

# **Democracy in our School**

## Student Councils In Ireland (Is there Democracy in Our Schools?)

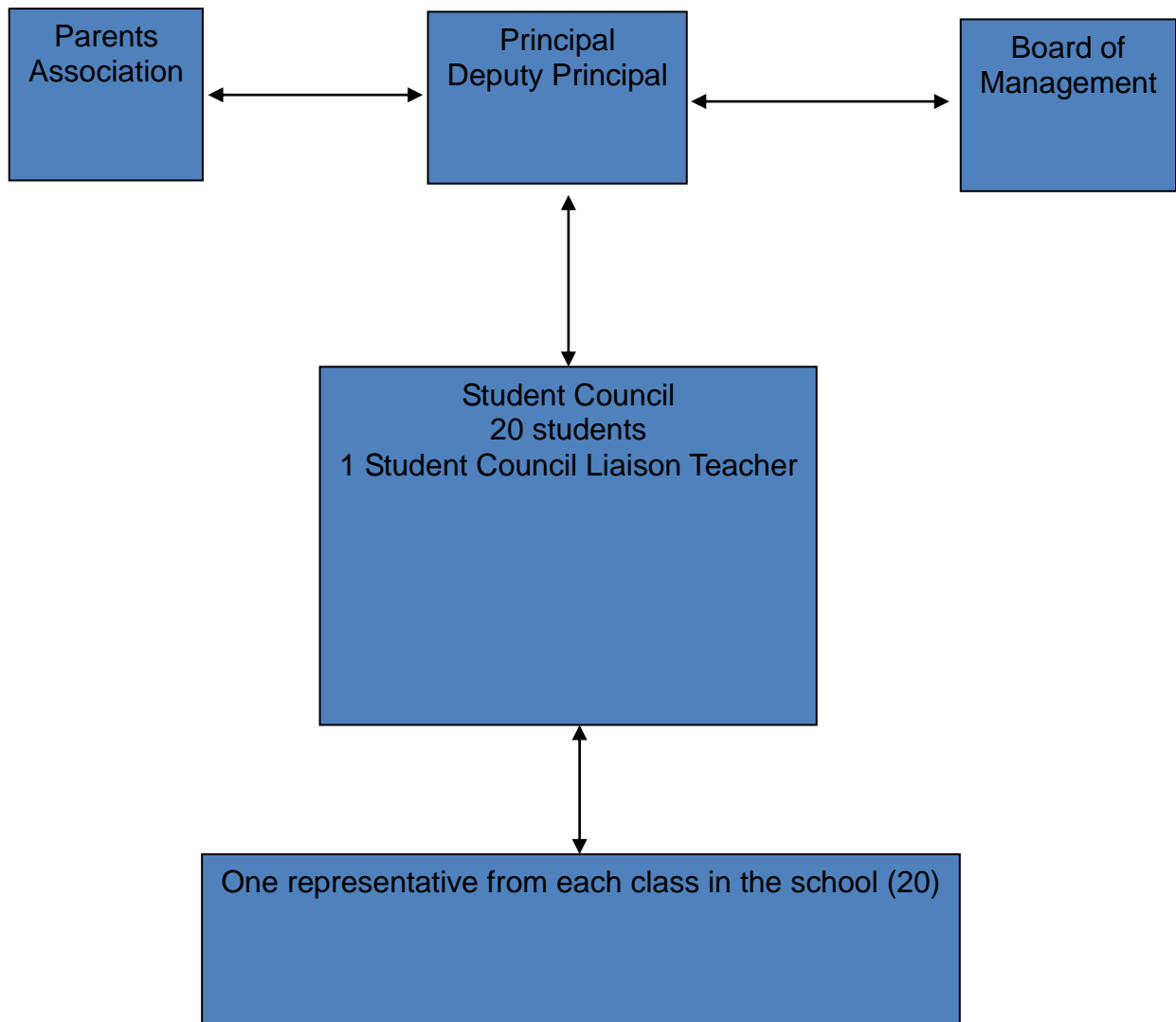
- The Education Act, 1998 provides for the establishment of Student Councils to provide a representative structure for students to contribute to the school community.
- Section 27 of the Education Act, 1998 says that Boards of Management shall encourage and give all reasonable assistance to students in the setting up and running of student councils in second level schools.

### The role of the Student Council is to:

- Enhance communication between students, management, staff and parents
- Promote an environment conducive to educational and personal development
- Promote friendship and respect among students
- Support management and staff in the development of the school, and  
*Represent the views of students on matters of concern to them!*

### Our Student Council in St Mary's College, Arklow

- Each class in our school elects one representative to the Student Council at the beginning of the school year.
- The school council (which consists of 20 class representatives and the Student Council Liaison teacher) meets at least once each month.
- The Council discusses issues which girls in the school have brought to the attention of their representatives (reps).
- If the Council feels that the issue is something that could be changed in the school then it is brought to the attention of management (our Principal and Deputy Principal) for consideration.
- The Council has also been asked to discuss various school policies while they were being formulated so that the voice of the students could be heard.



**DEMOCRACY AND ME**

Are you...

Male  Female

Are you or have you ever been a member of the school Student Council?

Yes  No

Do you know who your class Student Council Rep. is?

Yes  No

Do you understand the role of Student Council in your school?

Yes  No

Would you be willing to represent your class on the Student Council if you were elected by your class?

Yes  No

(If answered no, why not?)

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Have you ever discussed issues that you feel strongly about with your Student Council Rep.? If so, what issues did you bring up?

