

Developing a more positive school culture to address bullying and improve school relationships

Case studies from two primary schools and one intermediate school



AGENDA FOR

Children

Mahere rautaki mā te Hunga Tamariki



Acknowledgements

The Children's Issues Centre and the research team would like to acknowledge the good will shown by both the adults and children in each of the schools. Each principal was relaxed about having a researcher come into their school and ask questions about topics that are sensitive. This occurred in a context of agreeing to allow their schools to be named in this research report. The researchers were impressed by what has been, and is being, achieved at the schools in order to make them a better place for children to learn. These schools have learnt a lot about creating a positive school culture and we are happy to share some of their learning in this report.

Disclaimer

Any opinions expressed in the report are the views of the authors. They do not necessarily represent the views of the Ministry of Social Development.





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Executive summary

This study was commissioned by the Ministry of Social Development to help implement Action Area 4 of *New Zealand's Agenda for Children*, which aims to address violence in children's lives with a particular focus on bullying. The aim of this study was to collect information about the actions that three primary schools have taken to develop a more positive school culture and to reduce bullying in their schools.

The research questions focused on what the schools were like previously, how change was initiated, what programmes and community support were used, what the outcomes have been for schools and students, and what are the current challenges and goals that each school faces.

Three primary schools were identified and invited to be part of the research:

- Papatoetoe Intermediate School is in Manukau City
- Wilford Primary School is a full primary in Hutt City
- Caversham Primary School is a contributing primary in Dunedin City.

All three schools gave their permission to be identified in this report.

A researcher was assigned to each school. They undertook interviews with a range of adults in the school and facilitated focus groups with students. The adults who were interviewed in each school were the principal, teachers, school support staff, external professionals associated with the school, and a parent representative on the Board of Trustees.

Each researcher then developed a profile for their school. These profiles give a more detailed story about each school than will be found in this report. The profiles can be obtained online at www.msd.govt.nz/work-areas/children-and-young-people/agenda-for-children

The profiles provided:

- a description of the school
- a description of the school culture
- a description of the process of changing the school culture
- a description of the various programmes that the school used to bring about change
- a description of the role of different people in supporting the change in school culture
- a description of outcomes and new challenges.

The results of the comparative analysis show that there are identifiable themes common to all three schools. These themes were the importance of leadership in bringing about change, the centrality of relationships to school culture, the nature of the programmes that were used to bring about change, and finally, the nature of the change process itself.

While there were differences between the schools, these differences did not alter the relevance of the themes identified above. Each of the principals involved identified something different about their school that they wished to change but all three required a change in relationships within the school. All three schools had participated in the Specialist Education Services' *Eliminating Violence – Managing Anger programme*, but they also participated in many other external programmes or developed their own. All three schools had similar local factors that were

¹Specialist Education Services is now part of the Ministry of Education and referred to as Group Special Education.





influencing their development: they were all lower decile schools, they had high numbers of transient families, and families with diverse cultural backgrounds.

The principles of change identified in these three case study schools are critical for any school wanting to improve its school culture and to reduce bullying. Those principles are that:

- leadership is critical to initiating the process but staff support, followed by student support, is needed to achieve school-wide development
- the development of a more positive school culture requires people to look at the relationships that make up the school
- the programmes implemented, and it is unlikely to be just one, need to focus on supporting the wellbeing of students and their families and whanau
- the change process requires lots of time and energy and is not self sustaining.

The development that all three schools undertook, using the principles listed above, was a single school-wide policy or approach to managing student behaviour and the promotion of positive relationships. Such a policy or approach included:

- creating clear expectations through discussion about what was considered as desirable school relationships and appropriate behaviour
- setting in place consistent, immediate and fair consequences for both appropriate and inappropriate behaviour
- providing support for students so they could develop positive relationships and learn to behave appropriately.

It was the view of all research participants that their schools had managed to successfully reduce the amount and level of violence and bullying. Students within the focus groups reported they liked their school and felt safe there. They also knew what the expectations were in relation to appropriate behaviour at their school and could clearly describe what would happen if they or someone else were bullied.

The principles of change and the approaches to promoting positive relationships found in these three successful case study schools offer other New Zealand schools a starting point for reflection on how they might improve their own school culture and reduce violence and bullying.



Introduction

School culture is a relatively new concept in understanding schools as organisations. The development of the term began with anthropological understandings of schools and the way they work.

Neville (1998) used a case study approach to explore what it was that two New Zealand secondary schools were doing to achieve higher than expected outcomes for their students when other information about the schools indicated that this was going to be difficult to do. This study was able to identify why the schools were exemplary, and yet the same outcomes could not be achieved by using the structures and routines within these schools as a blueprint for other schools. That is, it is not a matter of student time tabling, departmental organisation, decision-making hierarchies or curriculum management and provision, but rather the quality of the leadership and interpersonal relationships within a school. This is because the structures and routines in the schools are the outcome of school culture. This study identified the values that underpin the individual culture of two schools and gave their culture coherence.

In this way it should be possible for researchers to identify the factors that underpin a school culture (also called school ethos) that in turn can lead to a reduction in the prevalence of bullying. Researchers should also be able to identify the school structures and routines that have been put in place as an outcome of holding particular values and beliefs in relation to the identified factors (see MacArthur and Gaffney, 2001; Sullivan, 2000).

Research aim

The aim of this study was to collect information about the approaches that three primary schools have taken to develop a more positive school culture and to reduce bullying in their schools. In particular, the study examined the factors within each school that gave rise to a change in their school culture. This information is presented here to showcase examples of good practice. It describes the approaches taken by three primary schools and identifies the similarities and differences in their approaches. The aim of sharing this information with other schools is to assist them in their own journey of school development, including the reduction of bullying.

This study was commissioned by the Ministry of Social Development to help implement Action Area 4 of *New Zealand's Agenda for Children*, which aims to address violence in children's lives with a particular focus on bullying. The aim of this study was to collect information about the actions that three primary schools have taken to develop a more positive school culture and to reduce bullying in their schools. In particular, the values and beliefs held by people within the school that led to them taking these actions were explored.

The study showcases examples of good practice to support those wanting to facilitate change in other schools. A determining factor in the research design and format of this report was the Ministry of Social Development's interest in sharing the findings of this study with other schools to help them in considering what actions they can take within their own school to develop a positive school culture and reduce bullying.



Research questions

The following set of research questions guided the development of the research method and each question is addressed in the research findings for each school.

What was the previous school culture like – what values and beliefs underpinned it?

To what extent was the previous school culture directly or indirectly supporting bullying in the school?

How were changes initiated and where did the drive to change come from?

What was the role of teachers in supporting change? What issues had to be resolved for teachers before success?

What aspects of the curriculum were used to support change?

Was a specific anti-bullying programme or other values-based programme used to support change?

Was there community support for change? How were community resources or school-developed programmes used?

Were other external professionals important to supporting or initiating change?

How has children's behaviour changed over time as a result of school initiatives? Do they report noticing a difference?

What features of the current school do people comment on as improvements?

What are the current and future initiatives, goals and challenges for the school?



Method

This chapter summarises how the research was conducted. A more complete description of the research approach adopted and how ethical concerns were addressed can be found in Appendix B.

Qualitative research tools

The aim of this study was to showcase the approaches three primary schools have taken to developing a positive school culture. A qualitative approach enabled us to gather detailed information from a range of research participants within each school. This allowed us to develop a comprehensive description of each school's approach to changing their school culture and reducing bullying. Interviews and focus groups were an appropriate means of gathering detailed personal perspectives and experiences which provide rich data for describing the actions taken, the process followed, the outcomes achieved, and the challenges faced in changing the school culture.

Ethical considerations

Consideration was given to ensuring that consent to participate was voluntary, informed, anonymous and confidential. The research plan received approval from the University of Otago Ethics Committee. Unlike many research reports, individual anonymity for some adults in each school could not be assured because of our wish to name the schools. Participants were informed of this before taking part. Where names are used it is with permission of those participants.

