the Junior Cycle.

⁴ 446 of these were TY students with 82 being 5th year students.

at Junior Cycle. Interviewees were offered the opportunity to provide any additional comments, not explored within the interview, to ensure all perspectives were captured.

Observation of Learning and Teaching

Observation of Learning and Teaching formed part of the data collection process during this round of case studies. Classes for observations were identified in two ways. First, principals in four case study sites scheduled and organised observations in advance of the school visit (n=9 observations). These observations were then timetabled into the researcher's schedule. In these instances, the teacher was then interviewed, where possible, after the observation. Secondly, teachers who took part in an interview were asked, via email, to take part in an observation once their interview was completed (n=4 observations in four case study sites). The researchers were conscious that frontloading a request to take part in an observation may reduce participation rates in case study teacher interviews. Therefore, the above two approaches were deemed most effective for ensuring those who wanted to take part in an interview, but not in the observation, would feel comfortable doing so. Thirteen lessons were observed across 8 of the case study sites.

The observation was conducted in a supportive way, with the emphasis placed on student learning. As teaching and learning are interwoven some observations of teacher practice were captured from the perspective of its impact on students. Observational notes were captured for all classes, capturing the room layout, classroom structure and teaching and learning activities and other general observations (Appendix 3).

Parent interviews

Parental participation in the study was sought via the case study schools in two ways. Firstly, the school principal or his/her nominee forwarded an email to all parents of children in 2nd year, 3rd year and TY/5th year, inviting them to participate in an interview. The research team also recontacted parents who had engaged in an interview in phase 1 of the case study visits, inviting them to participate. From this process, 30 parents agreed to take part in an interview, nine of whom had been interviewed during the first round of case study visits (of the 30 that took part in round one). The interviews consisted of a number of broad questions, inviting parents to talk about their experiences and views of the Junior Cycle. Research by Brown et

al (2020) highlights that parents may be reluctant to contribute their perspectives as part of educational evaluation and planning processes for a range of reasons including their own past experiences in school, perceptions related to the impact on their children, work commitments, childcare challenges and a sense that they may lack the resources to make their voices heard. Acknowledging such potential challenges, the questions were framed in a way that were supportive and drew on parents' experiences (please see Appendix 4).

Data analysis

Quantitative data (student survey data) was analysed using the statistical research software packages, Qualtrics and Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS V.29). Consistent with the longitudinal methodology of the research study and the purpose of this report, to illustrate the diversity of perspectives captured, the majority of statistical analysis is descriptive in nature.

All interviews were recorded, transcribed and read by members of the research team for familiarisation. These data were analysed using both deductive and inductive approaches to thematic analysis (Lewis, 2009). Firstly, the student focus groups, teacher and parent interviews were analysed using the Principles of the Framework for Junior Cycle as an analytical frame (deductive). This consisted of reading and re-reading the transcripts to identify all comments relating to each Principle of Junior Cycle. Participants' views were analysed as either positive, negative or mixed. Positive views were noted when the participant only provided positive comments relating to the principle; negative was noted when the participant only provided negative comments relating to the principle; mixed views were noted when the participant offered both positive and negative views related to the principle.

The interviews were then inductively coded, by means of bottom-up coding (Lewins, 2008), ensuring any additional themes expressed by participants, beyond the principles, were captured in the analysis. Using Braun and Clarke's (2021) steps for thematic analysis, the transcripts were studied, and codes were identified and developed. Cross-checking and confirmation of these codes was undertaken across research team members to increase

validity. These codes were then synthesised into macro-level themes to present the overarching issues, allowing for the voice of participants to emerge (Bryman, 2012) and ensuring that themes were sufficiently supported by the data. Analysis of the classroom observations identified the general tone of the classroom environment before then examining the nature of the student and teacher activities within the classroom. Particular attention was paid to opportunities for student engagement and participation and the extent to which the teacher facilitated these opportunities.

Section 3: Research Findings

The research findings are structured in five main parts. First, the main findings from the student data, drawing on focus groups and student surveys, are outlined. This is followed by the teacher interview data and the observation of learning and teaching. A brief summary of the principal data is then presented (please note that [Interim report 1](#) and [Interim report 3](#) previously explored principals' views in-depth). The findings section then concludes with an exploration of parents' views.

Part 1: Students' perspectives

The student data are presented under three main headings. Firstly, students' perspectives on the main purposes of Junior Cycle are outlined. This is followed by an overview of each of the eight Principles of Junior Cycle, with students' positive and negative experiences and perspectives considered. Survey data is also drawn on within this section. Finally, the changes students would like to see take place at Junior Cycle are outlined.

What do students see as the purpose of Junior Cycle?

Across the focus groups, students mainly saw the purpose of Junior Cycle as preparing them for the Senior Cycle, or more specifically for the Leaving Certificate examination. Students saw the Junior Cycle as '*just a mini-Leaving cert*' (School 7). Sitting a state examination was viewed as preparation for the same experience at Leaving Certificate, supporting students to realise what to expect, to become familiar with the format and related pressures. For example:

It's a practice, that shows you what the Leaving Cert is about (Youth Reach)

I think it gives you a slight idea of what you're going to be expected to do in Leaving Cert and like the pressure and stuff (School 3)

Prepares us for the Leaving Cert...Kind of gives us an example of what a state exam would be (School 4)

Like the big exam at the end of third year, I feel like that just prepares you for sixth year (School 6)

Secondly, students believed that the Junior Cycle supported them, and their teachers, to '*see where they are at*' in terms of their learning and to enable them, and others, to identify their

strengths and weaknesses. Students, for example, explained how *'if your teachers get your score, it gives them an idea of where you are'* (School 7) and *'so you know how good you are, what you can improve on what you want to do'* (School 8).

Finally, students saw the Junior Cycle as an opportunity for them to figure out what they liked and enjoyed in terms of subjects and learning, prior to selecting subjects at Senior Cycle. For example, a student in School 4 believed that *'it helps narrow down what people might be best at...they're really trying to get you to try everything and then at the end, like find your best subjects'*.

What are students' views and experiences of the Junior Cycle (Principles)?

Students' views and experiences relating to the principles underpinning the Framework for Junior Cycle are now presented in alphabetical order. Some principles garnered more discussion than others, reflected in the number of themes and sub-themes, as well as the number of supporting sample quotes provided.

Choice and flexibility

When asked about *Choice and Flexibility*, students' responses focused largely on subject choice. Choice of subjects and choice within subjects was central to students' commentaries, with mixed views expressed across both areas.

Those who spoke positively about *Choice and Flexibility* were content with the subject options available to them, as well as with the level of choice within subjects. For example:

With the choices as well, like we had a choice. There are about 5 or 6 choices of subjects that we got to pick in the first year and it just kind of gives us the freedom to try out our own stuff, instead of being told (School 3)

Those who contended that they did not experience *Choice and Flexibility* within Junior Cycle again referred to subject choice and spoke about the limited subject choices available to them and the limited choice they had within those subjects, as reflected in the following response:

I don't think there is much choice or flexibility in the Junior Cycle. I think you're forced to do a lot of irrelevant subjects... You're not putting your full potential in the subjects

that might actually matter to you. So, I think there should be a lot more flexibility on the choice...You should be able to pick subjects to suit you (School 5)

While students were mixed in their views of the level of choice offered at Junior Cycle, the majority stressed the importance of subject choice in providing greater opportunities for career options later in life. A high level of subject choice was proposed by students to provide access to a wide range of career choices. Conversely, limited subject choice was seen to reduce career choice opportunities as demonstrated in the following comments:

Like if you want to go into a trade or something later in life. If I wanted to be a carpenter, like I've no woodwork or anything like that ... I think compared to other schools we're kind of poor in terms of subjects because, like most of the schools even around the area have subjects like Home Ec., Metalwork, Woodwork. You know that like that's a disadvantage going into college or something (School 8)

Choice across and within subjects, was also central to perceptions of *Choice and Flexibility* at Junior Cycle. The majority of students stressed that there is a lack of consistency in the amount of choice offered within subjects at Junior Cycle with many proposing, for example, that 'practical subjects' provide greater choice and flexibility, while *'in the core subjects you kind of get no say at all'* (School 8) as detailed in the following excerpt:

I don't think there is a lot of flexibility apart from the practical subjects like Science and stuff. Like you do an experiment like you might have an option of which experiment to do or something like that. Yeah, like we have more choice and flexibility in those kinds of subjects if you get me. Like in the core subjects, you kind of get no say at all (School 8)

When discussing choice within subjects, students' responses focused largely on the level of choice offered in CBAs and examination questions. The majority of students commended the level of choice afforded within CBAs at Junior Cycle, noting that within the CBAs *'you have a lot of freedom to do what you want'* and *'we could do anything we wanted'* (School 2). Another student noted that:

Depending on the subject, if you have a book for that subject, it's saying sort of this stuff you can do [for the CBA], you can do something that isn't on it and then you can

pick a topic from the book. Or you can just pick a topic you know off the top of your head and do that instead of the teacher [telling] you [what you] have to do for your CBA (School 7)

A smaller number of students however were critical of the perceived limited choice afforded to students when completing their CBAs, noting for example:

We had to choose from certain titles, like we couldn't come up with our own title ...they kind of prompted us to like go with those titles. So, I didn't feel like I had much choice and flexibility. I actually want to do this. I had to choose from one of the three (School 8)

Some were more critical of what they perceived to be limited choice in the Junior Cycle exams e.g. *'You just have to answer the question. You don't really get a choice like'* (Youth Reach).

In addition to the responses on *Choice and Flexibility* emergent from case study focus groups, one aspect of the student survey explored students' experiences and views relating to student voice in Junior Cycle.

Drawing on the findings of the survey as presented in Figure 3 below, it is evident that a large proportion of students (83%) feel that they have the opportunity to voice their opinion 'all' or 'some of the time' within the Junior Cycle with only 17% of students believing this never to be the case.

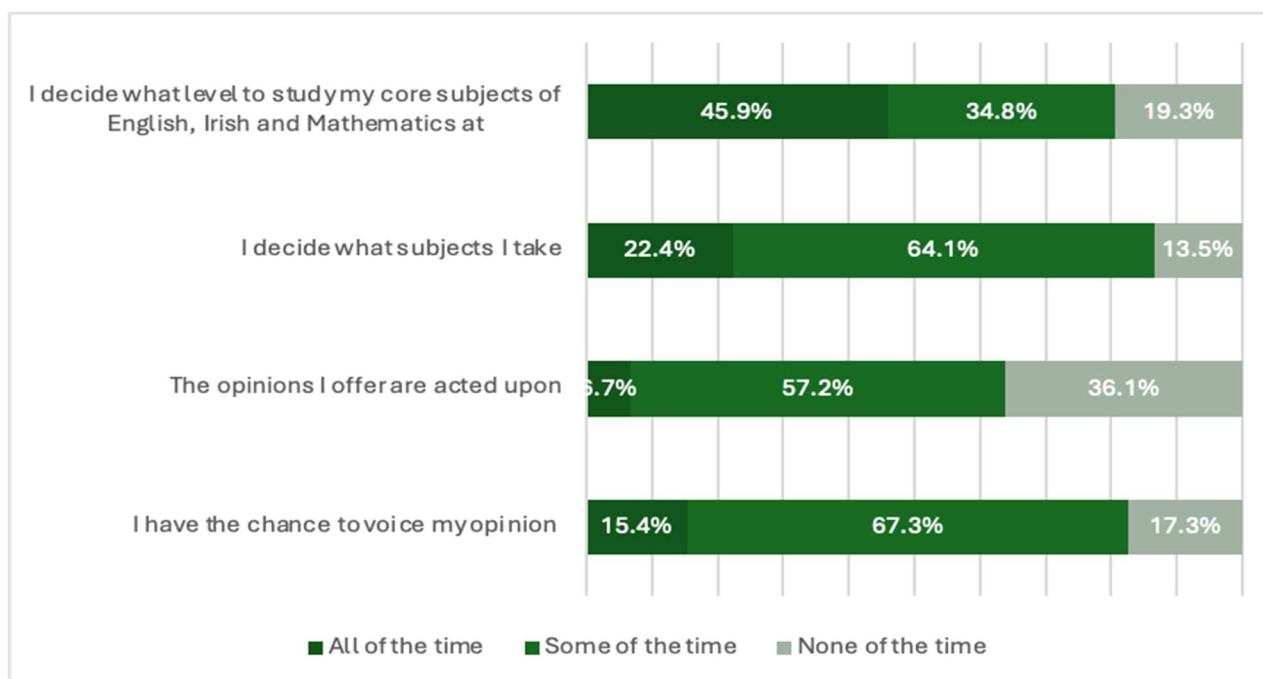


Figure 3: Students' views on dimensions of voice and responsibility.

In addition, the survey revealed that while many students suggested that they have the opportunity to voice their opinions, more than one-third of students (36%) asserted that their opinions are never acted upon by their teachers or school. Only 7% of students felt that the opinions they shared were always acted upon. This sentiment was reflected also in the focus groups where students commented:

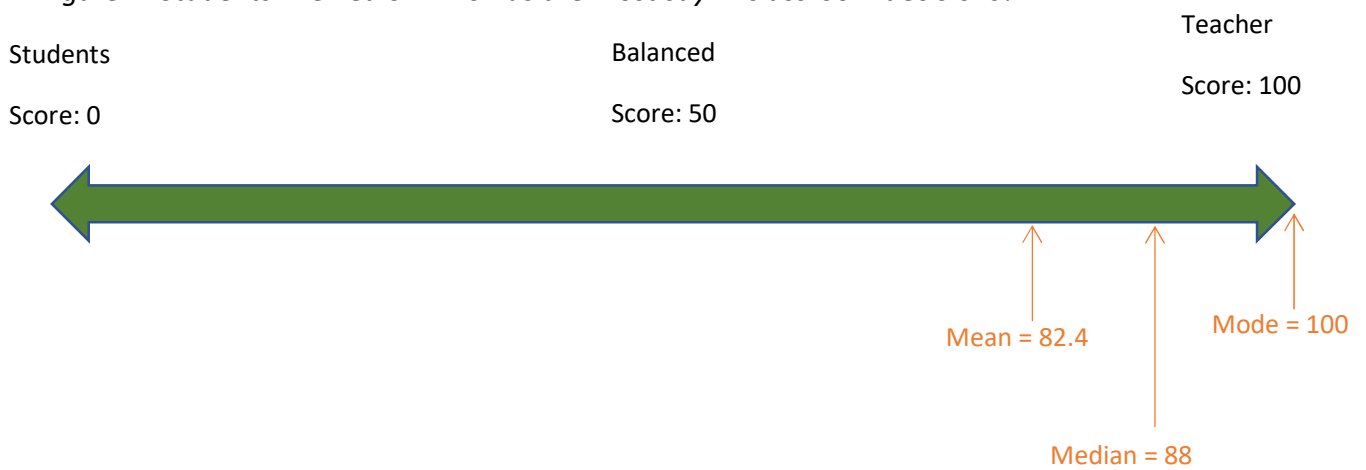
Student 1: We have a student council, but it was forgotten about...it was mostly that we talked about changes we wanted but nothing every really happened....

Student 2: In 99% of classes the teacher was like 'my way or no way, if you don't like it then there's the door'...so we weren't really allowed to voice our opinion or talk about anything, it was kind of like, 'this is our opinion if you don't like it then too bad' (School 9)

In the survey, the issue of student voice and agency was further investigated by asking students, on a scale from 0 to 100, to rank who had the most say in classroom decisions. A score of zero meant the students had complete ownership over all classroom decisions, a score of 50 meant the decision-making process was shared equally between students and teacher while a score of 100 meant that the teacher had complete control over all classroom

decisions. As shown in Figure 4, the most common score submitted by students was 100. In total, of the 1662 students who offered a response to this question, 623 gave a score of 100, indicating that 38% of students felt they had no say in decisions made in the classroom.

Figure 4: Students' views on who has the most say in classroom decisions?⁵



⁵ Mode of 100 was the response given by 38.0% (n = 632) of respondents. Standard deviation of 20.3 indicates the median should be used as the measure of centrality.

Short Courses

Short Courses are one way in which *Choice and Flexibility* is envisaged in the Framework. In addition to the compulsory short courses to be undertaken as part of the Wellbeing programme, schools have autonomy to develop Short Courses to meet students’ needs and interests. The survey explored students’ views in relation to Short Courses. Physical Education (PE) was the Short Course taken by the most students (89%), followed by Social, Personal and Health Education [SPHE] (85%) and Civic, Social and Political Education [CSPE] (83%). This is expected given their central role in schools’ Wellbeing programmes.

The majority of students (72.2%) indicated that they did not have a choice on the Short Courses they studied. Students were asked to rank, on a five-point Likert scale, their level of enjoyment of the Short Courses and their opinions of the content covered on the Short Courses. The results from this survey item are presented in Figure 5 below:

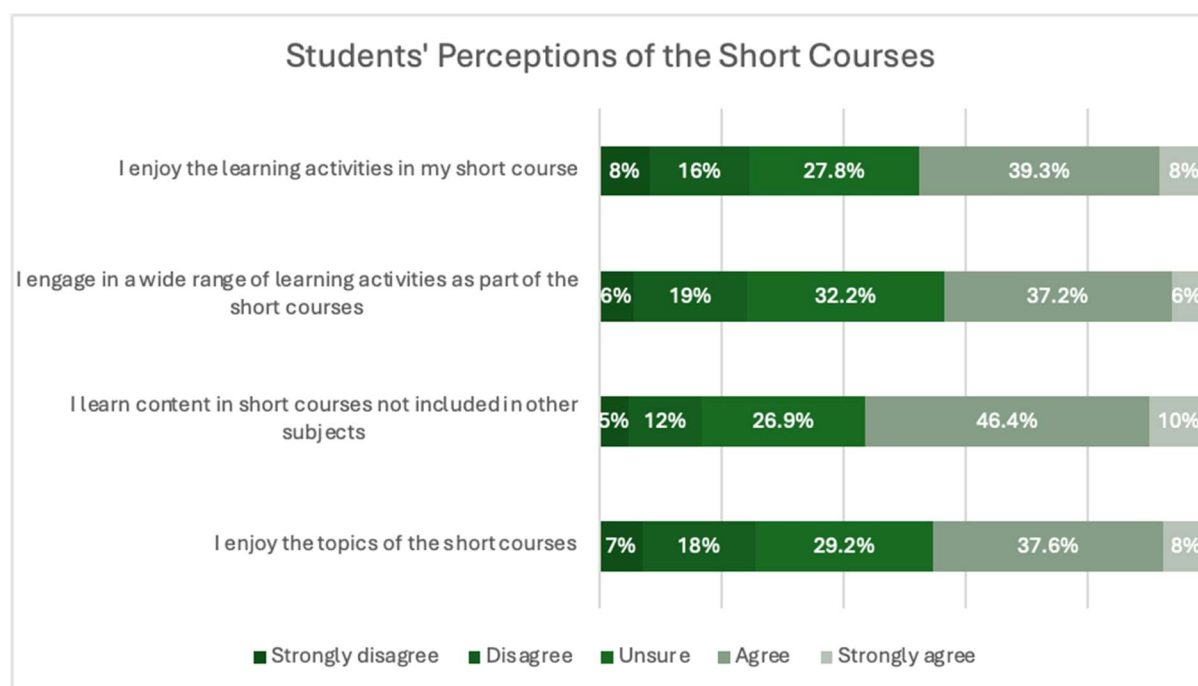


Figure 5: *Students’ level of agreement with statements regarding their perceptions of the Short Courses*

Figure 5 above suggests a mixed response amongst students in relation to their level of enjoyment of the Short Courses. 45.2% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoyed the topics of the Short Courses while the remaining students were unsure or (strongly) disagreed. The majority of students (56.4%) agreed or strongly agreed that the

content covered in the Short Courses differs from that covered in their other school subjects. Just under half of students (47.6%) strongly agreed or agreed that they enjoyed the learning activities within the Short Courses, while 43.5% indicated (strongly agree/agree) that they engage in a wide range of learning activities as part of their Short Courses.

Creativity and innovation

Within the focus groups, students identified ways and spaces in which they can be creative and innovative across the Junior Cycle. Students' comments demonstrate linkage between creativity and choice, with students indicating that creativity emerged when they had more choice and freedom. CBAs were deemed particularly helpful in this regard with students in School 1, for example, explaining how, '*CBAs allowed us to be creative ... we decided what we wanted to do for some topics*' (School 1). Similarly, a student in School 9 explained how, '*we were allowed to do our own work in some subjects which allowed us to be more creative instead of being told what to do and how to do, we could have our own ideas*'. These students felt that projects and interactive approaches to teaching and learning also supported creativity, with students suggesting that creativity is supported when, '*they give us like CBAs, and they allow us to learn by giving us a project to do*' (School 9).

While students were positive about the opportunities when they believed they could experience creativity, some believed that they had limited scope and freedom within subjects, particularly due to examinations. These students felt, for example, that '*besides, CBAs you're quite limited to just class work*' (School 4) and '*for a lot of the subjects ... there is no room to be creative in exams or even during class times*' (School 1). This is further reflected in the excerpts below:

I feel like we're being limited on our options, and ... we can't expand on it or like venture from it ... There's like a specific curriculum that you have to learn, but like you might want to learn something like that, but you don't have the option to learn that (School 3)

Like, you are kind of just handed a test or something like that and ... You have to mostly do what they want to do (School 4)

These above comments equally related to *Choice and Flexibility* and highlight the interconnectedness of the principles.

