

# Consultation with Laois School Communities

in Preparing

## Department of Education 'Statement of Strategy' 2023-25

26 May 2023



*Castletown N.S.*



*Tobar an Léinn*



*St Colman's NS*



*Scoil Bhride*



*Kofbe Special School*



*Sandylane NS*



*Host - Laois Education Centre*

Facilitated by Chris Chapman and Martin Hawkes

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# **Consultation with School Communities**

## **Department of Education ‘Statement of Strategy’ 2023-25**

**26 May 2023**

### **Introduction & Background**

In preparing its [Strategy Statement 2023 - 25](#) the Department of Education decided to innovate its consultation process by engaging with teachers, students and parents, using a model based on [BEACONS](#), as developed by the Teaching Council. Following a first consultation with school communities at the Dublin West Education Centre, the second of two consultations took place at the Laois Education Centre and included parents, teachers and students from six primary schools – Castletown, Tobar an Léinn (Raheen), St Colman’s (Stradbally), Scoil Bhríde (Mountrath), Kolbe Special School (Portlaoise) and Sandylane NS, (Portarlinton). Thanks are due to all who participated with special thanks to Catherine Doolan and her team at Laois Education Centre for both arranging the attendance of school communities in the area and for hosting the event.

A group of about 37 participated: 33 students, parents and teachers (adults and students in equal measure) two representatives from the Department of Education and two facilitators.

The below represents the distillation of the primary themes/messages emerging from the event. The comments of the participants are reproduced faithfully in the annexes, the only editorial input being the arrangement of some material in thematic form to facilitate ease of assimilation.



## Executive Summary

The event, stretching over three hours with a break in the middle, allowed the participants to surface what was important for them in relation to education, what their vision of an excellent education system would look like and what their priorities were for the future of education. This, and the earlier engagement in the Dublin West Education Centre, will inform the Department's preparation of its Statement of Strategy 2023 – 2025.

Mindful that all the participating schools, including one special school, were all primary schools, it's perhaps not entirely surprising that there was consistency and coherence in the themes that recurred throughout the various sessions. There was, in addition, huge energy and passion driving the conversations which elicited a very rich harvest.

In summary, and while acknowledging all that was good in the current system, there was a call for:

- ✚ A **school culture** with kindness, wellbeing, student voice and fun at its centre;
  - ✚ A **system culture** that is holistic, collaborative, transparent and responsive with the inspectorate playing more of an advisory role;
  - ✚ **Resourcing** that provides sustainable physical infrastructure paying attention to outdoor spaces as well as indoors; human resourcing that recognizes the need for differentiated learning and CPD to match the new primary curriculum;
  - ✚ Support for **special-needs** schools and classes with a responsive transparent NCSE;
  - ✚ A curriculum that addresses contemporary **life-skills** with a pedagogy that is more **experiential** and games-based;
  - ✚ Support for connecting with other schools and developing **Professional Learning Networks**;
  - ✚ Greater focus on sports, PE and **outdoor** learning and
  - ✚ Can we have a conversation about the need for and role of **homework**?
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## Introductions – What’s bubbling? *(Annex I)*

As participants introduced themselves and named a word (or a few words) that needed to be in the conversation, initial attention was on:

- **A kind culture:** wellbeing with kindness, mindfulness, celebration, plants and fun;
  - **Inclusion:** with equality and room for all abilities;
  - **Relevant curriculum:** a curriculum that pays attention to developing **real-life skills**, twenty-first century teaching and learning and with space to experiment;
  - **Less and more:** less homework, more sport and PE and second language;
  - **Also:** having voice and resources.
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## Vision I: What would an excellent Education System look like? *(Annex II)*

In this visioning exercise children, parents and teachers worked mostly in their own school groups to imagine what an excellent education system might look like. The harvest of the discussion, organised by school, is presented at annex II-B.

The major themes that emerged across the six schools, as presented more fully at Annex II-A, envisioned a system with the following characteristics:

- ❖ **Holistic Culture:** A school culture characterised by: (i) **trust**, empathy, happiness and kindness; (ii) **inclusion**, recognition of difference and catering for all abilities; (iii) mindfulness and attention to **wellbeing** of teachers and students and (iv) the **voice** of the student is listened to.
- ❖ **Holistic System:** A system in which: (i) the **linkages** between pre-school and primary and primary and post-primary are attended to; (ii) there is **collaboration** between schools and non-school support services; (iii) there is recognition for the role of **special schools** which are on the same campus as mainstream schools: (iv) there is better support for special needs with more **transparency and responsiveness** from the NCSE and (v) the **Inspectorate** adopts a more advisory role.
- ❖ **Well Resourced:** An excellent education system would have: (i) good **physical facilities:** buildings and support rooms/facilities, a school garden and playground etc’ (ii) adequate **human resources**, in particular teachers, teacher assistants and SNA’s to facilitate individualised attention to pupils; (iii) effective in-person **Continuing**

**Professional Development** with adequate substitution cover and sharing of experience with other schools.

- ❖ **Flexible Curriculum & Pedagogy:** There would be: (i) differentiated teaching and learning – play-based and **experiential learning**; acquisition of practical life-relevant skills; space for everyone to excel in their domain of giftedness; time for open conversation and team-teaching; (ii) a **broad curriculum** to cater to every child's needs including the arts and nature; (iii) a focus on **real-life skills** such as finance and housekeeping and (iv) access to a range of **sports, PE** and outdoor play.
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## Vision II: What would your School look like if your Suggestions were listened to? *(Annex III)*

In this exercise parents, teachers and pupils came together in their school groups to sketch on rolls of brown paper what their schools might look like if their suggestions were listened to by the department. In the tableaux that emerged – see Annex III – schools spontaneously organised their reflections around specific themes: Inclusion; Special Schools at the Centre; Fun & Kindness; Child at the Centre; Safety and 'Life-skills and Wellbeing'.

What emerged in the tableaux was a reiteration of the themes from the preceding exercise around the importance of: a wellbeing fun **ethos**; a system **adequately resourced** both in facilities and skilled personnel; a **curriculum and pedagogy** adapted to individual needs and the realities of contemporary living and greater attention to physical activity and **outdoor learning**.

In plenary feedback participants had an opportunity to expand on the themes their schools focused on:

- ❖ **Time and space for open Conversation:** a student at the 'safe' school asked why go to school if it's not safe to speak and give your opinion. In return a teacher observed that it was great to open up this conversation – she was unaware how much was going on for a twelve-year old, time and space were needed to have conversations about what was going on in students' lives. The focus in school was on core subjects, but it was in art and project work that you learn most about the student. Teachers hadn't enough time to get to know all children – so there should be a time of day to sit in a circle and get to know others.

- ❖ **Integrate Wellbeing:** At the 'Life-skills and Wellbeing' school the focus of the conversation had been on kindness in school, conflict management and emotional intelligence. All skills needed to be taught throughout the day, not just at wellbeing hour. Children wanted to know what was going on for other children and to be understood.
- ❖ **Inclusion:** Every child should be included equally irrespective of background and ability. Friendliness and kindness were important.
- ❖ **Special Education at Centre:** Two special schools in Portlaoise were on the periphery and were little known by others. If starting again, they should be put at the centre of a school campus. Likewise special classes should be at the centre of schools, rather than on the side. There was a need for greater transparency in decision-making about special schools. Schools were not a cure-all – other services were needed.
- ❖ **Pupil Agency:** At the 'fun and kindness' school there was a request for more PE and sport. Children should choose their own class set-up, where to sit, what colours etc. There should be i-pads in class, more group work and a better student/teacher ratio to help with learning. Children have different needs – what's fun to one is awful to another. They should be able to do what makes them comfortable.

More generally there were calls for a **pedagogy** of play-based learning and being outdoors in nature more. As well as reflective practice there was room for more team teaching. The culture should support kindness, sharing and helping each other.

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## Focus on Priorities *(Annex IV)*

In the second half of the event the initiative was transferred to the participants to decide on what should be prioritised for discussion. They recorded their insights in terms of what was good in the current situation, what could be improved, possible targets for what might be achieved in the next two/three years and what steps might impart momentum to change in their chosen topic.

Over two rounds, twelve conversations were convened which can be categorised under four broad headings: (i): Culture – Wellbeing, Voice and Safety; (ii) Collaboration and Interculturalism; (iii) Resourcing – Buildings, Environment and Special Needs Provision and (iv) Homework, Maths and Lessons from Covid:

### Culture - Wellbeing, Voice & Safety

- ❖ **Wellbeing:** There is increasing recognition by teachers and some parents of its importance and the 'Aistear' programme is working. Rapport can be built by bringing an 'Aistear'-type programme to older classes. Make wellbeing exercises part of homework. Provide practical skills training around social-media apps and provide school guidance-counsellors and wellbeing supports. Teachers also need emotional support apart from EAP.
- ❖ **Children's Voice:** Student voice allows the child's perspective to be heard and enhances student/teacher relationships. CPD is needed for older teachers in relation to student voice so that asking opinions of students in 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> classes becomes the norm. There should be more opportunities like today for students to share their views and opinions about education.
- ❖ **Safety and Trust:** There is the 'stay safe' programme and the issue of trust in staff. However, 'stay safe' needs to be updated and teachers need upskilling in group/team work. There is scope for more fun/games in class, more mixing of classes in small groups, more group work in projects, art, PE etc. It would be good for teachers to have more time to talk to their students.

### Collaboration & Interculturalism

- ❖ **Collaboration:** There is group work in schools and collaboration between schools through sport. The department could facilitate a half day/month for improved collaboration between staff. There is scope for more peer learning among older classes and there should be student councils in every school. There should also be more collaboration between neighbouring schools in various projects.
- ❖ **Interculturalism:** while good progress has been made e.g. inclusion of travellers in the definition of multiculturalism, there is scope for ambition in registering Ukrainian



teachers with the Teaching Council, increasing the number of EAL teachers, translation of health and other documentation and facilitating P/T meetings.

## **Resourcing, Buildings, Environment & Special Education**

- ❖ **Audit Buildings:** while new buildings are of a very high spec there are many old poorly insulated buildings and prefabs. There should be an audit of all schools to see what needs doing. Enhanced insulation, installation of solar panels, provision of adequate outside playground/learning space and better tendering cost-control are needed;
- ❖ **Environment:** Green schools and nature walks are good. Make schools more sustainable with solar panels and install gardens with raised beds for every school. Have a survey of every school.
- ❖ **Resourcing:** The digital grant and new book rental scheme are good. All children should have needs met and there needs to be flexibility to trial new things. Every school should have a grant that can be used flexibly. Assessment should be more holistic with CPD to support it and visits to other schools - the creation of professional learning networks. The role of the inspectorate needs to change. Lots of digital devices should be available! There should be hot meals for all with online ordering.
- ❖ **Special Education Curriculum and Supports:** There is greater awareness of special education and needs and teaching at own pace. There is need for greater one-to-one supports and more transparency in NCSE decision-making. Health and safety issues around challenging behaviour need to be recognized by the Department and stronger collaboration with the HSE. Special services/classes/schools need to be available locally and more ready acceptance of applications for SNA's.

## **Homework, Maths & Lessons from Covid**

- ❖ **Homework:** Some reading, maths/tables and mindfulness is good. But there is little real learning and it deprives pupils of social time. There is also little consistency between time required by different classes and schools. There needs to be less homework, greater variety outside the main subjects, more project work and 'no-homework months'. How about a national conversation or review about homework?

