Education Review Office
Te Tari Arotake Mātauranga

Bullying Prevention and Response in New Zealand Schools

May 2019

Ko te Tamaiti te Pūtake o te Kaupapa
The Child – the Heart of the Matter

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Bullying Prevention and Response in New Zealand Schools

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Foreword

Bullying is a serious issue in New Zealand schools and more generally within New Zealand society. All learners have the right to feel safe, secure, included and welcomed in their school. The harmful effects of bullying on physical and mental wellbeing are significant and long-lasting. Therefore, it is crucially important schools work towards the vision of a bullying free environment. The Bullying Prevention Advisory Group (BPAG) has provided useful evidence-based guidance for schools on how to do this effectively through the mutually reinforcing elements of the Bullying Free NZ Framework, underpinned by committed and consistent leadership. In this evaluation, ERO assessed how well schools were implementing the different elements of the framework. We also gathered student voice directly through a survey of more than 11,000 students in Year 4 and above.

Our findings show most schools are aware of their responsibilities to prevent and respond to bullying, and have appropriate policies in place. We found that improvements could be made by effectively using data for monitoring and evaluation, supporting student agency; and ensuring that whānau and the school community have a shared understanding of bullying and the school's prevention and response approach. In general, most of the schools we visited were implementing most of the elements of the Bullying Free NZ Framework to at least a satisfactory extent. The framework elements are informed by evidence and clearly have positive impacts when well implemented.

However, our conversations with students and student survey results indicate that bullying remains relatively high. A third of students we spoke to indicated they had been bullied at their current school, and around half indicated they had observed bullying at their school. Most students had learned response strategies and many used them when encountering bullying, but the strategies did not always lead to a permanent resolution of the problem.

Implementation of the Bullying Free NZ Framework is an important and necessary basis for moving towards a bullying free environment. Schools should continue to be supported to improve the consistency and quality of their implementation of it. More research and evaluation is clearly needed into the effectiveness of the many programmes being adopted in schools to assess their practicality, the impacts they add to a school's climate and ability to reduce and effectively respond to bullying.

Our overall findings echo New Zealand's results in the recent iterations of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), which indicates that New Zealand has a higher rate of bullying relative to most other OECD countries. Taken together, this suggests that there is something distinct in the New Zealand culture, which as families and communities we need to acknowledge and address. The ultimate solutions to bullying in New Zealand cannot rely entirely on what is under a school's direct control. Schools are largely doing the right things. The problem is a societal one, so our response needs to be too.

Foreword

This report is the culmination of work from many in ERO, supported by the students, principals and teachers who have given their time and shared their insights into their practices and experiences. I want to thank all involved for their contribution. During the course of this work one of our much loved staff members Paul Lawrence passed away. I want to acknowledge Paul's contribution to this work and the contribution he has made over the past 15 years to ERO's national evaluation programme.
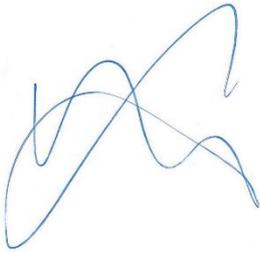
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May 2019

Overview

Bullying is a serious issue in New Zealand schools. The most recent available international comparative studies from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) make clear that we have one of the highest rates of bullying among Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member countries. Experiencing bullying has a negative impact on student wellbeing and achievement at school and beyond. In recognition of this, the cross-sector Bullying Prevention Advisory Group (BPAG) has published extensive guidelines and resources to support schools in their efforts to prevent and respond to bullying incidents. Additionally, schools implement a variety of programmes, from expansive whole-school initiatives like the Ministry of Education's Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L) School-Wide to more targeted, focused programmes on specific issues like cyberbullying.

ERO recognises the vision of a bullying-free New Zealand is aspirational, and no approach is likely to be 100 percent effective. Therefore, in this evaluation we looked at the extent to which schools were effectively working towards an environment in which students feel safe and free from bullying. A companion report to this one, *Bullying Prevention and Response: Student Voice* focuses on ERO's survey of students on their experience and understandings of bullying and effective bullying prevention and response.

ERO made judgments on the extent to which schools were implementing the kinds of policies and processes the Bullying Free NZ School Framework suggests support the effective prevention of, and response to, bullying. Of the secondary and composite schools ERO visited, around one-third were working towards a bullying-free environment to a great extent, a half were to some extent, and one in five to a limited extent. For primary schools, the picture was slightly better, with nearly two in five working to a great extent, just under 44 percent to some extent, and one in six to a limited extent.

While there were some challenges and weaknesses evident, particularly around schools' internal evaluation and engagement with whānau, these findings suggest most schools have some degree of strength across most of the domains of the Bullying Free NZ School Framework. Despite this, bullying rates remain high. In ERO's survey of students undertaken for this evaluation, 46 percent of primary-age students and 31 percent of secondary-age students reported having been bullied at their current school. 61 percent of primary-age students and 58 percent of secondary-age students reported having witnessed someone else being bullied at their current school. These findings align substantially with those of the international comparative studies mentioned above, and other New Zealand research from The University of Auckland's Adolescent Health Research Group, and the Office of the Children's Commissioner. The next iterations of TIMSS and PISA will provide further opportunities to benchmark New Zealand's bullying rates against those of other OECD countries.

The persistently high rates of bullying suggest that, while consistency and coherence in schools' approaches to bullying prevention and wellbeing are important, there is no silver bullet for bullying prevention. It is possible the elements of the Bullying Free NZ Framework where performance is weaker (use of data, support for student agency) are crucially important to successful prevention. It may also be that a focus on generic bullying prevention can only go so far, and further improvements can only come from more targeted actions focused on specific issues like racism and homophobia. Finally, many of the most salient drivers of bullying may be beyond schools' direct control, related to parental attitudes, and broader societal issues.