As part of the survey, students were asked to list the one learning experience i) they experienced the most; ii) they experienced the least; and iii) would like to experience more of in Junior Cycle. The data indicates a strong desire amongst students for more opportunities to be creative, with creativity emerging as the learning experience students have the least exposure to but also desire more of. This was consistent across year groups. The following two figures illustrate this finding:

Top **three** learning experiences that students engage with the **least**⁶

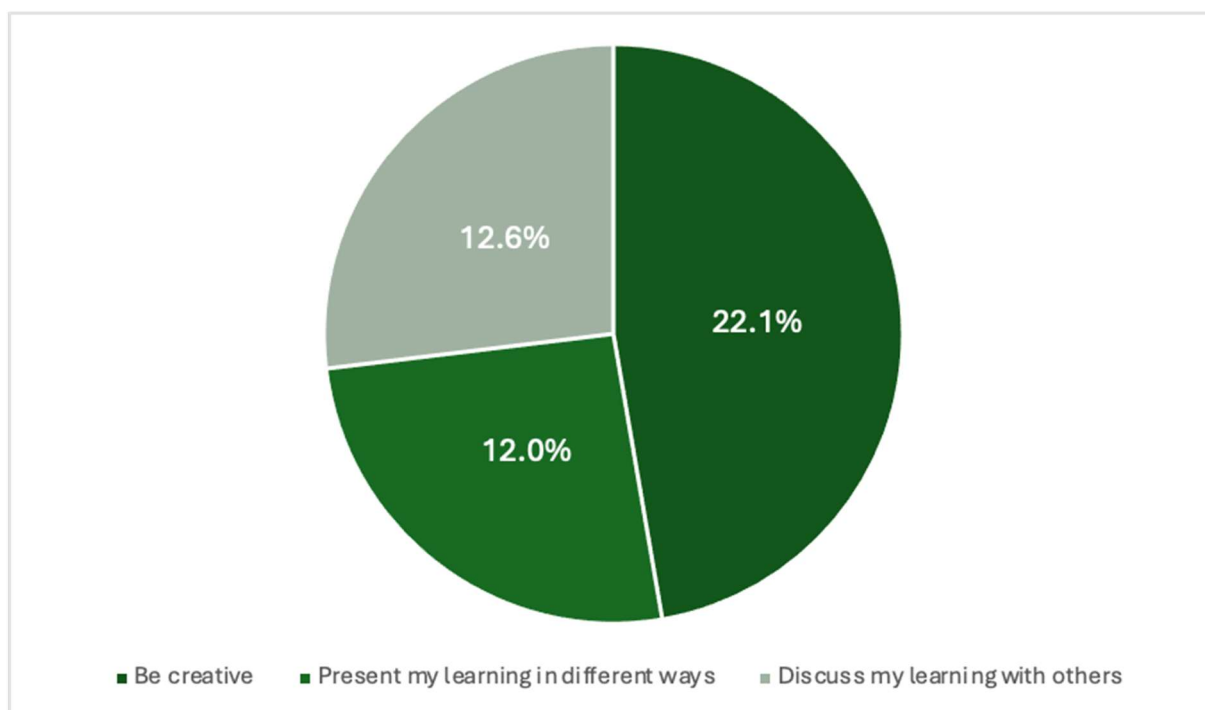


Figure 6: The Learning experience engaged with least

⁶ 1703 students responded to this question and the figures in the pie chart represents the proportion of students from this 1703 who selected each learning experience as the one they experienced the least.

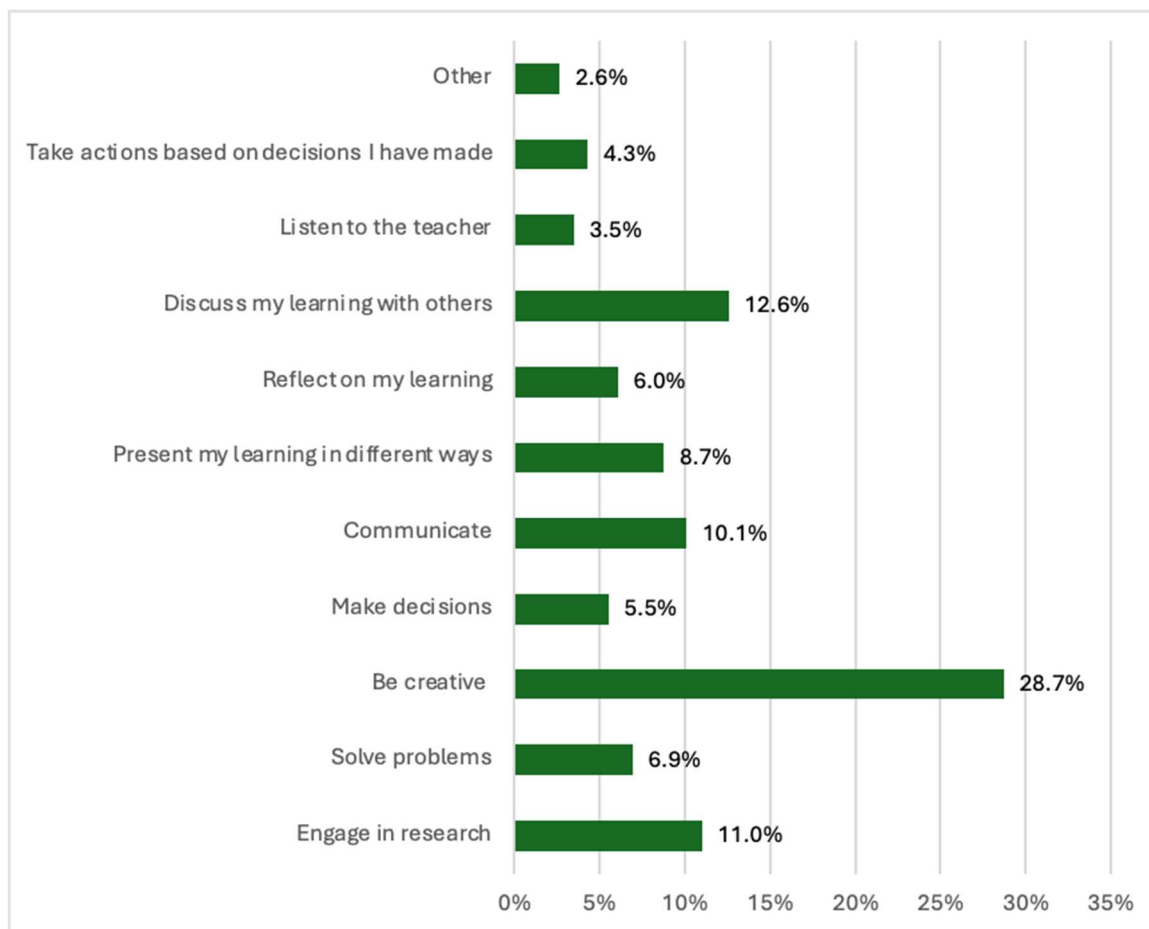


Figure 7: The learning experience that students would like to experience more of

On the other hand, the learning experience that the majority of students reported experiencing most was “Listening to teacher explanations”, with 41.6% of the sample offering this response, while only 7.8% of students believed that “Being Creative” was the learning experience that they were exposed to most frequently.

Students were also asked which Key Skill they believed they developed the most and least at Junior Cycle. The most common Key Skill identified by the students in response to this question was Managing Information and Thinking, with 24% of students citing this as the key skill they developed most. Being Creative was deemed the Key Skill developed most by only 7.5% of students but was the most common response (provided by 25.7% of students) when asked to outline the key skill they felt was least developed at Junior Cycle, as outlined in Figure 8 below. This was consistent across year groups. All of which reflects students desire for more opportunities to be creative at Junior Cycle.

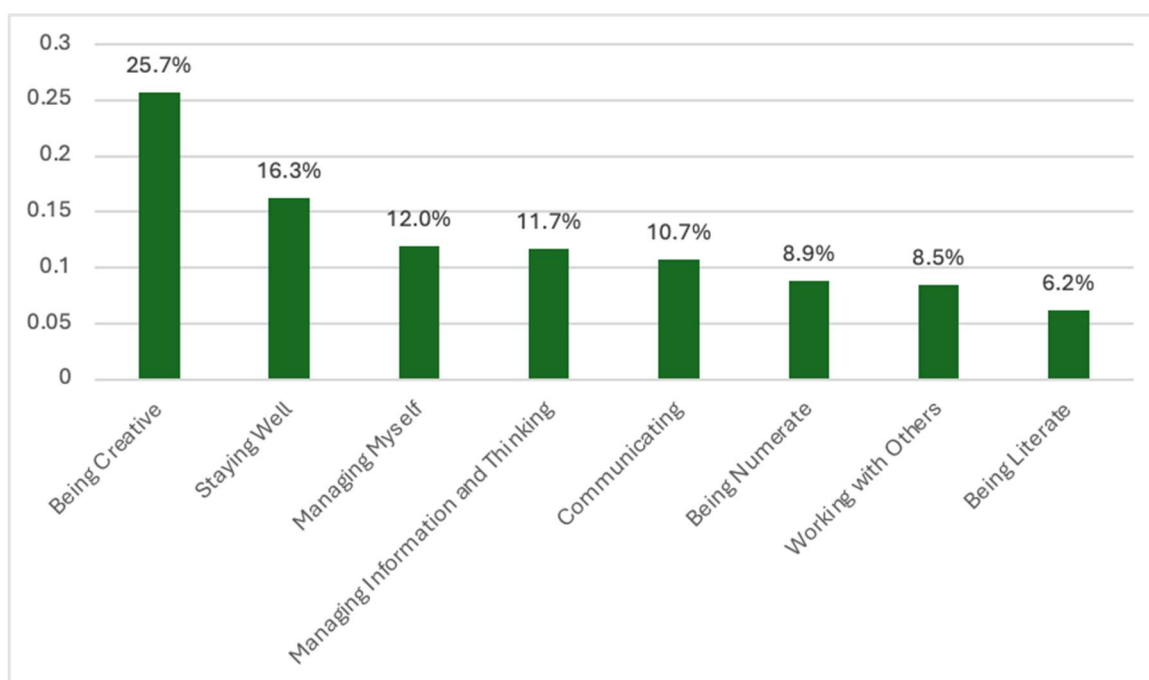


Figure 8: The Key Skills that students have developed least in Junior Cycle

Continuity and Development

Students that selected this principle as the one they experienced the most at Junior Cycle indicated that their learning was incremental with teachers building and scaffolding their learning throughout Junior Cycle. These students outlined, for example, that *‘it feels a lot more like you’re just building on what you already know’* (School 5) and *‘I’ve noticed in 2nd year ... you kind of build on those topics [from first year]’* (School 6). Similarly, students in the Youthreach setting explained how *‘in Geography, it’s like going off what we did last year, little bit of it, but not all of it like we’re learning new stuff too. But we’ve covered like the basics’*.

Some also spoke positively about continuity from primary school to Junior Cycle, with teachers, for example, making explicit links between past and future learning: *‘Teachers would say you’ve done this in primary school, like you will do this in 3rd year’* (School 1).

Finally, some saw a link between what they learned in school and their life and the world around them. These students explained how, for example, they *‘can see the links to the real*

world' (School 5) in terms of their learning at Junior Cycle, as further illustrated by a student in School 6: *'Yeah, like in business [I see a link with the real world] because you need to have to calculate your taxes and how much you owe and all that sort of stuff.'*

Those that raised concerns relating to this principle focussed on the transition from primary to post-primary, with these students either not seeing a link between their learning in each setting and/or viewing the move as a 'big jump', as reflected below:

I feel like a lot of people are kind of a bit lost when they go into first year. And people are kind of expected to be speaking at like a certain level that they might not have done in their past primary school (School 4)

I don't think it really connects with what I did in primary school... Like for example Maths like it's way different in secondary school (School 6)

One aspect of the survey also explored the transition from primary to second level, with just over 68% of students either strongly agreeing or agreeing with the statement, *'I was supported by this school in moving from primary to post-primary school.'*

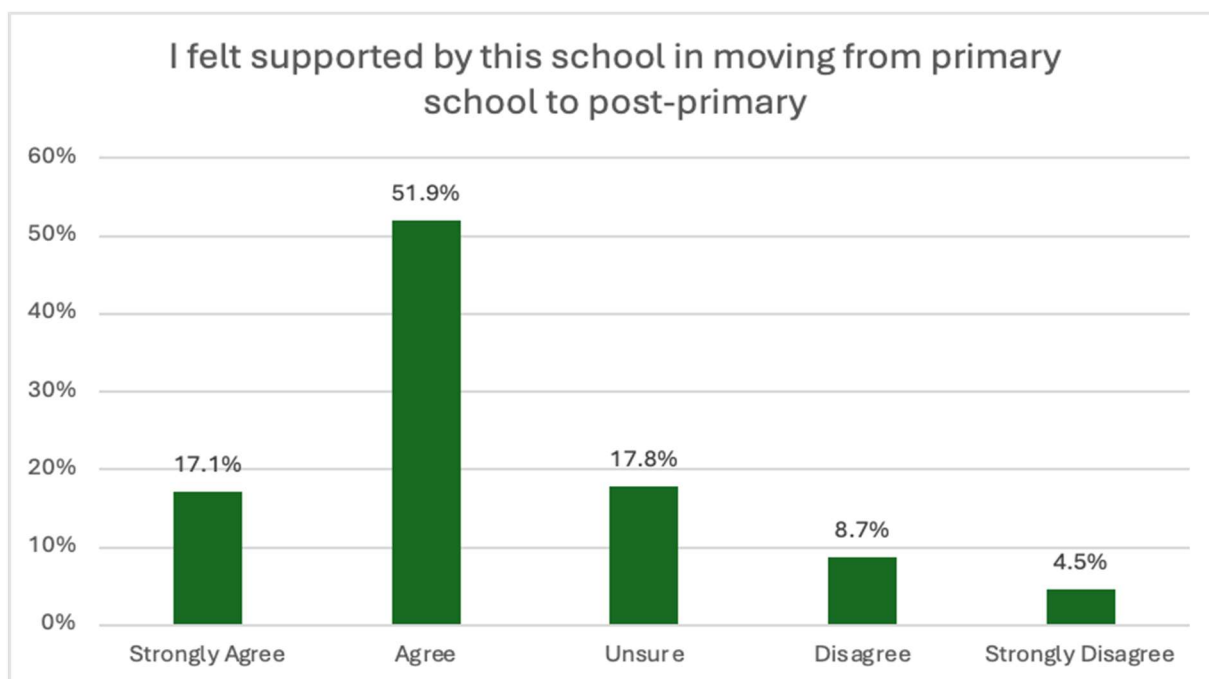


Figure 9: Transition from primary school.

Engagement and Participation

Engagement and participation received mixed views within the student focus groups. Those who spoke positively about this principle spoke about the student-centred learning and project work they engaged in, as well as the extra-curricular activities available to them. For example, a student in School 9 stated, *‘in most of my classes, it was a positive environment and I wanted to engage which made it easier to do...we did a lot of group activities’*. Similarly, students in other schools found project and group work supportive in this regard, as reflected below:

I just kind of thought like there's more participation there because you do more like projects in different subjects ... like in Business you make surveys ... When we're doing projects, we get a good social life and with everyone around you (School 1)

Like this year I dressed up as an anime character from one of my favorite shows and last year it was the Christmas festival, and I think this was like before this Summer. I think before the Spring break we did the Bake-Off (Special School)

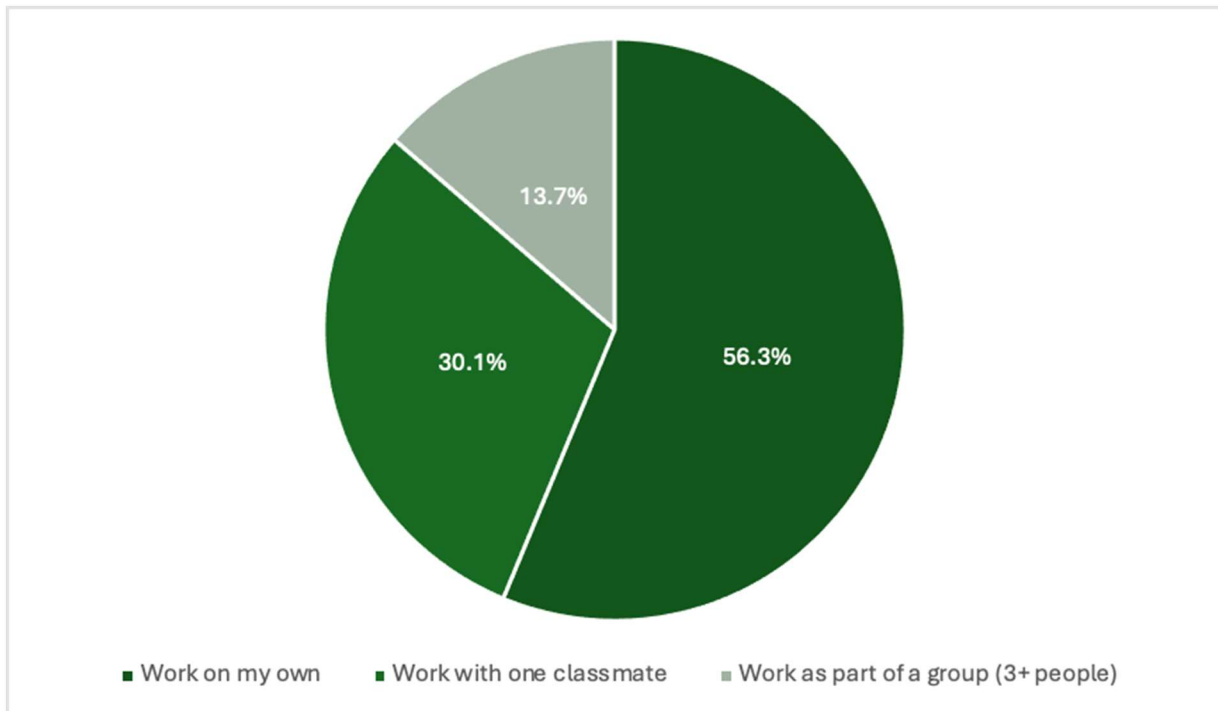
An aspect of *Engagement and Participation* looks at linking learning to life outside school. Some found it easy to link and relate their school learning to their lives, with a student from School 1 noting, for example, ‘*I was kind of thinking like in business the way that we have do like a household budget, like that kind of links to like ... later in my life*’ and another from School 4 commenting ‘*It kind of gives us an idea on especially CSPE, like what's happening around us and have to think very clear about a lot of stuff and SPHE and how to interact with people around us*’.

The three main concerns students expressed in terms of *Engagement and Participation* related to a lack of active learning, the perceived lack of relevance of the curriculum to their lives and the negative impact workload had on students’ capacity to engage and participate. These are reflected in the excerpts below:

The way some subjects are taught is not interesting and it bores you a lot. It's just if there were other ways, they could teach it to make it more enjoyable... sometimes it's the way its taught, it just makes it boring... just like putting notes on the board and taking them down and not explaining it or putting fun into it. You need to find a way to mix fun with learning to get it into your head (School 9)

It's more or less just either reading from your book or read it from the board or it's writing, so there's not much engagement between the students and the teachers. unless there's, like, special activities going on in class, like games or teachers or like posters being done for the class (School 6)

The student survey also explored the ways in which students work in the classroom at Junior Cycle. In particular, a number of survey items investigated if students, at Junior Cycle, were more likely to work on an individual basis or with their peers. Figure 10 below shows that 56% state that working on their own in the classroom is the type of schoolwork they engage with most frequently while 14% cited working in groups of three or more to be the most common type of learning they engage in.



*Figure 10: What type of Schoolwork do the students engage with **most** frequently*

Comparing across year groups indicates that TY/5th year students were more likely to state that the most common type of learning they experienced during their Junior Cycle was working on their own (72%), which compares to 53.6% for 3rd years and 45.8% for 2nd years, as outlined below.

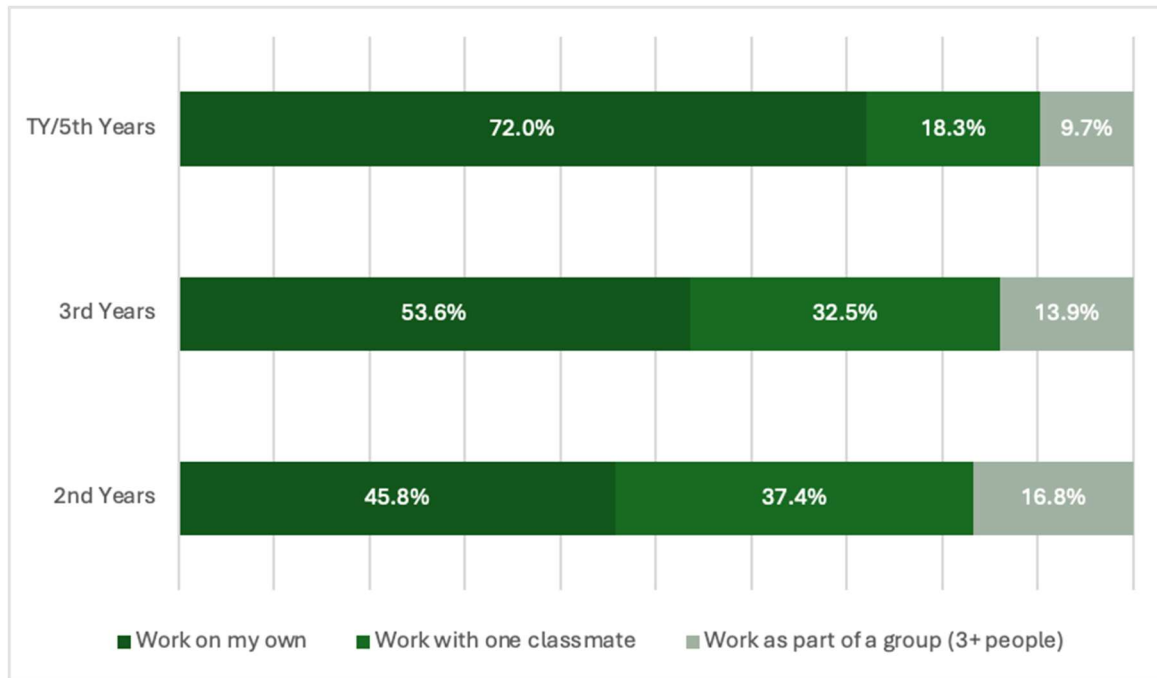


Figure 11: The most common type of learning students experience by year.

A follow-up question asked students to quantify the duration of time spent working collaboratively and individually. Just over seventy-one percent (71.1%) of students surveyed reported working on their own always or most of the time. The comparable figures for working with another classmate or in groups were 30.9% and 11.2% respectively. On the other hand, 37.5% reported never (3.6%) or hardly ever (33.9%) working as a group of three or more while the corresponding proportions for working with one other classmate and working on their own were 10.0% and 4.7%, respectively (see Figure 12).