- ❖ **Maths:** Learning tables is useful and fun-games helps problem solving. Relating sums to real-life budgeting/finance would help as would the greater use of calculators and provision of i-pads or tablets to pupils.
  - ❖ **Lessons from Covid:** Covid allowed more time with family and in the outdoors while we didn't miss much class, even if hard to take lessons seriously. Invest more in technology and use it more in class. Go outside more to lessen stress and enhance wellbeing – and open more windows.
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### Parting Advice to the Department *(Annex V)*

As a final exercise, participants were invited to share their parting advice with the Department. Not surprisingly, the themes that emerged during the day were rehearsed again with calls for:

- ❖ A culture that has **wellbeing**, happiness, fun and trust at its heart;
- ❖ Listen to the **voice** of teachers and pupils and take these consultations seriously;
- ❖ **Resource** our schools adequately before adding new initiatives and have adequate staffing to meet pupil needs – also, don't forget the emotional needs of teachers;
- ❖ Give more attention to **special needs** - special needs schools and special needs classes. The NCSE needs to be more transparent and responsive.
- ❖ Have a curriculum that is **practical, play-based** and adapted to the realities of modern life. Support **professional learning networks** in context of new curriculum;
- ❖ Pay attention to **outdoors education and play** – climate change is a real and present danger; and provide more space for games and PE;
- ❖ The role of **homework** needs to be reviewed and/or abolished;
- ❖ The role of the **inspectorate** needs to be reviewed towards a more supportive role.

## Concluding Comments

In the closing plenary there was admiration from the adults for the brilliance of the children in articulating their views. For their part children found it fun and exciting to talk about things. They observed that Covid had been stressful and they hadn't absorbed all they had missed.

Parents acknowledged that the session was an eye-opener about the lack of resources for teachers and the lack of emotional support for them – except for EAP when at a crisis point.

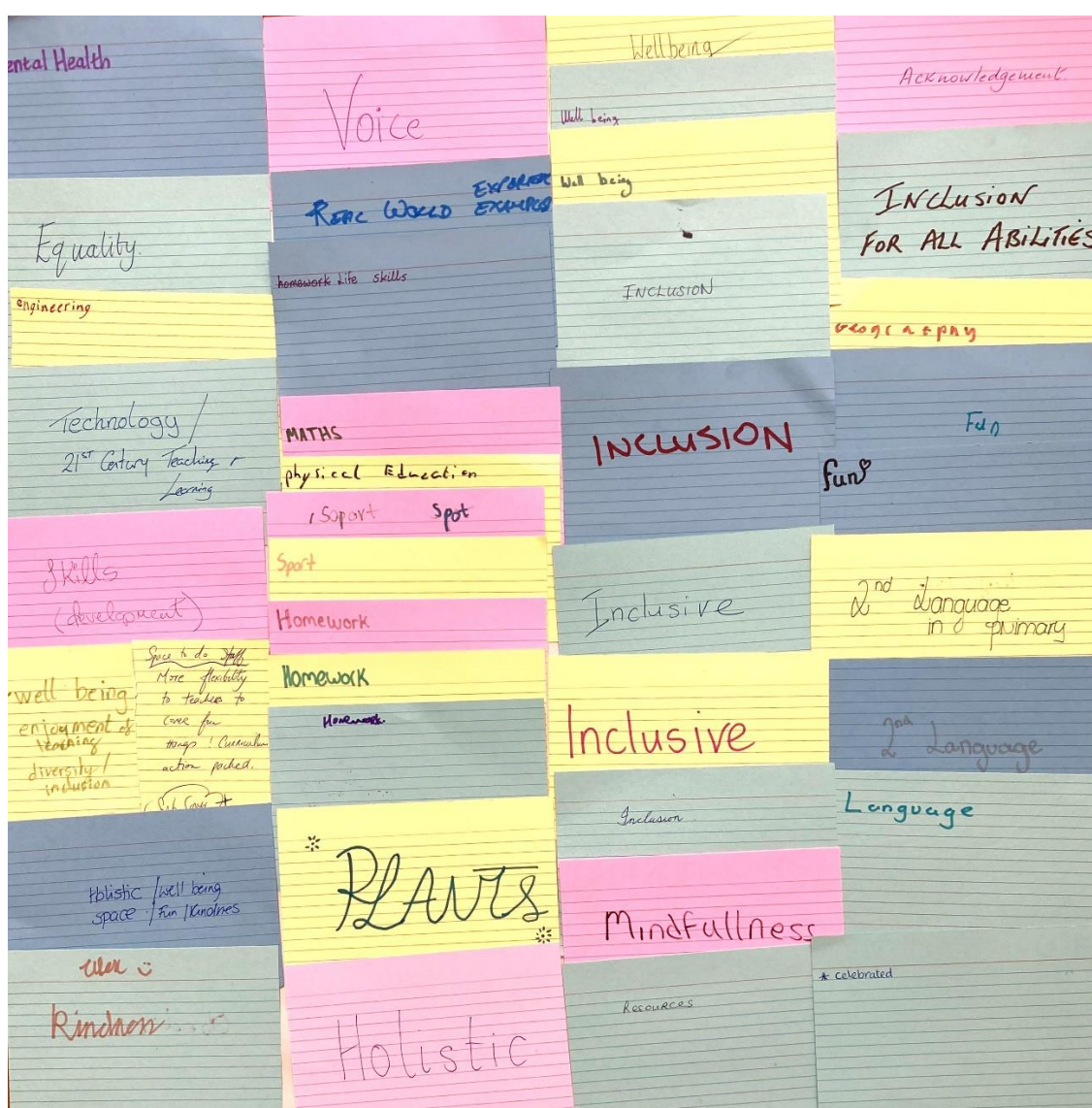
The Department thanks all who participated – the day had been incredibly valuable. It had surfaced new issues as well as issues that weren't fully appreciated. There was a sense of a strong core within school communities. The students were a credit to their schools.

Catherine, the host for the day, observed how BEACONS in person was different to the process online. It got under the skin of things. The Laois Education Centre had designed work around BEACONS findings and her hope was that these conversations would inform the Department's work. Never overlook the student voice. Keep the lines of communication open so we can keep innovating.

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### Words that need to be in the Conversation

- **Wellbeing culture:** wellbeing (x4); kindness (x 2); mental health; mindfulness; enjoyment of learning; holistic (x2); celebrated; acknowledgement; fun (x2); plants; holistic (x2);
- **Inclusion & Equality;** inclusion/inclusive (x5); diversity/inclusion; equality; inclusion for all abilities;
- **21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills:** development of skills; life skills; real world skills; engineering (x2); 21<sup>st</sup> century teaching & Learning; space to do stuff;
- **Homework:** x3
- **Sport & PE:** x3
- **Subjects:** maths; language; 2<sup>nd</sup> language (x2); geography;
- **Other:** voice; resources.



## Themes from Vision of what an excellent School System would look like

### Holistic Culture in Schools

- ❖ **Culture:** diversity; education for other sexuality; trust; equality; open-minded; empathy; happiness; politeness to teachers; safety; energetic; quiet classes; 'be-kind' truck; manners/hygiene; mental health;
- ❖ **Inclusion:** inclusion - SNA's + access to therapies and physical resources; 'special schools' shouldn't be separate; join the whole school community; meaningful inclusion (x4) all abilities are catered for; inclusivity; inclusion/recognition of difference; understanding difference;
- ❖ **Wellbeing:** Mindfulness; weaving wellbeing; fun; talents; wellbeing (x4, teachers and students); fun; appreciation; mental health; kindness (x4); flexibility; everyone feels celebrated; mindfulness; resilience training; stress management; emotional intelligence; wellbeing weeks to include external speakers; culture days; mental wellbeing toolbox; fun; 5-minutes after-break breathing exercise – time to build rapport;
- ❖ **Voice & homework:** children's voice is heard; open conversations; pupil in role; kids feedback listened to; balanced homework – based on ability and age;

### Holistic System

- ❖ **Transitions:** Better links/transition between primary and post-primary education; education begins in pre-school; there should be a direct link with primary school;
- ❖ **Collaboration:** school is not the cure-all; other services have a role – support each other; collaboration;
- ❖ **Special Schools:** there is a place for special schools; specialist units don't suit every child; special schools should be on the same campus as mainstream schools;
- ❖ **NCSE/SEN:** more transparency in how decisions are made – easier access to additional supports; schools should be better supported to open SEN classes; colleges need to change to meet the needs of SEN;
- ❖ **Inspectorate:** reform – more advisory role needed.

## Resources

- ❖ **Physical Resources:** Separate classroom for all classes and more time out of classes; hot meals; keep older classes in mind; the physical resources; decent buildings and facilities everywhere; + additional supports must be in place from the beginning; every school should have a school garden; playground; meaningfully resourced; no barriers; adequate resources; scope for structured support (not always academic); more funding; access to resources – not enough at present especially for small schools i.e. fundraise for goal posts and IT; some grants that are only open to DEIS schools to be available to other schools – lego, coding; playground equipment; I think we could improve our school by brightening it up like put pictures and colours on the corridor.
- ❖ **Resources:** extra human resources - SNA's/teachers (teaching assistants) – it's very difficult for teachers to get to everyone;
- ❖ **CPD:** more practical; easy to access; sub-cover; less webinars; substitutable days/hours for teachers to see other schools/visit with pupils; funding needed; substitute cover for all teachers to attend in-service; a celebration of teaching and learning;

## Curriculum, Teaching & Learning

- ❖ **Differentiated Teaching & Learning:** more team teaching; turn subjects into educational games – 'hit the button' is a maths game and it's fun; play-based; experiential learning; meeting needs; practical learning – hands-on experiences; real-world jobs; everyone can achieve; study skills (especially for senior end); IT training; language training; different learning styles; more time and resources for differentiated attention to individual pupils – and less paperwork; all intelligences are catered for – spatial, interpersonal, naturalistic, intrapersonal, emotional – preparing people for life vs content driven; team teaching in art/engineering and more time to have open conversations in the classroom.
- ❖ **Curriculum:** home economics is a core subject; 2nd language; social education; less maths; science experiments; career guidance in primary schools; a fully inclusive curriculum that is teacher-led; not all children are academic so a more flexible approach when needed; choice; broader objectives to account for every child's learning; technology; nature; languages; religion; history; music; art; more arts and music; projects; interests and hobbies explored;
- ❖ **Life-skills:** more educational trips; more real-life situations; opportunities to experience (trips, talks); adapting curriculum - life-skills; life skills are important; life

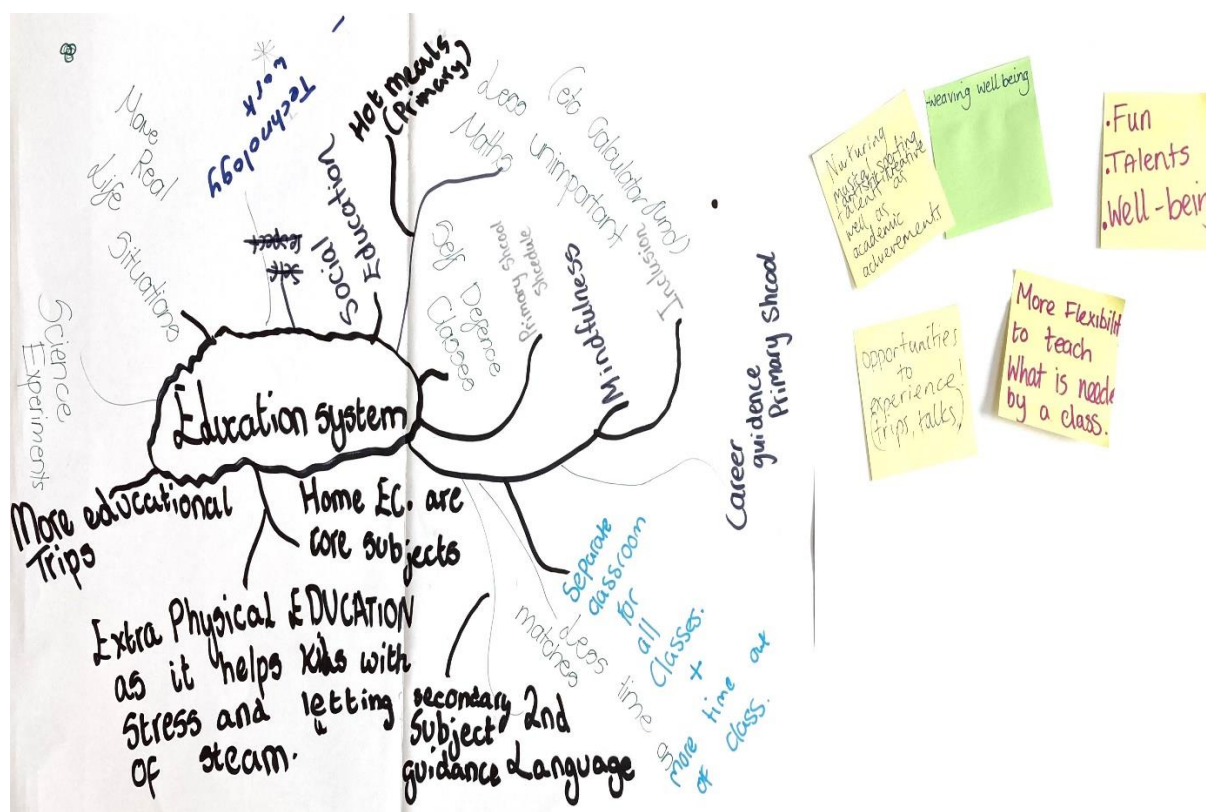
skills; real-life experiences; more focus on life skills; life-skills training i.e. money/finance; basic housekeeping/hygiene; parental involvement in skills;

- ❖ **Sport/PE/Outdoors:** extra PE as it helps kids with stress and letting off steam; less time on matches; self-defence classes; rugby, sport, art outside; good games; sports-twice a year; more time outside to play; fun games in school; a sports team; friends; we should have more time for PE – 3 hours/week; lots of other sports like volley ball, soccer, hand-ball – and not football all the time.