ERO recommends school leaders use the Bullying Free NZ Framework and associated resources to:

- make sure school staff and community have a shared understanding of what constitutes bullying behaviour, school policies are up to date, and bullying prevention and response processes are consistently evident in practice
- strengthen data collection, analysis and evaluation of bullying prevention strategies, including the impact and effectiveness of any specific programmes implemented
- provide opportunities for students to have input into the development of bullying prevention and response strategies, and empower student-led initiatives and groups
- involve parents and whānau more proactively in bullying prevention in addition to response.

Introduction

Bullying prevention and response: A guide for schools defines bullying behaviour as having four essential characteristics:

- *Bullying is deliberate* – an intention to cause physical and/or psychological pain or discomfort to another person
- *Bullying involves a power imbalance* – there is an actual or perceived unequal relationship between the target and the initiator
- *Bullying has an element of repetition* – bullying behaviour is usually not one-off
- *Bullying is harmful* – there is short and long-term physical or psychological harm to the target.

Bullying in schools can take a variety of forms, from more obvious practices of physical assault and intimidation, to more insidious practices like deliberate social exclusion or the spreading of harmful rumours. A key concern in recent years has been the growth of cyberbullying – children and young people using digital technologies, and especially social media, to inflict psychological harm on others. Cyberbullying presents a particular challenge to schools, as it can be more difficult to detect, and can continue outside of school time and off-site. Additionally, those targeted have no respite from the bullying behaviour.

While bullying is a universal concern, international research has consistently indicated that bullying behaviour is prevalent in New Zealand schools. The 2014/15 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) reported New Zealand had the second highest rate of bullying of the 51 countries in the study. The negative impact of bullying on students' short and long-term physical and mental health, educational achievement and social relationships is considerable, and comes at great personal and societal cost.

ERO has undertaken two previous investigations into bullying prevention, in 2007 and in 2015. In 2007 ERO published a report that found schools tended to have limited information about whether their practices, processes and behaviours were helping them to effectively reduce and respond to bullying incidents.

In 2013, the Secretary for Education established the BPAG to co-ordinate a national response to New Zealand's high rates of bullying, and to provide additional guidance to schools on how to prevent bullying. The BPAG published a guide, Bullying prevention and response, in 2015, which included information about bullying, good prevention practice and a bullying assessment matrix tool to help inform schools' responses to bullying incidents.

ERO investigated schools' use of the BPAG guide in 2015, and found fewer than half of the schools reviewed were using it. Of those that were, this was commonly to review and adjust their already existing policies and procedures for preventing and responding to bullying.

In 2016, the BPAG approved the Bullying-Free NZ Schools Framework, which sets out nine core elements of successful whole-school approaches to bullying prevention. The framework elements are based on research evidence that shows positive impacts when they are implemented with consistency and coherence. Associated resources and professional learning and development are available through the Bullying Free NZ website, which subsumed the standalone 2015 guide.

This 2019 ERO report focuses on the extent to which schools are implementing effective approaches to bullying prevention and responding to bullying that does occur.

Methodology

The key evaluative question for this evaluation was:

To what extent are schools working towards an environment in which students feel safe and free from bullying?

ERO drew on the research-informed and evidence-based BPAG Bullying-Free NZ Schools Framework to identify elements of effective prevention practice, considered alongside the domains of ERO's School Evaluation Indicators.

Figure 1. Bullying-Free NZ Schools Framework

Source: BPAG

The evaluation team then used a simple rubric derived from the Bullying-Free NZ Schools Framework to judge each school's performance on each of the domains as either good, satisfactory or unsatisfactory. Guided by these domain judgments, we made a holistic overall judgment as to whether the school was working towards a bullying-free environment to a great extent, to some extent, or to a limited extent. The full rubric can be found in Appendix 1, and further detail about the domains of the framework can be found on the BPAG website.

ERO collected data for this evaluation from 136 primary, secondary and composite schools scheduled for their regular review in Terms 1 and 2, 2018. Review officers collected data while onsite, drawing on interviews and meetings with school leaders, trustees, teachers and students, as well as conducting observations and document analysis. Demographic characteristics of the schools can be found in Appendix 2.

Additionally, students in Year 4 and above from these schools were invited to complete an online survey on their experiences of bullying. The survey was provided in both te reo Māori and English. Students were identified by asking for their school name, and the location of their school for data cleaning purposes and to match ERO's onsite data collection to the reported experiences of students. Students provided their current school year level, how long they had been going to their current school, gender and ethnicity.

We received 11,085 valid responses from 66 of the schools visited. The survey questions can be found in Appendix 3. ERO is also publishing a companion report, focused specifically on student experiences of bullying and what they have learned at school about bullying prevention and response, as shown in the student survey results.

Findings

Most schools are working towards a bullying-free environment to some extent or more

Of the secondary and composite schools we visited, 32 percent were doing working towards a bullying-free environment *to a great extent*, a further 48 percent to were working *to some extent*, and 19 percent *to a limited extent*. The spread was a little more positive for primary schools, where 40 percent were doing this *to a great extent*, 44 percent *to some extent* and 16 percent *to a limited extent*.

Figure 2: Most schools are working towards a bullying-free environment[1]
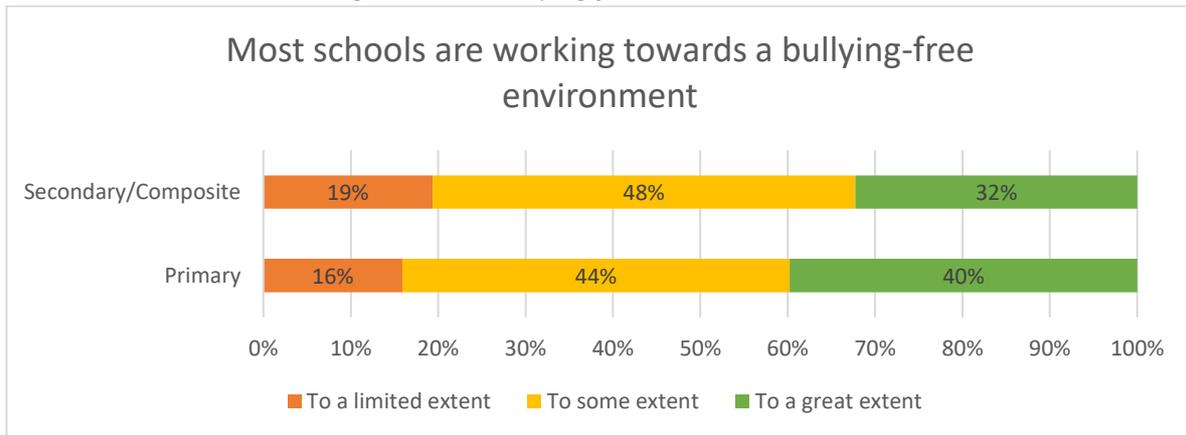
Smaller schools were somewhat over-represented toward the lower end of the spectrum, and so looking at the numbers of students enrolled in schools of each category yields a slightly more positive picture. This distribution also reflects the higher proportion of secondary schools, which tend to be larger than primary schools, in the *some extent* category.

