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IrishTimes.com, Tuesday, 28 September, 2010

## **Immigrant children badly bullied - study**

JAMIE SMYTH, Social Affairs Correspondent

IMMIGRANT CHILDREN as young as seven or eight years are experiencing serious racist bullying in primary schools in inner city Dublin, a new study shows.

Research undertaken by the Trinity Immigration Initiative at seven primary schools in Dublin's north inner city shows racist bullying is taking place inside and outside the classroom. Teachers are often not aware of the full extent of the racial problems as the children concerned often try and hide what is going on from adults.

Dr Philip Curry of the initiative told a conference yesterday there was a "clear strand of name-calling and bullying with specific racial overtones evident in most schools".

He said name-calling was more typical than physical abuse, although acts of physical violence were occurring in primary schools.

Dr Curry said there was evidence racist abuse had serious negative impacts on children, leading to depression, delinquency and health problems. He provided details of one interview with an eight-year-old Nigerian who, when asked if he would change anything about himself, responded by saying he wanted to be white.

A fifth-class girl from eastern Europe told interviewers she felt stupid because she had bad English. She said she often returned home crying because she had been punched by other pupils.

Dr Curry said some schools seemed to be experiencing more racist bullying than others, although it was not clear exactly why this was happening.

He said his own suspicion was that wider community influences could be a factor and racism could occur in areas experiencing other problems. However, he said further study was required.

Dr Curry provided a snapshot of the study at a Dublin City Council conference on One City One People – Integration: the Next Decade?

The study, which includes 330 interviews with primary students and two weeks of classroom observation in 20 classes, will be expanded in a book *Where To From Here? Children and the Future of Integration in Ireland*.

Dr Curry said the future for migrant children in schools was bright because they were generally industrious, well-behaved and had a traditional, positive attitude towards school and authority.

He said some local children had a very positive attitude towards newcomer pupils and there were many examples of “reaching out” to migrants.

The study makes several key recommendations to improve integration.

These include: ensuring key stakeholders acknowledge that serious problems such as ethnic division and racial bullying occur despite examples of positive interaction; development of school- and community-based strategies to tackle bullying and develop multicultural curriculums, and to collect data and evaluate the programmes already in place.

### **IN BLACK AND WHITE: INTERVIEW EXTRACT**

*African boy, second class*

**Interviewer** : So if you could change anything about yourself, would you change anything?

**Migrant boy** : Yes.

**Interviewer** : What would you change?

**Boy** : My body.

**Interviewer** : You’d change your body, in what way?

**Boy** : I’d turn into white.

**Interviewer** : You’d turn into white, why would you do that?

**Boy** : So people can’t laugh at me.

**Interviewer** : Why would they laugh at you?

**Boy** : Because they called me black.

\*\* Trinity Immigration Initiative – children, youth and community relations project