

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 2

The school is a large, metropolitan Catholic day school for boys in Years 4–12. Students are encouraged to live in accordance with the school motto – ‘Men for others’ – and the school emphasises a culture of approachability, trust and accountability.

WHERE DID WE START?

Although pastoral care and positive school culture were already high priorities at the school, school leaders were keen to use data gathered during the research project in conjunction with the Friendly Schools whole-school implementation model as a way to strengthen their approach.

WHAT DID WE DO?

While the school had an existing strategy for responding to bullying behaviours, the data gathered from Friendly Schools student and staff surveys highlighted several areas of focus.

Four initial priorities were identified:

- ➔ improving the school's physical environment by reducing hotspots, such as lockers and changing rooms
- ➔ delivering effective professional learning that empowers staff to deal with bullying
- ➔ improving information technology in response to one-to-one laptop and iPad programs
- ➔ establishing a more coordinated, course-based approach to pastoral care in order to strengthen delivery of content across the school

To implement the required changes, a school coordinator was nominated and actions were facilitated through regular meetings of the school's pastoral care team of year-level coordinators. In this way, an action plan was developed and embedded into the school's strategic plan.

Strategies implemented within the school over 2011–2014 include the following:

- ➔ current practices reviewed using the Friendly Schools' Map-the-Gap online screening tool
- ➔ staff professional learning provided on topics such as pastoral care, evidence-based practice in addressing bullying behaviours, and social and emotional learning
- ➔ training provided for both staff and parents concerning cyberbullying and the digital environment
- ➔ extra time allocated for staff to perform duties associated with pastoral care
- ➔ cyberbullying curriculum developed for students in Years 7–12
- ➔ additional supervision implemented in bullying hotspots
- ➔ parents actively engaged and empowered to contribute to whole school culture

“For us, the priority is the pastoral care. The students need to go home safely.”

— School leader

“It was great just to have an independent review of how we're delivering our pastoral care.”

— School leader

“The lockers have become a real highlight, to the point that when the Year 11s have to rotate on a term-by-term basis they are a little bit upset. They love being in among the Year 8s; they love the fact that they're having an informal relationship in a vertical manner and making a difference.”

— School leader

“I've certainly noticed a big shift in culture within the senior years of the school in the nine years that I have been here, but particularly over the last four years. It's been good.”

— School leader



WHAT DID WE DO? CONTINUED

Many changes to the school environment and culture served to reinforce these strategies. The location of staff members in leadership roles was grouped to form a 'hub' for ease of visitation; meanwhile, bullying hotspots were addressed through rostering, and staff on duty were encouraged to engage with students rather than just being present. Senior student leaders' lockers were integrated with those of younger year groups to provide supervision and positive role-modelling, creating a significant positive shift in senior-school culture. When the use of the school oval was lost due to repairs, this challenge was met proactively through the organisation of structured break time activities, and reduction of technology use at break times was also encouraged.



WHAT CHANGED?

Despite competing demands on staff time, successful strategies were implemented to strengthen the pastoral care practices of the school. Factors identified as key elements of the school's success include the following:

- ➔ the data generated through regular surveys
- ➔ the school's existing culture of pastoral care
- ➔ the school's willingness to open themselves up to an external agency
- ➔ school leadership's full support and endorsement of the project
- ➔ the presence of a committed champion to facilitate action

Comparing survey responses over three years (2011–2014), it was found that students had an improved feeling of connectedness to their school and teachers and held a more positive view of the school's climate, peer-support structure and anti-bullying agenda. Staff members also asserted a better perception of the school's climate and administrative leadership; like students, they felt that the school's prevention strategies had increased in effectiveness. Staff members' confidence in their own skill levels grew, as did the belief that their action could make a difference in reducing bullying behaviours. By the end of the project, the percentage of students involved in bullying or cyberbullying had significantly decreased.

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To have someone who is independent and external touching base with you is a real motivator and makes you feel accountable, therefore things get done.

— Staff member

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No one would really tolerate bullying and they'd all support someone being bullied – everyone would.

— Student

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It's given us real data, real 'live' data that informs our decisions.

— School leader

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It's been very good as far as improving our pastoral care in this school and as far as being reflective as practitioners and trying to improve outcomes for our students. I'd certainly recommend it to any school that is trying to improve their pastoral care.

— School leader

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