



Briefing Note: Addressing bullying in schools

To:	Hon Jan Tinetti, Associate Minister of Education		
Cc:	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
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Purpose of report

This report updates you on work to address bullying in schools and opportunities for next steps in 2021.

Summary

- Bullying is a significant and ongoing issue for children and young people. We know that bullying is a broader societal problem, not limited to schools and kura.
- The best approaches to address bullying involve students, staff, whānau and communities working together. They focus on a broad range of social and environmental factors that foster positive, caring and inclusive cultures within schools and kura. These whole school approaches take time to embed and sustain but can deliver benefits beyond bullying prevention, such as increasing safety and engagement and reducing racism and discrimination. Powerful connections with whānau, iwi and others build strong foundations for good educational outcomes and experiences.
- Supports currently in place for bullying prevention and response include resources, evaluation surveys and advisory groups. However, there is more to be done. We are exploring next steps for further work with opportunities in four areas:
 - refining resources as a foundational step. We want to simplify our guidance and identify the key actions that schools, kura and communities can prioritise to have the most impact on bullying reduction. This alone will not resolve bullying but can help us to focus Ministry supports and future work;
 - improving the measures available to schools so they can be used to better understand student experiences and the impacts of new actions and initiatives. We have an opportunity to work with the sector, communities and iwi to inform some work towards this, and to agree on shared focusses;
 - leveraging initiatives and approaches, such as Positive Behaviour for Learning or Mana Ake, and existing roles to increase on-the-ground support to schools. This

would help to realise the behaviour and culture change that needs to take place to make a real difference; and

- o clarifying expectations for schools and how we support them to meet these. This includes engaging with students and whānau as a key step in creating safe, inclusive learning environments, which is an action in the National Education and Learning Priorities (NELP). We want to work on how we support schools and kura to implement this, and meet other expectations and responsibilities relating to providing safe and inclusive environments. This would include, but not be limited to, a focus on addressing bullying.
- We are working with the Office of the Children's Commissioner on a project looking into enablers for successful approaches to create safe and inclusive environments that help to address bullying. This will inform development of further work to support schools and kura.

Proactive Release

Agree that this briefing will **not** be proactively released at this time until decisions on further advice have been reached.

Agree / Disagree



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Deputy Secretary
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29/1/2021

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 / /



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28/1/2021

Background

1. Bullying is defined as harmful behaviour that is deliberate, involves a power imbalance, and has an element of repetition. Bullying can happen anywhere, at any time, and can be verbal, physical, or social. This includes cyberbullying. Bullying is influenced by broader social and environmental factors and is embedded in the values and norms of wider society. Because bullying, like many interconnected negative behaviours, attitudes and beliefs, has complex drivers solutions must be equally nuanced.
2. This is a significant and ongoing issue in Aotearoa. Bullying is often discussed in education engagements and is consistently highlighted in international survey findings. In the most recent PISA survey of 15 year olds in 2018, the rate of frequently bullied students in New Zealand (15%) was the sixth highest out of 74 countries.¹ 36% of year 5 and 38% of year 9 students surveyed in PIRLS and TIMSS reported that they were bullied on a monthly basis. Our measures are not yet improving over time, with PISA findings indicating bullying had risen overall since 2015.
3. Bullying has negative impacts on student wellbeing and learning, including mental health, attendance, a drop in achievement, or leaving school altogether. This is not limited to students who experience bullying. Students who take part in bullying also have increased risks of poor long-term outcomes, and peers who witness bullying can feel less safe. Children and young people who take part in bullying may have unmet needs, which can manifest in aggressive behaviours.
4. The Ministry of Education (the Ministry) provides some supports to help schools and kura build positive environments, and effectively address bullying. We recognise there is more to be done to address this issue and are in the process of exploring next steps.
5. Successful approaches to bullying prevention involve sustained positive changes across the whole school or kura environment and community. This cannot be achieved without working closely with parents and whānau. Although this kind of approach can take between three to five years to embed, benefits can extend beyond bullying reduction. These changes can improve general safety and inclusion, reducing other issues which share some drivers with bullying, such as racism and discrimination.

Current work to support positive school environments and address bullying

6. There are a range of resources, supports and requirements currently in place to help schools and kura with successful whole school approaches to build positive and inclusive environments and to effectively prevent and respond to bullying.