## Vision as Articulated by each School

### School 1

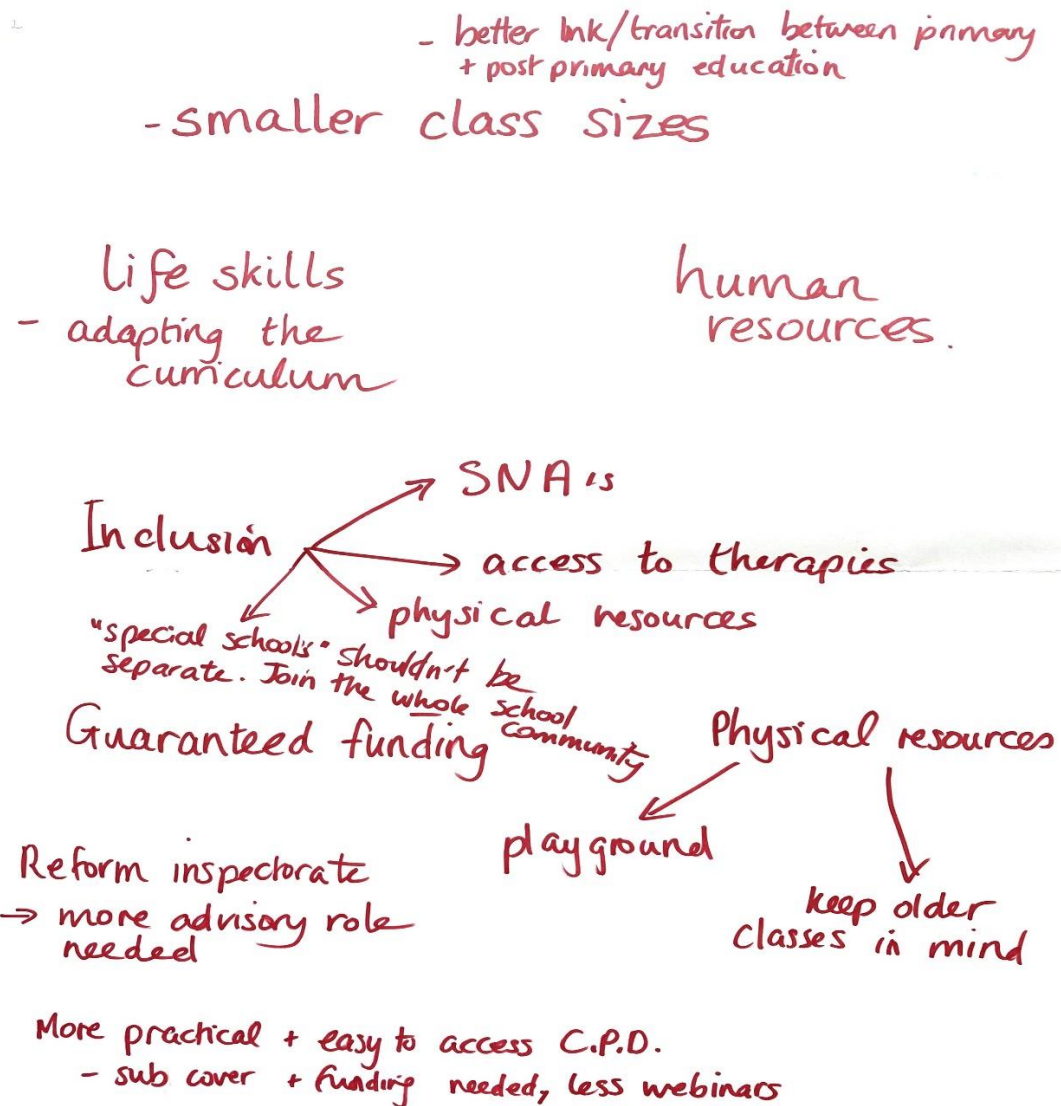
- **Real Life:** More educational trips; more real-life situations; opportunities to experience (trips, talks);
- **Wellbeing:** Mindfulness; inclusion; weaving wellbeing; fun; talents; wellbeing;
- **Academic Curriculum/Guidance:** Home Economics is a core subject; 2nd language; social education; less maths; science experiments; career guidance in primary schools;
- **PE:** Extra PE as it helps kids with stress and letting off steam; less time on matches; self-defence classes;
- **Facilities:** Separate classroom for all classes and more time out of classes; hot meals;





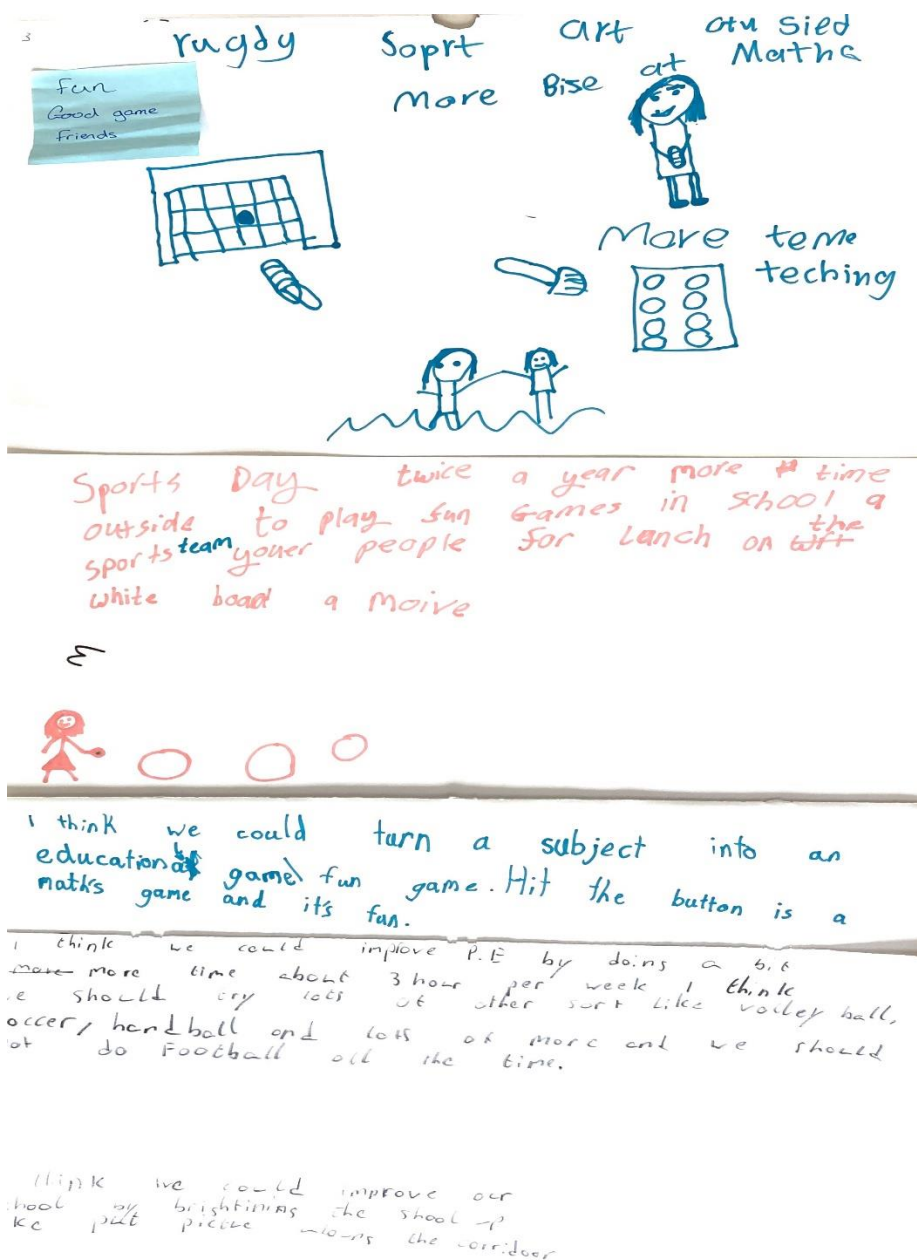
## School 2

- **Transitions:** Better links/transition between primary and post-primary education;
- **Small class sizes:**
- **Curriculum:** adapting curriculum - life-skills;
- **Resources:** human and physical resources; playground; keep older classes in mind;
- **Inclusion:** SNA's; access to therapies; physical resources; 'special schools' shouldn't be separate; join the whole school community;
- **Inspectorate:** reform – more advisory role needed;
- **CPD:** more practical; easy to access; sub-cover; less webinars; funding needed.