Description of case studies and research participants

A full description of each school in this study can be obtained online at www.msd.govt.nz/work-areas/children-and-young-people/agenda-for-children

Identifying participating schools

In Auckland, Wellington and Dunedin educational personnel who were familiar with schools in their regions were asked to identify one school that had changed its school culture in the past two to three years or more and as a result had reduced the incidence of bullying. When the agreement of the principal or board of trustees had been obtained for school participation the principal was asked to identify staff, resource teachers in learning and behaviour (RTLBs), board of trustees members, and external professionals who should be invited to participate. Teaching staff identified students to be invited to participate in the study.



Auckland – Papatoetoe Intermediate School

This intermediate school (Years 7-8) in Manukau City has a current decile ranking of 3G². The school had a July 2002 roll of 977 students and 72 staff. Changes at Papatoetoe Intermediate School were initiated 10 years ago when the current principal joined the school.

Participants from this school included:

- two groups of students – a year 7 group (8 students), and a year 8 group (7 students)
- the principal
- the chairperson of the Board of Trustees
- the school counsellor and the RTL in a joint interview (both of whom were previously teachers at the school)
- the public health nurse who visits the school.

Wellington – Wilford Primary School

Wilford is a full primary school (Years 1-8) in Lower Hutt with a decile ranking of 5M. The school had a July 2002 roll of 260 based on 11 classes, including two Māori immersion units. Changes began nine years ago when the current principal joined the school.

The participants from Wilford Primary School included:

- three groups of students – a year 5-6 group (six students), a year 7-8 group (six students) and a Māori immersion group (five students)
- the principal
- three staff members from different syndicates in a group interview
- the chairperson of the Board of Trustees
- an external professional who worked on the Mentally Healthy Schools contract.

Dunedin – Caversham Primary School

Caversham Primary is a contributing primary school (Years 1-6) in Dunedin. It had a July 2002 roll of 102 and has a decile ranking of 3H. The current principal initiated the changes when she joined the school four years ago.

The participants from this school included:

- three groups of students – a year 1-2 group (five students), a year 3-4 group (four students), and a year 5-6 group (four students)
- the principal who is on study leave
- the acting principal who has been the school's deputy principal
- a Group Special Education psychologist who was one of the facilitators of the Eliminating Violence programme
- a Board of Trustee's parent representative.

²Specialist Education Services is now part of the Ministry of Education and referred to as Group Special Education. The Ministry of Education uses a socio-economic index called the Targeted Funding for Educational Achievement (TFEA) as a means of providing funding based on formulae developed to target socio-economic disadvantage. The index uses a combination of Census data and school ethnicity data based on the socio-economic status of the families that contribute to a particular school. Each school is ranked into deciles (10% groupings) according to the TFEA index. A decile ranking of 10 indicates a high level of socio-economic advantage relative to a decile ranking of 1. Each decile is divided into three with a letter label. For example, within decile two there are three categories of 2D, 2E and 2F.



- three teachers (one of whom was also a Board of Trustee's parent representative in the past)
- two resource teachers in learning and behaviour (RTLBs) based at the school.

Research methods

As this study required the collection of qualitative data to be used in writing a descriptive case study covering the range of key research questions, face-to-face research methods were deemed most appropriate. Face-to-face interaction enables the researcher and participants to develop rapport and discuss issues in-depth. This approach enabled the collection of rich descriptive data.

Adult participants

Adult participants took part in an individual semi-structured interview at the school. The first part of the interview gathered factual information about the school, the changes made to the school culture, the timing of these changes, and information about any anti-bullying programmes used in the school. This enabled the researcher to focus the second part of the interview on the next layer of information about the participant's unique roles, experiences and perceptions about the change process underpinning the school culture.

Student participants

Students took part in focus groups involving four to eight children who were of similar age, school level and represented a mix of gender and ethnicity. The focus groups were run in a room provided by the school, which the students were familiar and comfortable with. The focus groups were conducted during the school-day and took approximately one to one and half hours.

Analysis framework

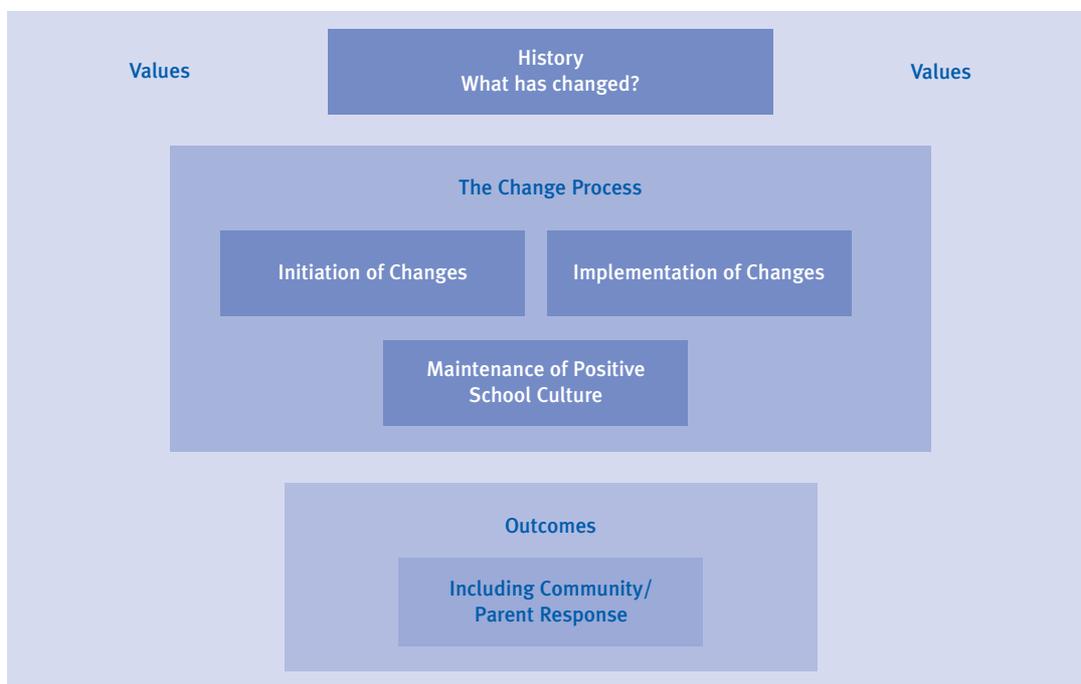
The approach to analysis was for each researcher to develop an individual case study around the school they visited based on the data they had collected. For each school a profile was developed. These can be obtained online at www.msd.govt.nz/work-areas/children-and-young-people/agenda-for-children. Once the profiles were checked and confirmed, the next part of the analysis was to undertake a comparative analysis across the schools. A more detailed explanation of the analysis can be found in Appendix B.

A model of school culture and change was developed to illustrate the various elements that were being made the focus of analysis at both the individual school level and at the comparative level. This model is shown in Figure 1.





Figure 1: Framework for collection and analysis of information



Analysis of the information drew on the elements within Figure 1 and described by the research questions presented in the Introduction. This enabled the descriptive case studies to be written as a profile in order to highlight the approach each school took to changing their school culture and reducing bullying. Additionally, the framework allowed for a comparative analysis of the resulting case study profiles.

Results

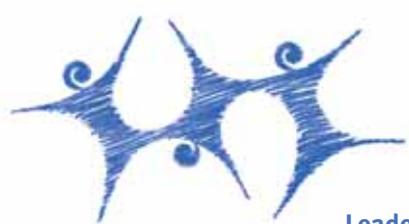
The three profiles obtained online at www.msd.govt.nz/work-areas/children-and-young-people/agenda-for-children present the three case studies as stand-alone presentations. Each school has a different story to tell and presenting the profiles allows those stories to be told without reference to the other two schools. There is sufficient information in each profile to give the reader an overview about what changes have occurred in schools and what they are working on currently.

In this section of the report a comparative analysis across the three schools is made.