Are you involved in any of the following school activities?

Sport  Debating  Senior Choir  Orchestra

Other (please state)

Are you aware of any improvements the school Student Council has helped to bring about in this school?

Yes  No

Would you like to be involved in Politics at some stage when you leave school?

Yes  No

# **Survey Statistics**

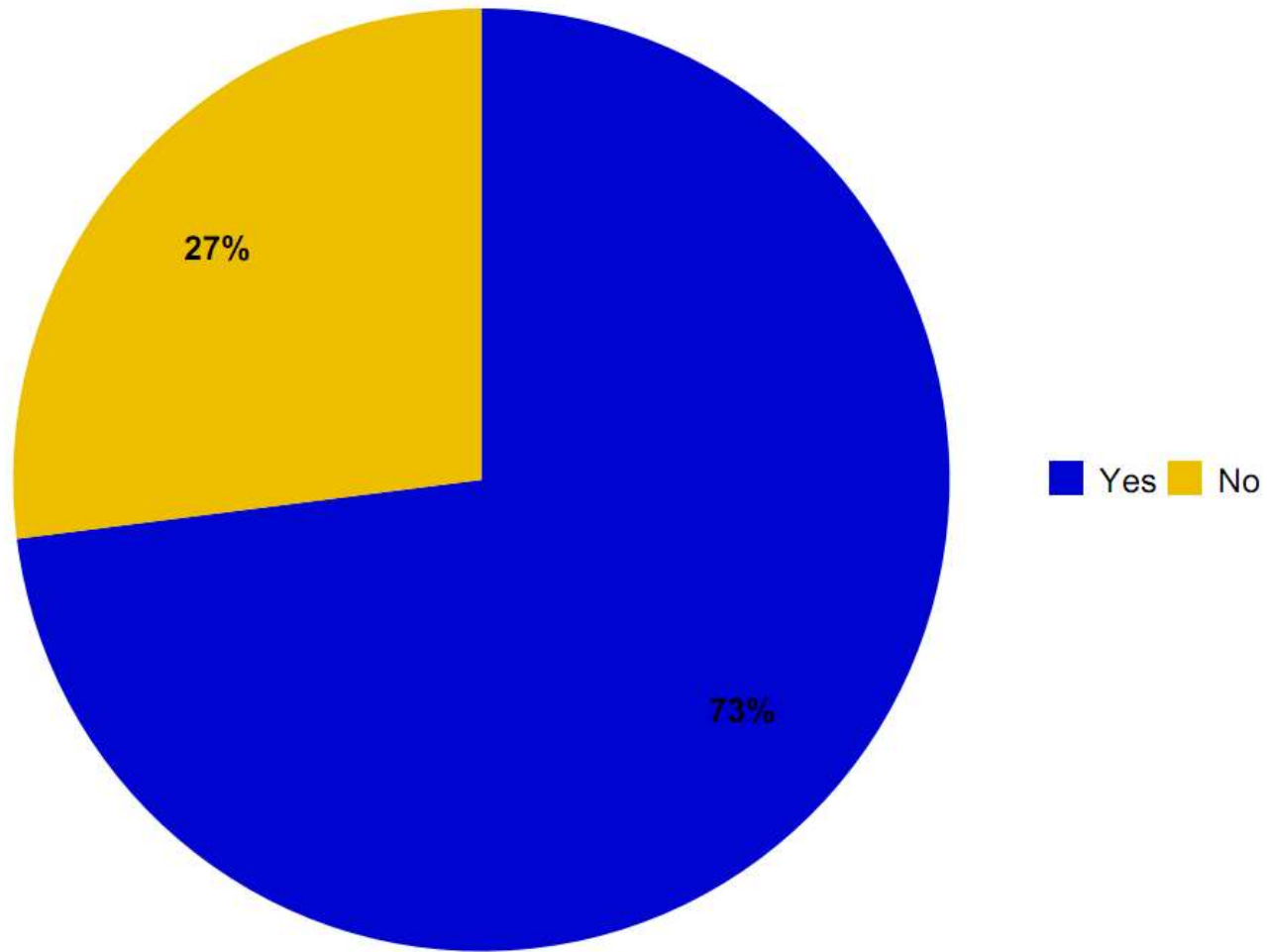
**School population: 550 girls**

**Sample size: 131 girls (24%)**

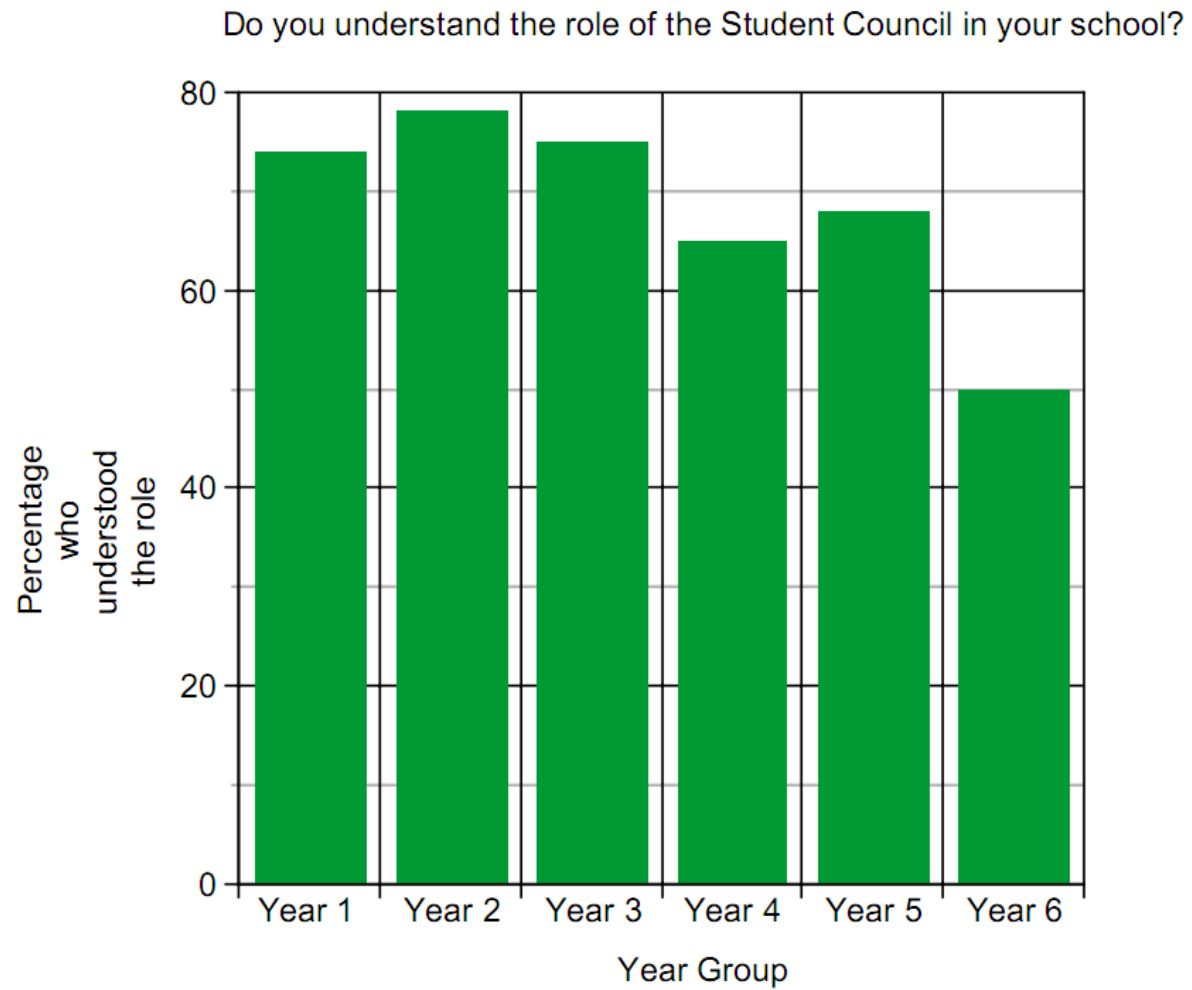
**Survey Distribution:**

**One class group from each year.**

Do you know who your Student Council class rep is?