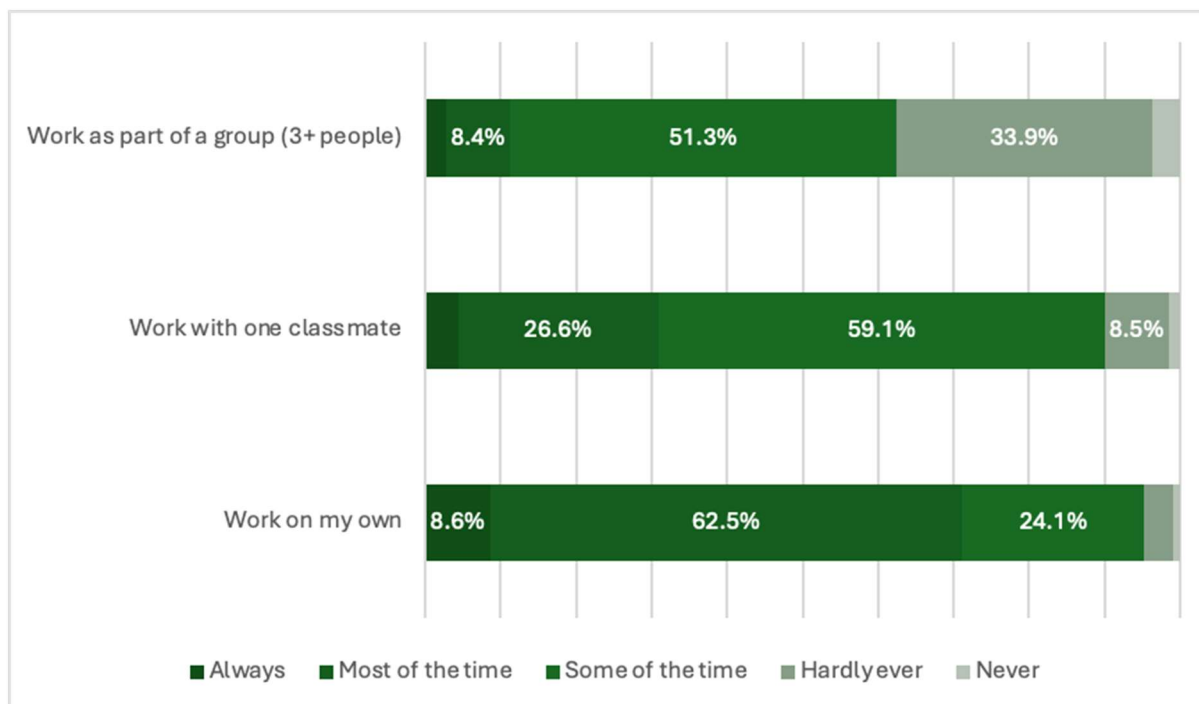


Figure 12: How often students engage in different learning experiences in the classroom.

Data from the student survey also appears to indicate that while individual work remains consistent across the three years of Junior Cycle, third year and TY/5th year students are more likely to report working on their own and less likely to report paired and group work. In comparison, second year students were more likely to report working with a classmate or with a larger group. The following tables provide detail of these responses.

	Year Group		
<i>Work on my own</i>	2nd year (n)	3rd Year (n)	TY/5th year (n)
Always	9.4% (55)	7.5% (47)	9.1% (45)
Most of the time	58.3% (341)	63% (394)	66.9% (330)
Some of the time	26.3% (154)	25.1% (157)	20.4% (100)
Hardly ever	4.4% (26)	3.5% (22)	3% (15)
Never	1.5% (9)	0.8% (5)	0.6% (3)
<i>Work with one classmate</i>	2nd year (n)	3rd Year (n)	TY/5th year (n)
Always	5.5% (32)	4.8% (30)	2.4% (12)
Most of the time	35.2% (206)	23.5% (147)	20.3% (100)
Some of the time	52.8% (309)	61.8% (386)	63.1% (311)
Hardly ever	5% (29)	8.2% (51)	13% (64)
Never	1.5% (9)	1.7% (11)	1.2% (6)
<i>Work as part of a group (3+ people)</i>	2nd year (n)	3rd Year (n)	TY/5th year (n)
Always	3.6% (21)	2.2% (14)	2.6% (13)
Most of the time	10.9% (64)	7,5% (47)	6.5% (32)
Some of the time	52% (304)	51.2% (320)	50.5% (249)
Hardly ever	31.3% (183)	34.9% (218)	35.7% (176)
Never	2.2% (13)	4.2% (26)	4.7% (23)

Table 1: Types of group work engaged in by students

Inclusive Education

This principle was not commonly discussed, without prompting, in focus groups. Those that selected *Inclusive Education* as the principle they experienced most at Junior Cycle

commented on teachers' approaches that support inclusion. Group work/projects and CBAs, along with teacher questioning and additional supports and exemptions for students that require them, were deemed to support inclusion within Junior Cycle. For example:

All teachers gave everyone an equal chance ... Everyone was friends in our classroom. Everyone had an equal chance in the classroom ... all teachers gave everyone an equal chance (Youth Reach)

Just with the CBAs and stuff like, we were all kind of included in group work and learning more than always in books (School 4)

They [teachers] would always be helping you with any questions you have... always just including everyone in the discussion (School 5)

All the teachers did a good job trying to include all of the students in the work they did in class, and they tried to make everyone not have a passive role. They tried to take an active approach to the students learning (School 8)

Extra-curricular activities, trips away and related friendships were deemed to impact positively in this regard. *'Our class on our trip to the Dáil for like CSPE and I feel like there was like it was quite like engaging [be]cause like everyone was like, had to like research and we all had to like do like sort the trip out together, like to go on it'* (School 1). Students attending the Special School, for example, engaged in whole-school sports activities, promoting a sense of community and inclusion.

The small number of students that viewed inclusive education as the least evident dimension of Junior Cycle felt that shyness and peer pressure may negatively impact on inclusion and noted that teachers' pedagogical approaches did not always support inclusion. Students linked the concept of inclusive education with reflections on participation and engagement: *'There's a lack of participation... Kids are not being supported... They're not being given the push to actually include... It affects your marks... There isn't much to participate in apart from notes'* (School 5).

Learning to Learn

Again, mixed views were identified from the focus groups regarding their experiences of *Learning to Learn* at Junior Cycle, with students in different years, different schools and even within the same focus group having differing opinions in this regard. Analysis of the focus group data identified four main positive dimensions of *Learning to Learn*. Firstly, students felt that their teachers encouraged, supported, and enabled them to learn effectively. Secondly, students felt that they were provided with opportunities to engage in self-directed learning and to take responsibility for their own learning – again, largely through engagement in the CBA:

Everything is all explained, and it is all easy to understand and if you don't understand something you're not going to get scolded or anything like they really explain it like they explain it again, so they make sure you know how to do it (School 1).

The teachers are really good. Like they don't kind of teach everything to you. Like, you kind of have to do a bit yourself and like it's good because you learn how to study yourself because you can't have teachers do everything for you ... You kind of have to be independent, like with our CBAs and stuff we didn't really have much help with them. People kind of have to do it themselves. Like in primary school, they don't really teach you to be independent, but like when you get to secondary school, like the Junior Cycle definitely does – it teaches you that little bit of independence (School 3)

Instead of just learning from the teacher or learning from your book, CBAs taught you how to learn on your own... it developed the researching skill which is very useful (School 5)

Thirdly, some were content with the level of study skills they received at Junior Cycle. For example, in School 8, students explained how *'they taught us how to study. They brought someone in to teach us how to study. They gave us a guide to study'*.

Finally, some saw a link between what they learned in school, supporting them to deal with challenges in life, further education, and work. For example, students in the Youth Reach explained how they *'learned stuff that I need for my future and stuff that I need to know for when I go to college and stuff'*.

In comparison, others suggested that they had not experienced or received enough understanding of how to learn and study during Junior Cycle and/or these students struggled to see the relevance of what they learned in school to their life now and in the future. These students felt, for example, that they *'don't really...learn how to learn...not really shown...how to do stuff'* (School 2) and *'they're telling you to like study, but they don't give you too much help on how to study in first year'* (School 3). The excerpt below reflects these students' concerns regarding the relevance of their learning to later life:

I feel like we're not going to be using algebra later in life and like, unless you've got a career like in Geography, you're not going to need to know what type of rock is on the floor. Like, you're not going to need to know about what happened in the past. And like, ... we're just learning off loads and loads of like knowledge to forget it the day later like. We don't remember it at all (School 3).

The survey explored a number of issues relevant to *Learning to Learn*, including dimension of Key Skills; CBAs and learning; Learning Intentions and Success Criteria, feedback and reporting; and tests and in class examinations.

Key Skills

As mentioned previously, an aspect of the survey explored what Key Skills students felt they developed the most and least at Junior Cycle. As outlined in Figure 13 below, students felt they developed 'Managing Information and Thinking' the most at Junior Cycle (23%). This was consistent across year groups.

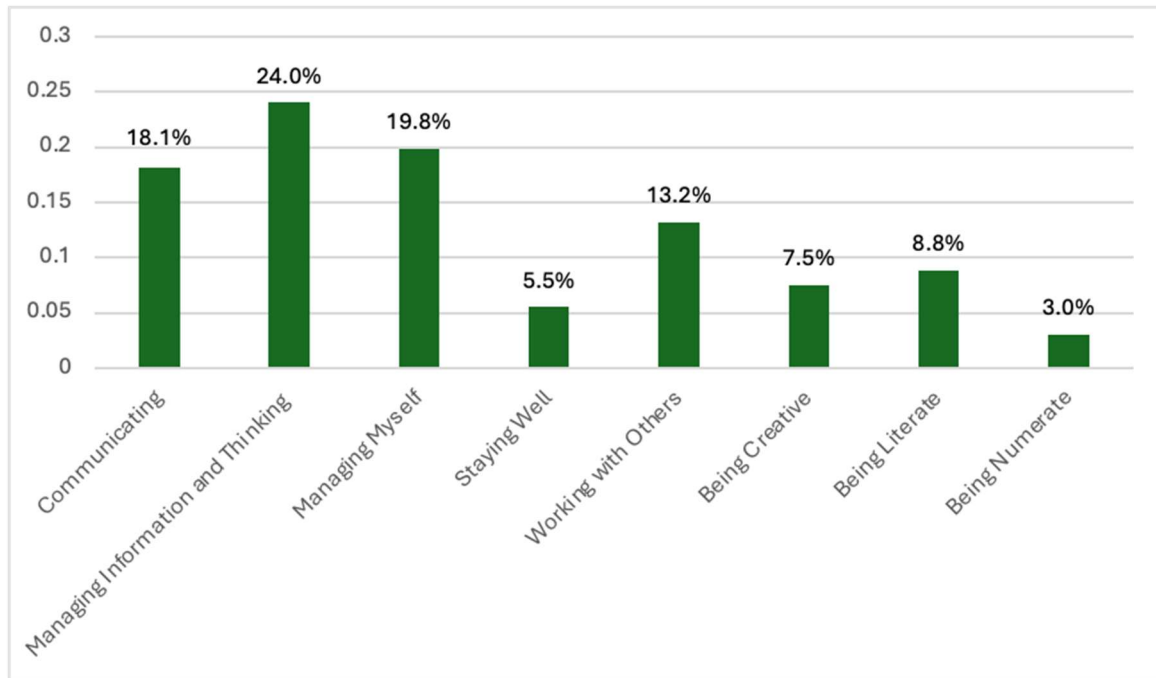


Figure 13: The Key Skills that students have developed **most** in Junior Cycle

The majority of students felt they can take responsibility for their learning all or some of the time (45.1% and 49.2% respectively).

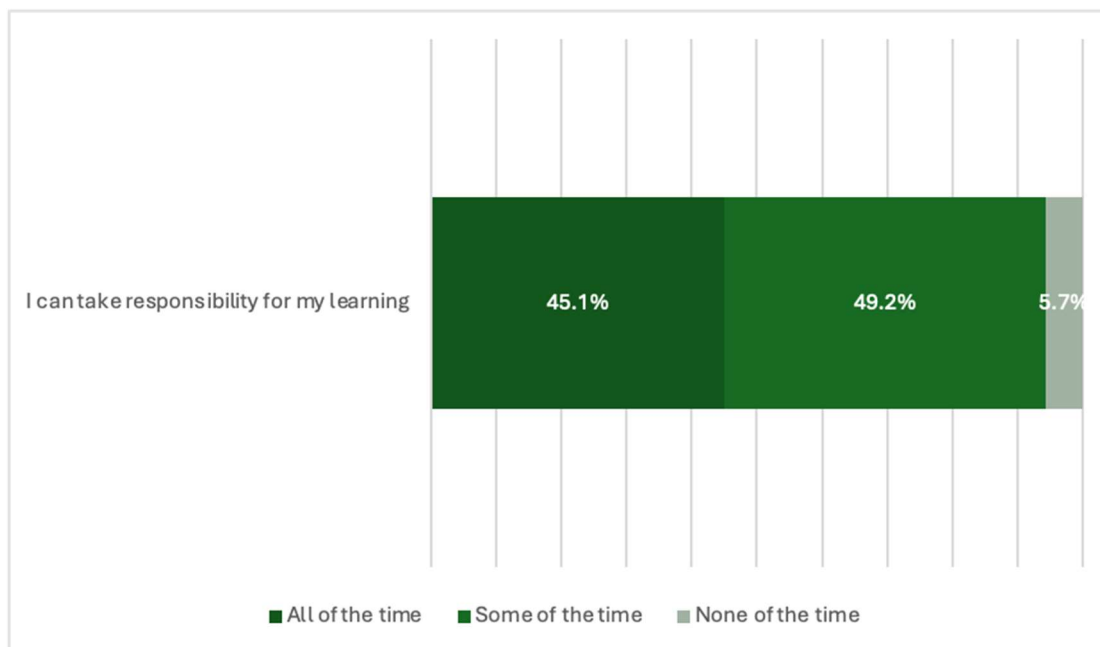


Figure 14: I can take responsibility for my learning

CBA's and learning

An aspect of the student survey explored student learning and CBAs. Over half of the students either strongly agreed or agreed that 'CBAs allow me to show my learning in a way that I could not within a written exam'; that they 'understand how my teacher assesses my CBAs' while 41.2% either strongly agreed or agreed that CBAs 'help my learning', as reflected below.

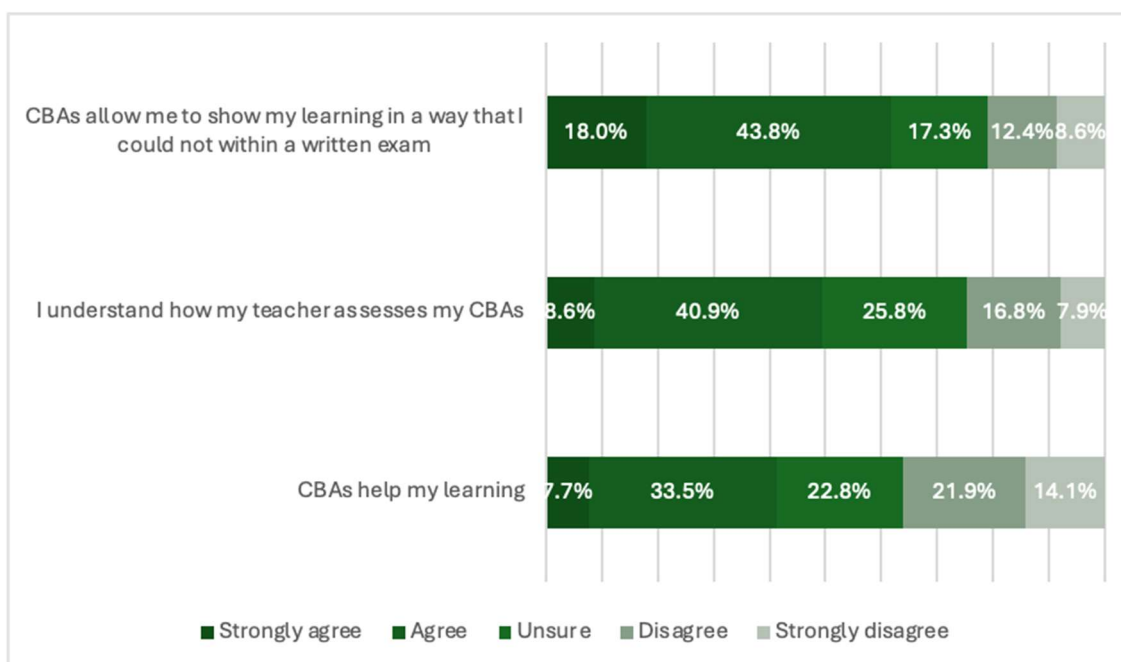


Figure 15: Students' views on CBAs and their learning

Learning Intentions and Success Criteria

As a central component of Learning to Learn, the survey explored the extent to which Learning Intentions and Success Criteria are utilised at Junior Cycle. The terms Learning Intentions and Success Criteria were defined for students in the survey, and they were then asked if Learning Intentions and Success Criteria are used by teachers to guide teaching and learning. The results are presented in Figure 16.

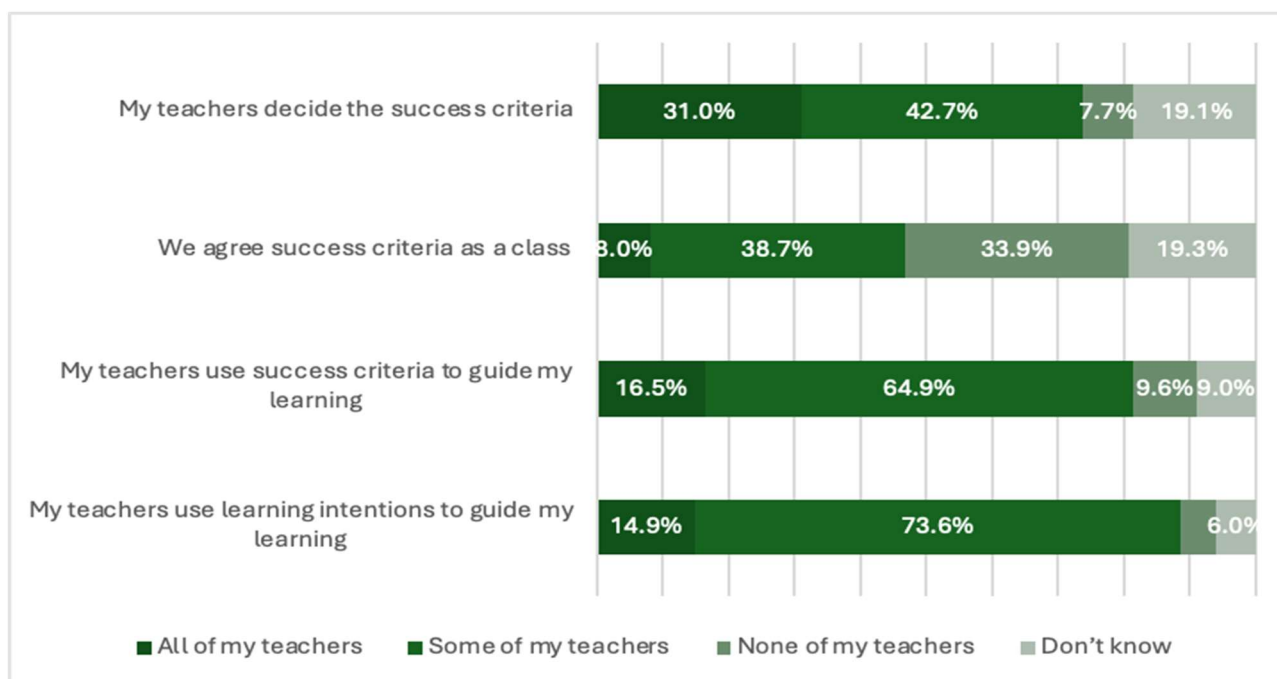


Figure 16: *Use of learning intentions and success criteria to guide learning.*

In both instances, students report that some or all of their teachers used both Learning Intentions and Success Criteria to guide their learning. For example, 14.9% of students reported that all of their teachers used Learning Intentions to guide their learning while the corresponding figure for the use of Success Criteria was 16.5%. Fewer students reported no teachers use Learning Intentions (5.5%) or Success Criteria (9.0%) to guide learning. In addition to investigating whether or not the Learning Intentions and Success Criteria were used to guide learning the survey also sought to ascertain who decides on the Success Criteria in a given class. Students were asked if decisions around Success Criteria were made by students in collaboration with the teacher or if the teacher was solely responsible for deciding on the Success Criteria. As can be seen from Figure 16 above, 38.7% of students report that some of their teachers allowed them the opportunity to agree on the Success Criteria, while 33.9% indicated that none of their teachers did so.

Feedback and reporting

Students were asked to outline the type of feedback they received most regularly over the course of Junior Cycle. Test scores were revealed as the dominant mode of feedback. As shown in Figure 17, just under half the sample (46.1%) reported that test scores were the type of feedback received most frequently. Almost twenty-seven percent (26.9%) reported

that written comments from teachers and 21.8% reported that oral comments from teachers were the most frequent types of feedback at Junior Cycle.

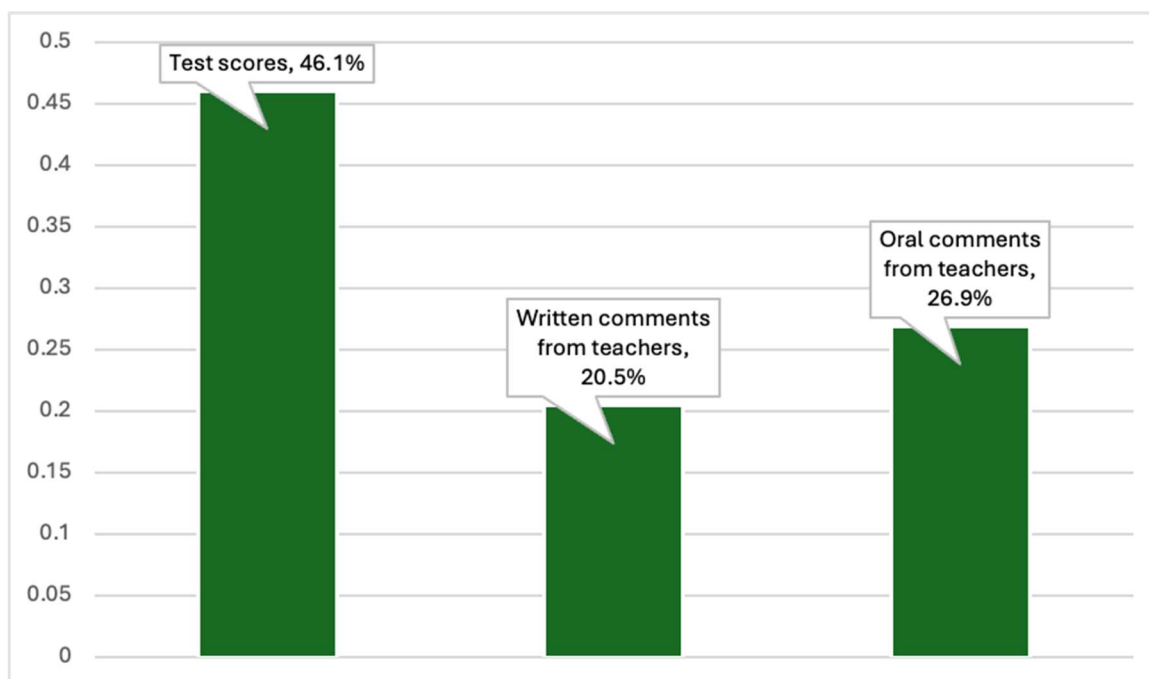


Figure 17: Feedback received **most** frequently (three most popular answers and segments represent proportion of **all** responses)

When students were provided with a list of potential sources of feedback and asked what type of feedback they received over the course of Junior Cycle it was evident that three main types of feedback emerged again: test scores, oral comments from teachers and written comments from teachers (Figure 18). 76.1% of students reported receiving test scores, 67.6% of students reported receiving written comments from teachers while a further 52.9% reported receiving feedback in the form of oral comments from teachers. Oral or written comments from classmates were a lot less likely (10.7% and 6.4% respectively).