Legislation and other requirements for learning providers refer to providing safe and inclusive environments and addressing bullying

7. Schools and kura have a responsibility to provide safe and inclusive environments, and to prevent and respond to bullying. This is included in legislation and other requirements. However, they have autonomy over the approaches they take. This provides for flexibility and the implementation of approaches that best suit each school, community and context.
8. The Education and Training Act 2020 states that one of a board's primary objectives in governing a school is to ensure that the school 'takes all reasonable steps to eliminate racism, stigma, bullying, and any other forms of discrimination within the school' (s127(1)(b)(iii)). Another primary objective for boards is that they provide a physically and emotionally safe place for all students and staff (s127(1)(b)(i)).
9. Ensuring that places of learning are safe, inclusive and free from racism, discrimination and bullying is also a priority in the Statement of National Education and Learning

¹ Jang-Jones, A and McGregor, A. (2019). *PISA 2018 New Zealand's Students' Wellbeing School climate and student mindsets of 15 year olds*. Available at <https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/PISA/pisa-2018/pisa-2018-student-wellbeing>

Priorities (NELP) and the Tertiary Education Strategy (TES). Boards of schools and kura must have particular regard to the NELP, including in their strategic planning.

Schools can access the Bullying-Free NZ School Framework and resources

10. Evidence shows that the most effective approaches to addressing bullying involve everyone in the school community, including staff, students and whānau, and have a school wide focus on social and environmental factors. The Bullying-Free NZ School Framework was developed to reflect this, with nine core components for an effective school-based bullying prevention and response approach:
 - a. strong leadership support to champion bullying prevention;
 - b. a positive school and classroom climate and culture;
 - c. gathering and analysing data, to understand the nature and extent of bullying;
 - d. student leadership, agency and voice, to better understand and address the issue;
 - e. effective and supportive policies and practices, shared by the school community;
 - f. involvement of parents, carers and whānau, to strengthen the school's actions;
 - g. school wide professional learning and development (PLD), e.g. to support staff with managing student conflicts and building their social skills;
 - h. a universal approach, with whole schools and classrooms having shared focusses; and
 - i. targeted approaches, with early responses and supports for students' needs.
11. This has been used to develop a range of resources and guidance to support schools to address bullying. These are available on the Ministry's Bullying-Free NZ website, which includes sections for parents, whānau and students: www.bullyingfree.nz.
12. In 2019, the Education Review Office (ERO) found that schools with the most effective bullying prevention and response were working well across all nine domains of this framework, and were consistent in implementing whole school approaches.² Students in these schools reported less bullying. Schools doing less well often showed some commitment to addressing bullying but had gaps across some of the framework domains. The biggest gaps identified were in evaluation and monitoring, and support for student agency.
13. The Ministry also runs an annual nationwide Bullying-Free NZ Week and competition to raise awareness. This is usually held in the same week as the Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand's Pink Shirt Day (which is planned for May 2021 this year). Currently the Ministry's approach to this week is somewhat separate from the work of the Mental Health Foundation. The week did not run in 2020 due to COVID-19.

Bullying programmes are not a standalone solution, but can complement approaches

14. We do not recommend or fund discrete bullying programmes for use in schools and kura. This is because most have modest to moderate impacts and are not designed specifically for use in our cultural context. Most programmes require a fee and this cost can sometimes be significant. There are a range of independently provided bullying prevention programmes available to schools. These often focus in on some of the aspects of a school wide approach rather than all nine domains. Because these tend to focus in on bullying, they do not always help schools work with their communities on holistic approaches to build positive environments, shared values, attitudes and expectations. Some schools use programmes to complement their overarching approaches, but successful approaches can also be taken without them. Each school and kura has different needs in their own context, so a single programme is unlikely to work well for all.

² *Bullying Prevention and Response in New Zealand Schools May 2019*, available at <https://www.ero.govt.nz/publications/bullying-prevention-and-response-in-new-zealand-schools-may-2019/>

15. We have previously had significant interest in bullying prevention programmes. The Race Relations Commissioner has asked us to fund programmes such as KiVa, an anti-bullying programme developed in Finland, for use in all schools in Aotearoa. We have also engaged with philanthropic organisations about the possibility of philanthropic funding for local research into the efficacy of these programmes. While the initial focus of these discussions was on a randomised control trial of KiVa (based on the Race Relations Commissioner's particular interest in this programme), we consider that a wider approach to this research would be more valuable. For instance, this could address current gaps in our understanding, such as research into successful approaches to cyberbullying, and/or could continue to build on the findings from our work to identify enablers of good approaches (discussed in paragraphs 21-27).