Comparative analysis

A summary of the three profiles has been created using the research questions that guided this research. The summary is in table form and can be found in Appendix A. The summaries allow a series of comparisons to be made in order to identify common themes across the schools. There are four themes from across the case studies that will be discussed here:

- the importance of leadership to bringing about change
- the centrality of relationships to school culture
- the nature of the programmes that were used to bring about change
- the nature of the change process itself.



Leadership

Change was initiated in all three schools upon the appointment of a new principal. The principals, on coming into the school, identified an important school feature that indicated that change would be desirable. The areas identified differed across the three schools. At Papatoetoe Intermediate it was the level of school suspensions and exclusions. At Wilford Primary it was the relative isolation of staff and the lack of collegiality. At Caversham Primary it was the overt level of violence in the playground. In all three schools the principals' starting point for change was maintaining the belief that school life did not have to be this way.

School-wide vision

A major sub-theme across the three schools was that individual teachers might be doing very well within their classrooms but it was the development of school-wide practices that would be central to bringing about change across the school as a whole. The principals said it was their role to keep drawing the school's attention to the big picture.

But within that there were teachers who were doing a remarkably good job. But I think by the time they had a classroom functioning they didn't have time or energy for the big picture. I didn't have a classroom so I came and got the big picture. (Principal, Caversham Primary School)

In support of this there were reports from research participants from all three schools about how the principals kept up with the latest research and ideas about learning and schooling. For example:

Oh yeah, right up to date with everything that was going on in education. I was reading stuff from the university training, actually if you went to discuss any of that stuff, which was right up to date stuff, with (the principal), she had read it. She knew it. She was way ahead of where we were, and we were supposed to be breaking new ground. (RTLB, Caversham Primary School)

The role of leadership was to identify potential points for change and bring the staff 'on board' or get their 'buy-in'. This meant that initial work within each school was with teachers and staff to develop a school-wide vision and strategies to support the vision. In the two larger schools (Papatoetoe Intermediate and Wilford Primary) the principals formally engaged the support of senior staff. At Papatoetoe Intermediate this was done by setting up a pastoral care team and at Wilford Primary it was the management team. In two of the schools part of the school-wide work involved curriculum professional development. For the smallest school, Caversham Primary, this was done by bringing in outside advisors. At Wilford Primary, because of the principal's desire to build collegiality, time was made available for teachers to observe each other working in their classrooms.

One of the most powerful things we did was introduce David Stewart's 'Quality Learning Circles', [whereby] teachers go into each other's classes to learn, not to appraise that teacher but to learn. I released people and they formed three groups within the staff and they talked about what they were good at and what they wanted to learn and others said 'well I would really like to come and see that'. And even doing this was hard for some people, they found it quite difficult to talk to someone about themselves in positive terms. (Principal, Wilford Primary School)





The importance of relationships

All three schools focused on developing and maintaining school-wide approaches to the management of student behaviour. This involved staff in each school discussing as a group what it was that they were aiming for in terms of vision, the types of relationships they wanted to have and the principles that would underpin such relationships. The key value identified by staff in each school to underpin the desired relationships was respect. At Wilford Primary staff were encouraged to focus on their own relationships first, to improve collegiality. For staff at Caversham Primary the relationship focus was about teachers taking the initiative to model appropriate relationships for the students. At Papatoetoe Intermediate, staff were asked to find ways to engage with more of the students. If students struggled to fit in at school, it was the school's responsibility to consider what could be done to support the students rather than using exclusions to remove them or suggest they go elsewhere.

But teacher buy-in is not a given. It is a process that takes time and you can't just assume that teachers will understand and accept what we are trying to achieve here. We find that once they have been through our staff induction programme and become familiar with our approach that most of them do come on board. It may be easier in one sense to spend a minute and flick a kid on rather than spend ten minutes and try and help them resolve their problem. But it is the latter we promote here, not the former! (Principal, Papatoetoe Intermediate School)

Setting expectations of appropriate behaviour

The improvement in relationships between staff was a precursor to looking at the relationships between staff and students and between students. An important feature of improving student relationships was the setting of clear expectations. These expectations were promoted school wide as formal school rules, within school newsletters and at school gatherings. Staff were asked to model and promote the type of interactions seen as appropriate to the school. Consequences for appropriate and inappropriate behaviour were an essential means of reinforcing the expectations. Participants in this study from across the schools talked about making sure that staff were immediate, consistent and fair in their approach when responding to inappropriate behaviour.

The schools used different aspects of the curriculum or classroom time to reinforce and model expectations of appropriate behaviour. At Caversham Primary the education outside the classroom programme (part of the New Zealand Health and Physical Education Curriculum) is used as an important opportunity to focus on social development and teaching social skills. At Wilford Primary social skills, peer mediation and conflict resolution are heavily promoted at the beginning of each year as part of the Health and Physical Education Curriculum. At Papatoetoe Intermediate a similar approach is taken with learning resources being made available to teachers to support classroom discussion about acceptable social relationships at school.

Getting student support

When most students understand what is expected of them and know what the consequences will be for both appropriate and inappropriate behaviour they not only meet the expectations, they sustain them. To this end at Wilford Primary School, while only some students are given the official role of peer mediator, all students are taught peer mediation skills.



Using the peer mediation model, I expect them to both agree to solve the problem. I expect them to tell the truth and not blame other people. I expect them to put themselves in other people's shoes and to generate a solution that is going to be acceptable to both parties. Quite often, because some of them are so skilled in this, they will come to me with a conflict, four or five of them and I will sit here, they do it, very quickly and off they go. (Principal, Wilford Primary School)

Change will not be successful if enforcement is from the adults only. For example, one principal said "the students could be a lot more sneaky about their violence ... because if a kid saw you they would stop being violent" (Principal, Papatoetoe Intermediate School). Once students started reinforcing expectations and supporting consequences, violence and bullying can be dealt with. At Wilford Primary attention was given to helping students to think about their choices. Those choices now extended to finding ways of involving students in decision making to increase their buy-in to the school culture. This includes giving the students opportunities to have a say and have the adults listen. This is done when school rules and classroom charters are developed, when the parent community is informed of school programmes, and, as in one example, school lunches were changed due to student dissatisfaction. At Papatoetoe Intermediate student safety audits are conducted to monitor the level of violence. The audits are surveys of students conducted three times a year to identify both who is bullied and who is bullying. Some of the older children at Caversham Primary described how they felt there had been a big improvement in the way students interacted with each other.

Student: When I was about six years old, there was heaps of bullies here. Um they used to be on the tower. They used to fight and stuff. Used to be like a wrestling ring, they'd push everybody off.

Researcher: Mmmm. So did it change over time? Is it better now?

Student: Yep. Yep. It's changed. Dramatically. (Student, Caversham Primary School)

In all three schools the students in the research talked about what the school or classroom rules were and knew what the consequences were for inappropriate behaviour in particular. The children generally reported that they liked being at school. They reported a sense of people caring and school being a safe place to be. Students also talked about what they should do if they saw a bullying incident developing. Adults in the research gave reports of how they saw students actively intervening in incidents of student conflict or bullying. At Wilford Primary student intervention had been formalised with the appointment of peer mediators and at Papatoetoe Intermediate with incident report forms. Staff from both Caversham Primary and Wilford Primary participating in this research noted that they felt much happier about taking their students on school trips because student behaviour was appropriate if not exemplary. This did not mean there were no longer bullying and conflict incidents at the schools but if they did occur then consequences would follow.

The programmes used to bring about change

All three schools had participated in the *Eliminating Violence – Managing Anger programme* (commonly referred to as the Eliminating Violence programme³) offered by Specialist Education

³ <http://www.ses.org.nz/specialprogs.htm#EliminatingViolence>





Services, an agency now part of the Ministry of Education and renamed Group Special Education. When looking for schools to participate in this study we did look for schools that had participated in some form of anti-bullying programmes, but it was not known until later that all three had actually participated in the Eliminating Violence programme. This programme itself is not based on set content, but rather introduces an ongoing process of the whole school and external professionals gathering data about what is happening in the school and then facilitating the school's development of a response to the information. This is in contrast to programmes such as D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) or Kia Kaha that are based on delivering a programme in the classroom with set content after a process of consultation.

