

Research snapshot from a literature review

by Australia's Safe and Supportive School Communities Working Group



What is the role of school culture and school climate in countering bullying?

- Patterns of social interaction, including bullying, do not occur in a vacuum — they are influenced by the setting in which they occur.
- Through their social interactions, children and young people participate and 're-create' the social world around them. The school culture and climate have a significant impact on students' interactions.
- Classroom and school climate appear to be the main variable between schools seen as either effective or ineffective in dealing with bullying.
- School climate is generated through the behaviour and relationships of everyone within the school community.
- The effectiveness of bullying prevention approaches may depend on how well they target the school climate and address the school 'ecology'.
- Because bullying occurs within a multi-layered context — the layers being individual, peer and whole-school — successful school-based interventions need to take a multi-level approach, and involve students, staff and parents and carers.
- The explicit teaching of values to students has been shown to promote a positive school climate.
- A strong correlation has been found between positive teacher–student relationships and both lower levels of bullying and increased feelings of safety for students.
- Specific training about bullying is a significant factor in teachers' ability to effectively respond to bullying. Calls for urgent attention to in-service teacher education are very common in contemporary studies about countering bullying in schools.
- It is critical to take teachers' personal perspectives and skills into account in implementing anti-bullying approaches.
- Teachers' perception that they would be supported by their principal is strongly related to their sense of self-efficacy in working with students involved in bullying.
- Teachers (as well as other staff and parents and carers) have a key role in modelling appropriate behaviour to students.

- Research highlights a strong link between adult behaviour and the frequency of student bullying, emphasising the importance of considering positive whole-school and community relationships in tackling bullying.
- The issues of workplace bullying for teachers is outside the scope of this work. However, the multi-level approaches identified as most effective to address student bullying need to involve staff relationships and behaviour as well.

Implications for schools

- The importance of a positive school climate suggests embedding anti-bullying responses and prevention within a whole-school approach.
- Teachers' everyday role in countering student bullying should be recognised in school policy and practice.
- Effective school-based anti-bullying initiatives promote positive social interactions between students and teachers in particular, and also between all members of the school community.
- The explicit teaching of positive school values to students has been shown to promote a positive school climate, which in turn is related to lower levels of bullying.
- Given that teachers' ability to respond appropriately to bullying depends on beliefs, knowledge, and skills, teacher professional development about countering bullying is essential.
- Given that teachers' responses are related to their perceived support from the principal, genuine support from the school's administration for staff is central to a whole-school approach.
- Taking the personal perspectives and beliefs of teachers into account when preparing bullying prevention and intervention strategies will lead to more effective outcomes.
- A link between adult behaviour and the frequency of bullying is highlighted in research, emphasising the importance of considering positive whole-school and community relationships in tackling bullying.
- Adults within the school setting need to be aware of providing positive social role models, and to avoid engaging in bullying.

- Fostering positive relationships across the whole school and the community should be incorporated into schools' anti-bullying approaches.
- The response by schools to an incident of bullying can be seen as an opportunity to explore and enhance a positive and supportive school climate.
- Schools need to be alert to all forms of bullying occurring at all levels of the school system.
- Addressing student bullying through whole-school, multi-level approaches would need to involve staff relationships and behaviour as well.

Want to know more?

This research snapshot is based on *A review of literature (2010–2014) on student bullying by Australia's Safe and Supportive School Communities Working Group*. (2015).

Other research snapshots on student bullying are available at [Bullying. No Way!](#)

Further information on bullying and on student safety and wellbeing can be found at: www.bullyingnoway.gov.au and www.safeschoolshub.edu.au