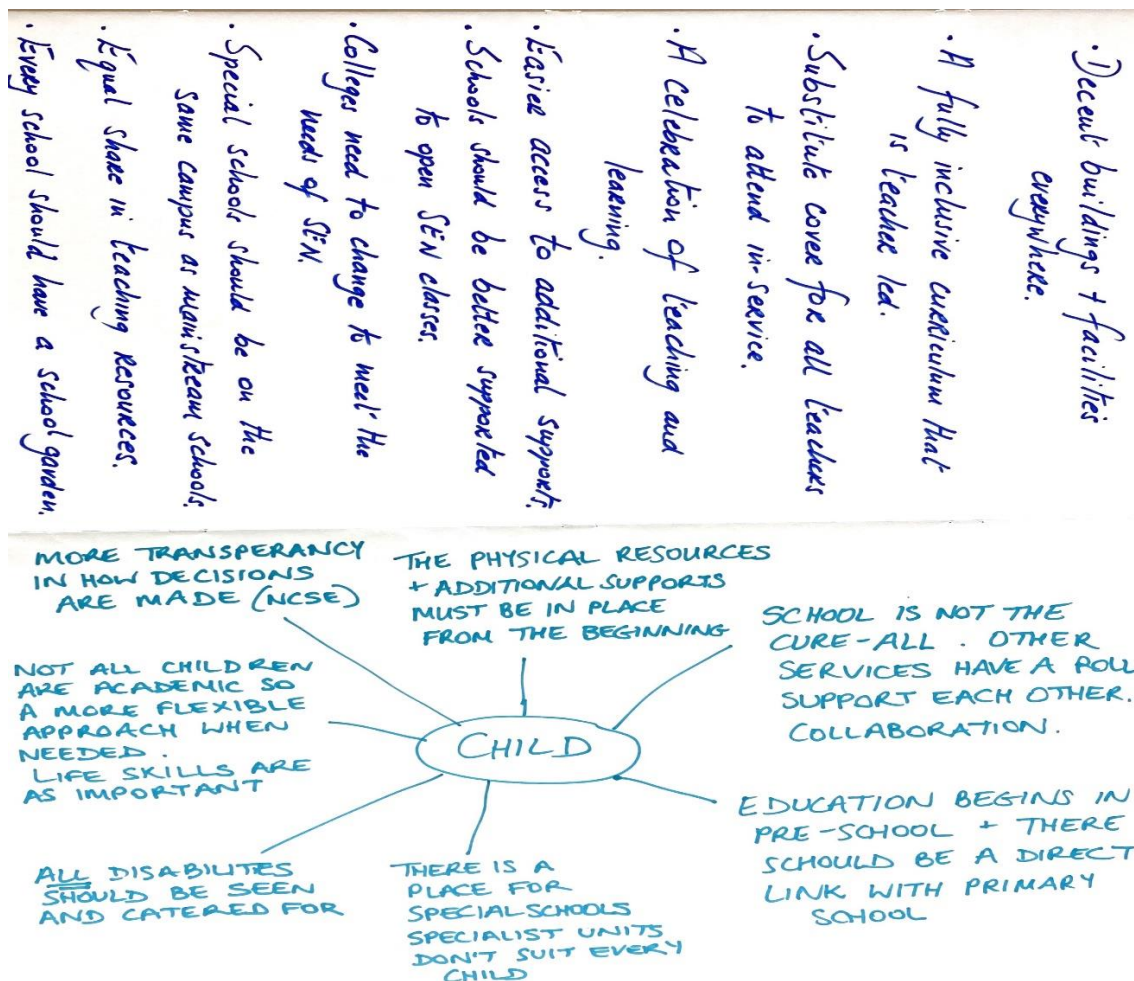
### School 3

- **Sports/PE/outdoors/fun:** rugby, sport, art outside; good games; sports-twice a year; more time outside to play; fun games in school; a sports team; friends; we should have more time for PE – 3 hours/week; lots of other sports like volley ball, soccer, hand-ball – and not football all the time;
- **Teaching & Learning:** more team teaching; turn subjects into educational games – 'hit the button' is a maths game and it's fun;
- **Brighten the school:** I think we could improve our school by brightening it up like put pictures and colours on the corridor.



## School 4

- **Resources/garden:** the physical resources; decent buildings and facilities everywhere; + additional supports must be in place from the beginning; every school should have a school garden;
- **Link to Pre-school:** education begins in pre-school; there should be a direct link with primary school;
- **Collaboration:** school is not the cure-all; other services have a role – support each other; collaboration;
- **NCSE/SEN:** more transparency in how decisions are made – easier access to additional supports; schools should be better supported to open SEN classes; colleges need to change to meet the needs of SEN;
- **Special Schools:** there is a place for special schools; specialist units don't suit every child; special schools should be on the same campus as mainstream schools;
- **Curriculum/life-skills:** a fully inclusive curriculum that is teacher-led; not all children are academic so a more flexible approach when needed; life skills are important;
- **CPD/T&L:** substitute cover for all teachers to attend in-service; a celebration of teaching and learning.



## School 5

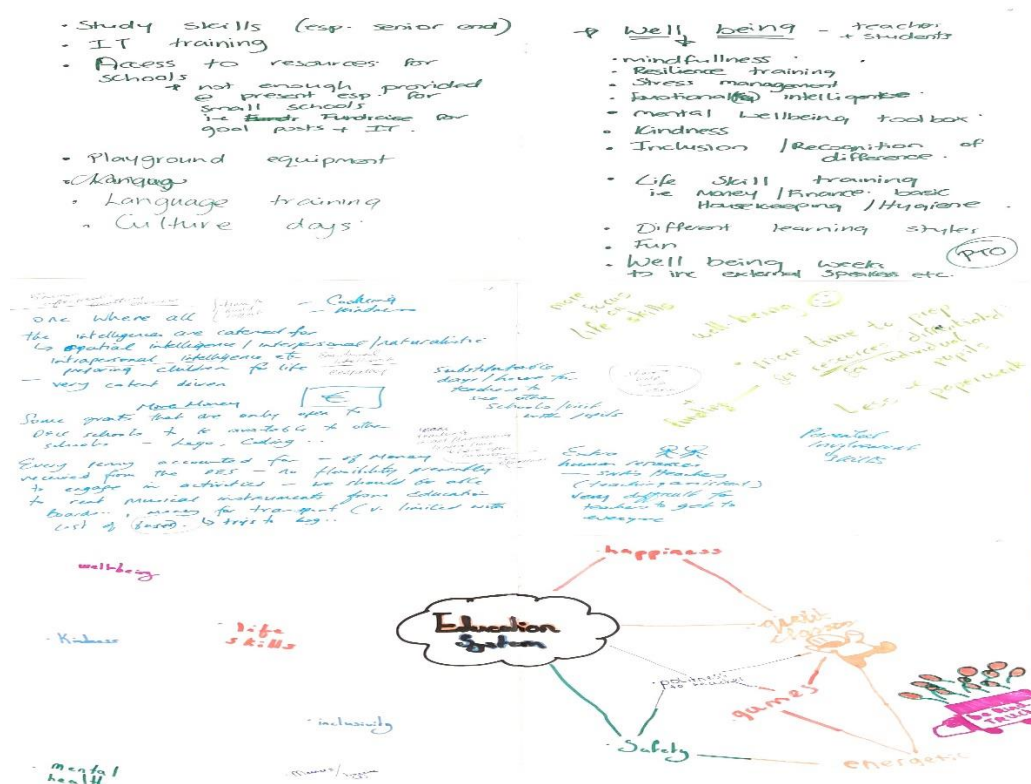
- **Culture:** diversity; education for other sexuality; inclusion; trust; equality; open-minded; empathy; understanding difference; meaningful inclusion (x2) all abilities are catered for;
- **Wellbeing:** fun; appreciation; mental health; kindness (x2); flexibility; everyone feels celebrated;
- **Voice:** children's voice is heard; open conversations; pupil in role; kids feedback listening to;
- **Curriculum:** choice; broader objectives to account for every child's learning; technology; nature; languages; religion; history; music; art; more arts and music; projects; interests and hobbies explored;
- **Pedagogy:** play-based; experiential learning; meeting needs; life skills; real-life experiences; practical learning – hands-on experiences; real-world jobs; everyone can achieve;
- **Homework:** balanced – based on ability and age;
- **Resources:** meaningfully resourced; no barriers; adequate resources; scope for structured support (not always academic); more funding;





## School 6

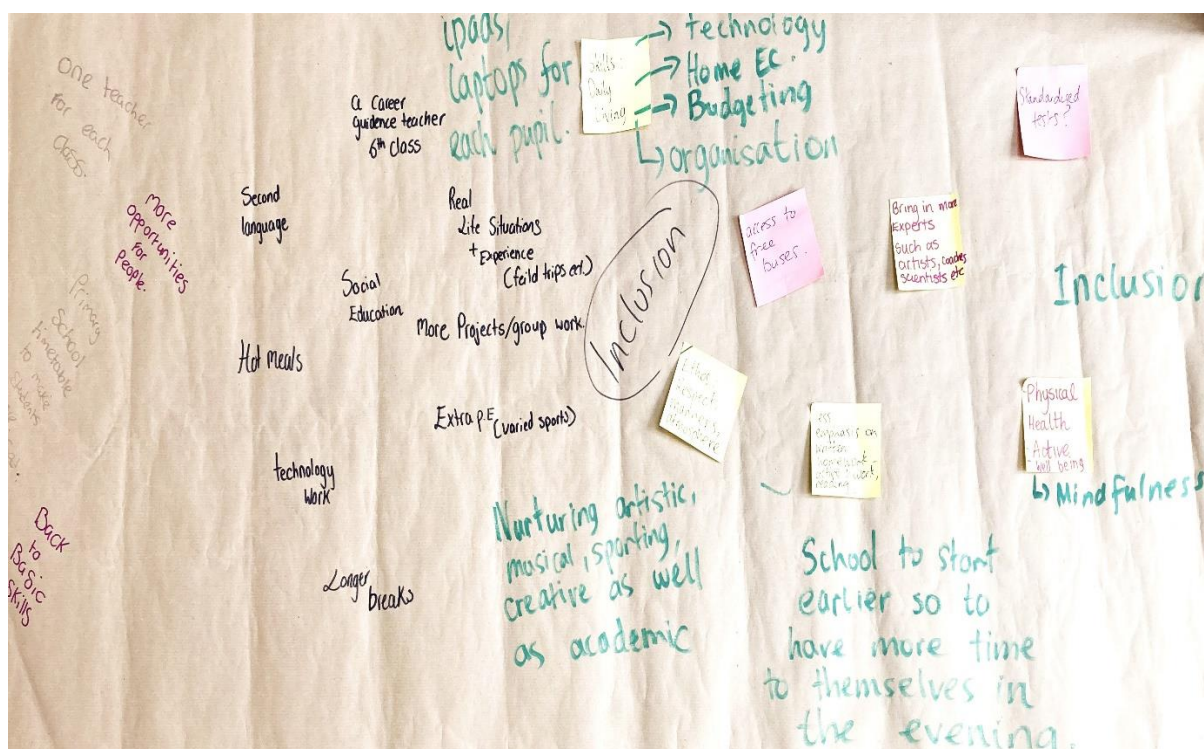
- **Culture:** happiness; politeness to teachers; safety; energetic; quiet classes; 'be-kind' truck; manners/hygiene; kindness(x2); mental health; inclusivity; inclusion/recognition of difference;
- **Wellbeing:** wellbeing (x3) – teachers and students; mindfulness; resilience training; stress management; emotional intelligence; wellbeing weeks to include external speakers; culture days; mental wellbeing toolbox; fun; 5-minutes after-break breathing exercise – time to build rapport;
- **Life skills:** More focus on life skills; life-skills training i.e. money/finance; basic housekeeping/hygiene; parental involvement in skills;
- **Resources:** access to resources – not enough at present especially for small schools i.e. fundraise for goal posts and IT; some grants that are only open to DEIS schools to be available to other schools – lego, coding; playground equipment; extra human resources – SNA's/teachers (teaching assistants) – it's very difficult for teachers to get to everyone;
- **Differentiated Teaching & Learning:** study skills (especially for senior end); IT training; language training; different learning styles; more time and resources for differentiated attention to individual pupils – and less paperwork; substitutable days/hours for teachers to see other schools/visit with pupils; all intelligences are catered for – spatial, interpersonal, naturalistic, intrapersonal, emotional – preparing people for life vs content driven; team teaching in art/engineering and more time to have open conversations in the classroom.



## Vision of an Excellent System

### School 1: Inclusion

- **Ethos & Wellbeing:** respect, manners, atmosphere; wellbeing, mindfulness;
- **Homework:** less emphasis on written homework – active homework, reading;
- **Resources:** one teacher for each class; access to free buses; more opportunities for people; bring more experts such as artists, coaches, scientists et.; a career-guidance counsellor for 6<sup>th</sup> class; Hot meals;
- **Structure of school Day:** school to start earlier so that pupils have more time to themselves in the evening; longer breaks; primary school timetable to make students more organised;
- **Curriculum/Pedagogy/Life Skills:** back to basics skills; second language; technology work; real-life situations + experiences (field trips etc.); more project/group work; social work; skills for daily living – technology, home-economics; budgeting; organisation; standardised tests; nurturing artistic, musical, sporting, creative as well as academic;
- **Sport/PE:** extra PE (varied sports); physical health, active.