Another feature of the programmes in the case study schools was that there was not just one. In the case of Wilford Primary, there was an umbrella programme called Promoting Positive Relationships that the school developed and under which other programmes were placed. The thinking and decision-making about how the programme operated was the responsibility of the principal and management team. At Papatoetoe Intermediate the pastoral care team, referred to earlier, provides overall direction for student welfare within the school. As other programmes are initiated by the team they may have their own teams set up with delegated responsibilities. At Caversham Primary, the school was small enough for change to be led by the principal without requiring separate teams or groups to be set up.

Focusing on student wellbeing

In looking at the range of programmes offered, the common focus across all of them at each of the schools was the focus on supporting the wellbeing of students (and staff). A reduction in bullying or violent behaviour was only one of the outcomes associated with improving student wellbeing. All three schools recognised that student wellbeing, both physical and emotional, is a requirement for maximising teaching and learning opportunities.

Research participants at all three schools talked about acknowledging the cultural diversity of the students within the school. Student ethnic identity and culture is supported and accepted.

[We] celebrate diversity. The positive about this school is there is no norm. So a lot of tension that goes on in other schools, doesn't happen because: 'who's the norm?' 'Where's the stereotype?' It doesn't exist. So your different culture, your body shape, your accent, how you look, what clothes you wear is just accepted. You can wear the hairstyle you like, what clothes you like. The clothes here vary hugely and no-one ever says anything. (Principal, Wilford Primary School)

Students made comments that indicated a sense of belonging to their schools.

We get lots of badges with the reward system – for being in orchestra, choirs, sports teams, road patrol, librarian. (Year 8 student, Papatoetoe Intermediate School)

Student 1: They always look after you when you get hurt.

Student 2: You're not bossed around.

Student 3: The best thing about Caversham School is when you come, you have friends and you don't feel lonely. (Students, Caversham Primary School)



Much of the support for students comes via programmes for individual students or small groups. This support might be in the form of counselling or therapy via programmes that are for short lengths of time, such as a term. Adults in the schools are also making sure that there is someone around for students to talk with. At Caversham Primary, this extends to being able to provide support to families in the form of the Social Worker in Schools programme and by having good working relationships with social agencies that will take family referrals.

Using professionals from outside the school

Professionals external to the school were important in the implementation of programmes such as the Eliminating Violence programme in which all three schools participated. Other current programmes referred to were the Mentally Healthy Schools programme, the Cool Schools programme, the Health Promoting Schools programme and the D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) programme. These programmes are based on professionals who come into the life of the school for the period of the programme, which may include periodic follow-up visits. External or visiting professionals can have some leverage with staff by bringing the outsider's more 'objective' view. This view is likely to validate the change leader's view.

It's good because I can preach whatever I like. I drive this, I am sure that I drive this and lead it, but it becomes like, 'she thinks that, the Principal thinks that but what about the rest of the world'. It is really powerful to bring other people from outside in who say the same thing in a different way. So we have done a lot of that, we've had School Support Services, Special Education, Peace Foundation in the early days. (Principal, Wilford Primary School)

Another group of professionals who can be called on at any time independent of a programme includes the public health nurses, the RTLBs or social workers in schools. These professionals provide ongoing support to the schools over time.

What the schools are doing now

The three schools in this study are currently all working on different aspects of their school culture. At Papatoetoe Intermediate attention is now being given to increasing the acknowledgement of good behaviour through an honours system. At Wilford Primary a lot of attention is being given to engaging with parents. Caversham Primary has just finished surveying its students, staff and families about the school culture. These results will then be compared to the data collected before and after the Eliminating Violence programme had been operating for a year. The education outside the classroom programme is being used to draw the parent community into the school.

The change process

Research participants, principals in particular, at all three schools commented on how developing the school culture they wanted required lots of time and energy. Originally, when looking for schools to participate in this study, the aim was to find those that had been in the process for at least two to three years. In the case of Papatoetoe Intermediate and Wilford Primary both had initiated changes with a school culture focus that began eight to nine years ago, yet the principals reported that the time and energy required now is just as great as that needed at the beginning.





Keep it alive, keep all parties involved, keep looking at new and interesting and exciting innovations, keep looking at ways to celebrate successes, it's a huge amount of work, so when people say send me your package well I am afraid it doesn't work like that. This is the ninth year I have been here and I still see huge development to be done. (Principal, Wilford Primary School)

There does not appear to be a time when the programmes or the school culture sustains itself. This is particularly true of Papatoetoe Intermediate School where students are at the school for such a short time and there can be a high turnover of staff.

It can be difficult to induct new staff into the school's ethos and systems at times. We have a large staff with 50 classroom teachers. Five left in the first half of the year, and although this is felt keenly within the school, a 10% resignation rate is really quite low. However, it still means that five new teachers need to be inducted by the syndicate leaders and deans.

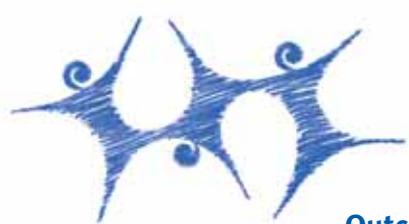
Many assemblies at the beginning of the year are driven towards getting the children on board with the pastoral care and discipline aspects within the school. These messages are then reinforced by each teacher within their classroom. Over the following fortnight they talk about respect and the other things we value, especially non-violence. The students then clearly know what we are aiming for here and why we have a counsellor, high expectations, discipline – rules and consequences. (Principal, Papatoetoe Intermediate School)

Challenges to change

All schools have challenges they are working on and current goals they are aiming for. At times the programmes may change or be dropped when they have served their purpose and are no longer required. For example, at Wilford Primary the 'think tank' is used as time out for students to cool off and consider the consequences of their actions with the support of a staff member. For many students this will be sufficient. However, after monitoring the students it had become apparent that certain students were appearing regularly in the 'think tank'. Something more or different appeared to be required. In this way as each programme or approach is put in place one issue may be resolved and new challenges identified.

The staff trialled a new practice for students who were repeatedly receiving time in the think tank during lunchtime, however, this new practice was ineffective initially and required further modification. The school is continually exploring new ways of working with these children and this year the guidance counsellor is beginning a programme on anger management for small group of senior boys for whom think tank and other practices within the PPR [Promoting Positive Relationships programme] are less effective. (Researcher, Wilford Primary School)

All schools reported that bringing new groups of students and staff into the school creates a challenge because it is important to introduce them as quickly and efficiently to the school culture as possible. With a quick turnover of students at Papatoetoe Intermediate School this issue is probably more pronounced. The school is looking at ways of documenting the work that has been done to date as a way of reflecting the expectations that the school holds and the supports that are in place to help students and staff meet those expectations. Such information will be useful for both the parent community and the staff to build a consensus around student behaviour management and support for students.



Outcomes for staff

Another outcome that was reported by school staff beyond the reduction in bullying and improvement in behaviour is that teaching is easier. Classroom management and playground supervision is a more pleasant experience rather than a chore. Staff report there is more support available, issues can be talked through and teachers are not left to work out classroom management on their own. For staff this improves collegiality and for students school is a place where people care.

Well I think the strengths are the staff work together as a unit. We support each other and we have a real dedication to our children. The children are first you know. They, I think the staff here go looking for what they can do to help. They don't hide from it whatsoever. I think you only need to look at the phone calls that go in after school or weekends and things, just to check up on how this is happening and 'can we help you here? And: get this meeting going'. Or whatever. And they look at the children very much as individuals and not as a group of a particular year ... And I think the staff getting on together is an important aspect too, to work as a unit, really. (Teacher, Caversham Primary School)

The students and teachers work together to create a pleasant environment in class and out of class – there is always someone who will respect you and make you feel good.