Figure 3: Number of students in schools by overall judgment

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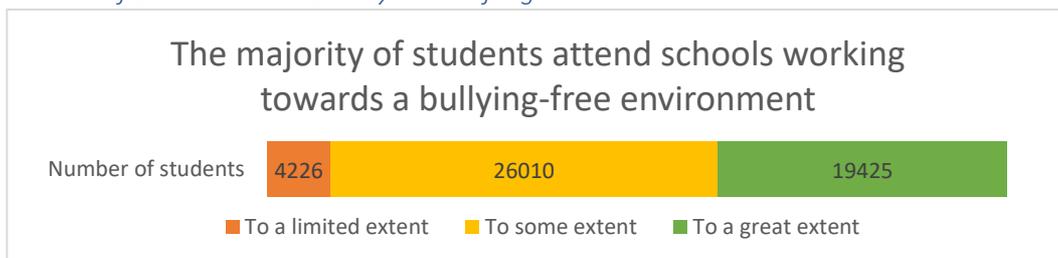
[1] Not all percentages sum to 100 due to rounding.

The strongest schools are marked by consistency and coherence

In almost all schools, ERO found some degree of commitment from leaders to preventing and responding to bullying, as well as relevant written policies. The most effective schools were effective across the nine domains in the Bullying-Free NZ School Framework, consistently implementing a whole-school approach. They had strong universal approaches, and targeted more intensive support where monitoring and evaluation indicated it was needed. The schools working to some extent had some domains of strength but were also weaker in other domains. The smaller number of schools working to a limited extent had significant weaknesses across the domains.

Figure 4 below shows the range of practice across the nine domains.

Figure 4: Performance in each of the Bullying-Free Framework domains[2]
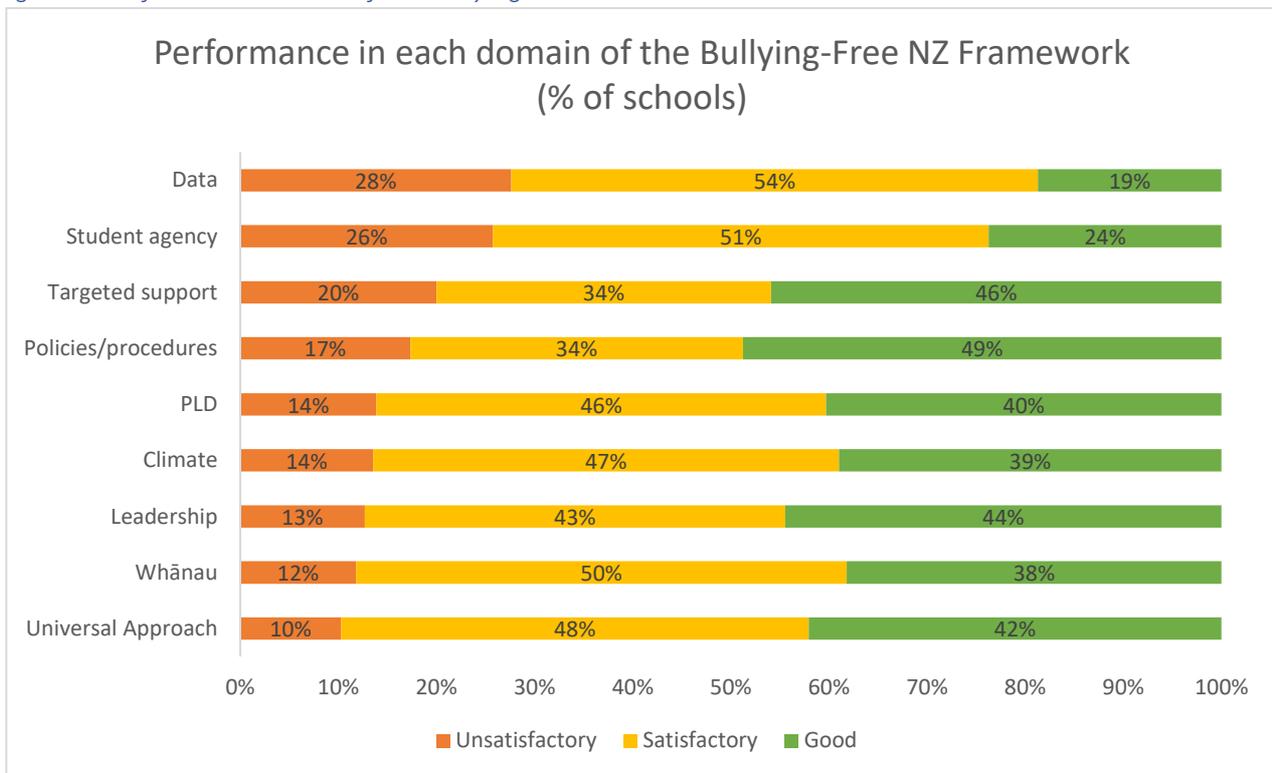
Evaluation and supporting student agency could be improved

ERO found the biggest gap in schools' approaches to bullying prevention and response was a lack of effective evaluation and monitoring. Schools often did not have clear and robust data on the incidence of bullying, and were unsure how effective their prevention and response strategies were. Only around a fifth of schools were performing well in this aspect, which relates to the data domain in the Bullying-Free NZ Framework. Supporting student agency was another area of relative weakness, and targeted support was sometimes less effective due to a lack of data on areas of greatest need.