## School 2: Special Schools at the Centre

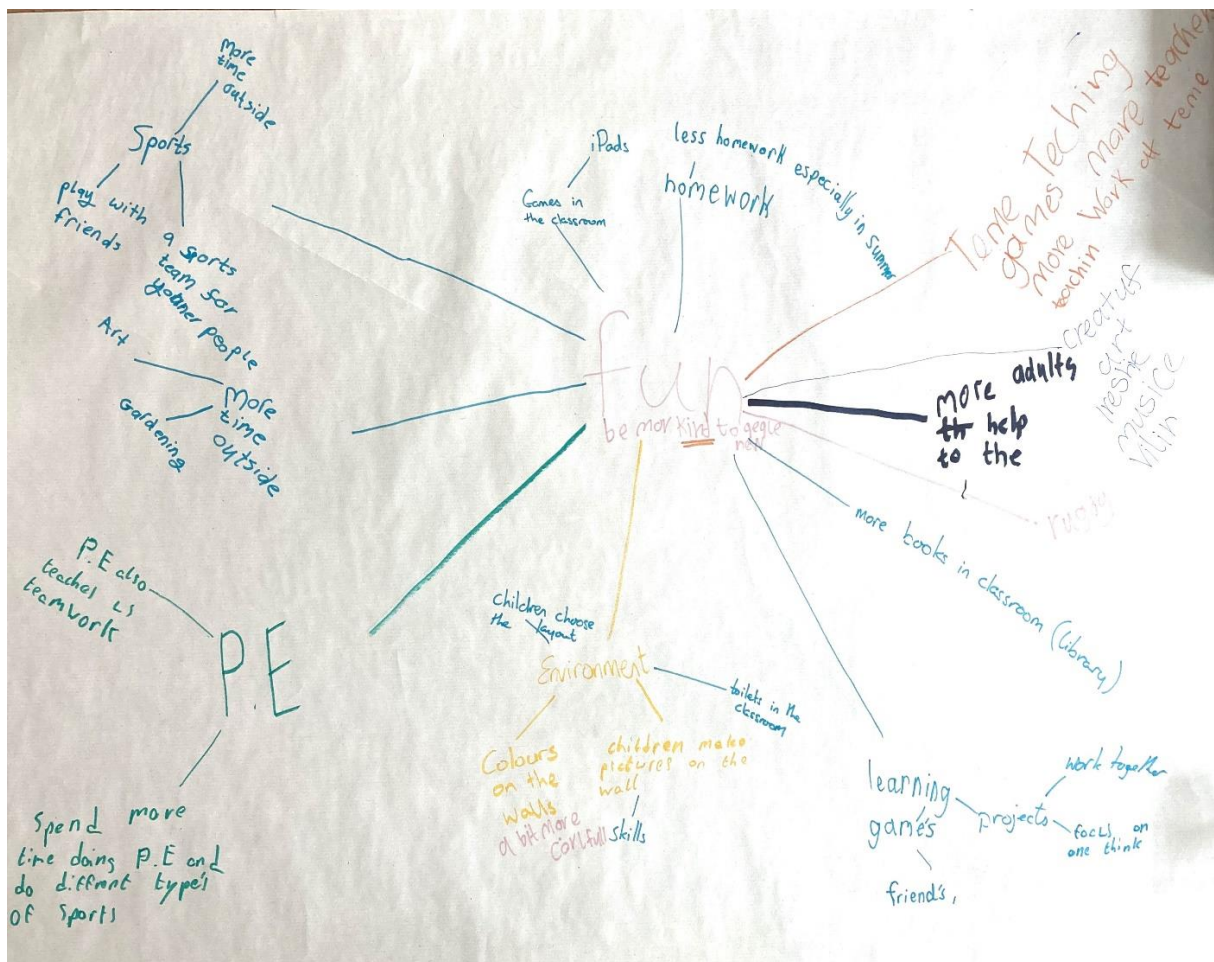
- **Holistic/joined-up:** special schools should be at the heart of every school community; join the whole school community together; more linkage and thought put into transition from primary to secondary education; active, green school;
- **Curriculum:** life skills at the core; languages; DEAR time;
- **Resources:** (i) **physical:** playground; football pitch; basketball court; green-house; library; calm; cookery rooms; music rooms; nurture rooms; science; (ii) **human:** inclusive education - more teachers, SNA's; smaller class sizes; (iii) **funding:** guaranteed funding; (iv) **CPD:** more practical + easy access to CPD – sub cover, funding, no more webinars; (v) **Inspectorate:** More advisory role from the Inspectorate;





### School 3: Fun/Kindness

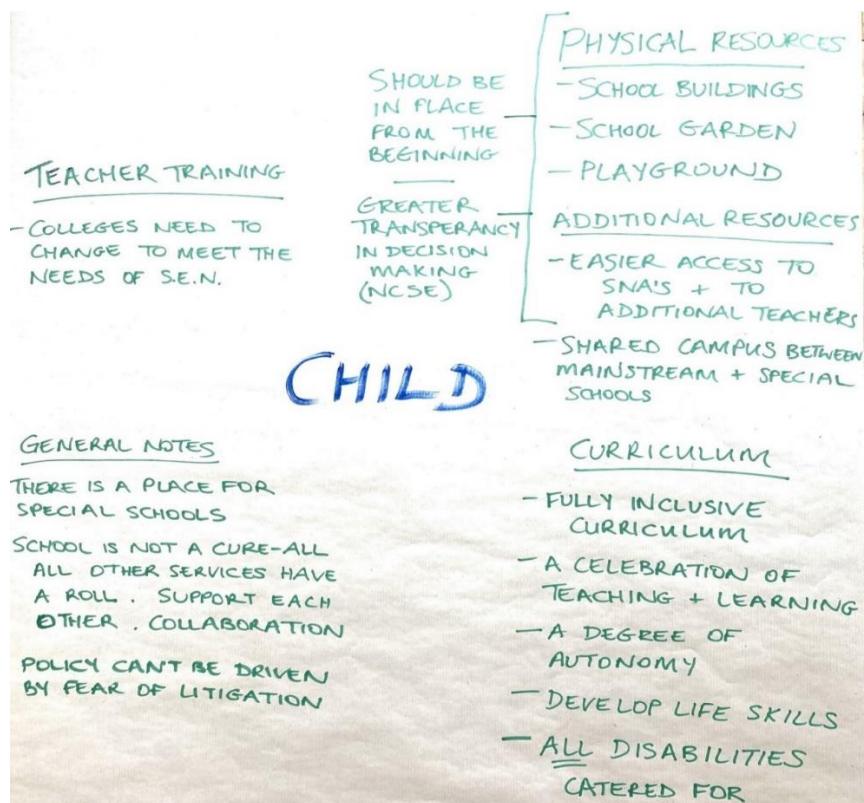
- **Ethos:** Fun – be more kind to new people;
- **Resources:** More adults to help; I-pads, games in the classroom; more books in classroom (library);
- **Homework:** less homework, especially in summer;
- **PE/Sports/Time outside:** more time outside; play with friends; a sports team for younger people; more time on PE and sport; PE also teaches team work; time Outside - gardening and art;
- **Pedagogy & Arts:** more team teaching and games; projects - learning games; friends work together; focus on one thing; creative arts and music.
- **Child Agency se school environment:** children choose the layout; more colourful colours on the walls; toilets in the classroom; children make pictures on the walls;





## School 4: Child at the Centre

- **Physical Resources:** These should be in place from the beginning: school buildings; school garden; playground. **Human Resources:** there should be greater transparency in decision-making by the NCSE and easier access to SNA's and additional teachers;
- **Teacher Training:** colleges need to change to meet the needs of SEN;
- **Curriculum:** a fully inclusive curriculum; a celebration of teaching and learning; a degree of autonomy; develop life skills; all disabilities catered for;
- **General Notes:** there is a place for special schools; a school is not a cure-all – other services have a role; support each other; collaboration.



## School 5: Safety

- **Culture/Ethos:** safe, trust, fun, meaningful inclusion; education for other sexualities;
- **Wellbeing:** mental health – comfortable to speak openly; voice; equality;
- **Homework:** why; choice; anxiety;
- **CPD:** Teachers keeping up to date on current issues/apps/worries;
- **Pedagogy:** real life experiences (projects – baking, charity work); hands-on work.



## School 6: Life-skills & Wellbeing

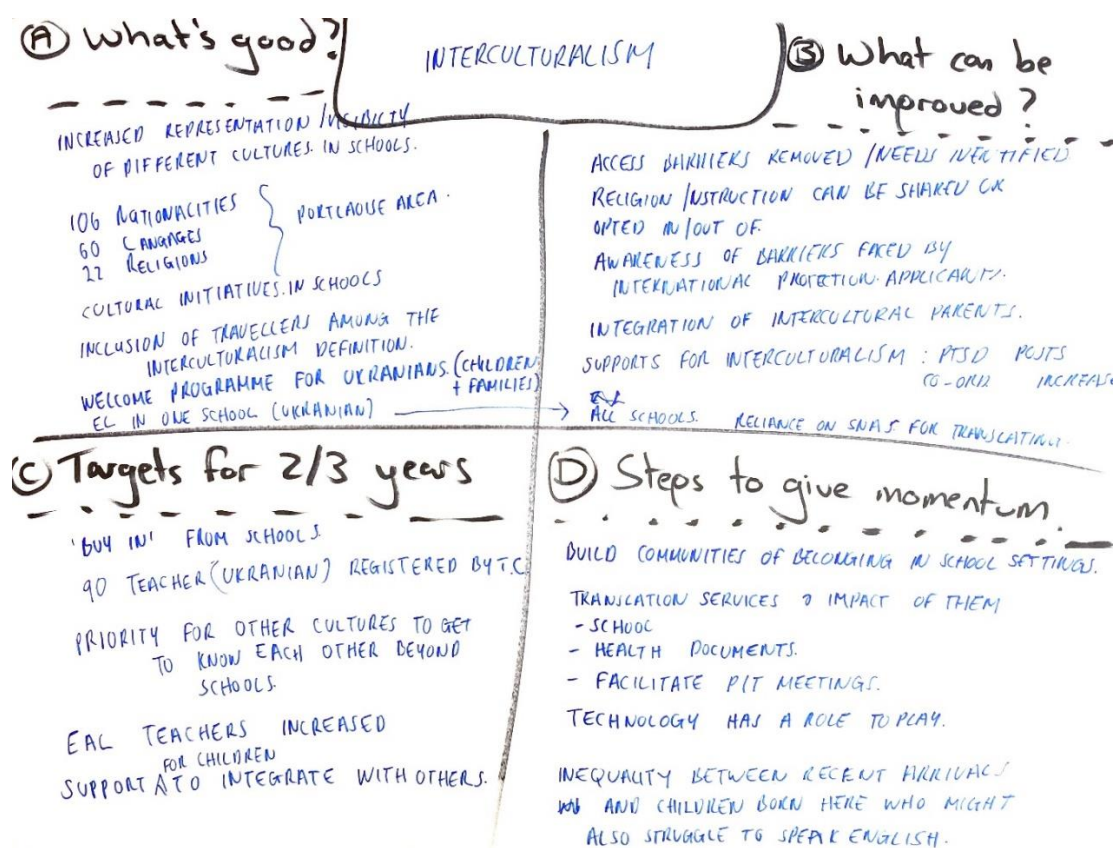
- **Wellbeing:** wellbeing hero - bonjour/hello/dia duit/hola; kindness tree – conflict resolution, wellbeing, happiness, stress management, emotional intelligence, kindness,
- **Resources:** for IT and equipment; more support
- **Curriculum:** life skills; hygiene; visit other schools;