We developed a work programme with the Bullying Prevention Advisory Group

16. The Ministry facilitates the inter-agency Bullying Prevention Advisory Group (BPAG) to provide leadership on bullying prevention. There are 17 members with representatives from across government and from the education sector, including Police, the Accident Compensation Corporation, Justice, education sector unions, the Human Rights' Commission and Office of the Children's Commissioner. The Race Relations Commissioner regularly attends these meetings.
17. In consultation with the BPAG, the Ministry produced the Bullying Prevention and Response Work Programme 2019-2022. Actions are grouped within five workstreams: wellbeing promotion; student agency; culture and community; measure, identify and review; and maintain, consolidate and strengthen. For example, this includes actions to engage with children, young people, parents and whānau and promote the Wellbeing@School tools. The Ministry is progressing most of the 32 items in the work programme. Some items have been paused pending further resourcing.

The Wellbeing@School survey toolkit can help schools review their approaches

18. The Ministry provides schools with free access to the Wellbeing@School survey toolkit, developed by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER). These can be used by schools to review the effectiveness of their approaches to bullying and providing a safe and caring environment. 509 primary and secondary schools have administered the student survey more than once between 2012 and 2019. These tools explore both student and teacher perceptions can be used to understand the level and type of bullying occurring.
19. NZCER provides information and advice to some schools and groups that support them, to ensure that schools are aware of the Wellbeing@School tools, know what they can be used for and to help them to interpret the data they produce. Some limitations of the Wellbeing@School toolkit are discussed in paragraph 33.

Netsafe and the Online Safety Advisory Group have a focus on cyberbullying

20. The Ministry supports Netsafe to provide online safety and digital citizenship education, advice and support to schools. This includes information relating to online bullying and abuse. Netsafe provides online resources and has education advisers who work with schools. Netsafe also chairs the cross-agency Online Safety Advisory Group (OSAG) which provides advice on identifying and addressing safe and responsible use of digital technology in schools. The OSAG provides advice to the BPAG on online safety, harmful communications, and wellbeing in relation to the use of digital technology for learning.

We are working on a project with the Office of the Children's Commissioner

21. The Ministry has partnered with the Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC) on the *Our kind of schools* project to strengthen our understanding of how schools and kura can provide safe, inclusive environments for their students that are free from bullying.

OCC and the Ministry have looked at findings from previous engagements

22. We have been reviewing previous engagements and gathering what we heard about bullying. We focussed on findings relating to barriers and enablers – factors that students, whānau and staff identified as helping, or hindering, efforts to address bullying. The OCC reviewed previous engagements. The Ministry prioritised four recent engagements: Kōrero Mātauranga | Education Conversation; Māori Education Wānanga; Pacific Education Fono; and engagement on the NELP. Our next steps are to summarise our findings from this review, which gave us some indications and examples of what is and is not working to address bullying.

Recent data findings have been summarised and are planned for release

23. As part of this project, the Ministry has summarised recent findings in the report *He Whakaaro: What do we know about bullying behaviours in New Zealand schools?* This includes some indicative findings about the types of bullying behaviours that are most frequent, and which of our children and young people are more likely to experience bullying. This provides useful context, which can help focus our next steps. Release is planned for the coming months.

We reviewed the guidance and resources we provide to support schools and kura

24. The Ministry also conducted a review of the resources available to support bullying prevention and responses, as well as inclusion more broadly, in schools and kura. It was clear that we have a large number of resources available online. These were often lengthy and generally did not clearly show key steps or priorities for schools and kura to focus on. This review could inform future work to strengthen our guidance.

To learn from good practice, we engaged with schools/kura identified as doing well

25. Between 27 October and 1 December 2020, our joint OCC and Ministry project team engaged with a kura kaupapa Māori and four primary schools. The four schools were identified by NZCER as having positive Wellbeing@School data results. The kura was identified as being an engaged and effective Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L) school, and we confirmed with regional staff that it would be a good example of positive practice.
26. We engaged with 250+ students (predominantly in years 5-8), approximately 70 staff members, and 45+ whānau and community members. We heard some great examples of what good practice looks like. This could be used to help give other schools new ideas to try out, and clear explanations of actions that have worked for others. For example, many schools find it challenging to form meaningful connections with whānau, in order to establish shared values and help with consistent responses to behaviours. One school told us about how they actively involved whānau in the creation of their marau ā-kura (local curriculum) and how this strengthened relationships within the school community.
27. We are currently analysing and writing up our findings. We plan to provide you with further advice before the end of Term 1 2021.

There are opportunities to increase supports for whole school approaches

28. We recognise that the supports currently in place alone are not enough to help schools and kura build and sustain safe and inclusive environments and to address bullying in schools. We have identified gaps and four key opportunities to explore going forward. We have detailed these below and in the attached A3 (see Appendix 1).

Refining resources to clarify priorities and demonstrate how they can be actioned

29. The guidance and resources we currently provide could be overwhelming, for schools, families and learners, both in volume and the content provided in each. It is not always clear how to apply guidance in context. This issue is not limited to bullying or inclusion.