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[2] Not all percentages sum to 100 due to rounding.

The challenge that school leaders most commonly cited in conversation with ERO was difficulty in developing effective partnerships with parents and whānau. ERO's rubric gave a 'satisfactory' judgment for those schools who were involving whānau as appropriate in response to specific bullying incidents, and 'good' judgment to those whose involvement of parents and whānau was more proactive.

Other challenges cited by schools included students' reluctance to report bullying, which complicated efforts to understand the nature and extent of the issue. Additionally, leaders and teachers believed cyberbullying was increasing in prevalence, but could often happen undetected, or offsite and outside of school time, making it more difficult to address.

ERO also found nearly a fifth of students had not learned what to do when encountering bullying, and some student comments indicated that they thought the strategies they had learned were not helpful. Finally, in some schools, leaders indicated that accessing or making time for training staff in bullying prevention was a challenge, with other competing priorities.

Bullying experience varied by gender

ERO's findings, both from the student survey, and from review officers' onsite discussions with students, confirm that bullying does occur to at least some extent in almost all schools visited. ERO's companion report on student survey results includes more detail about students' reported bullying experiences.

A smaller percentage of students reported experiencing bullying behaviour more frequently. Table 1 below shows different types of bullying behaviour students reported experiencing 'almost every day' or '1 or 2 times a week', broken down by gender.[3]

Table 1. Bullying behaviours reported often by students, broken down by gender

Bullying behaviour experienced	Percentage of respondents indicating experiencing this behaviour weekly or more often		
	Male	Female	Gender-diverse[4]
Called names, put down or teased	21	12	34
Left out or ignored by other students	14	13	33
Been threatened	9	4	27
Hit, pushed, kicked, punched, choked	11	4	19
Personal things damaged or stolen	7	5	23
Lies or bad stories spread	9	8	20
Nasty messages on phone or computer	4	3	18
Made to do something didn't want to do	9	5	20

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[3] These are unweighted percentages, as population figures for gender-diverse students were not available. See *Bullying Prevention and Response: Student Voice* for more detail.

[4] ERO's survey allowed students an open-response question to indicate their gender identity.

Male students were more likely to report experiencing every kind of bullying behaviour than female students, but the gap was especially wide with respect to being called names, put down or teased, and physical forms of bullying.

Comparing the proportion of gender-diverse and cisgender students,[5] both male and female, who identified that they experience at least one of the bullying behaviours almost every day yields an observable difference, with gender-diverse students reporting higher rates of bullying behaviours experienced. Only a small number of respondents identified as gender-diverse, so some caution is warranted in interpreting these results.[6] However, ERO's findings do align with The University of Auckland's Youth'12 health and wellbeing survey findings that nearly one in five transgender[7] students reported experiencing bullying at least a weekly. At minimum, ERO's findings support other research indicating gender-diverse young people are more likely to experience bullying than their cisgender peers. ERO has previously published Promoting Wellbeing Through Sexuality Education, a report focusing in part on how schools can improve their inclusion of gender-diverse students.

Students in more effective schools reported less bullying

ERO compared the difference in reported prevalence[8] of bullying across schools by overall judgment. Students in the bottom group of schools, those working to a limited extent, were more likely to report being bullied, or seeing others being bullied at their school. There was, however, almost no difference in reported prevalence between the schools working to some extent, and those working to a great extent. This is likely due to the input-focused nature of most of the Bullying-Free NZ Framework domains. Comparing reported prevalence based on ERO's judgment against the more outcome-focused school climate domain, however, shows that in the schools ERO identified as having a better school climate, students reported that they experienced and witnessed less bullying.

Table 2: Reported prevalence of bullying by school climate judgment

School climate judgment	Mean percentage of students reporting they had been bullied at school	Mean percentage of students reporting they had witnessed bullying at their school
Unsatisfactory	56	77
Satisfactory	47	67
Good	38	55

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[5] Meaning students who identify with the gender they were assigned at birth.

[6] The percentages listed above have a margin of error up to +/- 10.2%. For gender-diverse students indicating being left out or ignored, we would have 90% confidence that the true range lies between 14.2% and 34.6%. With the exception of the comparison between gender-diverse and male students reporting being called names, put down or teased, these differences remain after accounting for the margins of error.

[7] The Youth'12 survey used 'transgender' as an umbrella term. This is not entirely synonymous with ERO's preferred term 'gender-diverse', which includes for example intersex and gender-nonconforming youth. See the reference below for notes on Youth'12 usage.

[8] In those schools for which there were sufficient student survey responses.

Almost all schools have some policies but effective schools are more consistent

Appropriate charter values and written policies are a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for effective bullying prevention and response. What matters most in working towards a bullying-free environment are the deliberate actions undertaken by trustees, leaders, teachers, and students.

ERO found the vast majority of schools recognised bullying as an issue and had explicit policies and procedures for responding to incidents. The implementation of strategies aimed at bullying prevention was somewhat more variable. At a minimum, all schools visited recognised and accepted their legal and moral responsibility to provide a safe physical and emotional learning environment for their students. School charters espoused values related to this – commonly cited values included respect, responsibility, acceptance, and compassion. Often, school values were expressed as Māori concepts like whakamana,[9] whanaungatanga,[10] and manaakitanga.[11]

The most effective schools in this evaluation were distinguished by the commitment of their leadership, the consistency of their approach, and robust internal evaluation and monitoring. Schools with sound internal evaluation practice drew on a range of evidence to make sure they had a good sense of patterns of bullying incidents, and how well their prevention and response strategies were impacting on student safety and wellbeing. They used this information to continually improve their practice, targeting areas that most needed attention.

