

STRONG SCHOOLS SAFE KIDS

RESEARCH PROJECT 2011–2014

Strengthening student social and emotional health and creating a safe and supportive school environment



SCHOOL CASE STUDY 1

The school is an Anglican, coeducational boarding and day school with a population of approximately 1000 F–12 students and 175 staff. The school is of relatively high socioeconomic status. It is located 10 kilometres from a regional city.

WHERE DID WE START?

The school aims to create a caring, friendly and stimulating environment based on a Christian ethos. Pastoral care was a high priority prior to the school's involvement in the research project. Student pastoral care is managed by a team of staff who act as heads of house, following students through the years, and there is also a pastoral care centre for students. While the school already had clear bullying and cyberbullying policies, school leaders were keen to strengthen their whole school culture through positive education and other psychological strategies.



WHAT DID WE DO?

While the college had a strong focus on responding to bullying behaviours, the data from their Friendly Schools student and staff surveys highlighted some potential focus areas.

Four initial priorities were identified:

- ➔ developing a cyberbullying curriculum for Years 8 and 9
- ➔ facilitating staff professional learning on how to respond to bullying
- ➔ strengthening bullying and cyberbullying reporting procedures
- ➔ increasing staff and student knowledge about bystander behaviours

An action plan was developed and implemented within the school over the course of three years, from 2011–2014. A school coordinator was nominated and actions facilitated through the school's junior and senior leadership teams, who meet regularly. Actions taken included reviewing current practices using the Friendly Schools' Map-the-Gap online screening tool, arranging staff professional learning regarding bullying response techniques and educating both staff and students about best practices for social and emotional learning. Cyber-education was incorporated across the curriculum and a new cyber-curriculum was delivered to students in Years 8 and 9.

A new IT management system and a suggestion box were also implemented, while strategies to raise awareness of bystander actions and positive psychology approaches were emphasised.



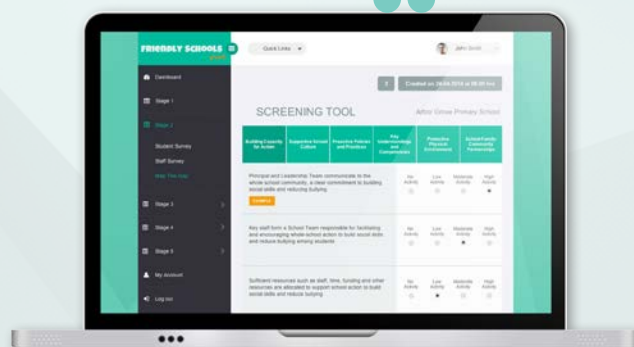
“The biggest thing that we'll be doing in the next year ... to three years is just embedding those positive interventions and positive behaviours into everything in the school, hopefully. Positive education will involve a focus on strengths. When people are able to use their strengths, they become engaged and their wellbeing increases.”

— School leader



“As a parent, I've seen all of those [cyber] issues that have come up in the last five years, and have seen how it works. I mean, obviously it's changed over time, but all of those are issues that the school does well and takes on board.”

— Parent



“When we did a few of these things, the staff reported that this is something that the kids really got into. They were really interested. They wanted to engage in the cyber world and you know, when the safety and those sorts of things were pointed out, they wanted to be positive.”

— School leader

WHAT CHANGED?

Despite competing demands on staff time, leadership changes and the logistics of a large school with many programs running, a strong staff team and embedded structures, enabled the school to strengthen their pastoral care practices over the three-year duration and facilitate a positive school culture.

Committed leadership, data generated through regular Friendly Schools surveys and the school's integral focus on pastoral care and dedicated staff time were noted as key facilitating factors.

Comparing student and staff survey responses from 2011–2014, results show that more students feel connected to their school and teachers, hold a positive view of the school's climate and ethos, and have anti-bullying attitudes.

Staff also maintain positive perceptions of the school's climate, feel that bullying prevention education is important, consider the school's prevention strategies to be effective and believe that they have the skills necessary to manage bullying and make a difference.

The percentage of students reporting they were not exposed to any bullying increased, as did the percentage of students who feel safe at school, and students' social and emotional health was comparable to Australian norms.



WHAT NEXT?

The school's strategy for the years following 2014 is to explore, understand, implement and embed positive education. The school will continue to build the positive culture that has been developed through best practices while raising awareness within the wider community of this evidence-based approach to bullying prevention.

“ [The Strong Schools Safe Kids project] clearly raised the profile on bullying and gave impetus to action. Moreover, it helped to show a way forward and added resolve to do so. ”

— School leader

“ We have a study period or assembly period, where we have workshops that we do exploring aspects of bullying and how it could be prevented, and what we can do to help. And so we do some fun activities to do with that. Like, watching video clips and answering quizzes and stuff. So everyone is aware of what goes on with bullying and how we can stop it. ”

— Student

“ We had an older student who noticed some Year 10 boys were being inappropriate to ... or she felt they were being inappropriate to the Year 8s, so she just went straight up to them ... and they were taken aback that she'd actually stood there. The Year 8 boy grew because he felt supported because just one person had said 'I don't appreciate the way you're speaking to him'. It just stopped everyone in their tracks and that got around the school and she was seen as a hero. ”

— School leader

“ I think there's probably greater self-confidence in our capacity to make change. I think there is an increased perception that we actually can challenge behaviours and stereotypes. ”

— School leader