School is a safe, fun and a nice place to go to – you don't get up in the morning and say 'oh, I don't want to go to school'. (Students, Papatoetoe Intermediate School)

How do we know change has occurred?

One of the questions that can be asked by outside observers is how do we know that change has occurred? The basis of the current study is collecting data according to different participants' perspectives on the change in their school over time. There is some documentary evidence provided in the form of Education Review Office reports that suggest improvements have happened. For example:

A number of significant indicators suggest that many students have acquired enhanced personal and social skills when compared with the students of 1999. For example, records indicate that the teachers very rarely need to address incidents of name calling, threatening, uncaring or unsafe behaviour. The review officers saw many examples of positive, helpful, caring and hard working behaviour and saw no examples of negative or unsafe behaviour throughout the review ... A significant indicator that the school is safe came from a random selection of students interviewed as part of the review. They said that they enjoy their time at the school and that Caversham is a 'cool school'. It is likely that these improved behaviour outcomes are one major reason for the significant improvements in the academic areas that were considered as part of this review. (Educational Review Office, 2003)

One of the difficulties for schools keeping their own records is that the nature of what is being monitored does not stay the same. For example, behaviour that was not given a detention one year might the next as the expectations for appropriate behaviour are increased. Thus recording the number of detentions does not account for the behaviour being monitored. This means that it is possible for responses to inappropriate behaviour to increase as adults reinforce the boundaries. Getting staff to record consistently the reasons for responses such as detentions is not as important as being fair and consistent over time and between adults.





The schools were asked if there was anything that might give an accurate assessment of change over time. Each school offered something that related to their own systems and was of relevance to their programmes. This information is described in the school profiles.

Papatoetoe Intermediate School presented 'safety audit' information (described earlier) for 1999 and 2003. The information showed a drop from 30 students in 1999 being identified as physical or verbal abusers to one in 2003.

At Wilford Primary School a record was kept of those students who were identified as repeat serious offenders in terms of transgressing expectations of appropriate behaviour. In 2000 the number was 20 and it has consistently dropped until it was three in 2003.

At Caversham a survey conducted in 1999 and 2000 was repeated in 2003. Over this time more students report liking school because of their friends (34% in 2003 compared to 16% in 1999) and fewer students report disliking school because of acts of violence and fighting but more students say they dislike school because of the bullies. It is not clear why students report being less favourable about the school because of bullying. Certainly the students report over time fewer numbers of students being hurt by others or being unkind to others since 1999. Fewer parents reported incidents of fighting and other conflicts in 2003 compared to either the 1999 or 2000 surveys.

Each school was able to provide evidence that shows change was successful in bringing about reductions in inappropriate behaviour. This was backed up by the views of the research participants who took part in this project.

Summary of case study schools' approaches

In summary, the key feature in altering school culture in each of the schools was the leadership of the school principal in deciding that change was required. In each of the schools there were practices and behaviours with which the principals were not happy and those behaviours did not fit their view of a 'good' school. The road to change for all three principals involved developing a 'big picture', sharing it with their school's staff and then encouraging the staff to come on board and contribute to its realisation.

One of the common approaches to developing the culture of each school was the implementation of a school-wide approach to managing student behaviour. While this is the common terminology in schools, focusing on all school relationships advanced the discussion about how this is done. It was no longer about what adults did to students but about making it okay to talk about what kind of social environment people wanted and then agreeing as to whom had what responsibilities for making it happen. The adults in each school as well as the students were given opportunities to examine relationships within the school and decide how they would like them to be. This discussion was symbolised in the development of school rules and classroom agreements. The work was done collectively and expectations about the way in which everybody in the school should interact were formed.

To help meet these expectations, clear consequences and procedures were established within the school that acknowledged both appropriate behaviour and inappropriate behaviour. Achievements were celebrated and appropriate behaviour rewarded. Students who did not meet



the expectations were not removed from the schools, but instead were provided with support and opportunities to learn how to interact within and through the school culture. These opportunities and supports made it possible for students and adults to succeed in changing the playground and classroom culture and contribute to the overall school culture. This process allowed adults and students to become committed to maintaining and improving the resulting school culture.

This common approach aside, each of the school's experiences are different. The starting point for initiating change was based on the principals making a judgement about where to begin. At Papatoetoe Intermediate School it began with the introduction of a pastoral care focus to better respond to the needs of their students rather than limit the focus to curriculum and discipline issues. At Wilford Primary School it was about improving collegiality among the staff and at Caversham Primary School it was about reducing school violence. The common theme across the different starting points was the focus on relationships. The common key value was the development of respect across school relationships.

Associated with a different starting point in each school was the diverse range of programmes implemented. But even within that diversity many of the programmes are similar. All three had been involved in the Eliminating Violence programme. The theme that holds the different programmes together within the schools and makes them appear similar was the focus on improving student wellbeing. The elimination of violence and bullying was only one part of improving student wellbeing.

There are other points of similarity reflected in each school's story. All three are lower decile schools in communities where families are often economically disadvantaged. The families are reported to be more transient than those using higher decile schools and the parents tend not to engage with the school without lots of encouragement.

The points of difference across the schools in their striving for success are often local or context issues. Papatoetoe Intermediate School is very large and only has the students for two years before they head to high school. This creates a challenge for inducting new students and staff into the school culture. Caversham Primary School faces the challenge of a falling roll and its accompanying reduction in government funding. Wilford Primary School reports enrolling a number of new students into the senior part of the school each year who have a lot more trouble fitting into the school culture than students who arrive earlier.

Despite any contextual differences, the approach to programme management was the same. The schools continued to monitor the success of their programmes and then drop, alter or add to them accordingly. Programme evaluation was done on the basis of people understanding how each programme contributed to their school and its community as a whole. This ongoing refinement of individual programmes supported the development of a more positive school culture and the realisation of each school's vision for itself.

The reports from all project participants were that the schools are much better places for students to learn and staff to work in now compared to before. The reduction in violence and bullying and the general improvement in student wellbeing is a reported success for all three of the schools.





However, having reached more immediate goals new challenges were exposed. There is no sense of having ‘finally got there’ as ongoing time and energy is required to sustain the culture of the schools and prepare for further development. Sustaining the culture of the schools required a recommitment to practices and beliefs each day. That recommitment was reflected in the routines and practices adopted, the values and beliefs espoused, and the programmes and systems implemented. Also, the process allowed for the identification of opportunities for further improvement or development. Recommitment is important because there were always new students, staff and community to introduce to the school culture and it allowed the development of school cultures to build on the learning of the people, both adults and students, who made up the school.

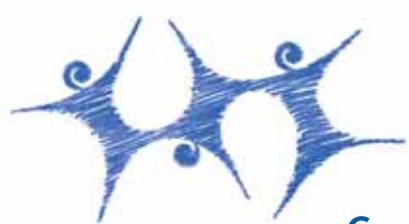
Critical principles for improving school culture

Studying the three cases offered here does not necessarily offer a recipe that other schools must adopt for success. However, we would like to suggest that the principles of change identified in these three case study schools are critical for any school wanting to improve its school culture and to reduce bullying. Those principles are that:

- leadership will be critical to initiating the change process, but staff support (buy-in), followed by student support, is needed to achieve school-wide development
- the development of a more positive school culture will require people to look at the relationships that make up the school
- the programmes implemented, and it is unlikely to be just one, will in general need to focus on supporting the wellbeing of students in the school
- the change process requires lots of time and energy and never becomes self sustaining.

The development that all three schools undertook, using the principles listed above, was a single school-wide policy or approach to managing student behaviour and the promotion of positive relationships. Such a policy or approach included:

- creating clear expectations through discussion about what was considered as desirable school relationships and appropriate behaviour
- setting in place consistent, immediate and fair consequences for both appropriate and inappropriate behaviour
- providing support for students so they could develop positive relationships and learn to behave appropriately.