## Open Space Topics

### Interculturalism

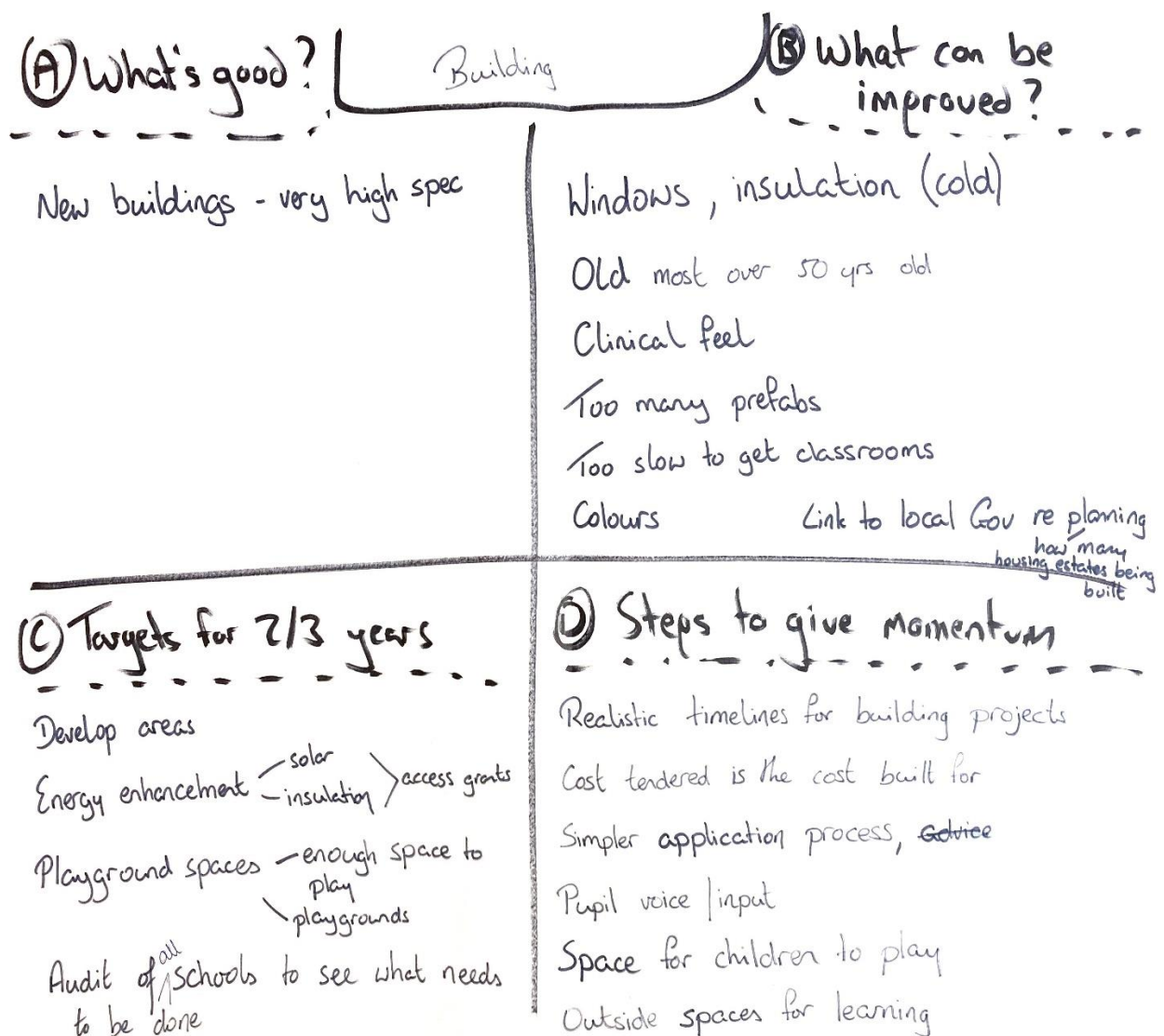
- **What's good?** Increased representation/visibility of different cultures in schools: in the Portlaoise area there are 106 nationalities, 60 languages and 22 religions; cultural initiatives in schools; inclusion of travellers among the interculturalism definition; welcome programme for Ukrainians (children and families) – EAL in one school;
- **Improvable:** access barriers removed/new initiatives; religion/instruction can be shared or opted in/out of; awareness of barriers faced by international protection applicants; integration of intercultural parents; supports for interculturalism: increased PDST coordinator posts; all schools reliant on SNA's for translation;
- **2-3 Year Targets:** 'Buy-in' from schools; 90 Ukrainian teachers registered by the TC; priority for other cultures to get to know each other beyond school; EAL teachers increased; support for children to integrate with others.
- **Momentum steps:** build communities of belonging in school settings; translation services and their impact: school; health documents; facilitate P/T meetings; technology has a role to play; inequality between recent arrivals and children born here who also struggle to speak English.





## Buildings

- **What's good?** New buildings – very high spec;
- **Improvable:** windows, insulation (cold); old – most are over 50 years old; clinical fee; too many prefabs; too slow to get to classrooms; colours.
- **2-3 Year Targets:** develop areas; energy enhancement – solar, insulation, access grants; playground spaces – enough space to play; audit of all schools to see what needs to be done;
- **Momentum steps:** realistic timelines for building projects; cost tendered is the cost built for; simpler application process; pupil/voice input; space for children to play; outside spaces for learning.



## Collaboration

- **What's Good?** Good classroom collaboration (group work); collaboration in schools through sports; transition days for secondary school.
- **Improvable:** neighbouring schools collaborating for various projects; opportunity for more secondary school transition collaborative activities; pre-school links – experience days (moving classes); teacher collaboration opportunities.
- **2-3Years Targets:** half day once a month to collaborate as a staff; student voices contributing towards teaching and learning; more opportunities for peer learning across the school e.g. buddy reading, maths for fun etc.
- **Momentum steps:** department granting time for collaboration (1/2 day per month); buddy systems, peer learning/training for older classes; student councils in every school.

A) What's good?	Collaboration	B) What can be improved?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- good classroom collaboration (groupwork)</li> <li>- collaboration in schools through sports</li> <li>- transition days for sec. sch</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- neighbouring schools collaborating for various projects</li> <li>- opportunity for more sec. sch transition collaborative activities</li> <li>- Pre sch links (Experience Days, moving classes)</li> <li>- teacher Collaboration opportunities</li> </ul>
C) Targets for 2/3 years.		D) Steps to give momentum
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Half day once a month to collaborate as a staff</li> <li>- Student voices contributing towards teaching + learning</li> <li>- more opportunities for peer learning across the school e.g. Buddy Reading, maths for fun etc.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dept granting time for collaboration (1/2 day per month)</li> <li>- Buddy systems, peer learning training for older classes</li> <li>- Student Councils in every school</li> </ul>

## Maths

- **What's good?** Learning tables helps your future; hit the button 'game-fun' game; problem solving helps your future;
- **Improvable:** I-pads for easier learning; tables for home-work; more simple wording of sums; more about money and budgeting; use calculators more; 1 hour of maths in a school day;
- **2-3 Year Targets;** less books, more I-pads/tablets; teach children about things they'll use in life; supply I-pads for schools – to pass around each class;
- **Momentum steps:** fund-raiser to raise money for I-pads; sponsored work to raise money; ask the government.

### ① What's good? (MATHS) ② What can be improved?

- . Learning Tables help your future
- . Hit the button game-fun game
- . Problem solving - help your future

- . iPads for easier learning
- . More simple wording of sums
- . More about money & budgeting
- . use calculators more
- . 1 hour of maths in a school day
- . Tables for home-work

### ③ Targets for 2/3 years

- . less books more iPads/Tables
- . Teach children about things they'll use in life
- . Supply iPads for school
- . iPads for school to pass around to each class

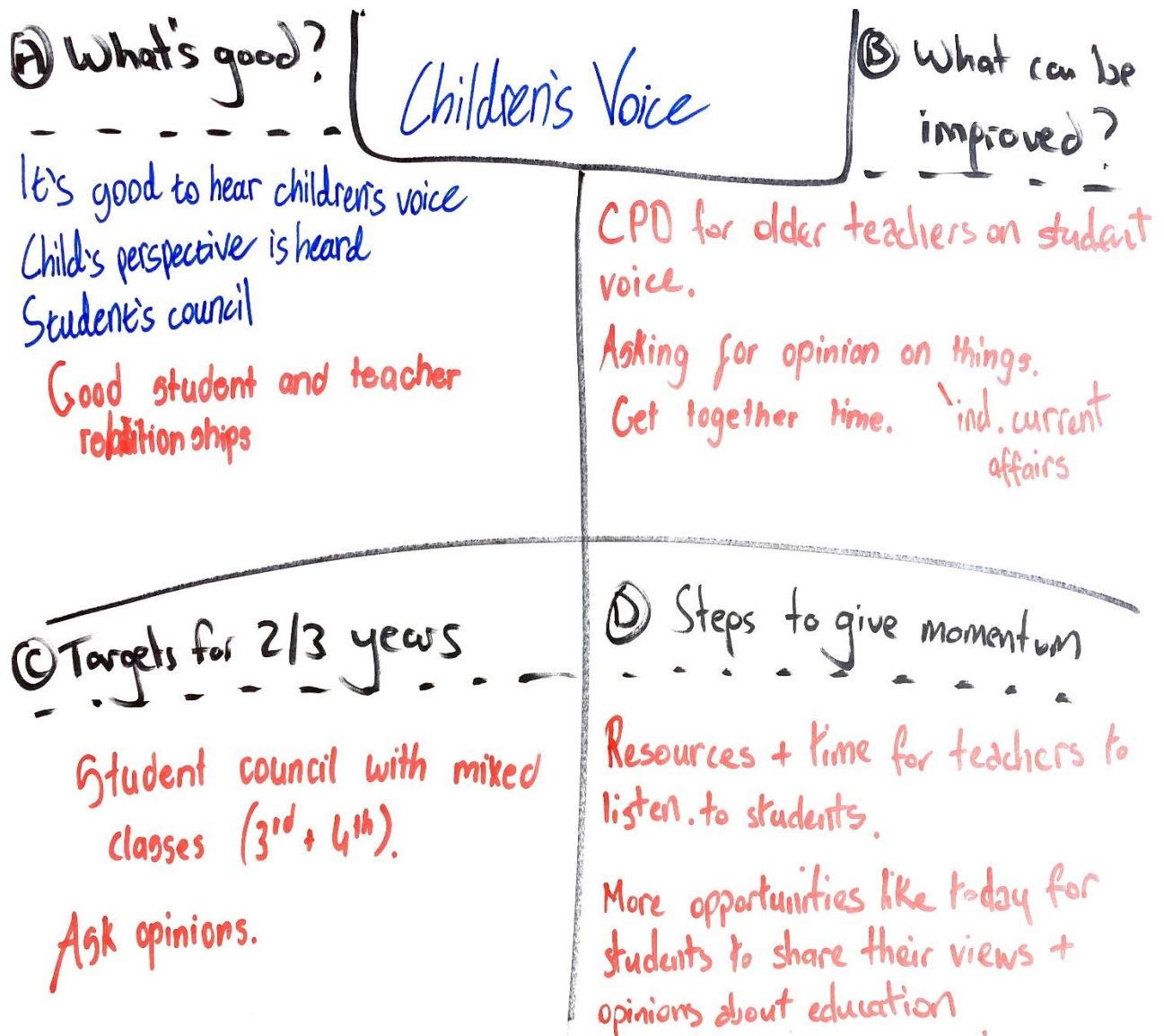
### ④ Steps to give momentum

- . fundraiser to raise money for iPads
- . sponsored walk to raise money
- . ask the government