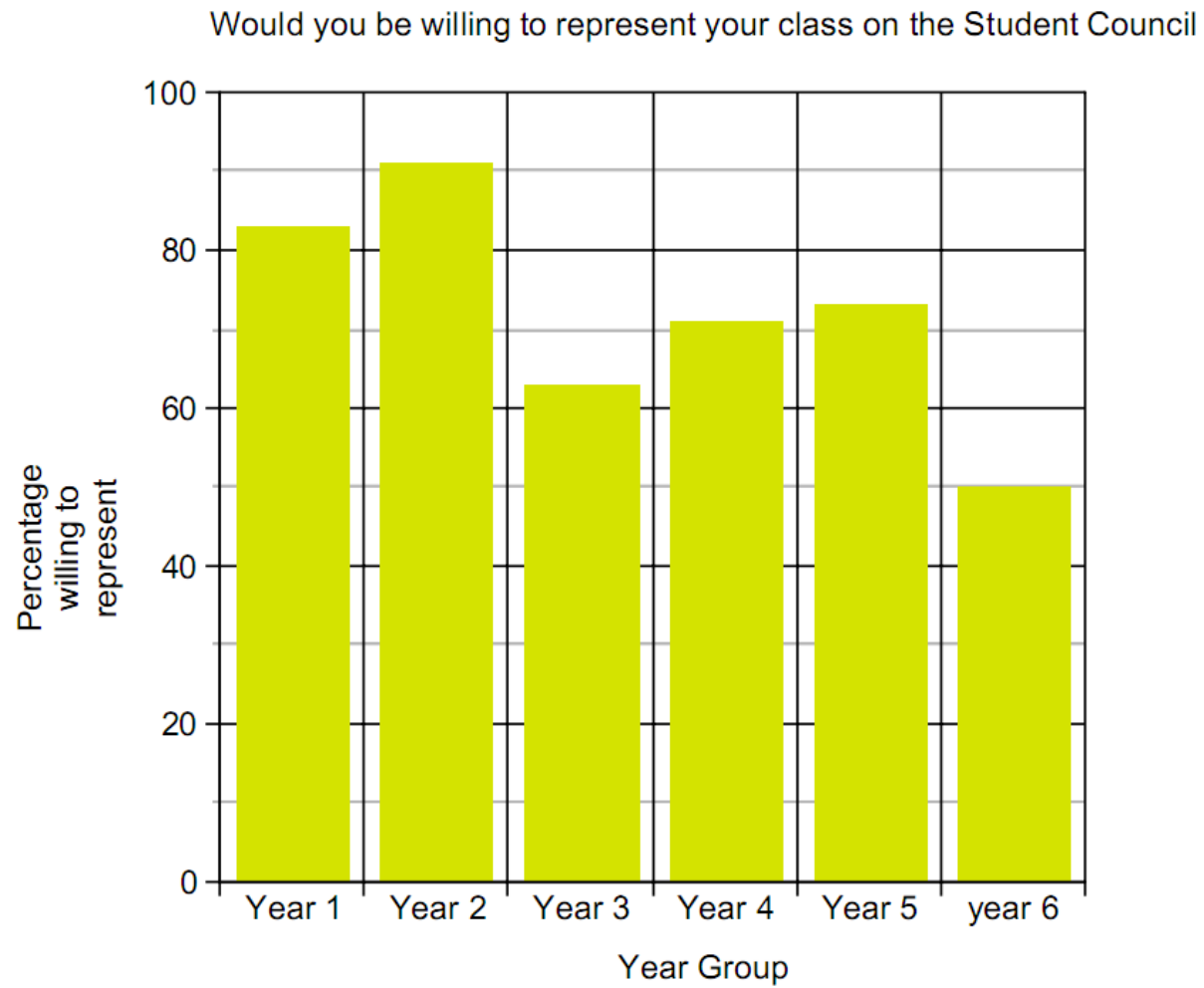


Comenius Survey



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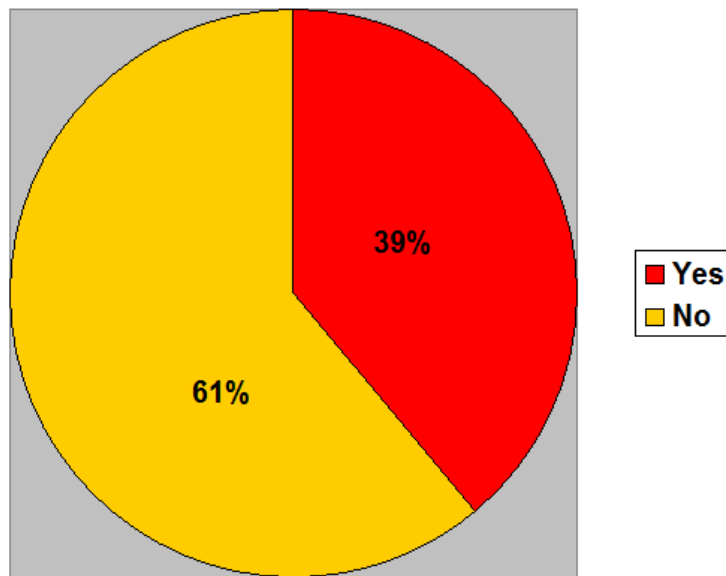
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## **Reasons why students were not willing to act as student representative on the Student Council**

- ⦿ **too busy with other activities**
- ⦿ **study commitments – this was most noted by third year and sixth year students who will sit State examinations this year**
- ⦿ **lack of confidence or too shy**
- ⦿ **lack of interest**

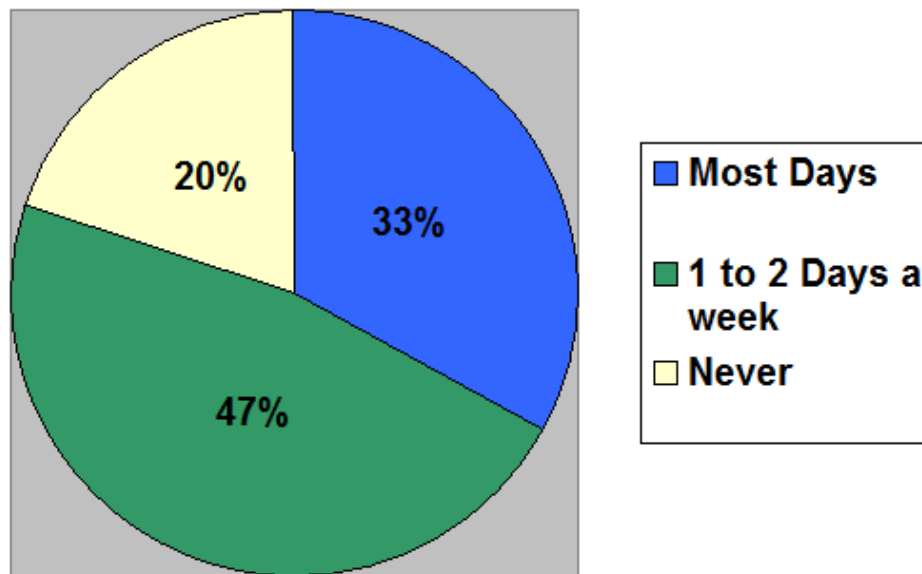
**Q. Are you aware of any improvements the Student Council has helped to introduce on your behalf?**