Leadership was crucial but the level of trustee involvement was variable

School leaders have a pivotal role in promoting a bullying-free environment. Leaders model inclusive practice, set guidelines and expectations for how teachers manage behaviour, and how they respond to specific instances of bullying. The whole-school climate is greatly influenced by how leaders demonstrate their commitment to enacting school values and treating others with respect and integrity. Most leaders espoused commitment to bullying prevention, although the level of implementation was somewhat more variable.

ERO found effective leaders were taking a deliberate and strategic approach to bullying prevention and response. They were engaged in the school community and, through both formal reporting and more informal channels, were aware of, and responded promptly to issues and incidents as they arose. Some leaders emphasised the importance of knowing their community and their students' family circumstances to inform the school's approach to bullying prevention and response. A few principals also had expertise specifically in restorative practices or behaviour management that informed their leadership and the broader school approach.

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[9] To confer mana; respect.
[10] Kinship; sense of family connection or other close reciprocal relationships.
[11] Kindness; generosity; support; hospitality.

Effective leaders were also discerning in their use of specific bullying prevention programmes, employing these when evidence suggested they would support the school's overall approach, or address issues of immediate concern. Leadership was also crucial in supporting staff capability by prioritising opportunities for relevant professional development.

ERO found trustees' level of involvement in bullying prevention and response varied from school to school. All boards were involved in developing school vision, values and bullying prevention and response policies. They were also responsible for creating the enabling conditions for bullying-free environments through their resourcing decisions. This included initiatives such as purchasing bullying prevention programmes for the school, funding additional guidance counsellor positions, or resourcing professional development initiatives.[12]

More engaged boards of trustees went beyond this to request regular detailed reporting on bullying and other student wellbeing matters, and used this information well as part of strategic and annual planning cycles. ERO found this was more likely in schools with well-developed cultures of internal evaluation. In a few schools, trustees and leaders talked about the board having a pro-active role around bullying. Examples included: board members and the senior leadership team developing a bullying prevention and response document with a strengths-based approach; surveying parents as part of a consultation series on bullying; developing a code of conduct for parents regarding bullying attitudes and approaches. One source also talked about the board and neighbouring marae proactively promoting the school's bullying prevention messages as part of engaging families and whānau.

In schools with less engaged stewardship, trustees were more passive and relied on leaders to decide what to inform them about regarding what was happening in the school with respect to bullying.

The most common approaches were PB4L and restorative practice

Most schools were implementing a named approach or programme, to at least some extent, as part of their approach to bullying response and/or prevention.

The most commonly implemented approach was some variety of Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L). PB4L is an expansive initiative, with several components and stages, so the level of implementation and specific actions undertaken varied considerably from school to school. Just over 40 percent of the schools ERO visited were using PB4L School-Wide, which is intended to be implemented over three to five years, and comprises three tiers. The tiers move from more general, looking at improving systems, processes and expectations across the whole school, to focusing more specifically on interventions for students presenting with more challenging behaviours, and requiring more intensive support. ERO found schools implementing PB4L School-Wide were often adapting the programme to fit their context and using tools from the programme to support internal evaluation and monitoring of bullying prevention and response.

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[12] ERO's evaluation was not able to isolate the contribution of resourcing decisions to overall effectiveness.

However, we found no clear link between participation in PB4L School-Wide and the overall quality of schools' evaluation practice in the schools ERO visited. ERO did find slightly higher rates of reported bullying prevalence in those schools implementing PB4L, but this could be due to a selection effect whereby some schools with higher rates of challenging behaviour implement PB4L as a response. Participation in PB4L is likely to result in improved monitoring of behaviour, which could also drive up reported rates of bullying.

The other approach schools were commonly using was restorative practice, although the formality of this and the level of implementation fidelity varied. Restorative practice specifies a set of responses to incidences of bullying, focused on restoring relationships. It contrasts with more punitive responses. There is a restorative practice programme under the PB4L umbrella, but some schools appeared to espouse restorative practice without necessarily being part of the PB4L initiative. Successfully implementing restorative practice requires staff capability building, and it is important schools implement processes with a good understanding of the rationale and philosophy behind restorative practice. In one school, ERO found that a lack of understanding meant restorative principles were inappropriately applied, leading to an unsatisfactory outcome.

Schools also selected from a large variety of other bullying-related, or generally pro-social programmes, including: Kia Kaha, Travellers, Keeping Ourselves Safe and KiVa. Additionally, some schools brought in external speakers or short-term programmes for specific kinds of bullying or problematic behaviour. Examples include the Police's Loves-Me-Not for abusive behaviour in relationships, and a variety of different programmes or seminars on cyberbullying. It is beyond the scope of this evaluation to assess the effectiveness of these programmes, and due to small numbers, it would be inappropriate to draw any strong conclusions about their contribution to the overall effectiveness of schools' bullying prevention and response strategies. ERO also acknowledges that approaches and programmes aimed at addressing school climate can take some time to embed and show impact, which highlights the importance of ongoing monitoring and formative evaluation.

Outside of specific programmes, ERO found schools also taught bullying prevention through the curriculum. Most commonly in secondary years this was in Year 9 and 10 health classes, although special character schools also commonly discussed aspects of bullying prevention in religious education classes. In primary schools, social-emotional learning was more likely to be woven through the regular classroom programme. Many teachers focused on relationships and interpersonal skills, developing empathy, resilience, and how to respond to bullying, both as a victim, and as a bystander. In a few schools, ERO found explicit opportunities for learning about bullying were spread across the breadth of the curriculum. Many teachers also used classroom pedagogy as an opportunity to reinforce bullying prevention messages by modelling respectful behaviour and reminding students of relevant school values.

The level of professional learning and development was variable

ERO found a variable level of explicit professional learning and development (PLD) in schools. In schools that were doing this well, leaders used their internal-evaluation processes to inform the choice of relevant PLD linked to a coherent whole-school approach to bullying prevention. Where schools were involved in PB4L, or restorative practice approaches, they often accessed PLD related to these programmes. Where this was done less well, PLD was accessed in a more ad hoc fashion, without necessarily being clearly linked to identified needs and priorities. Many schools had not recently accessed PLD relevant to bullying prevention at the time of ERO's visit, either because it was not seen as necessary, or because of barriers related to resourcing or finding relevant opportunities.

