



NCCA

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
Curaclaim agus Measúnachta
National Council for
Curriculum and Assessment

Press Release for *Children's School Lives* (CSL) study

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) today welcomes the publication of the first two reports from the *Children's School Lives* Study:

- *Children's School Lives – An Introduction, Report No. 1*
- *Experiences of Remote Teaching and Learning in Ireland During the COVID-19 Pandemic (March – May 2020).*

Initiated in 2018, *Children's School Lives* is an exciting and unique research study which follows 4,000 children in 189 schools through their primary school years to learn, in detail, about and from their experiences. The innovative study design and mixed methods approach draw on significant expertise and experience, nationally and internationally, in longitudinal research. It is carried out by University College Dublin's (UCD) School of Education on behalf of the NCCA.

Minister for Education Norma Foley TD said: "I welcome the research being published by the NCCA and UCD's School of Education today which is a significant study into primary education in Ireland. This innovative research gives a unique insight into the experiences of primary school children and will further inform policy making within this crucial area."

Report 1 introduces us to the children and schools participating in *Children's School Lives*. It details aspects of their lives such as their place of birth; mother tongue; social, cultural and material resources; their family structure; home learning environment; and their involvement in extra-curricular activities. The report also provides insights into their experiences of attending primary school by providing findings such as:

- children's access to and use of digital technology
- children's attitudes towards their learning in different subjects
- teachers' rate of enjoyment of teaching different subjects.

Report 2, *Experiences of Remote Teaching and Learning in Ireland During the COVID-19 Pandemic (March – May 2020)* captures what it was like for children, their

school leaders, teachers and parents at the height of the first national lockdown in Ireland in 2020. The data gathering for this report was conducted mainly online. A total of 149 schools, 123 principals, 85 teachers, 418 parents, and 548 children participated. The report provides important insights into

- preparedness for teaching and learning digitally
- opportunities and challenges for teaching the curriculum
- engagement of children in remote learning as well as the emotional experiences of remote schooling.

Noting the significance of research for the work of the NCCA, Professor Mary O'Sullivan, NCCA Chair, said: 'Both reports make an important contribution to the NCCA's commitment to sharing research evidence widely to stimulate and inform national and international debate on critical issues in education.' Commenting on the important role the study will play in the Council's work, Arlene Forster, NCCA CEO noted: 'The *Children's School Lives* study is contributing to a strong evidence base for the NCCA's high-level review of the primary curriculum in helping to ensure that full account is taken of children's experiences and perspectives on what matters to them in their young lives. Along with the perspectives of teachers, school leaders, parents and the wider school community, this will help us in the NCCA to ensure that the next iteration of the primary curriculum can provide a strong foundation for children to thrive, flourish and realise their full potential during childhood and into the future. In this way, the study acts as an important bridge connecting what happens in classrooms and schools with policy formulation.' Commenting on the significance of the study, Professor Dymphna Devine, a Lead Researcher on the study at the UCD School of Education noted: '*Children's School Lives* provides a robust evidence base, rooted especially in the voices of children, of what is happening in our primary schools. It highlights the centrality of primary schools to community in Ireland, including during times of national crisis, and the breadth and diversity of experiences that exist across our primary school sector. It provides a unique window with which to capture change in children's experiences over time that will be instrumental to evidenced based curriculum reform.'

The NCCA expresses deep and sincere thanks to the children, their parents and families, and to all their teachers and school leaders in the participating schools across the country for agreeing to share their stories for the duration of the study. The NCCA also thanks and commends the work of the UCD Research Team and looks forward to future annual reports from the study so that we can continue to learn, in detail, about children's lived experiences of primary school.

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Notes to Editors

You can access further information on the *Children's School Lives (CSL) Study* by visiting www.cslstudy.ie

The *Year One Report and Experiences of Remote Teaching and Learning in Ireland During the COVID-19 Pandemic (March – May 2020)* can be accessed on this website.

Contacts:

Professor Dympna Devine, UCD School of Education, at 086 3713058

or dympna.devine@ucd.ie

Associate Professor Jennifer Symonds, UCD School of Education, at 089 4086916

or Jennifer.symonds@ucd.ie

Arlene Forster, CEO, NCCA, at 087 635 3658 or arlene.forster@ncca.ie

Background information to the study:

The *Children's School Lives* (CSL) study was launched on October 25, 2018 and is significant as it is the only nationally representative study of primary school experiences with children, parents, principals and teachers linked together by classrooms and schools. The study is carried out by the University College Dublin's (UCD) School of Education on behalf of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

Children themselves—their lived experiences and their voices—are at the heart of this ground-breaking study. The first of its kind in Ireland, the research is generating rich, in-depth insights into what it's like to be a child in primary school in the third decade of the twenty-first century. Relationships are integral to high quality educational experiences in children's formative years and the study is helping to illuminate how their interactions and experiences shape and are shaped by schools as communities, institutions, and as a system.

The study follows two cohorts of children. One cohort began the study in the preschool year prior to school entry and will finish in second class, and a second cohort started in second class in primary school and will finish in first year in post-primary school. Focusing on themes such as engagement; school and teaching cultures; transitions; wellbeing; equality, diversity and inclusion; and learning outcomes, *Children's School Lives* enables us to hear directly from children across this diverse school population. The study also focuses on the voices of their teachers, school leaders, parents and, in some cases, their grandparents as we learn about the children's experience of moving from preschool to primary, of growing and learning through the eight years of primary school, and moving on to post-primary.