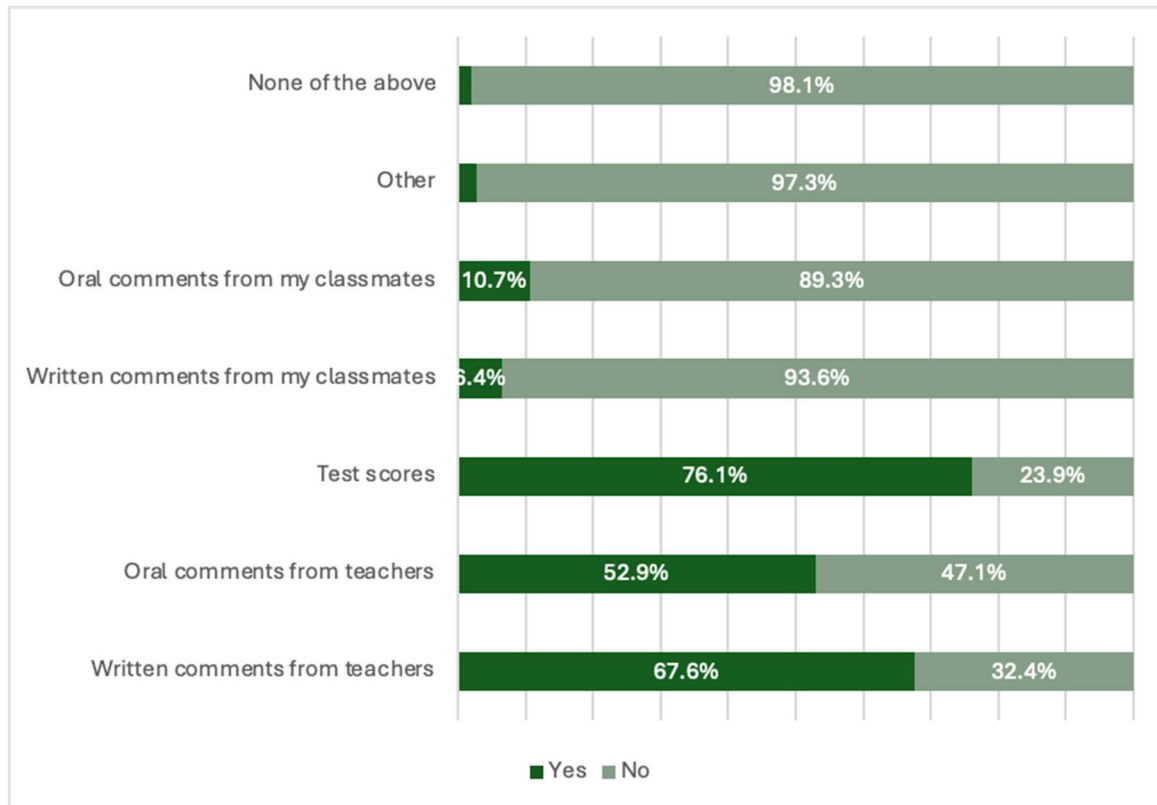


Figure 18: Type of feedback received by students over the course of Junior Cycle

Students were asked which forms of feedback they receive least. Written (51.3%) and oral (19.6%) comments from peers were the most common responses, followed by oral comments from teachers (12.5%), as reflected in Figure 19 below.

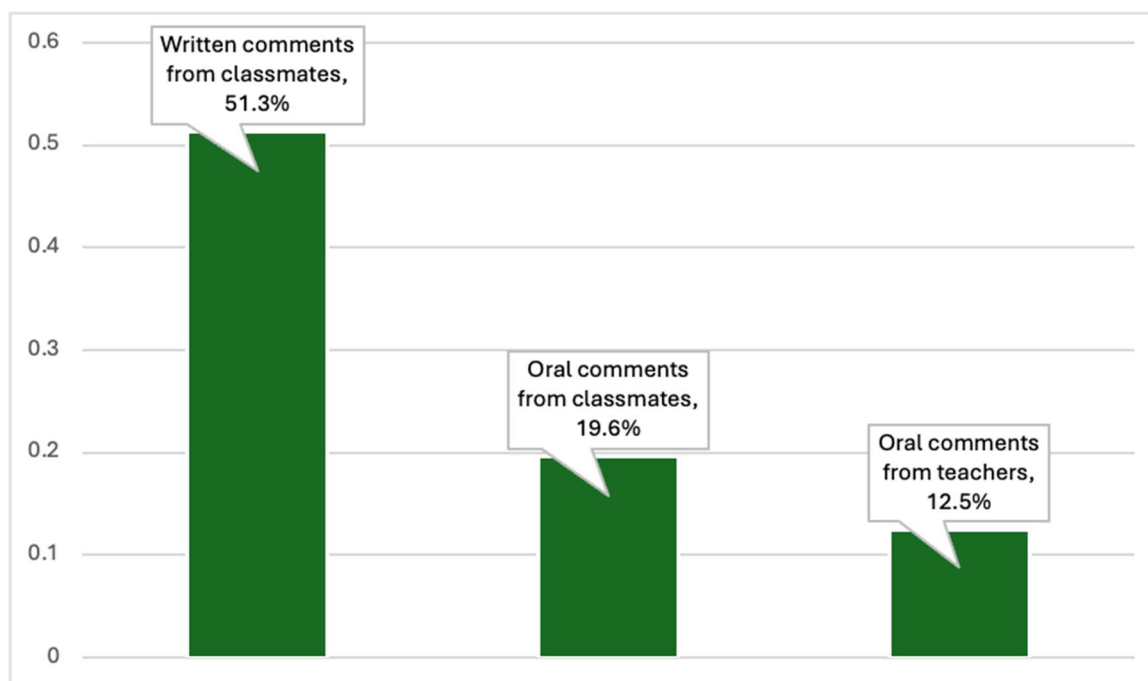


Figure 19: Feedback received **least** frequently (three most popular answers and segments represent proportion of **all** responses)

An aspect of the survey explored students' views on the impact of the feedback they receive on their learning. As can be seen in Table 2 below, 63% of students either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, 'the feedback I receive helps to improve my learning'.

The feedback I receive helps my learning	% (N)
Strongly Agree	16.2% (274)
Agree	46.8% (790)
Unsure	21.8% (368)
Disagree	10.9% (184)
Strongly Disagree	4.2% (71)

Table 2: Students level of agreement with the statement 'The feedback I receive helps to improve my learning'

Students were also asked for their views on aspects of the school reporting system, with over three-quarters (78.8%) of students strongly agreeing/agreeing that they and their parents/guardians receive reports on their learning. However, students were less likely to

strongly agree/agree that that these reports improved their learning (42.7%), as reflected below:

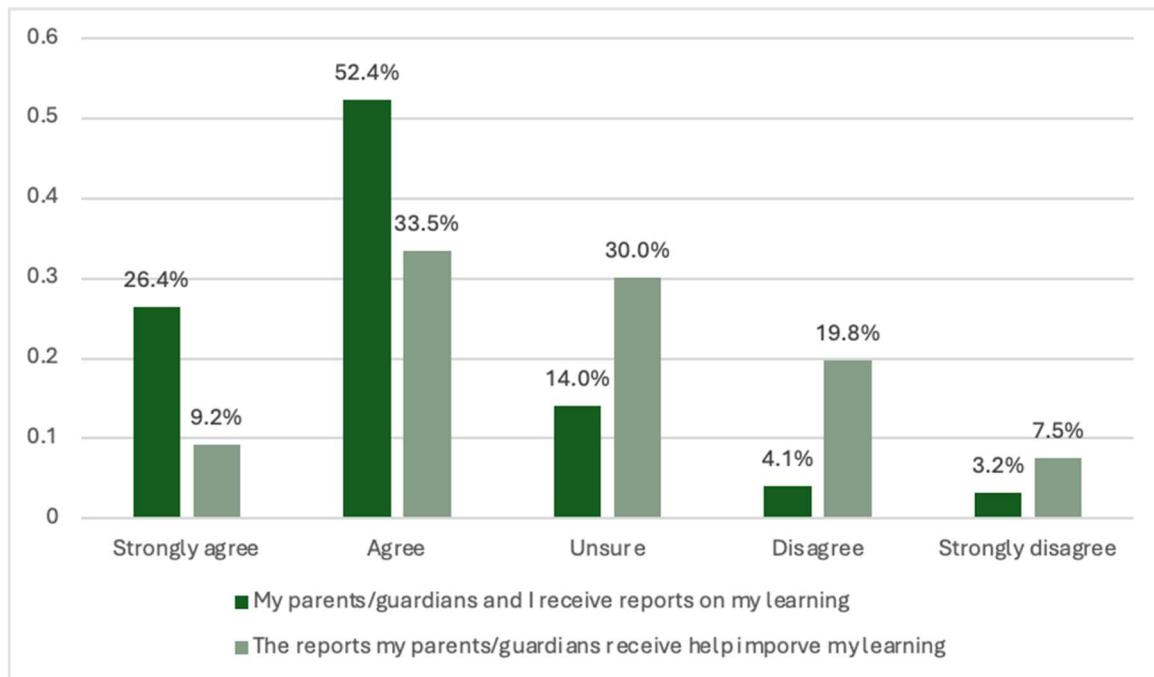


Figure 20: Students' perspectives on school reporting systems

Tests and in class examinations

An aspect of the survey explored students’ views of in-class and end of year examinations. Just over half strongly agreed or agreed with the statement ‘in-class/end of year exams are suitable ways of assessing my learning’ (55.8%) and ‘I know how I can succeed in an in-class/end of year examination (59%)’. A higher percentage (68%) strongly agreed or agreed that they saw connections between what they learn and in-class/end of year exams.

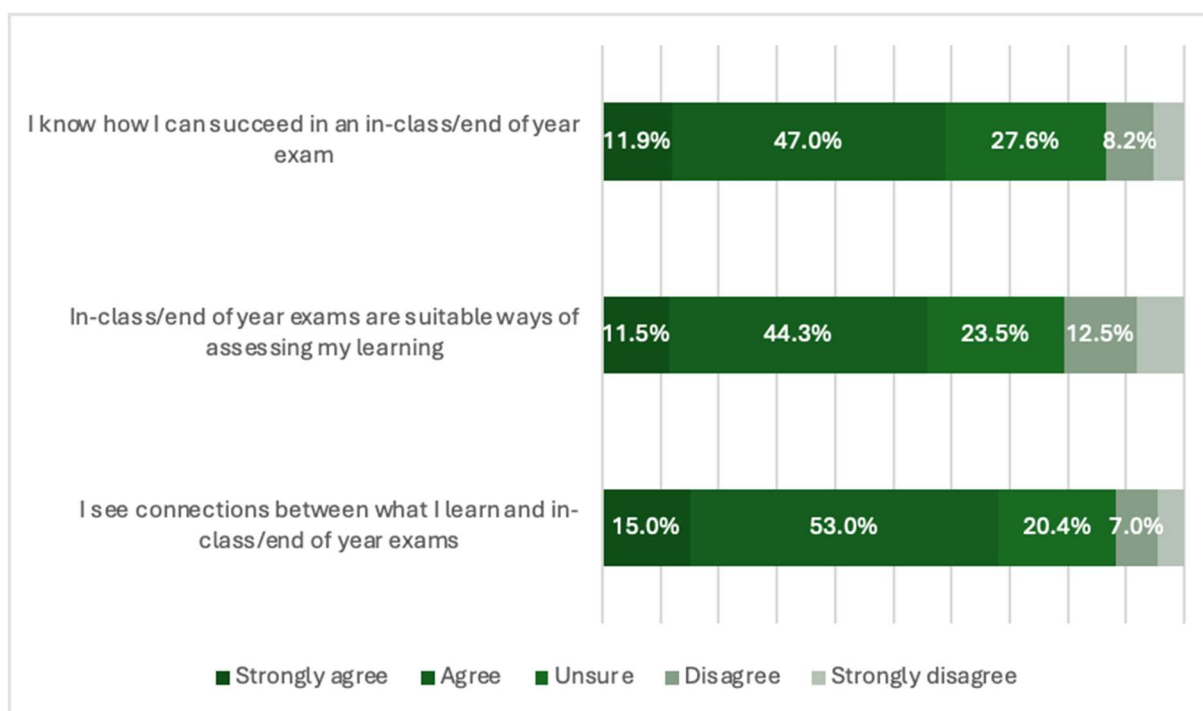


Figure 21: Students’ perceptions of in-class and end of year exams.

Quality

Students tended to equate *Quality* at Junior Cycle with teacher effort, commitment, support, and encouragement of students' learning and success, as well as supporting quality learning through feedback. While not a common discussion point in focus groups, *Quality* was discussed by some. Students in School 3, for example, felt that teachers provided '*a high-quality education*' and '*care about, like, what you're learning and like, how you're learning ... like no teacher would like want you to fail*'. Similarly, students in School 8 felt that '*most of the teachers care about what they're teaching*' (School 8). This is further reflected in a number of students in School 7 who felt that:

Most of the teachers anyway, they care about what they are teaching, and they see how the student is getting on. Say with a test like, the teacher would come down and say, 'this is what I think you can improve on next time'.

I think they just teach effectively, and they give feedback to you when you do something right or when you do something wrong.

Those that were unsure about whether they experienced *Quality* at Junior Cycle argued that this depended on the teacher, their efforts, pedagogical practices and professionalism.

Wellbeing

Wellbeing⁷ was a dominant theme within student focus groups, with students in all schools opting to discuss this principle. Students attending the Special School, for example, described the focus on kindness in the school, with kindness being rewarded through class awards and certificates.

While there were some differing views amongst students regarding dimensions of Wellbeing within Junior Cycle, students' comments were largely negative or critical with regard to this dimension. Central to the concerns raised by students were academic stress, high volume of

⁷ Wellbeing at Junior Cycle has a number of dimensions. Firstly, *Wellbeing* is a principle underpinning the Framework for Junior Cycle. Wellbeing is also a curricula dimension of Junior Cycle, with students engaging in 400 hours of formal curriculum requirements throughout Junior Cycle. An individual's wellbeing is a related but separate issue encompassing social, emotional and psychological aspects (Nohilly & Tynan, 2022). The differences between these are expressed where possible within the report, with an italicised upper-case W used when referring to the Principle, a non-italicised upper-case W when referring to a curricula requirement and a lower-case w used when discussing an individual's wellbeing.

homework, academic workload, lack of time for extra-curricular and social activities in addition to ineffective delivery of Wellbeing classes.

The most common issue discussed by students related to the principle of *Wellbeing* was the level of academic stress experienced in Junior Cycle. Stress was discussed at length and with frequency by students as a standalone issue of concern. Stress was also referred to as an outcome of additional concerns raised by students related to their experience of *Wellbeing* at Junior Cycle. The high volume of homework and increased academic workload attached to Junior Cycle were also noted by students to be detrimental to their wellbeing at Junior Cycle.

A smaller number of students commended the inclusion of stress management skills by their teachers at Junior Cycle, noting for example *'we do Wellbeing every Monday...we learn how to detect it and deal with workload, it's very helpful because sometimes you get stressed with the workload'* (School 9) and *'SPHE as well. It's like we looked at like ways of like unstressing and like planning everything that we have to do'* (School 1). However, other students, at times even within the same school, countered this position asserting for example, *'they didn't really teach you how to handle it [stress] so you have to learn yourself'* (School 5) and proposing that *'sometimes they [teachers] are just like, oh wait, don't like, don't quit on your sports, keep doing that and stuff but like, they don't really tell us how to maintain, like manage, all of that together cause it's a lot ...which I think that's like kind of stressful'* (School 1).

Many students also commented on the limited time remaining for extra-curricular and social activities across the school day and in the evenings because of the heavy workload they experience at Junior Cycle. Students outlined the negative impact of workload and lack of free time on their wellbeing with some students noting that they received very little guidance on ways of balancing their academic workload with extra-curricular and social activities. Below are examples of excerpts that reflect this theme:

Some people just stop...all their outside skill activities...worried...life revolves around school and studying (School 2)

There's too much homework, because then there's not enough time for yourself like to be at home and just to do what you want because there's like it was all like study and

exam papers and stuff that you have to do. And then also sports and all. There's no time. So that's when people get stressed (School 5)

I personally had a hard time during the Junior Cert, and I feel like that's not what the school is trying to do. Yeah, and because they're always ... like our School is very like about mental health ... but just like the way the exams went like it was way too much stress on me and I just felt like my mental health wasn't great (School 3)

They [teachers] are like you've got to study, study, study, study. So, it's just like put a bad idea of the Junior Cert in our mind and just like always studying and no time for yourself, like and stuff like that (School 7)

A large majority of students also perceived their Wellbeing classes to be ineffective as they lacked focus on themes of relevance to them, served as a source of additional workload and were in some cases used by teachers as a revision class for exams. For example:

I feel like we didn't really do much on Wellbeing it was more like safety in the home and all (School 6)

Like, Wellbeing doesn't really help anything. It's kind of just like one of those classes where you just do nothing and it's a waste of time. It's not really like supporting your physical, mental, emotional, and social wellbeing. It's just more work like (School 3)

The role of teachers with respect to students' wellbeing at Junior Cycle was as a key issue in focus groups. Students were mixed in their responses on this issue with many commending teachers as central to supporting their wellbeing at Junior Cycle. These students discussed a range of wellbeing supports provided to them by their teachers including providing support in managing examination stress and effectively promoting physical and mental wellbeing. Other students reported feeling less supported by their teachers due to teachers' own workloads. For example:

Like I'm sure they do care, but they also teach probably loads of students and they can't you know be like you don't have to do that cause you have a lot going on cause like everyone has (School 5)

Like they're all nice, but some of them are just like 'do your work' (School 7)

An aspect of the student survey also explored aspects related to the principle of *Wellbeing*. Just over half of the students surveyed indicated that they engaged in a Wellbeing programme in Junior Cycle (50.5%), 23.1% said they did not engage in such a programme, while the remainder (26.4%) did not know⁸.

Half of the students strongly agreed or agreed that their wellbeing was supported in the school. Under half (49%) of respondents however noted that this had a positive impact on their wellbeing, as reflected in Figure 22 below.

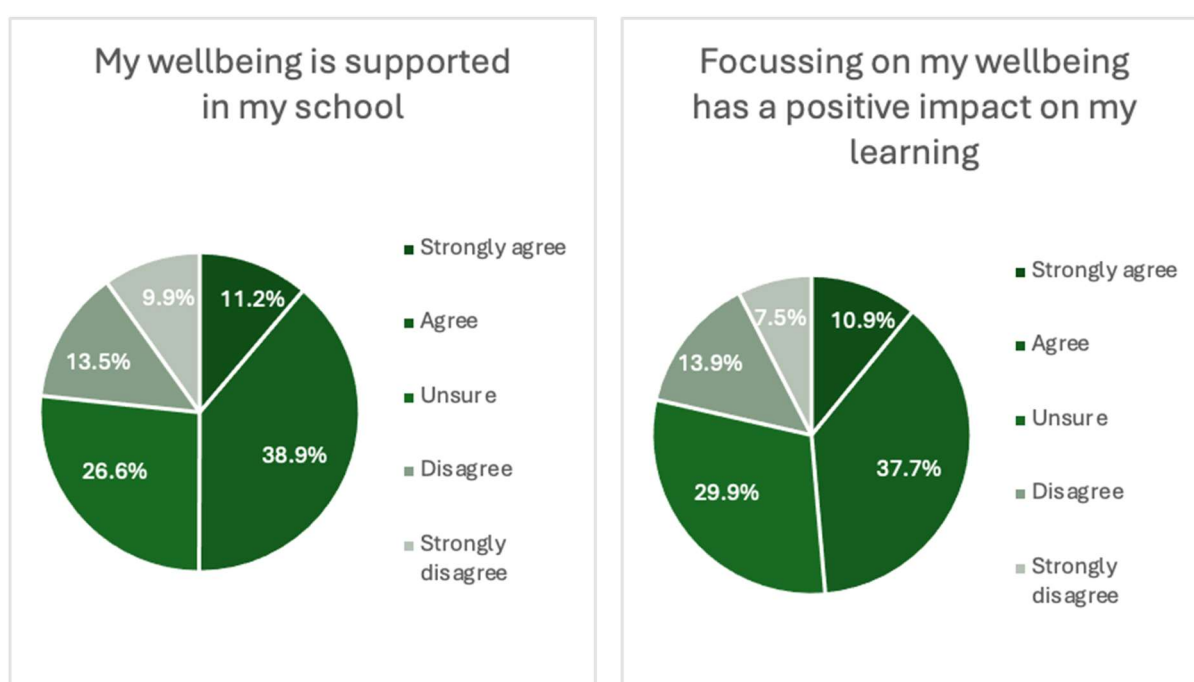


Figure 22: Students' views on aspects of wellbeing within the school.

Given that workload and related stress was identified as a prominent issue within the first round of case study visits, an additional related question was added to the second student survey. Students were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement, '*I can cope with the workload at Junior Cycle*', to which 30.2% of students strongly agreed or agreed. In comparison, 39.9% either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

⁸ Schools are required to allocate specific hours to Wellbeing with PE, SPHE and CSPE pillars of Wellbeing provision in schools but these may not be named as Wellbeing programmes within the school.