Often, schools mobilised internal expertise from guidance counsellors or other qualified staff to share effective practice and build consistency of approach in the school. They identified staff members who had a strength in bullying prevention and provided deliberate opportunities for them to upskill their colleagues, as part of professional learning groups, or staff meetings.

Cyberbullying was the most common area where schools brought in external expertise, whether from Netsafe, or a variety of other independent providers. In a handful of cases, parents and whānau were included in cyberbullying PLD, to promote consistent messaging in both home and school environments.

Parent and whānau engagement was mostly reactive

More than half of schools directly involved parents and whānau only when a severe incident occurred. Evidence suggests some schools involve the parents and whānau only of the student/s who is/are doing the bullying, while others involve the parents of both the bully and bullied students.

Around a third of schools were taking a more proactive approach to involving parents and whānau in their prevention approach. Typically, schools that demonstrated strong involvement with parents and whānau (and which ERO judge to be very effective against this criterion in the rubric) were also driven by strong leadership and took a school-wide approach to implementing bullying prevention and response strategies.

Proactive involvement usually took the form of communication from the school to the whānau, whether through information evenings, newsletters, blogs, and invitations to relevant assemblies or seminars on topics like cyberbullying. These schools often used surveys to gather whānau views on bullying or broader wellbeing issues. A few schools did involve whānau in a more genuinely collaborative way, providing opportunities for whānau to have meaningful input into the development of bullying prevention and response strategies and approaches.

In a few schools, leaders and teachers talked about regular informal contact with parents, for example, at the school gate, via an open-door policy for conversations with the principal or

teachers, which allowed opportunities for parents or teachers to raise any behavioural or wellbeing concerns about students.

A few leaders talked about active involvement with iwi and the local marae, or with parents of different cultures. Two schools specifically leveraged off active engagement with the marae and board of trustee members to promote bullying prevention messages and help build community support for the schools' approach.

Effective schools made a point of involving students and promoting student agency

School climate and culture are improved by student ownership of bullying prevention and response strategies.

ERO found that the most effective secondary schools provided many opportunities for students to exercise agency and leadership around bullying prevention. Many of these schools had some form of peer mentoring structure in place, where senior students were paired with junior students to help with transitions and provide guidance and support. Students told ERO this helped provide a more welcoming school environment, and having role models reinforced school values of inclusion and respect.

Student-led groups were the other main way in which many of the secondary schools supported students to contribute to bullying prevention. ERO found many groups focused on sex-, gender- and sexuality-diversity. These provided safe spaces and support for a population of students often more at risk of bullying. Other groups included health committees, and a 'Caring and Kindness' club. The existence of these groups and their activities in the school provided a protective factor that contributed to moving towards a bullying-free environment.

Student groups from nine primary schools talked about having specific student leadership roles in their school as part of the schools' approach to bullying prevention. Most were referred to as peer mediators, other titles included peer support, student leaders, student counsellor, and PB4L ambassadors. In general, the student leadership role was to uphold the school's values and expectations of student behaviour, and to support and be role models for other students. In addition, peer mediators helped identify and defuse problems in the playground. Some also kept a record of incidents to discuss with a dedicated teacher or school leader at regular meetings where the focus was on incidents and patterns of bullying behaviour in the playground and seeking solutions. Most students believed the peer mediators in their schools did a good job and were sought out for support and problem solving in the playground.

Less effective schools did not provide the same level of support for student agency. There were often still leadership opportunities in student councils or prefect roles, although these tended to be driven by adults not students.

Schools usually responded to incidents of bullying appropriately

In most of the schools we visited, most students were confident that teachers and leaders in their schools would, and did respond effectively to bullying incidents. In a few schools, students expressed a lack of confidence in their school's response to bullying, saying their concerns were minimised, nothing happened, or teachers 'gave advice, but didn't solve the issue'. In a few schools, students said things got worse, because telling a teacher was perceived as 'snitching' and teachers had not adequately addressed the issue.

ERO found schools' response to bullying incidents depended on the severity of the incident and other contextual factors. The BPAG guide provides a bullying assessment matrix to help schools decide on an appropriate response to incidents, but ERO found only a few schools where teachers or leaders explicitly mentioned using this matrix.

As indicated, ERO found many schools took a restorative approach to incidents of bullying. Restorative practice specifies different levels of response depending on the nature of the incident, but all focus on:

- what has happened and who has been affected
- holding those who have caused harm accountable
- providing support to those who have been harmed, and others involved.
  (adapted from Te Kete Ipurangi website)

Students were generally aware if their school employed restorative practice, even if they had not themselves been involved in any formal restorative conferences. Some students spoke positively about the use of restorative practice, while a small number favoured a more punitive response. In one school, leaders told ERO they had found it necessary to work with parents and whānau to counter a perception that restorative practice was 'all talk'. Implementing restorative practice takes time, and a few leaders indicated challenges in shifting teacher practice away from more traditional behaviour management strategies focused on punishment and reward.

More generally, and independent of whether they were implementing restorative practices, schools responded to bullying initially by talking with both bullies and victims to understand what had happened. Students ERO spoke to, and those who completed the survey, agreed that timeliness was very important. They wanted allegations of bullying to be taken seriously, to get all sides of a story, and delay any substantive response until the incident or incidents were well understood.

Students wanted, and expected, teachers or other staff would stop the bullying behaviour from happening, and would provide support to both the bully and the victim. Many students took a compassionate approach, and expressed the idea that teachers should check on the bully's wellbeing, recognising there could be underlying causes of the behaviour that would need to be addressed. A few students did say they would like to see bullies punished, particularly for more severe incidents.