Conclusion

It is a challenge for any school to be able to keep bullying and violence to a minimum while providing a warm and friendly social environment. It was a credit to each of the schools in this project that they could respond to the challenges placed before them and were able to find and continue to look for solutions that worked for them. They, along with all the other schools that have taken up the challenge, now place the challenge before other schools to look at their own school culture and seek improvement.



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Appendix A: Summary of school data according to the research questions for this project

Questions	Papatoetoe Intermediate School	Caversham Primary School	Wilford Primary School
What was the previous school culture like – what values and beliefs underpinned it?	There was an approach of supporting teachers by finding ways to remove 'difficult' students who did not fit into the school's ways of doing things. This made the school management of student behaviour teacher centred rather than student centred.	Participants report that the school was unsafe for students and staff. This occurred at a time when there was a high turnover in the principal's position and a number of children with behavioural issues joined the school. There was no respect shown between students and verbal and physical abuse was not uncommon.	The staff were operating as individuals rather than as a team. Initial work was on developing the relationships between staff so that a shared school vision could be developed. The isolation of staff was also reflected in the limited interaction between students and staff across the junior, middle and senior schools.
To what extent was the previous school culture directly or indirectly supporting bullying in the school?	There was a lot more student fighting back then and the level of student engagement with the curriculum was unsatisfactory. It was not clear to what extent bullying was an implicit part of the school culture.	During the changes in leadership over a short period of time, the school culture had lost its focus on supporting positive relationships. The staff were in 'survival mode' in terms of managing without consistent leadership and priority for a positive school culture was not maintained.	A certain amount of physical and verbal abuse by some students was due to the absence of a consistent school-wide approach to managing student behaviour. The school was seen by some as rough due to the perceived level of violence.
How were changes initiated and where did the drive to change come from?	The principal led changes as he decided to introduce a range of pastoral care systems within the school. The pastoral care committee he established developed a system for monitoring student progress and offering support where a need was identified.	The principal was the initiator of change. She was alarmed by the culture of the school and sought support to start improving the relationships within the school. The school had received a number of critical ERO reports that had suggested changes would need to be made.	Change came about when the current principal decided the relationships within the school needed improving. School culture was made a focus. An emphasis was placed on shared beliefs, building on the staff commitment and ownership, and the provision of strong leadership. Reflection and review became the means for continually evaluating progress. The principal encourages the staff to focus on school-wide programmes and on a positive school culture, which may otherwise be lost if teachers focus only on classroom issues. The principal's role is also supported by a management team that provides a forum for responding to issues and developing new programme components.
What was the role of teachers in supporting change? What issues had to be resolved for teachers before success?	Teachers need to be consistent in their response to the management of student behaviour. School management support this by providing ongoing support and access to advice for teachers. Written information about school philosophies, policies and practices is made available to teachers and they are provided with training to adopt these.	The role of staff in the school culture was to model appropriate behaviour; to be consistent and fair; to teach the curriculum and appropriate social behaviours; and to improve the self esteem and self worth of the children at the school. The teachers were always committed to the students but to contribute to a positive school culture it was important that this commitment was reflected in a school-wide vision for the students at the school. Other factors that were impacting on the running of the school included the closure of a special unit which changed the number of teachers available for activities such as playground duty. It also had an effect on classroom student composition with the mainstreaming of students who had been in the special unit. Staff at this time were also in the middle of trying to implement new curriculum statements within the school.	Relationships between staff had to be based on support rather than on competition. Staff were given the opportunity to develop their teaching goals and then they saw how other staff taught. This helped them learn from each other. Many of the staff were not used to articulating their practice and incorporating self reflection. The challenge, which most staff were able to meet, was moving from articulating beliefs to accepting the beliefs through to acting on them. This was an important process in getting the teachers to be consistent in their approach to relationships with others, especially the students.
What aspects of the curriculum were used to support change?	Most of the programmes to support change are individually focused rather than classroom based although all are strongly supported by teachers within their classrooms. There is a virtues programme where a team decides which virtues will be promoted during different parts of the year. They also provide classroom units of work to promote the programme which ensures better consistency across classrooms.	The staff worked on their curriculum planning and engaged in a lot more professional development to support their planning in literacy and numeracy. The education outside the classroom programme is used to provide students with opportunities for social development and provide experiences they might not otherwise get.	Most recently the school has joined the Mentally Healthy Schools programme which works within the Health and Physical Education Curriculum to improve student mental health. Teachers actively incorporate the teaching of social skills, mediation and conflict resolution in their classrooms.

Appendix A: Summary of school data according to the research questions for this project continued

Questions	Papatoetoe Intermediate School	Caversham Primary School	Wilford Primary School
Was a specific anti-bullying programme or other values-based programme used to support change?	The use of the virtues programme is promoted by the Working in Social Harmony (WISH) team, which developed out of the Eliminating Violence programme the school engaged with in 2000 and 2001. The school has used the D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) programme in the past, but now prefers to run their own programme that is not reliant on police support. The school is adept at taking successful components of various programmes and developing their own unique response tailored to their school.	Using the Eliminating Violence programme brought about the initial changes. The key components of the programme were celebrating good behaviour, developing rules and consequences, having students take responsibility for their actions and supporting children to find solutions to problem situations. Other programmes were used to improve the school environment and support student wellbeing.	The school used the Eliminating Violence programme which for school purposes they renamed as the Promoting Positive Relationships programme. This programme is described as an umbrella programme within which many other programmes are incorporated. The school has participated in many programmes including cool schools, skills for growing and Kia Kaha.
Was there community support for change? How were community resources or school-developed programmes used?	The community supports the approach taken by the school and the types of values being promoted. The financial support available from the parent community is low reflecting the limited economic resources available. This does not stop parents from taking an interest in their children's education and the school keeps them well informed about what is happening. The school draws on a voluntary agency to provide a life skills programme that works intensively with small groups of students. The school has become active in working with a cluster of schools in the area, both those from which students feed into the school and some of the high schools the students go onto.	The community was asked to provide support through a range of initiatives. Local businesses provided food for students. Parents are offered opportunities to join school outings, which have a strong social skill focus for students. Families contribute to school activities that celebrate the diverse ethnic make up of the school. The school has access to the social worker in schools programme that provides support to families within the school.	The school has gained access to a counsellor through a local church who also provides a group programme for students suffering from grief or loss. The school actively promotes programmes to support the parent community. These have included literacy evening classes, parenting skills classes and parent evenings to introduce new programmes. The Board of Trustees is kept aware of programme developments and they have given their support to the shared vision that has developed.
Were other external professionals important to supporting or initiating change?	The school does draw on external professionals but in being a larger school it has access to a resource teacher in learning and behaviour (RTL) on site and there is a counsellor on the staff. The school funds the counsellor's position from its own funds, something that a smaller school would not be able to do. The Public Health Nurse is on the pastoral care committee and the school has used external programmes such as Eliminating Violence and Health Promoting Schools. The principal and other staff (especially the counsellor and RTL) have excellent relationships with local agencies and draw on these as necessary.	The facilitators with the Eliminating Violence programme were important in providing an outsider's view on the school. They were involved in collecting data about the school and then sharing that information with the school to encourage people to think about what types of change to make first. School advisers played an important role in supporting the teachers' professional development. The principal has working relationships with a number of social agencies who she calls in when particular types of support are required.	The Mentally Healthy Schools programme was used to document the programmes the school had put in place over the last few years. The access to this programme allowed a staff member to develop a social skills resource for the school. The RTLs are used when children show particularly challenging behaviours.
How has children's behaviour changed over time as a result of school initiatives? Do they report noticing a difference?	The student safety audits and other regular monitoring suggest that the school is a safer place for students. There are fewer incidents of violence reported, fewer detentions being given and fewer students being stood down or suspended. The students themselves report they like the school and feel it is a good place to be.	The most recent ERO report noted the very different behaviour of children and how the students reported feeling much safer in the school. Some of the students, as part of the focus groups in this study, talked about the bullying that was present when they were younger and how this has disappeared. They now feel much safer in the playground.	Children report that they feel students and adults care for one another. School-wide rules were developed and children know these rules. They are continually articulated by students and staff. Students promote the expectations for appropriate behaviour. This is seen as more effective than relying solely on teachers to reinforce the expectations. Staff are now confident that students will behave appropriately at all times, including on school trips. A number of practices have been used to improve student relationships within the school. These include the use of role modelling; peer mediation and class forums; agreed classroom rules; rewarding positive behaviour; and a school-wide approach to managing student behaviour, especially serious misconduct.