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¶  
¶  
¶  
¶  
A.¶



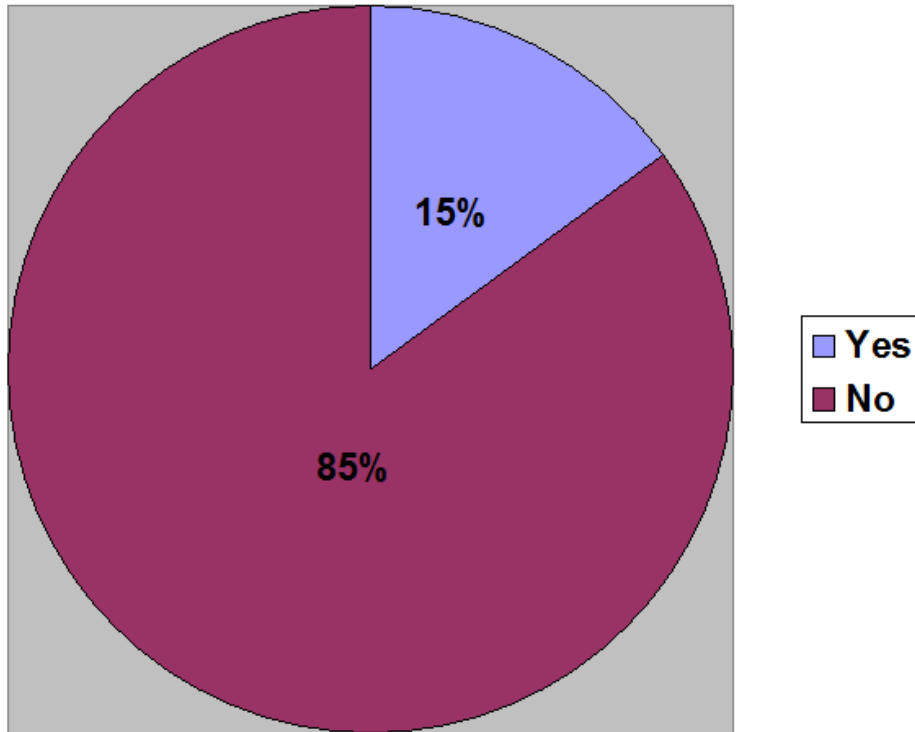
**Q. How often each week do you watch news programmes?**

A.



**Q. Would you be interested in becoming involved in politics in the future?**

**A.**



**Interview with Ms McKenna – Student Council Liaison Teacher****Interviewer: Stephanie O’Neill****Video: Molly McHale**

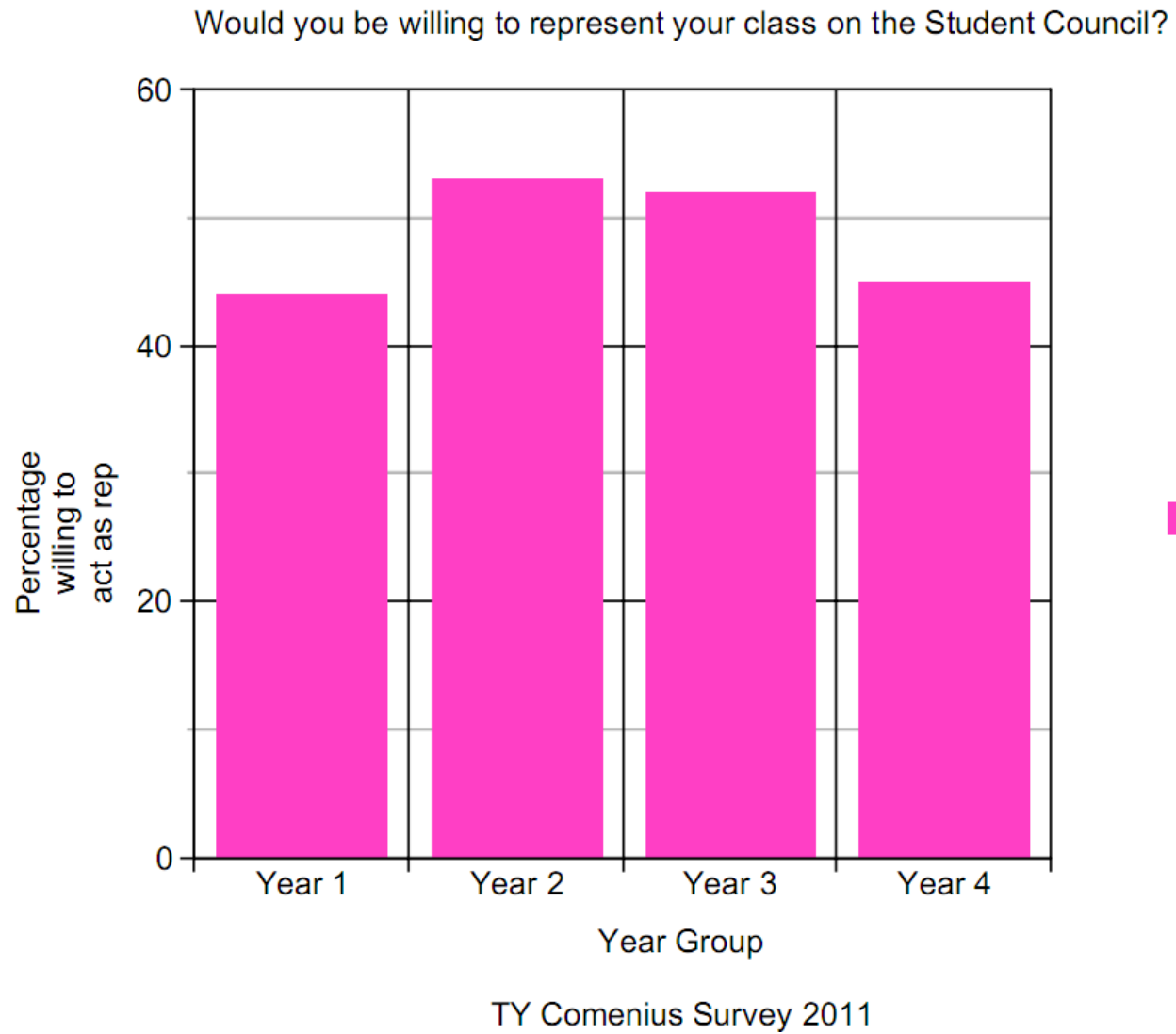
- ❖ **How long have you been involved with the Student Council in our school?**
- ❖ **We know that there is a representative from each class in our school on the Student Council. How often does the Student Council meet?**
- ❖ **When issues are discussed at meetings what happens then?**
- ❖ **Do the same issues come up each year?**
- ❖ **What has been the most recent suggestion which has been successfully introduced in the school?**
- ❖ **Are there different girls involved each year or do the same students represent their classes from one year to the next?**
- ❖ **Our recent survey has shown that some students are not aware of the improvements which the Student Council has negotiated on their behalf. How can the students be made more aware of the work done by the Student Council?**