Most students have learned what to do but do not always put it into practice

Three-quarters of secondary-age students completing the survey indicated they had learned, at their current school, what to do when experiencing or witnessing bullying. Eighty-nine percent of primary students said they had learned what to do at their current school, which suggests that primary schools have somewhat more of a focus on explicitly teaching students how to respond to bullying. In speaking with ERO, students identified three main strategies:

- reporting incidents to teachers/pastoral staff/other adults
- walking away/ignoring the bullying
- or non-violently confronting the bully, either on their own or others' behalf.

However, in responding to our student survey, secondary students were much less likely than primary students to tell a teacher if they were being bullied (26 percent secondary, 74 percent primary). By contrast, 66 percent of secondary students would tell their friends. These findings were reflected in onsite student interviews as well. Students told ERO they would first try to ignore the bullying, then escalate to another response if it persisted or worsened.

Having learned what to do when experiencing or witnessing bullying was positively associated with students' confidence to respond to bullying, although ERO's onsite discussions with students made clear their level of confidence was heavily influenced by the specific context of the bullying.

In the student survey, ERO asked about the outcomes for those students who identified they had used bullying response strategies they had learned at school. Thirty-five percent of students who responded to this question said the bullying stopped. However, the most commonly identified outcome (forty-four percent) was that bullying stopped for a while and then started again. Sixteen percent of respondents indicated the bullying continued, and five percent said the bullying got worse as a result of what they had tried.

Schools could do a better job of using data for monitoring and evaluation

The biggest weakness across the schools ERO visited was the level and quality of internal evaluation. Schools were better at monitoring incidents than evaluating their initiatives. Most schools collected administrative data on bullying incidents, stored and shared it through their student management system (SMS). The other major sources of data on bullying were student surveys with a wellbeing or school climate focus. Just under a half of the schools visited specifically used the New Zealand Council for Education Research (NZCER) Wellbeing@School survey, while others developed their own. The schools with well-developed use of data and evaluation also spoke to students more directly, for example, through focus groups, or otherwise making sure students had opportunities to contribute their views in whatever form they were most comfortable.

Some of the less effective schools relied overly on anecdotal data for monitoring bullying prevalence. This is of concern, as student reluctance to report bullying, and the prevalence of less visible forms, such as cyberbullying, could contribute to schools' systematically underestimating the extent of bullying behaviours in their school.

ERO found only few schools were doing a good job of evaluating their bullying prevention and response policies, programmes and procedures. Most schools used their monitoring data to some extent to target support where it was needed. However, analysis and sense-making were limited, and consequently schools did not know enough about how their actions were contributing to a bullying-free environment. Attributing some level of causality was also a challenge for those schools whose approach was less coherent, as pursuing a variety of disconnected programmes or initiatives could make it more difficult to know what specific actions were making a difference.

Conclusion

The BPAG has developed useful research-based guidance to support New Zealand schools to implement bullying prevention and response strategies. ERO found most schools were implementing many of the elements of the bullying-free framework to at least some extent. However, simply having many of the elements in place was not sufficient to make a difference in bullying prevalence. What distinguished those schools working towards a bullying-free environment to a great extent was the level of coherence and consistency of the whole-school approach, and the strength of internal evaluation that enabled leaders to be clear about the effect of their initiatives on school climate and culture.

For those schools working towards a bullying-free environment to some extent, leaders needed to further develop their monitoring and internal-evaluation processes to make sure they had a good understanding of bullying in their schools, and how effectively their policies, programmes and processes were meeting the needs of their students. Valid and reliable surveys like Wellbeing@School are a useful gauge of student wellbeing and school climate, and can provide primary evidence of the effectiveness of practices and programmes. School leaders can support student leadership and student agency to address the issues that matter most to them around bullying by providing opportunities for students to have meaningful input into how the school approaches bullying prevention and response.

Finally, those schools working to a limited extent need to make sure they have up-to-date policies and procedures that are consistently followed in the school. They should make use of BPAG guidance along with internal monitoring and evaluation to identify where their most salient issues are arising and build buy-in and a shared commitment to tackle, in the first instance, a small number of identified priorities.

Most students have learned bullying prevention and response strategies in their schools. While the coverage of this teaching could be improved in some instances to make sure all students know what to do when experiencing or witnessing bullying, it is clear that having knowledge of strategies is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for students to be able to respond effectively to bullying incidents.

The prevalence of bullying in New Zealand schools is intolerably high, and the impact of bullying on student wellbeing and achievement is significant. Bullying is a complex issue, and this evaluation has focused on the policies and processes schools have in place. However, it is clear some of the contributing factors extend far beyond the school gates. For instance, New Zealand has a similarly troubling record of statistics around family and sexual violence and a concerning level of workplace bullying. The problem is a societal one. Schools can play a significant part in addressing it, but the responsibility to bring about lasting change is shared by communities, whānau, and individuals across New Zealand.

Appendix 1: Evaluative rubric

Domain	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Good
Leadership	Lack of leadership commitment to bullying prevention. Lack of whole school vision/approach	Leadership commitment to bullying prevention and wellbeing, whole school approach is espoused, perhaps some pockets of inconsistency	Strong commitment by leaders to bullying prevention and wellbeing, and to monitoring and evaluation of approach, whole school approach consistently evident
Documentation, policies, procedures	Lack of documented polices/procedures or policies minimally evident in practice	Effective and supportive policies and procedures, mostly evident in practice	Effective and supportive policies and procedures, very coherent and evident in practice
School Climate and Culture	Negative school climate, many students don't feel safe, high incidence of bullying	Mostly positive school climate including for diverse students, most students feel a sense of belonging / inclusion	Positive and supportive school climate for all students, diversity valued
Universal Approach/ Curriculum/Pedagogy	Inconsistent messaging or lack of explicit teaching of social/emotional skills and resilience	Some social/emotional learning and teaching of resilience	Social/emotional learning and explicit teaching of resilience across the curriculum
Targeted support	Lack of targeted support, unknown where to target	School knows where to target more intensive support and mostly does so	Well planned and targeted support
Whānau	Lack of whānau involvement	Whānau involvement in response to incidents but not or little in prevention	School proactively involves whānau in both prevention and response
Data collection, use and evaluation	No systematic monitoring or evaluation, school staff unaware of extent of bullying	Some monitoring of bullying and some evaluation of practice but limited data sources	Robust monitoring and evaluation drawing on a range of data sources
PLD	No recent relevant staff capability building or PLD	Some recent relevant staff capability building and PLD	Well planned and targeted staff capability building/PLD linked to approach
Student leadership, agency and voice	Lack of student input, mismatch between staff and student perception of bullying prevalence and student roles	Students have some input into bullying prevention and response, students feel listened to, some opportunities for student leadership	Students are heard, exercise agency and leadership, school supportive of student led initiatives
Overall Judgement	**To a limited extent**	**To some extent**	**To a great extent**