Appendix A: Summary of school data according to the research questions for this project continued

Questions	Papatoetoe Intermediate School	Caversham Primary School	Wilford Primary School
			<p>Students who might come to the school with problems in managing anger are given the skills and support to change the way in which they deal with conflict. Other outcomes of the school culture change include students feeling safer in school, increased student attendance, and better academic achievement.</p> <p>Students felt the level of violence decreased because the teachers responded to incidents; the consequences for inappropriate behaviour were clear; and some children were no longer at the school. Students also talked about taking certain actions if they saw violent incidents developing.</p>
What features of the current school do people comment on as improvements?	<p>The school is a place at which students enjoy spending time. It does not mean there are not problems but people know how to respond when they do arise and the response is immediate and consistent. The level of reported bullying has dropped markedly over the last few years. The use of student behaviour conferences and a restorative justice programme are relatively new initiatives which have been successfully integrated within the school's pastoral care systems.</p>	<p>The school is described as a safe and caring school. Some of the specific outcomes mentioned include improved student achievement, a welcoming family environment and fewer observations and reports of bullying or violence at the school. Staff were able to go on school outings without fear of bad behaviour and parents were now sending their children to Caversham as a deliberate choice. Only one of the 13 children who were interviewed for this study said they were bullied at school by name-calling.</p> <p>All of the adult participants noted that bullying and violence did still occur at the school but the amount and level had greatly reduced. In addition, there were consistent procedures to follow and consistent consequences for bully behaviour.</p>	<p>There is a strong emphasis on respectful relationships across the school. There is an acceptance and celebration of diversity. Students take ownership and responsibility for maintaining the school culture, which is achieved by giving students an opportunity to have a say in what is happening at the school. Student safety is paramount.</p> <p>The adults report that the school has become more collegial over time. People now feel they are working together as part of a team.</p> <p>In support of this, the divisions that were apparent between the junior, middle and senior schools have disappeared. Staff are given support to deal with difficult circumstances. Classroom and playground management is now easier because clear expectations and procedures are in place. Staff also realise the importance of modelling the behaviours they expect from students.</p>
What are the current and future initiatives, goals and challenges for the school?	<p>The school is working on a foundations document that reflects the many aspects of the school. It will actively promote the pastoral care system developed over the years but not previously formally documented in this manner. The document is based on developing a consensus approach to student behaviour management.</p> <p>The school is also developing a school honours system for the beginning of 2004. It is designed to recognise students who show excellent behaviour and attitudes during their time at the school.</p> <p>Challenges are presented by having to bring new staff on board in a quick and efficient manner. The same issue arises with the new cohorts of students arriving each year against a picture of losing senior students after two years at the school. Alongside this is the continuous enrolment of new students throughout the year.</p>	<p>The school has been successful in developing an accepting and caring school culture. The principal continues to survey students, parents and staff to check whether the school culture is maintaining itself. Programmes are altered or adapted on the basis of the information received. The challenges for the school are operating with a falling roll and a transient family population, with fewer economic resources to draw on.</p>	<p>The maintenance of the overall programme is hard work and takes a lot of energy and time. There is a continual turnover in student population due to a relatively high transient community. Older students coming into the senior school often have a more difficult transition. Staff are still learning not to take violent incidents personally. Finding a balance between providing leadership and delegating responsibility to acknowledge ownership of change is a challenge. Engaging with parents, especially those who do not often visit school, or are hard to contact, is an ongoing challenge.</p> <p>Current goals include working with small groups of children who still have anger management problems. (Note: during this term the school has no students who have an anger management problem. The anger management programme plus one-to-one counselling has paid off.) Often this work is on a one-to-one basis with the principal. New initiatives include looking at resiliency training and the use of co-operative learning in the context of learning styles.</p> <p>The school is holding a celebration expo for the community to share its programme and celebrate its successes.</p>



Appendix B: Research method

Ethical considerations

This project was approved by the University of Otago Ethics Committee at their meeting on 13 June 2003.

Voluntary informed consent

Once the three schools had been identified, researchers met with each principal to discuss the project, identify other potential participants within the school community and deliver information sheets and consent forms. Participants in this project were involved on a voluntary basis. They were fully informed of the purpose, outcomes and process of this study before agreeing to participate.

Information sheets were developed for adult participants and modified with child-friendly language for the students of the school. Students were asked to take their information sheets home to discuss their participation with parents/caregivers.

All participants and the parents/caregivers of students were provided with consent forms to ensure that participants understood the content of the information sheet and were prepared to participate in the specified activities (interview for adult participants and focus group for students)⁴. The consent form reiterated the way that information offered by participants would be used in this report, shared with other schools, and written up in publications. They were also informed of their right to withdraw information at any point by notifying the researchers.

Staff at each of the three schools facilitated the collection of student and parent/caregiver consent forms. They also ensured that there would be no disadvantage to students participating in the study as a result of spending an hour out of their usual classroom activities.

Anonymity of schools

While the study was focused on positive achievements by each school some negotiation was required at each school to seek agreement for schools to be identified within the study and resulting publications. All three schools recognised advantages in being acknowledged as having developed a positive school culture that included a reduction in bullying and agreed to be identified in this report.

Anonymity of adult participants

Adult participants were assured their names and identifying information would not be included in this report or any subsequent publications. Adult participants are identified in this report by a descriptor of their role, such as teacher, board of trustees member, etc. This allowed participants to speak openly.

⁴ As the children participating in this study were under the age of 14, parental consent was required.





Agreement by schools for their school to be identified within the report, however, raised implications for the anonymity of adult participants because individual staff members become more readily identifiable. For example, if there is only one principal in a school and the school is named it is difficult to maintain the anonymity of this individual either within the school or within the wider community or education sector. Consequently, participants were informed at the outset of this project that their school would be named in the report and as a result their comments would be more readily identifiable. Participants agreed to be interviewed on this basis. Some adult participants were happy for their name to be used in the report.

Researchers have checked with participants where any controversial material has been included in the report. Some participants asked to see how their quotes were being used. We would like to acknowledge the frank way in which participants were able to share with us their experiences given that schools are identified within the report.

Anonymity of student participants

Student participants were assured their names and identifying information would not be included in this report or any subsequent publications. This allowed student participants to speak openly and know that their anonymity would be protected.

Student anonymity was protected by using pseudonyms, which the researcher assigned to each individual upon the completion of the fieldwork. The researchers are the only people who know which pseudonym has been allocated to each individual. Students involved in the focus groups may be able to identify comments made by other students in their group. However, the other students of the school, parents, the general public will not be able to link student comments to individuals, unless the student offers this information. Most importantly, students' names were not used in any of the material so they would not be readily identifiable to people reading the report or any subsequent publications.

Confidentiality

All personal details have been kept in a secure location for the duration of this work. They have only been used to provide a description of the students and adults who took part in the study. No personal details have been recorded in the report. The Children's Issues Centre will retain information from the study for a period of five years and then oversee its destruction as per University of Otago Ethics Committee guidelines.

Procedure for disclosure

A procedure for disclosure was developed for fieldwork with student participants. As the study focused in part on bullying, there was potential for students to disclose experiences of bullying that were currently occurring or which had affected them in a negative way. The procedure was outlined in the information sheet for students, which was shared with their parents/caregivers. Any student showing distress during the focus group sessions would be spoken to individually at the end of the workshop session. Researchers would ask the student if they would give their permission for the student's situation to be discussed with the classroom teacher or another mutually agreed adult (school counsellor etc). If the student did not give permission for this to happen, the researcher would provide the student with details of a confidential telephone child helpline – "What's Up".