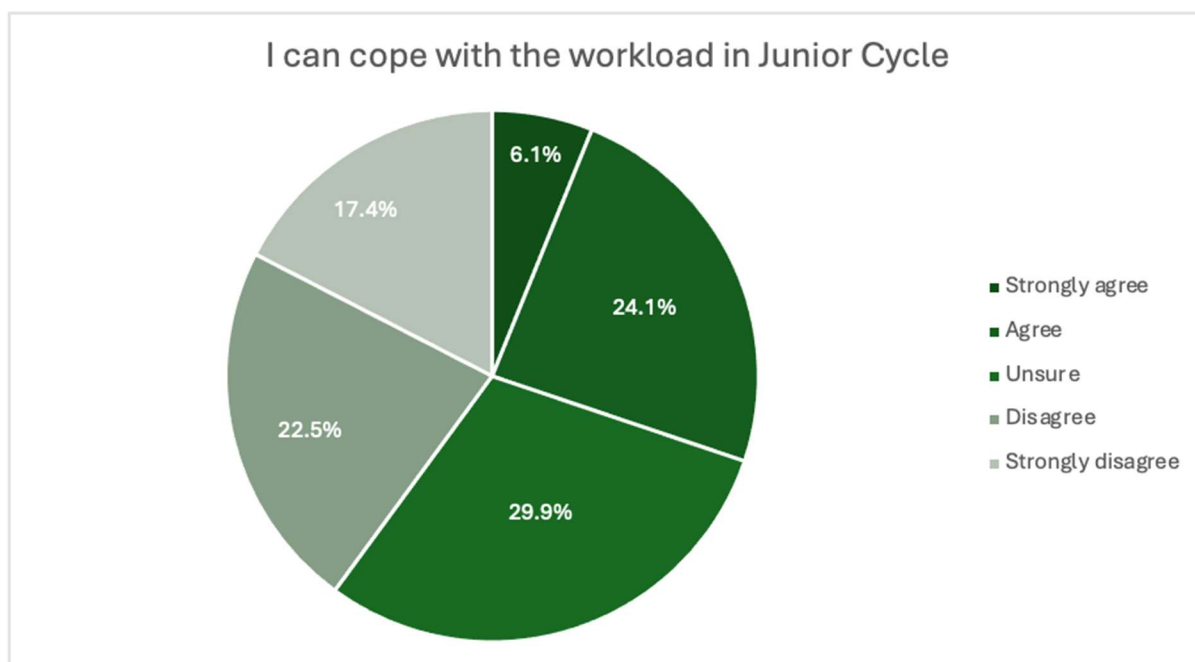


Figure 23: Students' views relating to the workload at Junior Cycle

As before, differences across year groups were considered. While students in 2nd, 3rd and TY/5th year were largely in agreement in terms of their wellbeing being supported in the school (51.0%, 48.9% and 50.5% respectively), differences did emerge for the other two questions. TY/5th year students (38.5%) were less likely to strongly agree or agree with the statement 'focusing on my wellbeing has a positive impact on my learning' in comparison to 2nd (53.4%) and 3rd year (52.1%) students. However, TY/5th year students (38.3%) were more likely to strongly agree or agree that they can cope with the workload in Junior Cycle, in comparison to 2nd (28.7%) and 3rd year (25.2%) students. These results are reflected in the table below.

	Year Group		
<i>My wellbeing is supported in my School</i>	2nd year (n)	3rd Year (n)	TY/5th year (n)
Strongly agree	12.7% (73)	10.4% (64)	10.4% (50)
Agree	38.3% (220)	38.4% (236)	40.1% (193)
Unsure	26.8% (154)	28.7% (176)	23.7% (114)
Disagree	12.9% (74)	12.9% (79)	15.0% (72)
Strongly disagree	9.4% (54)	9.6% (59)	10.8% (52)
<i>Focusing on my wellbeing has a positive impact on my learning</i>	2nd year (n)	3rd Year (n)	TY/5th year (n)
Strongly agree	14.1% (81)	11.2% (69)	6.7% (32)
Agree	39.3% (226)	40.9% (251)	31.8% (153)
Unsure	28.0% (161)	28.7% (176)	33.9% (163)
Disagree	10.8% (62)	12.9% (79)	18.9% (91)
Strongly disagree	7.8% (45)	6.4% (39)	8.7% (42)
<i>I can cope with the workload in Junior Cycle</i>	2nd year (n)	3rd Year (n)	TY/5th year (n)
Strongly agree	5.9% (34)	6.0% (37)	6.4% (31)
Agree	22.8% (131)	19.2% (118)	31.8% (153)
Unsure	32.7% (188)	29.0% (178)	27.7% (133)
Disagree	21.4% (123)	24.9% (153)	20.8% (100)
Strongly disagree	17.2% (99)	20.8% (128)	13.3% (64)

Table 3: Students' views on wellbeing and workload by year group

What changes would students like to see introduced to the Junior Cycle?

Two main suggested changes were identified from the analysis of the focus groups. Firstly, students across a range of schools sought a reduction in the workload and amount of content within Junior Cycle. With this, students also suggested that the workload, particularly in

relation to CBAs, class/school tests and homework, could be spread out more to reduce the related stress. Students felt that such changes would reduce stress, impact positively on the wellbeing and understanding/engagement with a topic. Students commented, for example:

Try to not give the students much homework or tests during [the CBA] time so they have more time to do it ... I feel like we shouldn't get homework at the weekend ... because that should be, like, our rest (School 3)

I guess not having all the tests at the same time during the same week, maybe just two, maybe one test a week throughout the year instead of doing all of them at the same time (Youth Reach)

I think if there was less material to try and cram in, teachers could spend longer on topics and like you would process it better. It's easier to remember them because it's done over a longer time (School 1)

CBA should be further apart and then you're trying to get your best and all of them. But when you're doing all four at the same time, like how are you meant to do your best and all. And so, I think maybe like every month or something have one designated because it's a lot of pressure having four of them due in one month like (School 5)

Less pressure about it ... since the first day we got here it's just been Junior Cert, Junior Cert, Junior Cert and like CBAs, CBAs, CBAs and it's just like in your head (School 9)

Secondly, students sought greater variety and choice across their Junior Cycle experience in terms of approaches to teaching, learning and assessment and the subjects they study. These students called for greater variety in terms of how they learn in the classroom and how that learning is assessed. Some also called for greater subject options within Junior Cycle.

More kind of practical ... make it so much more engaging ... It's more of a burden than anything ... Things like activities in the classroom ... we remember more from writing it on a poster ... than just looking at words on a page (School 4)

Probably just more hands on, like more creativity in all the subjects cause a lot of them just kind of doing them, you're just kind of like answering questions. I think it would be good if it's a bit more hands on where you get more into the subjects like for English,

maybe you get to do more writing or for like Business, you get to make a little company like just random things that get you more invested (School 5)

I often think like it should be more student-led and they should actually listen to the students' opinions because at the end of the day it's not them learning, it's us (School 8)

As reflected above, students were largely positive about *Quality* and *Inclusive Education*, largely negative about *Wellbeing* and expressed mixed views (both positive and negative comments) relating to the remaining Principles of Junior Cycle.

Summary of Part 1: Students' Perspectives

Students mainly viewed the Junior Cycle as preparation for the Leaving Certificate, providing them with exposure to and experience of a state examination.

Students in the focus group discussion were largely positive about *Quality* and *Inclusive Education*, largely negative about *Wellbeing* and expressed mixed views (both positive and negative comments) relating to the other Principles of Junior Cycle. The findings for each are now briefly summarised.

Choice and Flexibility: Choice of subjects and choice within subjects was central to students' commentaries, with mixed views expressed across both areas. Those who spoke positively about *Choice and Flexibility* were content with the subject options available to them, as well as with the level of choice within subjects. CBAs were generally considered one way in which students can experience *Choice and Flexibility* in Junior Cycle. Those that felt they did not experience *Choice and Flexibility* within Junior Cycle again referred to subject choice and spoke about the limited subject choices available to them and the limited choice they had within those subjects

In relation to choice across and within subjects, the majority of students stressed that there is a lack of consistency in the amount of choice offered within subjects. In the survey, many students asserted that they have the opportunity to voice their opinions, but more than one-third of students claimed that their opinions are never acted upon. The majority of students indicated that they did not have a choice on the Short Courses they studied.

Creativity and Innovation: CBAs, project and interactive approaches to teaching and learning were deemed to support the enactment of *Creativity and Innovation* at Junior Cycle. Others, however, believed that they had limited scope to be creative, particularly due to examinations. The survey data also indicates a strong desire amongst students for more opportunities to be creative, with creativity emerging as least experienced and the Key Skill least developed at Junior Cycle.

Continuity and Development: Some students felt that their learning was incremental and effectively scaffolded. These students also spoke positively about continuity from primary school. Some saw a link between what they learned in school and their life and world around them. Those that raises concerns relating to this principle focused on the transition from primary to post-primary, with these students either not seeing a link between their learning in each setting and/or viewing the move as a 'big jump'.

Engagement and Participation: *Engagement and Participation* received mixed responses in the focus group. Those that spoke positively about this principle spoke about the

student-centred learning and project work they engaged in, as well as extra-curricular activities. The three main concerns students expressed related to a lack of active learning, the perceived lack of relevance of curriculum to their lives and the negative impact workload had on students' capacity to engage and participate. Student survey results indicated that working on their own in the classroom is the type of schoolwork they engaged with most frequently with TY/5th year students more likely to report this compared to 3rd and 2nd years.

Inclusive Education: The small number of students that selected *Inclusive Education* as the principle they experienced most at Junior Cycle did so on the basis of pedagogical and teacher approaches that support inclusion, with students feeling included within the classroom environment. Group work/projects and CBAs, along with teacher questioning and additional supports and exemptions for students that require them, were deemed to support inclusion. The small number of students that viewed *Inclusive Education* as the least evident dimension of Junior Cycle felt that shyness and peer pressure may impact on inclusion, and that pedagogical approaches did not always support inclusion.

Learning to Learn: Mixed views were identified from focus groups regarding students' experiences of *Learning to Learn*. Those that felt they experienced this principle, felt that their teachers encouraged, supported, and enabled them to learn effectively. Students also felt that they could take responsibility for their own learning – largely through engagement in the CBA. Some were content with the level of study skills they received at Junior Cycle and with the relevance of what they learned in school with their life, further education, and work. In comparison, others suggested that they had not experienced or received enough understanding of how to learn and study during Junior Cycle and/or these students struggled to see the relevance of what they learned in school to their life now and in the future.

'Managing information and thinking' was seen as the Key Skill developed the most and the majority of students felt they can take responsibility for their learning all or some of the time. While students agreed that feedback helped their learning, test scores were revealed as the dominant mode of feedback with written and oral comments from peers received least. While the majority agreed that they and their parents received reports on their learning, they were less likely to strongly agree/agree that that these reports improved their learning. CBAs were seen as more effective ways of evidencing their learning and helping their learning. Just over half strongly agreed or agreed that in-class/end of year exams were suitable ways of assessing their learning.

Quality: Students tended to equate *Quality* at Junior Cycle with teacher effort, commitment, support and encouragement of students learning and success, as well as

supporting quality learning through feedback. Those that were unsure about whether they experienced *Quality* at Junior Cycle argued that this depended on the teacher, their efforts, pedagogical practices and professionalism.

Wellbeing: While students tended to recognise their school's attempt to care for their wellbeing, it was the principle that received the most negative comments from students, with students feeling overwhelmed by the workload and stress to perform in the examinations. These views are reflected in one of the changes students called for at Junior Cycle, namely a reduction and spreading out in the workload attached to the programme to reduce stress. TY/5th year students were more likely to strongly agree/agree that they can cope with the workload in Junior Cycle, in comparison to 2nd and 3rd years. Wellbeing programmes weren't always considered effective in addressing this stress.

Part 2: Teachers' perspectives

Sixty-three teachers were interviewed across the 12 sites. As outlined earlier in the report, the interviews were framed around the principles underpinning Junior Cycle, with teachers asked to identify the principles they felt have been enacted/embedded the most/least and why. As before, the principles are presented in alphabetical order, followed by any changes teachers would like to see take place at Junior Cycle.

What are teachers' views and experiences of dimensions of the Junior Cycle (Principles)?

Choice and Flexibility

Teachers expressed mixed views (a mix of positive and negative views) regarding their experiences of *Choice and Flexibility* within the Framework for Junior Cycle. Teachers tended to have a broad understanding of this principle, drawing on the concept of choice within CBAs, in and within subjects, in terms of resources and pedagogical approaches and differing ways of presenting work.

Two main themes reflecting positive perspectives and three themes reflecting a more negative view of *Choice and Flexibility* were identified within the data. Firstly, those that spoke positively about dimensions of *Choice and Flexibility* felt that CBAs supported and provided a space wherein students had choice within their learning. Some felt that this motivated students as they could pick a focus that interested them and aligned with their skills, talents and locality. For example:

Choice and flexibility ... because they can choose what resources they get, and they can be flexible in how they present [CBAs] ... Give them the choice and flexibility is again I suppose down to what I can give them as choice (School 1)

Choice ... I actually do like doing the CBAs. Yeah, because I find the kids like doing them and not listening to me, but they already have a certain amount of knowledge. I find they actually do the research (School 9)

I find the kids enjoy the CBAs because they can go off, and they would be from a sporting background so they can do things in their local area ... and relate it back to history (School 10)

Secondly, some teachers felt there was now more choice within Junior Cycle. These teachers felt, for example, that there was now more choice within their subject, through perhaps the selection of texts. Teacher felt they had a greater choice in the range of resources they could draw on within their practice. Some also felt that students had greater choice in terms of how they wished to present their work, and also in terms of the subjects they could choose. For example:

There is choice and flexibility, we offer a very wide curriculum, and they do have choice (School 2)

I would offer my students a couple of options; they can present their work back to me, they use Canva a lot, through multiple mediums (School 4)

The flexibility is great that we can do lots of different texts and they can get snippets and extracts from lots of different texts but there is a sense that you never cover any one text fully (School 7)

I provide choice and flexibility with how students demonstrate their learning. Some use online apps like Flip for verbal recounting, while others work on projects tailored to their interests, such as dinosaurs (Special School)

A small number questioned whether the principle of *Choice and Flexibility* was more evident for teachers, rather than students. A teacher in School 8, for example, questioned *'I do think the Junior Cycle has brought in more choice and variety... when it comes to students, do they have a realistic choice... I'm not sure'*.

Three concerns/issues were identified in terms of teachers' experiences of *Choice and Flexibility* within the Junior Cycle. Firstly, teachers felt that choice was limited within their subject, and they did not experience greater choice as a result of the changes, *'it's not as radical, I suppose, as you know what it sounds like it's going to be'* (School 1).

Secondly, some were concerned about the lack of choice within the exam. A teacher in School 1, for example, felt that *'there's no choice. There's no flexibility in the exam'*. This lack of choice within the examination impacted in two main ways. Some teachers felt under pressure to cover all of the content, resulting, from their perspectives, with less time to engage in active

learning pedagogies. Teachers also felt that the lack of choice in the examination impacted students, particularly those who might struggle with the subject, as they couldn't engage with the examination in a way that best suited their knowledge and skills. For example:

The final exam is very limiting to our kids ... There's no choice. Yeah, no anything. And like, if we go back to the old Geography paper, there was flexibility in that. Yeah. And right, is that a good way to be right that you can kind of teach towards an exam paper. Maybe not, but look for kids who had very, very poor participation and engagement, there was something achievable at the end ... when you're sitting down at an exam paper and there's no choice and like you have to face a huge booklet - I think that's a big challenge (Youth Reach)

Thirdly, some struggled with dimensions of choice, as, from their perspective, it left them unsure whether students were adequately prepared for the examination and whether the learning outcomes had been achieved. For example, a teacher in School 4 questioned, *'in terms of content ... I just don't know where to stop...what is the depth of treatment?'*

Short Courses did not emerge as a key discussion point within this principle.

Continuity and Development

While teachers expressed mixed views regarding their experiences of *Continuity and Development*, their views tended to be more negative than positive. As reflected in the themes below, teachers tended to understand this principle in terms of links with past (primary) and future (Senior Cycle) learning and student preparedness in this regard.

One main theme reflecting positive views was identified in the data. Teachers felt that students now developed important skills, often through the CBA, that aided them as they progressed through Junior Cycle and into Senior Cycle. Some felt that their specification now supported development and progression of learning from 1st to 3rd year e.g., *'the way the Maths course is structured... we recall it from first year and then we build it up'* (School 1).

Two themes reflecting a more negative view of *Continuity and Development* were identified within the data. Firstly, several teachers raised concerns about *Continuity and Development*

from the perspective of progression to Senior Cycle. These teachers raised concerns regarding students' level of content knowledge and capacity to complete longer (essay style) examination questions, perceiving this as 'a big jump' (School 1). There appears to be a strong link between concerns about this principle and those raised under the principle of *Quality*. Teachers in specific subjects identified concepts/content that had previously been included in Junior Cycle but had been removed, resulting in a perceived deficit when students entered Senior Cycle. For example:

There is a gap for me in terms of Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle ... There is not as much emphasis on writing 1, 2, 3 pages (School 10)

The problem we then have is the gap between Junior Cert and 5th year ... in the past, ordinary level French for Leaving Cert was very close to higher level Junior Cert. Now there is such a huge yawning gap (School 7)

The continuity between the Junior and Leaving Cert ... an awful lot of students that would come to me in Leaving Cert would find that they don't expect the workload (School 2)

Secondly, a small number of teachers raised concerns about the transition from primary to second level, often depending on the primary school a student had attended and the subject the teacher taught. For example, some felt that students may have differing levels of Irish, Mathematics or Science depending on their primary schools, meaning that teachers had to spend time in first year ensuring all students had the same knowledge, understanding and skills. For example:

At primary school, the kids haven't done Geography in what I need them to know, They've done countries, they've done capitals, they've done flags coming out their ears ... they are not bad at this ... but see Geography is rolled into SSEC and I think there needs to be more communication that this is what they need to come in with ... They are all starting from nothing and then going on ... the level of detail is questionable at times (School 2)

There's a huge leap from primary school into secondary school, a huge emotional leap, as well as a huge knowledge leap ... it's a big deal ... it's very overwhelming for them. I

do think that Junior Cycle has helped that a little bit because you're not as pressurised. You can start slower (School 1)

The Special School faced difficulties in identifying and supporting the progression of students following some Level 3 courses. Teachers in this school noted that there is often a last-minute rush to get students undertaking some level 3 courses ready for their assessments, particularly in their final year. They suggested that earlier identification and more structured planning starting in the second year could alleviate this pressure and ensure better outcomes. For example, one teacher noted, *'it has taken a while to get us where we needed to be. One of the areas we fall down on is identifying the Level 3s and getting them moving on the programme. If we could plan that a little bit better, so there's not this big race at the end of 3rd year to get it done'*.

Creativity and Innovation

Teachers were more likely to express positive views regarding their experiences of *Creativity and Innovation* within the Framework for Junior Cycle. Creativity was largely understood and linked to teacher and student choice in terms of CBAs, presenting work in differing ways and freedom to engage and draw on different pedagogical approaches, resources and technologies.

Three main themes reflecting positive views on this were identified within the data. Firstly, teachers believed that *Creativity and Innovation* were supported by the CBAs and secondly through the use of technology. Thirdly, teachers felt that *Creativity and Innovation* was supported within Junior Cycle through students being able to present work in differing ways, with choice playing a role in this regard:

You see it around the school with the different activities that are going on ... It allows them to work on areas they are strong in and also gives them the opportunity to work on things they are interested in (School 10)

I think that they're making it more accessible for them, learning how to be more creative. I think the Junior Cycle is really good for teaching them how to be creative (School 6)

I think this creativity big time, I think the CBAs are so creative real opportunity to be creative that is so like sometimes it's amazing (School 1)

The creativity side of it is great. We have our curriculum, but we step outside of it quite a lot. For example, we do a lot of coding, 3D printing, and science fairs, which tie into multiple subjects and future careers (Special School)

Those teachers who had concerns about the enactment of *Creativity and Innovation* at Junior Cycle raised two issues. Firstly, some were unsure whether all students, at Junior Cycle, were capable and interested in being creative. Secondly, some teachers struggled to be creative within subjects that they perceived to be content heavy, resulting in limited space and time to engage in related activities, with the focus remaining (or returning) to the examination at the end of 3rd year. Both of which are reflected in the excerpts below.

It would be lovely to teach it in the most creative way possible without the major time constraints (School 3)

I think kids are still being spoon-fed a little bit ... I see it nearly every day, you have to constantly push their creative side and that innovative side (School 10)

I think the creativity and innovation gets lost after first year ... the focus becomes very much on the exam (School 5)

Engagement and Participation

Teachers were more likely to express positive views regarding their experiences of *Engagement and Participation* within the Framework for Junior Cycle. Analysis of the data suggests that teachers understand this principle from the perspective of integrating student centred, active learning pedagogical approaches that encourage students to get involved in the learning process.

One main theme reflecting positive views on this were identified within the data. Teachers felt that they were now using more group work, active learning, and student-centred approaches, which supported student engagement and participation. For example, a teacher in School 2 explained how *'active methodologies and group work have improved engagement in the classroom'* while teachers in other schools explained how students:

Really enjoyed that [active learning approaches] ... I think it is due to the new Junior Cycle framework, that it's reminding me I can't be standing at the board 24/7 and I have to let them be creative ... it allows them to take ownership of their own learning (School 4)

I think students engage more ... just they're at the centre of their own education now, it's not chalk and talk and take down the notes and you go home and learn it and tell me what you learned (School 7)

Engagement and participation are very high. For example, during a space-themed project, students created and presented their work, which involved writing, speaking, and listening, fostering a sense of community and support (Special School)

Three themes reflecting a more negative view of *Creativity and Innovation* were identified. Please note that the frequency of the positive themes strongly outweighed those of the negative, hence teachers' attitudes towards this principle were deemed positive. Those that were unsure whether this principle had been enacted at Junior Cycle felt that 1) not all students were open to or capable of working independently and with others effectively, 2) poor attendance, as experienced in some case study sites, impacted negatively on engagement and participation, 3) some teachers felt their subject specification did not provide sufficient space and time for teachers (and students) to fully enact this principle.