## Children's Voice

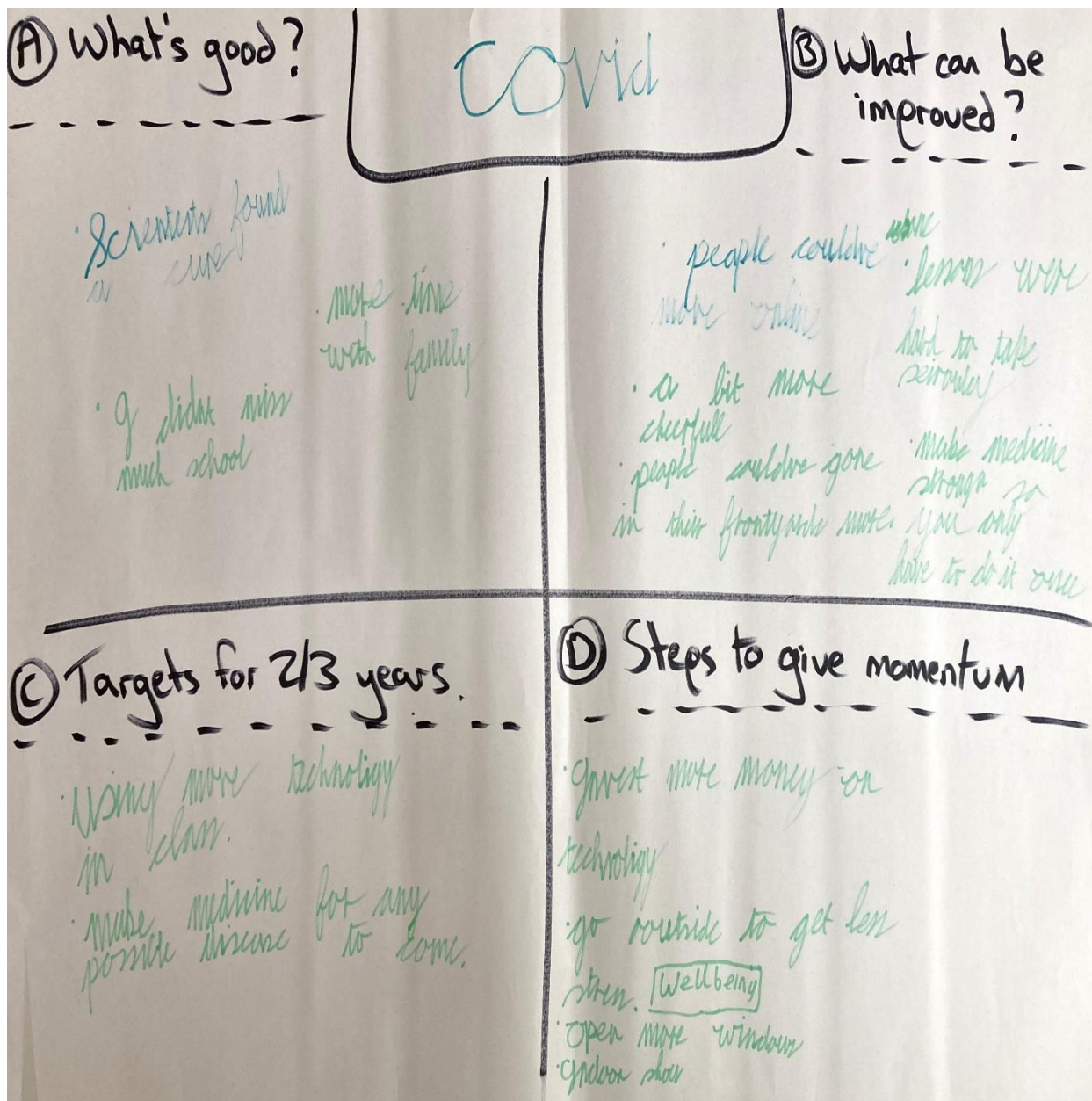
- **What's good?** It's good to hear children's voice; children's perspective is heard; student council; good student and teacher relationships;
- **Improvable:** CPD for older teachers on student voice; asking for opinion on things including current affairs; get-together time;
- **2-3 Year Targets:** student council with mixed classes (3<sup>rd</sup> + 4<sup>th</sup>); ask opinions;
- **Momentum steps:** resources + time for teachers to listen to students; more opportunities like today for students to share their views and opinions about education.





## Covid

- **What's good?** Scientists found a cure; more time with family; I didn't miss much school;
- **Improvable:** people couldn't meet; more online; lessons were hard to take seriously; a bit more cheerful; people could go in their front yards more; make medicine stronger – you only have to do it once;
- **2-3 Years targets:** using more technology in class; make medicine for any possible disease to come;
- **Momentum steps:** invest more money in technology; go outside to get less stress – wellbeing; open more windows.



## Environment

- **What is good:** space; bug-hotels; green schools; nature walks.
- **Improvable:** buildings; garden; sustainability; solar panels; green schools;
- **2-3Yr Target:** garden study; colourful; all-weather yard; flowers; bug-hotels;
- **Momentum steps:** raised garden bed for every school; teacher controls green school; architect survey for every school.

A) What is good?	Environment		B) What can be improved?
Space.	Bughotels Green schools Nature walks	Buildings	Green school Garden Sustainability Solar panels
C) Targets for 2/3 years	D) Steps to give momentum		
Garden study's Colourful All weather yard flowers Bughotels	Raised Garden bed for every school		
	Teacher controls Green school.		
	architect survey for		

## Wellbeing

- **What' good?** Teachers are pro-active; recognition by teachers and some parents that wellbeing is important; inclusion of an extra snack for junior/senior infants – mood improved etc; Aistear; programmes already in place and working.
- **Improvable:** time and space to build rapport; build and bring through 'aistear'-type programme to older classes; include parents in by informing them about RSE content; training for teachers; ongoing access and support for teachers around their wellbeing;
- **2-3 Year targets:** practical skills training around social media apps etc; time for support to be given; expanding the rainbow programme – not available in some towns; school counsellor/guidance/wellbeing supports; emotional support teachers outside of EAP.
- **Momentum steps:** wellbeing exercises as part of homework.

### A) What is good?

Wellbeing

- Teachers are pro-active
- Recognition that wellbeing is important by teachers + some parents
- Inclusion of an extra snack for Junior/senior infants → mood improved etc.
- Aistear
- Programmes already in place.  
→ weaving wellbeing

### B) What can be improved?

- Time + Space to build rapport
- Build + bring through "Aistear" type prog. to older classes
- Include parents in by informing them about RSE / ~~the~~ content
- TRAINING for teachers
- ~~From~~ Ongoing access + support for teachers around their wellbeing

### C) Targets for 2/3 years

- Skills training around social media apps etc. (practical).
- Time for support to be given
- Expanding the rainbow prog - no availability in some towns.
- School Counsellor / Guidance / Wellbeing supporter
- Emotional Supports for teachers outside of EAP

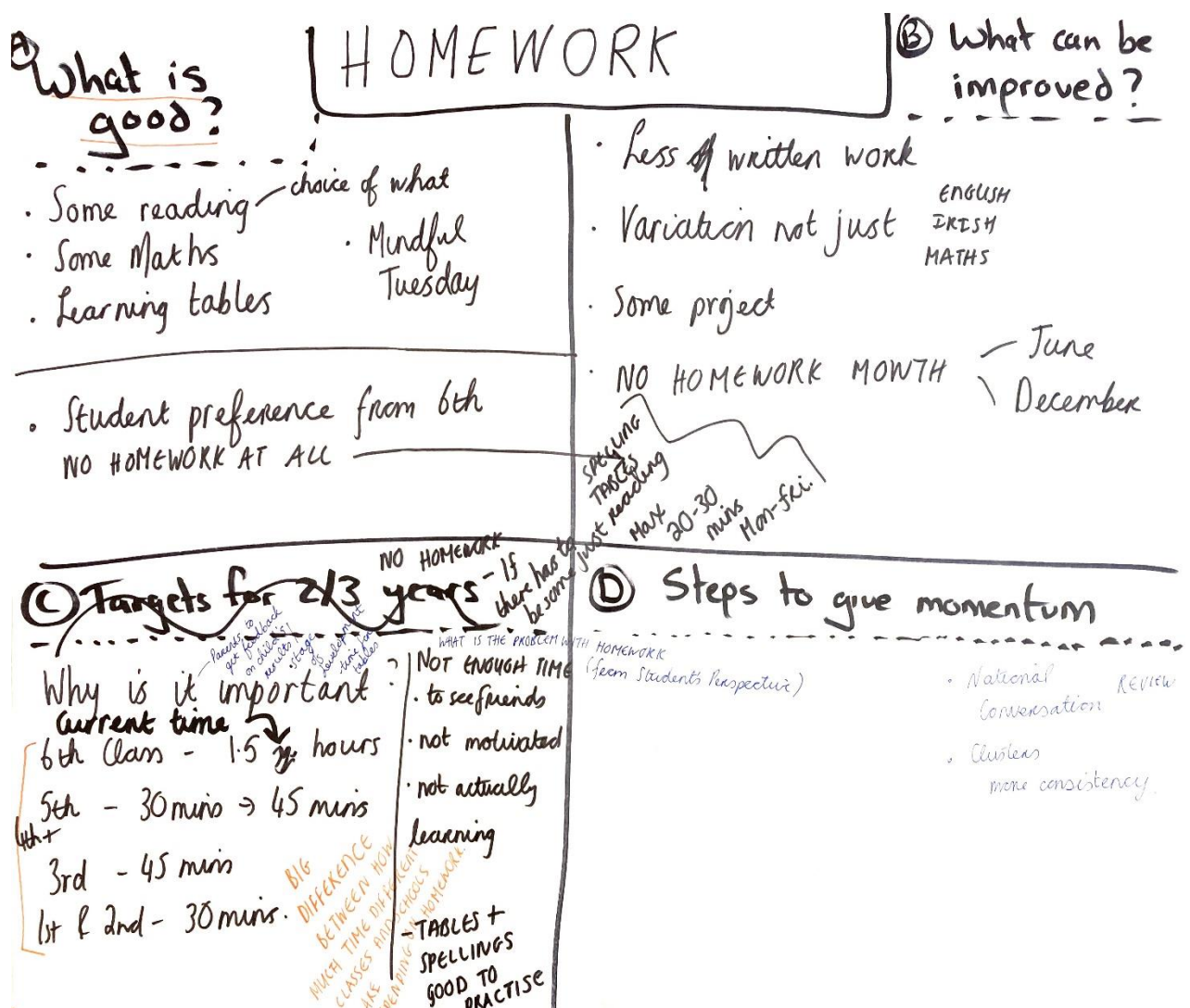
### D) Steps to give momentum

- Wellbeing exercises as part of homework



## Homework

- **What's good?** Some reading – choice of what; some maths; learning tables; mindful Tuesday; student preference from 6<sup>th</sup> – no homework at all; if there has to be some – just spelling, tables and reading, max 20 – 30 minutes Monday – Friday;
- **Improvable:** less written work; variation not just English, Irish and maths; some projects; no homework months – June/December; big difference between how much time different classes and schools are spending on homework; 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> – 30 mins; 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> – 30 – 45mins; 6<sup>th</sup> class – 1.5 hours
- **2-3 Years targets:** No homework; from student perspective homework entails – not enough time to see friends; not motivated; not actually learning; from parent's perspective it's important to get feedback on child's results and stage of development;
- **Momentum steps:** national conversation/review; clusters – more consistency.