Feedback and acknowledgement

As participants voluntarily gave up their time to participate in this study, each student was gifted stationery and each school was gifted a book voucher to acknowledge their input. Feedback was also an important component of the project. Once the analysis had been completed, each school was provided with a profile of the key findings for their school. This allowed participants to consider their contribution before the main report was developed. Each school was given a copy of this report once it was finalised with the Ministry of Social Development so that participants could see how the information they provided was used and read the information provided by other schools in the study.

Research methods

As this study required the collection of qualitative data to be used in writing a descriptive case study covering the range of key research questions, face-to-face research methods were deemed most appropriate. Face-to-face interaction enables the researcher and participants to develop rapport and discuss issues in-depth. This approach enabled the collection of rich descriptive data.

Adult participants

Adult participants took part in an individual semi-structured interview at the school. The first part of the interview gathered factual information about the school, the changes made to the school culture, the timing of these changes, and information about any anti-bullying programmes used in the school. This enabled the researcher to focus the second part of the interview on the next layer of information about the participant's unique roles, experiences and perceptions about the change process underpinning the school culture.

The interview was tailored to each adult's role in the development of the school's positive school culture but drew on the same set of questions/discussion topics. The priority and order of questions was altered to ensure that information specific to the role and experience of each adult participant could be gathered effectively.

One of the features of the study was to establish what changes to the school culture have been made over time and what effect such changes had. Each of the adults had differing information to draw on in relation to this. The Board of Trustees member brought a parent and leadership perspective; the principal brought a leadership and implementation perspective; the teachers brought an implementation and classroom perspective; and the outside professionals were able to bring a comparative perspective based on their knowledge of other local schools. The semi-structured interview format enabled us to draw out the different perspectives each participant brought to the study and to build up a comprehensive description of the approach each school took to changing its school culture.

Student participants

Students took part in focus groups involving four to eight children who were of similar age, school level and represented a mix of gender and ethnicity. The focus groups were run in a room provided by the school, which the students were familiar and comfortable with. The focus groups were conducted during the school-day and took approximately one to one and half hours.





When conducting research with children it is particularly important to provide opportunities for the researcher to build rapport with children so they feel at ease and can engage in the research in an effective way. To facilitate the building of rapport, each focus group began with an activity to allow the researcher and the students to get to know each other. Students engaged in an activity to help them to think about and express their views and opinions and represent these. For example, students were asked to stand along an imaginary continuum according to how much they agreed or disagreed with the statement the researcher called out. Towards the end of this exercise the researcher introduced statements related to the study, which allowed the student to transition from a fun exercise to a focused consideration of their views and experiences of the school.

Following this, the researcher introduced the activities for the session and outlined a set of rules to ensure that all students had a turn at expressing their views. Emphasis was placed on people having different ideas and there being no right or wrong answers, just ideas, experiences and thoughts.

Students worked in two groups brainstorming ideas on a number of topics that were centred around how their school had developed a positive school culture and reduced bullying. Topics included:

- what students liked about school
- what students did when they felt unsafe at school
- what students did when they felt upset or disagreed with someone else at school.

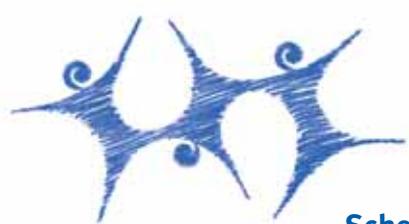
The students discussed these topics among themselves and with the researcher as the researcher moved about the room to query additions to the brainstorming sheets. Students were able to provide information independently, as a group, orally and in written form. Engaging students in a group also reduced the power imbalance with the researcher and helped students to feel at ease while working with an adult they did not know.

The final activity was a whole-group discussion about what happens at their school to make it a safe and positive environment. They were asked which aspects of creating a positive school culture or reducing bullying they thought worked best. Students drew on their own experiences of bullying (as victim, bully or bystander). They were asked to talk about how students and adults responded to bullying and to what extent that response was effective. The term 'school culture' was not used in discussions with students but instead words such as 'feeling safe' were used. Students discussed what they liked or disliked about school and their classroom and what adults do when students come to them with a problem. The sessions were tape recorded.

Each student was given a letter of thanks and a small gift (fun stationery) to acknowledge their involvement in the study.

Analysis framework

The approach to analysis was for each researcher to develop an individual case study around the school they visited based on the data they had collected. For each school a profile was developed. These can be obtained online at www.msd.govt.nz/workareas/work-areas/children-and-young-people/agenda-for-children. Once the profiles were checked and confirmed the next part of the analysis was to undertake a comparative analysis.



School profiles

Data was compiled for each school based on:

- qualitative data from interviews with adult participants
- qualitative data from focus groups with students
- information from school documents, eg Education Review Office reports, school programme descriptions and policy statements.

Content analysis of this data was undertaken to identify the actions taken and changes made to develop a positive school culture and reduce bullying and to try and ascertain which of these actions might be more effective.

The result of this first content analysis was the compilation of a profile of each school by the researcher who visited the school. The main focus was to identify the process of change – how it was undertaken, who was involved and what outcomes were achieved. Common themes or approaches to change within each school were also identified with points of difference between participants also being acknowledged.

Comparative analysis

The next phase of the work involved undertaking a comparative analysis of the three profiles to identify the similarities and differences in the actions taken by each school in developing their school culture and reducing bullying.

As the purpose of this study was to showcase the approaches taken by three primary schools in developing a more positive school culture, the focus of data collection and analysis was on the changes to school culture that occurred over time. Information was gathered to examine the process for changing the culture, the values that underpin the current school culture and the outcomes of changing the culture, including a reduction in bullying. These components of school culture are presented in Figure 1 (see below) to provide a visual model.

In the space around the boxes for history, the change process and outcomes is the term ‘values’. As indicated earlier, current literature on school culture highlights the importance of values that underpin a school culture or ethos. In this study we have highlighted the values made explicit with each school and how they relate to developing a more positive school culture.

Figure 1 acknowledges the role of school history. We gathered information from adult participants about the ‘old’ school culture and what created support for change. We also wanted to identify any values and aspects of school culture that have been retained and strengthened. This helped us to identify the key elements, which were vital to the success of developing a more positive school culture.

Figure 1 groups ‘initiation of changes’, ‘implementation of changes’ and ‘maintenance of positive school culture’ into the process of change. These elements form the core of the study. Participants were asked to describe how the change in school culture came about – who initiated this change, the reasons given for change and what processes were followed to change the culture. The implementation of changes covers school-wide implementation from a governance level through to classroom and playground levels. Participants were asked to describe how the school culture was brought to life and the changes in practices at each of these levels. Students were asked to discuss the culture of their classroom and playground so we could examine what these changes meant for the students of the school.





Figure 1: Framework for collection and analysis of information



Figure 1 includes a separate box for outcomes. This is to acknowledge that a reduction in bullying may be one of the many outcomes that resulted from the changes in the school culture. Participants were asked to discuss outcomes for the school as a whole and for students. They also talked about particular outcomes such as attendance levels, reduction in bullying, social relationships, etc.

The box including community and parent response indicates the focus we placed on exploring the views of the parents and the community about the changes in school culture. This information primarily came from the parent representative of the Board of Trustees, but also came from the external professionals and staff members.

Interviews and focus groups were tailored to ensure that when the researchers had completed fieldwork in each school they had covered all elements in Figure 1.

Analysis of the information drew on the elements within Figure 1. This enabled the descriptive case studies to be written as a profile in order to highlight the approach each school took to changing their school culture and reducing bullying. Additionally, the framework allowed for a comparative analysis of the resulting case study profiles.



MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Te Manatū Whakahiato Ora

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