Group work is great in theory and there's loads of it in the Junior Cycle. That's huge, it's the big thing for them. But I see it where you've a good kid who is doing all the work and they are getting annoyed because you have someone else in the group who is getting the same kudos, and they haven't done anything...you have good kids who want to work by themselves then (School 4)

We have a lot of absences, which is the main issue [in terms of engagement]. So, I think if we didn't have as many absences, we'd be grand with all these (School 9)

I think like with the engagement and participation and the new Junior Cycle courses and in theory, that is what we should be trying to achieve. But I always feel then, once again, because of the timeframe I haven't had time to do all the little projects and ideas I have for things (School 1)

Inclusive Education

Teachers expressed mixed views regarding their experiences of *Inclusive Education* within the Framework for Junior Cycle. Analysis of the data indicates that teachers view inclusive education from the perspective of including different types of learners, differentiation, and common level. However, common level tends to be discussed from the perspective of the examination paper.

Four main themes reflecting positive views on this were identified within the data. Firstly, some felt that Junior Cycle is now more inclusive of different types of learners, including students with Special Education Needs and those undertaking Level 2 courses through the integration of Priority Learning Units (PLUs). Secondly, these teachers felt that they were differentiating learning more. Thirdly, some felt that they were now adopting differing teaching approaches and selecting curriculum to respond to the needs of their students. Finally, Common Level specifications, active learning approaches, project work and CBAs were considered to help with *Inclusive Education* and were deemed to support with the enactment of this principle.

I think nobody gets left behind here ... whether its Level 2 or you're pushing towards higher level Junior Cycle results, your needs are catered for (School 10)

I do think it's very inclusive ... you can design your own curriculum based on the students in front of you (School 2)

The good things are we are moving towards more audio-visual learning which facilitates kids who might have dyslexia or learning needs so it means they can be involved in language (School 7)

Concerns relating to *Inclusive Education* tended to focus on Common Level specifications, with two main themes emerging in this regard. Firstly, these teachers suggested that some students can struggle with a Common Level examination paper due to the language used in the paper, the nature of the questions and the length of the paper. Teachers in School 10, for example, expressed concerns about the accessibility of the Common Level curriculum, especially for students in DEIS Schools. Teachers in this school suggested that some students

found the Common Level content difficult to engage with. One teacher mentioned, *‘Common level is still very, very difficult ... even the higher-level students find it difficult ... it almost gives them a negative feeling about the whole subject’* (School 10). Similarly, a teacher in School 4 explained how *‘the exam papers are far too long, far too literacy heavy for students who have dyslexia in particular’*, while others felt that:

For the vast bulk of students I have, the common paper probably suits them better, but in a DEIS School, there will be difficulties in things like French, where the Common Level is probably still too difficult for them (School 7)

There's definitely a big challenge there for the weaker student. And then I wonder sometimes is there enough of a challenge for a very good higher-level student? (Youth Reach)

Common Level caters to the average student, stronger and weaker students are bored and struggling, respectively (School 9)

Secondly, others felt that higher achieving students weren't challenged sufficiently by Common Level specification and/or a Common Level examination paper e.g. *‘higher achieving students, they hardly have a page for the answer to show off what they know’* (School 1) and *‘we are fabulous for the weak kids, the disadvantaged kids but we are not doing that well for our high achievers’* (School 4). Similarly, a teacher in School 7 felt that:

Inclusive education - people tend to focus on including the lower end of the scale and students that are weaker, but I feel they have missed the boat on including those really strong students.

Learning to Learn

Teachers expressed mixed views regarding their experiences of *Learning to Learn* within the Framework for Junior Cycle. Analysis of the data suggests that teachers understand this principle from the perspective of related skills, such as reflection, critical thinking, and questioning. Two main themes reflecting positive views on this were identified within the data. Firstly, some teachers felt that they now place more emphasis on supporting students to develop skills relating to *Learning to Learn*, including reflection, critical thinking, and questioning skills. Secondly, CBAs were considered helpful in supporting students to enhance

their capacity on learning. A teacher in School 2, for example, explained how *'reflecting on their learning has become really important ... they are becoming better reflective practitioners'*. This is further reflected in the following excerpts:

I know we're doing it [Learning to Learn] as well and like I know they're teaching them to use, like, really basic stuff, stuff that we take for granted, like reading something close in the book and bullet pointing like you remember, like, stuff that I don't even know where we learned it, but maybe just someone told us it or someone mentioned it (School 3)

The new Junior Cycle does set them up better because they have to think for themselves ... There was a lot of copying, a lot of very passive work [before the changes]. I wasn't happy about that. And so actually, I was really on board with the new Junior Cycle (School 5)

Three main themes reflecting a more negative view of *Learning to Learn* were identified. Firstly, some felt that there was limited space and time within Junior Cycle to focus on dimensions of *Learning to Learn*. Secondly, some felt that certain students at Junior Cycle lacked capacity to engage in reflection and consideration on their learning, resulting in students being *'dependent on teachers to learn, there is no self-learning'* (School 9). Thirdly, the fact that students would still ultimately be sitting an examination at the end of the three years posed a potential tension. These perspectives are reflected in the excerpts below:

The jargon [around learning to learn] is a little bit difficult for students to understand ... It's quite difficult for them to comprehend what does that mean to them (School 10)

They are waiting for you to do everything for them ... There is a gap in their willingness to learn because everything is so instant (School 4)

You're still feeling like you need your students to perform in the exam. And then in contrast to that, you're trying to develop independent autonomous learners who, you know, have a love for education (School 6)

You've had them in their groups, and it's been fantastic ... but there's the elephant in the room that you will have to write for 3 hours in the exam (School 8)

Quality

Teachers mainly expressed negative views regarding their experiences of *Quality* within the Framework for Junior Cycle. Analysis of the data suggests that teachers view quality largely from the perspective of content knowledge and the level/depth of content knowledge required for a Common Level examination. Concerns expressed within this principle appear to strongly align with the negative views expressed in relation to *Continuity and Development*.

One main negative theme was identified. These teachers believed that the quality at Junior Cycle had ‘dropped’ or ‘decreased’ since the introduction of the Framework for Junior Cycle. Some suggested that the Junior Cycle had been ‘dumbed down’, largely due to the removal of certain content areas within a subject and the nature of the examination questions. These teachers felt that the short, tick the box answers resulted in reduced quality. The lack of longer, essay-type questions in exams for certain subjects (e.g. English, History) was a particular concern in this regard.

I guess my one big concern is that French is now a common level paper and I really don't agree with that because of the standard. I think it's dumbing down the level of language (School 7)

What quality meant was a particular concern within the Special School, with teachers highlighting the struggle with ensuring consistent quality, particularly regarding evidence-based portfolios. They emphasized the need for clearer guidelines on what constitutes good evidence and more consistency across classes. For example, one teacher noted, ‘*Quality is an area we are constantly striving for in terms of evidence-based portfolios. Unfortunately, there are no guidelines for what the evidence should be, making it quite vague*’ (Special School).

Wellbeing

Teachers expressed mixed views regarding their experiences of *Wellbeing* within the Framework for Junior Cycle. Analysis of the data suggests that teachers view *Wellbeing* from the perspective of care within the school/school life, Wellbeing classes and the overall wellbeing of students (and/or related stress) throughout Junior Cycle.

One main theme reflecting positive views on this was identified within the data. When teachers spoke positively about the enactment of *Wellbeing* within the School they tended to

focus on the value and priority the school places on wellbeing. These teachers viewed their school, often even prior to the introduction of the Framework, as a caring place which places a high priority on students' wellbeing. These teachers often viewed wellbeing as now being considered a dimension of all teachers' roles, stemming across all subjects. The focus on related Wellbeing activities and events, throughout the school year, was considered effective by some. A greater focus on student centred pedagogical approaches and classroom discussion was also deemed helpful. For example:

Encouraging that chance in class to be more expressive about self-reflection elements ... that aural expression, that listening, that interaction among them, the think, pair, share. I think that is fundamental to mental health (School 4)

I think Wellbeing is looked at a lot more and I think that's positive ... in our school we have Wellbeing days and within every day, everyone is looking out for each other (School 7)

Wellbeing has lifted the school ... our Wellbeing coordinator, she has designed a programme based on the needs of our kids ... it is fantastic (School 9)

Wellbeing is incorporated into everything. For me, if it works as a programme, wellbeing will happen naturally. We have safe spaces and calm corners for safe spaces (Special School)

Similarly, three themes reflecting a more negative view of *Wellbeing* were identified. Again, the occurrence of the one positive theme is set against the more negative responses, hence teachers' views on this principle have been classified as mixed. Firstly, some teachers were dissatisfied with the approach taken to *Wellbeing*. These teachers felt that Wellbeing classes were not valued and/or were not effective. Some felt that such classes did not build resilience (as a form of wellbeing) and were not always valued by students. Some proposed that teachers (often untrained) did not like teaching Wellbeing classes. Others felt that the current focus on *Wellbeing* was 'overkill' and viewed as 'tick the box' (School 5), with students receiving too many Wellbeing related classes. Teachers in School 3, for example, suggested *Wellbeing* initiatives to be at times superficial or not taken seriously by students, with one teacher describing it as 'lip service'. Teachers in this school were sceptical about the actual

benefits of the current approach to Wellbeing classes, with concerns raised about whether these programmes have effectively reduced stress or improved students' mental health. One teacher summarised this sentiment by stating, *'I've never in my life seen the levels of anxiety that we're having in students'* (School 3). Similarly, a teacher in School 10 questioned, *'if we have 5 or 6 subjects such as Wellbeing, Digital Wellbeing, SPHE, CSPE, Religion, is it overcrowded? Are students seeing this as too much?'*. Some felt that the current approaches to Wellbeing classes *'wasn't teaching them resilience'* (School 1). The formal approach to Wellbeing was, at times, considered to have a negative impact on wellbeing within the wider school community e.g. *'Since it's become timetabled, we have lost so much in terms of wellbeing. I think it was a lot more when wellbeing was in the ethos in the school'* (School 2).

Secondly, some teachers believed that student wellbeing was not catered for within the new Junior Cycle, with the related workload causing significant stress and anxiety amongst students. For example, a teacher in School 5 felt that *'the number of CBAs at the moment is ridiculous and I really think that's impacting on wellbeing'*.

Thirdly, others were concerned that Wellbeing classes took time away from other classes, resulting in students have less time to explore a subject, often, according to some, without a related reduction in subject content. A teacher in School 8, for example, felt that *'the emphasis on wellbeing may impact teaching time for other subjects.'*

What changes would teachers like to see introduced to the Junior Cycle?

The majority of the changes suggested by teachers related to assessment. Firstly, some called for percentages to be allocated to CBAs. These teachers felt that the amount of time and effort students put into the CBAs should be acknowledged. Some also felt that CBAs were not taken seriously, and that students were not motivated to complete their CBAs to a high standard when the work did not contribute towards their final grade in the Junior Cycle.

Students I feel are demotivated... they are not placing an importance on it because they know none of the marks is going towards their end result (School 10)

You have two CBAs which are quite lengthy...but none of the marks for that is feeding into the practical which is ridiculous (School 2)⁹

In science, having CBA1 and it's not worth anything and a good bit of time and effort is gone into it ... I think they lack creativity and innovation when there's no reward ... I like the way it's going, but I don't feel that at the moment we are giving them credit for the things we are pushing. It's very hard to justify time spent on CBAs when they are not getting anything for it (School 7)

Secondly, some teachers called for changes to be made to the grading bands used in State Examinations. Teachers expressed two main concerns in this regard:

1. Some felt that the grading bands, specifically the 'merit' band, was too broad. Teachers felt that students who received 55% and those that received 74% should not be grouped in the same category. For example, a teacher in School 2 felt that *'the descriptors are too broad. Previously you had the grade ... what are the descriptors, that's difficult for students and parents.'* Similarly, a teacher in School 7 suggested that *'there's a large window of higher merits, but now they all land in the same place. You can land in the same place as someone doing 10% worse. I think a slight narrowing of the bands towards the top end [would be helpful]'*.
2. Some felt that it was too difficult for students to achieve a Distinction within Junior Cycle, with some suggesting that it was easier to achieve a H1 at Leaving Certificate than a Distinction at Junior Cycle. For example, a teacher in school 1 explained how *'this is a school where I would have had multiple A's in times gone by there, but there was one distinction'*.

Thirdly, some called for a return to higher and ordinary level, due to the concerns expressed above relating to the perceived impact of the Common Level exam. A teacher in School 5 felt, for example, that *'there are students who could really excel at a higher standard than what they're being offered'* if a higher-level paper was available to them. Relatedly, teachers in the

⁹ It should be noted that some Junior Cycle subjects contain a practical component that is assessed and awarded marks by the SEC and as a result these subjects have a shorter final written examination.

Youth Reach believed that *'it would be very important if the questions were very clear and simple language'*.

Fourthly, a small number believed that students should only complete one CBA in each subject. A teacher in School 1, for example, felt that *'I think it's going to really affect their wellbeing if there is going to be two CBAs. It is just overwhelming. It is a huge anxiety for a lot of our students'*.

Next, a small number believed that a clear breakdown of marks awarded per question on the examination paper was required and called for the allocated marks for each question to be clearly outlined on the examination paper. These teachers felt that students did not know how detailed their responses should be and/or what the important questions in the examination were due to the absence of a marking scheme. A teacher in School 8, for example, felt that *'the marking scheme on the exam is not clear and that really doesn't help students nor teachers ... Having no marks on a paper is very stressful for students because they don't know how to manage themselves or manage their time'*.

Finally, a small number called for changes to how the curricula provision of *Wellbeing* was addressed in school, proposing, for example, that a less structured/formal approach with a greater focus on resilience could be a more effective approach to supporting and developing student wellbeing:

Maybe these [approaches to Wellbeing] could be workshops ... at various stages as opposed to having it as a period every week (School 3)

As reflected above, teachers were largely positive about *Creativity and Innovation* and *Engagement and Participation*, largely negative about *Quality* and expressed mixed (both positive and negative comments) relating to the remaining Principles of Junior Cycle. While *Continuity and Development* was classed as mixed, this principle did garner more negative comments than other mixed principles.

Summary of Part 2: Teachers Perspectives

Choice and Flexibility: Teachers expressed mixed views (a balanced proportion of positive and negative views) regarding their experiences of *Choice and Flexibility* within the Framework for Junior Cycle. Those that spoke positively about dimensions of *Choice and Flexibility* felt that CBAs supported and provided a space wherein students had choice within their learning. Some teachers felt there was now more choice within Junior cycle. These teachers felt, for example, that there was now more choice within their subject. Teacher felt they had a greater choice in the range of resources. Some also felt that students had greater choice in terms of how they wished to present their work, and also in terms of the subjects they could choose.

Three concerns were identified in terms of teachers' experiences of *Choice and Flexibility*. Firstly, teachers felt that choice was limited, and they did not experience greater choice as a result of the changes. Secondly, some were concerned about the lack of choice within the examination. Thirdly, some struggle with dimensions of choice, as, from their perspective, it left them unsure whether students were adequately prepared for the exam. Short Courses did not emerge as a key discussion point within this principle.

Continuity and Development: While teachers expressed mixed views regarding their experiences of *Continuity and Development*, their views tended to be more negative than positive. Teachers felt that students now developed important skills, often through the CBA that supported continuity. However, several teachers raised concerns about *Continuity and Development* from the perspective of progression to Senior Cycle. A small number of teachers raised concerns about the transition from primary to second level, often depending on the subject and the primary school a student attended.

The Special School faced difficulties in terms of *Continuity and Development*, specifically in identifying and supporting the progression of learners after Junior Cycle.

Creativity and Innovation: Teachers were more likely to express positive views regarding their experiences of *Creativity and Innovation* within the Framework for Junior Cycle. Three main themes reflecting positive views on this were identified within the data. Firstly, teachers believed that *Creativity and Innovation* were supported by the CBAs and secondly through the use of technology. Thirdly, teachers felt that *Creativity and Innovation* was supported through students presenting work in differing ways, with choice playing a role in this regard.

Those teachers who had concerns about the enactment of *Creativity and Innovation* at Junior Cycle raised two issues. Firstly, some were unsure whether all students, at Junior Cycle, were capable and interested in being creative. Secondly, some teachers struggled to be creative within subjects they perceived to be content heavy, resulting in limited space and time to engage in related activities, with the focus remaining (or returning) to the examination at the end of 3rd year.

Engagement and Participation: Teachers were more likely to express positive views regarding their experiences of *Engagement and Participation* within the Framework. Teachers felt that they were now using more group work, active learning, and student-centred approaches, which supported student engagement and participation. Three themes reflecting a more negative view of *Engagement and Participation* were identified. Those that were unsure whether this principle had been enacted at Junior Cycle felt that 1) not all students were open to or capable of working independently and with others effectively, 2) poor attendance impacted negatively on engagement and participation, 3) subject specification did not provide sufficient space and time for teachers (and students) to fully enact this principle.

Inclusive Education: Mixed views were expressed in relation to whether greater *Inclusive Education* was achieved. Four main themes reflecting positive views on this were identified within the data. Firstly, some felt that Junior Cycle is now more inclusive of different types of learners, including students with Special Education Needs and the introduction of Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes was considered helpful in this regard. Secondly, these teachers felt that they were differentiating learning more. Thirdly, some felt that they were now adopting differing teaching approaches and selecting curriculum to respond to the needs of their students. Finally, Common Level specifications, active learning approaches, project work and CBAs were deemed to support with the enactment of this principle. Concerns relating to *Inclusive Education* tended to focus on Common Level specifications. These teachers suggested that some students can struggle with a Common Level examination paper due to the language used in the paper, the nature of the questions and the length of the paper. Secondly, others felt that higher achieving students weren't challenged sufficiently by a Common Level examination paper.

Learning to Learn: Teachers expressed mixed views regarding their experiences of *Learning to Learn*. Two main themes reflecting positive views on this were identified within the data. Firstly, some teachers felt that they now place more emphasis on supporting students to develop skills relating to learning to learn, including reflection, critical thinking, and questioning skills. Secondly, CBAs were considered helpful in

supporting students to enhance their capacity to learn. Three main themes reflecting a more negative view of *Learning to Learn* were identified. Firstly, some felt that there was limited space and time within Junior Cycle to focus on dimensions of Learning to Learn. Secondly, some felt that certain students at Junior Cycle lacked capacity to engage in reflection and consideration on their learning. Thirdly, the fact that students would still ultimately be sitting an examination at the end of the three years posed a potential tension.

Quality: *Quality* was primarily viewed through the lens of subject content and teachers mainly expressed negative views regarding their experiences of *Quality* within the Framework. These teachers believed that the quality at Junior Cycle had ‘dropped’ or ‘decreased’ since the introduction of the Framework for Junior Cycle. This was largely perceived to be due to the removal of certain content areas within a subject and the nature of the examination questions.

Wellbeing: Teachers expressed mixed views regarding their experiences of the principle of *Wellbeing* within the Framework. When teachers spoke positively about the enactment of *Wellbeing* they tended to focus on the value and priority the school places on wellbeing. Others felt that Wellbeing classes weren’t valued and/or weren’t effective. Some teachers believed that student wellbeing was not catered for within the new Junior Cycle, with the related workload causing significant stress. Thirdly, others were concerned that Wellbeing classes took time away from other classes, resulting in additional stress.

Teachers identified a number of changes they would like to see occur at Junior Cycle, the majority of which related to dimensions of assessment. Teachers called for percentage to be allowed to the CBA; for the grading bands to be altered; for Higher and Ordinary level to be reinstated; for students to complete only 1 CBA per subject; for a clear marking scheme to be provided and for changes to occur in how Wellbeing classes are enacted.

Part 3: Observation of learning and teaching

Thirteen classes, across eight case study sites, were observed. This included 2 Business Studies classes, 1 Communication class (in the Special School), 1 English class, 2 Gaeilge classes, 2 Geography classes, 2 History classes, 1 Mathematics class and 2 Spanish classes. This included 4 first year classes, 5 second year groups and 4 third year classes.

It is important to note that this data captures a snapshot of teaching and learning at a particular time for particular teachers and students. While this data can provide some interesting perspectives, the observations offer cautious insights and are largely used for triangulation purposes, to support a more complex understanding of the other data sets. Teachers were volunteers, as described earlier in the report, therein they were aware in advance and had agreed, either with the research team or the principal, to enable their lesson to be observed. The extent to which this sample is representative of other teachers' practices in the case study schools and is unclear. Following the observation, as previously described, the researcher completed an 'Observation of Learning and Teaching' form, which provided a brief description of the classroom layout and an overview of the lesson in terms of the activities and resources utilised within the class.

All but one lesson took place in classrooms, which were surrounded by other classrooms, with seats and tables typically organised in rows of differing formations – all facing the white/blackboard. One mathematics observation took place in a science laboratory. The classroom walls were typically decorated with a variety of resources, including samples of students' work, posters relating to the Framework for Junior Cycle and supportive learning aids, i.e. definitions, translations of words or relevant quotes.

While approaches to learning and teaching varied across the observations and lessons were largely teacher-controlled, strong student engagement was evident in the majority of observed lessons. Teachers (n=7) drew on a range of individual, pair or group activities. Students in School 1, for example, worked in teams to complete a household budget. Students worked on the budget for a set period of time and once their time was up, they moved to a new budget and had to correct the previous group's work. Other observations showed evidence of attempts at group work, but with varying levels of engagement from students

(n=5), perhaps suggesting that students were not familiar with working in this way. These lessons (n=5) were either largely teacher-led Q&A's and/or individual work.

Learning Intentions and Success Criteria were rarely shared (n=3), and where they were, they were not discussed in detail or negotiated with students. One example of reflection and self-assessment was identified in the 2nd year Business Studies class in School 1, with students reflecting on their learning and identifying an ongoing area of concern at the end of the lesson. A number of teachers (n=5) made direct links between the learning in this class and the examination (in house or Junior Cycle) as a way of supporting learning, with two of the lessons being fully structured around examination papers/preparation.

A number of the observed lessons included creative activities. During the observation of a geography lesson in the Youthreach setting, for example, students were provided with a fictitious Facebook post regarding the development of a Quarry in the locality. Students were asked to make a reply, based on their existing knowledge, to the post. Students could choose, within a range of options, from whose perspective they would reply to the post.