The Ministry provides many resources to schools for application across a wide range of subjects, students, contexts and issues.

30. We want to explore how we can simplify, prioritise and better communicate the critical steps that school communities can take to address bullying. We also want to explore whether we can identify key steps that can achieve a range of outcomes, e.g. improve wellbeing, safety and inclusion, reduce bullying and increase educational engagement. This could include updates to the Bullying-Free NZ website and resources. We will also seek opportunities to work with OCC and others on communicating examples of good practice in an engaging way.
31. Work to refine our guidance and resources would not on its own resolve bullying but would be a foundational first step. This could help us prioritise and focus our supports and help schools to understand what is most important.

Reflecting these changes in a refresh of Bullying-Free NZ Week

32. In future years, we think there are opportunities to strengthen Bullying-Free NZ Week for more impact. Following work to simplify and refine the Bullying-Free NZ resources, this week could be refreshed to reflect identified priorities for schools and communities, with activities and awards designed to reinforce these. This work will require some lead in time, so is unlikely to be completed in time to change current plans for Bullying-Free NZ Week 2021. We will also seek to work more closely with the Mental Health Foundation to ensure promotion, messaging and planning of future weeks is more closely interwoven with plans for Pink Shirt Day.

Improving measures so they can be used effectively by schools and communities

33. Although we have reliable national-level statistics that indicate the extent and nature of bullying across our schools, we do not have the same level of consistency with measures to support schools and kura with monitoring and evaluation. Wellbeing@School is an annual measure and is not available in te reo Māori. We have had feedback that the surveys are too long, can be time and resource intensive to administer, and that schools do not always know what actions to take based on their findings.
34. We have identified this as a gap and are developing a wellbeing outcomes and measurement framework. This will result in a shortlist of agreed priorities which can be used to regularly ask students about their experiences. This would be much shorter than the full Wellbeing@School question set and would allow for more regular data collection on the experiences seen as most important. This would inform cycles of inquiry, in which school leaders, communities and the Ministry use regular data to better understand the impact of initiatives and approaches. This could help focus practice to result in continuous improvement.
35. We have funding to begin co-design with the sector, including engagement with iwi and whānau Māori, and other stakeholders. Following this, the creation of a tool may require additional funding. The process itself could prompt some schools to begin asking students questions about bullying. We know that some schools and kāhui ako already develop and use their own surveys. However, the creation of a national tool for systematic data collection within schools would allow for data to be aggregated at multiple levels. This could provide for regional and national comparisons and be used to inform policy (e.g. to seek funding for targeted support). We expect to provide you with further advice on this workstream in the first half of 2021.

Leveraging initiatives and resources to increase on-the-ground support to schools

36. Although most schools are aware of their responsibility to address bullying, it is not always clear to schools and kura how they can do this effectively. We heard from some schools that we are more focussed on how we measure their progress, rather than how we help them to achieve success. The resources that we provide could be more powerful if they were well understood by Ministry staff who support schools, who could walk alongside school leaders and communities to achieve change on-the-ground. We want

all our contacts with and initiatives for schools and kura to provide aligned support, with each connection strengthening whole school approaches. This could include current staff, such as Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLb) or PB4L School-wide (PB4L-SW) Practitioners.

Approaches such as PB4L and Mana Ake might provide opportunities

37. We have some existing and planned initiatives and resources that could be leveraged to improve on-the-ground supports to schools. For example, we briefed you recently about PB4L-SW [METIS 1245412 refers]. As we indicated in this briefing, there are opportunities to strengthen PB4L-SW. Although PB4L-SW is not designed to address bullying, it is a useful vehicle through which the whole school community can begin work on elements of prevention. PB4L provides a systemic framework that supports schools to build a positive and safe culture through a focus on clear behavioural expectations, based on shared values. Schools can also choose to adopt a restorative practice model through PB4L. This can be a mana enhancing way to effectively respond to bullying and other negative behaviours. We could consider the merits of developing a bullying prevention component for PB4L-SW, or training practitioners. Leveraging PB4L-SW would likely require workforce issues with SW practitioners to be addressed.
38. Mana Ake – Stronger for Tomorrow, is a Christchurch based initiative that works with schools to support staff and whānau when children are experiencing ongoing issues that impact their wellbeing. Like PB4L, Mana Ake is not designed specifically to address bullying. However, it is still worth considering how aspects of Mana Ake can help support positive learning environments and meet the needs of children and young people. We know that there are some components that can be added on which focus on addressing bullying. Again, leveraging this type of approach would require additional investment to increase its reach and level of support available to schools and kura. The Labour Party manifesto at the 2020 Election committed \$151 million for a national roll out of Mana Ake over five years.

