



**ombudsman
do leanai
for children**

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Ombudsman for Children**

**Children's Rights and
Learning from Complaints**

ETB IRELAND CONFERENCE
Midlands Hotel, Portlaoise
1/2/24



Bank of Ireland 



LONDON GUILDHALL
UNIVERSITY



WHO AM I?



**ombudsman
do leanai
for children**



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Ombudsman for Children's Office

- Ombudsman for Children Act, 2002
- Independent statutory body
- Presidential appointment
- Direct accountability to the Oireachtas



OCO Key Functions

- 1. Complaint Handling**
 - Free, Independent and Impartial
 - Alternative to Court
- 2. Promotion of Children's Rights and Welfare**
 - Promote awareness of children's rights, including among children and including the UNCRC
 - Consult children and highlight their concerns
 - Monitor and advise on legislation and public policy
 - Undertake or commission research

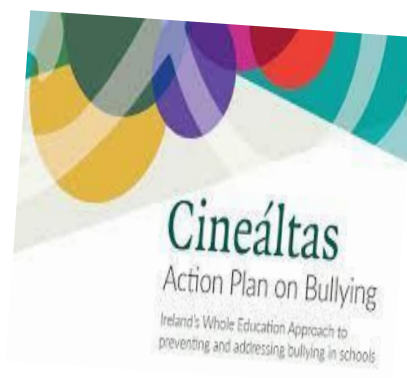
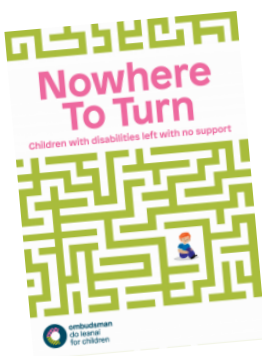


Complaints Across the Years

- Breakdown
 - 45-50% of ALL complaints relate to Education
- Issues include –
 - Bullying,
 - School Places,
 - Support for SEN,
 - Transport,
 - Restricted Timetables



OCO FOLLOW UP



Aisling – Case Study (Annual Report 2022)

- She reported sexual abuse within the school by another student
 - School treated it as “behavioural issue” by the student accused
 - Aisling felt blamed by the school and was forced to take part in a Restorative meeting with the accused
 - Abusive behaviour continued and school responded to this (and other disclosures)
 - Aisling continued to be bullied by the accused friends after that student left the school
- OCO sought school side, was unhappy with that and initiated an investigation
 - We found school failed to uphold Aisling’s best interests by failing to invoke its child protection policy and by not engaging with Tusla
 - Restorative meeting happened without adequately considering the negative impact it could have on Aisling

Aisling – Case Study

SCHOOL RESPONSE

- Apology to Aisling for how it handled the complaint
- Recognised Gardai and Tusla should have been involved
- Restorative meeting without parents consent was unacceptable
- Extensive review of policies and procedures within school

OCO RESPONSE

• ENGAGE WITH TUSLA AND DEPT OF EDUCATION

- Tusla not clear around handling of Peer To Peer abuse in schools AND Dept say it is up to each school

NOT GOOD ENOUGH ANYMORE

- They need to work together to support Principals and Boards around this issue
- In the vacuum – Schools and Boards are trying their best, but it is a minefield



COMPLAINT HANDLING ISSUES

- Delays
- Poor Communication
 - Good and Bad information
 - Awareness of how a complaint works
 - Awareness of role of Principal & Board
- ETB funnel complainants toward Professional Conduct Complaints mechanisms (need to name an individual)
- https://www.oco.ie/app/uploads/2018/02/14665_OCO_child-centred-complaints_Update_Web-1.pdf



~~Education (School Parents and Students)
Charter~~

~~Education (School Student and Parents)
Charter~~

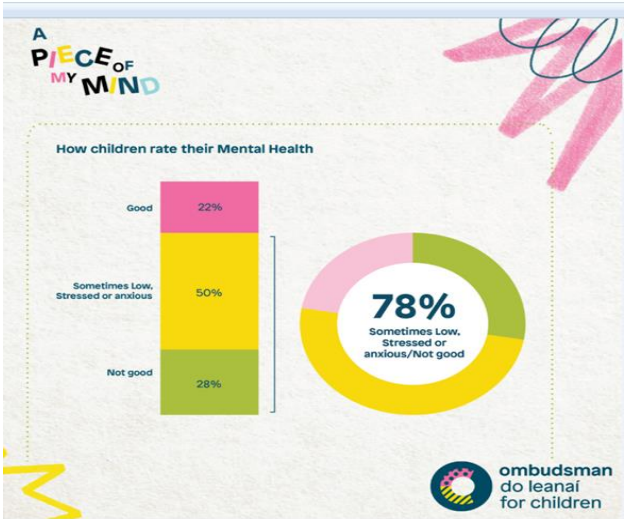
Education (School Community) Charter

- Create a standard complaints system around the country
- Engage all parties
- Promote the culture of informal discussion and communication
- Prevention vs Cure
- Self Reflection = Self Correction

OCO RESPONSE



On a totally different matter





“Just one more thing”