Technology was used, at times, in different ways to support learning (n=4). Some teachers drew on technology to support learning through, for example, the integration of fun online games and activities. A Modern Foreign Language teacher in School 5, for example, shared a rap on YouTube through the target language and students were encouraged to stand, sing and move to the rap. Technology and the integration of quizzes and games frequently supported pacing of lessons as students could progress at their own pace through the games they choose (n=3). There was another instance where a teacher integrated subtitles into a video to include Ukrainian students into the lesson (School 10).

Teachers across the observed lessons (n=8) made strong links to past and future learning. Throughout the lessons, teachers often made links to something students had already learned, as a way of developing understanding and/or linked to future learning or activities such as an upcoming CBA. For example, an English teacher in School 9 who was teaching a Shakespearean play frequently asked questions that linked learning in the current scene to earlier scenes.

The atmosphere in the majority of classes (n=12) was relaxed, supportive and caring. Students appeared to be comfortable asking questions, seeking clarification and providing opinions within the observed lessons. Teacher-student relationships appeared to be positive and supportive.

Summary of Part 3: Observation of Learning and Teaching

The observation of learning and teaching can provide some understanding and cautious insights of related practices at Junior Cycle. While approaches to teaching and learning varied across the data set and remained largely teacher-controlled, these observations showed strong evidence of student-centred learning, through the use of a range of activities and differing forms of group work. Many teachers drew on creative approaches to support learning, through the use of technology, games and creative activities/resources. Strong evidence of a relaxed atmosphere emerged, with positive teacher-student relationships being evident within the observed lessons.

Part 4: Principals' Perspectives

School Principals were asked what principles they believed were most and least successfully embedded/enacted in the school. Across the 12 schools, and 12 interviews, principals were positive about *Wellbeing; Creativity and Innovation; Engagement and Participation, Learning to Learn* and *Quality*. Principals were neutral (or expressed mixed views) on *Choice and Flexibility* and *Inclusive Education*. Principals were more likely to express negative views on *Continuity and Development*.

Principals' comments varied for the majority of the eight principles, with limited consistency across the case study sites. This and the small number in this cohort (n=12) meant that few reoccurring themes were identified. What is highlighted below are themes emerging from a minimum of two school sites or more. Given that [Report 1](#) and [Report 3](#) provided a detailed overview of principals' perspectives and experiences of Junior Cycle, this section is purposely succinct, with priority afforded to student, teacher and parents views in the current report.

Choice and Flexibility

Principals expressed mixed views around *Choice and Flexibility*. Some principals felt that they could offer a good choice of subjects within Junior Cycle, while others felt there was more choice within subjects and also more freedom on how to deliver the content. School size (as discussed below) impacted here, at times.

There is more choice on what students can do within the classroom – in terms of texts there is more choice. From a teacher's perspective, there is more flexibility (School 10)

There is a bit of choice, but you are trying to get them through the curriculum ... your choice is in the delivery (Youth Reach)

A small number noted that they hadn't given sufficient space and consideration to Short Courses, which could enable more choice: *'we haven't introduced Short Courses ... we would struggle to fit them into the timetable ... no one has come looking to do it'* (School 5).

Continuity and Development

Principals were more likely to be negative about *Continuity and Development* than any other principle. This was the area with most commonality with nearly half of the school principals raising concerns around the continuity from Junior to Senior Cycle, as reflected in the excerpts below:

They do snippets of writing ... we definitely see a short fall there in terms of the literacy levels of our 5th and 6th years is not where they were with the old programme (School 5)

Too much is done for them at Junior Cycle. At Leaving Certificate, they need things like independent learning and many of them aren't ready for that. Its bridging that gap ... Junior Cycle is just a stage. How we transition to the next stage, just needs to be given a bit of thought (Youthreach)

Creativity and Innovation

Principals were largely positive about this principle. Some felt that students could show off their creativity more due to changes introduced at Junior Cycle. CBAs were viewed as supportive in this regard, as they offered '*a formal structure*' (School 2) for supporting creativity and were considered '*the main place it can come through*' (School 7). The principal in the Youthreach setting felt that the framework offered '*creative teachers ... freedom – you can get at things from different ways.*' The Special School, for example, '*made a few big efforts*' in terms of creativity but engaging with '*outside projects ... creative schools*' and found '*plenty of CPD around it*', which helped with the enactment.

While most were positive, a small number felt that it depended on the teacher, '*to give it the time that it needs*' (School 2) with some teachers continuing to teach in a didactic way, showing '*token engagement*' with the principle (School 5), while others utilise creative and student-centred pedagogical approaches.

Engagement and Participation

Principals were largely positive about this principle, with many feeling that students were more engaged and active in classrooms since the introduction of the Framework for Junior Cycle. CBAs were viewed as supporting positively in this regard.

The Junior Cycle is less of a hot topic now. Time has passed. Its more embedded. I think there is less resistance to it ... the framework helps you to embed interactive pedagogies in the classroom ... CBAs give you scope (School 2)

Students do seem to be engaged in their learning, enjoy their learning, feel they have a voice in their learning (School 7)

We make sure everyone is getting an opportunity to engage in whatever way they can ... you don't want to get into the habit of letting people opt out ... that is more a cultural one (Special School)

Attendance and support from the home was a concern in some contexts and was deemed to impact on levels of engagement and participation e.g. *'you don't have the support from home or the access to resources. The school has limited resources'* (School 10).

Inclusion

Principals expressed mixed views on the enactment of this principle. Some (particularly in Schools with DEIS status) felt that the Framework enabled them to adapt and tailor the programme to suit the needs of their students to support inclusion i.e. some students may complete a partial JC or may complete a L2LP. For example:

There is now a place within Junior Cycle for students to experience success (School 9)

This is very important here and more important than it ever was. We are getting a different type of child here now. We need to draw on culturally relevant curriculum. We need to consider inclusion in terms of gender identity. The CPD and resources are very, very good (Youthreach)

A small number of schools (n=2) felt this was an area they needed to develop further. As both schools were in affluent areas or had limited diversity in their student body, the school principals felt that they could improve the range and type of student attending the school,

therefore supporting inclusion. For example, the principal in School 1 explained how *‘while we say we are inclusive, and there are lots of areas in which we are inclusive, we haven’t looked at L2LP ... we haven’t had enough support to move forward with this’*.

Learning to Learn

Principals were largely positive about the enactment of this principle in their schools. Some principals felt that students showed greater understanding and awareness of their learning, how they learn and reflection on their learning. Others felt that students showed greater levels of independence in their learning. For example:

I am bowled over by student’s metacognition ... that is all because of the framework
(School 2)

Students have more ownership and autonomy in their own work (School 3)

This is the biggest change ... it’s the foundation for progression ... the skills we need to give our kids is to think independently ... confidence ... teamwork ... that is why I like the CBAs because it can give them independence (Youthreach)

Feedback was an area some felt they needed to give more time and consideration in order to support student learning, while others had begun to pursue this area in more detail recently. School 3, for example, were now looking at their reporting and feedback approaches, trying to align this with *‘the language of the Junior Cycle ... and using verbs from the Statements of Learning’* (School 3). This was deemed to impact on, *‘the quality of the reporting that is going out’*.

Some felt that despite the changes, the priority remained on the examination at the end of third year and *‘the exam wasn’t changed’* (School 3). This was deemed to impact on this principle. This is reflected in the excerpts below:

You are trying to get them through an exam because that is how they are going to be judged and that will open doors going forward (School 2)

The teachers are working towards an exam ... they are working towards getting half decent results (School 4)

I know we are looking at the Junior Cycle, but the Junior Cycle fits into the Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate fits into the points race. At long as the points race is there, I don't care what teaching and learning is there ... the content still needs to be covered and if you can learn something off by heart, you will still get the points and get what you want (School 7)

Quality

While principals were largely positive about the quality of the education they provided, this wasn't an area that they discussed in detail and if they did, the areas they focused on varied considerably. As a result, no common theme was identified across a number of principals. Those that spoke about quality noted:

- 1) Satisfaction with the quality of the education provided in their school
- 2) The potential of Subject Learning and Assessment Review (SLAR) meetings to support quality
- 3) The effectiveness of the Framework in ensuring all students, irrespective of context, get the same education as their peers
- 4) Quality can depend on the teacher
- 5) Lack of examples of CBAs in the early stages of the Junior Cycle changes which impacted on quality
- 6) The perceived disconnect with Senior Cycle and the associated negative impact on quality.

Wellbeing

Principals were largely positive about the enactment of *Wellbeing* with their school. Principals were largely supportive that *Wellbeing* extends across all subjects and was now viewed as every teacher's responsibility. Some also felt that different structures in the school can support wellbeing, such as the care team, timetabling, or transition/buddy systems. For example:

The Junior Cycle has definitely helped the focus on Wellbeing ... what the Junior Cycle has done is made it clear that it is everyone's responsibility (School 5)

We keep coming back to it, and we keep amending it every year ... it aligns with our schools' values and the language of the school's ethos ... we always felt that we did the care piece really well and the Junior Cycle gave us a structure to do that (School 9)

The timetabling of Wellbeing is an area principals/schools continue to work on and revise in terms of how they do it in a way that works for them. Some felt that what counts as Wellbeing hours was too restrictive and didn't allow schools to include day to day practices and events that they have always taken part in. Some called for the recognition of Wellbeing hours to become less formal to capture non-timetabled school activities. For example, the principal in School 2 argued that *'not everything we do for Wellbeing counts, as it is not formalised'*. Similarly, the School 5 principal felt that *'[the approach is] overly formalised and rigid – our priority was always wellbeing'*.

Others questioned how effective the focus on *Wellbeing* was and what impact it was having in terms of student stress levels and resilience. For example:

The value that is being put on the Junior Cycle isn't as significant ... there are arguments for and against this being a good thing ... I am all for wellbeing ... certainly, its good if its improving wellbeing but if you listen to teachers and students in 3rd year and all the efforts are made in terms of wellbeing and they are stressed ... Intention versus the reality ... the reality is it is posing more problems in wellbeing (School 2)

They are Wellbeinged [sic] out. They can do nothing for themselves now ... They have no resilience. They just can't cope ... they need to stand on their own two feet a bit more ... they are going to have to cope with things ... I just think its overdone ... complete overkill (School 4)

As reflected above, principals tended to be more positive than students, teachers and parents towards the enactment of the Principles of Junior Cycle. Principals were largely negative about Continuity and Development and expressed mixed views (both positive and negative

comments) relating to Choice and Flexibility and Inclusive Education. All other principles were classed as positive.

Summary of Part 4: Principals' Perspectives

Principals expressed mixed views around Choice and Flexibility. Some principals felt that they could offer a good choice of subjects within Junior Cycle. Principals were more likely to be negative about Continuity and Development than any other principle, due to the perceived gap between Junior and Senior Cycle. Principals were largely positive about Creativity and Innovation. Some felt that students could show off their creativity more due to changes introduced at Junior Cycle. Principals were largely positive about Engagement and Participation, with many feeling that students were more engaged and active in classrooms. Some felt that they could adapt and tailor the Framework to suit the needs of their students to support Inclusive Education. Principals were largely positive about the enactment of Learning to Learn, believing that students now showed greater understanding, awareness and reflection on their learning. Feedback was an area some felt they needed to give more time and consideration to. Some felt that despite the changes, the priority remained on the examination at the end of third year, impacting on the enactment of certain principles. While principals were largely positive about the quality of the education they provided, no common theme was identified. Principals were largely positive about the enactment of *Wellbeing* with their school, believing it is embedded in all subjects and is viewed as every teacher's responsibility.

Part 5: Parent Perspectives

Thirty parents, across 6 sites, volunteered to take part in an interview. Analysis of the parent interviews found that parents tended to speak positively about dimensions of the Framework related to *Engagement and Participation*. Themes related to *Learning to Learn* and *Choice and Flexibility* were commented on both positively and negatively whereas themes related to *Wellbeing, Continuity and Development* and *Quality* were mentioned negatively. Themes related to the principles of *Inclusive Education* and *Creativity and Innovation* did not emerge significantly from the analysis, indicating that they were not a common dimension of parents' experiences and conversations relating to Junior Cycle.

Many parents noted that their experiences at Junior Cycle varied depending on their child, with parents who had more than one child having different experiences. Their experiences appeared to vary based on how motivated, engaged, and communicative their child was. What is presented here are the reoccurring and dominant themes within the data.

What are parents' views and experiences of dimensions of the Junior Cycle (Principles)?

Choice and Flexibility

Parents had differing and mixed views in relation to dimensions of the Junior Cycle that related to *Choice and Flexibility*. Choice was largely understood in terms of the subjects that students could choose at Junior Cycle and in terms of what subjects were optional and compulsory. Views tended to differ depending on the school, with schools having different procedures and offerings in this regard. Those that spoke positively with regard to *Choice and Flexibility* tended to be satisfied with the range of subjects their child could pick from. For example, one parent felt that:

They have a huge range of subjects and while they may not like it themselves, having the 9 or 10 subjects is important ... there is enough of a variety these and it doesn't pigeonhole any student ... at a young age (Parent, School 3).

Others were concerned about the range of subjects their child could pick from at Junior Cycle and/or that they were ‘forced’ to take certain subjects, while other subjects they deemed more important were optional. These views are reflected in the following excerpts:

Making some of the subjects compulsory – I would question that (Parent, School 3)

Why is so much time given to Religion but not to Geography? ... I actually think Geography is way more important (Parent, School 5)

CBA and the choice students had in terms of selecting the focus of the CBA was noted positively by a number of parents. These parents felt, for example, ‘*that having that choice and autonomy was really good for CBAs ... [my child] did love having that choice*’ (Parent, School 1).

With the exception of a parent with a child in a Special School, Short Courses were not specifically mentioned by parents. This parent felt that ‘*Short Courses taught [my son] about new things. He learned a lot more information doing that short course than he would sitting down reading a book about Short Courses*’ (Parent, Special School).

Continuity and Development

While a small number of parents raised concerns about their child’s transition from primary to post-primary in terms of the number of subjects taken and content within those subjects, parents’ main concern in this regard related to the link and transition from Junior to Senior Cycle. These parents tended to view the main purpose of the Junior Cycle as a practice run in a state exam. Parents tended to be happy that their child got this ‘practice run’ so that their first state examination wasn’t the Leaving Certificate. For example, a parent in School 5, believed that ‘*it’s based on introducing them to the state exam ... the only relevance is that it’s a state exam*’, while another in School 3 believed that ‘*sitting the exam is a really beneficial learning experience*’.

These parents did feel that it was ‘*a big jump*’ (Parent, School 5) and ‘*a big gap*’ (Parent, School 3) between Junior and Senior Cycle and that students were not prepared for the nature and amount of learning required for the Leaving Certificate. These parents suggested that differences in the grading bands and terminology, Common Level specifications, the amount

of content and differences in the nature of the questions asked in the examination papers across the two programmes resulted in this gap. Parents commented, for example, that:

Is there too big of a gap in terms of what they are used to? What they are familiar with? They are doing a state exam and that's to get them used to doing a state exam. It is a stepping stone to the Leaving Certificate ... but should it be more aligned in terms of the marking? (Parent, School 4)

There is going to be a big jump now going into Senior Cycle ... I don't think they [the students] are prepared for the Leaving Certificate ... it is based on introducing them to the state exam, but I don't feel they are prepared for the Leaving Certificate. I don't think they are prepared for the big jump. Otherwise, the Leaving Certificate has to change a lot too. There is too much of a gap at the moment. I think there needs to be much more of a stepping stone into the Leaving Certificate ... otherwise what is the point of the Junior Cycle? (Parent, School 5)

You do need to know your stuff and you do need to be concise. At Leaving Certificate, that all changes. It is more essay questions (Parent, School 3)

Creativity and Innovation

This principle was not dominant across the interviews. Of those that did speak about issues relating to *Creativity and Innovation* (n=4), three did so positively, while one was mixed in their views. CBAs and pedagogical approaches were considered to support and develop creativity e.g. *'she really enjoyed the learning [in CBAs]. She loved it. it gave an opportunity for her to demonstrate, outside of that template approach, what she could do and what she was thinking'* (Parent, School 1). However, the nature of the examination paper was also a concern for this parent, with the parent questioning whether the 'template' approach to examination papers, with limited space to write responses, impacts negatively on creativity:

It gives a more limited opportunity to show your knowledge in a creative way. Life doesn't come with templates and that's a good thing ... it makes it easier to mark ... I do worry about that broader creative, critical thinking stuff like that (Parent, School 1)

Engagement and Participation

Parents were more likely to speak positively about dimensions relating to *Engagement and Participation*. These parents spoke about approaches to teaching and learning and the amount of active learning and group work their child engaged in at Junior Cycle, with such pedagogies being considered '*much more interactive*' (Parent, School 3) and with teachers noted to be putting more effort into '*trying to bring a fun element into School*' (Parent, School 3). Some of these parents suggested that their child saw relevance in what they were learning in school, especially when learning was practical and applied.

Some observed that their child seemed particularly engaged (or more engaged) in relation to the CBAs. External trips, events and activities were also considered positive in supporting engagement and participation. Parents welcomed this focus at Junior Cycle. For example, a parent in School 2 explained how during the CBAs their child '*is more engaged, rather than just homework and study ... it keeps momentum going for her ... rather than just memorising for the mocks. It is pieces [of work] she can focus on right now and it feels like that work is done*'. These views are further reflected in the excerpt from a different parent who said:

My daughter seems to be much more engaged ... she seems to be quite proud of her work ... She is more engaged, more involved. There does seem to be more of a student centric approach (Parent, School 4)

Inclusive Education

This principle was not strongly evident across the analysed interviews. Those that did speak about issues relating to inclusive education (n=7), tended to be more negative or have mixed views relating to the enactment of this principle. CBAs were deemed to support with *Inclusive Education*, however these parents felt that this could actually exasperate existing inequalities, especially if CBAs were completed at home. These are reflected below:

Especially with the CBA's is definitely opening up to a wider spectrum of needs that is required for education today ... it gives them an opportunity. They don't feel so alienated within the Junior cycle because the CBA is quite well balanced (Parent, School 2)

It's not a level playing field for everyone either ... we are able to support her ... I know that it's not the case everywhere (Parent, School 1)

It discriminates against a lot of kids. Is this ok, is this acceptable. If you don't have access to someone who can decipher what is going on in the project, your laptops, downloading, printing. This is a bit class sensitive for my liking ... I don't think it's fair (Parent, School 3)

Some also raised concerns around the lack of exemptions and accommodations for their child, especially in the Junior Cycle examination e.g. *'Why wouldn't you give it at second level when you do at third level ... he's not getting enough time to get it all out [within the exam] ... he's leaving marks behind because he runs out of time'* (Parent, School 8).

Learning to Learn

Parents had mixed views in relation to dimensions of the Junior Cycle that related to *Learning to Learn*. Those that spoke positively about aspects of this principle focused on the nature of the learning students engaged in and their capacity to apply their learning and skills to future work and life outside of school. Some parents also felt that the process of, and feedback from, CBAs positively impacted their child's capacity to develop related skills and understanding. Clarity on how to succeed within CBAs and exams was also noted by some. For example,

There was lots of useful feedback [from CBAs] ... it was really clear how the descriptor was arrived at ... it was thoughtful, it was sensitive ... it was encouraging ... it gave a focus for teachers in terms of conversations on students work (Parent, School 1)

They are given quite concrete advice on how to approach learning, how to approach questions ... there has been effort in terms of structure around approaching learning and assignments ... there is good feedback (Parent, School 3)

I think CBAs are a much better way of learning and representing knowledge, because it's not just memory based. It utilizes different skills ... its' more researching, more comprehension, analytical thinking without that pressure of 'this all needs to be done in a short period of time'... I think that is much more valuable for a learning process, learning how to think. I think that it teaches people how to think better than exams, because exams are usually just memorisation (Parent, School 7)

The parents who raised concerns related to this principle focused on their child's understanding of the learning process and the schools' perceived lack of support in this regard. These parents explained, for example, how, *'they never learned how to revise properly. It was very minimum'* (Parent, School 4) and *'I don't think my child has learned how to learn'* (Parent, School 8). This is further reflected in the excerpt below:

They don't know the process of studying and they don't seem to know really how much is an appropriate expectation of how much to study. So, more direction there would be helpful. [my child] doesn't seem to know how to do it. He is reading, he would read all of the work. I told him to take notes – that was new information for him. He doesn't seem to have a structured approach on what activities he should do on how to study and learn, and I don't think it's fair to expect them to figure it out themselves (Parent, School 7)

These parents called for a greater focus on *'studying techniques from first and second year'* (School 1). Some felt that the focus on learning remained on memorising for an exam, as reflected below:

The actual learning itself ... taking notes, underlining stuff ... I don't know what the answer is, but I am sure it's not the same type of learning we did 30 years ago, which is notes, notes, notes, write, write, write instead of really receiving the information, thinking about it. Whereas you are writing these notes so you can cram at the end of the year rather than learning as you go (Parent, School 5)

Some parents questioned how much has changed in relation to learning at Junior Cycle. For example, *'teaching and learning hasn't changed massively – just the ways around it regarding CBAs and it's a bit more tech [focused] but you still have to learn your French, you still have to learn your verbs'* (Parent, School 1).

Quality

While this principle was less evident across the analysed data, a small number of parents did raise concerns relating to dimensions of *Quality*. These concerns tended to focus on what parents perceived as a simplified Junior Cycle, where students *'can do well without much effort'* (Parent, School 2). These parents felt that students expected high results without

necessarily having put in the effort or without sufficient depth in subject knowledge, potentially creating difficulties at Senior Cycle (as raised in the Continuity and Development section above). One parent, for example, whose child received a higher merit in a subject questioned this, stating *'if I was rating her, I wouldn't have given her a higher merit ... the grades aren't a reflection of the work put in'* (Parent, School 2). Others stated, for example, that:

I was surprised by how dumbed down it is really. It's not as hard as it used to be ... they don't do essays anymore ... the basic standards have dropped ... I don't think their knowledge is as good (Parent, School 5)

The syllabus is quite simplified. It's quite dumbed down. They shouldn't be expecting the 90 or 100 but most of them are getting it, but then they are told they won't get distinctions ... she is going into 5th year thinking she is getting 625 points ... the stuff they get marks for in Junior Cycle is way too easy ... there isn't much depth. It is barely touching the iceberg on a couple of topics, whereas what they know isn't great (Parent, School 3)

Some also believed that grading bands impacted student motivation. These parents felt that the range of the merit band impacted negatively on students' effort. For example, *'you could strive and get 74 and equally get by on 56%. There is no motivation there to go that extra mile because you are going to get the same result ... there is no mass on the merit'* (Parent, School 3). The perceived broadness of the merit band made it difficult for these parents to determine where their child 'was at' when going into Senior Cycle: *'You've no idea of where they are [within the merit band] ... as a parent you can't see where they are at for Leaving Certificate ... you can use all these lovely terms like merit, but at the end of the day, where are we at?'* (Parent, School 3).