## **What about other schools?**

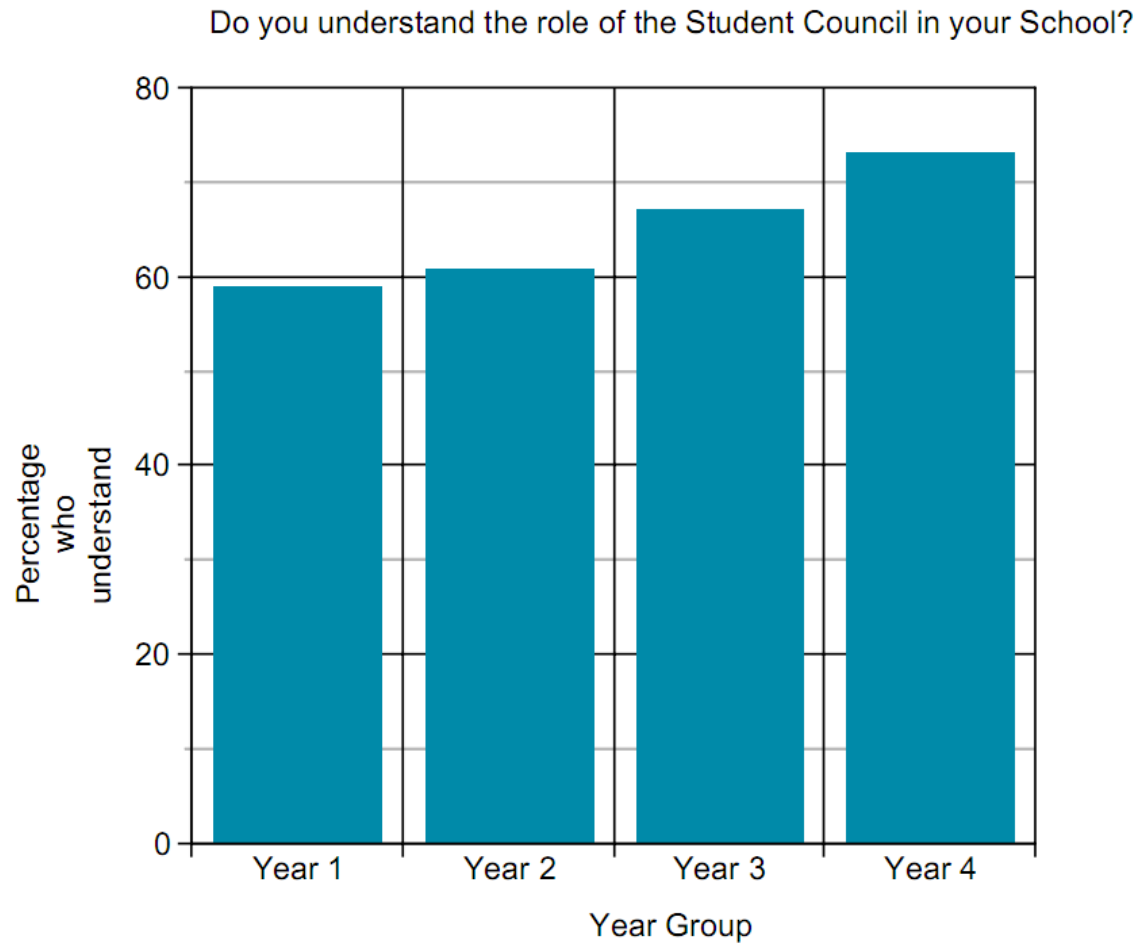
**We surveyed another school in our town, Gaelcholáiste na Mara, which is a mixed secondary school.**