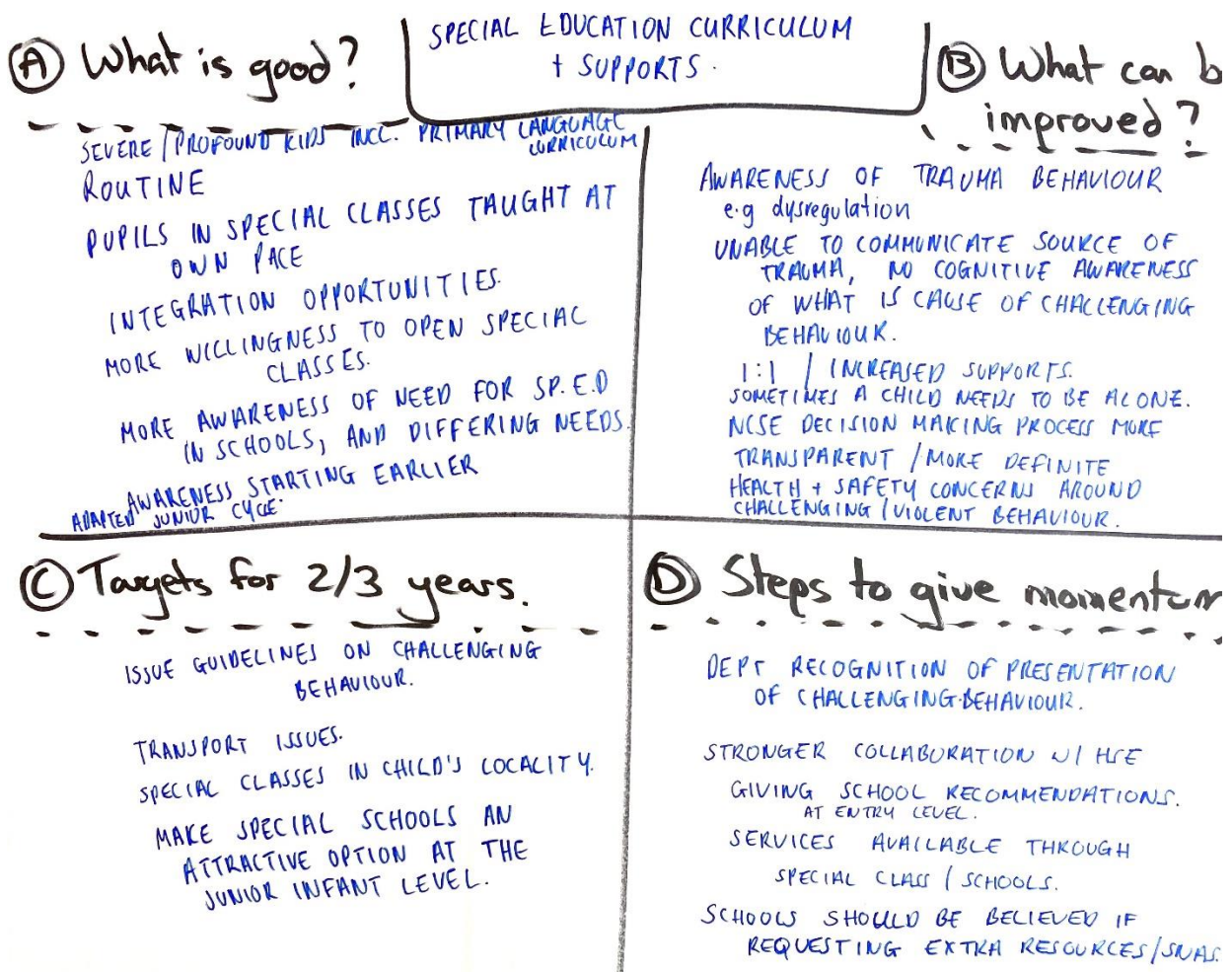
## Safety and Trust

- **What's good?** Teachers are open; you're with people you can trust; we can talk to our teachers/SNA's; stay safe programme; being with people you feel safe with;
- **Improvable:** stay safe needs to be updated; teachers need to be updated; more settling-in for first day of school; more groupwork and teamwork; flexibility in the gift curriculum (more bonding);
- **2-3 Year targets:** more games/having fun in class; more classes mixing together; having smaller groups not always being in big groups;
- **Momentum steps:** letting teachers have time to talk to their students; more groupwork in art/PE/Projects/Science/giving students options.

(A) What is good?	Safety and Trust	(B) What can be improved?
<p>Teachers are open</p> <p>You're with people you can trust</p> <p>We can talk to our teachers/SNA</p> <p>Stay Safe program</p> <p>Being with people you feel safe with</p>		<p>Stay Safe needs to be updated</p> <p>Teachers need to be updated</p> <p>More settling in for first day of school</p> <p>More groupwork and teamwork</p> <p>Flexibility in the gift curriculum (more bonding)</p>
(C) Targets for 2/3 years		(D) Steps to give momentum
<p>More games/having fun in the class</p> <p>More classes mixing together</p> <p>Having smaller groups not always being in big groups</p>		<p>Letting teachers have time to talk to their students</p> <p>More groupwork in art/PE/Projects/Science</p> <p>Giving students options</p>

## Special Education Curriculum & Supports

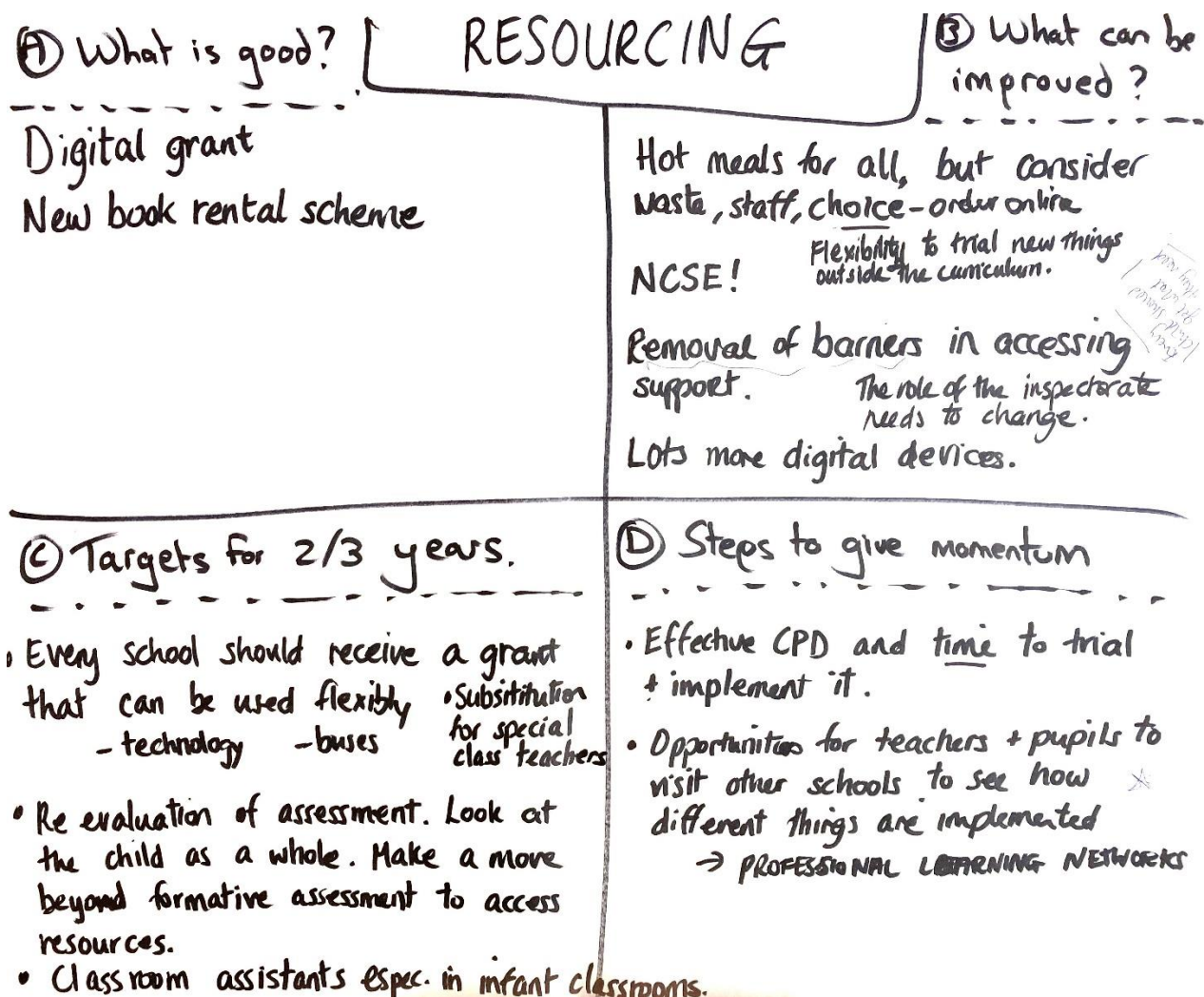
- **What's good?** Sever/profound kids included; primary language curriculum; routine; pupils in special classes taught at own pace; integration opportunities; more willingness to open special classes; more awareness of need for special education in schools and differing needs; awareness starting earlier; adapted junior cycle;
- **Improvable:** awareness of trauma behaviour e.g. dysregulation; unable to communicate source of trauma; not cognitive awareness of what is cause of challenging behaviour; 1:1 increased supports; sometimes a child need to be alone; NCSE decision making process more transparent/more definite; health & safety concerns around challenging/violent behaviour;
- **2-3 Years targets:** issue guidelines on challenging behaviour; transport issues; special classes in child's locality; make special schools an attractive option at the junior-infants level;
- **Momentum steps:** Departmental recognition of presentation of challenging behaviour; stronger collaboration with HSE; giving schools recommendations at entry level; services available through special class/schools; schools should be believed if requesting extra resources/SNA's.





## Resourcing

- **What's good?** Digital grant; new book rental scheme;
- **Improvable:** hot meals for all but consider waste, staff, choice – order online; NCSE! Flexibility to trial new things outside the curriculum; removal of barriers in accessing support; every child should get what they need; the role of the inspectorate needs to change; lots of digital devices;
- **2-3 Years targets:** every school should receive a grant that can be used flexibly – technology, buses, substitution for special-class teachers; re-evaluation of assessment; look at the child as a whole; make a move beyond formative assessment to access resources; classroom assistants especially in infant classrooms;
- **Momentum steps:** effective CPD and time to trial and implement it; opportunities for teachers and pupils to visit other schools to see how different things are implemented – professional learning networks.



## Parting Messages to the Department

- ❖ **Happiness/Fun:** Can you make school more fun please? More focus on kids' mental health; everyone should be more obedient and kind; a child should be understood no matter what and if something seems "different" it should be analysed and talked about to them feel safe, happy and motivated; more time in a crowded curriculum for wellbeing; make learning fun! balance: like when we're doing something more difficult it's nice to do something nice after; if children do not feel safe, happy or motivated to do something, they won't be confident to participate; socialising with other people and have to all get together with our class.
- ❖ **Listen to our Voice:** Listen to teachers, parents and pupils; take these consultations seriously – make education a real priority! Give children a voice and listen; listen to the child's voice; more consultation with schools before rolling out grants/schemes e.g. school books, hot lunches – iron out issues first; great to be given the chance to think/talk about the future of education; listen to what was said today;
- ❖ **Suitable Supports/Resources:** provision of resources before rolling out **new initiatives** - consultation with schools to what is needed in advance; resources – both human and monetary funding available; more resources for all schools; invest more in resources and schools; if children are unhappy in school, I think teachers should get at least five minutes to talk about what is going on but that won't happen if we don't have assistants; review of funding for resources for non-DEIS schools; education system and **schools seen as a catch-all** – can't absorb much more; we should cut down on **travelling expenses**, buses, school tours etc; free buses + access to more historical places etc; more funding for activities and buses from the department taking pressure off fund-raising; too much **red tape**, unfair distribution of limited resources; easier access to resources – less red tape; not enough teacher support so that children can actually thrive; more resources for teachers to get emotional supports; More resources for schools – extra teachers in classrooms to support and **build relationships**; extra funding for physical resources.
- ❖ **Invest in Special Schools/More responsive NCSE:** invest in special schools; make NCSE decision-making transparent and accountable; invest more in special education, acknowledge the great work that schools are doing; support schools more when they are for help and support; special schools need to be given the resources necessary to do their jobs properly. As a parent I see our wonderful staff having to constantly fight for resources and having to justify why they are needed. These staff members need to be listened to and supported. The **red tape** when applying to the NCSE needs to be at a minimum and decision-making needs to be **more transparent**. The system needs to move at a **quicker** pace because delays mean our children



suffer; more help with the special needs schools/ASD unit classrooms. To help them best evaluate our people's needs; more attention to special needs;

- ❖ **Pedagogy/New Curriculum:** Practical and play-based learning – to suit modern life! There is a unique opportunity with the new curriculum to offer time and space for meaningful engagement between teachers and **professional learning networks**. Give support to children that need it; we should bring in a second language for primary; in this new curriculum we need to make sure everything is right. Students want and need more opportunities for **practical learning** inside and outside the classroom. Teachers are so thinly spread that they haven't the time to give students the individualised support they currently need; more religion; learning through games;
- ❖ **Green Education:** greenery and climate change - the world won't change if we don't change it! Outdoor spaces are very important to young people. These need to be further developed. Help required with this;
- ❖ **Sport/PE:** More physical education – more sport; I would like more PE and not just football, other sports like handball, volleyball and a lot of other sports;
- ❖ **Homework:** No homework (x2); less homework; I would like some homework like reading, tables and spelling and NO test on Friday's; I would like to get rid of homework as it takes up too much unnecessary time in the evenings and confuses people;
- ❖ **Role of the Inspectorate:** to support schools.