Some also felt that the value and importance of the Junior Cycle had been reduced. This, in their opinion, was due to the delay in releasing the SEC results and less importance being placed on it at school level. According to these parents, this has resulted in a *'nobody cares attitude towards the Junior Cycle ... there is a "it means nothing attitude"'* (Parent, School 2)

and *'they [the results] really mean nothing. [my child] got her results. There was a bit of fuss over it and then nothing'* (Parent, School 3).

Wellbeing

Dimensions relating to the principle of *Wellbeing* were a concern for a number of parents. Those that spoke about *Wellbeing* raised a number of related points. Some felt that CBAs, while frequently considered a positive dimension in many ways, added stress and workload to their child's Junior Cycle experience, without taking pressure away from the final exam. This was deemed to impact negatively on students' wellbeing. These parents felt that the focus still remained on the final exam, which itself brought a certain level of stress. For example:

I thought the workload was quite a bit. It is a lot for them. It is a lot of balls to keep in the air ... [my child] did get stressed a few times around the workload. She did learn how to cope with it ... I think the CBAs are fabulous, but it does seem like they have come in on top of what was already there (Parent, School 1)

Others felt that there was either too much focus on *Wellbeing* classes within the Junior Cycle and/or the approach taken wasn't always effective. Some felt that the amount of *Wellbeing* classes *'is probably a bit excessive'* (Parent, School 3), with this parent continuing to explain how the amount of *Wellbeing* classes has impacted negatively on their child's wellbeing:

My child is heavily involved in sport. One evening, she had athletics training, came home, quick shower, back out for a match. She came home from the match at about 10 at night and she said, 'oh no, I've Wellbeing homework to do' and she cried ... She has also said 'my mindfulness colouring is stressing me out!' I see the benefit of it but are we targeting the audience in the right way, at the right time? I don't know (Parent, School 3)

Some parents felt, for example, that wellbeing should be integrated across the curriculum and applied rather than having *Wellbeing* classes that were viewed as a *'doss class'* (Parent, School 8), and they are *'talking about talk ... they are bored. They don't engage well with it'* (Parent, School 3).

A focus on resilience, as a core dimension of one's wellbeing, was considered important by some – something these parents considered to be lacking in the current system. For example, a parent in School 2 felt that currently the message is *'oh, don't be putting stress on them. Life isn't like that. You are going to get hiccups and ramps along the way. It is all about Wellbeing, ya, but life is tough'*. Similarly, a parent in School 3 questioned, *'Are we setting our children up for a very idyllic world ... you will have ups and downs in life but that is just life ... a little bit of resilience is no harm'* (Parent, School 3).

Those that spoke positively about issues relating to this principle specifically noted the school's care team and the range of activities, events, and themed weeks their child engaged in on wellbeing related topics throughout Junior Cycle. These parents, for example, *'really feel that the teachers care'* (Parent, School 1) and believe that the school *'have a great care team and like that, that's a big deal in in the School and I find that really good'* (Parent, School 1).

What changes would parents like to see happen at Junior Cycle?

Parents were asked what, if any, changes they would like to see introduced to Junior Cycle. Parental views were quite diverse; however, four main changes were identified within the data which are now presented in order of their prominence in the interviews.

Firstly, parents called for focus to be given to particular topics that they felt lacked sufficient attention within Junior Cycle at present. The range of areas were diverse and focused on a range of life skills, learning and study skills, ICT skills, social and team building skills, sustainability, racism, and philosophy.

Secondly, some called for greater weighting to be attached to the CBA. These parents believed that, given the time and effort their child put into the CBA, this work should be reflected in the final overall grade they receive for the Junior Cycle and might alleviate some of the pressure students can experience around the final exam:

[The CBAs] didn't actually add anything to the score. If they could do continuous assessment that would go towards the final score, that would take some of the pressure off them ... if there was percentage that counted towards the final results, to take the pressure off the kids ... rather than it being just an added page (Parent, School 1)

Thirdly, some parents called for changes to be made to the grading bands within Junior Cycle. While a small number raised concern about the low levels of distinction received in a subject, the main concern for these parents was the perceived broadness of the merit band, as previously discussed. Parents suggested that this band should be revised. For example, one parent felt that the current approach wasn't *'fair on the students. Give them the actual percentage they got'* (Parent, School 3), with another parent in the same school indicating that as a result of the merit band:

You've no idea where they are [within the merit band] ... as a parent you can't see where they are at for Leaving Certificate ... you can use all these lovely terms like merit, but at the end of the day, where are we at? (Parent, School 3)

Finally, parents noted concerns regarding the lack of focus and priority afforded to oral language dimensions within MFL and Gaeilge and called for 'orals' to be reintroduced at Junior Cycle. One parent from School 4, for example, suggested that:

The languages, there should be an independent oral assessment as part of the Junior Cycle ...I don't know that they fully understand that they are languages that you can communicate in ... The primary function of the language would be the spoken word ... without it, the language is compromised. It's too formal. You are too concerned with being correct that you aren't focusing on the communication of it.

As reflected above, parents were largely positive about *Engagement and Participation*, largely negative about *Continuity and Development*, *Quality* and *Wellbeing* and expressed mixed views (both positive and negative comments) relating *Choice and Flexibility* and *Learning to learn*. While parents did not make any substantial comments relating to *Creativity and Innovation* and *Inclusive Education*, those that did speak about *Creativity and Innovation* were slightly more positive, while those that spoke about issues relating to *Inclusive Education* were slightly more negative.

Summary of Part 5: Parents perspectives

Analysis of the parent interviews found that parents tended to speak positively about dimensions of the Framework related to *Engagement and Participation*. Themes related to *Learning to Learn* and *Choice and Flexibility* were commented on both positively and negatively whereas themes related to *Wellbeing, Continuity and Development* and *Quality* were mentioned negatively. Themes related to the principles of *Inclusive Education* and *Creativity* and *Innovation* did not emerge significantly from our analysis, indicating that they were not a common dimension of parents' experiences and conversations relating to Junior Cycle.

Parents had differing and mixed views in relation to *Choice and Flexibility*. Those that spoke positively tended to be happy with the range of subjects their child could pick from. Others were concerned about this range of subjects and/or that they were 'forced' to take certain subjects. The choice students had in selecting the focus of the CBA was noted positively. With the exception of a parent with a child in a Special School, Short Courses were not specifically mentioned by parents.

While a small number of parents raised concerns about their child's transition from primary to post-primary, parents' main concern regarding *Continuity and Development* related to the transition to Senior Cycle. These parents felt there was a gap between Junior and Senior Cycle and that students were not prepared for the nature and amount of learning required for the Leaving Certificate.

Parents did not frequently discuss dimensions relating to *Creativity and Innovation*. Those that did felt that CBAs supported in this regard, while the continued focus on a final examination was deemed to impact negatively on Creativity.

Parents were more likely to speak positively about dimensions relating to *Engagement and Participation*. These parents spoke about approaches to teaching and learning and the amount of active learning and group work their child engaged in at Junior Cycle. Some observed that their child seemed engaged (or more engaged) with and during the CBAs. While CBAs were deemed to support with *Inclusive Education*, some felt that this could actually exasperate existing inequalities, especially if CBAs were completed at home.

Parents had mixed views in relation to dimensions of the Junior Cycle that related to *Learning to Learn*. Those that spoke positively focused on the nature of the learning students engaged in and their capacity to apply their learning and skills to future life and learning. The parents who raised concerns focused on their child's understanding of the learning process and the schools' perceived lack of support in this regard.

While parents were less likely to discuss issues relating to *Quality*, a small number of parents raised on what they perceived as a simplified Junior. Some also believed that grading bands impacted student motivation, while others felt that the value and importance of the Junior Cycle had been reduced.

Those that spoke about *Wellbeing* raised a number of concerns. Some felt that CBAs, while frequently considered a positive dimension in many ways, added stress and workload to their child's Junior Cycle experience, without taking pressure away from the final exam. These parents felt that the focus still remained on the final exam, which itself brought a certain level of stress. Others felt that there was either too much focus on Wellbeing classes within the Junior Cycle and/or the approach taken wasn't always effective.

Parents identified a number of changes they would like to see occur at Junior Cycle. Parents identified a number of additional areas/topics they would like to see included at Junior Cycle. Parents also called for percentages to be allocated specifically to CBAs. They also called for changes to take place to aspects of the grading bands and for languages to have an oral dimension at Junior Cycle.

Section 4: Key Issues and Ongoing Themes

This section briefly considers the key insights that can be taken from the second round of case study visits. Four perspectives were explored within these visits, those of students, teachers, principals and parents, supported by the observations of learning and teaching. These perspectives sometimes aligned, and sometimes differed, nonetheless there are certain insights that can be gained from these viewpoints. The findings and all the various views on the Principles of Junior Cycle are not revisited here – rather attention is given to some overarching themes.

A move to more active learning?

While students had mixed views regarding *Engagement and Participation*, this principle appears to be the one most evident within Junior Cycle. Teachers indicated that their teaching had changed, and was more interactive, supporting students' engagement. Parents and principals views aligned with this. While students' reported experiences are less supportive of this view, we do see differences between the student survey responses from the first and second round of case study visits, identifying a greater move towards pair work within Junior Cycle¹⁰. The greater level of engagement perceived by teachers/parents may largely be due to CBA-related activities, outside of which students experience more teacher-led classrooms. Irrespective, it does appear as if teachers are, to at least some extent and at certain stages, engaging in more student-centred activities and group work as a result of the Framework.

The centrality of the CBAs in supporting many of the intentions of the changes

CBAs appear to be a vehicle through which students can experience a number of the principles. Participants, for example, suggested that CBAs provide students (and teachers) with *Choice and Flexibility*, support them to be creative and innovative and enable them to develop skills (e.g. independent and research skills) that they can use in their future learning

¹⁰ The number of students indicating that they work on their own all/most of the time decreased between case study visit one and two (77.9% versus 67.9%) while the number of students reporting working with one classmate all/most of the time increased (24% versus 29.6%) across timepoint 1 and 2 respectively

and work life. CBAs also appear to support inclusion, through ensuring, for example, that students on the L1L2 programme could participate with CBAs with other students.

While the lack of weighting for CBAs in the final grade was a concern for many, it is unclear what impact allocating such percentages specifically to CBAs would have. Changes have consequences, often beyond what is envisaged by curriculum developers (Settlage & Meadows, 2002; Ormond, 2011) and while it may be perceived that simply allocating marks from the CBA towards the final grade will fix this, such an action may impact in other ways. At one level, for example, allocating percentages to the CBAs may alleviate some dimensions of the stress/workload, as students work in CBAs goes towards their final grade. However, it could also increase this stress/workload, as students become focused on achieving the highest grade possible (Banks & Smyth, 2015; Hennessy & Nogueira, 2024). Currently, CBAs appear to provide a space for creativity, freedom, choice and inclusion. One potential reason why they do so may be because they aren't directly linked to a student's overall grade in the Junior Cycle. If such percentages were allocated, such space and freedom may reduce as students (and teachers/parents) become focused on the grade, with the process of learning becoming secondary (Hennessy & Nogueira, 2024).

Wellbeing, academic stress and workload

The enactment of certain principles was a consistent concern across the data set, particularly *Wellbeing*. The findings indicate that the enactment of *Wellbeing*, and the capacity of the Framework to support students' wellbeing, warrants consideration (see also Nohilly & Tynan, 2022). While the student survey data suggests that students feel that their wellbeing was supported by the school, academic stress and workload were a key aspect of the concern, exacerbated by the additional workload from CBAs. It is important to note that the survey data suggests that TY/5th, reflecting on their experience, felt better able to manage the workload. Irrespective of the year group however, workload and stress were, yet again, dominant themes within this round of case study visits.

The approach to Wellbeing classes was also a concern for many teachers, students and parents, and these classes weren't always considered effective (see Fattore & Mason, 2009; Ryan, 2018). There was a feeling that the enactment of the principle of *Wellbeing* should place

a greater focus on developing resilience amongst students, helping them deal with issues relevant to their lives.

A continued focus on terminal examinations and ‘dry run’ for the Leaving Certificate

A key concern regarding the changes to the Framework for Junior Cycle was *Continuity and Development* with Senior Cycle and students’ preparedness for Leaving Certificate. *Quality* at Junior Cycle was also critiqued in this regard. Students, and frequently parents, saw the Junior Cycle as an opportunity to gain experience of a state examination, to assist them in sitting the Leaving Certificate examination. The findings indicate that assessment, specifically the terminal examination, remains a central concern and priority of the Junior Cycle experience. The greater focus on individual work as students’ progress through the Junior Cycle is perhaps reflective of this (Smyth, 2009). The terminal assessment appears to impact on the enactment of a number of the principles in differing ways. For example, the lack of choice in the examination paper appears to impact on *Engagement and Participation*, as teachers believe they need to cover all aspects of the specification. Similarly, parents and students believed that the focus on the final examination limited students’ capacity to be creative (Hennessy & Nogueira, 2024). It is worth noting that creativity is consistently an area students called for a greater focus on.

Dominant Beliefs

Beliefs and values are central to any change process and if societal, school and individual beliefs do not align with those underpinning a proposed change, deep change is unlikely to occur (Fullan, 2016). Several dominant beliefs emerged across this data set which appear to influence the manner in which the Framework is being enacted. One belief that appears prominently across the data is the value and importance placed on subject content and content knowledge. While the Framework for Junior Cycle aimed to achieve a balance between learning subject knowledge and developing a wide range of skills and thinking abilities, the acquisition of such skills does not appear to be seen as important compared to subject content knowledge. Beliefs about student abilities may also be limiting (Charteris and Smardon, 2019). Some teachers believed that students weren’t always capable of engaging in the types of learning supported by the Framework i.e. being creative, taking responsibility

for their learning and working effectively in groups. Acknowledging the varied and frequently challenging contexts teachers work in, greater consideration may need to be given to exploring specific dominant beliefs at times of curriculum change – particularly where these societal beliefs do not align with those of the proposed change. If, for example, a focus on Key Skills remains a priority, consideration would need to be given to beliefs around what constitutes worthwhile knowledge. If a focus on creativity and students taking responsibility for their own learning remains a core priority, consideration may need to be given to some teachers' views in relation to students' capacity to engage in these types of learning. As always, CPD, particularly whole school CPD, plays a central role in this regard (Kelchtermans, et al. 2004; dePaor, 2016; Ucan, 2016). As reported in previous interim reports, assessment is also central to these dominant beliefs, with assessment determining and reflecting what is valued. Coherency between the intention of the changes and the role and mode of assessment are central to support enactment. These three beliefs, the centrality of assessment, an emphasis on subject content over skills and concerns about students' abilities to engage in more independent learning, intersect and overlap. For example, beliefs about the importance of subject content influence beliefs about what are appropriate modes of assessment and similarly beliefs about students' abilities influence views around assessment and what constitutes learning. It is arguably the interaction between these beliefs and the Principles of the Framework Junior Cycle that explains the gap between the intentions of the curriculum and how it is ultimately experienced by students.

The silences

What gets discussed during data collection can inform us about people's views and experiences, as well as their perceptions on the meaning, intention and priority regarding a curriculum change (Fullan, 2016). What doesn't get talked about, the indicative silences, also tells us something (McCormack et al. 2020). It is interesting to note that Common Level specifications and grading bands were not commonly discussed by students across focus groups. Short Courses did not emerge as a dominant area for discussion or consideration amongst most of the data sets. While inclusion and inclusive education was mentioned by some, often if it was specifically relevant to their context, it wasn't a dominant discussion point. Another aspect not frequently mentioned was the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement

(JCPA). This may indicate that the attempts to broaden the picture of reporting of students' achievements, beyond a concern around grading, has not been achieved. The concerns regarding the use of grade descriptors, and specifically the breadth of the merit band in grading, would support this contention.

Interconnective nature of the Principles of Junior Cycle

While perhaps understandable, it is interesting to note that the ways in which participants spoke about a principle and the examples they drew on highlight how interconnected the principles are within students' and teachers' experiences. Students and teachers, for example, spoke about how choice within learning can support creativity. Similarly, group and project work appears to engage students in their learning and support inclusive classrooms. Issues or concerns in certain areas impact on other areas. If the principles as currently outlined remain, consideration may need to be given to how changes and/or concerns relating to one principle impacts on the enactment and experiences of others. This perhaps suggests the need to consider the changes and related principles from a systematic and holistic perspective, focusing on the 'big' picture of the changes and the interconnectivity of the changes.

Looking forward - The final report

This fourth interim report concludes the data collection phase of the study. The next and final report will present the key overarching findings of the four years of the study. These key findings will be set against the intentions of the Framework, the wider curriculum change research literature and the change context surrounding its implementation. It will also explore the overarching insights of the research study.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Student focus group and description of principles

1. Exploring the principles underpinning Junior Cycle (5 minutes)

- . students enter the room, which has been set up with 8 posters, reflecting the 8 principles underpinning the Framework for Junior Cycle. The name of each principle is on the top of each poster and a short definition/description of each principle is in the middle of the poster (please see below).
- . Students are given 5 minutes to read each poster so that they are familiar with what the intentions of the curriculum change was and can ask the researchers specific questions in this regard.

2. Considering your view/adding to the posters (10 minutes)

- . Students are asked to contribute and add to each poster, be it in words or images that reflects their experiences of each principle at junior cycle. They do this individually to begin with and will be encouraged to add as much as they wish to as many posters as they wish.

3. Shared discussion (40 minutes)

- . Led by the facilitators, students are guided through a shared group discussion on each principle. The facilitator will use the following prompts:
 - . What do you understand this principle as being about? What does it mean to you?
 - . How is this principle evident (or not) in your school/at junior cycle? In what ways do you experience this principle at junior cycle? Can you give me some examples? If not, why not?
 - . Which of the 8 principles is most evident (common) at junior cycle? Why did you pick that one?
 - . Which of the 8 principles are least evident (common) at junior cycle? Why did you pick that one?

4. Suggested changes/future piece:

- . What changes, if any, need to happen at junior cycle for you to experience these principles more?
- . Any other comments

5. Any other comments?

WELLBEING:

My experiences at Junior Cycle have supported my physical, mental, emotional, and social wellbeing.

LEARNING TO LEARN:

My experiences at Junior Cycle have helped me to learn independently and prepared me for challenges later in my life.

CHOICE AND FLEXIBILITY:

I have had a wide range of learning experiences at Junior Cycle. I have had freedom and choices in my learning.

QUALITY :

I experience a high-quality education at Junior Cycle, where all students are encouraged to achieve.

CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION:

My learning experience at Junior Cycle allow me to experiment, to create and to be innovative.

ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION:

My experience at Junior Cycle makes me want to get involved in learning. I can link my learning at Junior Cycle to my life outside of school.

CONTINUITY AND DEVELOPMENT:

My experiences at Junior Cycle connect my past learning with my future learning and supports development of my learning.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION:

I have felt included in all learning experiences. Experiences at Junior Cycle give all students a chance to participate in and benefit from their learning.

Appendix 2: Teacher/Principal Interview Schedule

The research instruments are framed around the 8 principles underpinning the Framework for Junior Cycle, as outlined below:



Teacher interviews:

The last time we visited the school, we spoke with teachers about their views, experiences, and concerns with aspects of the Framework for Junior Cycle. These range of views were published in our detailed second interim report. We expect with curriculum change that some aspects will be implemented, others won't, and some will be altered in the implementation. For this visit, we are interested in exploring in more detail, what aspects of the framework are being implemented as intended, which aren't and why that might be the case. We have framed this discussion around the principles underpinning the Framework for Junior Cycle (teachers will be provided with a copy of the 8 principles, as outlined in figure 1 above)

1. The Framework for Junior Cycle has now gone through a full cycle with exams last year. Has this had any impact on your/teachers/students views and experiences of the framework? Why/Why not?
2. Which of the 8 principles underpinning the framework for Junior cycle have been fully embedded? Why do you think these have been fully embedded? How have they been embedded? Can you give some examples of this?
3. Which of the 8 principles underpinning the framework for junior cycle haven't been fully embedded? Why do you think these haven't been fully embedded? In what ways have they been implemented? What needs to happen for this principle to be implemented as intended?
4. Have any principles been implemented in a way that was different from intended? Can you give me some examples? (question 4 may have answered this)
5. Any other comments?

Leader interviews (principal or their nominee)

The last time we visited the school, we spoke with you, teachers and students about their views, experiences, and concerns with aspects of the Framework for Junior Cycle. These range of views were published in our detailed second interim report. We expect with curriculum change that some aspects will be implemented, others won't, and some will be altered in the implementation. For this visit, we are interested in exploring in more detail, what aspects of the framework are being implemented as intended, which aren't and why that might be the case. We have framed this discussion around the principles underpinning the Framework for Junior Cycle (principals will be provided with a copy of the 8 principles, as outlined in figure 1 above)

1. Before we speak to the principles, how has the roll out of the framework for Junior cycle been since my last visit? Since Post Covid restrictions have been lifted? What has changed? What is easier/more difficult?
2. The Framework for Junior Cycle has now gone through a full cycle with exams last year. Has this had any impact on your/teachers/students views and experiences of the framework? Why/Why not?
3. Which of the 8 principles underpinning the framework for Junior cycle have been fully embedded? Why do you think these have been fully embedded? How have they being embedded? Can you give some examples of this?
4. Which of the 8 principles underpinning the framework for junior cycle haven't been fully embedded? Why do you think these haven't been fully embedded? In what ways have they been implemented? What needs to happen for this principle to be implemented as intended?
5. Any other comments?

Appendix 3: Observation sheet

Year group:
Number of students:
Subject/topic:
Description of classroom (room type; desk layout; resources on the wall/room; lighting):
Description of lesson (i.e. student activities; teacher activities; nature of engagement (individual, peer to peer, group, teacher-led))
Resources used during the lesson:
Additional comments/observations

Appendix 4: Parent interview schedule

Parent interview

1. From your perspective, how does your child experience Junior cycle? What have you observed in terms of your child's experience of Junior Cycle?
2. What surprised you?
3. What did you expect to observe but didn't?
4. What would you like to see more of? Why?
5. What changes would you like to see happen, why?
6. Any other comments?