### **Gaelcholáiste na Mara**

**Sample Size:     60 boys  
                             53 girls**

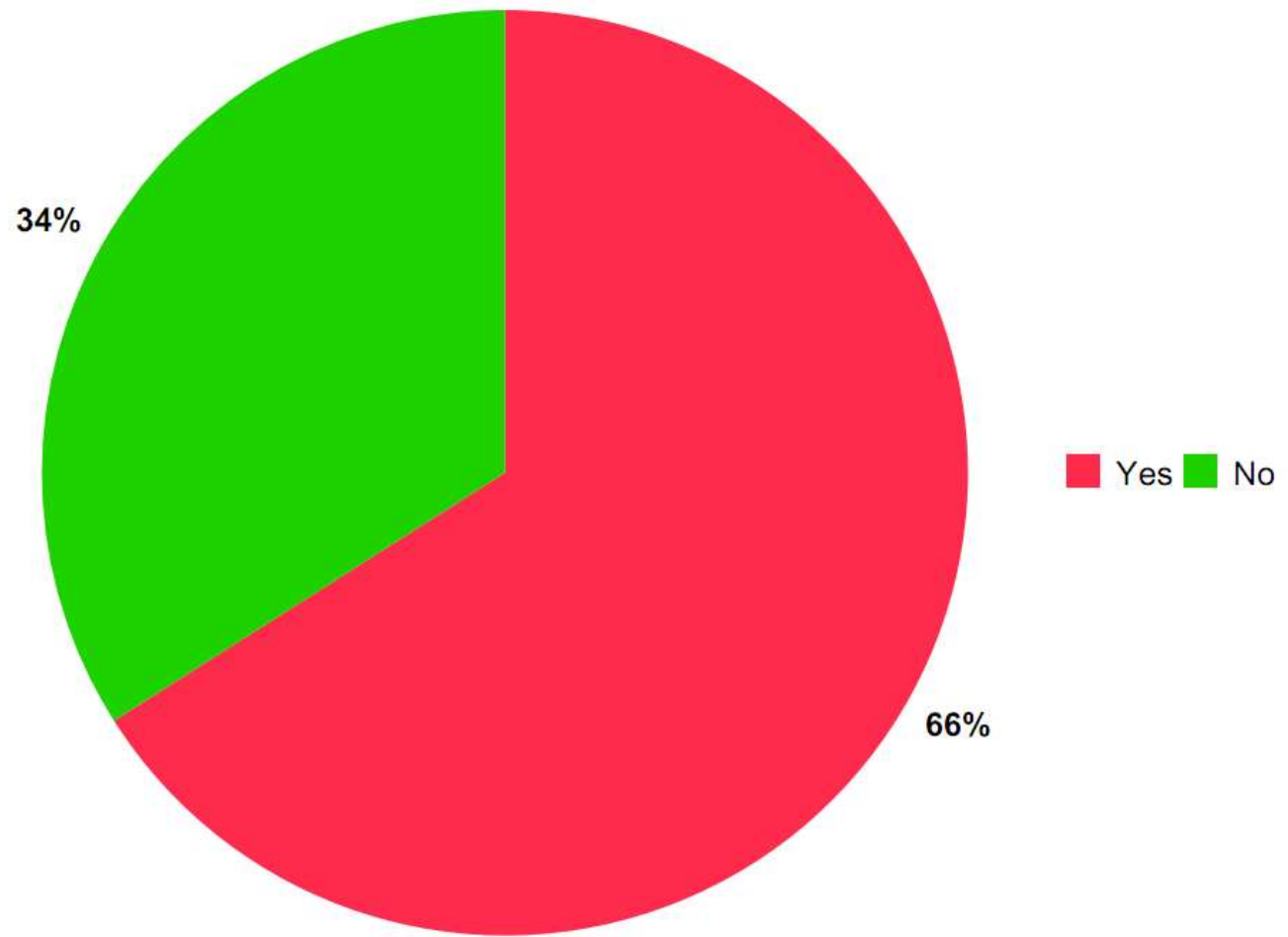






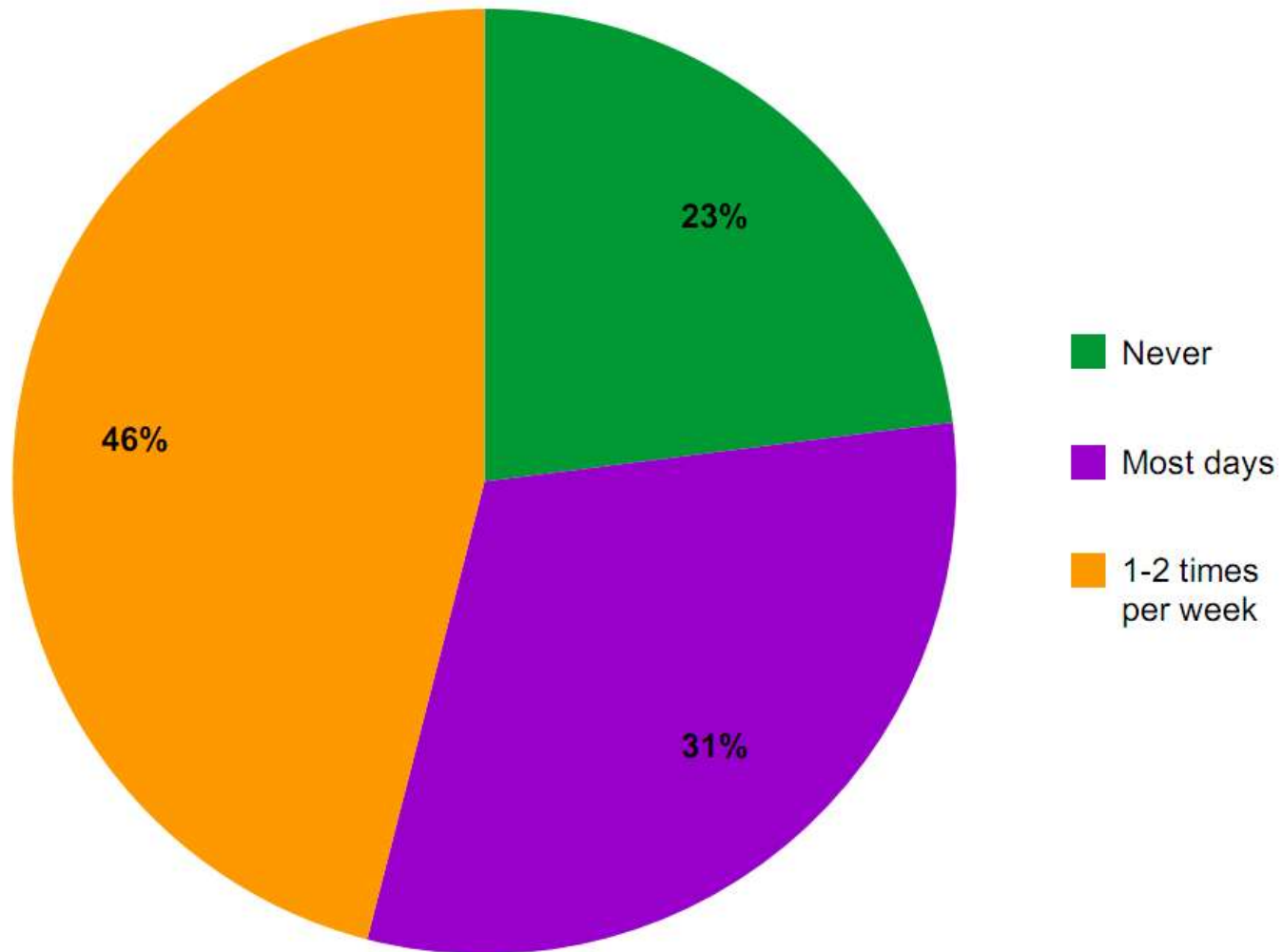
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Do you know who your Student Council class rep is?