Appendix 2: Schools in this sample

Table 1: School Type

School Type	Number of schools in sample	Percentage of schools in sample	National percentage of schools
Special	2	1	2
Composite (Years 1 – 15)	7	5	6
Contributing (Years 1 – 6)	46	34	31
Full Primary (Years 1 – 8)	47	35	43
Intermediate (Years 7 – 8)	8	6	5
Secondary (Years 7 – 15)	7	5	4
Secondary (Years 9 – 15)	19	14	9
Total	136	100	100

Table 2: Decile

Decile Group[13]	Number of schools in sample	Percentage of schools in sample	National percentage of schools
Low decile	35	26	31
Medium decile	57	42	38
High decile	44	32	31
Total	136	100	100

Table 3: Location

Urban/rural area[14]	Number of schools in sample	Percentage of schools in sample	National percentage of schools
Main urban area	74	54	54
Secondary urban area	5	4	6
Minor urban area	15	11	12
Rural area	42	31	28
Total	136	100	100

Table 4: School size

School roll[15]	Number of schools in sample	Percentage of schools in sample	National percentage of schools
Very small	8	6	8
Small	36	27	24
Medium	40	29	35
Large	29	21	21
Very Large	23	17	13
Total	136	100	100

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[13] Deciles 1-3 are low decile schools; deciles 4-7 are medium decile schools; deciles 8-10 are high decile schools.

[14] Main urban areas have a population greater than 30,000; secondary urban areas have a population between 10,000 and 29,999; minor urban areas have a population between 1000 and 9,999; and rural areas have a population less than 1000.

[15] Roll sizes for primary and intermediate schools are: very small (1-30); small (31-100); medium (101-300); large (301-500) and very large (more than 500). Roll sizes for secondary and composite schools are: very small (1-100); small (101-400); medium (401-800); large (801-1500) and very large (more than 1500).

Appendix 3: Student survey

Hi,

Your answers will not be shared with your teacher or parents. You do not have to give your name.

Please answer by ticking the boxes. Answer what you can and add any comments you would like to make.

If you are being hurt by bullying behaviour, please talk to an adult you trust.

Your answers are important to us to help schools know how to make them safe and free from bullying.

This survey will take less than 10 minutes.

Thank you for your time.

1. What is the name of your school? *(Textbox)*
2. What town or city is your school in or near? *(Textbox)*
3. What is your gender? *(Textbox)*
4. What is your ethnicity?
   - New Zealand European/Pākehā
   - Māori
   - Pacific
   - Asian
   - Other (please specify)
5. What year of school are you in? *(Options between Year 4 - 13)*
6. How long have you been in the school you go to now? *(Options for 'Less than one year' and 'More than one year')*
7. Who would you tell if you were being bullied?
   - My teacher
   - My parents or caregiver
   - My friends
   - Other adults at school – like your principal, dean or counsellor
   - Nobody
   - Is there any other person you would tell if you were being bullied?
8. Please tick whether you agree or disagree with the following sentences (*agree*, *disagree* or *not sure*)
   - At my school, people accept me for who I am.
   - I enjoy being at my school.
   - At my school we learn how we should treat each other.
   - My teachers behave in the way they would like us to behave.
9. At the school you go to now, have any of the things below happened to you? *(please tick how often: Never, or hardly ever; 1 or 2 times a month; 1 or 2 times a week; Almost every day)*
   - I have been called names, put down, or teased in a mean way
   - I have been left out by other students or ignored on purpose
   - I have been threatened
   - I have been hit, pushed, kicked, punched, choked
   - I have had personal things (like pens, clothes or money) damaged in a mean way, or stolen
   - I have had lies or bad stories spread about me
   - I have got nasty messages on my phone or computer (like text or Facebook messages)
   - I have been made to do something I didn't want to do
   - Other (please describe)
10. At the school I go to now, I learn what to say or do if I or other students are being bullied? *(Options for 'Yes' and 'No')*
11. Have you ever been bullied at the school you are going to now? *(Options for 'Yes' and 'No')*
12. Have you ever seen someone else bullied at the school you go to now? *(Options for 'Yes' and 'No')*
    If student selects 'Yes' for this option, question 13 will be displayed. If the student selects 'No' for this option they will be re-directed to question 17
13. How confident did you feel to say or do what you had learnt when you were bullied or saw someone bullied? *(Options for 'Very confident', 'A little confident', 'Not confident' or 'I have not been bullied, or seen bullying in my school')*

14. Did you say or do any of the things you learned about when you were bullied or saw someone bullied?
    (Options for 'Yes' and 'No')
    If student selects 'Yes' for this option, question 16 will be displayed. If the student selects 'No' for this option, question 15 will be displayed.

15. What was the main thing that stopped you saying, or doing, any of the things you learned?
    - I did not feel confident enough
    - I wasn't sure what to do
    - I felt too afraid
    - Someone else did something
    - Other (please comment)

16. What happened when you said, or did, any of the things you learned?
    - The bullying stopped totally
    - The bullying did not stop
    - The bullying got worse
    - The bullying stopped for a bit but then started again
    - Did anything else happen? (please describe)

17. What do you think adults at school should do if you tell them you have been bullied? *(Textbox)*

18. What do you do to make your school a safer place to prevent bullying? (please describe) *(Textbox)*

19. If you had a magic wand, what would you change in your school to stop bullying? *(Textbox)*