# Parents confront rising racist bullying in Irish schools amid new reporting rules



In an unexpected turn of events, I found myself in Genghis’s van, en route to the primary school for what could only be described as an emergency meeting. The gravity of the situation hit hard: my daughter had been accused of ‘bullying and racist behaviour’. This scenario had never crossed my mind, an indication perhaps of both my naivety and the growing complexities of childhood interactions in an increasingly multicultural Ireland.

As Genghis, whose real name is Brian McCann, manoeuvred the vehicle with alarming speed, I battled against not only the anxiety of impending discussions with school authorities but also the physical discomfort from a recently dislocated shoulder. “Slow down!” I cried out, grimacing as we jolted over yet another speed bump. To my surprise, Genghis, who typically refrained from meaningful conversation, offered unsolicited advice: “Rest it and it’ll seize up.” His casual confidence startled me, especially given my long-held suspicions about his views on race and identity.

Among certain circles in our community, Genghis maintained a formidable reputation. His reputation as a local protector, combined with an ambiguous moral compass, made him a complex figure. While many associated him with a rough-and-ready bravado, there were hints of depth and cultivation, particularly in the way he confided in me about the history of Tyrone and his passion for music; he was an accomplished uilleann piper. On that sun-soaked day, he sported a pair of cut-off denim shorts, a checked shirt buttoned up, and a baseball cap perched high on his head, evoking an unintentional resemblance to Crocodile Dundee, an image that momentarily eased my spiralling thoughts about the situation ahead.

Arriving at the school felt surreal. The principal's office loomed—an intimidating structure that was emblematic of authority and, in my mind, judgment. As I paused to steady my nerves, Genghis leaned against the van, puffing on a cigarette, and eyed the entrance. “What in under Jesus are you flummoxed about?” he asked, a genuine curiosity apparent in his tone. The weight of the accusation soon spilled forth, revealing the incident that made my daughter a supposed “culprit” in a narrative laden with fear and misunderstanding.

His reaction was immediate, “Racist? That child’s not racist,” he declared emphatically. A wave of relief washed over me, as his instinctive vehement defence mirrored my own conviction. In light of recent troubling data, however, such sentiments highlight a critical issue. A recent EU study outlined that Ireland experiences a higher incidence of racist bullying among children when compared to the overall European average, with alarming figures indicating that 56% of people of African descent reported facing racial discrimination. These statistics, combined with accounts revealing that black children in Ireland face the brunt of such bullying, paint a sobering picture regarding the atmosphere our children navigate in educational settings.

Amidst rising societal concerns over racism in schools, new guidelines have come into effect across Ireland mandating educational institutions to formally document all instances of bullying, including motivations linked to race and ethnicity. This initiative, referred to as 'Bí Cineálta' (Be Kind), aims to not only gather data but ultimately combat bullying through informed policies. According to Minister for Education Norma Foley, this effort is crucial to ensuring that children feel safe and supported in their learning environments.

As I prepared to confront the unknown at the school, I couldn’t help but reflect on Genghis’s unexpected support in this challenging moment. While societal progress toward acknowledging and addressing racism takes time and collective effort, it is the dialogues that emerge from incidents like these that pave the way for understanding and change. Ultimately, it is our responsibility to ensure our children inherit an inclusive world—one where their identities are embraced and celebrated, rather than vilified.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/opinion/speed-bumps-cut-off-jeans-and-lessons-in-life-from-tyrones-crocodile-dundee-G3VATZZPL5DL3ACL2WQIYATUC4/), [[2]](https://www.thejournal.ie/eu-study-finds-above-average-rate-of-racist-bullying-against-children-in-ireland-6206185-Oct2023/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/opinion/speed-bumps-cut-off-jeans-and-lessons-in-life-from-tyrones-crocodile-dundee-G3VATZZPL5DL3ACL2WQIYATUC4/), [[2]](https://www.thejournal.ie/eu-study-finds-above-average-rate-of-racist-bullying-against-children-in-ireland-6206185-Oct2023/), [[3]](https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/social-affairs/2023/10/25/black-children-in-ireland-at-greatest-risk-of-racist-abuse-report-finds/), [[5]](https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-41419468.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/social-affairs/2023/10/25/black-children-in-ireland-at-greatest-risk-of-racist-abuse-report-finds/), [[4]](https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/education/2024/01/30/schools-must-record-all-bullying-incidents-under-new-guidelines/), [[6]](https://www.rte.ie/news/2020/0821/1160506-school-racism-investigation/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[5]](https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-41419468.html), [[6]](https://www.rte.ie/news/2020/0821/1160506-school-racism-investigation/), [[7]](https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/appearance-and-race-top-reasons-for-bullying-of-schoolchildren-1.3914822)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.irishnews.com/opinion/speed-bumps-cut-off-jeans-and-lessons-in-life-from-tyrones-crocodile-dundee-G3VATZZPL5DL3ACL2WQIYATUC4/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.thejournal.ie/eu-study-finds-above-average-rate-of-racist-bullying-against-children-in-ireland-6206185-Oct2023/> - An EU study reveals that Ireland has a higher incidence of racist bullying among children compared to the EU average. The survey found that 56% of people of African descent in Ireland experienced racial discrimination in recent years. Additionally, nearly 40% of parents reported their children faced offensive or threatening comments due to their ethnic background, and 23% reported physical abuse, the highest rate among the countries surveyed.
3. <https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/social-affairs/2023/10/25/black-children-in-ireland-at-greatest-risk-of-racist-abuse-report-finds/> - A report by the EU's Fundamental Rights Agency indicates that black children in Ireland face the highest levels of bullying, racist comments, and physical attacks among the surveyed member states. The study highlights that 55% of people of African descent in Ireland experienced racial discrimination in the past five years, marking an increase from 48% in 2016. The report also points out that racism against black, African people in Ireland is among the worst in Europe and is on the rise.
4. <https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/education/2024/01/30/schools-must-record-all-bullying-incidents-under-new-guidelines/> - New guidelines in Ireland mandate that schools record all incidents of bullying behavior, including details about the motivation and method. The updated procedures aim to address various forms of bullying, such as cyberbullying, racism, gender-identity bullying, and sexual harassment. The initiative seeks to provide a clearer picture of bullying prevalence and inform future anti-bullying strategies.
5. <https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-41419468.html> - The Irish government has introduced 'Bí Cineálta' (Be Kind) procedures, requiring schools to report all bullying incidents to the board of management. This initiative aims to create a national database on bullying, recording types and frequencies to inform future anti-bullying measures. Minister for Education Norma Foley emphasized the importance of addressing bullying to ensure children's happiness and safety in schools.
6. <https://www.rte.ie/news/2020/0821/1160506-school-racism-investigation/> - A review into allegations of racism at St Columba's College in Dublin recommends immediate anti-racism training for all staff and students and a ban on the use of the 'n' word in classrooms and elsewhere. The review was commissioned after former students made serious allegations of racist behavior at the school. The college has apologized to past and present students who experienced racism and is committed to implementing the review's recommendations.
7. <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/appearance-and-race-top-reasons-for-bullying-of-schoolchildren-1.3914822> - A global study by UNESCO across 144 countries found that physical appearance is the leading cause of bullying, with 15% of students targeted for their looks. The second most common reason is race, nationality, or skin color, affecting 10% of students. James O'Higgins Norman from the National Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre at DCU expressed concern over these findings, especially as Ireland becomes more multicultural, emphasizing the need for proactive measures against identity-based bullying.