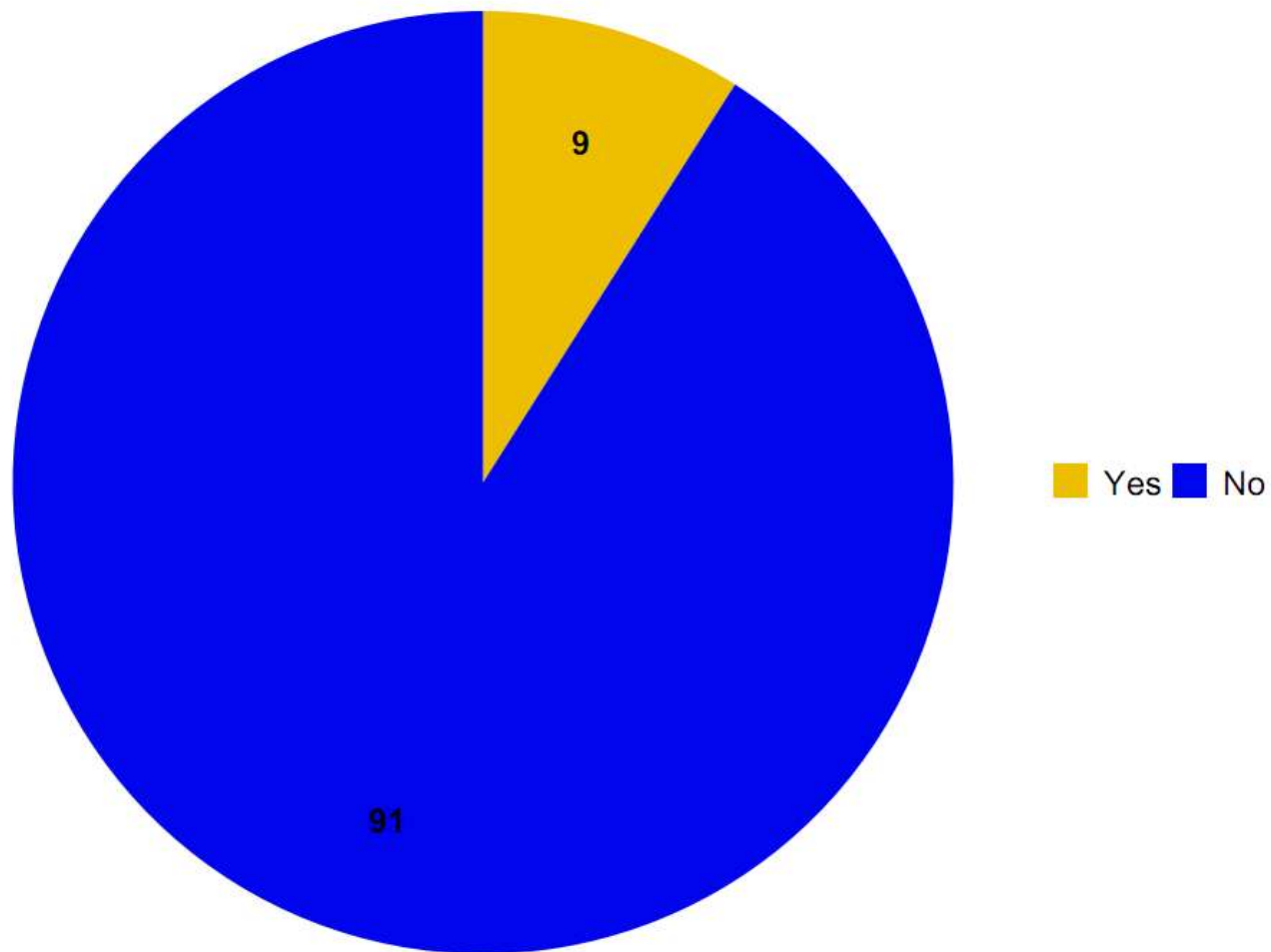
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How often do you watch news programmes on TV?



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Would you be interested in becoming involved in politics in the future?



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## **DOES GENDER MATTER?**

- ⌘ From our survey in Gaelcholaiste na Mara there were no significant differences in the attitudes of boys and girls.**
- ⌘ In the case of those who were unwilling to represent their class on the Student Council, boys were more likely to give a reason for their decision.**