There may be scope in support roles that we currently fund, or plan to establish

39. There are some roles we already fund, such as Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLb), that provide on-the-ground support to schools, who know them well and have strong relationships with schools and their communities. We could consider whether these roles could receive PLD to help with whole school approaches to addressing bullying. We would need to work through the details of this support, what this might look on-the-ground and how we could resource it.
40. Through Tomorrow's Schools, there are plans for Leadership Advisor roles to established within the new Education Service Agency. We could explore whether there is scope within these roles to provide any types of support with whole school approaches and continuous improvement in future.

Clarifying and aligning expectations and supports to help schools implement these

41. We have previously explored opportunities to increase regulatory mechanisms within schools, such as through amendments to legislation. We do not recommend regulating to require all schools to have a bullying prevention policy or plan. In comparable overseas jurisdictions with such a regulation, reported bullying rates are not significantly lower than in New Zealand.
42. To clarify expectations on schools and boards, we could support schools to realise the intention in the NELP for schools to collect information on students' experiences of bullying at school. This is currently an action within the first key objective in the NELP- "Learners at the Centre". We heard repeatedly in our engagements about the importance of hearing student and whānau voice and building community. There is an opportunity to emphasise this as a key step in creating safe, inclusive learning environments and implementing the NELP.
43. We could also explore opportunities with ERO to ensure performance criteria make it clear to schools what their expectations are for whole school approaches to providing

safe and inclusive environments, and bullying prevention and response, including utilising student and whānau voice. Any additional regulation would be best paired with targeted support, to help schools adopt the required approaches.

44. There are also opportunities to help schools and kura to commit to and implement our current expectations for providing safe and inclusive environments and addressing bullying, as part of a package of support. This could involve aligning priorities. For example, this could be wrapped up into a collective Ministry direction to strengthen Educationally Powerful Connections. There is a clear expectation through the NELP that the voice of learners/ākonga, whānau, families and their communities should be sought out and listened to. This is reflected in the action for schools and kura to “ask learners/ākonga, whānau and staff about their experience of racism, discrimination and bullying, and use that information to reduce these behaviours”, as well as in priority two, which focusses on partnering with whānau and communities to design and deliver education that responds to their needs.
45. The work we are progressing on a wellbeing outcomes framework could help assist schools to achieve this, by providing a mechanism through which data on experiences could be regularly collected. This would help inform cycles of inquiry, through which continuous improvement would be supported through improved understanding of the impacts new initiatives and approaches were having.

Next Steps

46. We seek an opportunity to discuss our approach to addressing bullying in schools and kura with you.

Attachments

Appendix 1

Safe and inclusive schools and kura – work to address bullying

Safe and inclusive schools and kura – work to address bullying

Bullying is a significant and ongoing issue in Aotearoa

Most schools and kura are working to address bullying to some extent, but it continues to be a significant issue for children and young people. We see this highlighted in international surveys and in education engagements. There is a real desire to solve this issue but solutions are complex.

The Bullying-Free NZ Framework

We know that the most effective approaches to address bullying involve the whole school community and cover multiple domains to create a safe and inclusive culture and environment:



We have some supports currently in place to support whole school approaches to build positive environments and to prevent and respond to bullying:

- Schools can access the Bullying-Free NZ Framework and resources
- We developed a work programme with the Bullying Prevention Advisory Group
- The Wellbeing@School toolkit can help schools review their approaches
- Legislation and other requirements (such as the NELP) for learning providers include addressing bullying.

We recognise there is more to do to increase and embed positive changes. Four opportunities to consider are:



Refining resources to clarify priorities and demonstrate how they can be actioned

Simplifying, aligning and better communicating the key steps for school communities to take to address bullying. Reflecting this through updated resources and future Bullying-Free NZ weeks. This would be a foundational step to help focus future work and support.



Improving measures so they can be used effectively by schools and communities

Current work could inform a short survey that regularly asks students key questions about experiences, which schools and kura can use to inform continuous improvement, and reflect on the effectiveness of actions to provide safe and inclusive environments and to address bullying.



Leveraging initiatives and resources to increase on the ground support to schools

Helping to apply guidance in context through face to face support. This could leverage initiatives such as PB4L-SW, or be achieved through training staff members in supporting roles, such as RTLBs.



Clarifying and aligning expectations and supports to help schools implement these

We could better support implementation of the expectations on schools, e.g. to promote engagement with students and whānau. Any additional requirements would be best paired with on the ground support.